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The Princess and the (Chauvinist) Pig

"Why are fairy tales so sexist? Why does the princess need help, anyway? Why is she always gorgeous and slender? Why are these princesses so open to being prizes for men to save?" "Fairy-Tale Fallacy," *Pride & Prejudice*, page 21

Cover photo by Stephanie Severance, Clarks Green, PA

A Victim to Heroin

Every issue of *Teen Ink* has a plethora of stories and pictures that enchant me and imbue me with refreshing perspectives of life and truth. One article in the March issue especially succeeded in grabbing my attention, since I'm an aficionado of all aspects of human behavior and psychology: "A Victim to Heroin" by "Allison." In her article, she relays an experience that anyone who has dealt with drug abuse and addiction can identify with. At the same time, she teaches the reader to identify the signs of heroin use.

Allison sets the background by recalling the date when her boyfriend's life was stolen by heroin. In explaining the telltale signs that he exhibited during the months before he died, she offers valuable knowledge that could help prevent any of us from dealing with the same grief.

This piece thoroughly encapsulates the horrific realities of heroin as a tainted and unreliable drug. Most notably, the last few lines include details of the night of her boyfriend's death that evoked deep sorrow in me, making me tear up. The declarative tone of the last two paragraphs leaves a resounding ache that is further emphasized when the author asserts, "it was already too late."

Amilya Phoeng, Phoenix, AZ

GMOs: What Do You Know?

I found Madeline Scott's article "GMOs: What Do You Know?" oh so very pleasing. This is by far the best article I've ever read in *Teen Ink* partly because of how well it was written. As I read, I couldn't help but smile knowing that not everybody is misinformed on genetically modified organisms. I loved how Madeline stated, "The stains on Monsanto's reputation have unfortunately rubbed off on GMOs as a whole." This is so true! GMOs are far from a bad thing, and without them there is no way farmers could feed our world's growing population.

Madeline also pointed out, "In 1999, scientists in Switzerland modified rice to

contain vitamin A, a vital nutrient for eyesight." This is only one of the many things that GMOs can do to help us, not hurt us. I think the best part of her article was the end when she stated, "So before you start campaigning to eliminate GM food, make sure that you know the facts." Too many people jump to conclusions about things they know nothing about!

I hope this article sends a message to teens who hear their parents saying that GMOs are bad. I want to thank Madeline for researching and writing this; it truly made my day.

Nick Brown, Ayersville, OH

Gravity

I found Katie Tsui's poem to be extremely captivating. It started out beautifully. I love how it is about a universal goddess who defies gravity. The figurative language is so effective and creative that I could picture what she was trying to paint in the reader's mind. Her words came to life and created a masterpiece. Her ending was what I adored the most: "and Newton never brought her home." Her references to scientists who studied or discovered the laws of physics are very interesting allusions and forms of figurative language.

"Gravity" was so good that I couldn't help but read it over and over. Katie deserves much acclaim for this piece. Thank you, Katie, for sharing your wonderful work of art. I hope to read more by you in *Teen Ink*.

Nancy Reyes, Phoenix, AZ

"No" Should Matter

Of all the wonderful pieces in the April issue, "No' Should Matter" was by far my favorite. It's a personal account of the author's experience coping after being raped. When she was assaulted, alcohol was involved, and so, until the author confided in her friend, she blamed herself for the incident. When her friend asked her if she had said no (which she had), she realized that she had been raped and that what happened was

not her fault but the fault of the rapist. The reason I love this piece so much is because the reader automatically sympathizes with the writer, and the writer learns something as a person. As a result, she is now telling her story to help others in similar situations. That, I believe, is the best expression of strength, and it comes across clearly to the reader.

I also agree with the author that "no" should matter. "No" needs to stop being taken for granted – not only in the context of rape, but in life in general. "No" could stop so many horrible things from happening if saying "no" did something. If you say "no" and are disregarded, you have the right to know that it isn't your fault, and you shouldn't torture yourself with guilt. People deserve to be listened to, especially when they say "no," and I think the author of "No' Should Matter" gets that across to readers perfectly.

Sabina Chernecher, Brooklyn, NY

The Price of Generosity

I enjoyed "The Price of Generosity" by Amrita Bhasin so much. It is true how people don't think about what they spend their money on. I too am guilty of wasting money on useless stuff, but if I have change, I usually donate it because, like Amrita said, "It's amazing that giving up something so small can have such a tremendous impact on another's life." I am very grateful for what I have, and I do not ask for much.

I hope the article was inspiring to other teens too. Maybe it will open their eyes and make them realize how giving just a little can make a huge difference. We could all save a dollar or two and donate it each month to a charity.

Logan Belcher, Holgate, OH

WAR NO MORE

"WAR NO MORE" by Tifara Brown is a very moving poem that highlights the truth in the never-ending fight for racial equality. In her poem, Tifara compares and contrasts

the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to today's society, and describes her life that is surrounded by racism.

The poem begins, "Dr. King, I respect your legacy, sure enough/But right now I just wanna scream and tear up some stuff." This is just one of the many lines that describe how Tifara feels about the way African Americans are treated today. She portrays their lives and her own as stained with blood, terminally ill from a lack of self-love, and turned against one another due to prejudice.

After reading this empowering poem, I was speechless. It made me realize that believing racial equality has been achieved is foolish. This common misconception is merely a way to hide the astonishing number of deaths due to hate crimes and to silence the screams of those who have no voice.

"WAR NO MORE" tells the cringe-worthy story of racial inequality without sugar-coating the evidence. It is time the world knows the truth. And lucky for them, it's all packed into one poem.

Jasmine Ramirez, Brooklyn, NY

A True High School Story

As a junior, I know the struggles associated with having a lot more on your plate than you can handle. Since I often bite off more than I can chew, "A True High School Story" resonated with me.

Ethan Gueldenzopf managed to relay a painfully accurate account of wanting to run away from it all that I could definitely relate to. I felt like I was reading my own thoughts. With countless nights coming home late from rehearsals to mountains of homework, I feel the same overwhelming pressure Ethan describes and the feeling of doubt you get when you are so stressed you just want to quit everything.

It's motivating knowing that I'm not the only one feeling this way, so thank you, Ethan, for understanding and relaying how stressful high school really is.

Brittany Skaggs, Phoenix, AZ

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The Other Sophia

by Sophia Watwood, Brooklyn, NY

Dear Sophia,
It takes an uncomfortable amount of introspection to admit that I am “the other Sophia.” I’m the one who has to sacrifice my last vowel so that we can be identified separately. I am the one who should give up a letter of her identity. Every time someone shouts our name in a crowd and I crane my neck like Tantalus to his fruit tree, my heart stiffens when I realize they are speaking to you. Whenever they announce an award and speak my three syllables, I hold my breath for the last name. Then I have to hold my tongue while you bow so low your medals scrape the floor.

I’ve always seen you as competition

The stab of “almost” and “so close” is always the slightest bit sharper when I lose to myself. Gold medals shine brighter next to silver when they are engraved with the same string of letters. It’s not your fault, of course. The only first place we’ll ever share is Most Common Name in the United States for Four Years in a Row. There are more than 50,000 of us in our country alone. But you probably already knew that.

Every morning I watch you disappear with friends and I think, *You know exactly where you belong.* Every question I answer incorrectly is a reminder that I am the other Sophia. Every stolen glance at you is a bitter wish to be as good as – no, superior to – you. I don’t know if you catch me jabbing you with covetous glares, but even if you did, you would graciously forgive me, like the saint I’ll never be.

I’ve always seen you as competition. You were the Sophia I wished I was. You were always one inch taller, one friend more likable, and one grade point smarter. I was Ron Wea-

sley to your Harry Potter. I turned you into an ideal that I aspired to and impersonated.

You aren’t the only Sophia I’d rather be. There is the one in math class who finishes her tests before I can scrawl out our name. There is a clone in dance who can *fouetté* while I wobble in a *passé*. There is the one laughing with her friends while I watch, only pretending to read. There are far too many people who give me unattainable standards. While other girls wish they were Jennifer Lawrence, I still can’t get over those god-damned Sophias.

“Sophie,” I shout at myself, “would you please clean your dorky glasses and look at things objectively? You need to get over yourself. Do you really think no one understands how you feel? You have become a cliché of a teenager. Maybe I should get you a 1D album and a *Twilight* book. We can meet up at the Starbucks.” I cannot succumb to the stereotypes of a generation. I must stop lather-

ing myself in self-pity and clean my glasses every once in a while.

It’s amazing what clear vision can do for a person. Suddenly I see the pimples hiding in the forest of your hairline. I see the crescents of stress and sleep deprivation beneath your eyes. I see the tears and the strength and all the bullet holes from everyone else who put a target on your back. I see a girl who wishes her name wasn’t so freaking common and that she could hide from all the pressure. I blink, to make sure I wasn’t imagining some wraith in this goddess’s place, and I see a girl just like me.

You were the Sophia I wished I was

Sophia, you are gifted and virtuous and the reincarnation of Galatea, but you are not the goddess I made you out to be. I turned you into an idol and a martyr and a model in a magazine, but you are as human as I am. For every insecurity I flicked onto you, I hope they didn’t stick.

I am not the other Sophia. I am no one’s lesser version.

– Sophie ♦



Art by Laura Chapman, Pleasantville, NY

Forgiveness

Remember when we were young and stupid even though we’re still young, and stupid doesn’t even begin to cover it, but we were more innocent then, and we wore matching rubber raincoats slicked with pearls of fog, our reflections small disturbances in the surfaces of murky puddles.

Think back to before we were willing to eat anything green, while being far from squeamish when it came to plucking earthworms from the sodden earth and dropping them as delicately as children can into red plastic buckets.

I imagine I could see the mischief igniting in your eyes as you slid one cool, wriggling form down my shirt. I ran into the house, screaming, slamming the door behind me.

You cried, panicking that in that moment you lost me forever which in itself seems funny now, since years have passed, and we have so much more to forgive each other for than earthworms on wet afternoons.

by Sophie Panzer, So. Orange, NJ

The Rice-Making Artist

by Sarah Nam, West Chester, PA

On a Tuesday night, the phone rings and I glance lazily at the caller ID.
“Hello?”

“Hi, Sarah. Can you make rice? I come home late tonight.”

“How many cups?” I say, staring longingly at the television.

“Four cups and two handfuls of quinoa.”

I grudgingly walk to the pantry. Our bulky rice dispenser, nestled between Nature Valley Granola Bars and Welch’s Fruit Snacks, spits out one cup of raw brown rice for each slide of the switch. After sliding the handle four times, I unlatch the carton from the dispenser and carry it to the sink.

While the faucet runs, I gently pour the rice into a bowl, then swirl its contents until the water turns milky. Once this is achieved, I hold the bowl with my left hand and rinse the rice with my right. I slowly drain the water from the bowl so that no grains escape. This procedure is repeated three times: swirl, rinse, drain. By the third time, my arms ache and the tips of my fingers are as wrinkled as the skins of dried tomatoes.

After the rice is washed, I pour three cups of drinking water – not tap water – into the bowl and add in two handfuls of quinoa seeds. The seeds are strictly for nutrition; they have no taste and disappear when cooked. I position the bowl snugly into the rice cooker and press the yellow button that reads “Mixed Rice. Start Cook.”

The rice cooker lets out a high whistle and sends up a skinny stream of smoke. Acting as a bell, the cooker lets

me know that it is now time to prepare the side dishes. I place the *kimchi* (spicy pickled cabbage), *gim* (dried seaweed), and *bulgogi* (stir-fried seasoned beef) in the center of the table.

I then ladle the dried-bean soup into five bowls before arranging the utensils: spoons on the left, chopsticks on the right. When the rice is ready, I scoop it into bowls and place them to the left – always to the left – of the soup.

Despite my whining and complaining, I feel a sense of pride that I belong to a culture in which the preparation of food is hugely important. When guests are invited into a family’s home, there is an unspoken obligation to bring the host a crate of tangerines or a box of apples. Despite the back-breaking hours required to make *kimchi*, my mom and her friends spend Sunday evenings crouched beside a tub filled to the brim with washed, pickled cabbage.

My grandfather knows how to make rice in fifteen minutes. When he visits us from California, he gently slaps away my hands as if I am a toddler playing with water. In a fluid movement, he swirls the rice, digging his fingers underneath the grains and swiftly rinsing the sides of the bowl. He is quick yet graceful; my clumsy, small hands look weak and insignificant beside his strong, experienced ones.

He teaches me to recognize rice-making as an art, as an integral component of my culture. Using two handfuls of determination, four cups of perseverance, and one spoonful of optimism, I strive to become a rice-making artist too. ♦

I gently pour the rice, then swirl the bowl

A Pound Does Not a Person Make

by Tristan Poindexter,
Vinton, VA

“It doesn’t fit.”
I peel off the dress, tighter than a second skin, and angrily toss it back over the changing room door to my mother. Her voice reaches me from the other side, her pitying tone pushing me even closer to tears.

“I’m sorry ... they don’t have it in any other size, honey. I already checked.”

Of course they don’t. They never do.

I quickly get dressed as I suppress the sob trying to escape my lips. It’s odd; you would think that I would get used to having the same experience every time I go shopping for clothes. Every time, I naively believe it will be different. Every time I am, once again, proven wrong.

As I wipe my face and leave the dressing room, I pass the trifold mirror, where a petite blond teen is trying on a bright pink sequined gown. She smiles in the mirror, turns, and strikes a pose. Her mother stands to the side, one hand on the mirror, as if she’s nearly blown away by her daughter’s beauty; she gushes about how beautiful her daughter looks and how perfect the gown is on her. I feel so sick of my own disgusting reflection that I look away, wading through the racks of clothes that are off-limits to me. My mom is looking through a rack of dresses, hoping to find one in any size bigger than a 16.

“Let’s just go,” I mumble, glaring angrily at the ground. She looks at me, opens her mouth as if to say something, then quickly shuts it.

“Maybe we could find something at Lane Bryant.”

The thought of going there to look fills me with a bittersweet mix of

excitement and dread. On one hand, I’d actually be able to fit into the clothes; on the other, I’d hate being seen walking into a place known as a “fat store.”

I shake my head. “Let’s just go home.”

This is a common experience for me, and always has been. There is a definite split between slim or average women and “plus-sized” women, and I have experienced the rift many times in my life.

The first time was at the tender age of eight. Some of the girls in my second-grade class wanted to make a club, just a silly group that would meet on the playground at recess. I ran over and excitedly asked if I could join.

“You can’t. You’re fat.”

I frowned, unable to process what I had just heard. Fat? What did being fat have to do with anything? I stood there staring, not sure what to do. I had been so certain that I would be allowed to join; not only was I always nice to these girls, I had never said anything rude or mean to anyone. That was the first time I experienced prejudice because of my weight.

Fast forward several years. I was sitting at a lunch table in middle school with a group of friends, just laughing and talking as usual. Suddenly one of the girls looked at me, a smile on her face, and loudly proclaimed, “Tristan, you eat like a pig!” By then I had learned why fat was bad – fat is ugly, disgusting, grotesque – but I had not experienced anything so public since the playground incident.

I turned red and slowly put my fork down. That was the year that I learned to hate eating in public.

I knew what it meant to be overweight: everyone believes you’re a slob, a glutton, a compulsive eater. People expect you to always supersize everything. Everyone thinks that you reach for chips when you’re hungry, and that all you drink is soda. When you go out in public, you always wonder if people are watching and thinking, *Ugh, of course she’d be eating that. Look how big she is!* The thought still bothers me whenever I go out to eat, that someone is silently judging my choices from two tables away.

The worst experience I have ever had, though, was later that year in math class. I was already made fun of for how I dressed. On this day, I stood up in class to go throw something away.

As I did, a hand suddenly made hard contact with my butt, eliciting an embarrassingly loud slap that echoed through the back of the room. I yelped and turned around to see a male classmate who had made rude comments to me before laughing along with half the class.

“She’s so fat!” a girl stage-whispered to her friend. My face turned red and my eyes began to fill with tears. I wanted to run out of the room. I hadn’t done anything to any of them, and yet they humiliated and demeaned me in front of the entire class just because they could.

Now that I’m older, I don’t hear many overt insults directed at me anymore, but I still see prejudice

I learned to hate eating in public

everywhere: in the clothing racks at department stores, in the magazines that criticize celebrities who gain even a pound, in the catalogs and ads and television shows that glorify the slim figure as the definition of beauty. I hear it in the comments made amongst my little brothers and their friends.

“Fatty!”

“Fatso!”

“Fat! Fat! Fat!”

I hear it when girls walk down the hall criticizing themselves.

“I look so fat today.”

“I’m on a diet. Prom is coming up!”

“Ew, look how fat I am!”

And I see it every day in the mirror, but only because I’m told to. ♦



Photo by Sabrina Santiago, Westwood, NJ

Brush Strokes

by Emily Smith, Simpsonville, SC

Today, a friend of mine will have her first child. Today, I visit my grandfather as he slips into oblivion. An entrance and an exit. A beginning and an end.

The two cannot look more different.

In a matter of hours, a screaming, wrinkled baby will be pushed from his mother’s womb and introduced to the world. His skin, flawless. His mind, blank.

My Papa, with his withered hands and tufts of white hair, sits on the edge of life, a huge valley of memories before him. His skin, scarred. His mind, full.

It’s amazing, the progression of life. The journey from birth to death, from beginning to end, is the brush strokes in a painting. Birth is the canvas, death, the frame.

As I sit by Papa’s bedside with one of his skeletal hands enclosed between both of mine, I can feel

tears welling in my eyes, burning against the rims. His life, a painting, is almost complete. It’s about to be framed and put on a wall. I think about my friend who is building a canvas workspace. A place to create a new masterpiece.

Then I remember that with a blank canvas, there comes an artist, and I realize that this little one, every little one, will soon be dressed with an equal number of scars, an equal number of flaws, whether voluntary or accidental.

Papa’s right elbow acquired a scar in 1945, before my existence was ever considered, before I was ever dreamt of.

I remember being small and tracing the puckered white line marring the tanned, aged skin, and I was happy because he told me that scars fade.

But now, as I watch him with his drooping eyes and sagging skin, I notice all the imperfections. The scar, yellowed and stretched into something noticeable, is a festering memory suddenly made manifest

after years and years of remission.

But it’s not only the scars. It’s everything.

The veins on the backs of his hands line a road map of his life, pumping the little bit of life left in him through his body, providing him with sweet, savored breaths. A tear breaks over the barrier, slips down my cheek, and drips from my chin.

I watch his yellowed eyes, sitting deep in their sockets beneath drooping lids and underlined with dark purple bruises, and I think that one day, everyone will experience the same decay. That freshness, the innocence present at birth, will fade away.

Part of it makes my heart ache, but part of it brings me to the realization that every mark, every bruise, every scar is a memory, is proof of life. And I’m thankful for the pain and the heartache and the bumps and the bruises because they’re reminders that there was life, that there is life. By the time the painting is complete, it’s going to be something to look at, something great, something worthy of framing. ♦

*Every mark,
every bruise,
every scar is
proof of life*

Dear Girl in the Blue Coat

by Rebecca Rakowitz, Stamford, CT

Dear Girl in the Blue Coat, When I was seven I went to the American Girl doll store. It was a birthday present from my friend Renee. I could barely contain my excitement! Renee and I immediately started planning what outfits we and our dolls would wear.

Before I knew it, it was the big day. I got dressed in my favorite purple velvet shirt (velvet was cool back then), and dressed my doll, Kirsten, in a sunflower dress and a light jacket (in case she got chilly). My mom and I met Renee and her mom at the train station. Excited jitters flowed through us. We got off the train hand-in-hand, two seven-year-olds ready to take on the Big Apple. We skipped from 42nd to 49th, and when the red awning came within sight, we started to quicken our pace. We were getting closer! Closer and closer to ... locked doors.

We rounded the corner and saw many other excited young girls waiting by the enormous golden doors. From our place in line, we could see through one of the windows the rows and rows of dolls! Endless racks of clothes! It was enough to drive any seven-year-old girl mad.

Seeing that we were getting antsy,

my mom suggested we take a picture. We quickly fixed each other's hair and glanced at my mom's watch. It was 8:57 – only three minutes until the doors opened! Right before my mom pressed the button, freezing this image forever, a lady screeched "Sweetheart, move out of the way! I'm sure they don't want your arm in their photo!"

Renee and I looked to the left to find a woman scolding a girl in a blue coat who quickly scooted out of the way. Renee's mom reassuringly joked that it would have been all right if she had been in the picture – then we would have always remembered the Girl in the Blue Coat.

I remember being confused by this. *Would* we have remembered her? So many of my photos were bordered with strangers, none of whom I remembered. Why would this girl be any different?

The sound of opening doors quickly erased these questions from my mind. I had convinced myself that the Girl in the Blue Coat would be forgotten. There was no way I would still be speculating about her years later, or

so I had thought.

Yet I sit here today and still think about you, Girl in the Blue Coat, and I have so many questions.

What's your name and age? Where are you from? How was your day at the American Girl store? Did we buy our dolls the same outfit? Did you go to the café? Please tell me you got a cinnamon bun!

And beyond that day – have we ever sat in traffic on the same highway just a few cars apart? Are you the new girl in my Spanish class? Do you sense it when I think about you, like someone with a knee replacement feels the throb of rain?

Have we ever laughed at the same time? Or cried? Do you think Justin Timberlake is totally dreamy too? Coke or Pepsi? If we knew each other, would we be friends? Enemies? Frenemies? Which of us would get to be the hero and which the sidekick?

What if, when we apply to colleges, our applications are next to each other in a stack? What if we get accepted by the same school? What if we end up as roommates?

Do you think some day in the

future you'll be a CEO and hire my child for his or her first job? Will you be the doctor who cares for my parents when they are old and ailing? Will you bake my wedding cake?

Did you pick out that blue jacket and treasure it, or did your mom choose it and you just wore it to please her? Do you even like blue? Where is it now? Did it end up in the Goodwill pile? This winter, did it keep some other girl warm as she stood outside the American Girl store?

Do you ever wonder about the strangers who are – or could have been (were it not for screeching moms) – in your pictures? Do you ever wonder about me? Do you even remember that day at the American Girl store? As I finish these closing lines, are you starting a letter to me?

I know these questions will probably be left unanswered and the blank envelope I send this in will get stamped with the words "Return to Sender," but I'll tuck this letter away in a drawer and scribble future questions in the margins. I hope one day I'll get the chance to ask them face to face.

Sincerely and curiously,

The Girl Whose Picture Your Arm Was Almost In ♦

If we knew each other, would we be friends?

On the Left

by Charlotte Sulick, Wilmington, MA

We didn't always live on Lua Street. Before that we lived on North Street. But there was nothing before that. Ten years we lived in that big house with the blue door, the door my dad promised he would paint red. He never got around to it. The house was tarnished white and set back far from the street on a grassy hill that ate up the driveway when no one mowed it.

The night before the move I scratched my life into the back of my closet. "1997-2014" looked like smudged charcoal against a pale wall. The morning we left I was not sad. My family had been created and destroyed under the roof of 35 North Street; I was ready to move on.

Lua Street is different. The house is not consumed by a luscious garden or tall pines. The floors do not have dog nail scuffs. The kitchen table is not worn down from plate after plate of spaghetti. Most unsettling is the wall that divides our side of the house from our neighbor. It seems too thin when he drinks and stumbles up the stairs. He is the kind of unpleasant man who doesn't care if

I was ready to move on

he keeps you up at night, even though you're a student. Momma is strong, though, and promises to keep him quiet.

My father doesn't have a house. He lives in a small room at my uncle's in New Hampshire, content with being far from the old white house that is overgrown with memories and well-kept by its new owners. Lua Street burns his tongue. He wants a house for us

kids again, he says. But I would rather live out in the boonies with the thousands of frogs and too-slow Internet than go back to that house.

We always buy houses on the left side of the street. My father says it brings the electricity to us faster, but I think he's just scared of change. The house on North Street was on the left. Momma bought a house on the left side too – 105 Lua Street. Even when my father's hold on Momma is gone, it keeps her in the cycle. I asked her why, when nothing goes right. She tells me and I smile. Maybe the left is where we belong for now. But the thing about lefts is that if you keep taking them, you end up right back where you started. ♦

snick

by Amy Carothers, Cape Coral, FL

I like the feel. *snick snick*. I like the sound. *snick snick*. A small button and my key flips out – *snick* – and I can pretend it's a pocketknife. I can pretend it will lock in the guts of the one who would try to make me feel small. *snick snick*. I am the giant and my claws are out. I can see the stars tonight and I walk unafraid.

snick

The key is flipping because I like it better in motion. When it is withdrawn I am naked I am panic I am a child I am prey, and when it's flicked out I'm overwhelmed how small how weak how useless. It's just a car key. But in the process of sliding, as ice floods my veins as I grit the moon in my teeth as metal carves the air, I can pretend. I am armed I am a giant I am all the things you can never take from me.

I walk down the street at night and feel eyes.

snick ♦



Art by Melina Thadea, Solo, Indonesia

Ayden James

by "Corrine," Walker, LA

Freshman year was by far the most stressful and emotional year of my high school career. My mom and dad's divorce still felt new to me, especially since it was not finalized until that summer, two years after they split. Our new stepfather helped my sisters and me cope; I was thrilled when he told me that he was planning to propose to my mom. The following day, while I was visiting my dad, my phone buzzed. It was my mom. "How would you feel about a new brother or sister?" She then announced that she was engaged – and pregnant.

We chatted for hours over preparations for my new sibling's arrival. I already had two younger sisters, and we did not have enough room in the house or car for a new baby. Our family would finally have a fresh start and leave behind the dreadful years with my dad. On the first day of school, I was ecstatic to tell my friends the news.

At the first ultrasound, the doctor discovered there was more amniotic fluid than normal surrounding the fetus. My mom's doctor ordered an amniocentesis – a procedure to diagnose chromosomal errors and possible infections. We were told not to buy anything for the baby until we knew more.

We got the results one long month later. The specialist sat across from my mom, with my sister and me crowded beside her. He told us that the unborn baby had mosaic trisomy eighteen, also known as Edward's syndrome. This chromosomal error could cause major medical problems, such as low birth weight, heart defects, abnormalities to organs, cleft feet, a small head or jaw and mouth, overlapping fingers, and clenched fists – if the baby lived. My mother would have to have weekly ultrasounds to monitor the baby. She was told repeatedly, "It's not your fault" and "It could have happened to anyone," but that's not how she felt.

There was less than a 5% chance he'd survive

That day we also discovered that he was a boy. I had never experienced what it was like to have a brother. But because the specialist told us it was unlikely that he would live, the excitement of this news was drowned with sorrow. Statistics showed there was less than a 5 percent chance he would survive past birth, and following that, a 5 to 10 percent chance he would make it to his first birthday. Although his chances were slim, we still prepared for his arrival. We stopped looking at houses and started looking for day care centers that could accommodate children with special needs. They were hard to find, so my mom told her boss to be prepared to replace her when the baby was born.

