

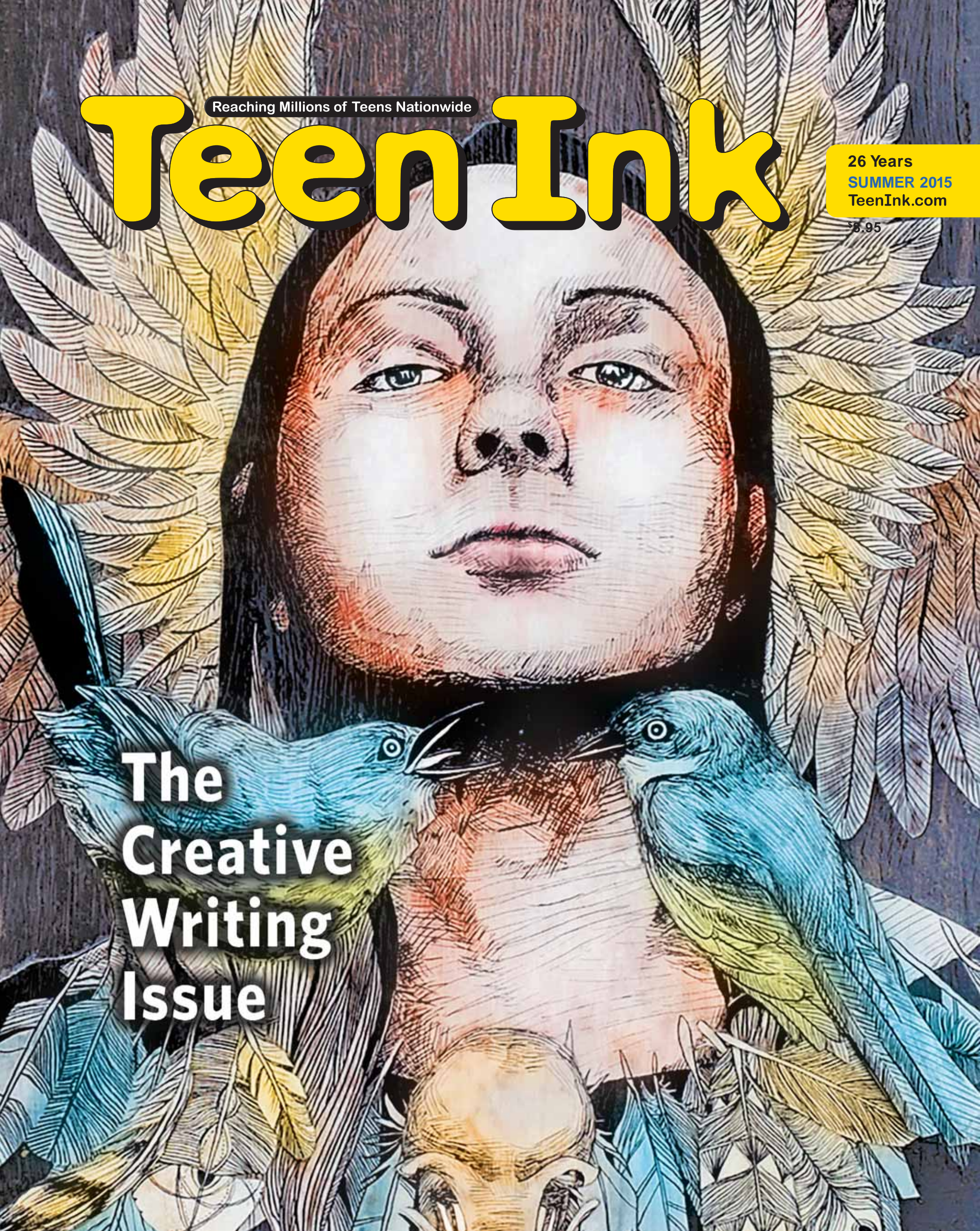
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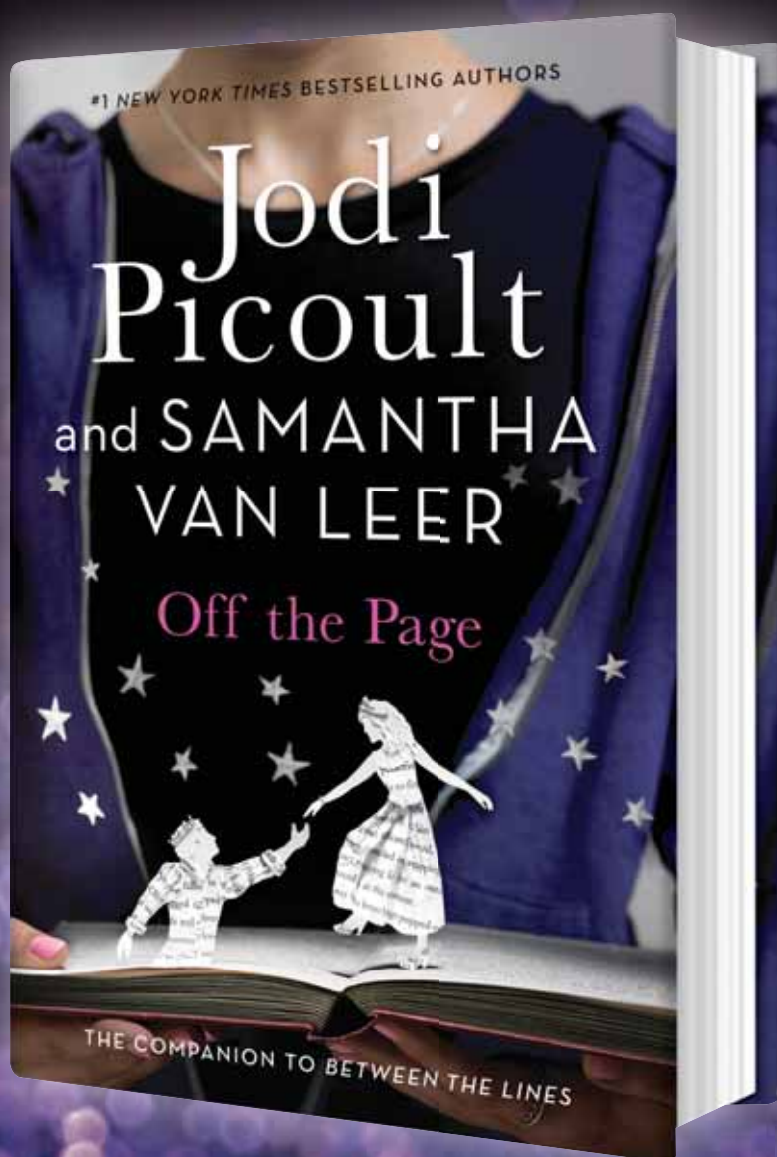
The
Creative
Writing
Issue



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JODI PICOULT and her daughter and co-author, **SAMANTHA VAN LEER**



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M eet Delilah, the girl who wished Oliver into being.

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LOOK INSIDE THIS ISSUE FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH **SAMANTHA!**

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Send Us Submissions All Summer

Although we don't publish Teen Ink over the summer, we're still here to read your submissions. Keep the poetry, essays, reviews, stories, and artwork coming! You may be featured in our next issue in September.

Cover art by Pam Best, Greenlawn, NY

Dear Teen Ink Editors,

Most teens might write about something they would like to see changed in *Teen Ink* magazine or on TeenInk.com, but I'm not going to do that. I want to give my thanks.

Teen Ink has given me the opportunity to show others what I think and feel without being judged. I have an outlet to express myself and write to my heart's desire.

Through Teen Ink I have found friends and other writers who help me and give me the support every aspiring writer needs.

Through Teen Ink I have found a sense of confidence that I never had before. My school is starting a paper because I had the confidence to confront the school about what I felt was needed. I also know now that I can be a writer if I truly put my heart into it and try my hardest.

So, basically, what I'm trying to say is simply thank you. Thank you for giving me the confidence to write what I want, and for helping me find people who support me in my writing.

Abigail Smith, Trenton, OH

Brush Strokes

I found Emily Smith's article "Brush Strokes" extremely effective because it reflects on what life leaves upon our skin and what it means. She writes, "Birth is the canvas" and our "death, the frame." In other words, a painting happens throughout our life and is completed when we die. It is then "framed and put on a wall," as if it's a new masterpiece. Additionally, it may seem as if there's nothing to every mark on our body, but each is "a proof of life" that we went through, with conflicts that turned into unforgettable moments. Yes, some scars are reminders of a horrific event, but that just makes us a stronger person. It's also evidence that we took the pain and didn't give up.

Reading this article changed the way I thought about life and reminded me that it isn't supposed to be easy.

Tyarra Mcthias, Phoenix, AZ

A Life Without Charms

a knife without a Blade,
a fruit without Seeds,
a garden without Flowers,
a jam without Sugar,
a lady without Heels,
a pencil without Lead,
a pen without Ink,
a star without Shine,
a sword without a Hilt,
a king without Wealth,
a crown without Jewels,
Teen Ink without Writers –
such is a life without Charms.

Jasmine Singh, Faridabad, India

I Run

"I Run" by Taylor Smith simply left me out of breath. This skillfully written piece describes the pure thrill of running and the satisfaction of passing the finish line. Taylor clearly loves running.

One of my favorite lines from the article is "When I run, I am Tarzan in the jungle, I am Billy Elliot in his ballet shoes, I am the Doctor in the TARDIS, I am Matilda with a book, I am Spider-Man on his web." Taylor feels perfectly in place with her life while running. She finishes the piece with the caveat, "I come in last place. I said I run. I never said I was good." With this completely unexpected ending, Taylor emphasizes that her reason for running is not winning.

I found this article refreshing because it wasn't written by an expert about the glories of breaking records or gold medals. Taylor loves running even though she isn't fast. Instead of competing with the other runners, Taylor competes with herself. When she conquers her mind and body, she is as victorious as the first person to cross the finish line.

I can relate to Taylor, having similar experiences in yoga class. When I started out in gentle classes, I was on top of the world, able to do every pose. Now I take basic yoga. What a difference! I can only do the simplest poses in this class. Yet the concept

of yoga is to be at peace with yourself after conquering your own goals – to rise to your own standards, not those of others. I imagine I feel the same satisfaction that yoga experts feel during the meditation that follows exercise. I watch as they lift into handstands and bend backwards into bridges like Taylor watches runners speed past her.

Thanks, Taylor, for coming in last place!

Sophia Atlas, New York, NY

Ashamed to Be American?

An anti-American culture is growing before us. The insidious seeds of such a society were planted in the Baby Boomer era, but now in 2015 journalists, celebrities, educators, and even politicians have made loud, crude comments that force many to question whether these citizens are aware of the blessings they have received from the land where they live. In such a culture it is not surprising that children are "educated" to see patriotism as "egocentrism."

I was taught that patriotism is gratitude, and I stand by that. When we love and take pride in our parents, are we blinded to the fact that they are imperfect? Of course not! We can love and be grateful for what America has done for us instead of whining about its imperfections. I am aware that America is not a utopia. When I am older I will try to make it a more perfect union, but for now I am simply proud to be an American. Therefore, I was extremely offended by Delaney Davis's article "Ashamed to Be American?" and Kameron Brown's poem "American Steering Wheels" in the May issue.

Among the many accusations the authors made about their country was the unfounded criticism that America's justice system is racist. In his poem, Kameron expresses frustration that the police officers involved were not indicted after the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. He writes, "Because not much has changed since the civil rights period/Instead of trusting the justice system, we fear it/Because the wrong way is where America's been steerin'." This is an insult to anyone who suffered through the horrific

discrimination and segregation before and during the 1960s!

Because pride is part of human nature, there will always be people who believe that their race is superior. That's not an American thing. That's a human thing. It is America's beliefs and ideals that make her so wonderful. We are the only nation founded on the belief that man has inalienable God-given rights: the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. No other nation has defended these rights with so much vim.

I am concerned that America is losing focus and our leaders are letting the American dream slip out of reach. America is an exceptional nation not solely because of its achievements, but also because of its ideals about human rights found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. I love these ideals, and I am proud to be an American. Now call me egocentric if you dare.

Anna Rose Maj, Staten Island, NY

A Piece of Gratitude

Dear Teen Ink,
At times I've felt the block growing
But it seems you pushed me on
Letting my ink flow stronger
Letting my ink turn darker
And when I clicked
"SUBMIT NEW WORK"
And turned to the home page
I found millions of thoughts
Bustling, brimming, glowing
Thoughts of teens who've shown me
That the freshness of young prose
Is powerful – so powerful like tides
And I've felt hope looking at 'em,
great hope
That tells me life is not a loss
That life is in all a great aspect
Of its enormity, our minds take in
what we can
The rest is with God
Thank you for teaching me to live life
Thanks a lot, Teen Ink
Yours poetically,
SilverInk

Vishnu Pillai, Bangalore, India

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PRODUCTION

Teen Ink uses Adobe InDesign to design the magazine.



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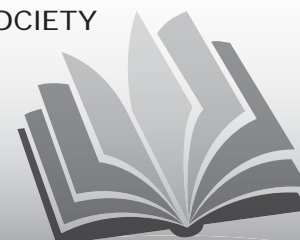
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Librarian • Arrowhead High School

Therese Rodeghier

by Gina Vilar, Hartland, WI



It's not every day you come across a teacher who finds a way to match her outfits with a headband, earrings, necklace, and bracelet. But my favorite teacher not only wears a sea of purple, but also a smile every day. Her smile is like a sunbeam that brightens everything and everyone.

A great educator must be intelligent, sincere, and motivating. During my time at Arrowhead High School, I struggled to find an educator who had those attributes. But one day, in the junior study hall library, a woman with a bright, bubbly personality handed me my school ID and said, "Oh my gosh! What cute shoes! I'm Mrs. Rodeghier. Nice to meet you!" It was refreshing to meet an educator who wasn't uptight and intimidating.

I have a lot of respect for Mrs. Rodeghier. Librarians are often disrespected by students and overlooked as educators. Sadly, Mrs. Rodeghier is not given enough credit for her hard work. She juggles a multitude of tasks: answering phone calls, checking out books, keeping an eye on students, and knowing the location of books I have never heard of. Unlike a teacher with 30 students in a class, Mrs. Rodeghier has

Exemplifies the perfect balance between leader and friend

to know everyone at Arrowhead, and does.

Mrs. Rodeghier exemplifies the perfect balance between leader and friend. She takes charge of the wild, animalistic students who sprint into the library. She is strict when necessary, yet personable and easy to talk to. She genuinely cares about each student, especially when she asks, "Hey! How's it goin'? What's new?"

Whether you know Mrs. Rodeghier or not, she is someone you can really talk to. I have confided in her on topics ranging from boy troubles to how to make cake fondant, and many things in between. And she is always more than happy to listen. She is trustworthy, witty, and will compliment you – even when you come to school in pajamas and messy hair.

I try to say hello to Mrs. Rodeghier every day. I will walk into the library yelling, "Hey, Rod! What's up?" Even a year later, having to remember 500 more new students' frivolous dramas, she remembers mine. She is unlike any other educator. She goes out of her way to learn about her students and form personal relationships – just like she has done with me.

I wrote this essay because Mrs. Rodeghier should be recognized and no longer overlooked. She is hardworking, intuitive, and good-hearted. She has taught me lessons I wouldn't have learned in school – lessons that will stick with me throughout life. She has taught me to be positive in negative situations, not to judge others, and never to give up. I am grateful to know her. On behalf of me and my peers, thank you, Rod, for all that you do. ♦



2015 Teen Ink Educators of the Year



★ **Paul Anderson** ★ History ★
Mundelein H.S., IL. Nominated by Sydnee Siver in the Dec. issue.

"He put a note on my desk. It read, 'If you need anything – to talk to someone – just let me know.'"

★ **Ethan Cherin** ★ Economics ★
St. Paul Central H.S., MN. Nominated by Linnea Peterson in the March issue.

"He shook my world like a snow globe, gently shifting my world view until I learned to do so for myself."

★ **Toniann DeGregory** ★ Visual Arts ★
Cab Calloway School of the Arts, DE. Nominated by Matthew Gamble in the March issue.

"She dedicates an entire unit to careers that require an art degree and how art pairs up with academics. I can't think of a person who has influenced my life more."

★ **Kevin Ehly** ★ Mathematics ★
Brooklyn Frontiers H.S., NY. Nominated by Cristal Cruz in this issue.

★ **Katie Enright** ★ English and Art ★
Cache H.S., UT. Nominated by "Anonymous" in the April issue.

"She doesn't give us shortcuts in order to get us good grades. She tells us what the end goal of an assignment is and then allows us to make our own decisions on how to get there."

★ **Eva Foxwell** ★ Business Technology ★
Brandywine Springs School, DE. Nominated by Lindsay Wolfe in the Feb. issue.

"She pushed me to be at the top of my game no matter how big or small the task."

★ **Maria Fricker** ★ Social Studies ★
North Shore M.S., WI. Nominated by Anna Van Neck in the Feb. issue.

"She had such a joyful personality that there wasn't a day that I didn't want to go to her class."

★ **Chumki Gupta** ★ Biology ★
McNair Academic H.S., NJ. Nominated by Tanushree Bansal in this issue.

★ **Robert Karcha** ★ Chemistry ★
John Dickinson H.S., DE. Nominated by Casey Dower in the May issue.

"He was the only teacher who made me feel like he understood. We had long conversations about college and anything else I wanted to know about."

★ **Mark Kohnhorst** ★ Coach ★
Lake Country Swim Team, WI. Nominated by Amanda Schaefer in the Jan. issue.

"When Mark promises he will do everything

in his power to help you reach your goal, he means it."

★ **Cheryl Lemine** ★ Creative Writing ★
LaVilla School of the Arts, FL. Nominated by Jasmine King in this issue.

★ **Steve Manne** ★ Basketball Coach ★
St. Joan of Arc and St. Catherine of Alexandria Parishes, WI. Nominated by Jacob Beres in this issue.

★ **John Melidosian** ★ Guidance Counselor ★
John Dickinson H.S., DE. Nominated by Grace Duncan in the April issue.

"He has an extremely difficult job, guiding students and coordinating schedules. For him to take so much time to help me means more than he will probably ever know."

★ **Nadia Mobley** ★ English ★
Newark Charter, DE. Nominated by Jacob Spruill in the Dec. issue.

"She would always be over my shoulder helping me with whatever troubles I had."

★ **Dave Olenchek** ★ Statistics ★
Arrowhead H.S., WI. Nominated by Brett Brester in the May issue.

"With every problem, he would make a pun. When calculating averages, he would say, 'Wow, that was a very meaningful statistic.' His humor makes class interesting."

★ **Therese Rodeghier** ★ Librarian ★
Arrowhead H.S., WI. Nominated by Gina Vilar in this issue.

★ **Sundoss Shad** ★ English ★
Lahore Grammar School, Pakistan. Nominated by Emil Hasnain in the May issue.

"She loves every one of her students. It's like we're an extended family. She's a teacher who taught my friends and me to be better."

★ **Suiyen Smith** ★ Drama ★
Global Leadership Academy, South Africa. Nominated by Amy De Raedt in the Jan. issue.

"She combines all her knowledge and years of experience in a wonderfully exciting and entertaining way."

★ **Steve Urban** ★ Math ★
Arrowhead H.S., WI. Nominated by Kinsey Morton in the Dec. issue.

"If a student raises his hand seven times, Mr. Urban will find seven different ways to explain the concept."

★ **Carol Warren** ★ Language Arts ★
Oakland M.S., TN. Nominated by Rosemarie Kuenn in the March issue.

"She stood by my side for three days when I didn't have any friends to comfort me."



Basketball Coach • St. Joan of Arc and St. Catherine of Alexandria Parishes

Steve Manne by Jacob Beres, Pewaukee, WI

Steve Manne started a Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) basketball team at my parish a few years ago. He often refers to practice as his outlet for enjoyment. He opens the gym to 30 players, runs practices twice a week, hosts games on Saturdays and Sundays, and takes our team to visit the Milwaukee Rescue Mission.

It makes me feel great to have somewhere to go after school in the winter. Playing sports has never been a talent of mine; I never enjoyed sports, and my teammates hadn't enjoyed me. Coach Manne helped make me feel comfortable playing basketball by putting me in the games. He made me feel comfortable around the team by bringing us together for bonding so often that it was hard not to get to know and like everyone.

Currently, Coach Manne is getting his Master's degree in a type of engineering beyond my comprehension, while at the same time working full-time, coaching three CYM basketball teams, and being a husband and father. He also works with the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, gives us kids a place to go in the winter, and most importantly, gives time to God.

Coach Manne has taught me that no matter what is going on in my life, the most important thing is to have faith. No matter how busy I am, I continue to pray and stay close to God.

Despite a heavy workload, Coach Manne has, to my knowledge, only canceled practice once. He

drove all the way to the gym in intense snow, in his little black car, only to cancel practice when he got there. That showed me how much Coach cares about our safety, and I always feel safe around him.

There have been times when Coach Manne had to fly back from a business trip on a Friday afternoon in order to make a 7 p.m. practice. In some cases, he stayed up all night working so he had time for practice. And during the weeks he doesn't get to see his family as much as he would like, he brings them to practice. The fact that Coach Manne makes time for his wife and kids despite a busy schedule shows me that work is important, but love is imperative. When I have a family some day, I want to treat them as well as Coach Manne treats his.

Coach Manne has made our team a family. We watch videos before Friday practice (including ESPN's "30 for 30"), and players trade off buying pizza. My teammates have each others' backs, not only in the game but outside the gym. We have never gotten upset with each other during a game, no matter what happens. We go into games as a team and come out a team; whether the outcome is positive or negative, we never turn on each other.

I have applied this team mentality to my everyday life, and it has made me a better person. It has made me realize that to be successful I need others' help. It has taught me that turning on my teammates in hard times will only lead to bad relationships and abandonment.

Helped me find joy in life and school

Being a part of Coach Manne's team has helped me find joy in life and school. It's given me a place to go and people to talk to. Taking journeys to the Milwaukee Rescue Mission with Coach has shown me how bad some kids have it. It's given me motivation to keep my grades up in high school, to attend college, and to hopefully one day help those who are less fortunate.

All in all, this has been the greatest sports team to be a part of. Thank you, Coach Manne. ♦



Photo by Zoe Davis, Chicago, IL



Creative Writing • LaVilla School of the Arts

Cheryl Lemine by Jasmine King, Jacksonville, FL

I walked into the room, shy with nerves. I didn't know the first thing about attending school; I had been home-schooled all my life. Mrs. Lemine, the head of the Creative Writing Department, looked at me and gave me a smile I'll never forget. It was the smile that confirmed my life was about to take an unexpected turn for the better.

To be straightforward with you: I was quite frightened to be in the Creative Writing Department due to the simple fact that I hadn't been writing as long as the other students in the class. However, Mrs. Lemine didn't mind. She liked the fact that I was inexperienced and that she would be able to see dramatic improvement in my writing, something that she hadn't seen in a long time.

After a few weeks of being in the class, I started to feel more comfortable and more confident in myself because of how encouraging Mrs. Lemine was. Whenever I'd share my work, I'd always start off by saying, "Honestly, this isn't really good but ..." Mrs. Lemine would not let me go

any further. "Don't downgrade your work. You'll never go anywhere in life if you keep saying that you aren't good enough," she'd say. Those words will be forever implanted within my heart.

I began to realize that my writing wasn't supposed to sound like everyone else's. I was unique, and I had my own writing style. Although I could always expand my style, I could never actually change it. My style was all my own.

I made so many friends in the class thanks to Mrs. Lemine. She was always changing the seating chart so we got to know different students. She gave me so many compliments – and suggestions – that made me a better writer. Eventually, she became much more to me than just a teacher; she became a second mother.

She was the only teacher who could tell when I wasn't acting like myself or when I was down about something – and if others noticed, she was the

only one to actually talk to me about it. I can't even begin to explain how much it meant to have a teacher just listen and not criticize. She would give me advice and, whenever I needed it, a hug and a shoulder to cry on.

Not so long ago, Mrs. Lemine chose me to represent the Creative Writing Department as one of the best writers in the class. I was going to

perform a poem I wrote in front of the entire school and community! I invited those very close to me. However, at the last minute, I got a text from my uncle saying that he wasn't going to make it.

My uncle and I are very close. Without being able to help it, I began to cry right there in my seat in class. Mrs. Lemine noticed. She let me talk to her and cry while she listened. I don't know how I would've been able to perform that night if she hadn't been there for me at that moment.

It is because of Mrs. Lemine that I now feel as though I can't live

without writing. I need to let everyone – not just her – hear my heart and understand the way I think. It is because of her that so many of her students are now independent young men and women who will forever remember the impact she has made.

This essay may not win an award, or even bring much notice to Mrs. Lemine, but I had to write something that showed how much I love her. Even if only one person reads this, I'll be all right with it. In my own life, I know people notice how much I adore her. No matter what happens, Mrs. Lemine will always be in my heart, giving me the motivation I need. She's the reason I write.

Thank you, Mrs. Lemine, and thank you to those who encouraged her to become a teacher. Without you, Mrs. Lemine wouldn't be here to encourage me at every tiny step. I can't wait to see what the future holds for my writing; whatever it is, it's because of Mrs. Lemine's encouragement. I'll always love you, Mrs. Lemine, for the future that you have given me! ♦

She became a second mother to me



Biology • McNair Academic High School

Chumki Gupta by Tanushree Bansal, Jersey City, NJ

She walked purposefully into the room. Her dark brown hair was tied in a loose ponytail with small flyaway strands sticking up at the sides. She had a jacket slung across her arm, and she was carrying that black stitched bag again, the one I knew held piles of carefully organized paperwork. She was breathing rapidly and seemed flustered.

“Mrs. Gupta!” One of my particularly extroverted classmates was the first to speak. Then a chorus of voices rang out, echoing his greeting.

“You’re back already, Mrs. Gupta?”

“When did you return?”

“How was your trip?”

And so on.

From my seat in the back, I watched as she made her way to the front of the room, greeting students with a flourish of her arm and a breathy hello. I could detect no trace of pain on her face as she briefly explained her situation to the class: Her mother was ill, and she’d had to travel to India unexpectedly to look after her. Though her mother was still in the hospital, Mrs. Gupta had returned for us, her Advanced Placement class, because she had much to teach us in preparation for our looming exam. Her flight had only just landed, but instead of going home, she had driven straight to school, to us.

She relayed all this in a few brief

minutes before turning to her lesson plan, ready to introduce her lecture.

“The synaptic cleft between neurons is the space through which neurotransmitters move,” she began.

As I listened, a part of my mind was back home. I pictured myself at night, being kicked out of my room by my older sister, who wanted to sleep, dragging myself down the stairs, cuddling on the couch with my textbook, staring dry-eyed down at the miniature black print, wondering why in the world at two in the morning I was still up studying when normal people were asleep.

And all I did was complain.

How dare I view my situation as difficult when here was a woman who endured so much? Looking at her, you couldn’t tell. She was 8,000 miles and 82 million billion gallons of ocean water away from her dying mother, and not even a sigh escaped her lips. Instead, she was working and seemed to be enlivened by every second of it.

Mrs. Gupta’s entire being reigns over the classroom, even though she is tiny. I watched as she taught, her hands freely gesticulating: shaking three fingers, fist slamming into palm,

both arms extended. She spoke as if neurons were prime-time news and we would be amiss to tune out for even a second. Only a woman who found a soulmate in biology could bring such fervor to a lecture that she had repeated innumerable times over the years.

“Nerve impulses can travel at more than two hundred miles per hour!” she exclaimed.

As I sat there in my green metal chair, I had to laugh. Not only was

I wrong to complain about how hard I worked, I was wrong to consider myself anything but lucky.

Mrs. Gupta radiated intelligence. It reeled in unsuspecting students like fish on a line. Her notorious classroom, the kingdom of the Gupta Gods, made students ask why, how, and what. It made them question everything they’d known, forcing them to look beyond themselves, beyond their ocean even, past the biosphere, into the Milky Way.

My head was spinning. My fingers tightly clutched the edges of my chair. I could feel the blood pounding inside me, like I was intoxicated by my thoughts. As Mrs. Gupta’s voice played in the background, the ups and

downs of her intonation composing a melody, I began to feel a burning sensation in my arm. I forced my fingers to release their hold on my seat and brought my arm up to get a better look. I saw everything.

I saw beyond my light brown skin, into my blood vessels, inside a cell, zooming past the cytoplasm, into the nucleus, focusing on the DNA, on its twists and folds, on its promoters and enhancers. And everywhere were proteins. Proteins that wrapped around DNA, that connected the nucleus to the cytoplasm, that glued the entire cell into a single functioning unit, that joined adjacent cells, that made a human being. It was like I had X-ray vision.

This is what Mrs. Gupta does. She takes students and gives them supernatural powers, turning them into learners who will not give up their intellect for anything in the world. I listened intently to the words of Mrs. Gupta, the woman who embodied everything I valued and aspired to – intelligence and kindness, passion and dedication.

She had been gone for two weeks, and upon setting foot in this country, had run right back to her students. For that I respect her and envy the pure zeal that she gives to all that she does. For that, I can only think that I am lucky. ♦

She spoke as if neurons were prime-time news

He helps you realize your own truth



Mathematics • Brooklyn Frontiers High School

Kevin Ehly by Cristal Cruz, Bronx, NY

I always figured I was unteachable because learning has never been my strongest skill. My grades would tell you otherwise, but the reality is that before this September, I was indeed unteachable. The teachers were not failing at their job; I was failing at mine. My mentality was to earn a grade instead of really learning the material.

In September, my math teacher, Kevin Ehly, figured out my problem. He realized I was able to get by using a method many students use – acting like I understood until the teacher gave me the answers. This allowed me to succeed, but I was failing at learning and developing my mind.

The first thing Mr. Ehly did was allow me to fail. I know that sounds harsh, but he wanted me to learn the lesson of punctuality and being present. I struggled to be on time and pay attention in class. Perhaps I was cocky about being able to pass without being there, or maybe it was pure laziness. Regardless of the reason, Mr. Ehly taught me that I would

no longer be able to slack off without consequences. If I came to class late, he would often ignore me or ask me if I was a student in his class. The one thing I hate most in this world is to be ignored. As my anger built, I decided to come to class on time. In return, Mr. Ehly gave me the acknowledgment I needed and praised my work.

His lessons didn’t stop there. The next step was to help me learn instead of just giving me the answers. He noticed that a lot of his students had a similar aversion to learning, so he encouraged independent work instead of a passive learning strategy in which the teacher lectures and the students listen and take notes.

It sounds great, but doesn’t always work well. Mr. Ehly taught us how to work diligently, not toward a grade but toward learning helpful tools for the future.

Mr. Ehly pushed me to a limit I did not know existed. He taught me the ways of an ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates: thinking and questioning. He

would often give us an incorrect answer and make us explain why it was wrong. When we answered a problem, he would question us until we sometimes doubted ourselves. He challenged us not to accept being told we’re wrong when we have evidence that we are correct. Mr. Ehly also encouraged us not to be afraid to ask questions or contradict authority.

He is a math teacher who taught me the philosophy of Socrates, geometry, common sense, and the importance of punctuality all at once. He is a special individual because he upsets you with the questions he asks in response to your questions, but by doing this you actually get your answer. He also makes time in his busy life to attend every school event in order to support his students.

Kevin Ehly is indeed a special educator and person. He makes you ask questions. He uses sarcasm and questioning to help you realize your own truth. He is a person who makes hard geometry problems so much easier. A person who can teach you about life through a math problem is one of the greatest educators I have come across. ♦

Author Samantha Van Leer

Interviewed by Danielle Kelly, Laguna Hills, CA

interview

Have you ever wished you could live in a different place? A different world? How about inside your favorite book? This is precisely the concept behind *Between the Lines*, a fantasy novel co-written by Jodi Picoult and her daughter, Samantha Van Leer. However, this is not just a lighthearted fairy tale; readers quickly learn that “happily ever after” isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

Between the Lines – a companion novel to *Off the Page* – will be available soon in bookstores everywhere. I was given the opportunity to ask Samantha Van Leer about her experiences and goals as a teen author.

When did you decide you wanted to be a writer?

I don’t think I ever formally decided I wanted to be a writer. When I was little I used to tell my mom I wanted to be like her when I grew up, but since my childhood I have named many other jobs I aspired to have. However, I have been writing poetry and short stories for as long as I can remember. I think I was just born with writing in my blood and somehow found myself in the career of a writer. I still don’t even consider myself an author. I feel like a really lucky girl who has somehow managed to get a lot of awesome people to read her work.

What draws you to the fantasy/fairy-tale genre?

I’ve always loved the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen’s original fairy tales because they aren’t the sanitized Disney versions – they are brutal and dark. The idea of a fairy tale filled with

so much suffering and strife makes the concept of “happily ever after” that much more desirable and that much more incredible if it is attained. I try to reflect that in my books. I don’t want my characters to just be given their happily ever after; I really want them to earn it.