Then all we could do was wait. Often, I would close my eyes and wish things were easy. I often thought, *Things like this don't happen to families like mine*, but I was wrong. There was no longer excitement. Only the friends I told at the beginning of the year knew of my mom's pregnancy, since I rarely spoke

about it now.

I attended several of the ultrasounds with my mom. I watched the baby develop and grow – slowly, but he grew. I watched, I listened, and I learned all about Edward's syndrome. From the ultrasounds, I could see his feet grow in a U-shape, his lungs fill with fluid, his hands ball up, tumors form in his neck, his weight slowly increase. I could hear his unsteady heartbeat and see his facial features. If he lived, he would never be able to walk, speak, eat, or do anything for himself; he'd have to be constantly supervised and would need a heart monitor, since his heart could stop at any moment.

This baby would change my life. My family would never be the same. I would no longer have countless hours of bonding time with my mom. We would have to buy a new vehicle and a new home to

accommodate my sibling's needs, and I would have a brother who would never grow up.

December 25, 2011, Christmas Day, I got into Mom's car ready to complain about Christmas morning at my dad's, but I quickly learned that my mom's labor had begun. Presents never crossed my mind again that Christmas day. She was only six and a half months pregnant; it was not time yet. I felt excited, nervous, upset, and angry all at once.

We rushed to the house to pack, and the only things I grabbed were a thick book and some comfortable clothes.

At the hospital, my family waited for hours. Finally my stepfather appeared with silence streaked across his face, and we followed. We knew what he wanted to say without him speaking a word.

My mom had decided to name the baby Ayden James. He arrived on Christmas night, four minutes before midnight, skin wrinkled, warm, and purple, two pounds, seven ounces, 14 inches long. The doctors did not know the exact time his heart stopped, only that it was beating when we arrived at the hospital. Ayden was passed around the room delicately so we could all see our new family member for the first and last time. Oh, was he beautiful.

After Ayden's birth, I spent two days in the hospital with my mom and stepfather. When we arrived back home, we opened Christmas gifts in an attempt to bring smiles to everyone's faces. What we did not know was how fragile my mom was. When she opened my sisters' and my gift to her – a necklace with charms to represent each of us, including Ayden – her face flushed with emotion and she wept for what seemed like forever.

I never knew I could love someone so much when I had never even had the chance to meet him. That Christmas, I learned to appreciate the life I have. Christmas is now a reminder of this loss and of the brother I never knew. ♦

The Girls

by Spencer Cooper, Westminster, CO

I knew I was different from an early age. Around 6 or 7, I wanted a Barbie instead of a G.I. Joe. It didn't really matter either way which one I got. I wanted to play with the clothes; the doll was simply an accessory.

"Can I play ..." was my most frequent line during my early school years. Can you guess the question's typical ending?

- A. "... with you?"
- B. "... with that when you're done?"
- C. "... over there?"
- D. All but A.

If you guessed D, you are correct.

Needless to say, I didn't have many friends – though not for lack of effort. I was always trying to make friends, but I wasn't very successful until I met the Girls.

You're likely wondering why I capitalized Girls. The answer is simple: they're important to me. They were, after all, the first friends I ever had. Would ever have.

You see, it started with guys. When I

was young, I was tormented by a group of boys who liked nothing better than to pick on me. It wasn't all that bad; they weren't smart enough to come up with any decent insults, just silly ones that really didn't have an effect. So I went on with my life, caring little for what they said. The Girls noticed this unusually quickly.

I didn't have many friends

I was always playing by myself. I had a small section of playground I had carved out, complete with a gravel driveway and a small bush "house" for whatever I brought to school – sometimes a doll, but often I would just bring a drawing because I knew the boys would take my stuff. I'd just draw something that I thought looked good and I would play with that for the day. Again, the Girls noticed this quickly.

Soon I noticed they were copying some of my day-to-day activities, such as ignoring the boys and bringing things they didn't care about to school to make sure the boys wouldn't do any real damage.

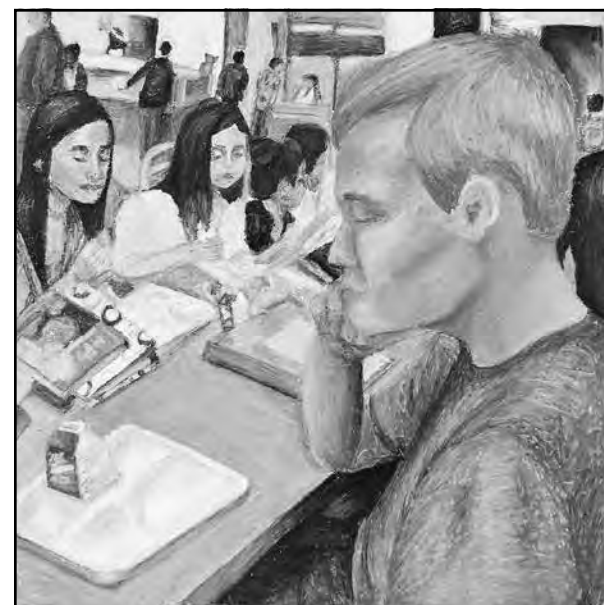
Eventually, I used my signature line.

"Can I play ..."

Surprisingly, they said yes. At first, they kept their distance a bit. Eventually, they warmed up to me, and I to them.

The boys took notice of this. They tried harder to get a reaction out of us with insults and name-calling. At first, we just continued on like nothing was happening. Then the boys changed their tactics.

Up to this point they had only made fun of the toys I brought to school. Now they started noticing everything I did. My clothes, not girlish per se, were definitely not masculine like the other boys'. My speech was more soft dialogue than loud chanting and yelling. And unlike all the other boys, who were always staring at the girls they liked, I was always staring at the boy I liked. They made sure to put extra pressure on that last



Art by Hailey Damschroder, Fort Myers, FL

one.

They started calling me names in class, in front of everyone. It didn't matter to me; I didn't have any real friends in my class. The Girls were in the room next door. They were the ones who consoled me afterwards, but they knew I would be fine.

I always was. ♦

Familiar Stranger

by Laura Shu, Livingston, NJ

“Be good, all right? Help your mom with your sister. Don’t forget to do your homework. Go to sleep earlier. Don’t drink too much coffee.”

“Okay, okay,” I reply awkwardly. “I get it.”

“I have to go or I’ll get stuck in traffic. I’ll call when I get home. See you soon. I love you.”

Six hundred and thirty-two miles from my home is Florence, South Carolina. That’s where he works. That’s where he lives. He’s far away, always out of reach in some way.

At midnight, I sit at my desk and attempt to concentrate on my homework. I rub my dry eyes, yawn, and stretch as I glare at my biology textbook. He may not be home, but he still wants to help me in any way he can. On the phone,

he’s waiting for my questions. Gulping down the lump in my throat that prevents me from saying what I feel, I choke out that it’s late and he should go to sleep. He’s driving home from Florence in the morning. Yet he insists on staying on the phone.

“Don’t worry about me,” he says. “You do your homework. I’ll wait just in case you’re confused about anything.”

It turns out that I do have questions, and he answers them enthusiastically, like he’s had five cups of coffee, until I finally hear a static-filled yawn. Again I tell him to go to sleep. I tell him I won’t be done until late, and he replies, “I’ll stay awake until you’re done.” A wave of gratitude rushes through me, but I open my mouth only to close it again. It would be strange if I said something cheesy.

“It’s my work, anyway,” I finally snap after a long pause. On the other side, I hear a long creak of a chair as he leans back, but he doesn’t say anything.

How do I say thank you?

I can hear the car in the driveway after his 10-hour drive. He’s staying for the night, and tomorrow he leaves for Boston. My sister and I run to the door to greet him. Outside, the car door opens and out pop two huge suitcases. He sees us and smiles brightly, despite his exhaustion.

My younger sister has no hesitation; once I help her with her shoes, she runs to greet him with a hug. “*Wo de bao bei*, my precious treasure,” he says, picking

her up and spinning her around. “How are you?”

I want to do just what my sister did, but I’m a teenager, and shows of affection are embarrassing. I restrain myself. My boots are on, my jacket is zipped, and I should go grab one of his suitcases. Instead I stop at the doorway, a concrete smile frozen on my face.

How do I say “hello”?

I’m shoving messy binders, enormous textbooks, and a lunch box into my bag while trying to cram a hot piece of toast in my mouth. The garage door opens.

He’s home this week to visit, so he can drive me to school.

I grab my jacket and slip it on. When I turn back around, I realize my backpack is gone. I don’t need to go to the garage to know that he has it, but I run downstairs to get it anyway, and try to get hold

of it. He pulls it away. “It’s too heavy,” he says simply, easily lifting it with one hand.

“I carry it every day.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt.”

I bite my lip, but I hastily grab the bag as soon as he puts it on the seat of the car. I can’t tell, because the car is starting, but I think he sighs.

Why can’t I just accept his help?

“Help me fold the laundry,” he says. I want to smile. I love the smell of clean clothes just out of the dryer.

“Fine,” I grumble, like it’s the biggest hardship in my life, and trudge up the stairs with him. Flatten, fold, place, repeat. Flatten, fold, place, repeat. Before

he left, it was flatten, laugh, fold, talk, repeat. I would tell him stories from school, and he would tell me nerdy math and science jokes. There’s an anecdote on the tip of my tongue, but I bite my lip and look down at the clothes. Flatten, fold, place, repeat. It’s the same feeling of trying to talk to your best friend after a fight. Awkward.

“Hey,” he starts with a grin, and I brace myself. “It’s snowing outside, so if you’re cold, go into the corner. It’s 90 degrees!” I’m about to smile, and he looks pleased. He’s been trying really hard, unlike me. But I suddenly sneeze, and that relapse slips back into the present, where he has to deal with a sullen, stressed daughter. I acknowledge the joke with a nod, then take my clothes to my room. I can feel his eyes boring holes in the back of my head as I lock the door.

Why can’t we get along like we used to?

“All right, I have to go or I’ll get stuck in traffic. I’ll call when I get home. See you soon. I love you.” He stops there instead of opening the car door and waits expectantly. I don’t react.

“Bye” would sound terse and uncaring, the way I have been acting. “Good-bye” is too formal, too final. “Take care” sounds cheesy. “So long” seems rude.

“Well, see you,” he finally says disappointedly, and gets into the car before I can say a word. The engine revs almost angrily as he drives away.

I stand in the doorway until he’s far, far away. “Bye-bye,” I whisper, with a tiny wave. Tears roll down my face. “I love you too, Daddy.” ♦



Photo by Maria Alvarez, Beachwood, OH

Why can't I just accept his help?

Wonder Woman

by Zoe Mason, Reno, NV

She whips down the narrow mountainside trail, pumping the hand brake, twisting around corners with precision and grace. At the base, she dismounts from the mud-specked mountain bike, her toned muscles rippling, sweat streaming over her popped-out veins, and an exhilarated smile on her face.

Meet my mom as she was four years ago. Physically impervious. Mentally determined. She ruled courtrooms as a lawyer, trails as a biker, roads as a traveler, classrooms as a teacher. Able to speak three languages and navigate any situation, there was nothing she couldn’t do. In my mind, she was a superhero. And then my every perception of her was challenged.

Late in the summer of 2013, I went somewhere I hadn’t been in 16 years. The hospital. I was going to visit my mom.

This was the oncology wing, where the nurses glanced at me with pitying smiles and sad puppy-dog eyes. One directed me to my mom’s room. I couldn’t bring myself to walk in right away, so I sat on the floor by her door. For a few minutes I felt overwhelmed by nausea. I needed to be strong for her; I couldn’t let her know how

scared I was.

Finally I forced myself to go in. I saw, distorted by my tears, the tubes in her nose for oxygen and the IV lines pumping her full of morphine and blood. She looked so small. She had lost even more weight since she’d been put on hospice care earlier in the year. She had pulled through that time, but now she had gone downhill again.

Her face was gaunt. Her skin, which had once been beautifully tan, was pale gray. She looked like death.

The cancer had taken over. Only a true miracle could save her now, and I’d pretty much lost faith in miracles. My mom was looking up at me with a smile, but her eyes were full of pain. Never had I seen her so broken.

All I wanted was to wrap my arms around her and cry into her shoulder like when I was little. But when I tried to give her a gentle hug, she cried in pain. I couldn’t comfort her.

It never got easier or any less painful to see my mom this way. She was in the hospital for over a month. She was told she would always need a wheelchair. They didn’t think she would ever get off painkillers. They didn’t think she would live much longer either.

Only a true miracle could save her

Eventually she was moved to a nursing home. They fed her terrible food, she was surrounded by dying people at least 30 years her senior, and she was in pain. I thought she would be stuck in that horrible place until her death. It was infuriating that I couldn’t take her home, cook her wonderful meals, and talk to her every day.

But somehow she started walking short distances with a walker, and they let her go home. She found a little apartment by my school that suited her perfectly. The doors were wide enough for her wheelchair, and she had a porch where she could sit in the sun. The cancer was there, but she wasn’t dying anymore. She had cheated death a second time.

She has been living in the little blue apartment for months now. We had Thanksgiving there and Christmas too. Just this week we celebrated her 45th birthday. She walked with a cane to greet us, nearly pain-free and off painkillers.

The doctors are astounded by how well she is doing. They say that she’s a miracle. They say she will be healthy again. They say she will live.

After everything that has happened, I’m convinced that she may not be a superhero, but that she is much more. She’s my miracle and my inspiration. ♦



Photo by Ethan Lai, Belmont, MA



Art by Grace Jin, Pittsburgh, PA



Photo by Elizabeth Erler, Lexington, MA



Photo by Dana Kechnie, Jonesport, ME



Art by Casey Wang, McDonough, GA



Art by Jolijn Schilder, De Weere, Netherlands



Art by Karla Amador, Easley, SC



Photo by Nicole Knebel, Fort Collins, CO



Photo by Aidan Sutherland, Mohrsville, PA



Mom's Scarves

by André Wheeler, Manhattan, NY

I sit in the dentist's chair with my mouth pried open like a plundered grave. I tap my foot along to Taylor Swift's "I Knew You Were Trouble," which is weakly coming from the overhead speaker. The laughing gas is crawling like an infant around inside my veins. My mom's voice has a heavy echo as she provides entertainment for the dental staff.

Three dental assistants are crowded around her, admiring the handmade scarves she's brought in to show off and sell to these strangers – even though it's the middle of June and 90 degrees out.

"Oh, I love this red one," one of the women says, wrapping the glittery scarf around her neck. There's real awe and wonder in her voice, as if my mom has just rubbed two sticks together and discovered how to make fire. "How do you make them?" she asks.

"It's a lot of work," Mom says proudly. "There's a certain technique. I can show you." My mom reaches inside a large lime green bag that's filled

with crochet hooks and yarn, and takes out a scarf that's in progress.

The women ooh and ahh as Mom instructs them. As I break out into a laugh, my tongue pushes the dentist's cold implement.

"He thinks I'm embarrassing," my mom mutters. The dental assistants all laugh.

"How long are you back from college?" the dentist whispers to me when my mom returns to instructing the women.

"Too long," I respond, but because of all of the stuff in my mouth, it comes out as "Ooo ong."

Surprisingly, he understands; patient gibberish must be a language requirement in dental school. He laughs. "You'll miss it when you get older. Trust me."

"Mphm," I say with an eye roll.

Mom sells the dental assistants two scarves for \$15. It's the first sale she's made, and I know this is only going to inflate her Macy's-Day-Parade-balloon-sized ego and encourage her to make more. You'd think she was crocheting Versace scarves, the way

she shows them off.

I feel a pang of guilt for thinking this, but the laughing gas quickly helps it fade away.

See, the reason Mom started making scarves is because she has so much free time. She takes care of an old white woman 24 hours a day, Monday through Thursday. And because we're black, it's like Mom is one of the women from "The Help." Most of the time it's her and the old lady sitting watching TV. Or the woman's other old white friends will come over and they'll sit and drink champagne while a musician plays for them on the grand piano. So Mom passes the time making scarves. Every Friday at noon, Mom comes home wearing a smile of liberation. She wants to go everywhere and do everything, while I just want to crash and alternate between napping, scrolling through Tumblr, and watching TV shows online.

But I go with Mom because she likes to take me on shopping sprees. She feels bad leaving me by myself in the house four days a week. Little does she know that I do things like go to Brody's place and party. Or have Kayla and her boyfriend, Peyton, come over and hook their gaming system to my living room TV. I make coffee for us all at midnight so we can keep yelling and screaming at each other as if it was noon.

I even let Kayla and Peyton crash in our guest bedroom once. "You just have to leave by ten," I told them, "because my mom will be here at eleven. And you'd better not fool around in this bed."

The next day Mom found a random board game instruction booklet in the living room. "What's this?" she asked. It must have fallen out of Kayla's bag.

"Nothing," I said casually. I started walking away.

"I know you probably have a real party up in here when I'm gone."

"No, I don't," I said as I walked to the stairs.

"Turn around and say that to me. I wasn't born last night."

"I told you. I don't have any friends!" I yelled as I ran up the stairs, silently laughing.

So the least I can do is let Mom have her scarves. "You can give one to your friend that you visited in California," Mom said as we drove to the dentist. "What's her name? Rachel? And her mom too. That'd be a nice thank-you gift,

I wish she'd focus her energy on something else

My dad emigrated from Mexico at 14, alone

hope for what he called a "better life" motivated him to learn English, get the best education possible, and pick up numerous jobs to support himself. This hope motivated my dad to become the first in his family to graduate from college.

It was not easy. My dad faced discrimination, an education system that neglected English learners, and many other setbacks. But his hope never faded and, in many ways, he achieved the American Dream,

complete with the two-story house and white picket fence.

My dad is now a fifth-grade teacher in Los Angeles. He works at a school on the not-so-nice side of town, mostly because he wishes to pass hope on to his students.

He seems to be doing a good job at it. A few months ago, one of his first students came back for a visit. She had just graduated from Harvard Medical School and wanted to thank my dad for motivating her.

My dad hasn't just motivated the many students he's taught in the past 20 years. He's also passed on his hope to his little girl. Even during my most discouraged and frustrated moments I have that hope to fall back on. From my dad's story and guidance, I've learned that I too can work hard and always hope for more. ♦



Art by Taylor Duncan, Waynesboro, VA

don't you think?"

I looked out the window at the rows of fast food restaurants. "Yeah. Okay," was all I said. And then, like a jerk, I tilted my phone away from Mom and texted Rachel: "My mom wants to send you one of her haute couture scarves BAHAHAAAA."

I'm an awful son.

She even gave my cousin Marvella a bag of them when she came to visit. "You can sell them in New York," Mom told Vella. "We can make a business of it. You wear one and when your friends ask you where you got it from, you tell them 'Gurl, I can get you one for twenty dollars.' Can't beat that."

"Okay, Auntie Audrey," my cousin said, laughing.

When we got back from dropping Vella off at the airport, Mom went into the guest bedroom to straighten up. I went into my room to take my usual afternoon nap, but Mom came in soon after, holding the plastic bag of scarves.

"Look at this," Mom whined. I pried open my eyes. "Vella didn't take the scarves with her. Why would she leave them?"

I lay my head back down. "She probably didn't have enough room in her luggage," I lied for Vella. I closed my eyes to let Mom know the conversation was over.

"Last time I give her something," Mom muttered as she walked out.

I don't know why the scarves are so important to her. And I don't know why I can't just let her have them as a source of happiness. Maybe it's because I wish she'd focus her energy on something else, like finally going to nursing school or finally getting that phlebotomy job she's been talking about since I was 10. If she can find a way to sell scarves in the middle

of summer, go to night school, work, send me off to college, divorce my stepfather, and find a way to support us all on her own, I know that she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to. ♦

Hope

by Sara Diaz, Buena Park, CA

Many people live in worlds where the odds are stacked against them. Lots of times, hope just doesn't live in areas where people suffer from poverty, discrimination, and negative expectations. However, it is very possible for hope to thrive, even in rocky soil. I know this from experience. I would not be here if not for the persistent hope that characterized my dad, even at the hardest points in his life.

My dad grew up in rural Mexico. The closest town was not very close at all, and the closest city was hours away from his family's small farm. Days were long. When the kids weren't working the rocky fields, they were struggling to complete a basic elementary education at the tiny village school. Most didn't make it past fifth grade.

The expectation for my dad, his brothers, and the other kids from Las Bocas, Zacatecas, was that they would continue the traditions of subsistence farming and alcoholism typical of their small town's culture. However, my dad hoped to escape that cycle and create something more for himself, even at a very young age.

For this reason, he immigrated to Los Angeles from Mexico at 14, alone and without knowing a word of English. His

Ferris Wheels and Pistachios

by Celine Wang, Newport Beach, CA

It was Halloween, which is a big deal when you're four. I was sitting on the couch in my Sleeping Beauty costume, eagerly waiting for my dad to come home so he could take me trick-or-treating. He had been away all week on a business trip in Singapore. He was supposed to return earlier that day, but now it was night and here I was, still waiting. Finally I nodded off, an actual sleeping princess. He didn't come home at all that night. The next morning I begged my mom to let me keep my costume on for him. She agreed, probably because she already knew something that I wouldn't find out for another couple of days. By then, I was no longer a princess. It was my dad who had a new identity: plane crash survivor.

He told us about it later. It had been raining hard as he got on the plane for home. The pilot was cleared for takeoff on one runway but turned a little too far and ended up taking off on another runway, one that was closed. Because of the rain, the pilot couldn't see the heavy construction equipment blocking the closed runway, and he crashed right into it. The plane was going 170 miles per hour, half in the air and half on the ground, when it blew up. The left wing was torn off, the fuselage split in two, and fire shot through the middle of the plane. Nearly half of the passengers died, but amazingly, my dad was completely unhurt. After the crash, he couldn't breathe because of the smoke and fumes, so he ran toward the exit. When the plane wreckage finally skidded to a stop, my dad simply walked out.

When I was older, he explained how stressed he'd been the day of the flight. As the plane took off in

the rain that day, he was worrying about money and how to keep everyone he worked with happy. He felt like he was failing. When the plane crashed, his first thoughts were of us, his family. As sad as he felt at the thought of dying and never seeing us again, he also felt a sense of relief that all his business and financial worries would be over.

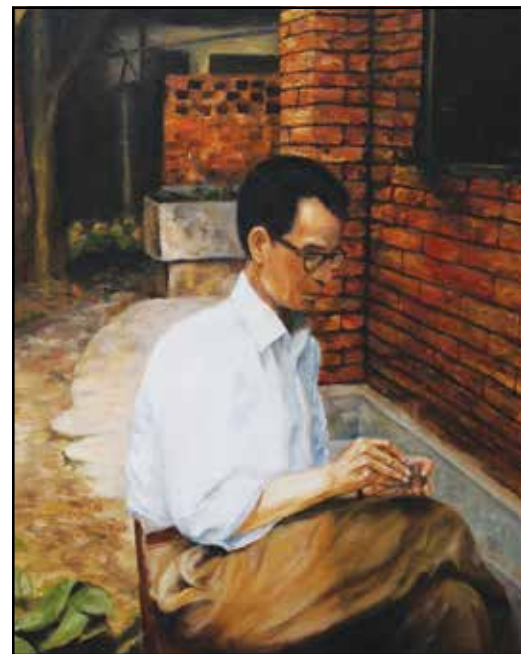
When he survived, he saw it as a second chance – but not the kind where you give up everything. Dad sold his business and started a new one. The crash made him realize how short life is and how we only have so much time to cram in everything we want to do.

I'm so proud of my dad for this, and his experience has made me strive harder in all I do because I know we won't be in this world forever. But this also means he's very busy. I've never had a dad who attended family dinner more often than not, who wasn't always either somewhere on a business trip or preparing to go on one. When

I was a kid, quality time with my dad was precious, since it happened so rarely. I'll never forget when we went hiking through the Grand Canyon. Even though my dad had back and foot problems and was probably in pain, he kept up with me the whole way.

I was always fascinated by that plane crash; it might sound morbid, but I was desperate for any scraps of information. I wanted to understand the effect the crash had on who my dad was. I wish I could remember the way he was before, but I was too young. I wondered how often he thought about it, whether he had dreams or nightmares about it. He didn't seem traumatized. When he talked about it, he sounded distanced – as though he were telling a story that had happened to someone else.

When the plane crashed, his first thoughts were of us



Art by Irena Yang, Oak Park, CA

Then one day, when I was nine, I threw a total fit at the mall. A Ferris wheel had been set up there, and I told my dad I wouldn't leave until I got to ride it. My dad finally gave in. We climbed in the carriage. The Ferris wheel was a simple one. It wasn't very high, and the seats didn't rock back and forth. As we began to climb higher, I looked over and saw that my dad was tightly clenching the bar across our waists. I asked him what was wrong and he explained he was afraid of heights. I felt so foolish for not realizing this earlier. I wondered if he'd been afraid of heights before the crash.

I was so small, a third-grader, but I wanted to comfort him somehow. I put my hand over his and told him everything was going to be okay. He looked at me and tried to smile. We rode the whole ride like that, and when we were back on the ground, he thanked me for helping him. It was one of the few times I learned what was behind his cool, collected exterior. It made me feel closer to him.

The way we spend time together has changed as we've both grown older, but our quality moments are still just as important to me. Both of us are quiet people, so we enjoy simply watching a movie together. We don't even have to talk – and that's sometimes a lucky thing. Our stubborn personalities are so strikingly similar that we often get into meaningless arguments that last for hours. Once a disagreement is done, we realize how silly it was and laugh about it, but when we're in the middle of it, we're both deadly serious. For example, we both adore eating out but often argue about where to go. We argue for so long that by the time we decide, we're starving.

We also know how to show our love in subtle ways. My dad and I are both addicted to pistachios, so we always keep a bag handy for when we need to get our blood sugar levels up post-argument. Sometimes I'll pull the bag out as a peace offering. Sometimes he will. It's a little gesture of goodwill, maybe even surrender – our own personal olive branch. Some of my favorite memories are of the two of us sitting at the kitchen counter eating handfuls of pistachios late at night when all the lights outside are dim and even the trees seem asleep. The house is quiet and the only sound is the crack of the shells. ♦

Mama's Pie Hands

by Maddy Reid, Salt Lake City, UT

Motherhood has rendered her hands rough but gentle, toughened by vinegar water and softened with baby's cries and sick-kid nights. Today those hands are tackling the art of pie making. Eight a.m. Thanksgiving 2006, she's getting an early start, plucking butter and flour from their places with nimble fingers. I prop myself up on the counter.

"Can I help? Can I make the pie this year?"

She pushes four cubes of butter across the counter.

"You can cut the butter, hun."

She demonstrates, pushing her palms on the top of the shimmering chef's knife, letting it sink into the cube like my feet in last month's mud. I never touch the knife.

Her hands flit about the kitchen, speed matching her smile as she heaps in flour, drizzles water, pinches salt, sprinkles sugar.

I look down at my seven-calendar hands. Sausage fingers and round palms could never make that magic in the kitchen. I beg to learn to wrestle the dough into a masterpiece. Her eyes say *I love you but I'm getting a little impatient* as her long-fingered hands, supple as young branches,

guide mine on the rolling pin.

Up and over and out and over and up and back and out.

Too hard.

I let her San Francisco wind hands finish, the fog rolling in with my jealousy.

Eight a.m. on Thanksgiving 2013.

"Can I help? Can I make the pie this year?"

Her experienced, thousand-pie hands gesture at the butter and flour standing at attention on the counter.

"Yours are better than mine." ♦



Art by Annika Roll, Brewster, NY

Mammy and Santa Man

by Maddie Hellwig, So. Pasadena, CA

It was probably the two thousandth time I had seen the crowded streets of Zhengzhou, and the familiar scents of morning bakery and gasoline enveloped me as I headed to my elementary school. A couple of older girls stopped me, cameras ready. Their English tripped over colliding syllables.

"Let's picture. Make picture ... with we?"

I swallowed an urge to scream. I was neither a free exhibition nor a character option from DreamSelfie with Celebrity! I wanted to reveal that I spoke Mandarin too, but my courage deflated upon realizing that the peak of my head only reached the base of the girls' necks.

"Look at this *xiaolaowai*. Is she Mongolian?" the taller girl asked her friend in Mandarin.

"No way. Look at her nose. She's definitely European ... or maybe Iranian," she replied.

Unable to stand it any longer, I

only further pointed out that I didn't belong. Ironically, I felt as Chinese as any other person on the street. At my school, every student was required to learn English, beginning in second grade. Like my dumbfounded classmates, I thought it absurd that those delicious red fruits would be called "straw-berries," and that each action took a different form of a verb depending on its tense.

I felt as Chinese as any other person on the street

Swim. Swam. Swum. Swan? Wait, what? My classmates always stared at my English exam scores with disbelief. How could I, with the flesh of those native English speakers, fail to score higher than a C? I met their disillusionment with hatred, and I began condemning the language, the English teacher, and everyone who looked at me like a foreigner.

It didn't help that my English teacher, Ms. Zhang, found a new hobby publicly lamenting my test scores. "A sixty-eight percent? Aren't you American, honey? Did you come to China because your English wasn't good enough?"

I couldn't answer. Why was I living in China? No matter how well I knew the roads to Zhengzhou's small shops and vendors, cautious eyes greeted me. America's image as a country of wealth and freedom inevitably made me into the object of assumptions, shallow admiration, condescension, and envy.

Back on the eleventh floor of our condominium, I asked Mama through puffy eyes and snot-filled nose why I didn't look like her or Baba or anyone at my school. Why did strangers speak to me in other languages, and why did Ms. Zhang mock me? Why was I tagged as *xiaolaowai*? Mama told me it was because I was an ethnically mixed American living in China.

The statement was straightforward, yet it answered nothing.

More questions popped up as my life there continued. In the span of a couple of years, I received love confessions, fought with my Chinese cousins, crushed on two boys, starred in a play, and made friends in the park while ice skating.

I also transferred out of Ms. Zhang's class. My neighbors, friends, and classmates had learned to accept my differences, and a few even became my best friends. Just when I was finally beginning to fit in, I was forced to leave my home in China.

I was nine years old when the largest white person I had ever seen arrived at our home. The man had a jolly, round face, like Santa, but the pink flesh of his mouth was

often scrunched up in a formidable scowl. This grumpy Santa introduced himself as my biological father, and I called him a liar. His scowl deepened when Mama translated.

"You are my daughter," the man's voice boomed. "I am your father."

For reasons I'll never understand, I began laughing hysterically. Then I escaped from the comedy and shut myself in my room, blocking out the rude guest who tried to call himself my baba. *I have only one Baba*, I thought, *and he's not you, Santa Man*.

I tried everything I could to prevent our departure for America – screaming, destroying things, escaping, glaring, throwing out Baba's expensive cigars, and self-harming – but the plane ticket had already been purchased.

"Honey, you're only staying in California for the summer. We want you to see Disneyland!" Mama assured me. "You'll come back next school year and see all your friends again. Then you can boast about meeting the mermaid Ariel!"

Her words got me to the airport, but they were lies, a facade that hid the desperate sadness of a mother about to lose her child. Even sweet Baba, who hated lying and always spoiled me, managed a crooked smile as he cheerfully said "See you again" in English.

But I wasn't fooled. As I crossed the line that stopped loved ones from accompanying travelers any further, my ears caught a strangled wail of broken pretense, followed by heart-wrenching sobs. It was my Baba.

I did not return to China when summer ended. Instead, I was enrolled in an elementary school in California.

My biological mother (whom I called Mammy in order to differentiate her from Mama) was straining to remain nice. I understood her impatience; the child she'd given birth to refused to see her as a mother and antagonized her at every opportunity. I found flaws in everything Mammy did. I hated her cooking, which was bland and ugly, and her abrupt bursts of anger. She refused to speak in Mandarin and told me that if I didn't speak more often to Santa Man, I would not be able to phone Mama and Baba anymore. The absurdity of the whole situation was worse than spicy Indian curry, and I could not take it any longer.

"I hate you! You're not my mother!" I screamed before shutting myself in my room.

My first and last year at my new

elementary school was the epitome of misery. I felt like the main character in a bitter Shakespearean farce. China was my home, but with pale skin and white features, I was no different from the foreign tourists in Zhengzhou. In California I fit in physically but couldn't speak the native language. The irony was palpable.

Every page of my unintelligible homework was stained by tears. At home I vented my frustration in a room that remained shut in order to avoid the woman who claimed to be my mother. At school I sat in an uncomfortably clean classroom full of scarily outgoing kids whose names I could not pronounce. Nostalgia hit me when I saw Chinese characters in the local supermarkets, and I was reminded of the classrooms in Zhengzhou, with their chipped desks, black chalkboards, and kids I knew and loved despite their prejudices.

My lack of social interaction with others pushed Mammy to find me my first friend, Susan. I clung to her, and never dared stray from her side. In the unfamiliar world of strange slurs and unpronounceable R's, I was tongue-tied. Only Susan saved me from absolute confusion. But even as I pretended not to notice her growing impatience, her small insults carved widening scars in my insecure and clingy self. Bad memories had always been more memorable than good ones, and I never forgot the offhanded comments of a friend.

"Why can't you spell 'schedule' correctly?" Mammy said, her hands lacerating the air with frustration. "We've gone over this five times already! Are you stupid?"

Summers in California were drier than rice paper. There was no air conditioner in our small apartment.

"Copy it ten more times!" Mammy commanded.

Her screaming left a buzz in my ears. In this place I now called home,

violent incompatibility escalated between Mammy and me. Sometimes days would pass without a real conversation. Only screaming. And calling for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, which we ate in separate rooms.

When Mammy found me escaping to the world of online gaming, she threw out the computer. My English was ugly, she bluntly told me. I needed practice. This prompted a new form of daily escape in the cool sanctuary of the public library.

I can never thank her enough for that decision. It was depressing that I had no social life, but time >>



Art by Maddie Hellwig, So. Pasadena, CA

mumbled an apology in similarly broken English, jostling past them and their indignant expressions. I kept running even after reaching the gates of my school, not pausing until I was in front of my second-grade classroom.

"Oh, look who is early! Good morning, *Xiaolaowai*!" Mr. He greeted me.

I cringed.

Xiaolaowai, the colloquial term for "little foreigner," was a word I encountered almost every day. It was a term people used jokingly and often without malice. But to me, the phrase

**"I hate you!
You're not my
mother!" I
screamed**

Coffee

by Francesca Giardine,
Syracuse, NY

The mornings belonged to me and Daddy. I'd rise well before the sun, and my small voice would pierce the silence. Daddy would hear it and come lift me from my warm blankets. He'd carry me to the living room, and we'd sit in the big rocker. Then we waited. We waited for the sun to rise until its glow had brightened enough to fade out the red light on the stereo. I watched that red light the whole time while waiting. It was a constant, always on but only visible in the shadowy darkness that slept in our living room.

Then, when the light had broken through the shades, it was time to make coffee. Daddy would first make me a cup of chocolate milk. I'd sip that as he got out the bag of coffee beans and poured them into the grinder. He would hold my small fingers over the button until the beans were finely ground.

"Smell," he'd say, and I'd let the rich aroma fill my nose. He'd help me measure the coffee and pour the water over it. We would wait for it to finish brewing, pour two cups out and stir in cream and sugar, using color to measure.

Perhaps I am Dad's alarm clock

The first time I sipped that bitter liquid he laughed at my shocked face and tears of surprise.

"It tastes different from how it smells," he managed to say through his laughter. I

vowed I would never drink it again.

Now I realize that coffee, as a beverage enjoyed universally, unites us. My coffee aficionado dad spent a lot of time trying to teach me that. Sometimes, when we cannot see eye to eye, I know that we can always return to coffee brewing. It's impossible to hold a grudge that early in the morning.

Even though I'm in high school now, I still rise early. Dad hears my footsteps plod downstairs and assumes that it's time for him to make coffee. Perhaps I am his alarm clock, as I was as a toddler. While I groggily eat my cereal, shivering in the chilly kitchen, he brews coffee. He doesn't actually have to open his eyes to perform this ritual, but he does anyway, smiling at me while I swirl my soggy cereal. Then he pours me a cup, and I dump cream and sugar. The pot will remain full all day for anyone who needs a pick-me-up or a taste of simple luxury.

Habit is a comfort, something that envelops us, a reminder of safety in the crazy world where we live. It's something we don't have to stretch ourselves to maintain but can simply achieve by being who we are. It's habit that grounds us when we want to fly too high, and habit that binds me and my dad. ♦

Dad's Coat

by Sophie Ezzell, Knoxville, TN

I don't know why I'm always warmer in Dad's coat. Maybe it's just a warm coat, or maybe it's being embraced by the scent of his scentless soap.

Every Christmas Eve of my childhood my parents dragged me and Will (my saintly big brother who once conned me out of \$10) to our slowly declining Episcopal church for the 11 p.m. service. I would wear a poofy dress that mimicked the costume of a Disney princess I'd never idolize, along with sparkly red dress shoes that I clicked together when I wished to go home. Will would sport a pint-sized navy jacket with gold buttons and a shimmery red clip-on tie that clashed with his stupid orange hair.

Will would always make an effort to stay awake and revel in the birth of Christ. Not me. I knew Santa was waiting for me to fall asleep, and the tone-deaf choir's rendition of "Silent Night" was not worth staying up for. It

wouldn't be long before I was slumped over my Daddy's shoulder, stroking his Homer Simpson Christmas tie with my four-year-old fingers.

Daddy would pick me up and wrap me in his snazzy black velvet jacket (he only wears it on Christmas Eve, that's how snazzy it is) and lay me back down in the scuffed maple pew, where my nose would disappear into the silk lining. I would sleep with my head cradled on Daddy's lap, only my eyelashes peeking through his coat, until the choir burst into "Joy to the World."

Even now, when I'm supposed to hate my father with a door-slamming passion, I can't help but find warmth inside his coat. Once my arm slides into the way-too-big sleeve, the shivers instantly cease and the goosebumps recede back into my pale, freckled skin.

I'm never cold in Dad's coat.

I'm afraid college will be frigid without it. ♦

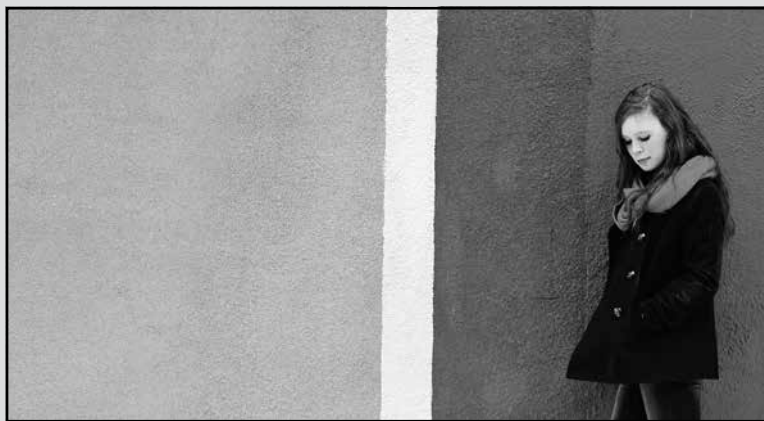


Photo by Emma Mortellaro, Granville, OH

spent in the library helped me shed the last traces of my Chinese accent in the span of one summer.

As a fifth-grader, however, I hated Mammy for forcing me to study all the time. I thought of Mama and her outgoing smiles. I remembered our shopping adventures in Beijing and hide-and-seek games in the dark. Mammy hated shopping.

For years, Mammy and I were mere co-inhabitants. I did what she wanted, and she provided me with food and shelter. But she stopped paying for phone calls to China, telling me it was for the best. She yelled when I got bad grades and threw fits if I didn't eat two organic eggs a day.

I didn't realize it then, but this was love. Mammy rarely shared toothy smiles like Mama had, but her feelings for me were equally strong. It was love. Tough love. But I was a bullet train running from one event to the next, and my childish haste blinded me to the person

behind my mother's iron mask of wrath.

Mammy was the topic of my research project in my ninth grade honors English class. I planned to just throw random snippets of my knowledge of her together and add extraneous text to round out the word count. But I didn't even know enough to fill half a page, double spaced.

The woman who had raised me as a single mother during my most rebellious years was a blank page to me. In a moment of rash contemplation, I asked Mammy about her life.

She chided me, "How pointless. You have to finish your homework still. Don't waste time thinking about things you won't understand."

"It's for a school project, Mammy."

We were driving home from my weekly art class, both tired from a Saturday

filled with work. Hearing I needed her stories for an English paper, Mammy willingly re-lived segments of the horrors hidden in the cultural revolution and her past as a young professor at Peking University in Beijing. Her calloused hands swept the air as she told her story.

Her tale was inspiring and tragic, but it was not the cause of the stinging tears in my eyes. It was the sudden realization that the woman in front of me had sacrificed so much and received so little but still remained loyal to a daughter who failed to appreciate her.

I didn't deserve a mother like her.

I hid my tears from Mammy that night because I was embarrassed. I was 14, and I had spent five years of my life lamenting my own tragedies. I pitied myself and allowed senseless bitterness to build up, but not once had I tried to understand the woman I had been living

with.

Since then, I have learned to appreciate my irascible mother. Mammy is not easy to love, and her cooking still hasn't improved. She continues to hate shopping and traveling, but now I value the moments when she complains of my shopping plans while scavenging her room for coupons and money.

Our relationship is a rich, bittersweet paradox. Ever since I allowed myself to enjoy the sweetness behind my seemingly dysfunctional family, history and future have linked themselves, mending the broken pieces in between.

It's been seven years since I've seen Mama or Baba, but our link has not broken. The initial experience of changing parents and moving to America left me in pieces, but I have come to appreciate this bitterness that conceals a great fortune: I have been lucky enough to be a part of two worlds with two sets of parents who love me. ♦

The woman who'd raised me was a blank page to me

Fishing with You

by "Terri," Hawley, PA

It's probably my favorite memory of you. It's the one I think of whenever I try to remember things that you didn't f--k up. It's bittersweet, of course, but everything about you is. But even though you weren't perfect, you were my dad back then, my real dad. There was no wartime PTSD changing your demeanor from day to day. You were imperfect, but you were my daddy, and you still liked to spend time with me.

It would always be extremely early in the morning, way too early for a winter's day, especially for an 8-year-old, but it was my choice to go. You would be grumpy because you would have liked to head out much earlier, but you still waited for me to get a little more sleep. That's the part I like to remember. Your irritation would be gone soon after we got in the car anyway.



Photo by Jade Green, Cameron, WI

I would get dressed in the clothes you picked out for me, my long ratty hair unbrushed but hidden under one of your favorite fishing hats, one of the ones that smelled like you. You would get the boat and the rods ready, if you hadn't done it the night before, while I ate breakfast. You were always in a rush to go, but you were always in a rush anyway, so it didn't bother me much.

Finally we would be ready, and you would help me up into the tall green truck that always smelled like smoke and had candy wrappers stuck in the ashtrays. You were always mad about that, even after we stopped stuffing them in there. I cried when you sold the truck, but now I'm glad it's gone. It's just one of those things that causes me acute discomfort whenever I think about it, a discomfort that lies low in my stomach and hides behind my tear

ducts, a feeling I can't quite explain.

You would hoist me into the front seat. I can't remember if I was actually big enough to ride in the front at that point or you just thought I was. You'd triple check to make sure I was belted in and belted in correctly. We'd pull out of the driveway slowly, carefully, boat in tow. I remember feeling guilty for holding you up; I was afraid that these extra minutes would exacerbate your anger to the point of making you give up and just stay home, and then we wouldn't spend time together.

We would be flying down the road soon after, and the radio would be playing low enough for us to talk, if either of us had anything to say. We were never very good at car conversation. I know you think we used to chat like old friends, but aside from the months following your deployments, when I talked endlessly and loudly just to make sure you didn't forget me, we were never good at small talk. I think I was just too in awe of you, or too hurt and ashamed of the life I had. I'm still not sure, to be honest.

Then would come my favorite part of the trip. We would pull into the convenience store to grab sodas and snacks. You would let me pick out whatever I wanted, usually Goldfish

or a can of Pringles, and you would get coffee. I would tag along, snacks in hand. You would get me the biggest cup for hot cocoa. I remember you would let me press the button, and I would stand on my toes to do it. My mind gives you a smile at this point, but I'm sure there were times you frowned. I prefer to remember the smile of perfectly straight, off-white teeth, and a crinkling around your eyes. It's an image that will never leave my mind, even if I don't see it often anymore.

You waited for me to get a little more sleep

You would put the lid on for me, since I could never get it on correctly. We would go pay for our stuff, and I would avert my eyes from the cashier, shy as I was. You would tuck me into the front seat again, and I would hold the hot chocolate. It was warm against my tiny fingers that were too, too cold on this winter's morning. The sensation of the seeping heat burned and delighted me, and I would breathe in the scent of the chocolate. I would blow on the cup a few times, and either singe my tongue or wait. Either way, you would buckle yourself in, take a fearless sip of your coffee, and then back out of the store.

And then we would be off to a day of you fishing and me soaking up your happiness, a thing sweeter than the hot chocolate ever could be. ♦

You Are Your Mother

by Natalie Mitten, St. Louis, MO

She will ask me to be home a half hour before our scheduled mother-daughter bonding time. I'll arrive an hour early to find her still fast asleep. I'll wake her 45 minutes before scheduled departure, and she'll spend 40 of them playing games on her computer, still in her pajamas. I'll come downstairs at the designated time, ready to go. She still won't have fed or dressed herself.

We leave 15 minutes late. She's typing on her phone as she drives; she doesn't know the address of our destination. She is swerving out of her lane, and I have to offer, as I do every time she drives, to navigate for her. She refuses, and I must sternly request that she not use her phone while driving.

It's days like today when I wish I had anyone else for a mom, when I wonder how things would be different if this ball of insanity wasn't the one I had to turn to when I'm lost. It's days like today when I believe that she's lost too, like she's using a map for a place that was destroyed years ago.

We arrive at an event for a food shelter in West County, a "politician stop," as she calls it. Her voice booms through the small warehouse; it is not a call, but a demand for attention. She manages, perplexingly enough, to be both dominating and congenial. She excitedly discusses ideas for collaboration with the food bank leaders, and introduces me to an old friend of hers from law school.

Days like today I wish I had anyone else for a mom

She greets a gaggle of thin, superficial-looking women and morphs into an upper-class snobbish character I don't recognize or understand. They take a couple of pictures together. My mother tries desperately to appear as though she fits in, but people who have seen the vibrant images her life has painted on her can recognize the falsity in her demeanor.

We leave, off to our sewing class. We are, of course, five minutes late, though fortunately not the last to arrive. The instructor begins lecturing. My mother cannot help but notice that the thread I've been given is blue, and my fabric, a bold pattern of reds, oranges, and yellows. She looks around the room distractedly for other colors to trade. Just the same as with any other task, she becomes unable to follow the structure or respect the intended use of the space, because her focus has become a life-or-death matter. The class cannot go on until she has found me thread that is going to match.

I whisper to her that we can solve the problem later, when we start sewing, or not at all. The threads are likely to go unseen; we will only sew on the inside of the soon-to-be bag. "Plus, I wouldn't mind having the contrast. Blue wouldn't necessarily look bad with these colors," I insist.

The lecture continues, but Mom interrupts my attention every five minutes. She asks me if I understand what's going on, as if I need her help, as if I'm incapable of com-

prehending or asking questions if I have them. I whisper, "Yes, Mom, I get it." Later on, to ease her anxiety, I ask her clarifying questions (as if I don't know that I have a handle on the material being taught).

We get through the class with minimal fighting, a feat that couldn't have been accomplished months ago. I've had to fine-tune my patience to meet her dynamite temper. The ride home holds less tension, and the roles finally switch as she listens to me pseudo-complain about my friends' silly shenanigans, and how frustrating and invigorating it is to be in high school, and how I'm still feeling a bit alone sometimes but I'll find some way to get through this growing up thing.

I wish I could count all of the times I've been told, "You are your mother." The words bring about a stinging feeling somewhere in the neurons that process aural information, and all the frustrations we've had with each other rush forward. Really, I just hate to think that we could ever be the same. Most of the time I resent her, but sometimes I guess it's not so bad to be told you take after a high school dropout with a graduate degree. I guess it's not so bad to hear you're like a woman who's always been able to speak her mind – a mind that is shockingly creative, analytical, thorough, and usually right. On days like today, when I have someone to remind me that I'm not so crazy, I guess "You are your mother" sounds almost like a compliment to me. ♦

Because We Love You

by Valerie Trapp, Winter Park, FL

I was six years old when everything changed.
“Mami y yo decidimos que todos nos vamos a mudar a los Estados Unidos.”

It’s funny how all it takes to hold your life upside down by the ankles and shake it up real bad is one sentence. And trust me, shakin’ ain’t nothing to play with. Oh no, life does it James Potter vs. Severus Snape style. And you know what the weirdest part is? Sometimes the shaking isn’t all that bad.

I was born into quite a melting pot of a family (hence, it is a given that we enjoy cheese fondue every Tuesday night). My mother is from the luscious Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic. My father came to be in the farmlands of Germany. Two worlds. Two cultures. One destination. America.

Until the unripe age of six, I lived my life in the Dominican Republic, complete with a flurry of beaches and “holas” and big – I cannot emphasize this enough – big families. Suddenly, my eight-year-

old brother and I were thrust into an English-speaking school, speaking not a drop of English. Suddenly, all these loud cousins and sassy grandmas were a plane ride away. It was just us – the four Trapps against the world. Suddenly, life was this thrilling

and exciting and ever-scary thing. Suddenly, the question “What will happen next?” couldn’t be answered.

I used to play a game with myself when I was young. I would think, *Okay, when you’re at*

ballet this afternoon, think the word “lettuce.” So I would be there doing tendues, thinking about lettuce and that moment when I thought to think of lettuce. It was my own mini version of time-traveling: knowing what was going to happen before it did.

I yearned for this knowledge. My six-year-old self hungered for this control. The future was a mystery now, but the present was a promise. I had the three people I loved most right beside me, going into the future simultaneously. I didn’t need some silly lettuce.

One day I asked my mom why we had left the Dominican Republic. She answered simply, “Because I love you.” Then that confused me more. If that were true, why would she wish for me to struggle in school? Why would she yearn for my failure to communicate with my peers? Why did she want me to work so hard and learn so much and never, ever complain?

One learns from example. I observed my dad as he traveled trying to make money for his family. I saw the tears that he didn’t want us to see but couldn’t hold back as they rolled slowly, sneakily down his stubbly chin. I saw his reluctance as he kissed my mother good-bye every Monday morning, knowing he would miss precious moments with his family until he could return on Friday.

One day I asked my dad why he put himself through this if he hated it so much. He smiled his watery smile and replied, “Because I love you.”

I watched my strong, independent mother make a place for herself in this new country, never taking no for an answer. I admired her as she juggled her children and her ambitions and her husband in this strange place. I observed as she started her own preschool, impressing investors in her accented English. All I could do was stare, amazed, as she was recognized as the “Director of the Year” and her school the “Center of the Year.”

Nonetheless, I couldn’t forget the bad times. I remember the first time our Green Card application was denied. My parents had spent the last year working toward paying the necessary fee, and suddenly, their efforts were for naught. That day I saw my mom crying, her head in her hands. I asked my dad why Mommy was upset. He simply said, “Because she loves you.”

The Trapp family motto is “Never give up.” Our family crest is a duck, but that’s beside the point. When our permanent residency was denied, my parents shook their heads and applied again. And you

*I was
thrust into an
English-speaking
school*



Photo by Joya Prevost, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic

know what? They got it.

Meanwhile I worked my six-year-old butt off in an attempt to understand this foreign tongue. The four of us were in the same boat, mispronouncing words and laughing at our mistakes. And oh, there were lots of mistakes.

My personal favorite is my brother’s sixth-grade trumpet instructor. The poor man was christened Mr. Beute, but for such a multicultural family, we were at a loss as to how it should be pronounced. Beauty? Boot? Buddy? Oh, the Beute Enigma. Nonetheless, my father called him one evening to explain my brother’s absence due to a fever, and greeted him, saying, “Hello, Mr. Booty?” He still hasn’t lived that one down.

“Because we love you.” Only now do I really understand. My mom was happy in the Dominican Republic, surrounded by her caring family. My father was content not being forced to travel so much, and living with those he loved. So why did they put themselves through all this? And then I finally understood. They did it for me.

The future was a mystery, but isn’t it always? By relocating, they gave our futures an opportunity, a chance, a glimmer of hope to unravel into a wondrous tapestry that would have been unfathomable had we stayed with our little island minds in our little island schools dreaming little island dreams.

My mom told me once, “When you put a shark in a little tank, the shark stays little. When you place it in a big tank, it can become big.” My parents gave us a chance in the big tank. And it’s scary in the big tank. There are amoebas

and piranhas and a whole batch of flesh-eating lemurs. (I have an indescribable fear of lemurs. Long story.) Nonetheless, in this big tank, we have the chance to become big sharks. There’s no guarantee we will. There are no promises made for the future that can be kept. But there are endless possibilities.

Love was once defined as putting someone else’s needs before your own. My valiant parents, my courageous heroes, forgot themselves in their hopes of finding a life for us. I pledge to honor their work, their labor, their tears and sweat and disappointments in the only way I can – looking into the blurry vision of the future and making a pavement for myself of the words and love they have taught me with.