How do you balance writing with school and other activities of being a teen?

That is a very good question. It isn’t easy. This year I’ve managed to jump out of classes into cars to go to New York City for an interview, or a meeting at Random House, or a photo shoot, and then drive back to school that night to be up and ready for my 9 a.m. class the next day.

My sanity comes from amazing friends and a meticulously mapped-out schedule. I feel like I can get anything done if I plan out every second of my week. As long as I stick to the schedule, nothing can go wrong! My friends are incredibly supportive and loving. They’re great at getting me out into the happy college zone after a long week of work.

What do you consider to be the hardest thing about writing?

The hardest part of writing is actually sitting down and writing. I could name 500 other things I could do at any given moment instead of writing, but I have to ignore them and take the time to focus and simply write. My mom always says, “You can edit a bad page; you can’t edit a blank one.” It’s true. It’s better to work with a total mess than to have a wordless page at the end of the day.

How does having an acclaimed author as a mom give you a unique perspective into the life of a writer?

I think I’ve gotten to see how informal the writing process can be. It’s not as if authors sit in their business clothes, in their fancy offices, typing out their novels till their fingertips burn off.

The truth is that authors wear their pajamas. They write between watching episodes of “Grey’s Anatomy.” And when they’re stuck, they eat candy and stare into space. It’s not a beautiful job. It creates a beautiful thing, but by no means do you look great doing it.

I also learned that publishing means a lot more than just the writing of the book. There is so much that goes on to promote it – from interviews to Q&As like this one – so that readers actually know your book has hit the shelves.

Writing isn’t just about sitting down and typing. It involves the planning that makes a great story, and it involves the promotion that gets that story read.



Samantha and her mother/co-author, Jodi Picoult

“You can edit a bad page; you can’t edit a blank one”

–Jodi Picoult

Writing books together is a very collaborative process. How did you and your mother divide up responsibilities?

We honestly split the work 50/50. We sat beside each other for eight hours a day, writing. We would talk back and forth while my mom typed. She might say a sentence, and then I would jump in with the next one. Sometimes we said the same exact sentence at the same time, which was both awesome and totally creepy.

Who is your favorite author?

I think the queen of teen-girl YA is Sarah Dessen. She just gets all those dramatic teen-girl feelings and perfectly bottles them into a single book.

Which character’s point of view did you enjoy writing from the most?

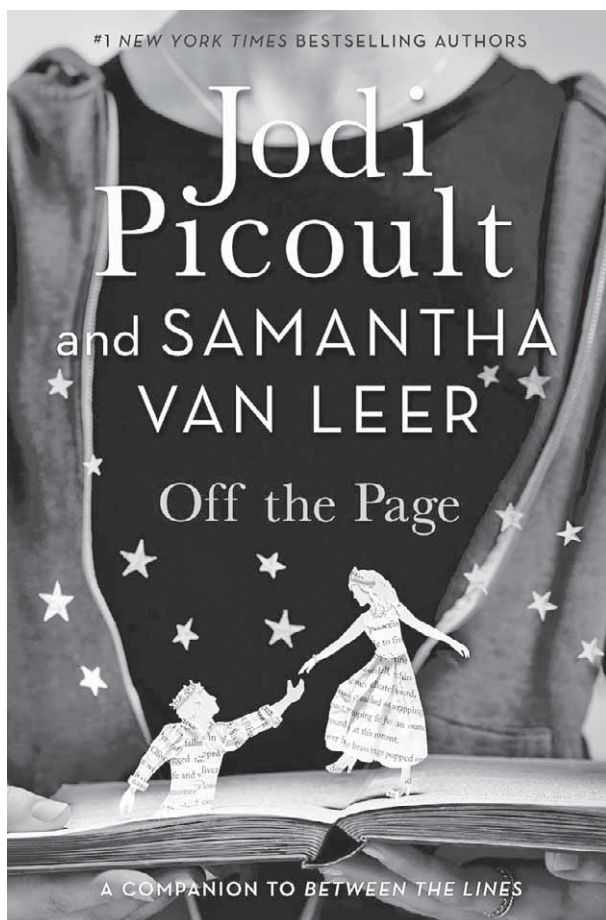
I loved writing scenes that involved Seraphima. She is a hilarious spin on the classic Disney princess. She was born and bred royal, but she has no actual skills to keep herself alive on her own. As for the three main narrative voices, I liked writing Oliver the most. It was really fun to imagine what trouble he’d get into in the real world.

Were any of the characters inspired by actual people?

Some. The science teacher, Mrs. Brown, was inspired by one of my teachers in high school who also had an addiction to self-tanning. Many of the names of the characters in our story are also pulled from reality: Delilah is named after one of my donkeys; Oliver is named after one of my dogs. And Mr. Elyk, the math teacher, is named after my brother Kyle, who is also a math teacher.

What advice do you have for aspiring teen writers?

Finish your work, even if you get bored by it. One of the hardest things in writing is getting to the end of your story, poem, etc. Even if you have other ideas popping up in your head, you should try to finish the piece you’re already working on, or else you’ll end up with a hundred half-told stories. ♦



Remember These Stars

by Jessica Abel, Huntersville, NC

An unseasonably cool May wind blows through my open window, screen punched out in an attempt to let everything breathe, to keep what's left whole. The breeze catches the pictures and calendar pages blanketing my room, blowing through years of memories before it disperses. This unmovable, ungraspable force has sailed along as part of nature's plan. It's skirted rooftops and clipped lawns, rustled tree limbs and lifted birds' wings, and just as it appears, it vanishes. It didn't know it was being created. The funnels of the jet stream happened to be exactly aligned, and the gust was just lucky – lucky to be formed at that place at that time when the universe could have passed it over, never given it life at all. What happens to the gust now that it's gone?

I don't bother to cross out the dates on my



Photo by Justina Schroeder, Butterfield, MN

calendar anymore. The neat green "X"s stop on May 14th, the last day reality didn't seem so real. That's the mystery of high school; no matter how real it seems when grades come in, standardized test scores threaten to ruin a perfectly good morning, or the team finally wins the big game, it's not. It's a virtual reality where numbers aren't accompanied by dollar signs and our bosses want us to thrive and our coworkers are the kids from three doors down, the same we've known since kindergarten, give or take. The smell of green tea and stale butterscotch candy that wafts down the theater hallway and onto the stage doesn't

really exist. The track where we run off our problems every afternoon is just a myth. "Your life doesn't really start until college," they say. "That's where you meet your real people."

But what if I've already met my real people, the ones cartwheeling in the atrium and planning each other's "surprise" birthday parties, who bring me coffee and brownies when I have double AP exams and a regional track conference on the same day? The people who I see more than anyone else, and who, if we had five minutes left to live, would I find and hug and say "You're my family" to as we awaited our impending doom while playing Cards Against Humanity?

In high school, the older you get, the lonelier you become. Freshman year, when we all come in starry-eyed and dewy-faced, the friends we've had before are all we know. We're used to being socially caged; it's not only the standard, it's the rule. Then, suddenly, there are so many people! People who like swimming and also sing and are really good at physics; people who dance ballet and play trumpet and who can rally a group around a cause; people who do nothing and own it. And we get to hang with all of them for a while. Well, more like hang onto – they've clearly got their lives together. They are the planets, strong and certain, and for that year we are asteroids orbiting, trying to figure out if we've found the right home.

Sophomore year rolls around, and we've found our real friends, and they are pretty amazing. They're kind and smart and hilarious – the kind of funny that takes time to cultivate and patience to deliver, that relies on the joke-receiver having a grasp of the intricacies of European history along with a strong inclination toward Horatian satire. They're juniors, so they know what they're talking about. They do theater, and now so do we. They spend their nights around bonfires and, hey, we do too! They give us advice, invite us to dinner, invite us to prom; they are really great friends.

And now we're the juniors! The friend group grows to add a few underclassmen (did we have that much energy as freshmen?) and some new kids who found our little gust the same way we did. Luck, I guess, but

more wholesome, like luck with a purpose. It wasn't fate: fate comes with the connotation of everything falling magically into place, and we've worked for this thing, this dynamic of laughter and intellect.

Together, we sing terribly; most of us are actually really good, but it's a lot more fun to wail "Bohemian Rhapsody." We make cupcakes from scratch and, inevitably, play more Cards Against Humanity, because we've decided that we're all horrible people. We're family. We form bonds. We form bands! Good bands with musicians who can stop at the same time on the right note! We help each other out and crack each other up.

But wait – we're not all juniors. The cold realization hits hard when we're in folding chairs and last summer's dresses and they're in caps and gowns, about to walk across the stage and out of our lives. *Don't leave!* my heart screams. *What about our picnics? Our jokes?* But they grab their diplomas and shake some authority's hand and suddenly they're gone. Caps are thrown and hugs exchanged, and I'm just standing in the middle watching it all happen. The rain hits forcefully, seemingly out of nowhere, and just as quickly as we came, we run. The

lawn is empty, the chairs dripping and desolate; the only noise is rain pattering on the windshield on the way home. No stories, no jokes. I turn on "Bohemian Rhapsody" and wail.

When next year comes, we will be planets, solid and encompassing. We will have asteroids, but these asteroids will have other planets too. We'll form a new gust, with our wind giving its last breath and new wind coming along to join the ride. We'll make new jokes, I suppose. Maybe we'll form a band. It could be nice. But I'm selfish and nostalgic. I like to think that our gust was something special, that we weren't asteroids and planets circling each other, trying to keep up: we were stars sharing a universe, shining on our own, dazzling together.

When I walk across the stage next May and go off into the world, my star will be in a different universe with all new people who like doing new things. But because of our family, it won't just shine; it will dazzle. ♦

We help each other out and crack each other up

Petals and Poisons

by Claire Armstrong, Pleasanton, CA

In the summer I am brainless and fluttery in my pink dress and bare feet and flower crown of innocence. It is the season of playing on the Fairy Hill, of baking homemade brownies, hard as trees and dry as dirt, and pretending they taste good because it's such fun to make them. The days go by like slow sips of lemonade, and I don't know anything except that foxgloves are poisonous and the cat in the bushes will bite you and fairies are out there somewhere. I am silly and spinning, feeling like magic myself, because nothing is ordinary and nothing is wrong. The days are beautiful and I have two grandmothers and I'm not worried. I waste time without even knowing it. Why do I waste so much time?

Poison worse than the foxgloves comes, but I don't know anything. You

ask us if we want to see your bald head and my sister runs because she knows to be afraid. But I am dumb and excited and I say yes, so you take off the wig and underneath there are no pretty dresses and no earthy gardening gloves, no glimmering earrings and no blonde hair. There is only bare skin, and this is when I begin to be afraid.

Time goes faster and Dad gets sadder and Mom speaks quieter each time I ask if you're going to be okay. Sometimes I begin to speculate, but I am eight and I am stupid and I don't think about the right things. When the weather gets cold, I'll wonder. If I knew, would I know what to do?

It's winter now and the cat is dead too, so it's me who hides in the furry shrubs,

listening to tears and wearing pink again because you don't like black, you didn't like black. I don't know anything, I don't know what to do, so I hide and swirl my fingers in the wet earth, sitting under the pearly gray sky and thinking that maybe I spent my time with you all wrong.

How do I remember you?

Did I even know me? Did I show you who I am? Or was I just silly and senseless? If I had been the one to go, how would you remember me? How do I remember you?

By spring I'll hate myself for thinking about my new dress on that day and wondering what jewelry would be mine and wishing I could drink soda straight from the bottle. I should have been asking the questions I had and crying when it was okay to cry, because now

it's too late to talk about it.

Now new life is finally starting to grow, but I still feel like an uprooted sapling. The world is a woman in green, and I'm a girl who wears black, and maybe you wouldn't like that, but I'll never get to show you who I am so it doesn't matter. I'll never be sure of anything, but I don't think you would care what color my clothes are as long as my heart is colorful, blooming beautiful as your garden. And sometimes it is, but sometimes it's cloudy, and I wonder if there is poison in me too.

I don't know what's inside of me, or if I ever will, but I know that there's something, something and it tastes like summer, sweet as the memory of burned brownies and rich as the seed-spotted earth. ♦



Photo by Amanda Goodman, Houston, TX



Art by Fajr Alam, Gujranwala, Pakistan



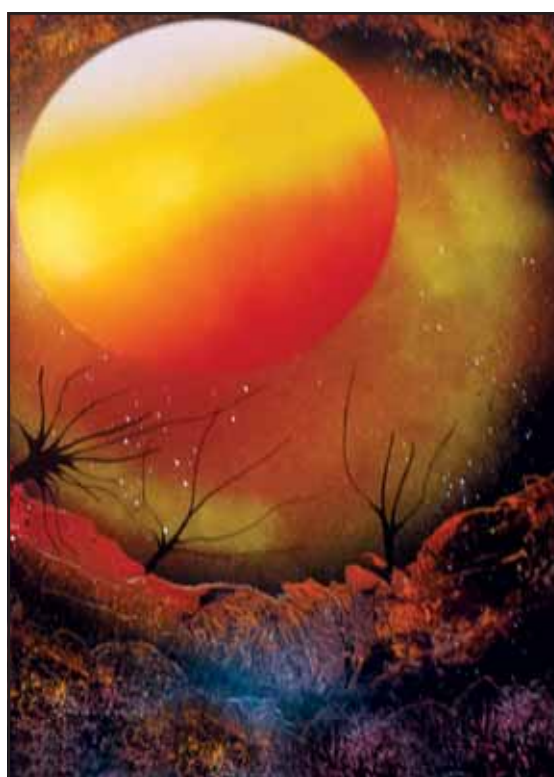
Art by Greta Chen, Birmingham, AL



Photo by Sonia Rousary, Stickney, IL



Photo by Rebecca Levine, Twinsburg, OH



Art by Jaylon Cooper, Saint Simons Island, GA



Photo by Madison Barker, Oxford, MS



Art by Sangeun Lee, Gainesville, FL



Not at All Like Baywatch

by Caitlyn Hartung, Junction City, KS

When my alarm goes off, I turn over groggily and slide out of the warm embrace of my bed, the fan in my room practically begging me to come back and sleep for a few more hours. Instead I turn away from its promises of comforting rest and struggle upstairs, my swimsuit, T-shirt, and shorts in hand. Quickly I take a cold shower to wake up. Most would find showering before going to a pool to be a waste, but I rarely have to jump into the water.

Hurriedly I dress and flail around the house in search of my most valuable tools: my flip-flops and whistle. One saves me from the elements, and one saves other people from themselves. On my way out of the house I grab three Powerades and my knockoff Ray-Bans, more essentials of the job. “Save wots of wives today, Taits!” my baby brother screeches over his Fruit Loops as I walk out the door.

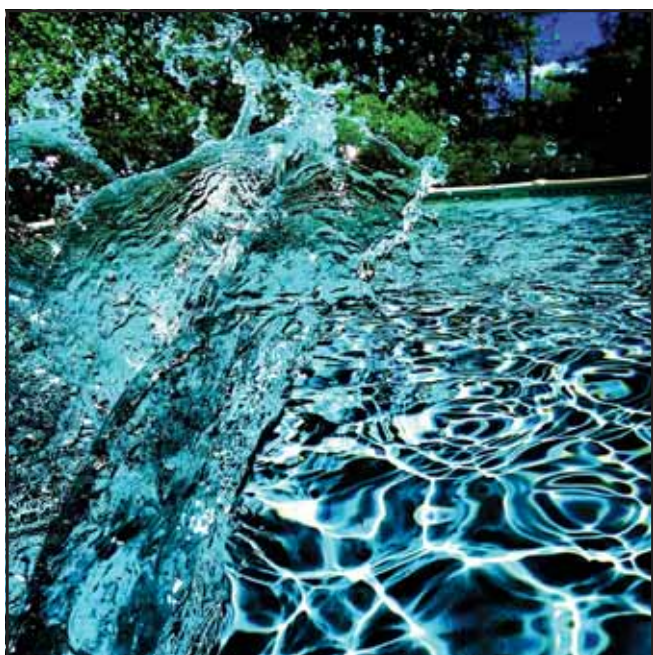


Photo by Jaimee Benson, Scituate, RI

I sing to an upbeat song as I drive into the military post, making the gate guards laugh. I wave at some soldiers I recognize as regular swimmers. A few turns later I’m parked in front of the community pool.

I look at my phone’s daily weather report to gauge how busy we’ll be, then unlock the gates. A sweet breeze hits my face as I stroll around the pool deck, unlocking various doors and picking up trash that blew in.

As acting manager it’s my job to do damage control, assessing any problems to my precious pool, and deciding what needs to be done before my coworkers get here. After doing this for so long, I can tell just by looking at the water color what chemicals are needed and how often I will need to call a pool break to replenish the chlorine.

I walk into the guard room and smile as I see a picture a bored staff member drew. I have to step around an unfinished game of Phase 10, and another of Go Fish – or maybe it’s War. If the weather is cold or stormy, there’s a lot of downtime and the pool staff get friendly quickly.

My whistle’s tweets become my second language

After a glance at the clock, I add the time to the clock-in sheet and pick up the chemical and incident log book. I sit on the side of the pool and begin the morning chem test. The sun is starting to warm my back. If it’s already warm at nine, I might not be

able to rely on the weather report to keep patrons away. This is my favorite part of opening duties; I love adding the different liquids and seeing how they react to the pool water. I read the labels of the tiny bottles and smile, thinking that my chemistry teacher, Mr. Mayberry, would be pleased that I can recognize the names and know

which elements create them.

The job’s responsibilities press down on me when I have to do very precise work, like operating the pump room. In this stuffy, loud space, seven tanks filter the water and add chlorine. It’s extremely important not to inhale the fumes. There have been many times coworkers have found me dry heaving in the grass behind the pool.

If the pressure in the tanks gets too high, we have to backwash them. Sometimes the pumps don’t work, which means I have to go to the control panel and try turning it on and off again. It’s almost like restarting a computer. It can be a long process, but I was trained very well and tested many times on my ability to do these tasks.

Working at a military post’s pool means that every morning everything must be placed perfectly. I like this part. I have a set schedule when I’m in charge. I grab three of guard tubes and four umbrellas to get things done efficiently. Dancing familiarly around each of the three guard stands, I place a tube where we put our feet and hook an umbrella to the stand.

As I head to the sign-in table to set up the last umbrella, I’m greeted by Jeremy and Jose, showing up for their shift. Seeing them, I know it’s going to be a good morning. I’m relieved that it’s not John since the other day I made him go home early when he told me I was incapable of doing my job because I was a woman.

Who I am scheduled to work with is extremely important. I’m younger than the lifeguards I am in charge of, and much younger than the rest of the managerial team. I am also one of only three women employees. There’s animosity toward me because of my age and gender, so prefer to work with the people who have shown respect for me, like Jose and Jeremy.

I ask Jose to flip the chairs over for the patrons. Jeremy checks the skimmer baskets, which pick up the trash, dirt, hair, and other random objects that float in the pool. These need to be checked every two hours. It’s the nastiest job, and sometimes the most tedious, but Jeremy can fly around the pool and clean out each grimy basket with a smile on his face.

I swap my T-shirt and shorts for a first aid fanny pack, whistle, and sunglasses. I walk out just in time to see

Jose open the pool gates to the public. As I head into the pump room to turn on the water features, I think how odd it is that I’ve done so much already and the real work hasn’t even started.

It’s not an easy job, being a lifeguard. I clean up so many bodily fluids that I’ve had to learn to block out their smells. Every day I deal with angry parents, and my whistle’s tweets become my second

language. Being in a bathing suit all day tends to make me self-conscious about my body, what with my coworkers being on their schools’ swim teams. Like all the pool staff, my body now has a permanent scent of chlorine, and don’t even get me started on the tan lines.

Yet I love this job. It has taught me the value of hard work and responsibility. I’ve learned that my decisions don’t only affect me; there’s a domino effect to every choice.

My thoughts are interrupted by a screaming child running toward the pool. Laughing to myself, I shout my catchphrase, “Walk, please!” Now the day has really begun. ♦

Sandcastles

the sand is scorching,
like pressing your soles into hot coals,
and the ocean isn’t pretty anymore –
it’s a dirty, oversized fish tank.

nothing is what you remember –
the blue silk water,
the drifting fog overhead,
the glossy seaweed
grazing your leg,
the shimmering shore
glazed over with smooth pebbles and snails,
your mother’s childish laugh
merged with the ambiance of waves and gulls,
the tide washing away
magnificent palaces of sand you built with her

now the water isn’t blue.
it’s a muddy green like
your father’s hardened, hazy eyes.
your breath seizes as seaweed
catches your ankles and wrists,
as though the brine is plotting
your inevitable end.

tin cans and beer bottles converge
in dark alcoves that
everyone ignores

but you.

by Heather Hunt, Gilmanton, NH



Photo by Victoria Phelps, Rochester Hills, MI

The Secret Life of Boys

by Amanda Izes, Ambler, PA

Eighteen-year-old boys playing squash. Loud, smelly, and sweaty, this group of young men become my teammates from November to February every year. After four years of exposure to cursing, belching, and the concept of “adjusting” oneself, I have become somewhat immune to teenage boyhood, but I still find myself stricken with culture shock every time I realize that I have essentially become one of the boys. As a teenage girl, my hour of squash practice each night provides me with a fascinating look into the secret life of boys, a world where, biologically, I will always be an outsider.

A small square room marked with red tape, the squash court at Philadelphia Country Club is my gateway into a parallel universe. Within this secret world, normal identity and behavior dissolve into nicknames and “smack talk.” I am no longer Amanda, the quiet, awkward girl; I crush my given name to become Izes, an edgy athlete with sleek red safety glasses, midnight black sneakers, and no fear. Among the boys, I am a stronger, less self-concerned version of myself. My ability to compete with, and even beat, my male teammates rips apart the predetermined statuses we have established for each other within the confines of our school.

My acceptance into teenage manhood took place the third day of practice – much more quickly than it can take to be accepted by a clique of girls. Deliberately untying and retying my shoes to the perfect tightness, I waited for the rest of the team to arrive. At about 7:35, loud, low voices in the hallway indicated the arrival of my teammates, a pack of four I’ll call Jock, Techie, Slacker, and Savage. They had just come from Wing Night at the restaurant down the street. When they came into view, I noticed that the guys were still wearing our school’s uniform of polos and khaki pants. Naively, I assumed that they would head to the locker room to change; however, they began to undress right in front of me. These boys did not seem

to care about privacy. They chatted about upcoming dances and parties as I averted my eyes from their Spandex and boxers.

While each team member has a completely different body type, no one comments about weight, height, or looks as girls would. In the boys’ world, because privacy is diminished, fear of others seeing and judging you or your body seems to decrease. My teammates’ lack of inhibition with each other is refreshing compared to the

secrecy involved in changing in a women’s locker room.

I learned quickly that there’s a strong negative correlation between this absence of inhibition and personal hygiene. While I prefer the smells of vanilla and citrus, it has come to my attention that these boys

enjoy, and may even take pride in, their own body odor. A healthy amount of body odor (described as “musk” by Jock) indicates to them that an athlete has accomplished hard work.

At squash practice, musk is, unfortunately, the prevalent odor. Because a squash court is only 21 feet wide by 32 feet long, the complex tends to trap smell. This stench appears to be part of the culture of masculinity – at least for teenage boys. Due to an apparent misconception of the science behind pheromones, my teammates, particularly Savage and Jock, believe passionately in their musk’s power of attraction. I can confidently inform any readers, male or female, that “the allure of musk” is a myth: I spend much of my time on the court breathing through my mouth.

Though my nostrils may never grow accustomed to their smell, I have observed that personal hygiene does play a part in the boys’ social culture. Unlike female groups, in which one girl may take on the role of mother, in male groups, no leadership or relational hierarchy seems to develop. Consequentially, few pieces of advice or guidance pass from friend to friend. This lack of communication can have detrimental effects on a group. For example, Savage, a lanky blond junior, unaware or uncaring of his pungency, grew more and more isolated last season. Savage eventually warmed up alone and talked minimally during practice, but remained unaware of the olfactory cause of his ostracism; no other boy cared to take on the responsibility of informing him.

I cannot help but compare my observations to the stereotypes of boys and girls that I have been taught all my life.

I am programmed to think that because boys tend to be less cliquy, they are more welcoming than girls. As I watched Savage lose the friends who should have simply handed him a stick of deodorant, it appeared to me that while the dynamics of male friendship make it easier to make friends, they also provide little safety net in keeping them.

In addition, as an avid reality TV watcher, I had been taught that male competition, unlike the passive aggression of females, is expressed through trash-talking and physical rivalry. Anticlimactically for me, the competitiveness I expected from a group of athletic young men was missing. They seemed to have a strong aversion to any type of cardio conditioning.



Photo by Sarah Dalgleish, Boulder, CO

Stench appears to be part of the culture of masculinity

They began to undress right in front of me

Instructed to sprint from one corner of the court to another 20 times, Jock, Techie, Savage, and Slacker jogged slowly with their arms limp at their sides. My teammates successfully avoided further physical exertion by locking our coach out of the court for the last 20 minutes of practice.

At the end of the final night of this season’s practice, I grabbed my bags, slowly exited the white court, and walked with Jock and Slacker to the parking lot. Gasping in unison at the assault of the frigid January air, Jock, Slacker, and I sprinted to our cars. Above the harsh slap of my shoes against damp pavement, I heard Jock shout, “See you later, Amanda!” I was reluctantly separated from the male world in which I had grown comfortable. With Izes left behind in the squash court, my time among the boys ended, and I was simply Amanda once again.

The next Monday, at school, I caught a glimpse of Jock, Slacker, Techie, Savage, and a bunch of other guys lifting weights in the field house. Clad in sweat-stained T-shirts and bright Nike running shoes, masking their musk with Axe body spray and their smack talk with blasting hip-hop music, they split their focus between lifting dumbbells and not-so-subtly observing the Spandex-clad girls’ volleyball team. The boys I had come to know over the squash season were puffed up with uncharacteristic masculinity. It seems that the need to flaunt one’s fitness to others mainly arises in the presence of the opposite sex. Much

like girls’ desire for bigger curves and flatter stomachs to appear more attractive to boys, the extrinsic motivation for a teenage boy to appear stronger comes not from masculine competitiveness, but the motivating presence of young women. I now know from experience that boys do not inherently want to work out or have

muscles of steel.

I have been taught all my life to consider boys and girls as opposites. However, after my immersion in teen male culture, I have reconsidered this idea. I originally expected that, upon entering the boys’ world, I would be struck by a strong wave of foreignness; instead, I found comfort there. Though the worlds differ in their smells, hierarchies, and support systems, the journeys of teenage boys and girls are parallel. Guided by insecurity, ambition, and often-times blatant sexual motivation, teenagers of both genders use the comfort of a unisex environment to develop their voices and personalities before releasing them into co-ed society. ♦

Aficionada

Multicolored posters cover every inch of my wall, magic marker tattoos embroider my wrists, and doodles envelop my notebooks.

My closet overflows with band logo shirts, one for every day of the week. My computer pours out every album, every song, they’ve ever released.

Whether I ace the hard test or hit every red light on the way home, their music blasts through my speakers while I indulge in a dance party for one.

Whether someone compliments my outfit or I think it’s a bad hair day, their lyrics declare, “She looks so perfect,” and I choose to believe them.

I’m the first one in line at the ticket office, and I’m front and center when the concert starts. I am not a part of the fandom. I am the fandom.

by Sarah Orr, Lakewood, CA

Shimmers

by "Allison," Irvine, CA

“Beauty” is a corrupted word. We’re too ready to define it according to ideals of perfection: a stick-thin figure, a complex concerto, or summer sunshine untainted by clouds. However, when we look closely at our world, beauty, as defined by nature, is much more subtle. A person who does not fit the modern aesthetic standard is beautiful because of the utter joy in their face when they smile. A song that is imperfect because of its simplicity is beautiful when the audience catches their breath after one note and relaxes at hearing the next. And a winter morning that is imperfect because of its biting temperature is truly beautiful for the fresh, cold air that rushes through your being, causing you to rejoice at the glory of being alive.

Over the summer, my family traveled to London, home of the Globe Theatre and Sherlock Holmes. Keeping with the motto “carpe diem,” we did not wait for our hotel room to be ready, but instead dropped off our bags and swung out into the streets bereft even of a map.

Our first destination was Hyde Park, an enormous expanse of soft grass, trees, lakes, flowers, and popsicles – basically, pure paradise for the weary traveler. Better still, one could rent a bicycle for 30 minutes for only one pound, or less than \$2. While my parents pondered the bikes, I wandered off into the cool shade of a small copse of trees.

Where the branches spread and interwove their bright leaves, the sun filtered through in fragments. As I looked up, my bleary eyes dissolved the trees into thousands of bits of light, glimmering and winking at me in shades of green.

As I stood before the majesty of something only nature could have created, it felt like so much more

than trees. It felt like something primordial had been unearthed. The ground I was standing on became sacred earth, the floor of the immense cathedral of Mother Nature. The glistening points became panes in an enormous stained glass window, looking into a shimmering world I could not reach.

I could only be brought back to the surface by my mother’s voice. As I walked, dazed, back to my family, I realized I was not planning to tell them what I had experienced. The spoken and written word cannot do the moment justice. I realized that happenings of this sort had to be found alone, without the help of others.

Half of the joy in finding these gold mines is the knowledge that of all people on earth, you have stumbled across these treasures, these shimmers in the darkness. It feels as though you’ve been singled out by the gods to be graced with such a gift. It wouldn’t be the same for anyone else. And so, when my mother asked me what I had been looking at, I smiled and said, “Nothing.”

Weeks after we had returned to sunny California, my second-oldest cousin came home after a year in Oman. My family’s tight circle of seven cousins was complete once more, so we decided to go night swimming, a tradition that hadn’t been the same with only six. We swam and ducked and jumped into the shallow end. The boys wrestled while the girls pretended to be mermaids (only for old time’s sake, of course). The cousin just above me in age tried to teach me how to blow bubble rings, but that art requires one to face the sky while underwater, bending one’s back in a position that I could not endure.

Finally, I swam to one of the walls, rested my legs on the edge, and let my body fall into the smooth embrace of the water. Looking up, I found not the

sky, but another shimmer.

The water distorted the night sky and its frame of pine trees into another world, one that rippled and wavered, as if I was staring at the pool’s surface from the side. Somehow I felt convinced I was not in water but in air, and that if I thrust my hand through the paper-thin surface between the two worlds, I would feel water. Slowly I raised my hand and felt the tips of my fingers emerge through the glassy sheet into clean, cool air.

The beauty and confusion of it all threw me into a dizzy whirl. There was another world in the water, I was sure, and yet whenever I tried to break through, I was once again in the surface world. Everything I saw was only a glimpse offered of horizons mortals could not reach.

As I lifted myself out of the water, my cousin asked eagerly, “Could you do it?” Even as I shook my head, I didn’t know whether I meant shattering the glass between the two worlds or blowing bubble rings.

I could not find my way into those glowing worlds through the small windows shown me. I could not find my way into that natural beauty. And yet there was something comforting and strangely beautiful in knowing that it was safe from human hands. It would always be there, just out of reach, for dreaming of and drinking in. It was hope, it was beauty, it was there.

These shimmers are in the broken world around us, small feathers of light drifting through cracks in the ebony skies. They remind us of what we’ve lost since those idle days in the Garden of Eden, and they tell us what we must strive to create in our world. It is the beauty of the unattainable that keeps us running toward the sunset, keeps us looking for the gold at the end of the rainbow. To this day, I keep my eyes open, looking for the shimmers. ♦

I saw a glimpse of horizons mortals could not reach

The Small Things

by Kelly Wurtz, Burbank, CA

I looked up today and found the finish line not far out of my reach. When did I get here? I can’t remember, to be honest. When I look back over my life, I become aware that most of my journey will live forever in my subconscious. I fall into a panic because this path, once the longest road ahead of me, has escaped me in the blink of an eye. My remaining thoughts just aren’t enough, and the void haunts me. It doesn’t seem like what little I’ve accomplished should be worth four years of my life.

I can’t say anyone knew what to expect out of the experience we shared in high school, but it certainly wasn’t what I thought it would be. I pictured myself being daring, bold, surrounded by friends, creating an experience I couldn’t help but remember. But it wasn’t so perfect. I found myself drifting off in the middle of sentences, pushing away people who cared, and doing anything I could to escape. I forgot most of every day, because each was identical to the last. What hap-

pened to the best time of my life?

In desperation for a memory to match my expectations, I’ve held on to what has stood out from the haze. I remember the “big” moments – the sports games, the fun classes, the awards I’ve won, and the friends I’ve made. Yet these memories don’t give an accurate picture of who I am.

What happened to the best time of my life?