I love you, Mom and Dad. ♦

*Our family
motto is
“Never give up”*

Nightlight

she had never liked sleeping,
when the lights from every house across
the street blinked off
like eyes that had seen too much,
there she was,
awake,
listening to the world breathe.

she wore socks to bed.
fuzzy socks, blue and green and purple
like the ones her mother wore.
like the sea, if it were friendlier.
she pushed them off with her toes at
the end of the night
when she knew the monsters
wouldn’t gobble her feet.

she envied the darkness.
she loved the way it smelled in the summer,
when the magnolia had long since bloomed
and the rain fell just right.
she loved the glow of the streetlight
outside her window
and how it snaked between broad leaves
to paint her wind-kissed cheeks with silver.

she was wiser at night.
she collected dreams like grains of sand –
glass, really –
and she swept them into her arms
and built castles
from the ones that made her smile.
she heard echoes from the stars.
wishes were her nightlight,
silent prayers her lullaby.

she stayed like this,
a creature of the night, a ghost of herself,
until her questions grew to be too much
for her consciousness.
sleep covered her like a second blanket,
and her starry eyes forgot
what they had learned.

by Grace Coberly, Oak Park, IL

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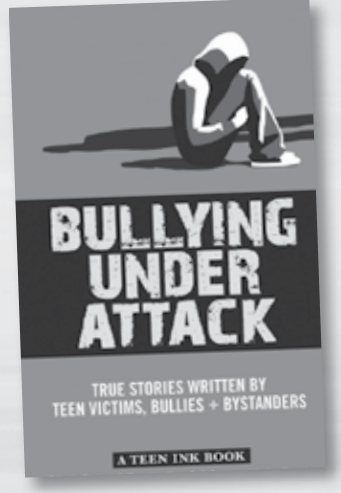
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Drexel UNIVERSITY

Philadelphia, PA: I have yet to visit a college that I dislike. From Connecticut to New York City to Pennsylvania, each college I tour has its own unique offerings that make up for any potential flaws. Drexel University is one of many I visited on my grand Northeastern tour, but it was one of the most memorable.

Drexel is a fast-paced academic institution in the heart of Philadelphia, an utterly charming city. Its student body comprises over 26,000 students, including 14,800 undergraduates, 4,600 graduates, and 5,000 online students. It is a huge, thriving urban university with approximately 200 degree programs. Almost every major under the sun is available, but the school is most well known for its science and engineering programs.

Drexel especially emphasizes student participation in scientific research. Over \$110 million in sponsor support is donated each year toward research. This is just one of the highlights of the university's offerings.

Drexel offers top-notch academic programs that provide students with hands-on learning outside the classroom. Perhaps Drexel's most notable program (which encouraged me to visit the university) is the co-op, an internship available exclusively to Drexel students. The co-op can be paid or unpaid, depending on the specifications of the company where the student interns. All students are required to participate in this program, which extends the traditional four years of college to five. I find that this is the ultimate educational experience, especially for someone who is looking to network in college to help find a job after graduation. The co-op typically pertains to the student's major. For example, a pre-law student spent her first year interning for Jails to Jobs, a pro bono service that helps former prisoners look for employment. My tour guide, who was studying criminology, was taken by

her professors to grisly crime scenes (à la "CSI"), murder trials, and even a jail. After that firsthand experience, she traded criminology for a much less ghastly major in communications. This hands-on experience is indispensable for helping students decide whether or not a major or career is right for them. It is this direct experience that urged me to apply.

There are myriad subjects to study at Drexel University within the 15 individual colleges. I found that Drexel's academics were comprehensive and diverse. Just imagine the cross section of people you will meet and the uncontrollable spread of ideas that will flow between you and other students! The possibilities are endless.

According to *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*, Drexel offers 136 extracurricular activities. Most involve the fine arts, such as band, orchestra, dance, and musical theater. Music, theater, and dance are offered only as minors. But don't let that stifle your creativity! Drexel's extracurricular musical theater program is quite distinguished and goes

well beyond the college level.

According to my tour guide, most sports offered at Drexel are at an intramural rather than national level. Drexel does not have a university football team, but it does have most other sports, including cheerleading, basketball, and rowing. Athletics is not as emphasized here as at many colleges.

The campus is not spectacular. There is no unifying style of architecture. The biology building is absolutely stunning, however! It is new, very contemporary, and features a wooden spiral staircase modeled after the shape of DNA.

During my tour, I had my first ever

The co-op program provides invaluable firsthand experience

opportunity to visit a college dorm room, which was certainly eye-opening. I had no picture in my head of what a dorm looked like, so I was amazed by how small it was. Roommates may be grouped by major. The room I visited was for honors students. It was in a skyscraper-like building that provided fantastic views of Philadelphia. Overall, I felt that the dorms were very basic. The showers were small, and the actual room was tiny. But I do understand that this is all part of college living, and I'll remain open-minded.

Despite its few drawbacks, I like Drexel. I believe that their academics are top-notch and will provide me with the tools I need to become a registered dietitian. I like the idea of the co-op program and the invaluable firsthand experience that I can gain outside the classroom. Drexel is a solid college for all students because there is something for everyone. You can definitely go above and beyond with a Drexel education.

For more information, visit www.drexel.edu. ♦

by Danielle Green, Westbury, NY



Photo by Angela Bentley, New York, NY

UNIVERSITY OF Washington

Seattle, WA: Although I'm still young to be thinking about college, I've had my eye on the University of Washington – Seattle for a while now. Since I am a competitive gymnast, my college search began at the end of eighth grade, in hopes of earning a scholarship. Gymnastics is a sport that recruits athletes as young as 13, so as a result, I started visiting schools much earlier than most. Seattle is 3,000 miles from New Jersey – a long way from home – and my parents originally laughed at the prospect of me going to school so far away. I eventually convinced them to take me for a visit on one condition: if I did end up enrolling there, I would move back to the East Coast after I graduated.

After a flight of six hours, we arrived in Seattle and began to explore. I am a huge fan of "Grey's Anatomy," which is set in Seattle, so it has always been my dream to visit the city. We took the elevator up the Space Needle and saw a unique view of a city framed by

snow-capped mountains and crystal clear water.

Then we visited the University of Washington campus, home of the purple and gold Huskies. We were dropped off in front of Husky Stadium, overlooking Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains. The stadium has a beautiful lake behind it where people tailgate before football games. I already started to imagine myself as a future Husky.

Ranked 14th globally by *U.S. News and World Report*, the University of Washington is a public institution. Undergraduate enrollment at the Seattle campus is approximately 30,000. After my visit, I completely understand why the school is so appealing. Not only does it have incredible Division I sports, the University of Washington's academics are very prestigious.

Academics are a significant part of college, but the culture of the gymnastics program is equally as important to me, as I would be spending 20 hours per week with the team and coaches. After just one day with the coaches, I felt very comfortable around them. It

was easy to imagine myself trusting them because of their warm personalities, love for the sport, and honesty.

I found a strong balance at UW. It is clear that students take both academics and athletics very seriously – exactly what I was looking

for. All of the facilities are state of the art, and the dorms are super clean and brand-new. It has the feel of a campus school, but the amazing city of Seattle is nearby as well. I completely fell in love with the school; even hearing about the rainy weather in Seattle couldn't make me love it less.

Students take academics and athletics very seriously

I left the University of Washington with nothing negative to report, except maybe the distance from home. My parents and I figured it would be a good experience for me to live out West for a few years and escape the hustle of living near New York City.

Just a few weeks later, my dream of participating in Division I athletics came closer to reality when I received and accepted a verbal commitment to the University of Washington. College is still a few years away, but I can't wait to be a part of such an amazing place. All the positives make up for the distance I will have to travel, and I couldn't be any happier to be able to say that I am going to be a Husky gymnast in 2017.

Find out more on their website: www.washington.edu. ♦

by Rachel Kaplan, Franklin Lakes, NJ

Fairy-Tale Fallacy

by Kayla Martinez, Mandeville, LA

Once, and twice, and three times as well, during a specific time in a specific made-up place, there lived a pretty girl in a not-so-pretty life. She sat around in despair because she could not go to the ball or leave the tower or wake up from her slumber until a handsome prince came and saved her, and then the two sang a little bit and were married almost instantaneously.

Why are fairy tales so sexist? Why does the princess need help, anyway? Why is the prince her truest love? Why is she always gorgeous and slender? I'd really like to see a plus-sized princess for once! Why are these princesses so open to being prizes for men to save – and why are they all straight?

One thing that bothers me about Disney movies, and fairy tales in general, is that exterior beauty is often equated with beauty on the inside. Think about it: Ursula (“The Little Mermaid”) was hideous, Cruella (“101 Dalmatians”) was gruesome, and we all saw Rapunzel’s wreck of a stepmom (“Tangled”). In reality, you can be gorgeous and not skinny – or a not-so-nice slim person – because there is no mold for real beauty. Also, the negative people in your life are not always unpleasant to look at.

Why does the princess need help, anyway?

I remember the first time I saw a photo of Hitler. I was expecting some greasy, grizzly, gross beast from the depths of hell, and what I saw was an average-looking man. Beauty outside has nothing to do with what is within.

I, for one, would like to see more princesses who fight with their parents like Merida in “Brave,” who wake up drooling like Anna in “Frozen,” who are inquisitive like Rapunzel in “Tangled,” who are dreamers like Ariel in “The Little Mermaid,” and who don’t look perfect 99.9 percent of the time.

I, for one, would like to see a lesbian princess, or a Disney story revolving around an LGBT character. It would be groundbreaking to have the fairy-tale world admit that love is love.

I, for one, would like to see a princess make mistakes, say things she shouldn’t, and deal with the consequences – without having to be rescued.

I, for one, would like to see a spunky girl save the prince, instead of the other way around.

We are the next generation. We are the ones who will enter the world and hit it hard. Do you want your baby cousin, or your brother, or your future children to grow up in a world where it isn’t enough to be average weight and height, where they feel persecuted for whom they love? Do you want this world to remain biased? I don’t. And I believe that *we* can change the world and get rid of these stereotypes. ♦



Art by Sara Gardner, Lake Stevens, WA

Thick, Curly, and Big

by Shae Omonijo,
Owings Mills, MD

Thick, curly, and big. Some see it as a political statement, others a side effect of being African American. What do I think? I accept my hair as a natural aspect of who I am, but this was not always the case.

For most of my life my mother used relaxers – tubs of caustic chemicals that would strip my hair of its natural proteins – to temporarily straighten my hair. I remember all the times I cried from the pain of getting my hair relaxed every two months. My mother would assure me that the pain was worth the beauty, and I gave in to her, because my hair would look like everyone else’s – “everyone” being my white classmates. The relaxer made my hair long, straight, and controlled. It was “presentable,” “fit to be seen.” My hair would blow in the wind and could be brushed back into a ponytail like my white classmates’. And so I blended in.

I grew up believing that wearing my hair straight was the socially acceptable thing to do. Whenever I saw a successful black woman in the media, she had straight hair. I wholeheartedly believed that if I wanted to be like them, be accepted, I would have to look like them and succumb to society’s standards.

As high school approached, though, I decided to try something new. I shaved off all of my hair and planned to let it grow back naturally. Unfortunately, my mother did not agree with this decision. She was

I cried from the pain of getting my hair relaxed

afraid that I would now be judged not only for my skin color, but by my hair. This belief has caused a schism in the African American community. There are women who relax their hair and those who choose not to. I have had people praise me for my brave transition, but others shame me, saying that I look “unprofessional, uneducated, and very African.” Well, I *am* African – Nigerian, in fact – which makes “very African” a very ignorant insult.

The inequality that African American girls with natural hair face is appalling. There are girls who have been expelled from their schools for wearing their hair naturally. There are well-educated women who are denied jobs because they were born with naturally curly hair and refuse to fit social norms. A female’s education and career can be put in jeopardy if her hair doesn’t fit Eurocentric standards. This is clearly racism.

The only way to eradicate inequality is to change what it means to be “normal” and “professional.” I, and others like me, am in dire need of African American women in positions of leadership and power to wear their hair naturally. Only then will young African American girls feel that it is possible to be who they are naturally and still be successful. If no one will rise up, I will. I will be a successful, natural-haired African American woman. ♦

I Am Hero

I shook and dissolved
into beams
of pride
and pain
as Neiel Israel spoke the line into
existence:
“Every day a black man walks
He is like Jesus,
Terrified of crucifixion.”
He strides down Newbury Street
responding to the peripheral glances
of His fellow human beings with
a million-dollar smile.
Fellow human beings who relate to Him
in no other aspect.
Marching to the melody
of sirens
signaling His inevitable
doom
as the mythical creatures
once did to heroes.
But He is neither
Odysseus of Ithaca
nor Achilles the warrior.
It is not the war
of Troy
we are fighting.
He fears no Cyclops.
His heel is secure.
Yet He quakes
and shivers
at the sirens
that dissolve His Compton
and release His Princeton
as He struggles
to bury the twang
beneath His extensive vernacular.
The monsters,
too real for mythology,
that shackle
His flame
with cuffs
but cannot remove
the rhythm
from his walk.
They steal his pride
and colonize his kind
leaving him with
nothing but
rhythm
and Holy
and God.
And they leave us with
broken
And they leave us with
power
because He is
still flawless.
Jesus –
hanging,
nailed to a burden
that he had built
and carried on his own bloody back,
rolled his head toward the Heavens
and begged his Father;
To forgive them,
for they know
not what
they
do.

by Kennie Etienne, Boston, MA

pride & prejudice

The Death of Chivalry

by Anna Sugrue, Philadelphia, PA

The term “gentleman,” created during the Middle Ages, originally meant a man of noble birth and title. A gentleman was not expected to be chivalrous, or even amiable; chivalry – honesty, fair treatment, and a grand respect for ladies – was associated with knights. Upon the extinction of the knight, however, the gentleman adopted the knights’ temperament. By Jane Austen’s time, late 18th- and early 19th-century England, a gentleman had both high birth and impeccable manners. The essence of a gentleman, as John Ruskin put it, “is what the word says, that he comes from a pure gens [Latin for “family”], or is perfectly bred. After that, gentleness and

In Jane Austen’s time, men, gentlemen included, were leaders in all aspects of life. Men owned the businesses, ruled the countries, supported the family, drove the carriages, butchered the cows, married off their daughters – their masculinity was their power. Their power was their masculinity. But, alas, single men did not have power over single women, and a gentleman’s grace was the only way to charm a woman into marriage. With the woman, the gentleman could secure full and unbreached power.

Being masculine has, of course, always been tied to not being feminine. In Jane Austen’s time, the difference between masculinity and femininity was much simpler than it is today.

1919 women gained the right to vote. Rosie the Riveter and thousands of other American women proved their economic worth during World War II. In the 1960s, women started regularly wearing pants, and the birth control pill became popular. Women fought for the power to control their own lives, and they won.

Today, men do not have nearly as much power as they once did. As women gained independence, men lost control, and they struggled to define their masculinity through other means. Thus began the evolution of the modern man. In the 1960s, sexuality had begun to make an appearance in media. Men were introduced to the idea of a “bachelor,” and *Playboy* magazine was published. With the popularization of the birth control pill, the public began to accept the sexually active single woman. On the cusp of a new era of sexuality and facing a steady decline of their power, men replaced gentlemanly manners with blatantly sex-motivated seduction. Masculinity became the ability to convince a woman to take off her clothes. With their control ebbing in the workforce and at home, men used sex as a tool to once again feel dominant, powerful, and masculine.

Along with the ability to seduce, modern masculinity idealizes physical strength as the key to attract, and hold on to, a woman. In the medieval era, knights used their strength to fight chivalrously. In Jane Austen’s time, men used their strength to provide for

their families. Testosterone has always graced men with muscle growth and physical power, but until the modern age and the augmentation of sex culture, how toned a man’s body was did not affect his public or private masculine identity.

Gentlemanly manners have thus been pushed aside by sexuality and brute strength. If a man attempts to be gentlemanly now, women may take offense. Feminists began to see gentlemanly actions – like men opening doors for women – as patronizing, as if the woman could not open the door

for herself. On the other hand, some independent and progressive young women still expect men to buy them flowers and pay the bill on a date. The cultural changes over the past 200 years have confused gender roles, and the public expectations for

gender-specific behavior have become difficult to comprehend.

From knights to Mr. Darcy to Channing Tatum, the definitions of masculinity and chivalry are always evolving. Women today may complain about the death of the gentleman; however, women, and their influence on the convoluted course of gender evolution, may have been the killers. If chivalry is to come back to life, its associations with male superiority must be discarded, as they have no relevance today. Men and women must disregard the old definitions of gender and simply show they enjoy the company of their companions to create a happy state of gender harmony. ♦

Gentlemanly manners have been pushed aside



Photo by Talia Bernstein, Aptos, CA

sympathy, or kind disposition and fine imagination.” Over the centuries, this regard for gentlemanly manners in general culture has decreased. Today, women often complain that chivalry is dead; however, that is not quite the case. Chivalry is not dead, but rather suppressed by the modern cultural image of masculinity.

Men wore pants; women wore dresses. Men paid the bills; women bore the children and did needlework. Being polite, courteous, and gracious were traits expected of men and women alike. Then, at the turn of the century, women began to evolve their definition of femininity, and masculinity was forced to change with it. In

Prom-blem

by Mikayla Toce, Wethersfield, CT

Ah, prom, that four-letter word that somehow manages to drive all teenage girls insane. The dress. The shoes. The hair. The date! Why do we care so much about this one night?

Sadly, teenage girls attach a lot of our self-worth to this event. Prom becomes a way to show off. Girls who attend with a date feel superior to those who don’t. It feels as though if you aren’t asked out, you are unworthy and will be alone for the rest of your life. All teenage girls are beautiful and special in their own way. I think it is time that we embrace the unique traits that make us who we are – and stop worrying about whether we will get asked to prom.

So what if you don’t get a date? That doesn’t mean you can’t go to prom and have just as much fun as everyone else. One option that most people fail to consider is going to prom with friends. I love my friends, and we have so much fun together that I can’t imagine anyone I’d rather get dressed up and go dancing with.

We hear so much about prom that glorifies the roman-

tic aspects, like proposals or taking pictures with your date. I blame social media for this. Just a few minutes ago, I went on Instagram and saw a bunch of prom proposals by people I know. Did it make me sad? Yes, because I want a guy to do that for me. And I know I’m not alone.

I’m feeling that time is running out and I’ll never be asked. Sigh. But I have to keep reminding myself that it’s only one night. It doesn’t reflect my worth or my future love life. It just reflects my desire to fit in with the crowd – a “need” that I wish I did not feel I needed.

So I implore you, don’t let prom get you down. Really. I know I haven’t met you, but believe me, you are beautiful, you are unique, and you have so many good things going for you. Females supporting other females is very important. We all may not like each other, but we all generally go through the same things.

I hope you go to prom and enjoy it – whether it’s with your best buds or with someone you’re dating. Just remember it’s only one night. ♦

Why do we care so much about this one night?



Photo by Michaela Beecher, Davie, FL

Ashamed to Be American?

by Delaney Davis, Grapevine, TX

American culture is obsessed with patriotism. Most of this is completely innocent – images of the American flag, baseball, apple pie, and the iconic bald eagle. Yet these symbols of American pride are masking something more sinister. Our egocentrism blinds us to the fact that we are *not* the greatest country in the world, but rather one with many problems that need to be fixed.

For example, some Americans have yet to realize that our country is still extremely racist. Many seem to believe that when President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racism magically ended along with segregation – as if all that was needed to erase centuries of tension was a mere signature. But in 2015, racism is still prevalent in our society. The Mike Brown, Eric Gardner, and Tamir Rice cases clearly demonstrate that our law enforcement system is corrupt with not only brutality but prejudice. I have black friends who are petrified of wearing hoodies at night because they are afraid of being labeled thugs and being attacked by the police. A classmate told a story about how a police car would follow her father every morning while he jogged through his neighborhood.

Prejudice isn't just confined to the police, however. One of my teachers once claimed that a rival school had better test scores because it had more white students. When someone was talking about a teenage girl who was pregnant, another replied, "Well, she is Mexican." I once overheard a group of people, people I considered friends, making a joke about a Muslim girl hiding a bomb in her hijab. Sadly, racist and Islamophobic comments like these are commonplace in America.

Another kind of prejudice that runs rampant in American society is sexism. It is often forgotten that women only gained the right to vote a hundred years ago. Until 1993, it was completely legal for husbands to rape their wives without being punished. Today, women are still treated as lesser than men. In 2013, women earned 78 cents compared to every dollar men earned. According to the Institute

for Women's Policy Research, women will reach pay parity with men in 2058. Our generation will be nearing retirement by then! Our health care decisions are also subject to the opinions of our lawmakers – mostly rich, white men who will never experience any women-specific health issues. In fact, women make up only 19.4 percent of Congress.

At the annual ceremony during which my school outlines the rules for the year, 20 minutes and multiple PowerPoint slides were dedicated to the school dress code. Sexual harassment punishments, however, only got a measly paragraph. This problem is just a symptom of the rape culture America has adopted – women's clothing choices become an issue in rape allegations. Often the first question a girl is asked when she reveals that she was raped is "What were you wearing?"

In America, a short skirt and high heels are viewed as an invitation for rape. A boy at my school said that his favorite Disney princess was Ariel because she was "half-naked and passed out." Is rape really some-

thing to joke about?

While LGBT rights have made substantial gains in recent years, homophobia is yet another issue plaguing the land of the "free." Only 14 states have not made the move toward marriage equality, but that doesn't mean homophobia has been eradicated. Gay men still face stigma when donating blood due to the "population's high risk for AIDS." Transgender teens are still denied the right to exist openly – an issue that gained national attention with the tragic suicide of Leelah Alcorn, a 17-year-old transgender teen from Ohio. Sex education still blatantly ignores gender, leaving teens who may not fit the traditional gender labels confused and vulnerable.

Patriotic images mask something more sinister

Given these issues – which are sadly only the tip of the iceberg, because I've failed to mention immigration, gun control, health care, and other pressing problems – I feel uncomfortable proclaiming loudly that "I'm proud to be an American!" How can I profess unbridled love for my country when I'm sickened by its internal problems?

Of course, I am aware that I'm extremely privileged to have the freedoms that I have, and I'm not taking them for granted. But I am not overflowing with pride to be an American. I'm indifferent to my nationality. It is simply a fact about me, like my blonde hair and green eyes.

When America collectively makes a conscious effort to fix the long list of problems we have, I will never stop talking about how proud I am to be an American. ♦

American Steering Wheels

Justice is a joke – this isn't the land of the free and our flag basically means nothing to me. People who aren't us say things have changed, and to that I advise to stay in your lane. It's easy to measure what's not inflicted on you. America's lies are the only things that are true. A boy the same age, height, who dresses like me was shot multiple times and left dead in the street. His killer swore to serve and protect. Isn't it scary to think that I could be next? Instead of curing the problem we try to cure ALS. Murdering unarmed black teens needs to be laid to rest. But to America, *we* are the problem. The cops are murderers too. Why would I call 'em? You're sick of me talking it? Try living it. 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 has been steerin'.

by Kameron Brown, Council Bluffs, IA

Bikinis Are Exhausting

by Lex Ellenthal, Old Greenwich, CT

There's something very tiring to me about bikinis. Get past their typically cute appearance and you've got some strange little scraps of fabric. There's a medley of reasons why I find bikinis exhausting. Mainly, it's wearing them.

Like many clothes made for women, bikinis are not designed for comfort or utility. While certainly better in those respects than the swimming costumes women wore a hundred years ago, they're not ideal swimwear. Look at the bathing suits designed by Victoria's Secret to see what I mean. They're beautiful, but they've got things hanging off them and pieces of metal and either no padding at all or an absurd amount of it. These things are designed not for the comfort of the wearer or to make swimming easier, but to make women look decorative.

I'm tired of stiff discomfort and feeling like a

fish out of water. I'm tired of needing a certain kind of bathing suit to be able to feel confident. I'm tired of it not being remotely easy to find a bikini in my size, because girls my size aren't supposed to be wearing something so revealing.

I once had the cutest bikini ever. It was fire engine red with white polka dots, and it was all kinds of strappy. But it was next to impossible to put on. I think I only wore it three times because it required a wardrobe crew to help me get it on. It made me weary. By the time the suit was on, I no longer felt like going to the beach or the pool. I felt like watching TV or taking a nap.

It makes me angry that swimsuits, of all things, are so exhausting. And I am tired of being angry.

Women are not decorations. We are human beings. Shopping for bikinis, especially if you're curvy, wipes a girl out. Putting on a bikini can be a

Putting on a bikini can be a serious acrobatic feat

serious acrobatic feat. I don't want to spend all my energy getting ready to swim. I want to spend my energy swimming and doing other summertime activities.

Plus, once I'm wearing the bikini, I get really self-conscious – wanting people to tell me I look good, but not wanting to be objectified at the same time – which is possibly as sigh-inducing as handling a large group of small children.

I don't like that I feel relieved when I finally change out of a bikini. I don't think it should be like that. When guys take off their swim trunks, do they exhale and slump, glad to be allowed a chance to rest? Somehow, I doubt it.

Maybe it's just me, but I feel like this issue isn't just about bikinis. Too many clothes designed for women are tiresome and made for decorative purposes. And I don't even have the energy to be angry about it. ♦

Meditation in Schools

by "Molly," Blacklick, OH

The schedule of the American teenager drowns us. According to the American Psychological Association, young adults are now the most stressed age group. This stress not only harasses our days, it also intrudes upon the sanctuary of our slumber; students often report sleepless nights. The problem is not what our education system is doing, but what it is not doing. High schools do not teach students how to revive their overactive minds, bodies, and spirits. This can only be done through the ancient practice of meditation. Meditation should be required in high schools because it reduces



Photo by Joey Rushfield, Rockville, MD

stress levels, leads to restful sleep, and improves brain functions that help students achieve academic success.

Envision this: You rise from bed before the sun and hastily rush off to school, where you struggle sleepily through classes and coursework. A quick moment is allowed for socializing, and then you drag your body off to the extracurricular activities that promise a rounded transcript. Homework, homework, homework. Then, suddenly, you are under the sheets, attempting to sleep. Sound familiar? This is the typical day of an American teenager, and the sprint through the hours reaps stress. As most students' anxiety comes from academics, it is the responsibility of high schools to offer some relief.

Meditation is the best tool for students to relieve stress. According to the Chopra Center, "Meditation mitigates the effects of the fight-or-flight response, decreasing the production of stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline." High schools should provide time in the day for students to relax the body and the mind, to break the poisonous monotony of a strained schedule. For meditation to be effective, it needs to last just 15 minutes a day. The process is simple: sit and clear your mind of negative thoughts.

Lack of sleep is another unhealthy aspect of teen life that can be eased with meditation. According

to the University of Texas, "Teens who don't get enough sleep are four times as likely as well-rested teens to develop major depressive disorder." Meditation works by sweeping out toxic thoughts and training the brain to let go of worries. When students learn to control troubled thinking, they will be able to snooze comfortably. This creates a more nourished mind that is ready to tackle tests and busy days.

Finally, meditation is a wonderful way to improve the high school experience for students overall. Various stressors linked with social life, such as peer pressure and the desire for acceptance, become more tolerable through meditation. The Chopra Center says that meditation offers a "refuge from painful, fearful, or angry thoughts" and provides a "greater self-understanding." This is particularly useful for students who are beginning the college search process.

Increased intuitive powers, improved ability to concentrate, and expanded consciousness are just a few of the benefits of meditation. People who meditate also have lower blood pressure.

It is surprising that meditation is not already a mandatory part of school. Schools are the masters of implanting good habits in young people; it is time that they encourage a custom that will replenish teenagers and help them handle the challenges of a rigorous school day. ♦

The process is simple: sit and clear your mind

More than a Little Nervous

by "Violet," Mesa, AZ

As I approached yet another one of my high school teachers with the hope of weaseling out of a presentation, I carefully prepared my argument in my mind. By this time I was all too familiar with the incredulous remarks teachers often made when faced with these requests. "Everyone gets nervous about class presentations." "You'll be fine." "You're just working yourself up about it." As I pleaded my usual claims of "I have severe anxiety" and "I have passed out before," I couldn't find a trace of empathy on her face. My heart filled not with disappointment but with rage – a rage that overflowed and surged into a panic attack.

Nobody understood my anxiety. It was complex, sinister, and in control. I could feel my gut wrenching, my palms tingling. My chest ached, and I gasped for breath between desperate and uncontrollable sobs. My heart raced and filled with worry and fear. I began to shake. My brain reeled with thoughts of things evil and taunting until I thought I might vomit.

These are symptoms of a panic attack, a common sidekick of anxiety. If you've never had one, the experience can be described as being held at gunpoint, except your brain is the gun. Your own mind is working against you, threatening to cause you pain until you hand over relief from its oppressor, fear. What is feared is different for each anxiety sufferer; for me it was any social situation, cockroaches, the ocean, needles, heights, the cold, and speaking

in front of large groups. My anxiety held me hostage every day. I covered my way through life, hoping that I wouldn't cross paths with a trigger that would set my anxiety off.

Despite this disorder's being very real, the only time my anxiety came off as "plausible" for my teachers was when my doctor wrote a note expressing his concern about me having to make class presentations my senior year of high school. This note was a huge relief for me but also set me up for failure in the future. Once this white flag was taken down as I entered college, my anxiety surged once again when I stepped into my first Human Event class. I saw the circle of desks and immediately remembered the Socratic seminars in high school mythology class. The social anxiety gun was cocked and loaded as my professor talked about participation points and daily discussions in class. Speaking. Out loud. In front of the entire class. Expressing my opinion. The trigger was pulled and all hell broke loose inside of me. The symptoms I was all too familiar with took control of my body once more.

Finally fed up with being a prisoner to my own mind, I found a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with anxiety. Now that the obvious was documented, I really wanted to change. I needed to change. The best

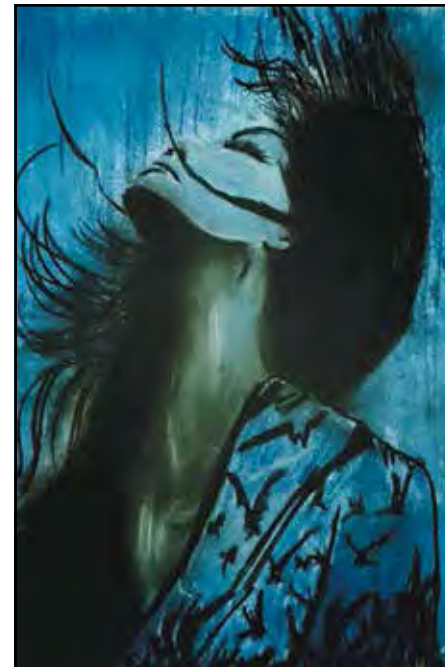
treatment was counseling and medication that would alter the way my brain worked. The medication would ultimately replace what I was missing – serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps suppress feelings of fear and anxiety. Ironically, I was terrified to take my first dose; even the idea of taking a pill to help my anxiety made me anxious. After grueling months of weird side effects, I reached the full dosage, and the gunmen in my mind slowly began to surrender.

The first time I remember conquering my anxiety was when I was faced with a group presentation in biology class. Waking at 7 a.m. for the lab period, I could feel the anxiety rising from my stomach. As I sat in class anticipating my group's turn, I ran through my part of the presentation over and over in my head. When we were

called up, my mind flooded with worry, wiping my brain clear of my portion of the presentation. I began applying some relaxation techniques my counselor taught me. I focused my mind on the source of the anxiety instead of fearing it and pretending not to feel its presence. I thought, *I am in control. This is my body and I don't want to feel like this.*

At last! I had gained control of my thoughts, and I felt liberated. From then on, whenever I would feel the distant presence of anxiety creep back in for a

My anxiety held me hostage every day



Art by Dua Anjum, Jhelum, Pakistan

sneak attack, I employed my new techniques to subdue it. I couldn't believe the results. This is what normal feels like. This is control.

Anxiety will never be completely absent from my life. I will continue to fight my demons, and I hope to continue improving my skills with the aid of counseling and medication. People who believe that anxiety is not a real and serious problem need to step into the shoes of those of us who constantly suffer from its effects. Only then will they understand the impact it has on lives. ♦

Animal Rights Activist

Interviewed by Lauren Kearney, Burgas, Bulgaria

Rachel Atcheson is the Humane League's Philadelphia director. I wanted to interview her to shine a light on her incredible work as an animal rights activist and, hopefully, encourage and inspire teens to take action on behalf of animals.

Why did you decide to become an animal rights advocate?

I decided to help animals because they are the most underrepresented group of beings in today's society. Some might think that animals get sufficient attention, but cats and dogs receive the bulk of it. When we hear of a hoarder with 100 cats and none of them sufficiently nourished, we empathize with those cats. But farm animals are suffering every day in factory farms and we rarely hear their stories. I decided to help farm animals because they need a louder voice.

How did you think you would be able to make a difference?

I didn't start out thinking I could make much of a difference. I began volunteering with a local animal protection group (the group I work for now, the Humane League), but I had no idea the ripple effect my activism would have in the world. With the help of many mentors, I've been able to hone my activism skills and influence many people to be more involved in activism.

"Farm animals are suffering every day"

Has your life changed since you started helping animals?

My life has changed dramatically. I have become more compassionate and more empathetic toward the plight of both human and non-human animals. I have taken on the role of an activist – and I think this is the most important change in my life, because now I understand that no matter how much a person wants to change the world, it's the hard work, the elbow grease, that really creates meaningful change.

What is the main problem animals face right now?

These issues of confinement and mutilation are common for farm animals everywhere. All factory farms treat animals as if they were commodities, property, and this is, I believe, the biggest problem facing farmed animals right now.

I'd love to tell you the story of one animal in particular. Buttercup is an egg-laying hen who has lived her entire life in a cage smaller than a piece of paper. She has never met her mother. Because of her close confinement with other chickens, Buttercup's beak was seared off with a hot blade soon after she was born so she wouldn't peck any other chickens in her cage. Ever since she was young, Buttercup has lived in this battery cage. She has never been outside, never felt the sun on her feathers or the grass beneath her feet. And she'll remain there for her whole life. Her feet might become mangled

in the wire mesh she stands on. If she develops an infection, she will not receive veterinary attention.

On a typical egg-laying farm, there could be 500,000 chickens, so Buttercup is just one of many chickens who will never see the outside of that warehouse.

What does it take to become an effective activist?

Be positive, set a good example, read literature on effective activism and, most of all, practice. If you want to learn more about animal activism, consider getting involved with groups such as the Humane League, Mercy for Animals, or Compassion Over Killing. All of these groups are very effective in their work.

How can we make a difference in the lives of animals?

The number-one way you can make a difference in the lives of animals is to cut back on the amount of animals you eat; consider trying Meatless Monday. And if you already do not consume much meat, consider going vegetarian. Are you already a vegetarian? Cut back on the amount of eggs and dairy you consume. And finally, try veganism.

While it may seem daunting to do anything in this list, if you take it one step at a time, one meal at a time, you'll find it easy, exciting, and fulfilling. We have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of animals three times a day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner – and with your help, we will see changes for farm animals. ♦

Superbad Superfunds

by Angela Axelson, Littleton, CO

"Superfund" sites are polluted areas of our country that have been designated as so toxic that they receive federal funding to clean them up. One such site, Rocky Flats, is just 16 miles from Denver, Colorado. Since Rocky Flats has a particularly dark history as a nuclear weapon production plant, how can we be sure it is safe?

A *Denver Post* article discusses a new neighborhood being constructed next to Rocky Flats. According to the article, activists are concerned that "ground disturbances, such as September's floods, homebuilding, construction of the proposed Jefferson Parkway on the eastern edge of the refuge, and planned development of biking and hiking trails will kick up plutonium-laced dust, increasing the risk of leukemia and bone, lung, and liver cancers for those who breathe it."

LeRoy Moore, PhD, has been making people aware of the risks since the 1970s and has served on the Federal Citizens Advisory Board for the cleanup of Rocky Flats for 13 years. Citing a study by Columbia University, he said, "One particle of plutonium taken into the body can harm the DNA and the end result might be cancer; it can also affect your offspring."

The Environmental Protection Agency disagrees. "Studies show that this contamina-

tion poses no threat to human health and the environment," according to the agency. But the EPA's standards state that the remediation process only has to clean six feet down. There is "no limit on the amount of plutonium that may remain," said Moore.

In addition, the guidelines for cleaning up hazardous substances are based on the "Reference Man" – a white male weighing 154 pounds and standing 5'7" tall. "If you're protecting that person, you're not protecting a two-month-old infant," Moore said.

Moore also pointed out that the problems at the site extend to all the areas the waste has been moved to. It is frankly terrifying that this kind of risk and uncertainty exists for the 1,200-plus Superfund sites across this nation.

Research shows that people near Superfund sites get sick more often. Also, toxic sites in poor areas get less attention than ones in wealthier regions. While that unfairness has been recognized, research shows that a plan to make it more equitable, Executive Order 12898, has not helped. Political pressure, ease of cleaning, and cost also have an influence on the cleanup of sites.

If Rocky Flats is an example of other Superfund sites, there could be a lot of toxic risks across our country. "The nuclear waste problem hasn't been solved at all," Moore concluded. ♦

Uncertainty exists for 1,200 sites across the nation

Edna in the Stars

Plagued with a stripped memory and limited mobility, Edna sought the natural beauty of the universe the celestial skies that ominous cosmos her lithe body swaying gracefully and intoxicated by the openness of the air and infinite possibilities she felt small, yet present, nevertheless, as she gazed toward flaming, enraging, manipulating balls of astronomical matter which seemed so fitting for the midnight navy sky. Edna prayed to those very stars; that static simplicity and overwhelming vastness renewed her soul. So it was nature she thanked for its grace and sheer love, which seemed to revive her whenever her disability attempted to confine and restrain her to one place

by Maurice Huff, Chesapeake, VA



Art by Kay Love, Chandler, AZ

Moving Out

by Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

Every time I mention the fact that I live in Nepal, my online friends seem to get into a state of mild hysteria, often followed by a bombardment of questions ranging from “Whoa, do you guys actually drink tea?” to an occasional “Have you seen a yeti yet?” I don’t mind these questions. In fact, I love answering them as much as I love asking my own questions. After all, although everybody has heard of the United States, there are details about the American lifestyle that we Nepalis simply have no idea about. Of the many, many surprising things about America that I’ve learned from discussions on the Teen Ink forums, the most shocking is the concept of “moving out.”

“Of course we move out of our parents’ house once we grow up,” my friend told me. “I mean, we can’t stay with them all our lives, right? Everybody moves out here in America once they come of age.”

Another user added, “Well, not everybody. I know a couple of people who still stay with their mothers. They pay rent, though.”

“Pay rent at your own home?” I asked, more confused than ever.

“Well, it’s technically your parents’ home,” she replied, “and we all want to be independent.”

As we discussed this further, this exotic practice began to make more sense to me. I must admit, I still find it very hard to digest that parents can accept rent from their own children, but all in all, my friends were right; this system does make a

person emotionally and economically independent. Children raised in such environments can clearly cope with life’s hurdles better, and it is not hard to understand why most of the Western Hemisphere follows this practice.

On the other side of the Earth, however, we do the complete opposite. Where I’m from, unless it’s absolutely necessary, children never leave their parents’ home. In fact, we don’t even call it our “parents’ home.” If children do leave home, not only

are they looked down upon, but the whole family is considered broken. Most families on the Indian subcontinent, therefore, are joint; more than one married couple live under one roof and share the same table. While middle-aged people are at work, the oldest generation looks after

the children. That way, all our traditional values and morals are passed down along the generational ladder. The children also benefit from being brought up by their aunts and uncles as well, exposing them to a wide range of knowledge that they might not have received from their parents alone.

What my friends and I found interesting was how one system’s con is the other’s pro. While people in the West have a harder time socializing than their Eastern counterparts do, they are independent, a trait that we don’t seem to excel in. If we could

We can’t stay with our parents all our lives, right?

somehow integrate these seemingly conflicting practices, perhaps we might have a perfect social system.

Until then, however, we should keep exploring and cherishing these differences – after all, who knows what we’ll end up learning? ♦

Heaven’s Pennies

grandmama, tell me
tell me about the summer days
When you danced in the streets of El Salvador
for pennies to buy candy

tell me about the rich man on the patio
who would give you pennies when you walked by
and how you would keep walking by
and by
And by

tell me about the songs and the dances
and how to move my hips like una española
tell me why they don’t grow chile in china

abuela dígame
tell me about the day she asked you to move to America
and how you shrugged your shoulders and left
the next day

tell me about the bus ride
about three straight days in the latin heat
with nothing but a floppy hat and some hope
tell me about the El Salvador dust that the bus left
trailing behind
not out of neglect but necessity
tell me about your first day in the land of opportunity

grandmama, tell me
tell me about the cooking and cleaning
and why I should eat beans with every meal
tell me about your coffee
and how it got blacker as the work got harder
tell me about tequila and men
and why I should avoid them both
and why El Salvador is where the beautiful people live
and why you say *eres hermosa niña, eres bonita*

abuelita dígame
tell me about the bus ride to heaven
under the warm latin heat like a river of salsa music
dancing through your soul to your hips
as you shake
and clap
and clank your glass
to la cucaracha, la cucaracha –

grandmama, tell me
tell me if they grow chile in heaven
'cause aye aye aye they don’t in china
and tell me, was your first step off the bus beautiful?
beautiful like eighteen cousins learning to salsa
beautiful like the fiestas
the tamales
the besos y brazos
beautiful like your strong spanish soul

Abuelita, tell me
tell me you hear my prayers
and that you know I miss you
grandmama, tell me
por favor
Does God give you pennies in heaven?

by Elise Dimick, Redwood City, CA

Through Mexican Eyes

by Alejandra Márquez, Monterrey, Mexico

My life has always been enveloped in the sweetness of Mexican culture. Even though my family has not always lived in Mexico, my parents have kept our cultural roots deeply present wherever we are. As a little girl I always felt belonging in the *chilaquiles* Mom made and the *chocolate abuelita* (hot chocolate) that warmed the cold days. I can feel it now in my grandmother’s ashen eyes as she fervidly talks about her younger days and all the colorful festivities like chocolate sprinkles on the days of our calendar.

But Mexican culture, in all its beauty and glory, also has its drawbacks. I live in a society where there is a single way of thinking that everyone is expected to share. Having lived for a great part of their lives in foreign places, my parents have never really fit in. My

mom has always spoken to us about the world outside the enclosed piece of sky that is our society. Amid the whispers of the night, she painted the skies of distant places, and opened in my brothers and me a curiosity about the world.

Because of the global view my parents inspired in us, I can now see the flaws of my enclosed society. I see the obnoxious way in which my peers have been

indoctrinated into religion – how none of them questions what they’ve been taught to believe, how they literally cover their ears when a contradictory idea is proposed. I am disturbed by the lack of confidence and ambition my peers show; one’s dream is everyone’s dream. I’m dismayed that some of my girlfriends de-

grade themselves, saying that it doesn’t matter how much effort they put into school and themselves, because they’ll end up being housewives anyway.

I want to be the cause for inspiration and ambition. I want to be the emblem of possibility. I want to help my peers and others realize that they can live beyond what they think themselves capable of. My world has brimmed with support and cheers of “You can do it.” All my teachers have believed in me and have challenged me to reach

my full potential. My parents have shed tears of pride and love behind my every step; they have unclothed my authenticity. I want to bring forth that conviction and self-worth in others.

I yearn to see the world and expand my small viewing glass. So, taking *chilaquiles* and *chocolate abuelita* by the hand, I will explore the world and bring back a bigger piece of sky. ♦



Art by Liliana Bollinger, El Cajon, CA

Ceylon Tea

by Erye An, Kamphaeng Phet, Thailand

“We’re almost there!” My father’s announcement instantly woke me. I wiped my drool from the seatbelt and stretched my neck to see out the window. It revealed a magnificent view of brilliant emerald green fields. I inhaled the cool countryside air. By the time I had settled back into my seat, we had arrived. Multiple Thai-style gazebos, with tractors parked next to them, stood out amidst the endless plantations. I held my father’s hand, and we walked on the muddy path paved by the heavy tractors.

We arrived at a gazebo, and my father and I were welcomed by an entire community of farmers and tea brewers. I was overwhelmed by the attention. Every single person I *waiied* to (*waii* is a gesture of Thai greeting where you put your hands together and slightly bow your head) held my hands and kissed the tips of my fingers. Unaccustomed to such courtesy, I stood awestruck. While I was still recovering, a lady in a traditional Thai outfit tied a rubber apron around me and offered me a pair of Wellington boots – the ugly military kind.

After I was geared up, I looked like a miniature farmer, and my father looked like a real one. We were dressed in perhaps the ugliest clothes we had ever worn, but we were satisfied. Tusaporn, the manager of the plantations, took us on the tractor, along with the other workers, to the far end of the plantation and instructed us on what we had to do. I was to gently hold onto the tea plant’s stem, and with a quick, slight twist, yank it to the right. The first tea leaf detached perfectly. With great care, I placed it in the basket.

In a very short time, however, the work began to feel monotonous and tormenting. It felt as if years

had passed when we had only been working in the field for an hour. The sun was beating down; my cheeks and forehead were burning and my back was drenched with sweat. The repetitive bending hurt my back, and my fingers were swelling with blisters from yanking the stems. I glanced around, only to see my father working diligently – though I could see the drops of sweat trickling down his face and the weariness and ache the work gave him. How was I going to do this for four more hours?

The hours passed by painfully slowly. I complained and whined to my father, pleading with him to bring me water or take me home. But silence was his only response as he continued to pluck leaves. Truthfully, I wanted to kick and cry like a child and force my father to take me away from this horrid work.

After the third hour, I simply did not feel like a human anymore. My hands and legs were numb to the core, and I became indifferent to the heat. I no longer bothered to stretch – it only made the pain worse. I simply trudged on, plucking leaves impassively.

When the sun had almost vanished below the horizon, it was time to stop. My father seemed to be experiencing catharsis as he smiled and stretched after the work. But I was feeling droopy, as if all the life inside of me had been sucked out. We entered the gazebo for the second time that day, though with heavier hearts and bodies than before – but yet again, we were greeted with love and affection. This time it was accompanied by cold drinks and a wafting smell of spicy Thai cuisine. The workers, my father, and I sat in a large circle on mats and ate in a comfortable family atmosphere, watching the sun set.

As I drank the tea, I felt my heart open

“*Ni bpen Chaa-Yen kaa.*” When dinner had finished, Tusaporn stood up, and in her strong Southern Thai accent proudly introduced the title of her treasured, home-brewed tea. She continued on to explain their tradition of serving home-brewed tea to their volunteer workers. Tusaporn poured Ceylon tea into a mug, placed it in my cupped hands, and nodded. The mug was hot, but my palms embraced the tingling warmth as it traveled beyond my skin and reached my nerves. The scent was enthralling – spicy, bitter, and sweet. I closed my eyes and sipped. The raw taste of Ceylon seeped into my tastebuds and evoked a swirl of sensations. For the first time that day, I was thankful and ecstatic, despite the long hours plucking tea leaves and sweating in the sun.

As I drank the tea, I felt my heart and eyes open to these people and felt God instill sincere humility in my heart, an attribute I only thought I had possessed before that day. The misty fog blocking my vision had finally cleared. It was only then that I saw the true joy these people shared, the pride they held in their work and plantations, the wrinkles on their foreheads and the calluses on their feet and hands, the lives they lived.

To this day, Tusaporn’s words and the scent of her Ceylon tea are engraved on my heart. They hang on the branches of my thoughts, waiting for me to pluck them down whenever I need a reminder of the precious gift I received on my journey to the tea plantations of Kamphaengphet, Southern Thailand. Interacting with the Thai tea farmers and experiencing their life made me feel ashamed for once seeing myself as better than these people.

I gazed down into the mug and saw tender ripples from the cool evening breeze. The tea now offered a different reflection of me. ♦

Far From the Streets of Rome

by Ella Brett-Turner, Toronto, ON, Canada

The woman wears black Wayfarer glasses. Her head is covered by a scarf and her skirt just passes her calves. She holds a bag in one arm and uses the other to push through a rotating door. Her skin is gray, her hair black, her skirt white. The photograph has been pasted into a silver frame next to an article listing all the celebrities who have stayed at this extravagant Italian hotel. The frame is harshly modern against the ornate red wallpaper and Italian marble pillars of the lobby. The lobby leads into a hallway where half a dozen glass boxes stand on stone pedestals. These display stilettoes, silk gloves, leather bags, and Swiss watches – all available for purchase in the lobby.

My sneakers squeak across the polished marble floor. We walk into the dining room. The ceilings are 20 feet high, hung with chandeliers and embossed with flowers and cupids. Brass-colored tassels decorate red velvet curtains, and the windows show a court-

yard scattered with glass-topped tables and tuxedo-wearing waiters.

An old man in the courtyard waves to us. He is dressed like a Silicon Valley executive, in khakis and white basketball shoes. Next to him sits a woman. She wears sandals and a fanny pack and sips tea from a porcelain cup. I smile at the couple and run across the Persian carpets through the open door. They are my grandparents.

The back wall of the courtyard is a steep hill garden. Stairs run up the hill to a traverse. Doors and statues are planted across the walkway. My chair screeches across the tile as I sit. A menu, printed in an elegant font on thick paper with sharp edges, lies on top of a starched napkin at my place. The menu is in English. The prices are not listed.

A man with a thick Italian accent and long apron takes my order. I set my sunglasses on the table. They clink against the glass.

“How was the walk?” asks my grandfather.

“Hot and crowded,” says my father.

“It’s supposed to be 100 degrees today,” offers my mother. My brother moans and slumps in his chair.

They continue speaking. The waiter brings my juice. It comes in a four-inch-tall bottle with a blue label.

“What kind of juice is that?” My grandmother has finished her tea.

“Apricot.”

“Could I try some?”

I pass her the bottle and watch as she sips it tentatively.

“That’s definitely not for me – too sweet.” She laughs. “I’m going to order orange juice; hopefully it’ll taste more American.” I laugh a little. My grandmother sits straight in her chair, her hands delicately folded across the glass top. Behind her a woman wearing five-inch heels is walking through the door, two children and a nanny trailing behind her. It is loud here; muffled conversations and children’s whines echo across the yard. Shoes and silverware clack on glass and stone.

But I cannot hear the streets of Rome. The Persian rugs and marble floors and Swiss watches block out the shouting and the traffic. Yes, the street is very far away. ♦

The boxes display stilettoes, silk gloves, and Swiss watches



Photo by Arushi Kuchhal, Noida, India

But I cannot hear the streets of Rome. The Persian rugs and marble floors and Swiss watches block out the shouting and the traffic.

Yes, the street is very far away. ♦

Little Miss Sunshine Cart

by Alicia Marzolf, Cupertino, CA

I've known I wanted to be a nurse since the day I took my dad's stitches out. It was early evening, and Dad was hunched over the bathroom sink, shirtless, trying in vain to remove the thin blue sutures from the still-pink – but healed – gash on his arm. I was watching him, fascinated.

After a few minutes of unsuccessful snipping and pulling, Dad handed the minuscule silver scissors to me and asked, "Would you help?" His forehead was shiny with sweat.

"Sure," I replied, bending down and gently sliding the scissors between the pink scar and the blue suture. Cautiously, I snipped then grabbed a pair of tweezers to pluck the stitch out.

"One down, four to go."

Dad smiled in thanks. I gingerly removed the last four stitches, rubbed some Neosporin on the scar, and gave Dad's arm a pat. Stitches out, job well done.

My desire to enter the health care field led to my interest in the human body. I spent hours and hours poring

over my dad's college textbooks. Every aspect of physiology fascinated me, and I turned myself into a human sponge, absorbing everything I read. However, I began to long for hands-on experience in the diverse world of health care.

Late May of my freshman year of high school, I applied to and was selected for the O'Connor Hospital Junior Volunteer program. I was assigned to the Sunshine Cart, which traveled to patient rooms to hand out toiletries and books. After five vaccines, three training sessions, and a two-hour tour of the labyrinthine hospital, I was ready to start.

On my very first day, I dropped my basket of toiletries, accidentally bonked into a nurse with the Sunshine Cart, and unintentionally entered an isolation room. That day was rough. I remember getting off my shift and

suffering a small identity crisis. *Is health care for me? I wondered. Am I fit for this field?*

But volunteering only got easier from there. I became an expert at navigating the busy and mazelike hallways, and juggling toiletry baskets and books became a breeze.

I longed for hands-on experience in health care

Most of my visits with patients were pleasant, and I was often complimented on my bright smile. The only persistent difficulty was the language barrier.

Most of the patients spoke Spanish or Vietnamese; I spoke neither. I was thankful that toiletries are easy to act out: I pointed to my mouth for "toothbrush," my hair for "shampoo," and my armpit for "deodorant."

One of my most memorable experiences as a Sunshine Cart volunteer was with an elderly Filipina patient. As I entered her room and began to introduce myself, she held up her tiny, wrinkled hand. "I will sing you

a song!" she exclaimed, clearing her throat.

"I love you,

For sentimental reasons.

I hope you believe me,

I give you my word."

"That's very good," I complimented her. She beamed and explained, "When I was 17 and coming on a boat from the Philippines to meet my husband in America, that song played as I was walking off the boat. I never forgot it." She grabbed my hand. "You are a very pretty girl," she told me. I squeezed her small hand before heading back to work, and I can still feel its warmth.

Despite the many challenges of being a Sunshine Cart volunteer, I wouldn't trade this opportunity for anything. Not only does it provide me with hands-on experience in the world of health care, it makes me feel good. There is nothing better than a patient smiling and exclaiming, "You made my day!" ♦

Nursing Home Helper

by Marian Park, San Jose, CA

Tick, tick, tick. Teeth brushed, school over, homework done. It was a Friday, and starting today, Fridays meant a trip to a senior nursing home downtown. This particular nursing home was special. The Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services of the Department of Health and Human Services had given it the lowest rating – one star out of five – based on health inspections, quality measures, and staffing. It seemed as if this nursing home needed help, but little did I know it would help me too.