Sometimes, if I try hard enough, I can remember the small things. I think of the arms that have held me, the people I’ve hurt, the chances I’ve taken, the moments that have brought me to tears. Then my mind begins to overflow with the beauty of my strife-ridden ride as if it had never disappeared to begin with. I think of how much has touched my heart, and of the moments, infrequent as they are, when I’ve felt a real connection with another human being. I think of the times when another person made me so incredibly happy that I couldn’t even sleep at night, when nothing could have gotten me to close my eyes.

When I look at the small things, I can finally start to see who I truly am – the

brehtaking discovery of this whole life that has been happening behind the scenes. This life wasn’t created for me, but instead created by me. The teenager I’m going to remember in 40 years will be different from the one who was actually here. I’m going to remember the football games and school dances; perhaps I’ll even remember some of the people. What I’m not going to remember are the times sitting at my desk at 3 a.m., lost in my mind over how beautiful existence is and wondering why I deserve this gift.

I’m not going to remember being so young and feeling as if there was no other human being in the world as perfect as the one looking back at me. I’m not going to remember how painful it was to realize that everything I thought I knew was wrong, and I probably won’t even remember how scary it was to build, from the ground up, my own definition of “right.”



Art by Lydia Wang, Novi, MI

Maybe if I can hold on to the small things, I’ll be able to remember the incredible vitality of the past four years. Even if one day I feel as if I’m losing a grip on my memories, I’ll know that at one point in time, I was the person in them. Even if one day I can’t remember what it felt like to love someone for the first time, a part of me will still be that naive, helplessly lost teenager. I might not be able to recall them forever, but for now, and for the rest of my life, I’ll always be made up of the small things. ♦

Power Addicts

by Sophie Panzer, South Orange, NJ

Everyone has their own way of dealing with disaster. Some burrow within themselves and attempt to shut out their circumstances. Some throw themselves into helping others so they won't feel panic or despair of their own. Others curl up in a fetal position, keening and wailing, until someone either takes pity on them or slaps them across the face. My coping mechanism is a bit less dramatic: I create routines.

"Superstorm"

Sandy was the mutant offspring of a nor'easter and a hurricane. It struck at the end of October 2012 and knocked out power throughout New Jersey for the first two weeks of November, just

when the nights were getting darker and the air temperature was changing from pleasantly crisp to bitterly cold.

My family lost electricity on the first day, when a tree crashed across our power lines and into our backyard, narrowly missing our house. It fell on our ancient swing set, an unstable structure of rotting wood and rusty chains that my sisters and I were too big to use. I had been trying to convince my parents to get rid of it for ages. To my irritation, it somehow remained intact.

My town was a mess of fallen trees and downed power lines, some areas flooded with debris from sewers choked by rainfall. Residential and public buildings alike were without light, heat, hot water, and landline phone service. Every school in the district was closed for nearly two weeks.

Every day my sisters and I would dress in the cold and dark, pulling on as many layers as we could and resenting the moments when frigid air zipped up our bare skin as we changed. We would shove our laptops, phones, and chargers into our backpacks and walk into town – gas station lines had become hours long, so driving was not an option. We would spend the day at the library, which still had power, only leaving to get lunch at a pizzeria. We were careful to start walking home before darkness fell.

The library was always crowded. People came from far and wide to enjoy the heat, light, and Wi-Fi. It took some hunting to find a free outlet. The floor was crisscrossed with cords leaching precious electrical power into people's devices like morphine lines. We were addicts, every one of us.

At first, I considered the break a gift. The first of November heralded the beginning of National Novel Writing Month, and I was determined to use this free time to get my word

count up. I sat in an alcove near the upstairs window and attempted to write, scrapping idea after idea. I would write a few thousand words one day, reread them the next, come up with something I thought was better, and start over. I wrote about child soldiers, dystopian societies, lesbian couples.

I am easily discouraged at the best of times, but something about my surroundings made me even more unsteady. I was hyperaware of other people's breathing, of tree branches scraping against windowpanes, of the number of sweaters I was wearing. I was always either too hot or too cold. The wires snaking over the

floor made me feel like I was caught in a web. One day a woman wearing a neon orange coat sat down next to me to charge her phone, and the brightness of the color distracted me so much that I slammed my laptop shut and went to find another seat.

After the fifth day, I gave up on noveling. Creating my own world proved to be too taxing in the aftermath of a natural disaster, so I devoted myself to getting lost in worlds that others had already created.

It was always dark in our house when we returned home. Our mother would be sitting at the kitchen table, reading by the light of a scented candle that oozed globs of fragrant wax onto the placemats. She would be bundled in layers of coats and sweaters and scarves. Worse than the cold for her was the fact that the trains weren't running and she couldn't get to her office in Manhattan; I could see her boredom and frustration growing with every passing day. Our father still went to work, because his office had a backup generator. When he came home we would go out to dinner,

taking our flashlights with us so that we could navigate around inside when we returned.

We usually went to the movies after dinner, drawn to the light and heat and distraction of the theater.

There was only one film out that was remotely entertaining, and I saw it three nights in a row, eventually getting so sick of it that I walked out early. The theater, which had seemed warm and comforting at first, became overheated and airless. I had the overwhelming urge to get away from my family. I was sick of being holed up with them, of not being able to wash my clothes or turn on a light. As my family gathered up their belongings and used the bathroom, I pushed through the doors and walked out onto the street, desperate for a moment alone.

Outside the suffocating movie theater, the cold night air felt thrilling, even arousing. I could feel my heart beating wildly as I looked up into the dark shapes of the trees. They seemed to grasp at the stars, most of which were normally invisible in my little electric world.

As I looked up, I felt like I was being transported back in time and space to the previous summer. I lay on a mountain in Oregon in the middle of the night, momentarily paralyzed by the fear of falling into an enormous, star-strewn sky. But my limbs remained on the ground, and my fear



Photo by Addison Gale, Clarkston, MI

was replaced by awe.

My trip to the back country of Oregon had been just four months before, but now it felt a universe away. Three months into my sophomore year, I was mired in work and friends and a looming dread of the future rushing to greet me with every passing second. I was deeply rooted in this place. I had a history, an identity, and a certain picture I painted of myself and displayed to friends and acquaintances.

Back then, in that remote place on the opposite side of the country, it didn't matter who I hit or kissed. There was no shared past and no promised future and no harsh electric light for the world to judge me by, only the gentle passive gaze of stars too ancient to care whether I broke a law or another person.

I stood on the sidewalk, momentarily alone, hovering on the edge of the darkness. I wanted to run, silent and invisible, for miles, over the fields and streets and yards of a town I had known since childhood, which now stood transformed by the absence of artificial light. I wanted to do something wild, crazy, forbidden – something I knew I would not have the chance to do again for a long time. I wanted one of the shadows that stretched over the ground to materialize into something solid, something that would fly out and attack me with claws and teeth so that I could experience the pure exhilaration of fighting it off. I wanted something I could beat bloody and rip apart without ever having to face the consequences by the light of day.

I felt myself teetering on the edge of these possibilities. A few steps, that was all it would take, and before I knew it I would be racing. But I thought of my mother's tired face, the tense set of my father's jaw, the way the promise of returning to a cold, dark house seemed to drag my sisters' mouths down and glaze their eyes, and I knew I couldn't just disappear into the night. ♦

My town was a mess of fallen trees and downed power lines

I wanted to do something wild, crazy, forbidden



Photo by Megan Lasnick, Jupiter, FL

The Turkey Story

by Kayleigh Warren, Española, NM

I know the beat of a truck on a dirt road almost better than I know the beat of my heart. I was raised in the fields, where my feet smush into fertile grit and my hands flutter like the dragonflies I chase through flawless rows of rough, sticky corn plants. My family stomps through the cloudy ditch water, painting our ripped Levis and cotton T-shirts with liquid life. Sometimes the irrigation pipe clogs up with clay. On these days, my father takes his rusty shovel from the bed of the truck and goes to war.

My brother and I squat like frogs and catch the clumps of mud that my father flings over his shoulder. When the wet earth seeps into valleys in our hands, our skin tone changes from a dusty paleness to its usual golden hue, just as the rain rejuvenates the cracks in the soil outside our home.

I try to make my lumps of clay into the thin, curving pots formed by the experienced hands of my aunts. Today I want a wedding vase, squash blossom-like with thumb handles. My eyes search and find a large clump – there, behind my father’s left boot. Visions of selling my pot to admiring tourists in Santa Fe dance through my head.

My father digs into the pipe and throws the mud back violently. I bend to grab the clump. The shovel stabs into the trapped clay, and I examine my treasure; it’s perfect. I stand, and the shovel flies back – into my forehead.

Blood spatters on my brown T-shirt, my favorite pink cowboy boots, and my father’s T-shirt when he picks me up and runs to the truck, almost leaving my brother in the ditch in his haste to get to the hospital.

As my father speeds like a crazy man, my head resting on the window smears red on the blurred

landscape outside. One-two-three, bump, one-two and right turn. I count the beats of the dirt road on the way to the city.

At the hospital, my father scoops me up and runs inside. I stare at my ruined boots while my father checks me in and the doctors settle me in a gurney. I wake up to my mother and a new haircut.

A blonde doctor comes in. “Hi sweetie!” she says in a high-pitched voice. “You got in a little tussle, didn’t you?” *Why is Barbie in the emergency room, and why is she calling me sweetie?* I wonder.

“I don’t know what a tussle is. But I have a laceration on my forehead,” I say bluntly. The doctor chuckles, and I see my parents’ shoulders relax. My brain must be working; I’m as sassy as ever.

“Yes, and you need stitches,” she says.

“How many?” my father asks, guilty tears rolling down his cheeks.

“About twenty. I’ll give her a shot to numb the pain.” She gestures toward a syringe on a metal tray next to her.

I’ve never been afraid of needles, but in this moment I feel like hearing something other than the twinkle of hospital telephones and the consoling chatter of doctors attending to others.

“Mom, can you tell me a story?” I ask, closing my eyes as the doctor positions the needle between my right eye and nose.

“What story, baby?”

“The turkey story.”

I hear a chair scrape and settle on my left side. My mother’s warm hand covers my small, muddy one. A sharp pain spreads through my face as the doctor injects the medicine.

“When I was a little girl,” my mother begins, “I stayed with my godparents a lot because my mom,

your Nali, worked and my dad, your Te-eh, was ... um ... sick.” She removes the real reason from the story, aware of the doctor listening.

“My godparents, Be-bah John and Be-bah Veronica, had animals: cows, chickens, pigs, and one turkey. They called him Mean Turkey.” She chuckles.

“Mean Turkey liked to chase the kids, so Be-bah John kept him in a pen. One day, Be-bah Veronica was out shopping and all us kids were helping Be-bah John feed the animals. We were standing outside of Mean Turkey’s pen when a man on a motorcycle drove into the yard. Back then, there was no UPS on the Isleta rez, so a man we called Froggie brought everyone’s packages from the post office. All of us, including Be-bah John, went to help bring the big package into the house. But we didn’t check that we’d closed Mean Turkey’s pen.

“When we came out a few minutes later, we saw Mean Turkey sitting on Froggie’s motorcycle, which he’d left running. Be-bah John tried to scare him off, but Mean Turkey wouldn’t budge. He pecked and clawed at the men when they came close.

“He sat on that motorcycle for almost an hour, until the thing ran out of gas. As soon as it sputtered and died, Mean Turkey hopped off and booked it back to his pen. It was the damndest thing we’d ever seen.”

My mother is shaking with laughter, and my teary-eyed father cracks a small smile.

“All done,” the doctor says. “Your mama is an excellent storyteller. I’ve never seen a patient so calm while getting that many stitches. I think it even helped me work faster, imagining how long it would take to patch up someone who’d gotten attacked by a motorcycle-obsessed turkey. In fact, I have a turkey story of my own” ♦

We didn’t check that we’d closed Mean Turkey’s pen

Good-Bye Forever

by Alex Helm, Double Oak, TX

To say that it’s been a strange week would be an understatement.

The last day I played in band – on my own trombone, at least – was Wednesday. I used somebody else’s on Thursday, since I purposely left mine at home, hoping to escape playing. Even though I was fuming that I couldn’t join the seniors and take a break, it still struck me as weird that within a week, everybody else would still be learning next year’s show music – and I wouldn’t be. I’d be a spectator, not a performer. I had already taken off my band bracelets, the mark of a band member, of the cult. The three rested on my shelf, missing the fourth that I would never receive. I’d already moved my trombone to the back of my closet, stored away all my old music, and said good-bye to the band hall and the trombones and Mr. Simon.

But it was okay. I had bigger things waiting.

On Thursday, I had to say good-bye to everyone who sat at the back table with me in newspaper. All of them were either seniors or not returning next year. My confidants, my political experts, my gam-

er goddess, my colleagues who worked their tails off on the rape culture issue would be gone. As Will took a picture of us outside the newsroom, I was struck by how alone I’d be next year without them.

But it was okay. It was my turn to be a leader on the staff.

Then came Friday. I sat in the hall before school and watched Ethan come around the corner. He was dressed in his standard too-big khaki shorts, dirty black and white tennis shoes, and a navy blue *Regular Show* shirt. His black curls were wet from his morning shower and he was wearing his new glasses, the ones with dark, thick frames that I never got to steal and wear. He came around the corner and we made eye contact. Neither of us smiled, but for a moment we were the only ones in the crowded hallway. Then he kept walking and was gone. And I realized that that was probably the last time I’d see that nerdy math geek who somehow managed to break my heart into a million pieces because he only under-

stood numbers, not people.

But it was okay. Maybe I’d meet someone better for me.

Then, after school, as Jared hugged me in the parking lot, I felt tears welling up. He kept saying “good-bye forever,” which I knew wasn’t true – I’d see him at Logan’s graduation party Saturday night – but I couldn’t help crying. My best

friend was going to college, and I couldn’t do anything about it. So I cried in my truck on my way home, even though he is only going to the University of North Texas 45 minutes away and where I’d probably be going as well. But who would sit with me in the

morning, at lunch, after school? Who else had our sense of humor? Who else knew what I was always thinking by just looking my way? Who else could I confide in about hard stuff – boys, drama, the pain of being a teenager?

I could tell myself it was okay. That I’d figure it out. All my friends may be graduating, but I would find a way. I’d make new friends. And I know I would.

My best friend was going to college



Photo by MollyKate Cline, Powell, OH

Except right now it’s not okay. If I were a Greek hero, my fatal flaw would be selfishness. And selfish thoughts keep careening through my head:

What about me?

What am I going to do next year? ♦

Texas Tough

by Rebecca Conner, Bothell, WA

“Junk fish!”

I looked on in horror as the small fish attached to my pole was thrown on the ground and squished under my grandfather's shoe. Just six years old, I was on my first fishing trip, and my first catch was a crushed, oozing pile on the ground. The fish (or, as Grandpa said, “seafood pancake”) was thrown back into the rushing river, no longer wriggling.

I was close to tears at his brutal killing of the writhing fish, and my grandmother was appalled at his actions and told him so. At the time, I could not fathom why my grandfather would be so cruel to the small fish dangling on my line; however, now I know that his actions, though blunt, had a clear cause. The species of fish I had caught was invasive and parasitic, feeding on many of the native species to the point where some were near extinction. To Grandpa, exterminating it was the only way to prevent it from further jeopardizing the ecosystem.

Having grown up in Texas, my grandfather felt that hunting and fishing were natural activities, and that there was no point to the “hippie ideas” about saving the animals. Vegetarianism was a ridiculous concept; why would God have given us meat if we weren't meant to eat it? Nonetheless, he valued the forest and its creatures more than many environmentalists do. My grandfather was respectful of the habitats he entered and the animals within them, and was careful to take only what he would use. He instilled in me a reverence for nature.

Three years later, I sat on the floor of my grandparents' spacious house, shouting triumphantly after winning a rousing game of cards against my brother. An old dog limped pathetically down the stairs toward us. Rufus was a wedding present from my grandfather's previous marriage. After his wife died, he had remarried, and the old dog was all he had left of that time in his life.

The wooden stairs proved to be too slick for Rufus's weathered paws and arthritic knees, and the dog slipped and fell down the last five steps. Suddenly, my grandfather stood up and declared, “I have to go do something.”

He took hold of Rufus's collar and dragged him to the door. On his way, he grabbed the hunting gun from the closet. My grandmother began to cry, and my mother looked distraught.

I held my breath, eyes glued on the closing door, waiting for ... what?

A gunshot cut the static of anticipation.

My mother gasped. The door slammed, and my grandfather came back in, his back hunched as he put the gun in the closet. He returned to his leather recliner without a word or glance to the rest of us.

Later, armed with only a shovel and his memories, my grandfather dug a grave as rain ceaselessly soaked the earth. He buried his venerable companion next to an apple tree under which the dog had spent many hours lounging in the summer sun.

Born during the Great Depression, a veteran of World War II, thrice married and twice widowed, my grandfather was neither tactful nor sophisticated. His fingernails were perpetually caked with dirt, and I never saw him wear any shoes besides his crusty brown work boots. He was bow-legged, broad-shouldered, had a wide face, and wore thick, square glasses. Grandpa was missing three of his fingers: while using a table saw in his shed, he'd sliced them to the knuckle in a moment of distract-

tion. He had continued to work as a carpenter for another year, until a fall off a ladder spurred my grandmother to finally prohibit any further construction work.

Raised in the South during an era of strict gender roles and segregation, he was far from politically correct regarding race and firmly believed women should stay at home and tend the house. He smoked and he drank, and despite my grandmother's pleadings, he would never break his nicotine addiction or fully abstain from alcohol. However, he was always happy to see my siblings and me. Grandpa would greet us every morning and bid us goodnight each evening, and never turned down a game of cards or an invitation to share a crossword puzzle.

Sometime around my third year in school, my grandfather had a stroke, and after that, I saw him very little. My mother warned me of the effects on him, both physical and mental, so I prepared myself to see a broken shell of my proud grandfather. I saw little change at first, though, just rare moments of confusion or a delayed response here and there.

Then we received more bad news. Years of smoking had left their mark on his body; cancer had bloomed in his lungs and had grown past the point of recovery. That same month he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The various terms used to label my grandfather's ailments meant nothing to me until, inevitably, on a visit to his house, he called me Louise, my mother's name. That was the day I began to see deeper, beyond my impenetrable image of him, past his face worn with wrinkles, to his more human, mortal aspects.

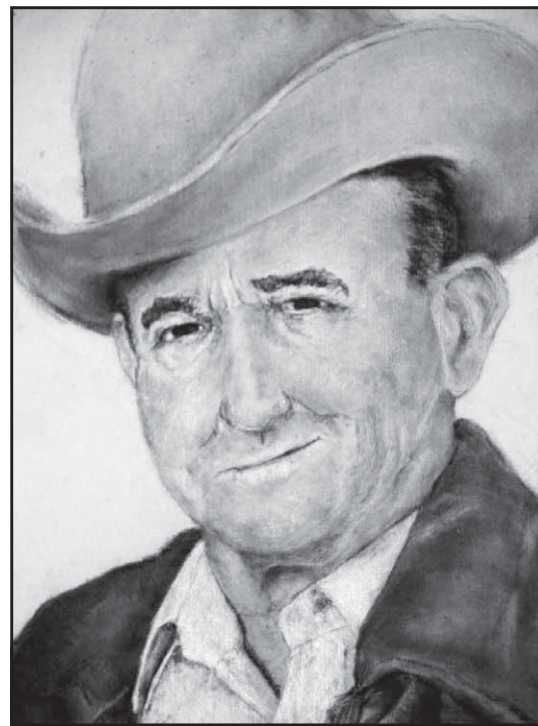
Grandpa appeared tough and often uncaring, speaking and acting bluntly when really he merely saw no point in social convention or dishonesty even for the sake of propriety. I loved him but was intimidated by his strict discipline and harsh voice. He demanded respect and obedience and was extremely pragmatic. I shared few of his political and social beliefs; I dislike hunting and am socially liberal, speak openly about my support of the LGBT community, and am a vocal feminist. If I had told Grandpa any of these things, he might have told me I was wrong, but he would not have judged me as a person because of my beliefs. He cared little about what people said (especially politicians, as he made clear whenever politics were mentioned), instead judging people's characters by their actions.

According to my mother, Grandpa loved my smile because it reminded him of Flo, my grandmother. With a small smile, she recounts how he loved me and my inexhaustible energy, how he thought I was a “riot.” “You had that grin, and you were such a character; it cracked him up,” she says. With all of my heart, I wish he could see me now.

A last memory to send you off: I was 11, and we were on the beach. It was cold, and my hair whirled around me in the confused winds, my feet on the freezing packed sand, my ankles splattered with sea foam. My grandfather walked beside me, bent from the weight of his years and the breakdown of his body. He was post-stroke and constantly confused. The rest of my family was ahead, laughing and screaming; in the fog they looked faint, and their yells echoed along the endless stretch of sand.

My grandfather and I did not talk, but we walked together, our footprints side by side. He was nearest to the water, and when I looked back his footsteps were gone, erased by the waves that caressed the

*My smile
reminded him
of Flo, my
grandmother*



Art by Aaron Black, Perryton, TX

sand, while mine continued alone.

I suddenly began to cry, devastated at his changes and the thought of a future without him. When he noticed and asked why, calling me Carol, his daughter's name, I told him that I just missed him. He was thoughtful for a long time, to the point where I thought he had forgotten. Then he turned to me and said, “Don't cry. That isn't worth none of your tears. Save them for something ... something that matters.”

But he did matter more than I knew and he himself knew. Five years after his death, I still miss him. He was gratingly honest, caring, and stood firmly for what he believed in, without letting his strong beliefs affect how he treated people. Despite our differing views, for that, I admire him. ♦

Hunted & Honored

Leather carefully cut and sewn together keeps the boy warm.
Leg sinew backs his high-powered bow,
Backstrap sinews make the string
kill hundreds of friends.
Hockskin holds the arrows in the bag.

Family and friends – hunted and killed.
My skin keeps the boy warm
on the coldest of nights.
My tendons kill thousands more
for the tribe to survive.
My bones held,
collected and cut.
My meat feeds families,
boys and girls.
Family and friends – appreciated and honored.

Bone handles hold ax heads that cut firewood.
Deer tallow keeps his tools from drying and cracking.
Meat feeds his family
to keep them alive.
Hooves hang as ornaments to show respect.

by Nicole Krickhahn, Hartland, WI

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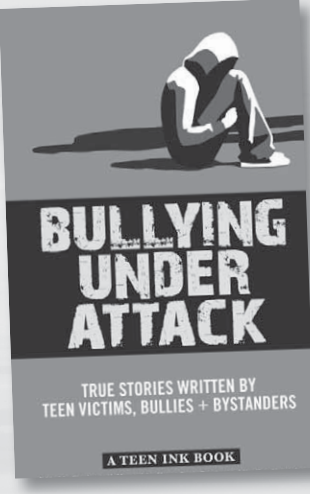
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Misadventures in Publishing

by Jack McLaughlin, Anchorage, AK

Fellow aspiring writers, this is a cautionary tale about publishing. I felt obligated to write it because I know that for young writers, having adults recognize and publish your creation is a dream come true. However, for me, it played out more like a nightmare. Last fall, I toiled over an article that a major magazine with over 70,000 subscribers was paying me to write. Sounds great, right? But the result was a disappointment.

The article's focus was Paul Claus and Kurt Stuwe's expedition from Alaska to Northern Greenland by bush plane. While in Greenland, they retraced the steps of Alfred Wegener, the famous geologist responsible for the theory of continental drift. (The story, "Let's Go to Greenland," can be found on TeenInk.com.) I got the idea for the article after Paul, a family friend, sent a short e-mail describing the trip to my dad, who forwarded it to me. Reading the e-mail, I envisioned a glimmering retelling of his story, one that was exciting, intriguing, and above all, published. This would be new for me, having only written for my school newspaper and blog. I spent August pitching my idea to various publications and eventually found a buyer, a magazine that would

While the old errors were gone, new ones had appeared

pay me \$350.

The initial elation of finding a home for my article was followed by the hard work of actually writing it. I made calls and did extensive research. Late nights spent at my keyboard and a definite decrease in social interaction gave way to a first draft that I was extremely proud of.

The next step, e-mailing my article to the magazine's editors, terrified me.

Would they like it? Would these grown-ups be less kind than the teachers at my school? I am only 16, and I thought they might decide that my writing wasn't up to par. I soon learned that my imagination had gotten the better of me when in my inbox appeared a reply from my editor. She loved the article but wanted my 2,500 words cut down to 1,500.

So I began reworking my article, taking out the less important details and scrapping a few anecdotes. This was a painful process; every word felt vital to me. When I was finished, my second draft seemed a shadow of its ancestor, but it would have to do. It was nobody's fault that my original article was too long. That's just how the publishing world works. Each piece is allotted only a certain amount of space. Magazines do not tailor themselves to writers' work; rather, writers must adapt to the needs of the

magazine.

The rest of the editing process went as expected, with my editor asking for clarification on some bits of the article, and cutlines for the accompanying pictures.

In early November, I was given a publication date of December 12. I didn't hear from my editor until December 2, when I received an e-mail telling me that my article had been moved to the publisher's Sunday newspaper instead and would be printed on December 7. My article would act as a teaser for the magazine's release. I was told that this was the result of cutting the size of the issue that my piece would appear in. This news didn't disappoint me; I was happy to have my piece published anywhere. However, I was quite disappointed after seeing a PDF of my article as it would be printed that Sunday.

It was fraught with errors, and I'm not talking about small grammatical errors. I'm talking about literary goiters that slapped you right in the face. The subtitle misspelled "retracing" as "retracting." An article about a painter was thrown in with mine, with nothing to distinguish where one ended and the other began. There were some nonsensical sentences, one of which was only two words long: "They questioned." The errors would've been comical if they weren't so disheartening.

To top it all off, the article had already gone to press. There was no way of repairing the damage to my hard work before it was placed on the doorsteps of thousands of readers. Nestled in the pages of the newspaper would be an article bearing my name filled with mistakes that were not my doing. I cringed at the thought.

I sent an e-mail to everyone involved in the publication of my article, asking what could be done about the mistakes. I received an e-mail reply from a vice president at the company. She did not apologize; rather, she instructed me to call her to "discuss next steps." I did, and we decided to republish the article the following Sunday. Accompanying it would be a note explaining that it was being republished because of its original errors. She said that mistakes like this happen, as if to say that it is normal for an article to be butchered during layout.

They sent me a revised version, and while the old mistakes were gone, new

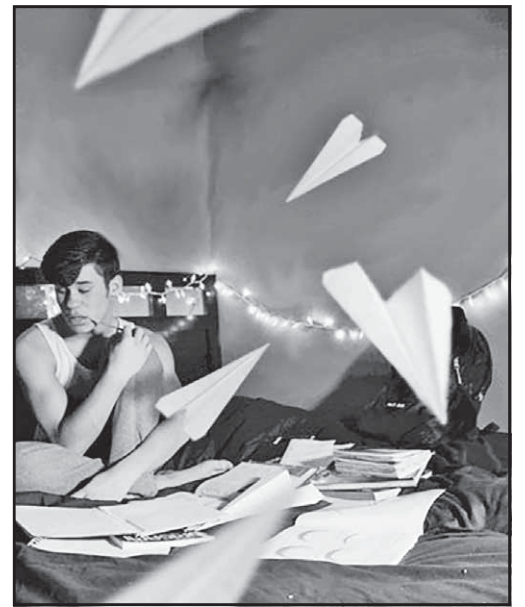


Photo by Austin Akidil, Lexington, KY

ones had appeared. Although the article had been reformatted to fit the new page, the hyphens from the old line breaks remained. As a result, there were random hyphens in the middle of words (i.e. "enthusiastical-ly"). Fortunately, I was able to notify the editors of the problem before the article was republished. It was astonishing that they, again, hadn't proofread my piece before sending it to me. These grown-up editors, whose knowledge and prowess once terrified me, now seemed incompetent and lazy.

I'm not saying that I think I'm better than those editors, or that I am free of fault. I was just disappointed that all of my hard work was rendered pointless by people whom I had admired and expected more from.

I'm sure I'm not the first writer to be unhappy with the published version of his or her work, and I am sure that I won't be the last. However, I do think that I approached this new experience of publishing with a certain level of avoidable naivety. I assumed that putting my work in the hands of professionals would automatically yield a perfect result, but I was wrong. I lost my grip on

what I had written because I was blinded by the excitement of being published.

Young writers are very susceptible to adults' opinions, and while it is wise to follow their counsel in most cases, it is not always necessary. If it is your work, your voice is more important than anyone else's. You shouldn't allow what you've written to be published unless you fully believe in it, unless you stand by it, and unless you are proud of it. See your work through until the very end, because in the end, it's your name in the byline, not your editor's. ♦

I lost my grip on what I had written

The Unpublished Author

She pours her soul into the context of your mix,
Her literary piece of heart.
But with all that she does and anything she writes
The world will never know the beauty of her words.
She's discouraged time and time again,
But she cannot seem to deny
This innate thirst for words
Her only option – to write.
Write her soul into the context of your mix,
Pour her aging words into this library of relics
Only to see them blended in, undistinguished from all the rest.
Fossils to the unspoken word.
What is it to write, write but not be read?
Though she's used to being told she is not good enough
What kind of polish and prestige does it take
For just one editor to find these little pieces of her heart
Useful?
She takes another piece of her soul's intent,
Pours the letters onto paper
Only to find
That maybe this time they will sparkle.
This piece comes from the unpublished author
She writes with the will to succeed,
though she has not.

by Rachel Chace, Stratford, CT

How I Met Poetry

by Isabel Meyers, Brookline, MA

I never intended to fall in love with poetry. The stress of perfecting each syllable required too much perseverance and too many late nights. For years I scrawled school-assigned poems hastily on the backs of math worksheets, always good but never good enough for my teachers. Putting words into exact order, with each letter balancing the next, used to be an arduous chore with no more of a reward than one receives for washing dishes. But spilling my emotions into sentences in front of a crowded room of outsiders changed me as a writer.

To say that my school's Slam Poetry Club was minuscule would be an understatement. It had four members. I joined not out of noble interest in the art of poetry slamming, nor the value of its appearance on my college résumé, but because the club leader was cute and said he liked my writing. Granted, he called me by the wrong name and was desperate to increase team morale, but that was good enough for me. I showed up to every meeting, not caring that I didn't have a single poem to show for myself.

The problem arose when the team leader announced we would organize the first annual Teen Word Poetry Slam. I still hadn't read any of my work to the group, mostly because my artfully decorated poetry notebook was full of blank pages. I was not a poet, and soon someone was going to call my bluff. So I did what any panicked procrastinator would do: I wrote a three-minute slam poem overnight.

It was great. I could just tell it was. Now all I had to do was recite it by heart in front of a hundred people.

My poem, "An Open Letter to the Chinese Cashiers at Whole Foods," was exactly what I wanted it to be. It was edgy with a sprinkle of sass to combat the racism and cultural differences that slam poets love to rant about. It wove anecdotes into my identity issues around being an adopted Chinese American. Most importantly, it added something to the nothingness in my poetry folder and could be memorized in a week. Unfortunately, I was too scared to show it to anyone, so I mumbled it to myself while walking my dog, ignoring the nervous glances of pedestrians who were convinced I was insane. I swear even in my sleep my hands imitated the gestures I had practiced for hours on end.

The day of the poetry slam finally arrived. My palms were all sweat and tremors, and my knees refused to let me sit down. I paced the back of the room until my number was called, pausing occasionally to stuff cookies

into my mouth to stop it from practicing my piece. The moment came that I had prepared for my entire career as a poet (half a month). I stepped onto the stage and adjusted the microphone. Taking a deep breath, I looked over the heads of strangers and let the first line fall from my lips.

I had prepared for days on the off chance I forgot the words and had to make the mortifying trip back to my seat to find the printed version. What I was not prepared for was the utter calm I felt standing in front of classmates and strangers, telling them the fears and musings I was still scared to confess to my parents. For the first time, I felt completely understood by everyone in the room. I was safe in their silence and their gentle murmurs of approval, and held close by their snaps and whoops.

The end of the poem, a brief translation of Mandarin Chinese that I had looked up the day before, fell in front of me before I could even blink back the spotlight. For a moment, the entire gymnasium of enthusiastic poets didn't have a word to say. At that moment, I knew I had succeeded.

The awards ceremony was brief. I finished second, behind a hippie girl without shoes.

I won a gift certificate to a wonderful bookseller, but that piece of paper was no match for the praise given to me by the audience members. Some complimented my performance; others said they were furious I had not won. Little did they know that winning did not matter at all. I had given them words and they had given them back to me. I was flying high and ran home desperate to put pen to paper again.