During my first visit I was asked to polish some of the female residents' nails. I'd never touched a nail polish bottle before, but I tentatively rubbed off the old color using a tissue dabbed with polish remover. As I applied new color and glitter, one woman asked me a stream of questions. "Where are you from?" "What school do you go to?" "Do you have any siblings?" After she was satisfied with my answers, she started to share some of her hidden anguishes, from

the deaths of her husband and second son to the one item she wanted the most: a camera. By listening to her and empathizing with her loneliness, I realized I had actually helped her; she looked relieved, unburdened of some of her past pains.

When she was finished, she told me something that inspired me to visit the nursing home every week. She said, "You're the only person I was able to tell this to. The other ladies are too busy to listen to me, and the other residents don't care. You'll come back next week, right?" After gently blowing on her newly coated nails, I smiled and promised, "Yes, I'll see you next Friday at three o'clock."

As I reflected on her bittersweet reminiscences, I left the nursing home that day gladdened by the fact that I had helped somebody. An action as simple as listening became something much more.

During every second I spent in the nursing home, I realized how much of a difference my actions could have on the lives of others; I found energy and vigor in a place not typically known for it. Every week, I walked around the dining hall, and one resident after another motioned to me to sit down and talk. One woman, who happily commented that we shared the same first name, confided her opinions, starting most of her sentences with the words "To me ..." Another proudly showed me a birthday card her children had sent her.

Of course, not all of the conversations were lighthearted. When one elderly woman talked to me about how her 13-year-old daughter would be graduating from middle school this year, I didn't know what to do but nod and listen, knowing that her daughter must have graduated from middle school decades ago.

I found energy and vigor in a place not known for it

Although I could not add more years to the lives of these elderly residents or offer them a chance to return to the past, I knew I could give them something simple that's often overlooked in our society. Through our conversations, I gave them the assurance that in this fast-paced world, they were not forgotten – that members of younger generations still cared about them and were there for them.

By spending several moments each week just listening and talking, anyone, from students like me to adults, can lift the burden off someone, touch and listen to the hearts of others, and live through them. It's not just limited to talking, however. It can

come from a homemade card or a single greeting. I cannot play any complex compositions by Beethoven or Chopin, but I can reach out and speak to the residents in the nursing home through music by playing Yiruma's "Kiss the Rain" and Paul Anka's "My Way."

It seems that the most troubling aspect of living in a nursing home is that it breaks the human connection between

those in today's society and the nursing home residents, who barely even noticed each other until a wheelchair blocked their path. Each is isolated, wrapped tightly in their own anguish and past.

Every moment I spend chatting is an opportunity to tie that connection again, to unwrap their troubles, to alleviate pain, and to shape someone's life. In turn, that moment also shapes me. I not only learn about life and experiences outside of school, but also receive the gift of being part of this process – this connection between humans. Those moments of sharing and listening are magical for both the giver and the receiver.

Tick, tick, tick. A conversation starts, a smile is exchanged, another life is changed. ♦



Photo by Alyssa Hall, Yelm, WA

Robert Karcha by Casey Dower, Wilmington, DE

My sophomore year was rough. I lost my grandfather the day after my birthday, and I was struggling in every class. I had no idea how to get a hold on my life. Every day I dreaded going to school because it was just one more reminder that I was failing and was as worthless as I felt. All I wanted was someone to help me.

My grandfather died while I was spending my birthday in Disney World. He had been fighting cancer for two years, so I was expecting it, but I still wasn't prepared. This was heartbreaking to me. All of my teachers knew; my mother had told them. But the only one who approached me the day I returned and told me how sorry he was was Dr. Karcha.

Dr. Karcha's honors chemistry room was the only classroom that had the air conditioning on all year, and it was always bright enough to make New York City look dim. I can remember the excitement that would bubble in my stomach as I weaved my way through the hordes of groggy teenagers to get to that room, to the only teacher who made me feel like I meant something during this dark time in my life.

Dr. Karcha was the type of teacher who wrote everything on the whiteboard – always in blue marker, because it was his favorite. He would give us notes during part of the class because he didn't want to overload us with information. But he was also the only teacher who made me feel like he understood. We would have long conversations about college and anything else I wanted to know about.

At the end of our conversations, he always said, "Anything you need, all you have to do is ask." This might not seem like a lot, but to me, it felt like someone was giving me a chance. After that, I worked hard to make him proud. I wanted him to see that he wasn't wasting his time on me.

Thank you, Dr. Karcha, from the bottom of my heart. Getting through sophomore year would have been impossible without your support and knowing you believed in me. Thank you for helping me decide what I want to do with my life and for shaping me as a person. I may have only been in your class for nine months, but those days when I would sit in your freezing, over-bright room were some of the best of my young life.

Thank you for everything. I'll never, ever forget you. ♦



Photo by Cloey Robertson, Oxford, AL

Educator of the **Year** contest

**Winners will be
announced next month!**

Sundoss Shad by Emil Hasnain, Lahore, Pakistan

After reading Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, I began to dream of a homeroom teacher who was just like Miss Honey: sweet, loving, and caring. It's every student's dream to get a teacher who doesn't just teach you but treats you like her own. In ninth grade I met such a teacher, and I wished she were not only my Language teacher, but also my homeroom teacher. (I know, I ask for too much.)

She was like Miss Honey, only ten times better. She wasn't someone who would teach a class of kids their ABCs just because she got paid; rather, she was someone who put her heart and soul into what she did, and she loved every one of her students.

What makes her stand out from every other teacher I have had is the plain fact that she teaches us a variety of things, all in an hour and thirty minutes. Those lessons are enjoyable, interesting, and easy to remember. We'd be reading a comprehension article on grave robbers, and she'd explain the entire history, science, and logic behind the actions of a character.

We'd have to attempt an essay, and she'd link it to real life.

She's like an encyclopedia – she knows everything about everything, and I really mean it. And what she teaches us doesn't just sleep in our brains, it makes us think and wonder about the world. Teachers are only successful when their students want to learn more after being in class. And I swear, I always wonder about and

research what she tells us. I am so impressed that I want to be like her when I grow up.

She's a teacher with whom you can talk about anything: your grades, your essay, what goes on in your brain, celebrities, or even the latest Disney movie (she loves "Frozen"). I have grown so attached to her, it's like we're an extended family. She's a teacher who taught my friends and me to be better.

She isn't just a teacher; she's a friend. And I am lucky to have such a teacher. So, of course, I was jumping with joy on the first day of tenth grade when she told us she was our homeroom teacher. ♦

*She's like an
encyclopedia*

*Call me crazy,
but I can't
wait to work
with numbers*

Dave Olenchek by Brett Brestler, Pewaukee, WI

Everyone has one class on their schedule that makes them grimace. For me, that class used to be AP Statistics. The thought of working with numbers for hours made me cringe. Not many people enjoy a class where your calculator is your best friend. But little did I know that one teacher was about to change my perspective on numbers.

My first class senior year was AP Statistics. I was the first student in the room. I was greeted by a short, slim man with a small grin on his face. It was the type of grin you see on children as they enter a candy store. I soon noticed that his never went away. This man is my AP Statistics teacher, Mr. Olenchek.

During my first week, I realized this class would not be my least favorite but rather my favorite. With every problem, he would make a pun. When calculating averages, he would say, "Wow, that was a very meaningful statistic." Sometimes when a student got an answer wrong he would say, "Take that back" or "I will see you in my room half an hour before school for such a treacherous answer." Although somewhat cheesy, his humor definitely grew on us and makes class interesting.

Also, Mr. O does things differently. Rather than yelling over rowdy students, like most teachers, Mr. Olenchek uses a different

method. If you have ever seen golf on TV, you notice the officials holding signs that say, "QUIET." Mr. O strives to be like them. He sits in the corner of the room raising his sign until silence fills the room.

Along with this technique, he has the infamous "table of death." If Mr. O catches you on your phone, he commands you to put the device on the "table of death." Then, as you walk back to your seat, he laughs at you as you take what he calls the walk of shame. These little quirks may not seem important, but they make class enjoyable.

Finally, Mr. Olenchek changed the way I look at a list of numbers. Before, they were just numbers. Now, I understand the importance and application of these "boring" numbers.

Entering my junior year, I was constantly asked what I wanted to do when I grew up. I always responded that I had no idea. But now I know exactly what I want to do. I'm going to major in actuarial science and become an actuary. In this job, numbers are your second best friend – second only to a calculator. Call me crazy, but I can't wait to work with numbers.

Mr. O changed my view of math. He turned numbers into meaningful statistics and taught me how to use them in everyday life. He is different but in a great way. And this is why Mr. Olenchek is my Educator of the Year. ♦

Beyond the Tutu

by Allison Liu, Princeton, NJ

I was there when her career ended. The beginning of the end happened like this: She leaped into the air with her feet pointed and knees straight, arms above her head. Time slowed, then stopped. Everyone in the studio drew in a breath, unable to look away. Then, suddenly, she was falling. There was a crack. If your body is your instrument, what happens if it fails you? There was an agonized wail: the sound of the end of another ballerina's career.

When people think of sports, they think football, soccer, baseball. Ballet dance is often overlooked and viewed as a hobby for little girls in frilly pink skirts. Ballet is not a hobby. It is a sport and an art form. It is a passion and an addiction. It is a way to express emotion without words. Dance is the poetry of the soul. However, ballet is a challenge that not many dare to take. The pain is very real, and dancers need immense strength, both physical and mental.

The windows fog up from the heat in the room. Sweat streams down everyone's faces and bodies. Toes are wrapped and taped and wrapped and taped. Bloody bandages are thrown out and exchanged for new ones. Pointe shoes are dipped in rosin and banged on the ground. Criticism echoes through the room.

"Those feet are atrocious!"

"Where are your arms?"

Ballet is often viewed as a hobby for little girls

"Your leg isn't high enough!"

"If you do your turns like that, you'll never be great!"

The tension is palpable. All around the room, dancers silently judge and compete with each other. The practice room is where dancers spend most of their time. It is not easy. They do not sit pretty.

Dancers work. The amount of energy it takes to dance a full ballet is equal to what's needed to run 18 miles.

Everything must be precise. Legs are lifted past shoulders and hyper-extended; feet are pointed, slicing through the air. Not one muscle, not one bone can be out of line, and yet dancers are not stiff. They glide across the floor with an

ethereal grace that is breathtaking. Beneath the pristine tutus, sparkling tiaras, and soft pink pointe shoes are weary muscles and aching bones supported, for the time being, by adrenaline.

The hours and hours of practice will either pay off in the end or be wasted. Hundreds of ballet dancers train to become professionals, but few succeed. The ballet world is very competitive, with few spots available. Dancers have to be mentally strong to survive the constant judgment and competition.

Ballet dance is not for the weak. It may seem that ballet consists merely of silly ribbons and prancing girls, but it is so much more. Dancers are athletes and artists at the same time. We put our entire body weight on our toes, and though our muscles cry out in pain, we remain graceful and light. We continue to dance even as our bones twist and muscles tear, even as the sweat pours down our bodies and blisters form on our feet. It is an endless cycle, but it is one we do not wish to escape from, for the reason we dance is because it is the closest thing there is to flying. ♦



Photo by Tindall Hutchinson, Florence, SC

A Wonderful Day at Sea

by Luke Czarnik, Royal Oak, MI

My family and I always go to Alabama for spring break. My favorite thing to do there is fish for mackerel. One recent summer, my dad, my friend Zack, and I headed down to the Alabama State Fishing Pier. Zack and I ran ahead, racing each other to see who could get his line in the water first.

While we were setting up, I couldn't help but notice the sunset. It looked like something you would see on a postcard. The pier smelled like fresh fish and sea air. Seagulls and pelicans were fighting over scraps of fish, and old guys were arguing over whose fish was bigger. I leaned on the railing. The breeze was whispering to me like a kid who sits next to you in class.

I could see that the fish were biting; everyone around me was pulling in mackerel. But I wasn't even getting a nibble. Thirty minutes later, the strangest thing happened. I saw a man struggling to pull something up over the railing, so I ran over to see what it was. He had hooked a pelican. The man was calling for help, so my dad's friend ran over with a hoop net to get the pelican out of the water. Once we pulled it up onto the pier, the huge bird stopped fighting us, as though it realized we were trying to help. When my dad's friend got it unhooked, the pelican flew off, looking relieved to be free.

As that was happening, I was finally bringing

up a Spanish mackerel. But I was so distracted that when I grabbed the fish, it freaked out and I lost my grip. The three-pronged hook went right through my finger. Quickly, I cut the hook from the lure so the fish couldn't shake and make it worse. When I realized the hook was sunk in past the barb, I thought, *This is going to hurt!*

While everyone else was freaking out, I tried to stay calm and figure out how to get the hook out without needing stitches. I told myself, "Just do it," then pulled the hook straight out of my hand, barb and all. Afterward, my dad said I turned as white as a ghost, but I pushed on and continued fishing despite my bleeding, throbbing finger. I was not going to go home without a big fish.

On the very next cast I hooked a king mackerel. It was starting to take out a lot of line, and I had to run down the pier, almost pushing people out of the way. When it stopped fighting and taking out line, I returned to my spot. The hoop net was too small to get the fish out of the water, so we had to gaff it.

We pulled it up, and it ended up being 40 pounds. It looked like something prehistoric, with very little color and blue stripes. You can only imagine how big the smile was on my face. Then we went home, cleaned the mackerel, and swam in the ocean for the rest of the day. ♦

Everyone around me was pulling in mackerel

I Run

by Taylor Smith, Paris, IL

When I run, I am running for my life. The dirt under my shoes is a trampoline, propelling me onward like a jellyfish on steroids. The smell of an oncoming storm, the sun rising over the trees, the coach telling me to "go, go, go, GO!"

I go. I go like it is all I have. I not only give it all I have, I give more than all of my opponents combined. I am the dragon, and they are the horrified peasants. I am the jaguar, and they are the gazelles. The sweat pools and burns my eyes, but I do not wipe it away, because it is my trophy.

When I run, electricity flows through my fingertips as the wind blows in my face, attempting to hold me back – a pathetic attempt. Electricity flows like the blood in my veins, keeping me breathing, holding me intact. It is my oxygen.

When I run, I feel safe. All of my troubles are left behind, because they cannot catch me. I run "over the river and through the woods" and through the place "where troubles melt like lemon drops high above the chimney tops," but that is not where you'll find me, because I've already passed it.

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.

When I run, I see the finish line. It is as close to me as a bond between mother and child.

I come in last place.

I said I run. I never said I was good. ♦

Monument Valley

The utterly gorgeous and captivating mobile game “Monument Valley” was released in 2014 by UsTwo. The point-of-view character is a silent princess who wanders through impossible structures and optical illusions in a surreal dream world. It is your responsibility to guide her through this challenging environment.

A rave review of this game piqued my curiosity enough to try it out myself. A few minutes into playing, I began to understand why this game intrigued me. Its impeccable, geometric design was not anything I had ever seen before. The game itself is bright and contains a breathtaking soundtrack that goes well with what’s happening in the different levels.



Pure creativity

“Monument Valley” is not only beautiful, it is complex. You are able to manipulate the gameplay by dragging, rotating, or turning certain parts of the colorful background and structures on the stage. The game is entirely made up of puzzles and challenges that make you think harder than you usually do on a daily basis, forcing you to take on a different point of view. Every level is a work of art.

Despite the fact that it is called to be a single-player game, “Monument Valley” is a lot better to enjoy with friends. The app grants you the gift of seeing them struggle as they try to maneuver themselves around the squawking crows that patrol the levels. Although the game is mostly silent, you receive occasional dialogue that helps lead you through the plot, but you have to piece things together carefully because the dialogue is in riddle format.

Inspired by M.C. Escher’s wonderfully bold artwork, this game is an outstanding portrayal of pure creativity which is sure to leave its players wonder-struck.

If you’re worried about the price (\$3.99), don’t be discouraged. It might sound like a lot for two hours of entertainment, but though it is quite short, “Monument Valley” is a game worth experiencing. ♦

by Melanie Moctezuma, Grand Prairie, TX

Five Nights at Freddy’s

You stand in a small room; its walls are covered with posters of images ranging from an animatronic band to cupcakes. Then you turn on your cameras only to realize that one of the four animatronic characters is missing. Frantically, you flip through the different views – then you hear a quiet scamper. You put down the camera and are attacked by a robotic creature with a demonic face, lunging at you with a blood-curling screech.

“Five Nights at Freddy’s,” developed by Scott Cawthon, is an absolutely terrifying horror game. Working as the night watch in a Chuck E. Cheese-esque

pizzeria, your goal is to survive for five nights. Each evening, four animatronic characters – Bonnie the Bunny, Chica the Chicken, Foxy the Fox, and Freddy Fazbear – try to “forcefully stuff you into a Freddy Fazbear suit.” It may seem that characters with such adorable names would not try to harm you, but they will not stop until your life is in their hands.

You are granted a set amount of

power, and use it up by completing actions such as looking at your camera, shutting the doors, or turning on the lights. It becomes harder to survive as the game progresses. Each night, you hear a hilarious recording made by the old guard, who gives you the information you need to know to play.

There are very few negatives to

“Five Nights at Freddy’s,” but one is the graphics that aren’t great. However, the game certainly makes up for this with truly petrifying audio. Footsteps, voices, and eerie music add to its potency. The controls are very simple; you only use the mouse.

Once the gameplay is completed, “Five Nights at Freddy’s” can get boring. However, you can spend a lot of time playing it, and for about \$5, it’s money well spent.

“Five Nights at Freddy’s” delivers serious scares. Remember, conserve your power, and only close the doors when absolutely necessary. ♦

by Erik Zilber, Brooklyn, NY



Truly petrifying

The Walking Dead

If I fell in love with the zombie genre the day Telltale’s “The Walking Dead” game came into my life. Based on Robert Kirkman’s comic book series, “The Walking Dead” is a masterpiece that guarantees both great gameplay and a perfect story that plays with your emotions and tugs at your heartstrings. This episodic interactive drama video game allows your choices and actions to affect the story, leaving you satisfied or depressed over the decisions you made.

The game starts with convicted murderer, Lee Everest, on his way to prison. But before he reaches the big house, the zombie apocalypse breaks out. This catastrophe brings a ray of sunshine to Lee’s life – a little girl, Clementine, whom he vows to protect.

“The Walking Dead” consists of five episodes that have some eye-widening and jaw-dropping scenes full of thrills and suspense. They might make your hands leave sweaty prints on your keyboard. Beware! There’s a good chance of you being trapped in an old mansion with zombies

lurking outside.

What makes “The Walking Dead” remarkable is that you and I have to protect Clementine, but in our own ways. I might respond to a situation by going crook or getting steamed, but you might remain a cool dude. However, the ending will not be completely different; the game leads us



A roller coaster with twists and turns

to the same conclusion but with different experiences. In the last episode, the choices you’ve made, the things you’ve done since the first episode will reappear, even if you had forgotten them.

The game allows you to experience adventure, including distracting the walkers, giving a helping hand, and discovering the secrets of people’s weird actions – but what will happen when somebody comes to know yours?

All in all, “The Walking Dead” is like a roller coaster with twists and turns that make you ponder harsh realities. And the ending is so unforgettable that it will leave you craving more. ♦

by Hafsa Ahmed, Karachi, Pakistan

Super Smash Bros.

Super Smash Bros. has been one of Nintendo’s most successful franchises. Masahiro Sakurai clearly had a hit with the series, so he took a bold step by introducing it to handheld. I am happy to report that this game’s 3DS version has exceeded my expectations.

The traditional Smash is just as much fun as you remember, with new maps along with some classics. You start off trying to kill enemies and find treasure chests to gain stat boosts and items. Then it comes down to a final battle, which could be anything from a match with 300 percent starting health to a race to the finish.



Best solo experience in Smash history

Customization is better than ever. You can finally make a Mii character, customize the special moves that characters use, and give them equipment to make them stronger, more defensive, or faster. You can unlock these in Smash Run and Trophy Rush, a new mode in which you can spend coins to have a chance at trophies and custom items.

The other modes are neat too. Classic mode has new branching paths, All-Star mode takes you through the years to battle everyone chronologically, and the Home-Run Derby is still an amazing mode. The third-party characters (Mega Man, Pac-Man, Sonic) give a wave of nostalgia, and the obscure characters are really fun to play with.

Its only downside is its weak online multiplayer mode. Local play works fine, but one bad connection and your whole game drops to a single-digit frame rate.

Still, the poor multiplayer shouldn’t detract from the best solo experience in Smash history. The Wii-U version may have fun multiplayer, but this is a must-play for any Smash fan. ♦

by Jacob Klein, Pittsburgh, PA

DRAMA

Birdman

Thank the film gods for “Birdman”! It is a beautifully artistic film, and those appear in cinemas only every so often.

This is an epic story of the inward and outward effects of the ego on main character Riggan Thomson (Michael Keaton). His journey through this war is a sad yet beautiful experience. This could well be Keaton’s most outstanding performance yet. Riggan comes to terms with the truth about his career and reputation but risks it all to leave his soul on stage. His character embodies the struggle and devotion one man has to his art, his audience, and himself.

This film is colored with the dim lights and shadows of Broadway, the inward madness of an actor, and the shining, beautiful applause that comes after it all. It is brought to life by a most original score, using drumbeats to heighten the energy and emotions experienced by its characters.

Director, producer, and cowriter

Alejandro G. Iñárritu made an unusual and much-needed film that revives the true power and inspiration that audiences hope for. The cast is the best of 2014, and “Birdman” shows acting in its purest, most beautiful form. Iñárritu is the model of a true artist and filmmaker. His ideas about art and film should inspire anyone who watches this film.



Acting in its purest, most beautiful form

“Birdman” received two Golden Globe Awards – Best Actor (for Keaton’s performance) and Best Screenplay – and four Oscars: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Cinematography. Watch and support this brilliant film and

enjoy the creative thoughts it will leave you with! ♦

by Tabitha Bavosa, W. Palm Beach, FL

This film is rated R.

TV

House of Cards

Washington politics are tedious. Filibusters, pigeonholing, and stagnation based on partisanship are the norm in Congress. So if I told you that “House of Cards,” based on this day-to-day monotony, is one of the most shocking, disturbing, and riveting shows today, would you believe me? No? Well, you clearly haven’t met Rep. Francis Underwood.

“House of Cards,” which streams exclusively on Netflix, with entire seasons released at a time, begins on New Year’s Eve, 2011. Frank (Kevin Spacey) and his wife, Claire (Robin Wright), are at a ball also attended by the recent president-elect, Garrett Walker (Michel Gill). Frank briefly explains to the camera how, despite his dislike for the man, he sensed a winner and attached himself to Walker, assisting greatly in his presidential victory. In return, Frank expects to see the favor reciprocated with a nomination for Secretary of State, a prestigious step from his current position as House majority whip. When the president goes against the plan and revokes his unofficial endorsement at the last minute, Frank is taken aback by the betrayal. Privately, he and Claire seek vengeance, and, formulating a plan to be carried out over the course of the show, they prove their cunning as well as their ruthlessness.

Frank’s obsession with power leaves us, equally improbably, pulling for him to accom-

plish his twisted, sociopathic goals, even though in the process he ruins the lives of many more moral, sympathetic, and not “fundamentally deceptive” people, in the words of one of Frank’s many vanquished colleagues in Congress.

The overarching plot of this series is truly ludicrous, yet each individual episode makes you feel that a realistic, urgent, threat-presenting matter needs to be addressed by your hero, or villain, depending on how you come to view Frank. The visual elements of the show are amazing; camera work, sets, and wardrobes all leave you thinking you’re really seeing a congressman on his way to a crucial meeting in the West Wing of the White House.



Shocking, disturbing, and riveting

With regard to the story, one might only wish for a truly challenging rival to emerge – someone Frank is not capable of easily outmaneuvering. Without a consistently formidable opponent, he has, despite some brief setbacks, remained undefeated

in his political and personal battles.

Frank’s Macbeth-like rise to power seems to suggest a Macbeth-like end. We can only hope he and Claire continue their brutish power climb as far as their rarely detectable consciences can bear. ♦

by Cole Heisner, Boulder, CO

This series is rated TV-MA.

ACTION

Man of Steel

I wanted to love director Zack Snyder’s “Man of Steel,” I really did. The man understands action, he knows how to frame a scene, and he can tell a story. The problems that generally plague his work are weak casting and a signature breakneck pace that doesn’t leave room to invest any sort of emotional stakes in the proceedings. But in “Man of Steel,” Snyder works from a script created by David S. Goyer and a story co-created by Christopher Nolan – emotional stakes, check – and his cast includes Amy Adams, Diane Lane, Kevin Costner, Laurence Fishburne, Michael Shannon, and Russell Crowe. Stronger casting, double check.

Goyer, Nolan, and Snyder have gone all-out in a complete overhaul of the Superman mythology and do many, many compelling things with it. Here Clark Kent (Henry Cavill) gets his power not from the sun but from the adjustment to Earth from Krypton. He is referred to as Superman only twice during the entire film.

In addition, Kryptonite is notably absent as Kal-El’s source of weakness – there’s a more rigid scientific explanation. There is an extended (too extended, in fact) opening sequence on Krypton that is visually breathtaking and does an admirable job of providing us with the necessary back-story about the circumstances of Kal-El’s creation. They make Zod (Shannon) of “Superman II” into a compelling, layered villain. Amy Adams also gives a sensational performance as Lois Lane, written as an intelligent, capable, funny woman who is entirely aware of the Clark Kent/Superman duality for a change.



Gone is the goofy, period-specific Americana of the original film series – instead, “Man of Steel,” as superhero movies should, reflects the sociopolitical climate of its time with diligence and doesn’t shy away from big, loud set pieces guaranteed to satisfy.

While the changes to the Superman mythos are truly compelling, the script that contains them is fatally weak. It scratches the surface of insight numerous times without breaking the skin. Worse, this is an action movie that

The script is fatally weak

has never heard of pacing. It manages to be both too long and undercooked, refusing to tie up an incredible number of loose ends that don’t resurface for at least an hour.

After the opening sequence on Krypton, instead of showing us Kal-El’s arrival on Earth and subsequent coming of age, “Man of Steel” treats us to a fully grown and deeply tortured Clark recalling his childhood in flashbacks. These are successful and well directed. Unfortunately, Goyer’s narrative technique makes it impossible to invest in these moments. The non-linear storytelling undercuts the job of these scenes in the first place: it’s difficult to actually care about a boy you meet at age 7, 11, and 14 for a few minutes at inconsistent intervals. It’s a shame, because Henry Cavill is a capable newcomer, and it’s clear that he could command the screen with gravitas.

Snyder remains so gleefully committed to showing the audience what destruction must be wrought by two super-beings at war (Superman faces Zod and numerous other Kryptonian semi-fascists) that he goes overboard and ends up creating a noisy bore. In fact, noise – narrative and literal – is the movie’s biggest problem. Nearly 45 minutes of all-out destruction begin to blend together, and each time a new giant set piece is introduced it becomes more exhausting. Hans Zimmerman’s deafening assault of a score doesn’t help.

The flaws of this origin story don’t entirely overshadow its value as a piece of popular entertainment. A honing of its overblown action sequences would render them mind-bending. A fleshing-out of character development in the script could complement the breathtaking visuals. And some of its ideas – most notably that of Superman’s “no kill rule” – remain rich.

The attempt to synthesize the serious and the grand gives “Man of Steel” a definite tonal identity in a sea of faux-clever, toneless, assembly-line superhero films. As it stands, it’s an occasionally riveting, emotionally shaky, admirably flawed first step into what could be the start of a great franchise. ♦

by Conner Reed, Banks, OR

Tyranny • Julian Casablancas & The Voidz

Julian Casablancas doesn't play by the rules anymore.

Upon first listen, his new album "Tyranny" may sound like a mad scientist's creation. It's a bizarre, mysterious, outside-the-box barrage of sounds that mix together to form an album like no other. Traditional song structures and smooth production are abandoned in favor of a raw release. Vocals melt behind powerful riffs and blasts of cacophony. "Tyranny" is truly an adventure into no man's land and, as Casablancas puts it, a protest record against mainstream society.

Casablancas, now 36, has always had a nostalgic side. This is evident from his classic rock 'n' roll days with The Strokes and his '80s-influenced solo album "Phrazes for the Young." In "Tyranny," he finally steps outside of his comfort zone and fully releases his creativity. Acting as backing band are The Voidz, an assemblage of musicians who have fully bought into Casablancas' new style.

The use of unconventional sounds brings tremendous flavor to the album. Numerous cultural influences, including sounds of Arabia and Latin America, come together well with catchy guitar and electronic vibes. Ambitious

guitar riffs, however, are what truly fuel the album. They are especially strong in "Dare I Care" and "Johan Von Bronx." Casablancas also shows off the extensive power and range of his vocals, with high-pitched falsettos and deep growls, and has taken strides lyrically as well.

Every track brings something different to the table. With the spacey, Daft Punk-influenced "Take Me in Your Army," the tropical vibe of "Father Electricity," the sounds of revolution in "Mutually Assured Destruction," and the gently pulsing "Xerox," it's a pleasantly diverse album. Tyranny's finest track may be "Human Sadness," an 11-minute collage

of emotions and melodies. Only the not-so-grand-finale, "Off to War," disappoints.

It can be said that "Tyranny" is a masterpiece for the rebels. It's far beyond the comprehension of mainstream pop. In fact, the music finds itself in a "void," but Julian Casablancas and the Voidz have found life and energy in this unknown. If this truly is the sound of the future, we are in for one heck of a ride. ♦

by Alan Brown, Manhattan, KS



Sounds like a mad scientist's creation

1989 • Taylor Swift

Taylor Swift shook the pop world with the release of "1989." Her loyal band of "Swifties" were thrown into a swirl of turmoil. Some fans were overjoyed at the opportunity to add yet another album to their collection. Some mourned the loss of "the old Taylor," who sang their diaries through the relatable ballads on her previous albums "Fearless," "Speak Now," and "Red." Even non-Swifties turned a curious ear to the new release. Some marveled with grudging approval at the record-breaking sales. Some just looked at her reputation as a blonde serial dater and groaned inwardly, muttering to themselves disgustedly about the "music of this generation."

It's a shame that all these people are missing the point.

"1989" isn't just another mishmash of heartfelt country, a jumble of meaningless lyrics, or a melodic array of soulful R&B. It's a breath of fresh air for modern pop, teeming with a mixture of upbeat tempo and clarifying honesty that has never been seen before in the music industry. It's a beacon of light amid the foggy clutter of repetitive bubblegum beats and dubstep that infests our radio stations.



Just the jolt that pop music needed

"1989" is a delightful mix of ballads tinged with background drums ("Clean"), feisty dance tunes ("Shake It Off"), and sassy, satirical messages ("Blank Space"). Swift dabbles in the hit-or-miss world of electropop with "I Know Places" and "Wildest Dreams," resulting in a novel mixture of piercing lyrics and haunting falsetto.

But the most defining trait of this album is the innocent honesty that won Swift legions of fans in her previous albums. In "1989" she sets it free, letting her truthful lyrics tumble through the new terrain of pop tempos until they shine brighter than in any of her previous endeavors.

The hidden pain in the seemingly carefree song "Welcome to New York" rears its head with the lines "And you can want who you want/Boys and boys and girls and girls" by revealing the prejudice that haunts the world. The bittersweet melody of "But you come back to what you need" in "This Love" hides a deeper, darker resentment relatable to all those with broken hearts.

With "1989," Swift declares to the world that her talent for storytelling isn't confined to the soothing guitar strings of country music. In fact, when paired with the upbeat percussion of today's pop, her musical integrity cuts deeper than ever. Swift may be a newly inducted pop artist, but her message has never been clearer.

This album is just the jolt that pop music needed. And if you're still not convinced, well, I guess Taylor said it best: "The haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate." ♦

by Annie Lu, Camas, WA

Young the Giant • Young the Giant

The American indie rock band Young the Giant came on the scene in 2004, taking the public by surprise with their mellow tunes. Lead singer Sameer Gadhia, guitarists Jacob Tilley and Eric Cannata, bass guitarist Payam Doostazadeh, and drummer François Comtois create captivating music that genuinely warms your soul. Their hit album "Young the Giant" is 51 minutes of silk blowing in the wind. It's a breeze of rhythmic intervals traveling from gentle to strong tempos.

YTG opens with "Apartment," filled with hypnotic guitar chord progressions and occasional riffs that take you by surprise. The upbeat track reels you in, gets your head bobbing, and leaves you wanting more.

YTG's most popular song, "My Body," follows. This brilliant hit has been featured in ads for the popular TV show "Teen Wolf," and in commercials for Mountain Dew and Michelob Ultra. "My Body" has a steady bass line beat that gets your body moving and your feet tapping. The relatable chorus "My body tells me no, but I won't quit because I want more" can be applied to a number of real-life situations; whether it be in love, in life, or simply on the dance floor, everyone can relate. Cleverly inspired, they paint a personal connection with their words.

YTG continues their upbeat and lively pace with the next track, "I Got." Gadhia's smooth voice makes you sway as

if setting sail on a warm summer day. The guys then grab the listener's attention by opening their next song, "Cough Syrup," with the mesmerizing cello undertones featured throughout the piece. The repetition of the lyric "Life's too short to even care at all" tries to convince you that worrying is pointless and pushes you to believe that something better is on the horizon. "Cough Syrup," when taken responsibly and in the correct dosage, can definitely aid in healing.

YTG slows it down with "God Made Man." It maintains a laid-back feel but catches you off guard with a sudden burst of energy when the tempo picks up midway through. For the last two minutes of the nearly five-minute-long song, Gadhia sings his heart out, desperately trying to figure out why "God made man, and his reason."

The band returns to its more typical, mellowed-out style for the next three songs. Then they hit you with "Garands." It starts with a militant drumbeat that is soon accompanied by a dominant guitar melody. The lyrics speak of someone standing up for what he believes in, which in turn allows him to grow personally. The subject of this track is in a bat-

tle where he "falls down," gets back up, and keeps fighting with his "broken bones and muddy shoes." It's clear that even though he has "been betrayed by the ones they trust," what he is doing is right; otherwise, "it wouldn't feel so familiar."



Talented young band with an easy listening style

Next, "St. Walker" opens with a catchy guitar slide. Gadhia mimics the guitar's lead by manipulating his voice from high to low. The beat and rhythm of the lyrics grip your hand and walk you down the street on a brisk, clear night. YTG goes from the upbeat "St. Walker" to the much calmer "Islands," consisting primarily of Gadhia's wispy voice layered over smooth guitar strumming and faint drum tapping.

YTG concludes the album with authority. They are somehow able to compile the emotions of all the previous tracks into their finale, "Guns Out." Magically, it's soft and savory yet edgy and persistent.

YTG is truly a talented young band whose easy listening style is enticing to all ages and genders. They capture your soul from the jump and hold you until the ride slows to a satisfying but unwanted end. ♦

by Sidney Cameron, McDonough, GA

NOVEL

The Book Thief • Markus Zusak

The Book Thief floated around my mental, then digital, book lists for years. In elementary school, librarians recommended it. Once I even checked it out from my public library but never read it. So I put it off for years and years until one day I was at Barnes & Noble and picked it up again. The movie had come out months earlier, but I hadn't seen it.

I had certain expectations for this book – the kind of unconscious assumptions that build up before you read a book. In some cases, the book falls short. Not this one. I expected sad. I expected interesting, and a good story. *The Book Thief* didn't fail me there, but surpassed my highest expectations. I didn't expect the tragic, thought-provoking musings – or actual happiness in a World War II book – but this is a complete and beautiful story.

Markus Zusak's writing may be the best I ever encounter. His frequent yet lasting imagery and thorough character-building gives his words the power that Liesel Meminger sought so desperately. *The Book Thief* follows four years in Liesel's life during which she lives with foster parents Rosa and Hans Hu-

bermann. She runs the streets with Rudy, the boy with lemon-colored hair, and Hans teaches her to read. They harbor a German Jewish man who shares Liesel's love of words. All the while, Death narrates their tumultuous and fragile lives in World War II Germany.



Surpassed my highest expectations

Zusak perfectly balances action with inaction. There are spurts of fear, loss, and adventure, but nevertheless, the everyday moments are frequent. These are sweet, touching, and sometimes funny.

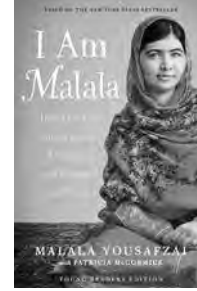
Each moment in this book demands to be appreciated and felt – and strongly so. Maybe it's due to the setting, Death's narration, or the fact that Liesel's story begins with loss. Maybe it's all of those. It's life, isn't it? We know our end might be coming any day, but we continue living anyway. We keep laughing and crying and making friends. Death himself reminds the reader of this often. It is easy, especially during a war, to blame Death for taking Liesel's brother in the first chapter. But if this book tells us anything, it is that Death is not evil – humans are. They are also heroes. ♦

by Aubrey Juel, St. Paul Park, MN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I Am Malala • Malala Yousafzai

I Am Malala is an inspiring autobiography that teaches readers of all ages the importance of standing up for what they believe in. At age 11, Malala Yousafzai became a young blogger and activist for girls' education in Pakistan. She and her writing became famous. Then, when she was on her way to school in 2012, a Taliban gunman stormed onto her bus and shot her three times. Malala woke up in a hospital in England. As she healed, she wrote



Malala speaks for girls who cannot speak for themselves

this book explaining what she and other women have had to experience. This brave girl won a Nobel Peace Prize for all she accomplished.

Malala grew up under the laws of the Taliban. She followed the footsteps of her father, Ziauddin, a great man with much to say and teach. His story of overcoming a bad stutter and becoming a great public speaker gave her hope that change was possible for her too.

Malala wants to change how people view women in her society so that one day all girls can go to school to get the education they deserve. Because of the horrible incident Malala endured, the world became aware of her story. She can now show the world her story and speak for girls who cannot speak for themselves.

Throughout this autobiography, readers will learn the horrible oppression women and children endure under the Taliban's rule. The more people become aware of these stories, the more they will take a stand. Eye-opening events can help change the world and make it a better place for everyone.

Because of Malala and her incredible story, we are getting closer and closer to making many dreams a reality. ♦

by Andromeda Vetsch, Richfield, MN

CLASSIC

Lord of the Flies

William Golding

Are humans inherently good or evil? William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is a raw look at the horrid depths of what happens to human nature when societal and governmental controls disappear. It takes place on a Pacific island where a plane full of British boys has crash-landed. You meet Ralph, the democratic leader who brings the boys together; Piggy, whose large body reflects the expanses of his brilliant mind; Jack, who is a touch peeved at the lack of favor for his leadership; and Simon, the shy and caring one who provides the "littluns" with fruit and kindness.



You'll cringe, gasp, and weep

At first, the boys seem to establish a functioning and systematic society. But things change as Jack's tribe begins hunting, terrors of a beastie haunt the boys, and the minds and order on the island begin to unravel. Rescue, rationality, and order begin to lose their importance among the boys as savagery, violence, and thirst for killing plague them.

You will cringe, gasp, and weep alongside the characters as the end of innocence and "the darkness of man's heart" is exposed. A warning to us all, *Lord of the Flies* isn't necessarily a pleasant read, but it is an important one. ♦

by Alicia Marzolf, Cupertino, CA

NOVEL

Out of Reach • Carrie Arcos

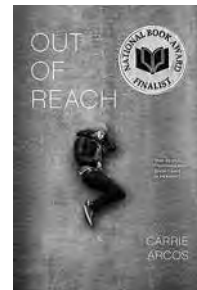
What do you do when someone you love has an addiction? Do you let them be, make them stop cold turkey, or take them to rehab for professional help? Does your loved one even want to be helped?

In *Out of Reach*, it is up to Rachel to help her brother, whether she likes it or not.

Rachel is used to being known as "Micah's little sister," a title met with scowls or smiles from the teachers. Rachel and Micah bond over lying to their parents and watching each other's back. But her brother has a secret that even Rachel feels bad keeping: he has started using meth. When his addiction gets really bad, their parents send him to rehab.

Then Micah runs away. With her brother missing and her relationship

with her boyfriend breaking up, Rachel's life is going downhill. When she gets an anonymous e-mail saying that Micah is in trouble, she decides to search for him with Tyler, his best friend. This whole book



Many loose ends

takes place during the day and a half Rachel and Tyler are trying to find Micah.

Out of Reach is Carrie Arcos's debut novel and was a finalist for the National Book Award. I personally did not find it very exciting. Rachel as a character is not interesting. The sad, unfinished ending did not make me happy either. Arcos left so many loose ends that it makes it feel

like there may be a sequel coming. This is not a bad book, but I would not read it again. ♦

by Megan Ansems, Kentville, NS, Canada

Marked

by Gracie Gill, West Monroe, LA

There's a rustling noise off to my left, and I look up from my garden. It's probably just another reformed criminal from the nearby community who's cut himself and come looking for my help. A man around my age – early twenties – pushes through the trees that line the path to the house I share with my dad. He comes into view and stops, hunched over, panting and clutching his right arm. Long, shaggy black hair covers his face, but I can still see the vine tattoo. It's red. Why is it red? Is he an escapee?

He looks up at me, and I can't help but gasp at all of those vines, all of those leaves. Not only is his tattoo still red, but he's a mass murderer. The vine begins just above his collarbone and curls up to end at his eyebrow. The branches cover half his neck and most of his right cheek. Countless leaves dot the vines.

I look into his panicked green eyes. There's blood running down his arm. He's badly hurt, and I can help him. What should I do?

"Please, help me," he begs in a soft voice.

If it weren't for the murderers who had served their time, Dad wouldn't be alive.

Maybe I can help him, then call the Enforcers while he's resting.

"Yes," I say.

Relief washes over his face. I wrap his uninjured arm over my shoulders and guide him into my house. I can't stop glancing at his tattoo. So many lost lives. Why would someone kill so many? I want to ask him, but that would be rude and invasive. He glances my way out of the corner of his eye.

"I never killed anyone, if that's what you're thinking," he says. "I was set up. Me and a few others."

What do I say to that? Why would he have been set up if he hadn't done anything wrong?

He seems to notice my lack of words.

"My name is Rhydian, by the way."

That's an easy statement. I can reply to that one.

"Mine's Shelby," I say.

He doesn't say anything in response, which is a relief. I'm not sure I could handle another bomb like "I'm marked a mass murderer, but I never killed anyone."

I help Rhydian to a chair, then go off in search of my first aid kit. When I return, his eyes are closed. If he's asleep, that's okay. It'll make it a lot easier to bandage him then call the Enforcers.

I settle down next to him on the couch and gently begin rolling up his sleeve. He winces and opens his eyes.

"I think the bullet is still in my arm," he mumbles. "I couldn't find an exit wound."

I stop, stunned. A gun? He's claiming to have been shot with a gun? That doesn't make any sense, but when I look closely, I can see a sliver of steel embedded in the wound.

"Why would the Enforcers use guns? Nobody uses those things anymore."

"Because electronets don't work on me," he replies cryptically.

I pause in my cleaning. "Why not?"

"The electricity in the nets that's supposed to stun people only makes me stronger."

I stop cleaning his wound. What the crap? This day just keeps getting stranger and stranger. How could electricity make someone stronger? This is all

just too impossible and too insane.

He's crazy. That must be it. He's a murdering lunatic, and I've let him into my house.

Okay. Stick to the plan. Patch him up, give him a sedative, then phone the Enforcers while he's out. Simple as that. Just need to act calm.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"No, I do," I lie as calmly as I can manage.

He looks relieved and leans his head against the back of the couch. I finish cleaning the wound and hand him some gauze to press against his arm.

When I come back with the syringe in hand, Rhydian stiffens. "What is that?"

"It's just something to numb your arm while I sew you up," I reply.

He relaxes a bit but still seems wary. Did he have some kind of traumatic episode with a Healer as a child? There are so many things about him that don't add up.

He pulls the gauze away from his arm, and I shove his shirt sleeve up.

"Here, let me do this," he says.

I pull my hand back as Rhydian begins unbuttoning his shirt. He gently wiggles his arm out of the sleeve, and my eyes widen. Scars line his chest. One stretches from his sternum to the space between his collarbones, indicative of open heart surgery. Another begins halfway up his bicep and ends just below his shoulder. A third rests on one of his lower ribs.

"What on earth?" I breathe.

Rhydian clenches his jaw. "Biopsies and tests in the prison labs."

What? Maybe they're self-inflicted because he's a lunatic. But they were obviously made using surgical precision. The only other time I've seen cuts like that is in class.

I do the only thing I can think of: I push the needle into his arm. It only takes a second for the sedative to take effect. Rhydian's eyes slip shut, and his head lolls to the side. I sigh and begin carefully sewing the wound. After it's bandaged, I go to find my phone.

This whole situation is bugging me. He sounds like he's stark raving mad, but there are things that point to his story being true. I don't know what to think.

My conversation with the Enforcers is short. They should be here soon. I walk back to the couch and sit. Rhydian has two other scars around his wrists. Those are a lot rougher and make me think of really bad rope burns.

I shake my head. I need to stop thinking about all this insanity.

Rhydian stirs, and I jump. How can he already be waking up? The sedative should have kept him out for a while. He opens his eyes and lifts his head, obviously groggy.

"Wha-what happened?" he mumbles.

There's a knock on the door, and I jump to my feet. The Enforcers are here. They tip their hats at me as they enter. Rhydian sees them and struggles to his feet, eyes wide.

*He's a
murdering lunatic,
and I've let him
into my house*



Art by Leah Choe, Burke, VA

I suddenly feel like I've done something horribly wrong.

Rhydian reaches out toward the electronet on an Enforcer's belt. My heart stops as electricity arcs through the air toward Rhydian's fingers. One of the Enforcers raises something like a gun and shoots him in the shoulder. The electricity dissipates into the air as Rhydian collapses, unconscious.

"Sorry for the disturbance, ma'am," one Enforcer says. "We'll get out of your hair."

As they carry Rhydian out, there's only one thought in my mind.

He was telling the truth. ♦

Granted

by Paula Amezcua,
Winston Salem, NC

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust and probably your broken bones.

I once tried to open it; you said the money was for us. I wondered if "us" consisted more of you and your secondhand outfits.

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust, your broken bones, and probably your lipstick stains.

I used to sit on the sofa and the window was always open. The men kept grabbing, and slowly I think they broke your body.

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust, your broken bones, your lipstick stains, and probably me.

I laughed when we paid rent together, thought it was going to become a routine. You said we had incomes now.

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust, your broken bones, your lipstick stains, me, and probably your tears.

I didn't come out of the room when they took you to the police car, not even when they said I was safe.

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust, your broken bones, your lipstick stains, me, your tears, and probably solitude.

It took me seven days of content to realize you gave your all. It took me seven days of imprisonment to realize the money you saved for tuition was in my bank account. It took me seven days of nostalgia to realize you opened the window so I didn't boil inside. It took me seven days of gratitude to realize you told me jokes so I'd forget everything we didn't have. It took me 18 years and 11 months to realize you were there when I was not.

The jar in the kitchen keeps dust, your broken bones, your lipstick stains, me, your tears, solitude, and not an ounce of whore. ♦

Onions and Butter

by Rachel Seiler, De Pere, WI

Six hours. 360 minutes. 21,600 seconds of staring at one textbook and one page of notes.

Maybe biochemistry isn't my thing. I don't think it ever was. It's more of my dad's sort of thing.

Well, he's not sitting here in my sauna-like dorm room cramming for a course, now is he? He's probably back at home untucking his shirt and having a glass of wine with his fiancée. Lucky jerk.

I sigh loudly enough for my neighbors to question my activities. I don't really know them at all, so it doesn't matter. I'm not one to be in my room very often. Even back at home I didn't enjoy it.

Sick of microscopic matter and things you can't see with the naked eye, I grab my backpack and coat and head out the door.

The moment I step out of the dormitory, the unrelenting wind smacks me. Oh, yeah. Classes were canceled today because of it. For a moment my sweaty room seems tempting, but my textbook is still plotting my death back at my desk, so I'll tough it out.

The walk through campus is cruel, but at least my biochemistry stress is whisked away by the wind. I'm probably the only idiot outside right now, but I know a place that will remove any and all of my worries. Hopefully it's open on this frigid evening.

The whole way there I stare down at my numb feet skirting along the frozen sidewalk. I've made this trek across campus enough times that I can find my way there by the cracks and crannies of the sidewalk. A moldy sandwich on the curb congratulates me on my arrival at my destination. It's been there for three weeks.

The Purple Onion Café's lights greet me as I step through the glass door. It's open. I quickly step up to the counter to place my order. There's no line. There's no one here but me and the staff.

"The usual," I say confidently to the waiter, but it's just habit. I'm not confident.

He raises his eyebrow. "It'll be right up."

I take a seat at a center table. I would usually sit in the corner, but no one's here, so it doesn't matter. I grab my giant headphones from my backpack and let the New York Symphony Orchestra string their violins in my ear.

"One large coffee, a plate of onions, and a side of melted butter. Pay whenever you're ready." The waiter slaps down my order.

I know. It's weird. I stare at my unique meal. It reminds me too much of her. I can't take it anymore – the

tears start. But it's not because of the onions. They're just an excuse.

"If you ever remember anything I teach you," she said with a sly smile, "it's always use a condom, and always order the meal a restaurant is named after. That means it's their best dish."

"Yes, Mommy." I didn't know what a condom was at five years old. But the other part made sense. Jim's Burgers had the best burgers. I liked them with extra pickles.

She smiled her huge smile. It used to remind me of whitecaps on a windy day at the beach. Her smile stretched across her entire face and into her eyes.

As I got older, though, her smile started to end at her lips, not able to make the journey into her deep green irises. I knew something was wrong. She never really cried in front of me, but her empty-eyed smiles didn't fool me.

"Just get over it," he'd whispered to her in the kitchen. "Just don't feel that way." It was late, and I was supposed to be in bed.

"You don't think I've tried?" was her muffled response. She didn't have the energy to be hostile, but I think she would have been. I would have

been – I still am now.

My dad placed his wrinkled forehead in his hands. It aged quicker than the rest of his body. Probably from all the frustration he experienced with human emotion.

I wish she hadn't tried. Trying too hard to make her sadness go away made *her* go away. And my dad didn't try enough. Maybe if he had, my mom wouldn't have had to try so hard on her own.

Maybe I should have tried harder too. But being eight years old doesn't allow you to help adults.

"Excuse me." The small voice brings me back to the sight of my barely touched bulbs of buttered vegetables. "Are you okay, sir?"

"I'm fine," I tell the waiter, wiping away the stream of snot and the tears in my eyelashes. He walks away, glancing over his shoulder one last time before going into the back room.

I'm fine now, but I wonder if he is. I wonder if my father untucked his shirt and sat down next to his fiancée, his arm slung across her shoulder.

I wonder if he thinks of her, remembers.

Does his smile reach his eyes? I've never noticed.

Ten and half years. 92,041 hours. 5,522,460 minutes. That's how long she's been gone.

Just in case you were wondering. ♦

"The usual," I say confidently to the waiter

The Raincoat

by Ayla Fudala, Eureka, CA

Her dad had given her the raincoat. It was green on the outside and had an army camouflage pattern on the inside. He said it had been his, but now it was for her. Right now it was tied by the arms between two white pines, doing a bad job of keeping off the rain.

Tracey had made camp with the things she brought from the house – two blankets to cover the ground, a Capri Sun to drink, a comic to read, and the raincoat as a roof – but she wished she'd had time to bring more. The blankets were cold and wet, and the wind kept blowing the rain in under the coat. The Capri Sun was almost empty, and soon she would have to start foraging to survive. She remembered what Dad had told her – she could eat wintergreen berries and chew their leaves, crush acorns into flour, and eat huckleberries when they were in season. But right now it was late fall, and everything was all shriveled up and dead.

Tracey thought longingly of her soft, warm bed, of her stuffed rabbit Jemima, and the orange cat, Samson, who sometimes curled up next to her pillow. Maybe if she just went back and said sorry, Mom would say it was all right and make her hot cocoa and pancakes like she used to when she was little and they fought.

But she couldn't. She didn't want Mom's pancakes.

She'd rather live the rest of her life as a savage in the woods eating acorns than go back and beg for Mom to let her in. Mom hated Dad, and now Dad was gone because of her.

Tracey didn't care what Mom said Dad had done, why she kicked him out, because Mom was a liar. Dad had told her so last month when they were camping. He had said, "Tracey, your mother is going to tell you some very mean things about me, but I want you to remember that they're not true. Your mother is a liar."

The wind was blowing hard now, and the raincoat wasn't helping at all. Tracey's hands were numb, and she couldn't stop shivering. She tried to read the comic, but the pages had gotten damp, and the words were all bleeding together.

Far away, she could hear her mom calling her name. "Traaayyy-seeee! Baby, where are you?"

Tracey covered her ears, and then uncovered them. Mom's voice was a bit closer now.

"Honey, I'm so sorry. Please come back inside." Tracey felt her eyes begin to water and shivered. She started tearing little pieces off of the comic. Then, before she could stop herself, she was bawling. "Mommy, I'm here! I'm here!"

The raincoat fell to the ground as Tracey jumped up and started running back toward the house, and the brambles grew over it. ♦

Far away, she could hear her mom calling



Art by Fajr Alam, Gujranwala, Pakistan

Walls

by Angie Jurek, Naperville, IL

I've been staring at the ripples in my ceiling for at least two hours. Maybe it's been four. Maybe it's only been half an hour. I can't tell if I'm waiting for someone to knock on the door or not. I know no one will come, though. Everyone's busy. I'm busy too, you know. There are a lot of circular thoughts that need tracing. A lot of made-up problems that need made-up solutions. I'll never follow through with them, of course. I don't have time for that nonsense. I'm a very busy person.

On Sunday – or maybe it was Tuesday – the wall to my left started looking at me weird, calling me lazy. Agitated, I informed him he was in no place to judge. I was very busy; didn't he know that? I flipped over to my right side, nuzzling my face into a mix of greasy hair and pillowcase.