If words were a drug, I became a junkie. I breathed in rhymes and exhaled alliteration. For days after the slam I sat at my desk, tearing through page after page trying to recreate the rush of perfecting a masterpiece. After that night, I had a greater understanding of why people spend weeks writing the perfect poem just for one showcase. I got why those four team members went to meetings even when no one at school appreciated their hard work. It's for the moment of connection between the poet and the reader, when everything suddenly makes sense and each line brings you closer to knowing each other.

Hoping that readers will find themselves in my writing is why I hunch over my computer in the wee hours of the morning, riding a wave of creativity until my brain betrays me. It's why I keep pestering my friends to join Poetry Club, even when I know they will never show up. It's why I write. ♦

*I was not a poet,
and soon someone
was going to call
my bluff*

An Open Letter to the Chinese Cashiers at Whole Foods

I know you're looking at me
Trying to pick out an accent,
Dissecting my American.
Hoping the Chinese school vocab
Has stuck to my skin, coating me in
enough Asian
To cover my paling soul.

All you are is a checkout bagger,
a minimum wage mom
Asking a scarlet red girl to say
something, anything
In her native language.

And I can't.

I can do other things, you know.
I've completed more than one
Victorian novel,
Struggling all night to recall
pretentious character names
Like St. John and Rochester
There was that time the third graders
voted me Runkle Elementary
Next Top Model, strutting past the
swing set in Gap Kid jeans
And a toothless grin

But that's not what you seek.

You want a sign, a beacon of hope
to show
I am not the twinkie my highlighted
tresses have betrayed me to be.
That I have not sold out,
Letting my liver and kidneys be
bleached by the media
Leaving my canary-colored exterior
a shell
To my creamy white plastic insides
Your elevated eyebrows asked
When I stopped being Chinese
For the day I was corrupted,
Auctioning my soul to Uncle Sam,
Because his wide cobalt eyes proved
to be more brilliant
Than Mao's icy stare

It had to be a rhetorical question.
Even I don't want to know
When my skin became an elaborately
painted mask,
The seams barely straining at all
But I do know, and I'll tell you
Because I'm tired of standing in line
With my melting Ben & Jerry's
And my heart pounding so hard
my lungs
Are bulging with the effort to keep up
While you pretend we have anything
in common

You see, at the intersection of
Chinatown and Anytown,
There is a point of a #2 pencil,
Five minutes into math,
When the boy in pleated khakis
stretches his eyes out at you,
And you cover your perfect math test,
Willing that A+ to eat some
McDonalds and expand

Into the voluminous C of your
classmates

When the line on your
eyelids grows red and rashy
From the double-sided Scotch tape
used
To fold those widescreen-
viewing eyes
Into those American creases of
beauty and power

Because at that moment the red silk
cheongsam
Wouldn't fit over my hamburger
thighs,
And those navy blue sweatpants
began to feel a whole lot like home

And now I don't speak my family's
tongue,
I choke on syllables foreign to my lips
Like forcing grape cough syrup to
go down

Perhaps my ancestors, connected to
me
By the impossible stream coursing
through my veins
Have snapped the arteries and turned
their eyes
From the girl using Google Translate
to pray

I have realized they cannot hear
my pleas,
My garbled English must blanket their
angel ears
But as I hand you my wrinkled dollars,
I ask of you one thing more.

You who have struggled through
adversity
Seen culture and curses oh so different
than your homeland
You who can speak to my ancestors,
Still sharing the root of language
That binds two entities together in a
knot of understanding

Please leave them this request,
As my bones have grown tired
Of kneeling for repentance
And paper macheing my body
with lies

Tell them to peel away my faded beige
exterior
Remove my skin stained with my
family's tears and shame
Their hunger and pride
Tear through the layers of my rice
packed complexion,
Harvested from second children lost

And once they finish,
When down my arms pours the blue of
my striped flag,
The blue of America
The blue of my guilt,
Tell them *Wǒ ài nǐ* – I love you
And *Duìbuqǐ* – I'm sorry ♦

Thank You, Google

by Amy Carothers, Cape Coral, FL

In *The Simpsons* episode “Holidays of Future Passed,” our favorite yellow-skinned family visits the ominous, tech-tyrannized world of the future. Within the “Ultranet,” Lisa accesses Google by walking through a special door and declares, “Google, even though you’ve enslaved half the world, you’re still a damn fine search engine.”

That’s possibly my favorite quote of all time. It’s just so relatable. I mean, come on, there is absolutely no justifiable reason that I should search Google for linguine recipes and wind up watching a video of He-Man singing “What’s Up” by 4 Non Blondes. But it’s like they always say: when you pay attention to boredom, it gets unbelievably interesting.

One of these casual Google searches changed my life in the summer of 2013. I was home alone, bored, and hungry (the natural state of a wild teenager). Out of habit, I browsed Google so I could feign productivity. “High school writing contests,” I typed. Being the competitive sort, I loved pitting my words against others’. I was looking for contests, not programs. Competitions, not camps.

You know how they say that Google learns about you from your browser history? I just gotta say, I’m so glad that it believed that I’m better than He-Man and linguine, because there was one search result amongst the myriad that stood out: Teen Ink’s New York City Summer Writing Program.

I felt a thrill. What self-respecting artsy, pink-haired individual doesn’t love New York? And it was an all-girls program. Thirty-two girls from across the globe would convene for two weeks in NYC to embrace our passion. These were the kind of girls who preferred to spend their summer vacation in writing classes.

Spoiler alert: I applied.

I stepped off the plane onto the shiny linoleum of the JFK airport, a stark contrast to my hometown, Nowheresville, Florida. I’d never visited a city bigger than Miami. I’d never seen a skyscraper. I’d

never even realized how many nevers I had. It was a summer awakening. New sights, new places, new scents, new faces, new, new, new! I breathed it in with a dreamlike wonder. We explored what seemed like every inch of the city, slept on the 25th floor of the Juilliard School, and shrieked with joy at Independence Day fireworks.

I remember walking into Strand Bookstore. The smell of paper hit me like a bulldozer. Piles of books, mountains of books, three stories of books.

I remember not being able to get off the Statue of Liberty island. I was sticky and angry and hot, but we were together. The umbrellas we held up in

broad daylight were like multicolored mushrooms sprouting at Lady Liberty’s feet.

I remember crying at the surprise Fourth of July party. I remember lying on our stomachs in the dorm debating the pros and cons of first-person versus third-person narratives.

I remember meeting Irene from South Korea and Dana from Nigeria and Francesca from Nicaragua and Catherine from Silicon Valley. The Internet connected me with those girls before the program, so that when I ran to embrace them on the steps of Lincoln Center, I was uniting with friends rather than strangers. It’s the Internet that has kept us tight ever since.

The streets of New York pried open my ribs and opened me up to a whole new world. Thanks to my trip, I can’t help but feel like I expanded. I never imagined I’d end up in New York City, and I realized I have potential. My future is wide open.

Now, Google, you’re not completely innocent. You’ve whittled away my free time and kept me up ’til 5 a.m. But that summer was the definition of living. Say what you will about kids and technology, but the Internet isn’t (only) the graveyard where trigonometry homework goes to die. It’s the places I visited, but not only that, it’s the people I met. It’ll be how I submit my internship application to Penguin Publishing, calling upon one of its editors who mentored me in NYC, and it’ll be how I Skype with the friends I made across the globe.

Google, though you’re just an inanimate search engine, I’m so thankful to you. You’ve served me very well. (You don’t even display pop-up ads.) You’re the tour guide in my exploration of the wild jungles of the Outside World. I have a feeling that our alliance will go far.

So listen, Google: when others were shaking their fists about “kids these days,” I defended you. Please remember this when you become sentient and enslave the planet. ♦

It was a summer awakening



Photo by Maggie Whittemore, Rumson, NJ

So Long, Teen Ink

by Brett Bohan, Stanwood, MI

My first submission to Teen Ink was during freshman year, almost six years ago. My style was rough and unoriginal, my voice was unclear and needed polishing, but it was a start. The only reason I found TeenInk.com in the first place was because my creative writing teacher forced us to submit our work somewhere; Teen Ink was that somewhere for me. If I could thank that teacher for one thing, it would be directing me to this magazine.

My fourth semester of college has been hectic; school, work, and friends have occupied the majority of my time, and I don’t get to write as much as I used to (well, not creatively, at least). I continue to write when I can, and even though my more recent work is likely too adult for the magazine, I wouldn’t say that I have outgrown Teen Ink. The only reason that this is my last submission is because I will no longer be a teenager in less than a week.

To say that I’m disappointed to go would be an understatement. If there’s one outlet that has bolstered my confidence, it’s Teen Ink. Receiving Editor’s Choice awards and being published in the print magazine was incredibly uplifting and helped me believe that my writing is good enough. I wrote in an article on my blog that being published by *Teen Ink* is the ultimate congratulations I could receive. So, first and foremost, this is a thank you letter to the editors and everyone else working behind the scenes to maintain TeenInk.com and the magazine.

Honestly, though, perhaps my favorite part about Teen Ink is the comments from readers. I enjoy interacting with my “fans” and getting positive feedback from people who aren’t socially obligated to say that they like my work. Every like, every rating, every com-

ment, every response makes me smile. I love receiving those notices in my e-mail.

Teen Ink was, is, and hopefully will remain a long-lived creative channel that gives young people the chance to show their talents to the world. I didn’t realize how important that was until last year. Teen Ink gives so many gifted artists a voice in a way that I haven’t seen anywhere else. It has been an important outlet for my creative writing career, which I hope will be long and fruitful, but it goes beyond just me – to future creative teenagers who will also get their start through Teen Ink. As much as I want to thank Teen Ink for giving writers a chance, I want to thank the authors for being willing to share. Keep writing.

I’d also like to thank the Teen Ink artists. A lot of the focus is on the writers – I know I didn’t really think much

about it when I picked an image for my submissions – so I would like to give a special thank you to the people who produce those images.

I remember thinking in creative writing class that I had a long time before I would no longer be a teenager. Heck, I remember thinking last year that I had a long time. I was wrong. Time flew by, and I am glad for the opportunities I did take advantage of. A piece of advice I would give my younger self would be to utilize Teen Ink more. If you’re serious about writing, even if you’re not sure that it’s what you want to pursue long-term, it can’t hurt to give yourself a start here.

Anyway, I think I’m getting long-winded. Looking back at what I’ve written, I see a little “graduation speech” in it. I hate graduation speeches, and I gave one. So – thanks, Teen Ink and the members of the website. It’s been a good run, but it’s time to say good-bye. ♦

Being published was incredibly uplifting



Photo by Surya Miele, Los Angeles, CA



Photo by Ethan Lai, Belmont, MA



Art by Tanner Abel, Rome, NY



Art by Magdalene Landgren, Pipestone, MN



Photo by Koryn Bennett, Nashotah, WI



Art by Karla Amador, Easley, SC

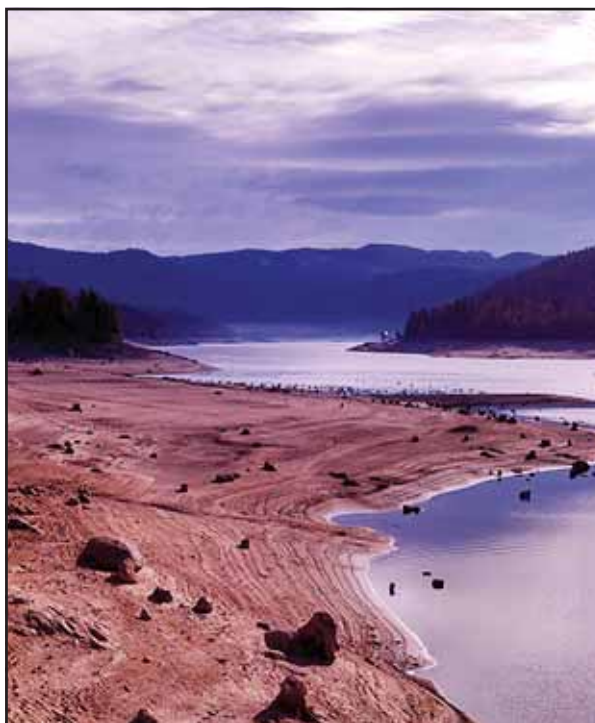


Photo by Katie Marke, Nipomo, CA



Photo by Caitlyn Stansfield, Loveland, CO

Aftermath

by Olivia Zhang, Houston, TX

A hazy summer light flooded the village. The sky was a clear, bright blue that echoed the peaceful, gentle waves of the sea. At noon I departed from the house of my hostess, Gwanda, and skipped down the steps leading to the shore, sundress blowing in the wind. Gwanda's son, Ganzi, was already there, playing tag with Layza, his eight-year-old sister. I could hear their laughter even before I reached the bottom of the stone steps. Stepping out of the shade, I called to Ganzi.

He turned. I could see a hint of a five o'clock shadow surrounding his wide smile. "Caroline! Where have you been? You missed the pre-games. I won all three."

I grinned; I'd understood every word. After two months of living and doing research in the village, I had gotten used to the local accent. It was a stark contrast to my city speech, but lately the difference had begun to matter less.

"Oh, that's great! I'm sorry I missed them, but your mom asked me to help prepare for tonight. It's going to be a blast," I responded cheerfully.

It was the night of the midyear festival when the whole village took a day off work and gathered on the beach to celebrate a prosperous fishing season. Gwanda had been panicking, as there were still many preparations to be done.

"All right. You are forgiven." Ganzi grinned. His expression then changed from joyous to slightly timid. A faint blush rose to his prominent cheekbones. "I have not asked anyone to the moon dance yet. So ... I was wondering if you would be my—"

A loud shout interrupted Ganzi midsentence and startled both of us. We looked to see one of the builders yelling and pointing at the shore. The tide was receding. Very, very quickly. It was the strangest phenomenon I'd ever seen. The water was shrinking away, as if it were being sucked back into the ocean by some invisible force. Uneasiness tugged at my chest.

"What's going on?" I asked Ganzi. He was frozen, staring at the shore, a statue amidst the increasing commotion.

"Tsunami."

It was the faintest sound. I wouldn't have caught it if not for the slight movement of his lips.

Questions whipped through the air. An elderly lady I had often seen wrung her hands and chanted a hurried prayer. Gulls squawked, their wings useless in the sudden gusts of cold wind. A baby wailed in her straw cradle at the change in temperature. It felt as if the whole world was a blur of shouting and running, a tornado with Ganzi and me in the eye. My entire body trembled with fear, an earthquake in itself. I was as cold as if my blood had turned to ice, but I knew it wasn't because of the sinking temperature.

"What did you say?"

My words were drowned out in an ascending roar. I thought my head would explode from the pressure of sound. In my peripheral vision I caught sight of men, women, and children swarming up the beach. I didn't feel the frantic tug on my right arm, but my eyes registered a wildly gesturing Ganzi. He spoke rapidly, but I didn't hear a word.

The fading light behind his body created a halo around his figure, a glowing outline. I looked past him toward the sea. *That's funny*, I thought. The waves were no longer peaceful. Instead they were

rushing toward the beach at a terrifying pace. They leapt back and forth, back and forth, getting bigger with each second. I imagined they had sharp, watery talons, like a predator waiting to strike. I watched in a dreamlike state as, finally, a giant, grasping claw loomed over the shore.

"Run!" Ganzi shouted. And then it crashed.

I was sprinting for my life up the sand. I didn't know where I was going. Suddenly I heard a shout.

"Help!"

I knew that voice.

I spun around in time to witness the sea swallow Layza's flailing arms.

No.

My eyes widened. People, my friends, were around me, drowning, struggling in the unforgiving current. Their screams for help pounded in my ears like drums of war. My chest tightened. I was suffocating. My vision blurred. I couldn't breathe. I stumbled, searching for something to hold on to, and screamed as I tripped over a large rock. The sand scraped my skin, and the pain that shot up my leg was enough to shatter my trance. *This is real.*

Suddenly, I felt warm hands slide under my back and legs. Ganzi was picking me up and carrying me bridal style – ironic, given the way he was scrambling unceremoniously up the wet sand. He shouted, and a moment later my body was soaked and freezing.

I was dragged underwater and tossed back and forth in a whirlpool like a rag doll. I resurfaced, gasping, choking. Screams filled the air. I flailed and thrashed my arms and legs, but it was no use. The current had an iron grip on me and wouldn't let go. Before I knew it I was sucked under again. I lost track of how long I was under, tumbling wherever the current led, trying to keep hold of Ganzi. My mind numbed, slowly fading to darkness. The last thing I remembered was Ganzi with his arms tightly wrapped around me, a shield against the storm.

I awoke to the sharp smells of ginger and candle wax. Blinking, I took in the small room: a familiar red armchair, a scratched but clean desk covered with my papers from the university. I was in my room – well, the room I had stayed in for the past two months. The lodging belonged to Gwanda, the village's assistant chief. Gwanda, the mother of Ganzi. Ganzi, who must've saved me from ...

Tsunami. The screams, the loss, the roar of the wind and waves came rushing out from the recesses of my mind, demanding attention and response.

I leaped out of bed and winced as pain jolted through my injured leg. Taking a deep breath, I moved as fast as I could, almost tripping over a neat stack of my clothes that Gwanda had washed and folded. After I'd searched the house and found no one, I slid on my pink flip-flops and went outside.

A dismal sight greeted my eyes. The air was heavy, drooping over the village. The sky was gray, the sand muddy, and there was not a single undam-

*My friends
were around
me, drowning*



Art by Rafi Layish, Orlando, FL

aged building. But the sounds that rang through the air were not those of weeping, but hammering and working, wood planks scraping against stone.

I spotted Ganzi repairing the roof of a nearly decimated house, feet on the highest rung of the precariously propped ladder.

"Ganzi. What happened?"

My arrival surprised him. He jerked backward, almost falling, and stared down at me as if I had just shown up at a party, unexpected, unannounced, with the invitation in my hand.

"Well, after you were sucked under, the tide receded, and I got us back to the house. You passed out; you have been unconscious for almost a day now. You got a fever from swallowing seawater. My mother cooled your temperature with ice, which reminds me, she told me to tell her when you woke up. I guess I'll go find her." Ganzi spoke methodically, as if he were giving someone a list of steps to follow. He turned back to the roof.

"That's it? What is everyone doing now? Why does no one seem sad? How many were lost?" The words tumbled from my throat.

He glanced at me. "All the men are working to repair the damage. If we do not clean it up quickly, the wood will rot and then all will be a disaster. The others are trying to salvage what is left of the food and water." He hammered more nails, composing a dull rhythm. Thump, thump, crack. Thump, tap, thump, thump, crack.

"You still haven't answered my questions. How many are gone? Why is no one acting sad? Why is no one crying?" I inquired desperately.

Again he swung to face me. This time, anger clouded his eyes. The new look was unfamiliar and transformed his face into a stern mask, older than it was with his heart-lifting smile.

"There is work to be done – not a second to waste, and crying over people who are lost to the sea is a waste of time. Also, they would not appreciate it if they knew we had been idling hopelessly weeping instead of productively working."

His words threatened to pull me into the swampy ground. Somehow they upset me more than all the loss. People, children – his little sister – had died. How could he and the village be so heartless? How could everyone go on acting like this tragedy never happened? >>

*How could the
village be so
heartless?*

Lesson Number One

by Kenna Ownbey, Cleburne, TX

Jay flat-out sprinted across the yellow grass toward Canterbury Hall, quite aware that he was late for class for the first time ever. He was sweating slightly, and his coat stuck to him, but the savage wind sneaked under his hood and whipped at his face with such force that his teeth chattered. He drew closer to the sleet-topped building, closer to the rattling gate, closer to the familiar warmth of insulated classrooms. For a second he thought the doors were getting farther away, purposefully mocking him for being late. *I know. I'm sorry*, he thought, hoping doors could read minds.

"People are liars, Julius"

He nearly stopped when he saw an actual person sitting on top of the tall brick gate. Jay had thought it was a statue, but then he saw it was a girl leaning against the flickering lamppost like it was a hot summer day. He feared the angry weather would bring her dark red podium down in a blur of dark hair, long limbs, and chipped brick. She clearly didn't think so.

Bewildered, he slowed to a jog, then stopped, watching as she turned the page of the book in her lap. She

looked serene, even comfortable. A completely inadequate jacket was wrapped around her like a blanket.

"Hey!" Jay called from below. The air stole the words from his mouth, but she heard and locked eyes.

"Hey yourself!" Her reply was loud somehow. It seemed to float straight through him, around him. He shivered.

"What on earth are you doing?"

Nice one, Jay.

"Reading," she answered, like he hadn't just asked the stupidest question in the world.

Jay paused, wide-eyed. She did not elaborate, so he hesitantly went on.

"It's, like, zero degrees out. And when you sit on the fence like that, you literally get twice as much wind. You'll get hypothermia."

Jay felt even more foolish; his gut twisted as one of her eyebrows raised. She was holding back a laugh.

"Why do you care?" she asked.

The heat of Canterbury Hall was calling him, and he knew he was wasting time. Nonetheless, he stood his ground. His stupidly icy ground.

"Why don't you just read inside?"

"Brilliant art cannot be contained

within those flimsy cages."

"Frames?"

Her eyes widened at that, and then she really smiled, all white teeth and crooked lips. "What's your name?"

"Dude, go inside."

"Your name first."

With a small surge of victory, he answered, "Jay."

She chortled. Her chortle wasn't embarrassing, and that was not fair at all. "That's not your real name."

Jay's ego would have been bemiseric had she not been right. "Julius," he said honestly. "My mom was a Shakespeare fanatic."

The girl's lips drew into a thin line. She nodded.

"Are you going to come in now?"

"No, thank you."

He guffawed awkwardly, fiercely. "But you promised."

The girl looked Jay right in the eye, not exactly serious but more serious than before.

"I didn't. It wouldn't matter if I had. People are liars, Julius. That's lesson number one."

Later, when Jay finally persuaded her to go inside (he'd had to resort to letting her call him Julius and, presumably, swearing an oath of eternal friendship), she hopped down from her brick gate tower and landed on the frozen ground somewhat gracefully, despite her legs being numb from the cold. As they began to walk, the light bulb in the lamppost exploded, freezing without her heat, sending crystalline shards flying over their heads. She turned and smiled the smile again, all white teeth and electricity. ♦



Art by Haley Richards, Berkeley, CA

Tears brimming in my eyes, I shouted, "You're crazy! You all are. I can't believe you'd spend the entire day working to fix something that will ultimately be damaged, instead of mourning your own sister!" My voice built up strength, a steady crescendo that reached a pinnacle of fury. "How do you call yourself human? How do—"

"Enough," cut in a voice.

The interruption didn't come from Ganzi, whose lips were pursed in a tight line. I spun around to see Gwanda closing the distance between us.

"Enough arguing. You are shouting so loud that the man on the moon can hear your words. You will wake the sleeping children."

I knew I would explode if I stood there one moment

longer. My mind went blank and my surroundings blurred as I ran past the builders and damaged houses, down the shore, my feet pounding against the rocks.

I ran and ran, wishing that I could disappear into a place of my own, a spot in the universe where the entire village and its noises were nonexistent, somewhere I could unleash all my anger and confusion and frustration and where no one would be there to care.

Reaching a secluded stretch of shore, I stopped. I did not collapse onto the rocks. Instead I noticed the sea, serene and simple. The water around my feet was shallow. Thick, gritty sand squished between my toes as I tentatively waded deeper, farther, toward a blue horizon. I tilted my head toward the darkening sky, feeling as if I were the

only lucid being left in an unpredictable world.

I floated in another universe from the people of the village, from Ganzi. I thought about his stoic, almost robotic response. Could it be that our thoughts, our emotions, our entire perspectives were truly different? His voice had been sharp and direct, a straightforward declaration of what was to be done. He'd said that repairing the houses and salvaging fresh water and food were more important than mourning his own people. What could be more important than grieving the end of so many lives?

I stood in the foam for an immeasur-

able amount of time, pondering his words, playing with them, flipping them so that I began to see them backwards. I kept asking myself why. Why did this have to happen? Why was Ganzi acting so indifferent? Why did I feel like I didn't belong here? Why, why, why

The breeze caught my hair in a torrent of frustration, tangling the strands, desperate to fly free. As the low roar of water thundered in my ears, I gazed out at an open view of the sea.

The sunset no longer a reflection in my eyes, I began the trek back to the village, back to Ganzi.

Aware that everyone must be asleep, I carefully picked my way over the rocks. I had almost reached the low row of houses when I heard a small sound from near the shore, silhouettes against the ocean. My feet sinking in the cold sand, I moved quietly around the rocks to find the source of the sound.

There sat a man with the well-built body of a builder. His body was slumped, his posture limp. He bowed behind the fortress of the rocks, hunched into a ball as if all the life and energy keeping him upright had died. I stayed there for a while, watching his shaking shoulders, listening to him weeping out feathery sorrows, the rush of the waves a background song that played unceasingly. The man shifted ever so slightly, tilting his glassy eyes toward the stars. Unbroken moonlight beamed down upon him, illuminating the high, prominent cheekbones that I knew so well. ♦

Could it be that our emotions were truly different?



Photo by Regan Connaire, Chestertown, MD

Collin and Caroline's Post-Grad Trip

by Zoe Harris,
San Francisco, CA

Collin and Caroline's Ten-Day Post-Grad Journal-Documented Takeover of Australia. There is a ring to it, a certain stylistic touch when written in your scrawling handwriting on the first page of the leather-bound journal – though every sentence with our names next to each other sounds professionally brainstormed. Collin and Caroline.

Thirteen days after high school graduation – and I remember that because it was the day we left for Australia – you said if we didn't

pages, the journal, the trip. We promised we wouldn't read them until we were 25, pinky-swore on that fateful bench, and I kept that promise. I don't expect you to keep it. In a manila envelope, I send you my painstakingly scrawled and your likely flowing sentences. You always were the more willing writer.

Collin: June 20, airplane to Venice
Planes are metaphors for transitions to change – I don't like them. We start out somewhere, either anticipating or dreading leaving (I was the former; God, I couldn't wait to leave home),

and then we find ourselves suspended in the air, nowhere in particular, no ground to identify with. I don't mean to be overly philosophical – Caroline always says I am – but aren't we locationless in a plane? Excuse my unavoidably foul language, but there is no way in hell that I would allow someone to put “above Missouri” as my place of death if the plane were to crash.

Caroline is trying to read over my shoulder (even though she isn't “into” this journal thing). This morning when I bought it, she said, “I know you're a good writer and everything, but I'm not really into this.” Caroline, get into this! With every beat of my heart, every cell of my being, I pray that you will get into this.

Or else we won't remember Collin and Caroline's Ten-Day Post-Grad Journal-Documented Takeover of Australia.

I'm sure you wrote wonderfully in the journal, Collin. You have a way of perceiving the world that I didn't know was possible. When we first met, during freshman orientation, you said I seemed like the type of person who would collect stamps or rocks – objects no one wants. After I picked up an old pen cap I saw on the floor, you said that I probably saw excitement in unimportant things because they're more simply understood. I laughed at the idea that I would be a trivial stamp collector. But I was, and I am, and I lied.

Caroline: June 21, hotel in Melbourne

I never lie. So I told Collin I hate his shirt. That short-sleeved, button-up blue shirt with the huge birds – it's the worst. I never lie – he looks kind of cute in it. I can say that because he won't read this until he's 25. Today we're going to the opera and hopefully to an aborigine art museum (I have yet to convince him on that one). I have a good feeling about this trip, especially since Collin is in

charge of the schedule. After sitting next to him in homeroom and witnessing his color-coded planner every day since freshman year, I don't doubt his organizational skills.

Collin: June 24, outside touristy gift shop selling cheesy souvenirs

At our high school, people who were just friends suddenly became couples at the end of senior year. Everyone said Caroline and I would be one of them. We laughed. We'll probably laugh again when we read this in seven years. Our peers thought we would date. But whatever they think, and whatever we think, right now, we care about each other. So I simply cannot allow someone I care about to buy this dreadful glass s***-show – excuse my unavoidably foul language – that is being thrust in my face. Caroline is about to buy a snow globe with the Sydney Opera House inside. I have transcribed the conversation that is currently unfolding so that she will one day regret every word.

“Collin, I'm going to buy this. It's the most charming thing I've seen.” Yes, Caroline, you used “charming” to describe that thing.

“I will not let you spend twenty dollars on fake snow,” I said.

She didn't listen, or didn't care.

“It's charming! Look at all the little puff balls—”

“Snowflakes?”

“Yeah, look at all the snowflakes, look at them getting caught on the windows, just a little spot to rest their legs.”

“Snowflakes have legs. You're absolutely correct.”

It's almost true, though. Caroline had a point. The tiny snowflakes got caught in the ridges of the building on their way down, like a detour, a pit stop, a place of solitude. It managed to be true and cheesy all at once.

Collin, I hope you're reading this journal. We promised we wouldn't and I didn't, but I want for me to have kept that promise and for you to have broken it. As a symbol.

Collin: June 28, street corner

Today we ate Vegemite on toast. Even more off-putting than the name is the smell, but we opened our minds, arms, and mouths to Australian culture, and for that I am grateful. We met our guide, Bernard. He is undoubtedly after Caroline. I can sense it, and it takes all that I have not to scream “Just tell us about the goddamn paintings!” when he flirts with her in the museums. One of those mouth-breathers, he is. Caroline,

when you're 25 and reading this, I hope you laugh harder than you did at the bad jokes told by this poorly named man.

Collin, I lied when I said I never lie. But I am not lying when I write that I do not know why you booked that ticket. I know that you ate pretzels while packing, because you left crumbs on the bed, but I do not know why you were packing. Why you got on that goddamn plane, Collin, I couldn't tell you.

Caroline: June 29, taxi to the “club” and “normal teenage scene”

Today we decided to be more like post-grad teens. Thus far we had just been going to museums and cafés, and we were content with that. Tonight, though, we're going to a club downtown where Bernard will show us “nightlife.” But to breathe life into the night is the least we expect to do, treading with our heavy feet from the bus, wallets heavy with coins so we can ride it.

I remember Bernard kissing me on the cheek, you catching my eye from across the club. I mouthed for you to come upstairs with us to get a drink, Collin, but you turned away. From the window in the top floor of the club, I remember very little – the steam worked wonders in the fog of my memory, for which I am not grateful – but I remember looking outside, wishing you and I were sharing the same steam-filled moments. Across the street you were getting into a cab, some beautiful Australian girl next to you, and in the hotel that night all you left were those pretzel crumbs.

Collin: June 29, hotel room

Sometimes I think that fate has me marked like a bull to be slaughtered. Caroline, if you read this journal tonight, before we're 25, which I know you will, which is why I left it, know that shock drove me away in that cab. Shock that you went upstairs with Bernard. I hope you read this tonight when I leave it on the bed – he kissed you, and you looked at me and mouthed “go away,” so of course, how could I not?

Caroline: June 30, hotel room

Collin looked away and left, so of course, I left, too. How could I not?

Collin, I hope you read the journal and my letter. I hope you break another promise and read them and scavenge up an explanation from the hill of excuses piled upon each other you've probably given yourself. Hell, I've scavenged plenty of explanations on your behalf since then. How could I not? ♦

We opened our arms to Australian culture



Photo by Angela Fu, Birmingham, AL

write down everything we did each day, we might as well not have gone.

I'm writing you this letter, Collin, because I wrote in the journal as you insisted, but you left anyway. Got on a plane six days into the trip and never told me why. I'm writing this because we were, excuse the expression, like two peas in a pod. Because between the days and nights there was a sort of half-brightness to the sky in Sydney and only you noticed. Because when you say a word enough times it quickly loses its meaning, and this happened to us with “platonic” and our relationship. Because I brought a mug for my Earl Grey tea and you put coffee in it and I could never wash out the taste but I didn't care. Because I have not once made fun of you for having two “l's” in your name when it's supposed to be “Colin.” Because you took pictures of the buildings in Melbourne and said I was annoying when I told you to capture moments with your mind instead. Because I thought you would like the koalas at the zoo, but you said they seemed like “lazy idiots,” and I realized you were right.

But you left this four-year, perfectly platonic friendship. I don't want these written words. It's the least you could do to take them off my hands. I never read them and I never will; here are the

He kissed you, and you mouthed “Go away”

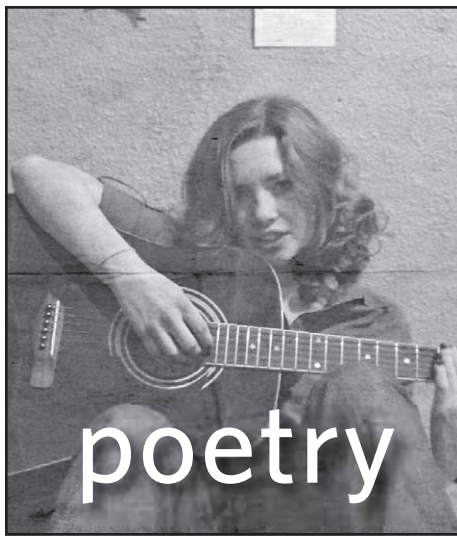


Photo by Taeona Seiler, Newman Lake, WA

Contemplating

Disgust cannot be hidden with eloquent words.
That is why rock bottom's tears are empty
and that muggy thrift store smell will
be stuck
on my scarf forever. It explains why
summer love
dies with the trees and why the Dead
Parents Society
excludes the drug addicts' children.
As it turns out,
we are not the offspring of heroes. Sleeping
under the quilt my grandma gave me leaves
me as cold and lifeless as she is in her grave.

I'm trying to be more positive, I promise.
The dogs always bark when my car pulls up.
Guitar-induced calluses have replaced
what was once self-infliction by way
of razor blade.
I eat spaghetti squash and try not to care
about the extra calories when I add butter
and garlic.
I listen for quiet piano pedal squeaks
in acoustic
songs, and wear dark purple lipstick
on the days I want to.

There are many problems with me,
nonetheless.
My favorite shirt is black and can hide
cold sweat
for as long as it does not change color.
Long-sleeves can hide scars until I
am offered
a summer babysitting job by the pool.
Chlorine infusion will turn my hair
murky green
because I am The Girl With the Flaxen Hair,
played in G flat major.

I don't understand why life is so hard,
or why there is no proper way to resolve
an augmented triad. The gunmetal crown
on my tooth is colder than it should be,
while
my cheeks stay hot and rosy. Sometimes
I wonder
if I am stuck in a burning building, or if
it is the steering
wheel communicating, only through my
raw palms,
a hate message to my entire body.

by Courtney Cox,
Nicholasville, KY

Listen, Obey

listen, obey.
The color of you is the only one that can
captivate me whole.
The blanket of ours is the only one I want
to drain midnight moonlight out of
When we're stepping out of our own breath.
listen, obey.
I am the details in the fabric
squeezing your ribs.
Listen, obey.
I am a stitch fallen in the wound drawn
across your palm.
And listen, obey
Because I'm giving in to toying pills
with my fingers,
To running downstream,
to listening,
and obeying.

by Natalie Slopem, Albany, NY

mechanism

the ocean is a cradling thing with her
wrists exposed, baring her marble
teeth to the wind (who promises to be
calm but i know better).
me, all brain and much too full of
heart, begging.
i want stillness, the silence
before dreamless sleep, hair arcing for
the blooming springtime – i have left as
i came, unheard and unheard of –
the gentle froth of a great machine that
has swallowed me, whole and alone –
i drive with empty seats and keep the
windows up.

by Sydney Shavaliar, Byron Center, MI

Womanhood

1.
You're a woman, shrunk like a jitterbug
in damp soil, dancing up leaves for sleep.
Wash away the crooked eyelashes
clinging to your damp cheek.

You hurt like bruised fruit left in shade.
You let your bones creak
more with every step
toward a stranger's bed.

You've been taught that you were made
of dirt.
Whistle through the gaps of your mouth;
quiver.

2.
Soak your skin in milk
to get rid of your South
and become a compass.
Learn the directions your body chooses
in broad daylight and observe
which way it turns
and why it ticks and how it moves.

Indulge the vegetables your mother picks
at dawn, before the dogs and the sun
and the husband wake and whine
like cicadas.

Let the mosquitoes
tear open your skin
and create circles of pink.

by Nicola Preuss, New Orleans, LA

Jackson, Nebraska

Mia's lying back on the couch, clutching
the brocade pillows like rosaries.
The air in the room is stale from cigarette
smoke and not talking, so
I offer her water, but she says she's afraid
of salmonella.
Everything scares her nowadays.
Face smooth with sweat, lips parted in
agony, she looks like a real madonna
in our holy rental room of the Motel 8.
When she falls asleep
I press my ear against her stomach
and in the almost-silence I can hear the
thumping of a heart
but it could just be the sound of footsteps
running toward us in the hallway outside.

by Maya Caulfield, Boulder, CO

Seasons

Autumn swept through the hushed streets
Like a shooting star
Setting the trees ablaze.

The words took shape,
Restless birds beating with their wings
Against the sealed fortress of your teeth and
You parted your lips
But feathers turned to dust
And all that emerged was silence.
Colors tasted sharper, vivid with cold.

On the church steps
Under the darkening sky among
Gray steeples and gray footfalls
Of tolling bells, you were carved
From stone. Inhaling smoke,
The night crowned you king
With a garland of ice.

Spring was endured.
Light through the windowpane
Music caught in a doorway.

Blue water and fireflies of dust:
In the falling rose of
Summer dawn
Shadows are sharp, laughter
Even sharper.

And the years piled up in a corner
Softly, like snow.

by Avital Carmo, London, England

In the Dark

I showed my favorite song to a friend
but she did not understand
when I showed you my favorite poem
you cried a little
and then we began
to say things we shouldn't
telling the truth while at the same time
leaving it unwritten
saying the things that have not been said
revealing ourselves of the past
while today we could be all but dead
I cannot tell you what you mean to me
because under the denial and uncertainty and
fear I feel so potent
I would not know where to start digging
to catch so much as a glance of what I am
searching for

by Zulma Martinez, Santa Rosa, CA

Smoked Salmon in Stir Fry

It's that time of the month when you
can hear
my brothers' stomachs growling out a
countdown 'til payday,
last month's check long lost in my father's
whiskey bottles.

So when I stumble off the bus at 7 o'clock
and trudge
up the potholed dirt driveway into our
home on the hill,
I'm surprised to see Mama cooking stir fry
on the stove.

My four brothers stand guard around her,
clinging ready bowls to their chests
and staring with ravenous wolf eyes
at the miracle of food before them.

I send a questioning, wondrous grin
toward Mama,
and she shrugs, unexpected relief lifting
her up.
"One of the Bible study groups at church
had a potluck.
They brought us the leftovers."

My worn pride is scuffed by this charity.
But there's a hungry she-wolf in me,
growling just like any of the four beside me
licking their chops around the stove.

Mama barely starts to step aside,
and the warm dish on the stove is empty
before she can set down the cooking spoon.
We devour the blessing while still on
our feet –
inhaling teriyakied rice, noodles, cabbage.

For a while, only satisfied pleasure
and gratefulness hang in the air.
Then the youngest one whispers
a wish for some chicken to mix in.

He says it hushed, more observation than
complaint,
yet Mama's waiting ears catch his
confession.

And she tells him, chin high, that she
added what we had –
some smoked salmon, saved from
the summer.

In my bowl, I prod at the pink, flaky attempt
to stretch our luck just a little further.

Mama Wolf keeps her chin up as she
watches us devour,
but I can see the hurt from *Not good enough*
falling onto her weathered, weakened
shoulders.
Her defeated eyes wander to the screen door,
searching for that elusive *Good enough*
in the spot where my father's pickup
should be parked.

And she won't turn to see the satisfied
eyes of her pups
silently howling that she is good enough.
At least, good enough for something better
than this.
Better than having to wonder who her mate
could be spending the night with this night.
Better than having to mix smoked salmon
into stir fry.

by Whit Jester, Orondo, WA

Clockwork City

by Alice Qin,
Carpinteria, CA

The thick smog always traps the late afternoon heat, and it muffles noises, too, causing everything to sound far away. A sour smell – the smell that always precedes the rain – hangs in the air. *I'll be fine, though*, Henry thinks. *I'll be back under shelter before the acid begins to fall*. As he walks home from school, Henry counts the concrete squares.

Today his return coincides with his neighbor's. The man, a white-collar worker ruffled from a day of sitting, slips inside his house, calling a greeting to the dark silhouette within.

There are rumors floating around the neighborhood about that figure. There is no doubt it's a woman, though no one has ever seen her. Maybe it is the man's wife, but they've never been seen out together at a store, or cinema, or anywhere. Maybe a sickly daughter, but no physicians are ever seen entering the house. A housekeeper? A sister? Even they would show their faces once in a while. When questioned, the man always fluidly changes the subject.

It's all a great mystery until Henry happens to glance over as the woman comes to the door. He loses his count of the concrete squares. Henry sees her for less than a second, but it's enough for him to realize she's like no one alive.

Never has he seen such an angle in a spine. Her movements are creaky like old machinery. Atop her head are a few white wisps. *She is old*, thinks Henry, with disgusted pity. *She is suffering. She should have been sent to the white room to be put down a long time ago.*

Released, he corrects himself. Released, not "put down." It's insensitive to think of assisted suicide as equivalent to euthanizing unwanted dogs at the pound. When old people can no longer contribute to economic production, release assists the country by ending their lives.

Henry is distracted from his thoughts by the strengthening odor saturating the heavy atmosphere. He needs to get inside soon. He turns into the path to his house. Climbs the three concrete steps. Reaches for the doorknob and twists.

The steel sphere doesn't turn. Suddenly he remembers that his mother told him she'd be out with friends this afternoon and to make sure to take the key. The key ... did he take it when he left this morning? He checks his pockets and his backpack, but he doesn't find the house key anywhere. He rummages through three more times just to be sure. Of course he forgot. He always forgets. Henry feels panic

beginning inside him.

Judging from the smell, now strong enough to sting his eyes, the rain could start any second. Henry scans the neighborhood for cover. There is nowhere to take shelter. No awnings, no umbrellas remain outside; they wouldn't last beneath the acid deluge. There are no cars to hide under either. Henry steps back from his door. What should he do?

A single drop plips down next to Henry's worn shoe. Nothing happens. The road and sidewalk are protected, covered in a special lacquer. Another drop plips onto Henry's bag. The spot hisses, a tiny tendrill of smoke floating up from the point of contact. He stares at the smoke for two seconds, then steps off the porch.

The lights in the neighboring house's windows call to him. It's his only choice.

Nobody else is home on this Friday afternoon. Henry sprints next door and pounds on the steel. His eyes are wide, fixed desperately on the impassive gray rectangle.

The drops continue falling slowly, randomly. One lands on the cuff of his pants, eating a hole in the khaki. He gives the neighborhood another scan. No lights in any other house. No shelter.

Henry pounds harder. "Help! Please!" His voice cracks. It's taking far too long. What if his neighbor is in the shower? What if he's fallen asleep? And the old woman ...

The door clicks open. Henry scrambles inside, almost falling to the floor. He's safe.

The foyer is bathed in yellow light. The floors are brown, with uneven concentric brown rings. *It's like one of the old pictures*, Henry thinks. This style was characteristic of the early 2000s.

Henry's neighbor smiles. Out of his business attire, the man looks ten years younger. He's barefoot, too. "How'd you get into such a mess?"

"Locked out," says Henry sheepishly.

"Well, you're welcome to stay here until the rain stops ..."

"Henry."

"Henry. I'm Matthew. Take a seat. Want anything to drink?"

"Thanks. I'm fine." Henry shuffles to the couch.

"Matthew? Who is that?" calls a wavering voice from the kitchen.

"Our neighbor, Henry, the high schooler," he calls back. "He's locked out."

The tiny, hunchbacked woman steps into the living room.

Henry's first glimpse of her wasn't nearly as shocking as seeing her this

She's like no one alive



Photo by Victoria Deck, Newtown, PA

close. The woman's skin is pale, crumpled, and spotted. She holds a cane and walks so stiffly Henry thinks he can hear rusty creaks coming from her joints. Gravity shows its work on every part of her face, from her overhanging brow to her drooping jowls. *This is unnatural*, he thinks. *Humans should not live long enough to look like this.*

"Hello." She offers a gnarled hand and a smile. "I'm Emily, Matthew's mother."

Henry, realizing he's staring, quickly drops his eyes and takes Emily's hand. It's stiff, the knuckles swollen but warm. Tentatively, Henry moves his eyes to Emily's face. There, amidst the folds of ancient skin, glimmer two blue eyes, lucid and piercing. Henry's breath catches. The way she's looking at him makes it seem like she knows what he's thinking, about her, about the world.

"Nice to meet you," he mumbles.

"It's great to see someone new once in a while! It's always good to get to know our neighbors. I love having fresh ears to listen to me ramble. Matthew's heard all my stories, so he gets tired of them. But I still want to tell them, you know? I've lived a long time. I've seen a lot of

change. If I don't remind myself about how things once were, I get mopey."

"But don't they say that things were worse long ago? Like the standard of living, productivity of the economy, and availability of commodities?" Henry rattles off the list he's memorized from history class.

"Is that what they're teaching you?" Emily snorts. "I bet they never tell you how beautiful the world used to be. You see, now the sky's always gray. But did you know, it used to be blue?"

"Before the companies took over," she begins, "there were so many more colors in this city. Grass, prickly and

green, spotted with pink and white flowers, covered the ground. The air was so clear you could see the red of a cardinal at the top of a tree. The buildings weren't all gray with soot. The sunlight made its way to the earth. Sometimes it was so bright it was hard to keep my eyes open, and lots of times I fell asleep lying on the grass in the park that was where the textile factory is now. I loved listening to the faint sounds of conversation, laughter, and kids playing. I always imagined that their voices danced together in the air and hopped up to the sky to rejoin the essence of the universe."

Emily stares at a spot on the wall like she's projecting her memories onto the blank space. Her eyes are still clear but unfocused. "Those were good times."

"What about now?" ventures Henry. "I mean, if it was that good then, isn't the present ... hard to live with?"

She barks out a hoarse laugh. "Sure, it's not so great, but I still love life.

Even though I've lived so long, there's always something new each day. Plus, I'm waiting on grandchildren."

"Sheesh, Mom," says Matthew in mock embarrassment. "Henry, I know you must think it's weird

for my mom to be alive. But as long as she wants to live, she will. I can't send her to the white room. It's murder, plain and simple, something people don't seem to understand these days."

Emily beams at her son. "See, I don't believe in an afterlife. I don't think I'm afraid to die. I just ... I love seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. Even if my joints make it hard to leave my bed some days, the world captivates me. I'd like to spend just a little more time here. Even if it hurts."

Her face, white and spotted like the moon, seems to pull something from Henry. A tide rises up inside >>

"The white room is murder, plain and simple"

He Was Like Asphyxiation

by Paula Amezquita, Winston-Salem, NC

I saw blue – not indigo blue, not deep sky blue, not even Tiffany blue. It was sea blue, the simplest of all blues, nothing showy, right inside his iris. When he wore certain shirts, the color of his eyes didn't pop out, and he didn't even like them himself; he had admitted it once when he presented himself in front of class. They always appeared to be glossy, almost teary, which made them even shinier, like a gemstone – a gemstone that had been a bit roughened and never recut.

Sometimes his eyes were gone, almost like they had disappeared, and it was sad – almost pathetic – not only what I perceived from that stare, but what I had become from looking into the eyes of this boy. He had normal sea blue eyes, and every time I tried to crawl out of them my instinct told me to stay in, almost drowning. His eyes were like reading a page while distracted, then having to reread it; they told the story, and I was so consumed in the way they made me feel that I forgot to read it.

His words sounded like they were hard to pronounce and his letters had a thick, rich sound. I wondered what such an exotic sound was looking for in our lame American photography class. He showed pictures of his mother, the freckles she had under-

neath her eyes, her blonde hair.

I stared at the way his mouth moved. He had fast lips but the words came like a struggle and I wondered why it sounded like his tongue was attached to the roof of his mouth. He took thirty-one pictures, and he looked like for a second he was about to stutter; my bad, he was showing us the picture that meant the most to him. What was such a mystery doing in this boring class?

I wanted to taste his lips. I wanted to know if the taste of the chocolate milkshake he had drunk at lunch stayed on them, but then he laughed at something someone asked. I heard sunshine, bright and powerful and overwhelming. The sound that came out of his mouth was beautiful. For a second I thought that laughter could be a baby's in a commercial, but then again he was twenty and babies couldn't keep up with his laugh anyway.

He had callused knuckles. When he bumped into me on his way to our literature class, he knelt down and helped me pick up my old dusty books. His hands looked like they had been working at a bakery, getting bread in and out of the oven. I didn't want to wonder what else this boy had for me, because here he was. I wanted to know what he had done with his lanky fingers.

I had been attentive to his ways

I wanted to know if he had strummed his guitar. I wanted to know if the thoughts that came out of his head had once been translated to words and marked on paper with those hands. I wanted to think and think of his hands' pastel color. I wanted to tell him that the color of his skin made his eyes pop out. I wanted to scream that I had been very attentive to his ways – not how he slept, but how he acted toward people. His hands were on the floor picking up the books he had made me drop, and I didn't understand why I felt like he was suffocating me. ♦



Photo by Emily Weaver, Westerville, NY

him. He's sitting on the couch, but at the same time he's suspended in deep green among all he's only seen as wavering shadows previously. Life, the world – Henry has never thought about any of it like Emily has. All he's done is walk through it. It's a means to an end, not a thing to be enjoyed. There was the ticking of the clock that he always obeyed. Go to school, go to college, get a job, go to the white room. But down underneath the tide, the ticking is dull. Henry likes it there.

He wants to rove the world and devour all of its curiosities. He wants to bask in the sun of Emily's childhood. He wants to run, breathe hard, and inhale clean air. He wants to fill the cavity underneath his ribs with something warm, buzzing, and whole.

He understands now why Emily is still alive.

Emily tells him many stories of the past. Hours pass, and the rain slows to an echoing silence softened by the cheerful chatter inside the house. Finally Henry excuses himself, promising to come again.

"Bye," he calls at the door, "And thanks."

"Any time," Emily replies.

"Be more careful next time rain's in the forecast, kid," cautions Matthew.

Henry steps out into the dark.

It's still outside; no one's leaving for or returning from work. The night air, damp and light from the rain, washes over Henry's face and through his hair. He closes his eyes, breathes in like he's trying to inhale the very spirit of the earth, and leans his head back. He opens his eyes wide again. There are three stars fixed in the sky. It's his first time seeing them. He stares at the tiny points of light in the flat black sky.

He only begins moving when he starts to lose his balance, falling into that pitch black. Henry slowly walks toward his house. The chilly air tickling the back of his neck, making its way underneath his clothes. His blood rushes to his cheeks and fingers and legs. His mouth stretches into a grin. Isn't this living?

The feeling doesn't last. The next morning dawns dull. There is absolutely nothing, from the concrete streets to the gray sheet of sky, to draw Henry's interest or passion. Sleep has faded the vibrancy he felt the previous night. As Henry plods to school, he counts the concrete squares again, his back hunched. The street noises pick up, and the scuff of Henry's shambling steps merge with the rhythm of the clockwork city. ♦

"Before the companies took over, the air was clear"

My Walk

by CheyAnn Magic, Cresco, IA

My younger sister, the middle daughter of our family tribe, has once again ignored her chores without punishment. She lazes about as I wash our pots and pans for reuse, give our animals drinking water, and remove the fur from our den. Once I'm ready to leave for the day, I will deliver my messages to the priests at the Temple of Knowledge and listen to their hour-long prayers.

The journey is not long, but a harsh winter has shrouded the hillside in mist. As I open the entrance to leave, I hear a howl – quite possibly a beast in the fog. A child would have run back inside, but I must deliver my messages at all cost. I seal the entrance and start trotting down the snowy stone road to the Temple, hoping no beast comes my way.

My light shoes crush the snow. I walk in the tracks of monsters with my winter garments on tight and my inventory swung over my shoulders.

When my journey is almost at an end, I come across the monster's resting place. Nearby, I spot another traveler walking toward the younger children's section of the Temple. We are fine, for it sleeps – but if we crept up on it, attempting to collect the treasure in its belly, it would awaken, eat us, and spit us out in another place. Most family tribes here have monsters as

pets, but going up to a monster owned by another is not a good idea.

As I approach the entrance of the Temple, I hear a roar. A beast is coming toward me. I run down the stone path, but it follows me, its yellow eyes burning through the fog.

I run to the front door, looking for my key to enter. The beast comes closer, slowing its approach. To my relief, it is just here to give me my dear friend and

leave. I greet her as she enters the Temple, then notice something else in the fog.

My companion arrives on his green and silver horse. I happily embrace him in greeting.

"Hey, did you finish the history homework?"

"Oh, yeah. Just have to turn it in today, or it doesn't count, right?"

The girl laughs and follows a boy her age into the school building. Many cars litter the parking lot, and she takes out her keycard to get through the school's security system.

"Did you have any trouble on your way to school?" the boy asks, seeing that the girl is breathing heavily.

"No, just entertaining myself on my long walk here."

The boy just laughs and pushes the door open for her. "You live a block away." ♦

I walk in the tracks of monsters

Controversial Ma(i)l(e)

Post offices are transient,
without the bustle
street corners have.
It seems I'm only here
when I need to lose something.
Or find someone
I didn't need.
There is cold familiarity
in her countenance.
It is hard to forget the face,
the form, that formed you,
though God knows I have tried.
God knows this is largely
his fault.
My childhood was spent
sitting dutifully in church pews,
singing other birds' songs,
trying to turn water into wine
and only getting grape juice.
She wouldn't accept any miracles
that weren't of the trinity,
nor any that didn't have
an alcohol content.
She believed herself
to be 75% holy water;
since water is 75% of the body,
she believed herself to be
¾ the body of Christ.
I was, I still am, Devil
in her eyes.
I can feel the disgust
burning, hotter than any bush
Moses could find,
through the back of my head
when she sees the ring on my finger.
Because men may lie to men
with fantasies of higher power,
but may never lie with them.
She avoids eye contact
like she's suddenly interested
in stamps with the fervor of a collector,
or someone that cares enough
to write letters.
The letter I am holding
claims false holiness.
I drop it on the stack of
brown paper packages
that she carries
better than the weight
of moral superiority.
"I forgive you, Mother."
She doesn't look at me
when she spits it:
"Murky water can't cleanse a wound;
a sin can't forgive mine."

by Veronica Kowalski, Philadelphia, PA



Photo by Caleb Burns, Tustin, CA

fourth of july

when we sat on the warm metal steps by
the river
and you patiently explained the type and
quality of the welds that held
us out of the water;

when you kissed my shoulder
but would not help me up.

by Morgan Chesley, Kasilof, AK

Lip gloss

"Always wear lip gloss,"
my mother gently scolded me,
inching a tube filled with pink ooze
to my lips.

I wondered why I had to wear lip gloss
if I only talk to the cracks in the pavement.

I've never been great with conversation.

I think it's because I wonder
if people are actually
listening to my voice,
or simply
waiting
to hear their own.

I guess that's why I've traded in
glitter glue-tipped wands for
ballpoint
spears.

Mouths can no longer fire
bullets of
slander or dismissal,

I only bleed wasted ink.

I tell my mother
that I won't wear
lip gloss
because it
all
dries
up
anyway.

by Jenna Sherriton, Plantation, FL

The 238,000 Mile View

We are drawn to one another.
No matter how far I wander
You know I'll come spinning back.

You, with your deep blue seas
of emotion
could not function without me there
to draw you in.

And as for me
I would be sent hurtling into space
if you didn't always pull me back.

That is why every night
I stare down
with my deep black eyes
watching your
electric
sparkling
dreams.

by Madison Laflamme, Gilford, NH

Dear Delilah,

last night, I slept with a frog.
yes, he was green and slimy
but he wasn't you.
Afterwards, he didn't slam the door
to my unsated face
there was no yelling, crying,
hot-headed hits, threats that
I never really meant, *baby, I'm sorry, my
dancing Daisy, I love you.*

last night, I forgot our first kiss.
with lips too big for mine, a smile
I always fell for and
hands too rough for my thin arms
you even bruised the bedroom walls, why
did I trust you to hold

anything?

last night, I curved against a new heartbeat.
hidden under a chest
much larger than yours,
it beat and beat and beat against
my ear until mine matched his
too tired to regain its own rhythm.

last night, I gave up on you.
remember when I promised I wouldn't?
a dangling hook, sharp and much
sexier than I
I saw your eyes widen
like a doe at her daunt
remember when you promised you
wouldn't?

last night, I turned off my fairytale.
I tore off my crown
I was not a princess, and
no little girls looked up to me.
I believed you when
you swore to slay the dragon,
insisting on wrapping my wounds –
smoke you convinced me I dreamed up
rising from your nostrils.

by Stephanie Huss, Lakewood, WA

Grief

Loss is a blanket that settles slowly down
and numbs you from the rest of the world.
Grief is your perfume in which I slowly
drown

And your favorite Crown Royal, in a glass
that I swirled
around for hours because I am too young
to drink it.

Denial is the screaming in my head that
you aren't really gone
because I have never known life
without you.

Depression is sleepiness prolonged
because if life is so short then I have
nothing to do
and I don't want to do anything if you
aren't here to see it.

I don't know where you are, or where I am.
The Christmas cactus you gave me is on
my nightstand,
the picture of us is on my desk,
but the smiles you gave me are nowhere near
my lips.

I guess they died with the both of us.

by Samantha Chang, Farmington, NM

Mother on the Moon

The plant that birthed plant that birthed me,
the mother on the moon,
would allow me my godwill and serenity.
I'm glad I waste my time.
I use it all being the elephant to blue,
still reaching for that mother on the moon.
I'm hiding in a puddle of one too many
spilled milks.

I'm barely there right now,
but the future is all mirrors.
I'm counting my time, waiting for the
mother on the moon.
This all gets old when you only have
so many motions.
When time held combustion, my skull
vesseled gunpowder.
But now, I'm rejected in a blood stream.
I'm really milking that mother on the moon.

by Zach Willits, Chalfont, PA

Mining

When your youthful command of language
is not enough to convey
what swings its jaws inside you,
when you stand pulling from your shelf
volumes written by the great and
inimitable –

names that inspire centuries of admiration,
minds that managed what you cannot,
their icy clarity pummeling you
like a stream of fists,
you of trembling and grief
and writhing weariness –
when your age prohibits you from
expressing
your apocalyptic, purgatorial verve,
you don't stop trying,
you let the sun drop and rise
and then

you launch your body at this wall again,
you bruise yourself willingly,
you throw your whole weight into the crash,
you work up a fury of hope, an improbable
recklessness,

you keep going and going and going
never mind the blood in your mouth or
bells in your ears

because you are the whale that beaches
itself by choice
and you are right to be this way,
you are brave to keep looking for gold

by Claire McCulley, Niskayuna, NY

Web of Waters

I like to swim by clear white pools
Where you can look up from the bottom
and see

A sweet web of waters
Where the sun is divided into threads of light
Where diamonds sparkle, relieving the blind
You can almost stay forever
But air is nowhere to be found

It's peaceful for moments
Until you paddle back up
And the world is back to normal
To when you don't hold your breath

by Alyssa McPike, Monticello, IL

Elective Boundary

Four faces, one mind.
A single distinction you could find
under that firm handshake,
the eye contact and confident smile.

It's pigments and melanin;
shapes and hues to the blurry eye
if you scrub away the preconceived notion
burned into the common American child
that renders them indifferent
to the dense cultures, deeply hewn lines,
the only things richer
than a person's caramel outside.

I'm not saying it hasn't ameliorated;
at least skin color is not a crime.
But it'd be insulting, contemptuous, insolent
to fail to bring certain things to light.

It may seem to some
society is erasing the lines
segregating those people called black
and those people called white.
But when the police officers we hire
see a dark man with his hood drawn tight
our jurisdiction says it's all right
for them to shoot on sight.

A cashier nods to a woman in line,
an Indian mother, you couldn't deny.
"What, no curry?" he chuckles, he cries
as he bags the poultry
for fried chicken night
The young man couldn't help but stereotype
when as a little boy at dinnertime
Father would rant on and on
about those "cocoa puffs"
and what every single one of them
seemed to be like.

And just because it's been a while
since there have been internment camps
doesn't mean an impulsive tongue stays mild
and contains itself when it's not content.
Because when a girl hears
Mother shout out of her car's left side
"I swear to god, that bloody Asian
doesn't even know how to drive!"
She might as well go tell her friends
to fear for their lives
because their Korean bus driver
might not see the stop signs.

It'll take many generations
for a person to take pride
that instinctive discrimination
is no longer an American vice.
It'll take more than a reckoning
with an unseen divine
to discard a reputation
of condemn, conform, confine.
The only thing that will break loose
the shackles we ourselves have tied
is when every color on the spectrum
is as patriotic as red, blue, and white.

by Hannah Morrison,
Redondo Beach, CA

Waterfall

A waterfall pours
a stormy and crashing ghost
dying in the night

by Brett Comstock,
Omaha, NE

On the Cusp of 19

The box seems too small
Still, she smiles
at its leaning frame
and trails a finger
down the side covered
in residue of its past life

Movement in her fingers,
which had been rigid,
like she'd caught frostbite again, slows;
grabbing objects becomes a caress,
and her digits flow as if
drenched in honey

She presses her dry lips
to every piece of childhood
she gingerly packs away,
sealing the box itself
with one last kiss
she's been waiting to give

by Sarah Bridgeport, Columbus, OH



Photo by Veronica Liow, San Ramon, CA

Anomaly

Shadows collect in threes.
You slur regret, and nighttime falls,
Leaving just a print of bones in the window.
The stakes are high, and Sylvia's at the
clock again.

"I'd hate to raise your hand," she goes,
and emphatic laughter
Flutters about the theater.
Then, back at home, the kettle boils:
It is now June and even I am growing
to loathe you.

Once again, the monotone of your
idiosyncrasies caused havoc. I'm sick
of cats in the sink and butter knives
on the carpet.

I polished the mirror, but you still can't
see me. It's all getting too much.

So I thought I'd fix us. Your joints groan
as you slide over to him, seamless as,
free, you cast a smile and I am aghast.
You pick him up and he cries milk tears,
baby blue and pansy pink.

I don't like his eyes like yours,
Hook, line, and sinker; I do pity his mother.
It was on the weather forecast, I saw storms
and painted lilies,
They float about in the bathing tubs
of prosperity
Where you make a living and they
do not care.

by Charlotte McMackin,
Oxford, England

The Noise

I became what I am today
from listening to the silent roar in my mind.
A distinct chatter
that sounds like the clicking of trains on a
track or
maybe it was more like the hum of bees.
Most of the time it felt like the latter,
an inconclusive conversation of stings.

by Katrina Gervais, Westminster, CA

red eyes

the lenses
on her glasses
are so thick, i wonder if
she wants me to see her red eyes.

by Amai Gensou, Mercer Island, WA

One Sentence

A man with a
cheap haircut,
large teeth,
and gray eyes
floats everstill
in my mind
after only

a

few

words
of
conversation.

by Will Albea,
Hartland, WI

The Unexpected Mentor

Her voice was low and fast as she spoke
to me

My self-consciousness slowly ebbed away,
leaving burning curiosity and mild awe
The look in her eyes remained the same:
quiet, shadowed, contemplative.

I watched her deftly defy authority, forging
her own path
Loose and intricate pants fell about her
like clouds
She said the things I would say if I were
braver and wiser.

Raw conviction shaped her lifestyle,
beautiful in its independence
We made passionate attempts to flout the
labels
And shared some of our most primordial
thoughts on meaning.

Life parted us out of the blue one day, the
clean snap of a twig
The silence is eloquent and complex, yet
we yearn for more.
At the same time, I can only hope others
will be so lucky
As to meet exactly the right person at
exactly the right time.

by Julie Vaughn, San Diego, CA

Cicatrix

An indent on the palm
A cut on the upper cheek
A window into the past
Memories of accidental injuries

A knife mark, or a fall
A memory, but enduring
through rain, sun, or snow
A scar is always there

I have a couple myself
A mark on my foot
From the ocean
stepping on a forgotten anchor

But the one that is most important:
a circular spot on my upper arm
The one that stores away my reminiscences
Like a treasure chest with gold

The only key required
is a single glance at my arm
and I begin to remember
the past that brought me here

You see, I was born in Russia
And every single newborn
As a safety measure
Had a vaccine of BCG

It protects against tuberculosis
but it definitely leaves its mark
as a permanent patch on my upper arm
At least it brings memories back

Unlike most other vaccines
this one is intradermal – just beneath
the skin
It causes the skin to stretch like a globule
if you can watch the needle go in

It brings back
cold, vastness, family
borscht, pelmeni, olivier salad
and sleeping outside, bundled up

All these feelings
From a small mark on my arm

by Paul Reshchikovets, Lititz, PA

Monsters

I was confronted by a sullen monster,
its blue eyes and screeching roar.
Scars ran up and down its arms
from when it fought other monsters,
different monsters,
monsters who bubbled and popped within
the beast;
who stewed upon its negative waves
as they sank deep into each pore of it.
Their breath like steel,
each word molding itself into a new weapon.

The monster stood before me with
ragged and ruined fur,
empty wet eyes which seemed to forever
drop into nothingness,
and broken, curled claws.

But it did not want to hurt me;
instead
it only could hurt itself.
Because what monster learns anything but
self-loathing?

by Madeline Campbell,
Sturgis, SD

Steaming Cup

Reminiscing, your brown eyes
Gleam like gold in the sunlight.
Missing your warmth, radiant touch.
Tension, astray, conflict
Glancing down my steaming cup
Stirring away obscure memories

by Jasmine Case, Hartland, WI

Always There

Always there, even during the day.
To draw another picture, with sleepiness
on its way. Mess up.
A feeling that never goes away.

Fighting the urge to obey. You scream.
The whispers stop for now, poison liquid,
death cup.

Always there, even during the day.

When origin's recalled, heart hurts. Give up.
Who knew such fatal words claimed
hostages. Led astray.
A feeling that never goes away.

Sounds amplified, nothing is sacred,
constant bother.

Fighting a losing battle, not much
gained. Today.

Always there, even during the day.

A deadly viper ready to strike. Attack.
Your will subsides, left alone. All but a husk.
A feeling that never goes away.

Last ray of hope, covered by the truth.
The whisper in your ear, it calls your name.
At dusk.

Always there, even during the day.
A feeling that never goes away.

by Gabriel Watson, New City, NY

Anatomy of Love

My love for you was merely firings
of neurons,
Ions jumping over sheaths wrapped
around aggregates of phospholipids
Rumbling with the stampede of particles
and currents swirling
Up and down my body to finally vibrate
at the bottom

Epinephrine unlocking doors to the secret
cells of my longing

But now I'm at homeostasis – or am I?
Why does my heart ache so?

Perhaps the myocytes contract in fear
of loneliness

Perhaps the lack of oxygen,
The lack of you, has accumulated the acid
Eating away tissue with every beat

And blood is straining to burst free from
the bond we didn't share equally

Is love merely this cycle of substance,
This electric circulation of protein,
carbohydrate, lipid and cell fragments?

Powerful is he who can stir up this mad
brew in my placid veins

And powerful is he who can silently
corrode every passionate cell

Leaving nothing but a dense groveling
cloud of why?

by Lydia Wang, Novi, MI

Worldly Nightmare

Manila brown and government tan
Haunt my daily dreams
Cloth-hewn cubicles and vanilla parchment
Managing corporate teams
A brown briefcase and a company car
With a wallet not too gaunt
I toss and turn and sweat and moan
Because I know they won't wake up

by Wolfie Drake, Baltimore, MD

Gummies

I will never taste gummy worms
without tasting the salty tears
that rolled down your flustered cheeks
and smashed onto my pale white cheek
from pulling you close.

No eyeliner, just mascara,
nor concealer, just cover-up,
not even lip gloss, just chapstick,
and always some perfume.

She once spent a whole 10 minutes
laughing, but not *laughing* laughing,
laughing with tears coming down,
choking on air, to the point
there was no sound coming out.

How couldn't I see
the deep sea sorrow?
How could I miss the "I'm fine"s
that really didn't mean fine.
Your face camouflaged your thoughts,
but the spark in your eyes faded out.

Sometimes I think
of the parents you have,
now gone,
Mr. to the windy city,
Mrs. home with you.

To get you to hurdle those jumps,
"I'll always stay with you, trust me,"
with her leaping to hug me.
Colorful worms, blue 'n' red,
your favorite,
green 'n' yellow, also fine.
"Gummy worms take me home"
as I keep her close and stroke her hair.

by Payton Anderskow, Mt. Prospect, IL

White Skies and Brown Stars

I identify with the stars.

My freckles are a reflection of the dark sky
above, but my skin is pale like new sheets
and my stars are brown like my eyes
and the dirt.

I live in the city
so the stars don't shine as bright as
car headlights or
the towering buildings that cave me

into the cement that lines the Earth
I'm tired of blank skies and dotted skin.

Sometimes I look for constellations in my
skin but remember I am just flesh
and bones and not the
universe.

by Freda Sciarappa, New Orleans, LA

Long Player

I laid some
vinyl
onto the vintage
turntable
– with spinning thoughts aboard my
old-fashioned mind –
then I
soared off toward
my imagination
dreaming
of escape

someplace distant,
someplace – wonderful –

but I continue
to return
longing to be
remembered as some
flawless melody –

where the crackle
of my appearance
sends him into
oblivion just like
the pop of a record
launches me
toward Nirvana
– it actually smells like teen spirit –

when the needle
stops dragging

my mind
loses its thought
and

fades to black

by Isabel Crosby, Cannon Falls, MN



Photo by Jack Graham, Orlando, FL

so ocd

you like your flashcards color coded,
hoodie strings perfectly even –
"so ocd."

i'd roll my eyes
but i'm preoccupied,
can't breathe.

you brushed against my left side,
laughing in the hallway.

the right is on fire –
skin is ripping with
creeping, crawling, tingling
fire.

set the scales even,
please.

by Charlotte Chui, Cupertino, CA

Tapping Back

Remember how we searched for sunbeams,
Those rays that fell on everything –
They bounced off our tin-roof house
And pushed through purple wildflower
petals
They sprang from the ripples of skipped
stones on water
And skated along the tops of clouds
Shafts of light fell from windows and
created channels for dust motes
And there we danced with the floating
specks.

Remember the way we felt the rain,
The drops that knocked on our windows –
We mirrored each beat with our fingertips,
Tapping our own rhythm against the glass.
The sky tears fell on our smiling, upturned
cheeks;
Our bodies spun in time with nature's song
And when the water filled our rain boots,
We took them off and ran with barefoot glee
Through the storm.

Remember how we played –
Last night's rainwater sloshed around
inside the tire swing out back,
Spilling out onto our grassy carpet.
The ropes of our pulley system for apple
slices and peanut butter
Dangled from the tree with low branches.
We left scented markers from our drawings
of stick figure families
Scattered on the kitchen table
And fairy forts among oak tree roots.

The puffy ballerina skirts were replaced
With torn-on-purpose jeans.
Macaroni necklaces exchanged for mascara
and blush,
Then dust motes, drawings, and swing sets
For plane rides, salaries, and wedding rings.

Never forget that we once chased twinkling
lightning bugs,
Clutching mason jars with
hole-punched lids.
And sometimes when a thunderstorm
comes my way,
I'll tap out our song against a windowpane
And swear I hear you tapping back.

by Kayli Wren, No. Garden, VA

Sunset, December

the sun sets but the actual
flaming orb of gas cannot be seen. Rather
the trees on the valley glow scarlet, as if
in the throes of
autumn in the middle of winter,
but as I step closer, I see
they are masquerades, trying vainly
to recapture their once brilliant hue.

the clouds drift across the sky, pink
like balls of cotton candy. I wonder,
if someone pinched some of the fluffy thin
mass apart, what would our
ozone layer peel back to reveal? maybe
people scuttling for cover,
desperately trying to recapture
the peace before, as the glass sky shatters
and the clouds
fall down around us.

by Truelian Lee, Ridgefield, CT

Intersections

by Jacob Beardsley, Virginia Beach, VA

For the first year, Ellen would never have called it “people-watching”; it was a study, meditation, how she expressed herself. She would sit in lobbies or restaurants, meaning to read or do homework, only to invariably take more interest in the strangers around her. Sometime during the second year, watching became writing notes on whatever napkin or scrap paper she could find, until she bought a proper notebook. By year three, she took photographs and occasional videos on her phone, and still went unnoticed. By the seventh year, she had filled 22 notebooks and eight gigabytes of storage data, and any twinges of guilt that once haunted her were by now totally dead.

On July 1, Ellen sat in the back corner of her favorite coffee shop with coffee she didn’t like and a novel she did not intend to read, and she watched.

By 2 o’clock, she had documented six strangers, nine orders, and two subconscious quirks, which wasn’t terrible for a Tuesday afternoon in summer. Still, even Ellen could only take so much interest in the familiar girl behind the counter and the elderly couple on the other side of the shop, and she almost wished that she had brought a novel that wasn’t crap. She sipped what was left of her coffee and wondered how long she could go without being expected to buy another cup.

Just as she was counting her money and trying to determine how much self-expression it could buy, she heard the jingle of the door. Ellen began to write.

2:04 p.m., male, late teens, 5’10” or 11”, white, blond, brown eyes, blue T-shirt, white Nikes, black shorts to knees. Unaccompanied.

She clicked her pen and placed it on top of the little notebook, then opened the novel. She glanced at the book for half a minute, then looked up as the boy with blond hair gave his order. From the table at the back,

Ellen could usually get a solid three-fourths view of the customers’ faces, while she herself was unlikely to be noticed. She stared at her phone for a moment, as if texting, and managed to take a photo of the stranger without even looking up.

Her notes for the next ten minutes looked like this:

2:07, boy sits at window seat by entrance w/ caramel macchiato.

2:09, the couple departs.

2:10, boy spills carm mach, saves most of it, goes to front for napkins.

2:16, he still hasn’t

looked this way.

2:17, why hasn’t he

looked this way?

By 2:19, Ellen’s cup was clearly empty, and the girl behind the counter was giving her looks. She reluctantly threw her cup in the

recycling bin and reached for her wallet.

“Hey, uh ...” Ellen turned to see the boy in blue standing in front of her. “You ordered a while ago. Like, before me. It looked like your cup was pretty empty when I got here, actually.” Ellen tried to look indifferent and said nothing. “I was just thinking, um, would you want to talk for a while if I bought your next drink?”

Although she was a bit shaken, Ellen quickly assumed a smile. “I’m a lesbian,” she lied.

The blond boy smiled. “That’s what you think this is about?”

Ellen’s smile fell. She had.

“I just like talking to people. What do you usually get?”

She muttered something about cream and decaf, because she hated coffee, but she drank nine cups a day, so it might as well be decaf.

A moment later, he returned with her drink.

“Thanks.” She stared at the table, lightly fingering her phone, too shy to say anything.

“S**t!” The boy knocked her cup slightly off balance as he put it down. She dropped her phone and caught the cup before realizing her own misstep.

“S**t,” she muttered, but it was too late; the total stranger before her was already scrolling through her phone. “What the hell?”

“Thought so,” he said, turning the screen toward her. Ellen blushed as she looked at the photo she had taken.

“Give it back.”

“Fine,” he said, placing it on the table, “but you promised to talk to me. Can I see your notebook?”

Ellen grabbed her phone, then snatched the notebook and held it to her. “No,” she said. “No way.”

“Suit yourself,” he said. “I’ve already made my point.” As he said this, he began playing with his phone and turned it to show Ellen. The screen displayed a brunette girl in her late teens, holding her phone as if she were texting and glancing disinterestedly at a novel.

Ellen made a choked sound.

He smiled.

“Now, miss,” he said, “let’s not be hypocritical. I’m guessing you’ve never encountered a person like yourself – or never known it, at least.”

“Like us,” she said.

He ignored her. “To be honest, I’m not sure what interests us so much. I mean, the fact that even reading through my notes can reinspire the sensation so vividly ...”

“Notes?” said Ellen.

Ellen would never have called it “people-watching”



Photo by Summer Laurick, Tuttle, OK

“Yes.” He presented a faded green notebook. “Would you like to read some?”

Ellen cautiously reached over, but he pulled back; “Sorry, friend, but no subjects are allowed to read.” “Subjects?”

“There’s a whole page devoted to you, dear.”

Ellen felt as if she wanted to vomit, run away, smash her storage drives, and burn 22 notebooks all at once.

“So,” he continued, “why do you watch people?”

Ellen took a few deep breaths. “I guess I like the knowledge,” she said. “Afterwards, I mean. Looking and relooking over the smallest details of other people’s days, details they themselves don’t remember.” He looked more serious now, so she continued. “It’s like, I have thousands of photographs of hundreds of people – any one of them might have died or had a sex change or become a serial killer. But I’ll never know. I just have a few minutes of their lives, the intersections.”

He nodded. “Tell me, did you think you were special?”

Ellen wasn’t sure what to say.

“I mean, did you think you were alone?”

She nodded weakly.

“Well, you aren’t. There must be hundreds of us in this city alone, and I’m damn good at finding them. I’ve heard stories that would make you salivate. I know a woman who made a career in mall security just so she could secretly copy the tapes for herself.

I used to know an atheist who attended a Baptist church every Sunday for 20 years just so he could switch classes whenever he wanted a new batch of subjects and claim that the will of God was guiding his decisions. He was pretty committed. I’m pretty sure they buried him there.”

Ellen thought of her computer filled with photographs, her bookshelf filled with notebooks, her brain filled with worthless memories. She thought of this and reached to touch the boy’s arm.

“A lesbian, huh?”

“Could you tell that I was lying, too?”

“It occurred to me,” he said, “and now I really have to go.” He stood.

“Wait,” said Ellen. “Let me give you my—”

The boy shook his head, cutting her off with a gesture of his hand. “Don’t you see that that would ruin it?”

He took out his phone and snapped a final photograph of the stunned girl at the back of the coffee shop.

“This game is about one-time encounters – you called them intersections. I’m going to steal that. So, until and unless we intersect again,” he bowed deeply and said, “at least we’ll remember it.”

With that, he walked out of the coffee shop and was gone before Ellen could even take a picture. ♦

Snow White

When I left the front door open that morning,
I waited for the birds to fly in.

I imagined I was

Snow White and

The Seven Dwarves were still asleep upstairs.

I could almost hear Sleepy snoring through his

Tomato-red nose while

Grumpy suppressed curses beneath his dreams.

When I left the front door open that morning,

I waited all day for their wings,

But I never once caught a glimpse of

White feathers.

My crown stood tall,

The mirror spoke,

But I did not feel as if I were

The fairest.

When I left the front door open that morning,

I waited for you to step through the frame.

The birds refused to perch on my shoulders,

But I thought you’d be here

Rescue me.

I left the front door open today

And waited for the witch to offer me an apple.

I imagined that I’d

Take a bite and

Slip to the ground and

I’d no longer have to wait

For the birds to join me.

by Hannah Butcher, Lake Worth, FL

Coconut Childhood speech

Childhood was like a coconut; I sailed on
for many years
Waves daunted with untendered words
Everything shaking, shattering into shambles
afraid to land, settle my roots, expand
my leaves

Buoyant and free-floating, I suppose it is
fortunate
That you happened to like coconuts and
take me under your shade
The natives call coconuts the “tree of
life” but
I am not sure what to make of it because
I am nothing without you, my shell
cracked and bruised
Coir fibers at the husk splintered and broken
The damage greater inside, coconut milk
turning bitter and sour
I suppose you can be considered the
gardener
Touching lives with your green thumb,
nurturing

Childhood was like a coconut; I sailed on
for many years
Tides hugging the shore, words with
a place to fall
Months wash into years and words
Pulse, press, pucker at the fringes of my lips
Ink splattering along “My Memoirs”
The aroma of coconuts lingers in the air

by Ellen Zhang, Troy, MI

home limited love

like white caps on sideways mountains
breathe all that is me
i glow in the radiation
like a cyber bride adorned in white
break my neck to love you
feed you with reboots
it is a constant battle under my
eyes, a trapped thought between
snakes of goey brain
majority rules and they are like
dinosaur bones brittle with age.
contention building like legos.
extinction doesn't fit passivity well.

like all that i am is a set of hands
that are replaying a game of tracing
everything that is not mine
i am the height of the consumer
overdoing, digesting, listening to the
clicking music
and we are like dinosaur bones:
easy to break. easy to break.

like i am made of pixels, all is square
the home network went limited
and it only took me minutes to crack
my wrists. (broke my neck to love you)
my retina was fried, bled out my eyes
this internet love is like dinosaur bones;
only a shell, a fossil, skeletal imprints
the real thing died a long time
ago and yet

i am back for more

more of our home limited love
(like dinosaur bones)

by Chinasa Okezie, Hayward, CA

bring me the sunset
in a teacup
so i can fill myself with something
other than darkness,
to drink down this panicking
electric shock.

it comes easily
for most
words can flow
with responses
and questions,
comments in return
but my throat burns
as i chew on the ashes
each stare a little
heavier
on me, my words are
chopped up
into pieces
i pick them up
always mistaking
the order they
belong in

by Megan Tyler, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

The Sailor

In the vast ocean, a man sails smoothly
in solitude.
Miles absent from land, he strikes a storm,
pushing him further.
“Time to get out of the bathtub,” Mom yells
from across the house.

by Sean Nigel, Nashotah, WI

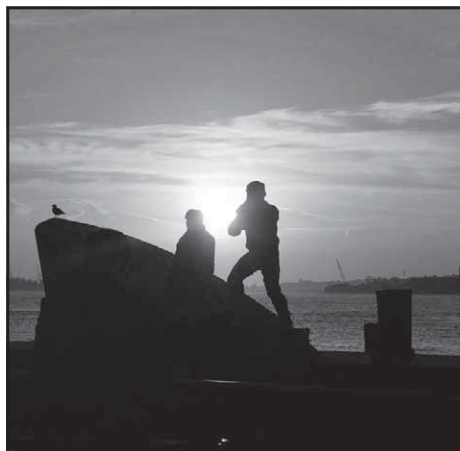


Photo by Cori Schimko, Tomkins Cove, NY

Define: Happy

Posters of cliffs and mountain peaks,
exclaiming perseverance and achievement:
things we may desire and fight for,
but never achieve.
Places we'll never go
due to normalcy, regularity,
lackluster people,
lackluster accomplishments.
Perseverance and achievement
are reserved only for the successful:
the ones who have earned the power
to mountain climb and cliff-hang,
the ones who live their dreams.
So what are they still doing,
remaining less than satisfied?

by Eleni Aneziris, E. Setauket, NY

polaroid

as the squares charred,
lying to my eyes that their
matter was disintegrating, salted
droplets eroded streams of
regret that deepened my dusk
and dulled my blaze.

but it's somewhat amusing
isn't it, that my own fleshy
urn holds no shape as
symmetrically sound as the squares
that charred and lied.

call out my name; let my ashes be the
penultimate vibrations that echo as
the squares squares squares grasped twigs
and tufts of amphibological
debris, beckoning my
eyes to glow ablaze.

while the wisps of smoke
escape the dancing radiance that
crackled and
cackled as the memories i was
too burnt out to memorize
decomposed knowingly, deceiving my
orbs that will
indeed always forget the
silently sleeping squares.

by Jacob Kind, Furlong, PA

Gray Space

I breathe, think, need
in black
and white:
love and apathy,
obsession and exile,
depression and joy –
but you
are gray space.
I want to write you a letter
all about me,
I want to write you a letter
telling you I'm done;
I want to write a letter
that says everything.
But how could I put
our everything into words?
What colors could I use
to describe the grayness
of in-between?

If I could transcribe my brain,
it would explain that
you never leave,
that a new word for you appears
every second,
but those words don't form a sentence.
I want to define you,
to paint you inside of my lines,
but I am unable
when you, like a hurricane,
slip so casually in
and out of my life.

by Cassidy Southern, Sewickley, PA

Violent Night

The night bruised my eyes
with its darkness until
it knocked me unconscious.

by Irene Enlow, Pohang, South Korea

Stay on the Lines

I want to get stabbed on the color spectrum
so as my body begins to bleed
I will bleed in all different directions
to the left is red, to the right blue
up means yellow, down means green
I want to stand back and watch
where the northwest blood will go
because all of the important things
have always been in between
between the words,
between the irises,
between the petals,
and between the bones
lying on the color spectrum.

by Presley Hargis, Hebron, KY

Garbage

When we were young
we used to help Grandma
pick up trash on the side of the road.
Galloping down the pavement
as if it were a competition,
carefully grabbing glass beer bottles
while plugging our noses.
We would count the cigarette butts,
disgusted at the world.

Never once did we imagine
that one day we would be
the ones throwing our innocence
out the window.

by Josie Taylor, Gilmanton, NH

Delicate

Crossing.
Gold, silver, platinum, copper,
luster.
Crossing over.
And again.
Continuously, until so wound
that all it can do
is turn.

by Bethanie Mendel, Lake Mary, FL

with the bark ripped off

let's go for a walk in the snow,
let's find a way to not be alone

when the snow comes
tonight,
will it take us both away

I don't wanna leave this life
but I wanna
be wrapped around you

a tree with the bark ripped off
reminds me of me and you
naked in the harsh cold,
how could we survive

we look white and young
beside the snow that looks red
reflected in the setting sun
I don't wanna have to go

by “John,” Shavertown, PA

Lost in the Mail

by Ali Schindler, Philadelphia, PA

fiction

Paula broke Mrs. Winthrop's perfume bottle, and that's why she told us we had to get out of the house and leave her alone for a while.

We were playing witches, and we needed things for our magic potion that was gonna turn us into cats. Paula was gonna be a yellow cat, and I was gonna be a black one. We weren't even gonna use the perfume because we already had dish soap and water and green food coloring and a few hairs from Toby, the cat that lives outside.

The potion was all finished and we were turning into cats and Paula was running around with the long wooden potion-mixing spoon and she was waving it around (because it was also a magic wand) but then she hit the perfume bottle on the dresser and it broke all over the floor with a big CRASH.

I know that it was a bad thing that the perfume bottle broke because there was glass all over the floor, which is dangerous, but after the bottle broke the room smelled really pretty and I thought that was a good thing.

Mrs. Winthrop did not think it was a good thing. She pushed us out the door, and Paula tripped over the front step a little bit. Mrs. Winthrop was talking really fast with her eyes pointed up to the sky – she does that sometimes when she talks to Jesus – and she said, “Jesus, help me, some days I wish I could just put you two in a cardboard box and tape you up and put a giant stamp on it that said ‘Return to Sender.’”

Then she looked at us and said, “You girls stay in the neighborhood and play for a while so I can clean up the mess you made. Come back before it gets dark. Dottie's head hurts and she needs to take a nap. God knows this headache won't get any better when the whole damn house smells like freesia.”

And then she went back inside.

Paula squeezed my hand.

Mrs. Winthrop's first name is Dottie, like she said, but I don't like to call her that. A Dottie is someone who lets you sit on her lap and try on her lipstick without yelling and wears polka dots and not just the same brown sweater every day. Paula sometimes calls Mrs. Winthrop Dottie, and that makes me mad. The point is, I don't like calling Mrs. Winthrop Dottie and since this is my story I don't have to call her Dottie if I don't want to.

We were still standing in the yard. Paula looked at me and said, “What's ‘Return to Sender’?”

I shrugged.

I should tell you that Paula looks just like me, and I look just like Paula. We're identical twins. We have the same brown hair and brown eyes, and sometimes when I'm looking in the mirror I think I'm looking at Paula. We always hold hands when we do things. Usually we hold really tight, but sometimes Paula's hand goes wobbly like spaghetti and it's hard to hold or she lets go and won't let me grab her hand back. It's like when a Band-Aid gets dirty and then doesn't stick to you anymore. Sometimes I worry that Paula will let go of my hand one day and I'll never be able to stick her back onto me.

Anyway, Paula decided that we were gonna go and ask someone what “Return to Sender” meant.

We decided to ask Brian O'Connor. When we got to his house he was playing basketball by himself in his driveway. He's the same age as us, but he plays a lot of chess and reads a lot of books so he's pretty smart. He also wears glasses, which would probably make him look smart even if he wasn't.

Paula let go of my hand and ran to grab Brian's basketball after it came down through the hoop. She held it to her chest and said, “We got a question for you.”

“If I know the answer, will you give me back my ball?”

“Maybe,” said Paula, “if it's a good answer.” All of a sudden Brian tried to grab the basketball from Paula's hands, but she ran away and yelled, “If you touch me, I'm gonna scream!” Paula's scream is good enough to scare anyone away. If she's holding my hand, I feel like I'm screaming too.

“No, no, no, don't scream,” said Brian.

“What's your question?”

“What's ‘Return to Sender’ mean?” asked Paula.

“It's like when you send something in the mail, only there was something wrong with how you sent it or who you sent it to, so the mailman gives it back to you 'cause you're the one that sent it. Now gimme back my ball.”

Paula looked at him and shrugged, then let the ball go. Brian pushed his glasses up on his nose and picked up his ball.

Paula grabbed my hand, and we started to walk away. I turned around and waved to Brian and said “Bye!” but I don't think he heard me because the sound of the basketball bouncing was too loud.

I was getting hungry, and I asked Paula if it was time for us to go home yet. “We're going to the post office now,” she said, “to talk to the mailman.”

“Why do we have to talk to the mailman?” I said.

“We already know what ‘Return to Sender’ means.”

“Because,” said Paula, “we just gotta.”

The post office was cool inside and smelled like cardboard boxes. Paula and me walked up to the counter, but we couldn't see over it because we were too short, so we both had to stand on our tiptoes to see the man who was working there.

“We wanna know who our sender is,” said Paula, and she thumped the hand that wasn't holding mine on the counter.

“Excuse me?” said the man.

“Mrs. Winthrop said she wanted to put us in a box and return to sender,” I said. I tried to thump my hand on the counter like Paula did. It hurt a little.

“Oh,” said the man. “Okay ... well, who sent you to Mrs. Winthrop?”

“Miss Jessie,” said Paula quickly.

“And who's Miss Jessie?”

“A social worker.”

“She wears big glasses and has curly hair like us and gives us hugs,” I said.

Miss Jessie is the kind of person I could call Dottie.

Paula squeezed my hand.

Paula kept talking to the post office man, and I let go of her hand and picked up a big flat piece of cardboard that was sitting in a corner. I knew that it would turn into a box if I folded it the right way, because I had seen Mrs. Winthrop do it. I was trying really hard but I couldn't get the sides to stick together and I got angry and then I tried to rip the box but I couldn't even do that. I punched it a few times, but it just sat there and I got angrier. I didn't want to be angry at the box but I was and I was angry at myself too and I was really hungry and I just wanted to hold Paula's hand and go home.

When she was done talking to the man, Paula walked over to me. “What are you doing?”

“I'm making a box so we can sit in it and go back to our sender.” I sniffled a little and felt tears in my eyes, but I wanted to make Paula happy, and I patted the floor next to me so she would sit down and help.

“That's stupid. We won't fit in the box and we can't even go back to our sender anyway.”

“Why not?” I asked. “I wanna be returned to Miss Jessie, and I'm gonna return both of us together.”

“We can't be returned!” Paula yelled. Paula had never yelled at me before, and I started to cry.

“Miss Jessie's not our sender. We were somewhere before Miss Jessie, don't you remember? The

“We wanna know who our sender is”



Photo by Burgandy Braun, Lowell, IN

man said our mom or dad was probably who sent us in the first place. Stop crying!”

But I couldn't stop.

“I don't know why they sent us away, okay? But the man said that they probably thought we would come back and that we got lost in the mail, which is why Miss Jessie took us. He said she takes in a lot of lost mail like us and takes care of them and finds them homes. But we can't go back in the box because we don't know where we really came from.”

I tried to cover my ears so I wouldn't hear what Paula was saying. I didn't want to hear it, but my ears wouldn't stop listening no matter how much I yelled inside my head.

“I don't wanna be lost in the mail!” I shouted. “I want to go in the box!”

Paula sat next to me and held my hand. “Me too.”

Eventually I stopped crying, and Paula kissed me on the cheek. The post office man asked if we were okay. Paula and I said “yes” at the same time.

Paula and me, we're still lost in the mail. But that's okay, she told me later, because Miss Jessie and Mrs. Winthrop know where we are at least, and they're supposed to make sure we don't get lost again. Sometimes I dream about getting into the box and flying and looking down at the houses trying to figure out which is really mine. Sometimes Paula is with me, and sometimes I'm alone.

The whole way home we squeezed each other's hands, and by the time we got back our fingers were turning purple. Mrs. Winthrop was happy again when she opened the door, and the whole house still smelled like perfume but there wasn't any broken glass on the floor. It took me a long time to fall asleep that night because I kept staring at the mailbox outside, and when I fell asleep that's where this story ended. ♦

The whole way home we squeezed each other's hands

The Art of Tips

The smile is the hardest part.
Somewhere between 9 and 10 the soft
meat of your jaw starts to throb,
followed by a twitching cheek around 11
and finally a frozen scowl by 1.

It's an art –
learning not to let your brows clench
together,
not to slip the chowder bowl down the
lady's glittering neckline,
not to sprinkle cardamom in that
seigneur's crested locks.

But they all smile
and you do too.
You'll wash their snotty napkins and
scour their drooly plates
and they'll giggle and blow bubbles at you
as if to say

thank you
for being
and for bearing.

by Stratton Coleman, Gilford, NH

Care on the road

The earth breathes on me
Making my nose colored
My skin is like snow
Spring comes to bloom my skin bright
Years go and my skin shines dull

by Isaiah Edwards,
Daegu, South Korea

What I've Done to Myself

My lungs were a melting pot
of chemicals from under the kitchen sink.
The knot in my gut was two and a half times
bigger than the lump in my throat.
They say you can't believe rumors,
but how do you know what's true
when you can't look your mother in the eye?

I did not know how many ceiling tiles
stared down at my trembling hands
and bowed head.

I did not know how many times
she repeated the question.
I did not know which room in the house
was mine.

I did not know consumption;
I was eaten alive every night.
I did not know how violently a body
can shake
while screaming into a mirror
or vomiting up ten months of "I love you."

I learned to remove stains,
but they don't teach you to bleach
your insides
in Family and Consumer Sciences.
My pillowcase is white again,
but I set myself on fire every night.

I rip off my skin on nights without stars,
and I bleed out by morning.

by "Hazel," Missoula, MT

Sign Here

They said I signed a contract with the devil
when I liked my first girl, but I didn't
even know cursive at the age of 6.

My dad told me that kids who pass away
automatically go to heaven.

So at age 8 I wanted to die so I could
be set free from the anchor
secured on my ankle

by the bible that would show its weight
when I died.

At 12, I started choking back the scream of
"This isn't a choice"

with sympathy for ignorance.

At 13, I had a dirty mouth. I swore that
if this were a choice

I wouldn't have teeter-tottered to the side
of sin.

I swore that if this were an option, I
would wear

Charlotte Russe clothes more than I wear
sweatpants on a Monday.

I swore that if this were a choice I would
have chosen to be my
daddy's little girl rather than a 1 a.m.
psych evaluation.

At the age of 15, I saw my first ballet in
the way

her eyes danced in the music of her smile.

At 16, I felt wrong for buying tickets,
so I started

wishing on 11:11 and shooting stars just
for a refund to be normal,

almost as if it were my prayer, but how
dare I be religious when religion doesn't
accept me? I could say I don't believe
in God because I'm afraid he won't
believe in me.

At 17, psychiatrists gave me medication
to lock the doors to
the storm cellar of my mind for the tornado
that's going to

come when
I'm 18; turns out I'm no storm.

I'm a volcano erupting, and the lava's
only hot

because your suppression let it boil for
so long.

Homophobics told me so they didn't
confuse me with a boy,
to dress in dresses and skirts.

The bible tugged on that anchor day in
and day out

while society simultaneously asked me
to ignore the stares

I got when I walked into the bathroom.
I just had to deal with people asking me if

I was a girl
every time I had to pee in public.

I had to implement a fire escape in my
own mind because

they were burning holes in my temporal
lobes with their

eyes, as if they were trying to get it in
my head that

this "lifestyle" is wrong.

My sexuality is no lifestyle.

My sexuality is no choice.

You see, they said I signed a contract
with the devil when I liked my first girl,
but I didn't sign.

Society forged my signature.

by Cassia Lev-Ruth, Skokie, IL

I Want to Know You constellations

Tell me your darkness
What you might not blurt out right away but
would come interlaced with "um" and
silence

Because here I sit, on the second tallest
branch of this forgotten tree, you below me,
not yet grounded but shaky-leg on the
ground,

I am the body of a listener split open
with a hollow space to
fill with what you will tell me

Tell me your rock
What might hold you down more than
the way
you stand now
The part that feels most solid and cold,
comforting,

tell me why and really, why
Climb this tree to join me, in the ridge
of this branch,
my hands are open for you to place in them
what words you
can offer me

Tell me your breath
What makes it come quickly, sporadically,
and what makes it stop
I am ready, silent, greedy for a piece
of knowing

you can place in my hands,
An offering, seemingly small but I know,
knowing you
will fill all of me and spill over
splattered knowing on the trunk of the tree
on which I perch

Tell me your hands
What makes them open more than close, and
when you papercut or bruise them, who
holds your fingers

What does that drawing mean, on the skin
next to your thumb, and
why is the scar shaped like a lake on
your palm

I want to hold your hands in my open ones,
still greedy, tell me more about why
your pinky bends like that,
If it's a long story,

tell me your time.

by Zoe Harris, San Francisco, CA

Heaven

Boredom drapes over
humanity like the night sky,
shielding us from some
comely white light which gleams of
Everything.

Men have struck their fingers
up toward the sky, poking
holes into the night,
plotting in stars
and configuring constellations, revealing
only a glimpse of what
they fail to know. The glimmering
light, seeping through
the holes of boredom,
(stars)

is what humanity
likes to call Heaven. When I die
I'd like to go there someday.

by Anna Aureliano, Glen Head, NY

I don't believe in
astrology but I've started
doing many things unusual for me
like writing poems on
the backs of pages and
sharing the spaces between my
fingers with boys most
undeserving, so it came as no
surprise when suddenly I was
checking the stars for
our compatibility.

We are twin fire signs fueled by
the passion and power of the sun:
mine a sensitive faith that
can move mountains,
your strong hands leading
the loyal and the lost.

I've tried loving you in the most
selfless ways but my heart
can't help but wonder, who are
we to deny ourselves a love
that challenges, fulfills, and enhances
all the incredible, sparkling things
that the universe has instilled in us?

by Katie Witte, Pilot Point, TX



Photo by Stacey Hall, Fountain Valley, CA

Elegy for Poets

We stretch out on our backs –
Quilt-less, quill-less,
No paper, no typewriter –
Forever comparing earth
With sky.

One would say we've an endless
Supply of material:
We have our night, our grass,
Our shooting stars,
Our dirt and worms, their appetites,
The clouds and all their ways of
being clouds,
The roots of trees, the far-off birds,
The sound of air, which is not the sound
of breath.

The stillness of our breath may be compared
To the stillness of our hearts
Hearts that skip beats like dusty old records
More often than not.
What verse can prop us up again
On legs of bone and blood and skin?

by Samantha Lee, Needham, MA

Call Me Mandy

by Adriana Jenkins, Firestone, CO

It was a June night, and we sat in the bed of a truck, legs tangled in a mess of humans and hearts beating in sync.

Only one car passed that evening. I remember it clearly. It was an old Honda. The back bumper was crumpled like paper and the engine sounded like it was looking for a drink of water. A scratchy throat or coughing fit was waiting to release itself. I looked closely as it passed. The people inside were probably around seventy years old, with an old map sprawled out on the dashboard and the dome light illuminating the scrunch of their brows. They looked lost and confused; they looked kinda like us. I guess you never outgrow your confusion.

The boy I liked at the time, Bryan, touched my hair with his rough football-playing hands and breathed in near my ear. I laughed and tucked my sweatshirt – his sweatshirt – tighter around my body. I may have been wearing this piece of him, but I still hid behind it like my body was a secret not to be shared. *Maybe ... I wondered. Maybe he deserves to finally know me. Maybe I can't keep me for myself forever, despite all the ways that I try.*

He moved closer to me and my heart raced. This felt newer, scarier than when we'd kissed on the bench in front of school while I waited for the bus. It was no longer sophomore year, and the ripped jeans with the paint stains didn't fit anymore. Sometimes I wondered if Bryan still fit me like a friendly sweater. He was warm and comfortable, but I wouldn't have cared all that much if he ended up in the donation pile.

My friend Sadie laughed from her corner of the truck bed. Her boyfriend, Patrick, mirrored her expression of pure joy. The two of them weren't meant to be together. It was an accident of the universe that owed its thanks to miscommunication. You couldn't question it, though; Sadie expelled so much

radiance.

I was jealous even though I seemingly had no reason to be. Bryan and I were golden. The yearbook had stated it; my parents had stated it; even my older sister, with bright purple hair and a Yale law degree, approved. And she never liked agreeing with me.

Streetlights were nonexistent to us. It would be miles before we even approached the city limits. I thought about what it would be like to stay here forever. *I could live off potato chips and never change from my track team T-shirt and beat-up yellow sneakers. My parents couldn't nag about college. Teachers couldn't remind me of slipping*

grades

"Do you ever feel like talking, babe?"

Bryan asked.

My silence wasn't meant to be hostile. Lately I can't do anything the way I'm supposed to.

Bryan, the boy with the shaggy brown hair and puppy dog brown eyes, never called me by name, just "babe," "honey,"

or "love." *Why can't he call me Mandy? Oh, what I would give to just be Mandy again.*

I met his eyes and answered, "Only when the right person comes along."

It was a shot at him and he knew it. Instantly his eyes widened and his grip loosened, but I didn't mind. My body wasn't up for discussion. I didn't want to lose my virginity after a football game in celebration of his success. I'd feel cheap. I'd feel used. I'd feel like my body was only a reward for him and that I didn't deserve to win too.

A cold breeze rolled in and raised goosebumps on my arms. For once, the universe agreed with me.

Sadie and Patrick stared into each other's eyes while the radio played a Katy Perry song from two summers ago. It was anything but about true love, though for some reason they soaked it in like it

I felt like I was being suffocated



Photo by Sameen Maali, San Diego, CA

was butter and the two of them were the bread. The upbeat tune prompted me to reconsider my position. I sat up, placing my hand on Bryan's chest, and flashed him the only smile I'd shared all night – the one that showed I was done. I couldn't play this part anymore. Maybe he didn't realize it in the moment, but I could no longer give my life to someone who didn't acknowledge that I also had one worth living.

That night was the last time I saw him. I was headed for the East Coast, and he was playing on the football team of our state's biggest university. We had so much to live for, and I felt like I was being suffocated. His desires and accomplishments were stealing the oxygen from my air. I couldn't have any dreams when I was so busy making his come true.

I didn't cry the way I thought I would when we parted. It wasn't a loss at all. And although I never got those two and a half years back, I did find a piece of me that I hadn't realized was missing.

My high school years were characterized by a boy with shaggy brown hair, and my future was dependent on him too. We were gonna get married and have two kids and a golden retriever. Things changed, though, like they always do. I no longer wondered. No one was going to answer all my questions, and I couldn't keep asking them. ♦

I Don't Remember

by Lindsey Mutz, Bloomfield Hills, MI

"Just try to tell me what you remember," he said. He smiled warmly. As far as therapists go, he was nice. Patient. Reassuring. I looked at the clock. Grandpa wouldn't be back for a while. I had nowhere to go, nothing to do.

"What do you remember?"

I don't remember much. Oh, the pain, sure. But that's different. The pain was constant. That pain flowed through my veins and across my blackened skin, even working its way up to the blink of my eye and the pulse in my neck. Every minuscule cell that makes up my body throbbled with an agony so powerful it could control masses, start wars, destroy nations. It festered in every wrinkle, every joint and twitch and breath. That pain was all-consuming.

Maybe that's why I can't recall anything else.

I don't remember the plane spiraling out of the sky like something out of a superhero movie. I don't remember an impact that should've killed me. Did kill, I might add, everyone else.

I don't remember being alone in the blackest of nights with wildly cold temperatures, or hearing the vindictive, howling echo off the emptiness around me.

I don't remember wishing to die, opening my eyes every morning, again and again and again, and cursing into the frost that I had lived to see another day. I don't remember the hunger, the way my stomach became like a bad boyfriend, never quite leaving me alone, snarling in the back of my head, reminding me of all the ways I had failed it.

I definitely don't remember a chopper appearing out of nowhere, deafening the silence and scattering metal scraps and stray body parts in its wake. I don't remember being flown to a hospital, having lights shone in my face, or being poked and prodded, despite, might I remind you, my never-ending pain.

Thankfully, I don't remember the drugs they gave me. Then I really did sleep – for the first time in 63 hours, apparently. I don't remember slowly coming back to consciousness, part of me still desperately clinging to that cloudy bliss.

I don't remember realizing that the unthinkable had happened and now I had to deal with it. I don't remember the stares and glances and pitiful looks. I don't remember the nightmares. And I don't remember what it once felt like not to be absolutely alone.

"I don't remember anything." ♦

I don't remember the plane spiraling out of the sky



Art by Misa Steinmetz, Bothell, WA

Supernova

by Julianna Therese, Fair Lawn, NJ

We had one rule.
We had one rule, and I broke it.

I didn't know I broke it. Honestly, I didn't. It just happened. It was spontaneous. It was sudden. It was like I was driving a car, turning a corner, and – bam – there you were. Right there, in my blind spot, waiting for me. I slammed the brakes, I cursed, I tried to swerve around you. But nothing worked. I crashed into you head-on.

I couldn't avoid you.

I couldn't avoid how desperate I was to be near you, to feel your leg against mine as we sat under our favorite oak tree, to stare at that spot at the back of your neck where your curly black hair ended in a V.

I couldn't avoid you.

I can't avoid you.

Even when you're gone.

• • •

You came up with the rule while we were sitting under the big oak tree in my backyard. We were sharing a bag of Sour Patch Watermelons.

"If we're going to be friends," you had said to me, all those years ago, "I've got one condition."

You were 13, and I was 12. Four years before the Incident. You hadn't

your bottom lip. Your eyes were emerald green in the sunlight.

"Okay, seriously. What?"

You hesitated for a moment, like you were starting to regret asking. "Promise not to fall in love with me."

I scoffed and turned back to the bag of candy. "I told you not to buy those cigarettes from Louis. Now you've gone and gotten high."

You pulled the bag away from me, frowning. "I mean it, Lena. You've got to promise." You put your hand on my shoulder, and everything suddenly became sharper, more focused, like I was looking through a magnifying glass. Your fingers were warm. My stomach did somersaults like a professional gymnast.

"What does it matter?" I picked a large green leaf off the ground and started ripping it up.

"It just matters to me," you said.

Your hand slid off my shoulder. I stared at the spot where it had been, my heart racing. "Swear on something important to you."

"I swear on Sour Patch Watermelon candy," I replied.

You rolled your eyes, but I could tell you were trying to suppress a laugh. "Seriously?"

"Fine." I twirled the stem of the leaf between my fingers. "I swear on The Island's next album, whenever it comes out."

That seemed to satisfy you. You relaxed against the tree. Your curly black hair swept over your eyes. I kept ripping apart leaves.

I didn't know what the promise meant. I didn't know

what love was. It was a word in the dictionary, an expression in the books at school, the weird thing that made even weirder people do even weirder things. I didn't know how much trouble that promise would get me into.

I miss you.

• • •

On the day of the Incident, I got the first phone call at two in the morning.

I ignored it. I'd had a huge track meet that evening, and I'd been so exhausted that I went straight to bed as soon as I got home. I pulled a pillow over my face and tried to block out the sound.

Then my house phone rang.

I should have known to answer it.

You never called my house phone unless it was important. That was an ancient law of ours. The last time you'd called my house phone was freshman year, when you'd accidentally deleted the latest episode of "Doctor Who" from the DVR.

I answered the phone after about three calls. To this day, I don't know if I wish I had answered it sooner, or not at all.

"It's two in the goddamn morning," I said. "What do you want?"

"Is this Lena Tate?" asked a voice. A voice that was not yours.

Panic started to rise in my throat.

"Yes. Yes, it is," I said.

"My name is Catherine

White. I'm a nurse at Middlebury Hospital. I have your friend here. Kyle Pope."

I felt like someone had dumped a bucket of ice water over my head. "What?"

"Miss Tate, Kyle's parents would like you here with them . . ."

I was already slamming drawers, throwing clothes on, not even caring if they matched. "Christ," I said. "God."

"Are you okay to drive, Miss Tate?"

"What? Yes. Fine. I'm fine. God. Is . . . is Kyle okay?"

Catherine hesitated. I clutched the phone so hard that my knuckles turned white.

"I think you should get here before we discuss that, Miss Tate."

• • •

When I joined the track team sophomore year, a year before the Incident, you bought cigarettes from Louis for the first time.

"How can you smoke those?" I demanded, grimacing and fanning at the smoke. It was a Friday evening, after practice. We were walking to my house to sit under the oak tree. "Jeez, put it away."

You coughed and spat on the pavement. Your spit was dark, like tar.

"This year," you said, taking another drag, "The Island will come out with a new album."

"You're high, aren't you?"

You tapped the cigarette, making ash flutter to the ground. "Maybe." Your green eyes were clouded, and your hair was sticking up like you'd been struck by lightning.

"We ought to celebrate when their album comes out," you continued.

"Of course."

As we walked, I couldn't help staring at your hand, the one not holding the cigarette. Your hands were

massive compared to mine. Your fingers were long and slender, your nails short. I watched the bones dancing under the skin.

I was suddenly overcome with the desire to touch it.

"Can I . . ."

I stopped myself.

You turned toward me. Your hand stopped swinging. "What?" you asked.

I shook my head. I felt like I was suffocating. My heart felt like it would either explode or stop beating altogether. "Never mind."

• • •

"Why can't I fall in love with you?" I asked one day while we were sitting under the oak tree. It was a week before the Incident.

Your eyes were closed. An unlit cigarette dangled from your mouth.

"Because you promised," you said.

"No, I mean why did you make me promise? Why is it a rule of ours?"

You cracked an eye open to peer at me. "Did you fall in love with me?"

"No," I found myself saying.

You tucked your hands behind your head. Studying your hands had become a habit of mine.

"Because I don't want to ruin our friendship," you said.

I snorted. "Bull."

"Okay." You rested your palms against your thighs. I sat on my hands so I wouldn't reach out to touch your fingers. "I don't want to love anyone."

"Ever?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

"Love is short-lived, Lena," you said, like it was as obvious as two plus two. "Love is temporary. There's a certain kind of magic in falling in love, but after a while, it wears off. After the first kiss, kissing isn't as dreamlike. After the first time holding hands, there's no more electricity between your fingertips."

"'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all," I quoted.

You laughed. "Yeah, right." You lit your cigarette with practiced ease.

"Think of love as a supernova. When supernovas burst, they outshine everything in the galaxy. They emit more energy than the sun can ever hope to in its lifetime. It's stellar and explosive and bright and beautiful. But then it's gone. It fades. Love is the same way. It's beautiful for a while, but when it fades, it's devastating."

I couldn't meet your eyes. "So you'll spend your entire life alone?" I whispered. "Most people would find that painful."

You buried your cigarette in ►►

"Promise not to fall in love with me"

"It's beautiful, but when it fades, it's devastating"



Photo by Jessy Barr, Portland, OR

started smoking yet. You were still my next-door neighbor, my best friend. You still shrieked like a banshee whenever a wasp came anywhere near you. We were both obsessed with The Island, a band from New York City. We were convinced that The Island would put out a new album soon, even though they had only released two singles in the last three years.

"Okay, what is it?" I said.

"This is going to sound weird," you told me. "Crazy. Random."

"Quit describing yourself," I said.

"No, Lena, seriously."

I swallowed a piece of candy and turned to face you. You were biting

The Elephant Broke

by Daria Syskine, Cupertino, CA

The elephant broke.

Just like that. As she was dusting the top shelf, the cloth snagged it, and it sort of ... slipped.

There was, of course, a shattering sound. As her mind wavered between the last few seconds and now, she did not hear it.

"What did you break this time?" he called from the other room. He was reading a newspaper. He was the sort of person who was permanently reading a newspaper.

It wasn't so much that she was clumsy or often broke things. She didn't. There were plenty of knickknacks that had survived. It was just that she had that aura about her that caused people to instinctively replace their precious china and reach, instead, for the 90-cent plates with cute little pictures on them.

And now the elephant had broken.

It had been very beautiful. It had been a glass elephant, delicately spun, crystal clear.

For a moment she raged inwardly, and then she snapped, "The elephant, all right? It was the elephant."

A pause. He emerged from the other room, salt-and-pepper hair tousled, glasses askew. He put the newspaper down and glanced at the remains dolefully. They were sparkling in the fluorescent light. He sighed. "That's a pity."

"My mother gave it to me."

"I know."

"Before she died."

"... Yes."

"She said it was one-of-a-kind."

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?"

She stared at him for a moment. "Nothing."

He picked up the artistically crumpled newspaper and went back to reading. Maybelline whimpered from her crib.

The next day he came upon her trying to glue the shards back together. "Oh, come now, dear. You have plenty of other trinkets. And it's the memory

that counts, right?"

She glanced disconsolately at the shelf. It'd had a place of honor, lit by one of those little lamps. Now that special spot was empty, and the light seemed to be joking, or perhaps playing a trick on her, showing her that there was nothing there.

She put the Superglue down. The sight of the glue seeping through the cracks almost nauseated her. Their daughter, perplexed, looked on.

Ignoring Maybelline, she dumped the shards in the trash. There were other chores to do.

In the evening, he came home half an hour later than usual, looking supremely pleased with himself. With much fussing with the zippers and pockets, he pulled a small box from his briefcase and placed it in the middle of the dinner table, surrounded by slowly cooling mashed potatoes and green peas.

"Could you put that somewhere else?"

"Why?"

"It's in the middle of dinner. Put it on the shelf, would you?"

As if noticing the food for the first time, he put it on the shelf, looking at her apologetically. She sighed.

"Aren't you going to—" he started.

"After dinner. I thought you would be here earlier. Can you at least give me a call next time?"

Once the plates were cleared and Maybelline had been fed her puree, he handed her the box and watched her expectantly. She undid the silky blue ribbon and lifted the lid. It took her a minute to open up the tissue paper.

It was a little porcelain elephant. It was dancing on its hind legs, trunk held up in jubilation. A delicate tracery of patterns and flowers was etched onto it, and a beatific smile graced its face.

"Oh."

This was not an excited "oh." It was an "oh" that crumbled at the edges.

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

She looked at him askance, and he added, "Come on, put it on the shelf. It'll fill up that empty space."

Now that special spot was empty

She stood, put it in the light, and sat back down, considering it. "Of course I like it," she said. When he left the room, she continued to stare at the elephant. Eventually she turned the light off.

The next day there was another round of chores. Vacuum, wash the windows, sweep, mop, clean the kitchen table, dust everything. At the end of the day she told him, "I think I should go on a vacation."

"Who'll take care of Maybelline while we're gone?"

She gazed at him until he finally stammered out, "I ... uh ... of course. I'll stay with her. You deserve a break."

When she left the house to catch her flight, the little glowing door looked forlorn in the fast-fading light. She glanced back as her taxi pulled away. He looked at her, Maybelline in his arms, and then slowly went back in. The house was quickly lost in the dark, and she turned to the front.

"Where are you flying to?" the driver asked.

"Somewhere with elephants," she answered, and that was that. ♦



Photo by Katherine Kellogg, Yuba City, CA

the dirt. A wisp of smoke rose from the tip. "Burning bright only to be snuffed out, that's painful, Lena. How can you live in the dark when you've already seen how wondrous the light can be?"

I didn't say anything. I rested my chin on my knees and closed my eyes.

They said you were driving home drunk, your blood alcohol level way beyond legal intoxication. They said you were so drunk that you let your car drift to the opposite side of the highway, and a truck crashed into you. You were killed on impact.

When I arrived at the hospital your parents looked like ghosts. They couldn't speak in complete sentences. They shoved a CD at me. Your father pointed at it and said, "Was in his back seat."

It was The Island's new album, the one we'd been waiting for since we were kids. It had come out that day. We had planned to buy it together, except

I had that stupid track meet. I had told you to go without me. I turned it over in my hands, holding it like it was made of glass. The cover was broken, a crack spreading out from the corner like a spiderweb, but the CD was still intact.

My vision blurred. It wasn't fair. Why did you drive drunk and high? Why didn't I skip the track meet to go with you, to stop you from getting killed? Why had the CD survived the accident and not you?

I drove home in a daze. I placed the CD on top of my desk, next to my stereo. Then, too fast to think better of it, I chucked the CD at the wall with all my might. The case shattered and the disc exploded against the wall like a water balloon.

I didn't want to listen to the album. Not without you.

At your wake, I held your hand. The bones weren't dancing under the skin anymore. Your fingers were as cold as ice. I tried to warm them up, but my fingers were cold too.

I love you.

My throat burned with words I didn't get to say

I love every single last bit of you.

When you died, my body felt like it was burning. My eyes burned to see you, to study your hands. My ears burned to hear your voice, to hear your laugh, to hear your whoop of celebration as we listened to The Island's new album. My lips burned for kisses that I never got, never fought for, never would receive. My throat burned with words I didn't get to say, words I should have said. My hand burned for yours, my fingertips thrumming with electricity that I would never get to share with you.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

You said love would fade, like supernovas.

You were wrong.

I love you even now, even though our stellar explosion is over, even though you made me promise not to fall in love with you. I broke my promise. I broke our rule. My only regret is that I didn't break it sooner.

You never faded.

I can still feel your leg against mine. I can still smell your scent — cherry lollipops, with a hint of vanilla and a dash of tobacco. I can still picture the way the bones in your hand thrashed under your skin. I miss you. I love you. I need you.

You never faded.

You're a supernova that won't stop exploding, so bright that I can still feel your fingertips searing the skin of my arm.

You never faded.

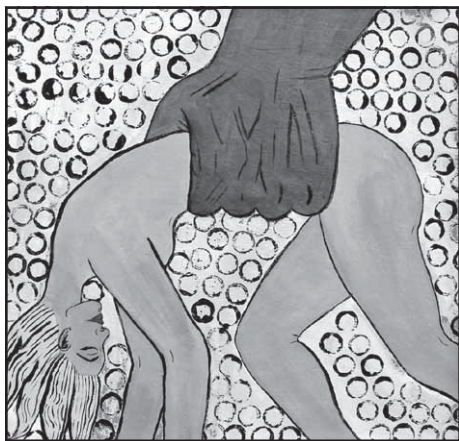
And to me, you never will. ♦

Surprise Visit

Your body was rigid and chipped
like a windshield
And with one question
“What happened?”
The pain spider webbed
across your face
and your tears pushed through the cracks

You buried your head
into the crook of my neck
to muffle the sob
And I, without reservation
came to carry an unknown burden.

by Marisah Croakman, W.Valley, NY



Art by Karina Wojnar, Ringwood, NJ

the bends

your arms hang from your torso like
pale wires
with no one to croon their neck
and check
on you. in your room. with the pathetic
purple bedside lava lamp that you turn on
every thursday. religiously.

you take a deep breath from your mouth,
not your nose,
the lines on your arms are prose, not poetry.
the stains on your teeth are fatal to strangers,
never created
willingly. oh my god. my stomach hurts.

i don't want this to be about me
don't make this out to be more than it
ought to be.
don't mention my nervous tension and
don't mention the slot
between my thighs that my phone can fit
into and support its side on the car seat.

when i had a middle part, nobody loved me;
this is still true. the middle part
is the split walnut of my very core
and the split
where there should be a meeting
in my 97 pound legs. i like to say i'm 95.
17.7 < 8.5 = no good, girl child. no good.
lesser space = lesser words = less and less
i heard poetry about less and now i'm
thinking more
about not thinking at all, and how easy
that would be
for me, the spineless and whimpering
statistic. i am everywhere and i want
to be in one place.
i am everywhere. bring me down.

by Veronika Gillespie, Pittsburgh, PA

Love is ...

Love is a slippery chair.
It's one that spins all on its own.
Through that swirling blur faces grin at me,
And they whisper sweet bass-note nothings,
And their breaths smell of poppy petals.
Few come close, but their lips brush mine,
soft.
And the seeping emotions fall unfamiliar
on my tongue.
And it tastes like wintry air when frost
coats my lawn.

Ben Gibbard sings to me from somewhere;
he's in the waiting room,
The hospital so close to home.
He's not singing to me.
I've walked barefoot in the snow,
watched my toes turn red and then
to bruises.
And I don't do it to be edgy or emo,
although my feet do bleed. I just want
to walk on water.
My legs are short so I walk slowly.

“You're walking on eggshells, darling.”
Happiness is a breaking eggshell.
And when they break we drown in joy.
And in that moment between breaking
and drowning,
I focus on my mind and how it was before,
and I bring it back to me.
Back on the eggshell.
Kitty knows she can't do that.
She knows she can't fix the broken and
can't help but drown.

I will be drowning in my joys, I know.
And I will feel warm.
And I won't hear him sing.
And all I'll see is the face that taught me
love is a slippery chair.
And I'll see the face that keeps me
from falling.
And I'll feel a burning cloud.

Love and happiness are not the same.
I can be happy drowning but I can't love it.
I can love the spinning,
But not be happy with it.

“A rich heart
In a poor coat.”
The lampshade told me that,
Grinning at me.
My feet are bleeding, and the chair,
I'm still dizzy.

by Kaitlyn Knight, Rome, ME

The Other Side

A nobody. Has hope. Spontaneous.
Repeatedly naive. Denoted
worthless before their performance.
Assumptions
cleared. Bad beat befalls
upon them against the angle adversary.
Resolute sable ink.

Prism perspectives.
To make decisions many cannot. Ceasing
chirps. Will never

exist on the evolving
hierarchy. Like porcelain becomes a
bleary windowpane.

by “Ava,” Collierville, TN

A Picture

Picture this. The sky is lit blue, the kind
of blue that comes in paint cans and drips
down the sides and onto our hands and
down our arms and on our elbows and on
your nose and tickles and makes us giggle
at its blueness because it's just so blue. And
the sun is warm. It's warm like the smell
of chocolate chip cookies and hot cocoa
and mashed potatoes with gravy and fuzzy
blankets and pillow fights and the slight
glow of a lamp while you read your favorite
book at midnight. But the breeze – the
breeze is wild, wild like the birds who float
through it and dance in it and become it. The
kind of breeze that floats up your back and
twirls through your hair and starts to dance
with you because you know it likes you. It
makes you feel like you are made for more
than just a gentle drift through space. And
the clouds make silly faces as the mountains
start to roll over and whisper awe. So your
eyes become your most prized possession
and your head starts to turn upward and off
the deserted highway because you can't help
but picture it all.

by Sophie Brockell,
Waldorf, MD

Kitsugi

Slap the clay so hard your hand leaves
imprints and your palm is stinging,
Bake in a kiln, a fiery crucible, until you
forget what winter is,
Until your lips are cracked like city concrete
and your throat is so dry it's sandy,
Glaze yourself untouchable, be the dazzling
pinnacle upon your haughty zenith,
Then smash your vessel upon the ground,
Embrace the sudden pull of gravity and
meet with open arms
Your raw and formless destruction,
Fill the world with that deafening silence,
the painful stillness,
As you're scattered in pieces across
the earth,
And then, my dear, pick up each fragment
with naked fingers,
Never mind the cuts on your ungloved
hands,
Baptize with blood your shattered vessel
before overcoming each inch of space,
To reassemble your self-destructed remnants
So that now pure gold will course through
your veins,
Beauty is not beautiful, nor does
“successful” ring with success,
So construct your eternal temple upon
your own cadaveric waste,
Re-break each bone to set it straight and
bulldoze a path through all in your way,
Stand alone, my savage beauty, upon
your lonely pedestal,
Below you and all around, you may
shudder at what you see,
But strain your neck toward the sky,
where you'll have earned the right to be,
The path will not be pretty, love, but
follow it with utmost care,
For then, and only then, little one, will
you shine gold eternally.

by Meha Razdan, Gurgaon, India

Poetic Justice

I just want to talk.
But no, my words are stuck on the tip of
my tongue
And the constellations of my thoughts are
burning like so many dead stars.
My mouth burns with the sticky words
like my cousin's baklava.
My brain is full to bursting,
Pastel pinks and electric blues swirling
into the most beautiful hues
That no one will ever see
Poems that will never be

My destiny stuck halfway to fruition when
I go to the biggest bookstore within
an hour from me
Ten shelves in a store with at least 1,000

Is this what I have to look forward to?
The books were dusty.
In a store like that, the books were dusty,
I could've cried.
The only way I have to express myself
concentrated down to nothing.

All I want to be is something,
I can barely breathe,
Thinking of what's out there for me.

by Sydnee Harris, Auburn, ME

life support

chiaroscuro you press your hands against me
fiery and acrid and silent and still
we never breathe while we're together, so
once you leave I gasp freedom through
the holes in my chest
wonder when your eyes stopped
transfixing me

[even the lashes,
even the ashes]

shut the window; draw all the curtains
dam up the cracks in the walls against the
winter that already burns in my blood
but forgive me; I need to pick up the phone
you're on the line again.

by Margot Armbruster, Elm Grove, WI

Annoyed

Little things
build up,
then I explode.
Leaving milk in a cup,
cookie crumbs in a bowl.
Overprotective shield,
I'm 16 years old.
No effort on projects,
no effort at all.
That bit of mascara
by my eyebrow bone.
When the well runs dry,
so does my patience.
Having \$1.64 left on a gift card.
When the internet won't load.
Slow people in the hallway,
I have somewhere to go.
Little things build up,
then I explode.

by Omarra Hannibal-Williams,
Voorheesville, NY

The Seed

by Taite McGrady, Berthoud, CO

It was about a year ago when the seed in my chest sprouted. I woke up the morning after our date still warm in the glow of what happened. You planted this seed with a kiss, and in my chest I felt it root. When I woke up, I remembered you and was only a little surprised when I saw the green sprout shooting right out of in the middle of my chest. I was careful in the shower, making sure the hot water rushing over my shoulders didn't damage it. I could trace the lines of the roots under my skin with my fingers, a radiating organic squiggle branching out from where you rooted yourself in me. When I came out for breakfast I asked Alex what she thought of it, and she just looked at it and shrugged.

"Oh, yeah, that happens. I had it in high school, once," she said, taking another bite of off-brand Cheerios. "Not uncommon. Be careful, though, sometimes it can hurt." She didn't say any more. I poured myself a glass of orange juice and poked at the green shoot under my shirt, feeling it spring back up.

When I saw you that night, it grew again. I could feel your vines wrap around my ribs, pushing deeper. It wasn't painful; the roots gave off a wonderful warmth as they spread through my chest. We talked for hours; you had a seed of your own, the same hue, the same beautiful growth. It was small then, and each time I saw you, talked with you, even if I had just thought of you, I felt it grow a little more inside of me.

Summer started, and we fell through it together, our leaves growing stronger and stronger in the hot summer sun. I felt roots wrap around my lungs, could feel them shift as I breathed in and out. It was a part of me, just as much an organ as my heart, and as it pushed deeper it was more and more my own. It warmed up my muscles, made it easier to breathe, easier to get up in the morning.

It grew, though, to be quite large. It was a bright green covering, wrapping around my back, up my shoulders, down my arms, clinging to my skin.

At first I covered it up. It was easy because of its size, and when it was small it didn't feel like anything worthy of showing off. I was, truth be told, embarrassed by it, because it seemed silly and insignificant, just a tiny little thing. But that summer, I wasn't afraid of showing it anymore. I took off my shirt to swim, and I wore it proudly.

Lying on the beach, you traced your fingers idly along the tangled vines. I traced mine along yours.

"What do you think this is, honestly?" I asked.

You paused, looking off at the waves. "I think ... I think it's us. In a way. Not you and me on our own, but some combination of us."

I said, "Hmm," and we said nothing more.

Summer ended, and we started to change. The roots and vines remained tangled around my exterior and tangled in my insides, but the skin started to grow tough and brown. You complained that yours was too tight, green tentacles squeezing you, holding you back. But I could only see what they used to represent. I disregarded what they had become.

So you left. You tore out your own first, grabbing it by its wilted roots ripping it out with a quick pull. Yours had been decaying for some time. But mine was still an organ, a part of me. So when you pulled it out, there was a lurching, wrenching pain, leaving traces for me to find when I coughed them up in the shower, covered in blood and bad memories.

The day after was tough. At work, I couldn't help but poke at the hole in my chest. It hurt, but it was

impossible to ignore, and people noticed.

"I know what that is," said Teddy, whom I'd never spoken to before. It surprised me when his bearded mouth started to move. He spoke with a Southern drawl. "It hurts, don't it? It gets better, though. I promise." He patted my shoulder and gave a sad smile. One of the gaps in my chest started to close.

I got home, and Alex asked if I wanted to talk about it. "No," I said, but in the way that left an offer to push a little more. I sat on the couch next to her.

"What happened?"

"It's gone," I said, and with that came a whole new crushing feeling. I felt the hole clench as my chest tensed. I tried not to cry. I wanted to fall apart, but I wanted to take everything else apart. I wanted to scream, but I wanted to be left alone. I wanted you back, but I never wanted to see you again.

Alex scooted closer to me, put her arm around me, and just held me there. I let loose, and everything poured out. The tears stung my open wound as I told Alex every detail through stuttering breaths. After a while it didn't hurt anymore. Alex's fingertips traced my back, circling each little dot where vines had once peeked out. Her fingers never ventured inside the Swiss cheese holes, though. She knew it was too early for that.

It took a couple months for my wounds to heal. At first, I tried filling them up with another tangle of roots. I set up a fake web in the holes, using anyone willing to fill up the blanks and gaps. All that did was stop the wound from healing, but I couldn't see that. I could only see that I had a hole in my chest and these temporary fixes could fill it.

"I don't think this is healthy," Alex said to me after a while. I'd just walked through the door after work. "You're not helping yourself, only hurting."

I told her I just needed time. That after such a long time I felt I'd earned some freedom.

"How long?" Alex asked. "It's been almost a month."

I looked at my feet.

She looked at me, now sympathetic, and took a deep breath. "I think you need time for yourself. Just be you. Find out what you like."

To relax a bit, I got into the shower. It was always refreshing to feel the hot water roll down my back, turned to a point where it stung but didn't quite hurt. I thought about what Alex had said, and after a while I stopped thinking at all, just let the water pour over me and drip into what holes were left unhealed. My fingers idly traced the scars.

The wounds began to heal faster. I started doing things again, things I hadn't even realized I had given up. I hung out with friends, and each time the holes healed a little more. Once it was mostly gone, I started to date again. I kept it hidden for as long as possible. I wasn't embarrassed, but it never seemed relevant. At least, never relevant enough to bring up.

It did come up, though, as it always will. We got to a point when we were comfortable being bare with each other, and I had to be honest. I was anxious about this, worried about scaring them off. But it was okay, because they had one too. Relief washed over

I poked at the green shoot under my shirt



Art by Kristy Kettle, Tokyo, Japan

me when I saw that familiar dotted scar, when I knew they understood. We held each other tight, understood that we knew how much it hurt, and understood that there was no reason to be jealous. The wounds had healed.

It was only after this that a new seed could take root, and it took root in them too. We were both scared to let it grow again, but that organic warmth calmed us. We stood together, roots growing slower, but just as strong as before. This time they didn't wilt.

At least, not yet. I don't think they will, and anyway, now I know how to handle the release.

I'm better now, I think. I have another heart to tend to, another bond to grow, and it's better than what was before. The scars are still visible. They're mostly covered by the new growth, but they're there. They'll never go away.

As ugly as they are, they toughened me; I at least have that to thank you for. But the calluses hold this new growth back, and it's hard to relax when I'm afraid of being ripped open again.

Time and distance taught me what poisoned the seed we grew together, and I blame neither of us. It was a mutual destruction, and while it took root, it was built on shaky ground. I can accept that now. I've moved on, I've learned, and a new seed has taken root. I hope the same is true for you. ♦

Relief washed over me when I saw that familiar scar

My Cry

My cry is not like any other cry. I was born into the mouth of a tiger.

I'm growing to be digested by an animal that denies me even when I'm crawling inside his intestines. My cry is not for my own pain but for the bodies of my brothers.

My cry is to trick the beast into a satisfied hunger. My cry is to clog the tracks into these bowels, to leave no empty spaces for my unborn children.

by Noemy Santana, New York, NY

River Bank

The river bank is
Calling my name all day long
So I set the hook.

by "Jamal," Brookwood, AL

I hope you see this

I'm standing in the dead center of a
snow-covered yard
snowflakes falling one by one colliding
with my skin
pricking the back of my neck like
frozen arrows
i stand shivering
watching city buses groan by,
and as the smell of gasoline is carried away
in a cloud of gray smoke
My arms stretch out beside me trying
to reach what isn't there
and I'm falling
hitting the hard-packed ice-covered
crystallized-gunk-like ground
but I don't mind because this is serenity
looking up at the constellations stretching
left and right
like a panoramic picture
I could dip my fingertips into the
inky horizon
drenching them one by one in golden paint
and writing poems across the night sky
Causing a ripple effect of "I miss you"
and I wonder if
across a shallow sea of distance and
determination
you can see it too

by Ren Brian, Park City, UT

Skin Bleach

lather it onto your skin,
let it soak into your pores,
let it burn, let it burn, let it burn,
funny how it burns when what it does is
make you light,
they package it in the fanciest plastic jars,
pretty pink lettering, pretty pink letting,
pretty light skin.
pictures of women zipping the outer
layer off,
the outer, darker layer, only to reveal a
smiling porcelain beauty,
can I be you,
how come when i pull at my skin
i don't hear the zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzip
how come when I pull at my skin
i don't see the smile.
I pick 3 of the offenders out of the line-up,
i have three of their jars on my dresser,
they watch me as I undress,
they stare at every inch of me, sweating in
their unopened boxes.
I'll package you up and call you colónizer,
smelling musty, hard, like a journey
on a boat,
and on the box under the little N°5 sign
I'll write *indentured slave* and tie the bottle
with the rinds from a sugar cane stalk
sucked dry.

by Sarah Gafur,
New York, NY

Between the walls

The rage,
oh, the rage, it finds me at night
when the shadows shed contrast
onto what had previously been
too bright to see.
I lie awake and I wonder
if you are tossing and turning
as well.
But I know you are not.

My mind drifts in and out of your bedroom,
and in the very earliest periods
of the morning, I can feel my soul leave
with it.

I've left so many ghosts in your room
I am afraid I will never
truly remove myself from between the walls.

When you leave for college
will your parents vacuum
me out of the corner?

by Abby Johnson, Flemington, NJ

Skeleton Trees

Remember when we walked
down half-deserted streets
sometime between twilight and sunrise?
When the street lamps formed orange
puddles on the sidewalk
and the city was nothing
more than a charcoal sketch
with smudge marks
and coffee stains.

We laughed so loudly that the
darkness tensed
shifted
rolled over
and finally went back to sleep.

Remember how the night was cold
and sharp?
How it tasted of chlorine and metal?
How the tree branches formed
skeleton hands
that reached to pull you away?

But we laughed
so loudly that we thawed out the sky
as you whispered memories of
watercolor paintings
and kite strings
snug around tiny wrists.
And as the night dripped over us
you looked up and smiled
and the stars were in your eyes.

Remember when I found out you
were leaving
sometime between twilight and sunrise?
The night was cold and sharp
and the skeleton trees had hands that reached
to pull you away.

I didn't know
that your stars were going out.
One by one,
like a handful of snowflakes tossed
into the sky,
turning and twisting and flashing
against the darkness until finally
the sunlight took them away.

by Allie Pitchon,
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Identity Free

A piece of paper
crumpled, torn, aged by the chaos of society
whittled to the shape of a man as soon as he
gives his Legos
to his brother.

Dropped in a puddle
and stomped on, beaten
into conformity by the footprint and rains
of a bustling world.

Wrinkled and ripped at the edges
tire marks through the center.

The original font
no
longer
legible.

An unsustainable lifestyle scorched
the potential
originality
from this paper boy.
Even the bleeding ink
is washed away
leaving an expanse
of far-yellowed
blankness.

This paper piece is insignificant without
the words that make it hop.

Fibers pulled apart like heartstrings,
the descriptor "paper"
easily traded for "rubbish" or "scrap."

Pressed in the corner where the pavement
meets the curb
is a purposeless piece of paper
that deserves to be readable;
that
deserves
to
be
read.

by Zoe Webb,
Auckland, New Zealand

Iron-Jawed Angels

Your silver-lined mechanical jaws
Click to the metronome of a noble agenda
Forced open by white-gloved hands

With the justification of insanity
They shove food down your throats
For bravely standing on the sidewalk

"Fly away on welded wings!"
they said. "If you are so ethereal and
heavenly, go and fly away!"

The one who bore the wings is dead
The doe-eyed Russian is hungry in
the corner
And they trussed up your best friend
in handcuffs above her head

So what will the Iron-Jawed Angel do now?
She will be hungry in the corner
She will raise her arms above her head

Whether the message is written in spit
or stale ink, spread the word
The good news for all women of America!
Wipe the bile from your mouth, the blood
upon your eye
'Cause I cross my heart and hope to die.

by Jenna Grossbarth, New City, NY

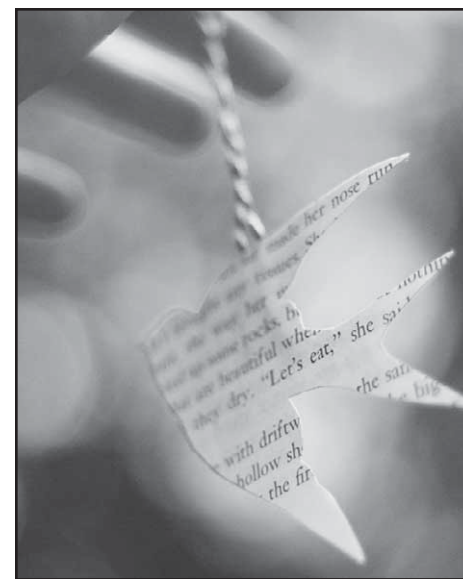


Photo by Hannah Heckart, Jackson, TN

Your Horoscope

Beyond the glass protecting my reflection
from my reality
is hollowness haunting the midnight desert.
Shadows playing puppeteers,
teasing control over slouching stars.

A whisper of wind whips past windows.
My father holds my hand, the record
player skips.
My father says it will be over soon.
Close your eyes, wait for morning.

The sun flirts with the moon.
A lock of auburn clings to her cheek,
wet with tears or dreams.
What does it mean to be alive?

The last thing I swallowed was my heart.
These are not butterflies in my stomach.
There are no knots in my gut.
My body is a locust.

Existence is a generality.
What is security?
My home is a thousand miles north of Mars.
I am not an alien, I am a parasite.

My brain is a leviathan.
This is where my fear lives.
This is where people I love buy their poison,
where a child gets lost before she grows up.

When everyone is asleep, God opens
his wardrobe
and walks around in the chalk outlines
of children.
He didn't have a childhood;
this is why he takes so many from us.

I'd like the sky to be black more often.
I'd like to swim in the shadow of Jupiter,
to taste the breath of Saturn,
to waltz with Neptune.

I am not a writer.
I am not a dreamer.
I do not dream in pictures.
I do not write in words.

This is a field where only weeds grow.
This is a collection of coins.
This is a place setting at a table with
only one chair.
I am sorry it all has to end this way.

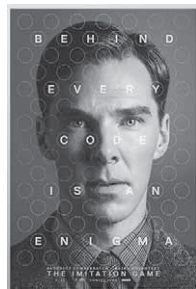
by Hannah Fradkin,
Missoula, MT

DRAMA

The Imitation Game

“The Imitation Game” tells the true story of the creation of a supercomputer built to break Enigma, the Germans’ code machine, and end World War II. But this plot is overshadowed by the personal life of Alan Turing (Benedict Cumberbatch). Turing was gay in a time when homosexuality was illegal.

The movie is set in the 1940s and ’50s in Bletchley Park, England. At the beginning, Turing is asked to be part of a super-secret mission to break the Enigma code. There he meets team members Hugh Alexander (Matthew Goode), John Cairncross (Allen Leech), and Peter Hilton (Matthew Beard). When a woman, Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley), is recruited to help, she and Turing build a sort of relationship. When she must leave the mission because of her family, Turing proposes to her so she can stay. At their engagement party, he talks with



True story of a war hero

John about Joan, saying, “What if I don’t fancy her in that way?” John replies, “You can’t tell anyone, Alan. It’s illegal.” *Will someone else find out?* I wondered. I was more worried for Turing personally than I was about the problem of the Enigma code.

Near the end, we see Turing in a police station, accused of “gross indecency” with another man. When the officer interrogates him, Turing admits that he is a homosexual. Instead of being seen as the man who cracked Enigma and helped end the war, he is treated as a criminal. He is sentenced to two years of hormonal treatment with estrogen, which makes him shaky and depressed. Ultimately, the hormone treatment drives him to commit suicide.

When I saw this scene, I felt terrible and felt like it was unfair. I sat in the cinema shocked, thinking of how the country he had saved had killed him.

In 2013, when the story of Alan Turing was revealed, he received a posthumous pardon by the Queen of England. This was a huge step in the right direction, but in my opinion, Turing deserves more than just a royal pardon. He is a war hero and should be remembered because of that, not for his sexual orientation or his tragic death.

But since this story occurred, not much has changed. In some countries same-sex marriage is allowed, but in most it is illegal. The world is still ignoring equal rights for LGBT people, leaving me wondering how humane we are.

“The Imitation Game” made me think about what is different in the world today compared to the 20th century. Personally, I don’t think much has changed. We are still discriminating against gay people and taking away their rights. I hope stories like this one will help people realize what the world is doing to homosexuals and finally begin treating them as equals. ♦

by Izzy Zsolnai, Vienna, Austria

DRAMA

Whiplash

Almost everyone has someone who has pushed them to excel. It could be the coach who challenges you to run that extra mile. Or a teacher who knows you can make the grade, or a parent who loves you enough to convince you that you’re on the wrong path. Yes, you might chafe a little as they try to help you be a better person. But deep down you understand that they are doing what is good for you.

But is there a point where one can push someone too hard? What happens when the line between excellence and perfection is blurred? What is the result when the path to greatness is warped into something more akin to torture?

“There are no two words in the English language more harmful than ‘good job.’” Terence Fletcher (J.K. Simmons) plumbs terrifying depths to follow this creed. Fletcher, a distinguished jazz teacher at a music school, finds Andrew (Miles Teller) practicing the drums in a tucked-away room on campus. He takes him under his wing, but Andrew finds out the price of his tutelage is high as he endures Fletcher’s abuse disguised as training.

For the audience, it is equal parts breathtaking and wince-inducing as we wonder how long Andrew will put up with Fletcher’s “teaching” – and whether or not Fletcher, in his own twisted way, is doing what’s necessary for Andrew to succeed.

These are the ideas “Whiplash” masterfully asks us to consider. The film presents the teacher/student relationship in the

harshest light possible as a parable for our day. We are forced to question if our culture pushes people to greatness enough.

In an age when competition is discouraged, everyone gets a trophy, and we are encouraged into group thinking, this film makes a point that is hard to refute. But flip to the other side of the coin and we see the abuses that the push for individual excellence creates. It can lead to obsession, a devaluation of our self-worth, and the edge of a cliff that demands we die for our passions.



Breathtaking and wince-inducing

As the film concludes in a whirlwind of revenge and musical prowess, “Whiplash” shows us that the push for excellence is needed now more than ever. But it is up to us to ensure that we are not the push that causes someone to fall over the cliff.

“Whiplash” is a daring piece of American cinema that will be remembered for years to come. In his directorial feature debut, Damien Chazelle crowns himself as a bold, exciting talent in Hollywood whom I look forward to seeing again. He leads an all-star cast and crew who give their all in everything from the acting to the sound design and film editing. Simmons emerges as the movie’s MVP for his Oscar-winning performance as Fletcher.

This is a movie I highly recommend, and one you do not want to miss. ♦

by Connor Brantley, Crowley, TX

This movie is rated R.

DOCUMENTARY

Jiro Dreams of Sushi

Everyone, at times, struggles with the universal question: What is success? Many pursue a comfortable lifestyle, others happiness; yet others pursue love or power. The titular Jiro, a master sushi chef in Japan, is left undefined by any of these categories. This documentary, directed by David Gelb, manages to capture a snapshot of the life that surrounds Jiro’s work.

Jiro’s restaurant is located in a basement near Ginza Subway Station in Tokyo, Japan. Its humble sushi bar holds 10 people, and there is nothing extravagant about the venue. So what makes it a three-star Michelin establishment, serving arguably the best sushi ever created?



Depicts mouth-watering masterpieces

The film’s mouth-watering depictions of Jiro and his staff’s masterpieces come only after a brutal dissection of what lies behind their construction. Everything from the lengthy massage of the squid to the orientation of the plate is scrutinized in fine detail by both camera and chef; anything less than a perfect process and presentation is failure.

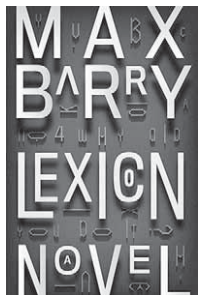
Connected thoroughly with this, however, is an unexpected human side. Abandonment, war, and suffering all factor into Jiro’s past, and one wonders if his sons, who are set to succeed him, could ever escape his shadow. The sushi master offers no apology for what he has traded for his life’s work. Memorable shots ranging from storefronts to congested fish markets establish a surreal but visceral tone.

By its conclusion, the film’s various perspectives have spun a story of the enigmatic owner of the famed sushi restaurant and what he has achieved, creating a work of art arguably greater than Jiro’s 20-course meal. For Jiro himself, though, perhaps true success does not exist, making its pursuit all the more worthwhile. ♦

by Andrew Chen, Cerritos, CA

Lexicon • Max Barry

Words impact us every day in ways we don't even realize. As I sit here composing this, I'm choosing my words carefully to try to convince you to agree with me. That is what the poets in *Lexicon* by Max Barry do. They use words against you without you even knowing it. They have people on the street asking people questions to determine what words will work on them. Watch out if someone ever asks you, "Are you a cat person



Words are the center of this story

or a dog person?" or "What is your favorite color?" They could be trying to figure out your segment so they'll know exactly what words to use against you. Even picking a number between one and ten can be dangerous.

What happens when a word is released that destroys a whole city, when a poet is manipulated into using her skills to do bad things? What happens when a 16-year-old girl is taken from the street and brought to a special school to learn the science behind words and the skill of manipulation? What happens when an ordinary man falls in love with a poet and she falls in love with him too?

This story is told in a way that is interesting. It starts right in the middle of the action and switches between characters' times and stories. You have to be a detective to figure out the narrative piece by piece.

When the puzzle is complete and everything makes sense, it's better than Christmas morning. I love how *Lexicon* is told in a non-traditional, creative way. As a writer I love that words and the way they are used are at the center of this story. I think very scientifically, so the science part of it makes me love it even more.

"Vartix velkor mannik wissick": I command you to buy this book immediately! ♦

by Cassie Michel, Littleton, CO

CLASSIC

Brave New World • Aldous Huxley

Imagine a world where everything is perfect. People are eternally happy, all illness has been eliminated, old age is a burden long buried, and even death is a pleasant experience. If you were offered a life in this heaven, what would you do? The answer may seem fairly obvious, but Aldous Huxley's ambitious dystopian novel, *Brave New World*, will definitely make you give it another thought.

This novel is set nearly 600 years in the future, in a civilization where human values and norms have undergone a drastic change. Thanks to scientific advances, almost all of humankind has been made into a well-oiled machine that perpetuates a state of worldwide stability and fairly reasonable happiness. However, individual identity and passion have been lost along the way.

When John, a savage untouched by these changes, is suddenly brought into this society, he realizes that the fabled new world might not be so brave after



Can change your mindset

all. The story becomes a battle of principles between him and the blissfully ignorant new world. Will his righteousness be enough to change his fate?

What I loved most is Huxley's approach to creating a dystopia. Unlike most anti-utopian authors (like George Orwell and his classic, *1984*), Huxley does not oppose utopian idealism by presenting a world enveloped in fear. Instead, we are shown how perfection itself can be a bane if approached the wrong way.

One downside: the book focuses so much on the setting that the plot can feel subordinated at times. Despite this shortcoming,

Brave New World offers much more than just an interesting read. It is thought-provoking and can potentially change your mindset about your personal goals. Reading it is an experience you do not want to miss; I recommend it to everyone. ♦

by Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

NONFICTION

Polly Wants to Be a Writer

Laura Thomas

Laura Thomas's *Polly Wants to Be a Writer: The Junior Author's Guide to Writing and Getting Published* provides much-needed insight into the everyday battle budding young writers wage against their inner dragons, depicted through the inspirational tale of Polly, a 15-year-old



The ultimate guide for aspiring authors

aspiring writer attempting to tame her defiant inner dragon. This brilliant fusion of adventure and guidance should be every young writer's greatest weapon in the battle to beat procrastination and writer's block. It's embedded with vital information relatable to writers everywhere.

Anyone who has a toe in the world of literature is well aware of the endless spectrum between fiction and nonfiction, and it is safe to say that Thomas has effortlessly mastered a blend of both genres, rendering *Polly Wants to Be a Writer* the ultimate guide for aspiring authors in their quest for publication.

I genuinely recommend this book to anyone considering a career as a writer, publisher, or editor, or even just someone who might enjoy a coming-of-age tale about a determined young girl and her truculent dragon. ♦

by Nina Chabanon, Bay Harbor Islands, FL

NOVEL

Afterworlds • Scott Westerfeld

Scott Westerfeld is a genius. Once in a while I come across a novel that cleverly blends two narratives in a unique way; however, *Afterworlds* has taken this to a whole new level.

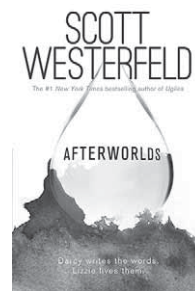
Our first character is Darcy Patel, a teenage girl who is excited and terrified that her first novel, coincidentally named *Afterworlds*, is going to be published. She quits college, and while experiencing apprehension about having her book edited and published, begins dating another writer new to the scene. I won't tell you who, because, honestly, you won't expect it.

Then we have our second main character, who is another teenage girl simply named Lizzie. After a near-death experience during a terrorist attack, she realizes she is what others call a "psychopomp" – a grim reaper for ghosts. Enter Yamaraj, a Hindu boy who protects souls from rogue reapers and evil spirits.

What do these two narratives

have in common? Lizzie is the main character of Darcy's soon-to-be published novel.

Afterworlds is one young adult novel that all writers should read. It vividly shows the stress and fear involved in the complicated process of having a book or story published.



One novel all writers should read

I also enjoyed the narrative structure. It's like watching Suzanne Collins as she writes the first Hunger Games book, but both narratives are entertaining enough to keep you interested.

The chemistry between Yamaraj and Lizzie seems somewhat flat, mainly because they don't see each other very much. However, you

can make a constructive argument that Westerfeld wrote it that way to show how much Darcy can improve.

Either way, I never got bored. If *Afterworlds* sounds intriguing to you, check it out and feel what it's like to step into the shoes of an author. ♦

by Nathan Hopp, Green Bay, WI

Spunky • Dori Brink

Spunky, written by my great-aunt Dori Brink, explores the wonders of a developing love between three dogs: Spunky, Happy, Dodger, and their adults: Daphne, and Peter. My great-aunt was a one-of-a-kind, affectionate person, and you can tell that from this book.

She continues to inspire me to write creative pieces, just as she did. Whether, you're looking to chuckle, to cry, to wonder, or just to read a great book, *Spunky* is the one for you.

The story begins when a couple, Daphne (based on Dori) and Peter (and her husband, Paul), have their lives disrupted by a stray dog who begins following Peter around as he works. After a few weeks, they adopt her and name her Spunky. The mesmerizing ways their lives change after adopting Spunky is what makes this book so heartwarming.

Later, Daphne and Peter decide to add a watchdog named Dodger to the family. Spunky and Dodger's relationship grows, and the narrative shows how smart they are as they play with each other or communicate with their owners.

They are inseparable. Then one day, Peter comes home with a small black dog named Happy. The three dogs have lots of adventures, whether climbing mountains or trying to catch birds. Many of these events are based on true stories.

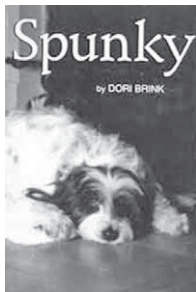
While all seems good, dreadful events happen that will bring you to tears. I felt so many emotions, from joy to devastation, and from humor to awe.

You can tell that this couple's love and passion for these dogs is something special. *Spunky* is a book like no other. It has thrilling moments humans might experience, but these happen between the dogs, with Spunky as narrator.

Spunky makes you feel like you are in Spunky's situation, feeling like dirt at one moment, and a hero at

another. The truthfulness of this book is why it is one of my favorites and might become one of yours. I believe *Spunky* is an inspirational work that should be cherished and read by all. ♦

by Brandie Zucker,
Bedford, NY



Three dogs' astonishing adventures

The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die • April Henry

She wakes up on the floor with blood in her mouth. The voices by the door are arguing about whether to "take her out back and finish her off." She doesn't know who she is, where she is, or why they want to kill her.

All she can do is run.

April Henry's suspense novel *The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die* follows in the footsteps of her other mysteries, but this time with a twist: the heroine has no idea who she is.



Readers will fall into the mystery

Readers will be pulled into the plot and resonate with fear as they discover that no one can be trusted and no place is safe. Rumors fly around the protagonist, hinting that she may be a criminal, a murderer, or an insane asylum escapee. Only one thing is for sure: someone wants to get rid of her.

Reading *The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die* creates a new and riveting experience for readers as the protagonist's story becomes their own. From the first line, the reader knows as much as the main character. Readers will fall into the mystery as they work with the young victim to find out her name, her family, and the truth.

Henry does not disappoint; this book is every bit as exhilarating as it sounds. It contains everything – action, mystery, heroism, and even romance.

Winning numerous awards, including the YALSA Quick Pick, Henry's novel transforms reading into a true adventure.

Read with caution: you will not be able to put this book down until the very last page. ♦

by Mary Kelleher, Santa Rosa, CA

Outliers • Malcolm Gladwell

If you want to seem smarter and impress your friends, *Outliers* won't help you at all. I decided to read this book because the inside flap claimed to explain the "extraordinary success of Asians at math." I was hoping the next time someone assumed the reason is because otherwise our parents would disown us, I could quote the book. It didn't disappoint.

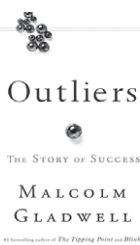
Outliers tells a diverse selection of interesting stories about people's paths to victory, but the recurring theme is that you need an incredibly lucky mix of the right cultural background, birthday, geography, and parenting to get there. Hard work is just the byproduct of taking the fortune and deciding to pursue it – or you could take the other route and practice for 10,000 hours on your chosen pursuit.

The book covers Bill Gates, Jewish lawyers, Asians, people with high IQs, Canadian hockey players, and the history of Gladwell's own family. The arguments are believable. However, after reading the one-star reviews on Amazon I realized that there are holes and too many assumptions, the evidence spread

too thin. You might enjoy the book if you don't read those afterward.

I give it three out of five chickens for holding my attention for the most part, teaching me about my cultural background, and exhibiting new insights. ♦

by Grace Zhou, Marietta, GA



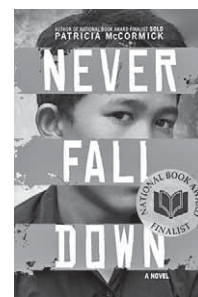
You need an incredibly lucky mix

Never Fall Down • Patricia McCormick

Arn Chorn-Pond was 11 when the Khmer Rouge came to his small Cambodian village to round up people. It started when they urged all the soldiers to follow them to the airport to greet the returning Prince – none of these men ever returned to their families. Shortly thereafter, all the people in Arn's village were told to flee into the country. They had been led to believe that American bombers were on the way and the village would be obliterated. They were told they would stay for only three days. Along the way, many died. "They fall down, they never get up. Over and over I tell myself one thing: never fall down," Arn said.

Arn is separated from his family and forced to work under horrible conditions. Some of what he was forced to do – like throwing bodies into a ditch – filled me with horror. It was hard to remind myself that, although this is historical fiction, it was inspired by the story of Arn's life.

Never Fall Down paints a gruesome picture of life under the harsh rule of the Khmer Rouge. I can't even begin to imagine how terrifying it must have been. It makes my stomach churn to know that



Inspired by the story of Arn's life

these atrocities happened in recent history. Readers are pulled into the marches, camps, and fighting alongside Arn.

The diction is easy and written to match the cadence of Arn's voice. It felt as if he were sitting next to me telling me his story. I will admit that the writing style threw me off at first, but I got used to it after reading author Patricia McCormick's reasons behind her style.

The novel makes me so thankful for all the opportunities I have. It's so easy to take these for granted and get sucked into the stress of life. A novel like this reminds you how insignificant your problems are when compared to the suffering of others. ♦

by Nate Shurtleff, Richfield, MN

Night Visions • Imagine Dragons

Beware the lulling melodies in Imagine Dragons' "Night Visions." The album, released a few years ago, wields mystical powers that will lure you into an everlasting passion for the band. The songs showcase a unique style accompanied by catchy beats. The result is a refined, intriguing rock album with heartfelt lyrics and unforgettable melodies.

Imagine Dragons was formed back in 2008 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Their lyrics share personal stories about braving countless obstacles and overcoming lasting scars. They hoped to reach the hearts of an attentive audience – perhaps a group of broken people who have also endured pain – but at that time, they thought it unimaginable that they'd obtain widespread popularity. However, over the years, Imagine Dragons steadily gained popularity and earned spots on numerous music charts worldwide.

Since the release of the hit single

"It's Time," the band has launched into stardom. The song's upbeat story revolves around lead singer Dan Reynolds' realization of his true self. It holds a powerful message that connects with listeners, and the rhythmic clapping that stands out from the soulful melody further enhances its meaning.

The success of "It's Time" drove the band to work tirelessly on their first album. In an interview by Sound-Spike, Reynolds said, "I think that from start to finish, our album has a theme to it, just running the gamut of human emotion. There are some songs that are a little darker and some that are a little happier." The band was passionate about portraying an in-depth representation of life, and

they were determined to make their first album successful.

"Night Visions" set the band off to a great start. The album reached its peak as number two on the Billboard 200, and a few singles reached prominence as well. "Radioactive" is a riveting piece that depicts Reynolds' awakening from his normal routine. Its positivity empowers listeners, with his deep, clear voice shining through the background of heavy drums. Another popular song, "Demons," offers a close understanding of humans' tendency to act wrongly, using the metaphor of "demons" that hide beneath our skins to portray everyone's selfish needs. If listeners venture further into the



Its positivity empowers listeners

album, they will find many songs worthy of attention. One of my favorites is "Bleeding Out." Its whistling chimes create a captivating atmosphere from the start. Then the song suddenly speeds into the chorus as Reynolds belts out eloquent lyrics displaying his willing sacrifice for a loved one. "Tiptoe" follows a similar idea. It begins with a mysterious mood and gradually increases in intensity, while maintaining a steady beat. "Underdog" also incorporates a stable rhythm as voices harmonize in a mesmerizing tune, displaying the band's outstanding talent for mixing melodies with earnest lyrics.

Imagine Dragons has experienced a whirlwind in the music industry, and their adventure continues. Their monumental efforts have finally paid off with the success of "Night Visions." It is a phenomenal collection that will stick with you. ♦

by Jocelyn Tang, New York, NY

BLACK METAL

Funerals from the Astral Sphere

Midnight Odyssey

Dis Pater of Midnight Odyssey, an Australian one-man band, can do it all. His atmospheric black metal music, and especially this album, can make for some spacey adventures. "Funerals from the Astral Sphere" was released by I, Voidhanger Records and is a 16-track, two-disc, two-hour-long ride that may very well take a



Things are going to get epic

while, but you will have fun along the way. The synths, vocals, and drums create a very spacey vibe.

Right from the first track, "Fallen from Firmament," you can tell that things are going to get epic. The music transports you from lightly floating in space to suddenly screaming because you are running out of oxygen and need help. Eventually you realize that if no one is going

to help, you might as well die peacefully. But remember, if you scream in space, no one will hear – unless you're listening to this massive album.

The repetition adds to the excellent atmosphere (as it always does), and the space theme matches the artwork on the cover. I may have to consider this one of my favorite albums of all time.

Overall, "Funerals from the Astral Sphere" is a phenomenal release that anyone should check out. My rating is 9.5/10. ♦

by Kaelan McAlpine, Winter Haven, FL

ROCK

Songs of Innocence • U2

Last year, Apple released U2's new album, "Songs of Innocence," as a free download to over 500 million iTunes users. While fans rejoiced, critics called the release an act of desperation from an aging band trying to stay relevant. The move appears to have put a target on the band's back, and the album has received mixed reviews. While "Songs of Innocence" is certainly nowhere near the stature of the U2 classics "The Joshua Tree" and "Achtung Baby," many of its sour reviews from the international press are simply off the mark. This album is a quality addition to the band's extensive collection.

Overall, "Songs of Innocence" certainly is deserving of respect. Bono clearly hasn't lost a beat vocally, and the production, while overpowering at times, is high quality. Unlike the stadium rockers and defiant songs of U2's past, "Songs of Innocence" is much more personal. Much like the Beatles did in creating their "Magical Mystery Tour" album, U2 looked to their childhoods for inspiration. "Cedarwood Road," for example, describes a street Bono remembers as a boy. This interesting approach makes the songs lyrically appealing.

After a few listens, it becomes apparent that the album is top heavy. Structured by garage band gristle and a poppy energy, the opening track, "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)," cements itself as the anthem of the album. Smooth rockers "Every Breaking Wave," "Song for Someone," and "Iris (Hold Me Close)" bring back the classic U2 energy and sound. Not to be forgotten is "California (There Is No End to Love)," a song as sunny and cheerful as the name implies. The album's first half has an optimistic vibe that builds a connection with the listener.

While "Songs of Innocence" begins with a bang, it ends with a whimper. None of the concluding songs are terrible, but they leave something to be desired. "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight"

and "The Troubles" are lifeless and seem to float endlessly. "This Is Where You Can Reach Me Now" is far too bland and repetitive. The melancholy "Cedarwood Road" doesn't make a lasting impression either. The occasional uninspired lyrics, like "tomorrow dawns like someone else's suicide" and "Northside, just across the river to the Southside," leave listeners scratching their heads. Bono's awkward falsetto in "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight" isn't impressive. The unconscious, dreamy effect that the band is trying to produce with their final songs simply falls flat.

"Songs of Innocence" is a mixed bag. But considering that this is the band's thirteenth studio album, the outcome is actually quite impressive. Even though the critics have been quick to label this album irrelevant, that is not the case. U2, while not as consistent as they once were, prove that they are still very much alive and capable of producing quality music. ♦

by Alan Brown, Manhattan, KS



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