"I haven't washed my hair in four days, you know," I said to the right wall. Deadpan, he stared back.

"I shower every day and all; I'm not a complete caveman. I just get too lazy to reach for the shampoo and everything," I clarified.

Right Wall stared back at me.

Annoyed with the both of them, I rolled onto my back, returning to the ceiling. He never seemed to judge like the others.

The sheets ruffle. I wriggle my toes and sigh. Propping myself up on my elbows, I have a brief staring contest with the lamp switch. He wins. Covering my eyes, I flip the switch. The light leaks through my fingers as I stumble to the door and step into the hallway. The sweet smell of corn and grilled chicken dances its way up the staircase. I follow it willingly to the kitchen.

I pull a chair out, and its legs grate against the kitchen tile, signaling my presence to the cook.

"Al, honey, have you done that paper yet?"

"I've been really busy, Ma."

"Dear, with what?" She sets a mountain of food before me. "I mean, I assume you're doing your work up there, but when you're just down here watching TV ..."

"I'm under a lot of stress, Ma."

I push the corn around my plate, bunching it into

a pile. The heat from her gaze burns my forehead. I look up. Her brows are furrowed. She stares at me expectantly. When I shrug my shoulders and drop my head back to my plate, she sighs audibly and returns to the stove.

"Everybody in that school is under the same 'pressure' as you are." The spoon scrapes the pot rhythmically as she churns the mashed potatoes. "I don't see why you have to make such a scene about your assignments." She looks back at me expectantly and exhales again. Her jaw tenses, making it appear wiry; the skin on her face seems loose, tired.

"I wish you wouldn't worry about me," I try. "I've got everything under control."

No response. Dinner rolls on. I return to the walls. Sometimes they help me not to think so much. Sometimes they make it worse, letting my thoughts bounce and echo off one another, teasing me as my chest begins to shudder.

Who knows how much time passes before my next episode. I try not to keep track of time. I realize that no matter how chaotic your thoughts are, being acutely aware of the time you're wasting only exacerbates the situation.

Once or twice I've asked Left Wall if he thinks I should go talk to someone less emotionally involved than my mother, but he always reassures me that I'm giving my best. He understands that I'm under a lot of stress.

One afternoon, a triangle of light dashes into my room, splaying itself across the walls. It grows rapidly around a shadowy figure.

"Al, you've been in here all day," the figure says. "Your father and I have been talking and—"

"So now you guys talk about me behind my back? You think I'm a slacker," I whisper to Right Wall.

"Speak up, dear. We're getting concerned."

I stare aimlessly into Right Wall's face. He holds

*I've been
very busy. She
doesn't get it.*



Art by Pam Best, Greenlawn, NY

my gaze and promises me she's wrong. I've been very busy. She doesn't understand. Warm drops of liquid salt hit my lips as I realize I'm speaking.

"I just ... I don't care."

And it's true. I don't. I've been trying to care. I've been caring enough to do that, haven't I, walls? I've been caring enough to know I don't care. But I'm very busy. She doesn't get it.

She's speaking, but her words are unintelligible to me now. The warm salt is sprinting down my cheeks. The walls are disappointed in me. I've let her in.

I let her in. I break down and let my mother in. I don't think the tears away. I know now. I let her hold me as I cry. Her arms absorb my sobs. Walls don't have arms, you know. ♦

Mums and the Sun

by Susanna Olson, Charlotte, NC

I rose with the sun, but she was already awake. I imagined that it was Mums who brought the day again. Every morning, as I was fighting consciousness, my Mums would slip out into the horrible darkness. Hours later I would wake up again, this time for real. A few rays of light would steal through our dirty windows just as my Mums returned, all sweaty-smiley.

I had seen her run a few times – so, so fast. She was the only one fast enough to run the distance each morning. Out of our crumbling neighborhood. Past my half-broken school. All the way to somewhere where it was a little less cold and a little less angry. She would find the sun sleeping there. She would smile, kiss his cheek, and tell him that it really was time to get

out of bed.

Even on those days when we stayed up late, working on homework or chatting about the boy who gave me a flower, my Mums was always up to fetch the sun in the morning.

I imagined that the sun rolled back in the sky and begged for five more minutes. Sometimes he probably didn't want to wake up at all. Who would want to shine down on such a cruel world? Mums could coax him, though. Even on the most horrible of days. She always had the perfect words spoken with a certain softness that made the most unbelievable things make sense

*No one knew
how important
she was*

and the most ridiculous jokes sound almost kind of funny.

No one knew how important she was. Not her dad, who kicked her out because she was too tall to belong in his church. (That's why she told me he gave her the boot. I never did quite believe that story.) The guys she dated, one by one, they didn't know how important she was. Or perhaps they didn't like how she kissed the sun. My teachers complained 'cause she couldn't give me what I needed to succeed. I needed books and tutors and something called "intervention."

"What is intervention, Mums?"

"It is when you don't fit inside

their underfunded boxes because your eyes are too bright. So they try to buy another box for you, but they don't realize that your eyes are gonna shine outta any box they put you in, girl."

It was always that way. The great big world versus Mums and me. Nobody knew how special she was, 'cept for me and the sun. That's cause we knew what it felt like to wake up to her smiles.

Then she was gone.

They told me she was gone forever. That I should just get used to waking up to broken miniblinds instead of Mums' smiles. But I knew they were lying. I knew that somehow, we had still won. All I had to do was look out the window and say good morning to the bright, sleepy sun. ♦

Sweet Sorrow

by Yaasmeen Piper, Harrisburg, PA

Ten years. Ten years I've been kept away from this place. Ten years I've been dreaming about this moment. Now it's happening. My heart is beating so loud I'm sure Eli can hear it.

The metal door opens. I see his eyes first. They're clear, lucid gray, just like Eli's. His smile stretches across his face when he sees us but falls a bit when Eli doesn't greet him, preferring to stare at the concrete floor.

He slides into the bench across from us and immediately grabs my sweaty hand. I can't believe it. I'm sitting face to face with my father. A tear slowly makes its way down his cheek in the dim prison light. I hold his hand, tears threatening my eyes.

"Hi," I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Hi." His voice is groggy and deep. "You look just like her."

My mother. My grandmother has shown me pictures of her and my father together. She was beautiful and

flawless, nothing like me.

My dad leans back. "How've you been?"

"Good," I say, a quick answer, though I've been anything but.

He leans forward as if he has a secret to tell.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" His face is stern, but humor dances in his eyes.

I shake my head.

"Good." A smile. "Do you still make those vanilla cupcakes?"

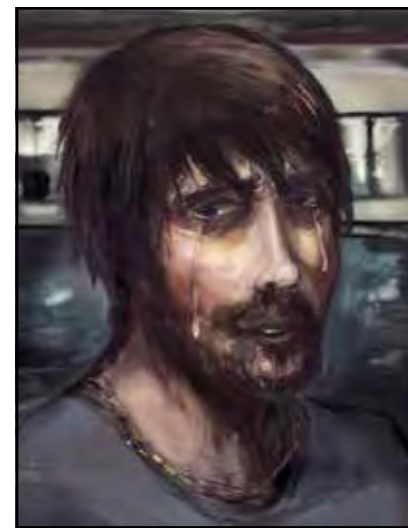
Every Sunday, Mom and I would bake her world-famous cupcakes with the secret ingredient she shared only with me. Eli and Dad would sing along to the Beatles while we baked. I smile at the memory. "Of course."

He looks at Eli. "How are you?"

"Fine, I guess." Eli shrugs, glancing at Dad, then back at the ground.

They chat, emotionless, Eli answering yes or no or shrugging. Maybe two minutes pass before he stands and mumbles, "I have to pee," and exits the room.

"Do you still make those cupcakes?"



Art by Misa Steinmetz, Bothell, WA

sorry. I'm so sorry."

"We have to help him." I race back to the van, Eli right behind me. I press on the gas.

It isn't hard to discover where the governor works. I assume that if there is one person who can help us, it's him. I end up at a large white building. Men in suits mingle around the steep marble steps. I put the van into park and run toward the steps, looking for someone, anyone, who can save my dad.

"Charlie!" Eli says, both a shout and a plea. Before I even look at him I can tell he's crying. I hadn't thought about what would happen to him when he confessed.

"Please don't tell," he begs as he steps from the van. "I-I can't lose you. Please. Aunt Lucille and Uncle Greg planned this. They're trying to break us up."

"But it's the right thing to do."

"Please, Charlie. I-I don't know what they're going to do to me. Please."

Tears are streaming down his face. I can't imagine a world without my brother, but I grew up in a world without

my father. All I want is normal. Can he give me normal?

I look at the building where the governor works – the man who holds my father's fate. Then I see Eli. Although he's older than me, he needs me more than anything in the world.

The night sky has appeared. Eli sleeps, scrunched up in the passenger seat. He looks so innocent, so relaxed. The cool night air blows through the open window, keeping me awake. I grab Eli's hand. Nothing could bring us closer than something that's tearing us apart.

I turn on the radio and the Beatles' "She Loves You" drifts in the air. I nudge Eli awake.

"Hey. Wanna make some cupcakes?" ♦

"I have a problem." I lean closer to Dad. "Aunt Lucille wants to put Eli in a psychiatric hospital, but he won't do well there. He needs to stay with me."

Dad squeezes his eyes shut for a second. "Maybe Lucille is right."

My heart feels like it's being ripped out. "How can you say that?"

He shakes his head. "It's not up to me, Charlie. What can I say? Look where I am."

He's right. There is nothing he could say to Lucille.

"All right, people," a police officer barks, "wrap it up."

Dad glances at the door. Eli is still gone.

"He'll be fine," he says. Doubt has crept into his voice.

"I hope so." I fidget. "Maybe I can come up again this summer." I wince, remembering I can't. My dad will be dead by then.

"Tell Eli I said good-bye." And then, just like that, he's gone.

"What's up with you?" I ask Eli back in the van.

He flicks his cigarette ash out the window, dismissing the conversation with a wave of his hand, but I'm just getting started.

"I know what Dad did was wrong. But he's still our father."

His face beams red and tears begin to surface. He starts banging his fists against his head, cigarette ash falling all over his clothes.

"Eli . . ."

"Pull over."

I pull off the highway. As soon as the car stops, Eli slips out of his white Vans and takes off into the grassy field. I follow, shoving the keys into my pocket, sliding out of my flip-flops.

We run. The grass scratches my ankles and the wind slaps my pale skin. I head toward the fuchsia sun until Eli suddenly crashes to the ground.

I lie with him, our heads back to back. He smells of cigarette smoke. We stay silent for awhile until I hear snuffles.

"Eli?"

"I did it." The snuffles turn into sobs. "I didn't know the guy. He had his hands all over her. I thought he was hurting her. I grabbed the gun, but she got in the way. I thought he was going to hurt me, so . . ."

His words drift into a distant hum. Eli did it. He killed our mother and her lover. My father is about to be executed for something he didn't do.

Eli wraps his arms around me, his head against my shoulder. His sobs dampen my sweater. "I'm sorry. I'm

I run, looking for someone, anyone, who can save my dad

In Fiction

by Tori Corpening, Marion, NC

In fiction I can ride a dragon with blue scales and a horned tail, its fingernails made of silver that is the rarest of the land.

The dragon does not breathe fire but throws up pixie glitter instead. I have a special riding bag with magic spells and little creatures of impossible feat.

In reality I ride in my mom's white Ford. Yes, I have my license, but I fear driving because I could get hurt in a crash. That may be a small possibility, but still I live in fear.

One day that could happen to me. The car is not special. It goes from point A to point B.

In fiction I live in a 19th-century brownstone with one thousand bookcases, ten little cats, five little dogs, and a large bed just for me.

I have a Smart Car because I care for the environment and they are so cute in the street.

My wardrobe consists of scarves, wedged boots, turtleneck sweaters, and skirts of all kinds.

In reality I live in an apartment with my family and share a bed with my little sister, who is scared to sleep alone.

I have only one bookcase, which will be out of room soon, and I have nowhere to put another one.

We don't have pets because they cost too much money and leave hair everywhere.

Nor do I have a car, because I don't have a job. My closet is full, but it only has sweatshirts, jeans, socks, music T-shirts, and sneakers.

In fiction I fight for my land. I can battle any wizard who comes my way.

I can shoot spells from a magic wand. I have the highest agility of my kind. In reality I fight to hold my tongue. I battle with homework that is due tomorrow.

I can make a smartass comment like a very short comedian. I have the shortest attention span that I have known.

In fiction I am a dragonslayer, an aspiring novelist, and a sorceress with amazing power.

In reality I am an older sister with a loving family, a teenager needing a part-time job, and a student trying to get by day by day.

Both worlds collide when I have my laptop out during class and write whatever I like.

They meet in my daydreams after taking a test.

They mash together when I read. I could not live without fiction – But I could go a few weeks from my reality. ♦

A Teenager's Guide to Paralysis

by Evelyn Gilbert, Brookline, MA

fiction

Sit across the table from him. Notice how he has set a place for her. Ignore it. Watch him eat. You will see the slack noodle dangling lifelessly from his fork. Make him eat. Exaggerate your bites. Slurp as loudly as possible and do not forget to chug your milk. Your actions will draw his attention away from the empty seat at the head of the table. He will mimic you, trying to act normal.

Remember he is your dad. He may not be acting like it, but he is the one and only dad you have ever had and will ever get. Tell him that you want to see her. That he should see her. Notice the deep lines permanently engraved in his boyish face. Your dad will clench his hands into fists. Brace yourself.

He will tell you that as much as he wishes he could go, neither of you can. Notice how he neglects to mention the black ice outside. Do not ask him to drive you. If you do, he will lose it and lecture you on how cars are not, never have been, and never will be safe. Tell him you are going for a walk. He will give a weak smile and say okay. Leave. You must see her, and he is definitely not going to take you.

Be sure to dress appropriately. Put on your winter coat, hat, scarf, and gloves. Do not forget your traction boots. Call to let them know you are coming.

Step outside. Hear the cold wind whistling through the empty streets. Feel the snow crunching under your boots. Your foot will slide on some ice. Remember, it's just ice. Trudge to the corner where the bus stops. Watch as the bus slowly rolls toward you, as the wheels crush anything in their path. They are in complete control. Take comfort in that.

The doors will snap open, waiting for you to enter. Your heart might skip a beat. Remember that buses are safe – one of the safest forms of transportation. Get on quickly, because a small line will have gathered behind you and the driver will beckon for you to move. Step into the bus.

Look up at the enormous brick building that looms over you. Watch as a snow flurry dances at the edge of the roof, sprinkling on you. Realize that you cannot feel the snow. Your face will be red and numb with cold. You will have been standing there for seven minutes. Enter through the revolving door and go up to the desk. Do not stroll up; walk like you have a purpose. You do have a purpose.

Do everything the nurse tells you. Follow her down the hallway, keeping up with her brisk pace. She will brief you on your mom's condition, telling you what to expect. Nod solemnly, showing that you understand. Fold your hands behind your back to keep the shaking from showing. She will ask if you came with anyone today. Simply answer: no, it's just me. Take a deep breath and compose yourself, hiding your emotions.

Place one foot in front of the other along the spotless tile floor. Raise your eyes to your mom on the bed. You will notice tubes hooked up to her and the useless way her legs lie there. Rush to her side, being sure not to step on or trip over any of the machines surrounding her.

The reality of the situation will hit you and all your emotions will flood through your body. Keep yourself in check. Think: she's alive and everything is going to be okay. Push the thought that your whole life will be affected by this to the back of your mind. Forget that your dad is wallowing in sorrow at home. She will smile at you, but not with the glow you're used to seeing.

Perch on the edge of the bed and hug and kiss her. Do not cry. If you cry, she will cry. She will fold you into her arms, whispering not to worry. Wait to say anything until you are positive that your voice will not betray your feelings. She will ask you how your day went. Answer: everything's fine, Mom.

Describe the delicious ramen noodles that you and Dad had for lunch. Be enthusiastic. See the barely touched tray of hospital food at her bedside. Try to remind her how good the food is at home, but do not make her feel like she's missing out; it is not her fault that she is here.

Tell her that you got an A on the essay she helped you with, whether or not it's true. She needs good news. She will whisper how proud she is of you. Avoid glancing at her useless legs. She will ask: what are you doing in physics? Mumble something about energy and work. Say last night's homework was hard but you were the only one to get problem 3b correct. If you mention your lab on car explosions it will be too soon. Way too soon. She will try to lift the mood by telling you one of her knock-knock jokes. Laugh, but not overenthusiastically. Don't force it.

She will ask how you are feeling. Get up and wander around the room, paying close attention to all the medical equipment, mumbling something about how it reminds you of the technology exhibit at the science museum. You mustn't tell her how you feel. You won't even know what to feel.

As the silence begins to lengthen, you won't be able to keep it in anymore and you will whisper: how about you? She will immediately begin chattering about how nice everyone is and how she's learning to use a wheelchair. Notice how she makes everything seem positive, that she hasn't mentioned Dad's absence at all. She will ramble on, talking about how clean it is here and the free room service. Let her speak; she will need to get it out of her system.

Finally she will stop. A sad silence will settle over the room. Her eyes will become glassy, shining like headlights. Realize that she is reminiscing about the accident. You will be able to see the wheels turning in her head. You must snap her out of it. Remark about something, anything. Your mouth will betray you as questions begin flowing out.

She will turn her head toward you. See the IV lodged in her arm and the bland blue hospital gown that hangs on her small frame. She will look you directly in the eye, calculating whether you can handle the answers. Set your jaw in a determined line and wait, taking comfort in the steady rhythm of the heart monitor. The next time she opens her mouth, the truth of the past few days will come pouring out of her like a waterfall that's been blocked for far too long. You may cry now.

Talk. Talk about how she'll soon be up and like her usual self. Say: I've always wanted an elevator in our house! Keep a smile plastered on your face, trying to lighten the mood. It will not work.

The inevitable question will finally surface. She will ask where Dad is. Realize the nonchalant façade she has put up about Dad's truancy. See how a little smile is painted on her face but that her eyes are full of anguish. The heart monitor will catch your attention because it is beeping faster now in anticipation of what you will say. See how in her eagerness she has managed to push herself up to a sitting position with her arms. Fierce hope and love will burn in her

eyes. Open your mouth and . . .

The small sob that escapes your mom will startle you. Turn around. Look at the dark shadow that has appeared in the doorway. You'll be staring into the eyes of your dad.

Notice how the tips of his ears are bright pink.

How he is gasping in large gulps of air. That his gloves are mismatched and he isn't wearing the red scarf that he always wears. How his outfit has been thrown together as if in a rush. Realize that he ran there.

Watch as he gazes at Mom and she at him. How Mom's shoulders are now shaking with sobs. See that tears are brimming in his eyes like a river that has been blocked up by a century-old dam and the dam is close to breaking. How he manages to get across the room to Mom in one fluid motion. Notice that you can barely see Mom anymore because she is enveloped in his arms. Their eyes are squeezed shut, but tears are running freely down their faces. ♦

You won't even know what to feel

Your dad will clench his hands into fists. Brace yourself.

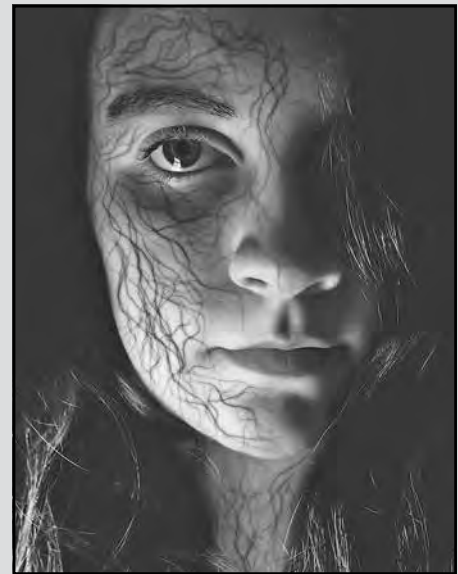


Photo by Kailey Harris, Portland, ME

Machinery

Our bodies are machines that we pump oil (black and slick and shiny) through. Oil makes us run but dampens our feathers to keep us from flying. Our bodies are machines with iron (hard and thick and shiny) lungs.

Iron makes us strong but only for a while before we rust.

Our bodies are machines controlled by zeros and ones (01100011 01101111 01101110 01110100 01110010 01101111 01101100 01101100 0110011 01100100) sent through wires but wires can be cut.

Where does the message go then?

by Amanda VanNierop, Wentzville, MO



Photo by Veronica Liow, San Ramon, CA

The Fall of Rome

Peer through the binoculars, observe
the steady
gray rain and the wrought iron bench,
the stone
wall that has borne witness to a
thousand days
(maybe more)
and will continue to stand upon
the grass that has grown and
withered away
several times over since that distant evening
(*vesper, vesperis*)
when she looked in through the blown glass
window
and saw the tiny hidden kingdom of
chocolate hugs and sunrise eyes.

Then a pebble was carried on the wind
and struck
the window, not so hard that the pane
shattered but
enough to dislodge a chip of molten sand
whose place was taken by a silvery
spiderweb
like the ones that used to brush against
her face,
ghostly tears on her walks through
the woods
(*silva, silvae*).
That spider has long since died, cooked
alive by
the rising sun peeking through hazy
golden lashes.

The secret kingdom evaporated, misty
through the
minuscule cracks that became gaping
chasms the closer
you got to them. The scribbled words
and the eye pencil
and squishy red fish, all rising out of
their transparent
prison to land on the dry crunchy grass,
dust of forever
coating stark curlicues and stone walks
who stand,
keeping vigil now and into the night
(*nox, noctis*)
and ever after.

by Caroline Kubzansky,
Washington, DC

Maybe

There should be a switch
or a lever
welded to my ribcage.
One that I could pull
in times of distress
or when I'm feeling particularly lost
Because
as I watch the subtle morning dew
slide across a single blade of grass
like the microscopic snapshot
of a heavy ocean wave,
or how my infantile neighbor
scoops earthworms
from the soggy dirt,
preluding archaeological ventures
below a misty mountaintop metropolis,
I fear
there is little to write about.

by Tessa Constantine,
Arlington Heights, IL

simple

The secrets of the universe are speaking
louder than ever:
are you listening?
Closer, closer than ever before
catch them in the realm of unimaginable
things
tickling, torching
like anticipating wrinkles
I can see them
old, touched, how you've been touched
so harshly
The story being told within every second
a spinning wheel that does not stop
I was staring at an older couple
talking to each other at a table
No one lives forever
but for some reason we all believe
we weren't put on this earth just to die
and then, just like that,
it all makes sense

by Sarah Wedge,
Cinnaminson, NJ

dehydrated

my mom told me i needed water
said i looked pale, like i would crumble
under one touch. she thought
water
was what i needed.
but it cannot fix two-month-old
burn marks where you stroked my
skin with your midnight wildfire
and thought i liked how it felt.
water cannot fix how i felt
after i realized
i could've said no.
would've said no,
if i hadn't been so torn apart
so dehydrated of love,
thinking you would fill me up again
when in reality the glass
has never been more
vacant.

by Claire Braverman,
Davie, FL

Harlem Waltz

I came across her at a ripe hour,
catching the breeze, daring fate,
waltzing to a beat of her own,
all this in a drunken stupor, the beat
playing on and on in her head.
Spectacles of horror, one night, every night.

Only fools mistake the time for a quiet time,
fools who fail to see how bright it can be,
the might of it all,
the confidence of it.

Night dogs walked between parked cars,
scratching boulevards like old records
their mamas used to play on downtime.
Teeth sharp, backs arched, sloping those
streets without a care in the world.
No straight line for them;
every movement was a sharp blow to
the concrete.

Back-alley, dilly-dallying old cats launched
shadows over concrete,
concrete shivering under the weight of
voluptuous shadows.

They grew up too fast; their mamas taught
them how to launch a shadow,
and the mamas before them,
and the mamas before them.

The creatures met beneath the red light,
cats brushing soft, tender, cheap perfumes
onto the sharp-toothed gargoyle-like
animals,
and the dance began.

I remember a sharp A minor, eerily off-tune.
The street rippled like a backbone.
Trombones leapt from sewage pipes,
pianos from fire hydrants,
African bongos from the depths of a
basement,
French horns from out of phone lines.
A cacophony of sounds formed from
the drop of a note.

Then there was a howl of a thing clearly
and undeniably cold.
Perhaps it was a dog, or a cat, or a rodent
who wanted to really kick things off.

The dogs and cats joined bodies,
their paws scratching old pavement,
their shadows freezing new concrete,
one massive conglomeration, moving
in sync.
Hearts were torn and beat on cold slabs,
spurting out melodies and ditties,
lights torn from sockets,
ambulances screaming final notes as
they sped through the hills of the town.

See, I thought it was my time, they thought
it was theirs.

But the night doesn't owe itself to any
selfish crook behind a triple-plated
window
or to one sorry sucker behind a shard
of glass.

I become paralyzed and my limbs scream
for some release while they give it up
for some thrill.

No one wins; we just watch.

by Hillel Rosenshine,
New York, NY

Milk

You used to rip off the tags of my clothes,
Said it looked "tacky" when they showed.
I always found it funny,
'Cause you ripped off anyone you could.

You got ready for the day by
Stitching lies
To your collar and strapping on those
shoes of
False glory,
Slipped in your jacket of a corrupted story,
And before you left, I made you unravel
the truth in yards of
Expensive sweater-strings.
Did it work?
No, it never did a thing,
And you still waved off people like those
flies buzzing around your mind who
were hungry for the lies of a man who
Couldn't keep his pride.

You never bought milk by the gallon
'cause you said it was better to buy
people's trust by the pint,
And every once in a while I'll look up
into the sky and wonder if God offered
you His love and trust in pints
Or gallons.
Well, it wouldn't matter.
I gave you enough love for you to keep
your balance,
And there was never a better challenge
than making sure you
Stood tall.

by Hannah Butcher, Lake Worth, FL

May/Sixteen

Reach for those stars,
grab them by their
hair.
We need something
to hold us
down to earth.

by Sabrina Koss, New City, NY

Higher place

Cracks in and on the concrete
making it seem less and less complete.
I'm a backseat driver
in my own car
I forgot to throw away two and a half
weeks ago
yet an ornate, difficult magnet to misfortune
The latter times reek of crimes
from that torn wrapper
Lucid, unintelligible,
and unmentionable to anyone
Keyboard with all the keys switched
I still function but all is just
Guesswork and inferred motions
I'm a –
of a higher status.
I'm a –
and the notions made tend to not make sense
But with the questions come answers
from others
and I can stop mindlessly hoping i'm
speaking in right mind.
Whatsoever.

by Emily Jones, Frisco, TX

Blank Functions

Different eyes see different lines
in Smart Board marker squiggles and swirls.
I tamely disappear in a logical world.
The x's and y's of graphs derived
seek answers locked in quiet minds.

Perhaps I lost my treasure map,
for sharp corners and birds fly over
the horizon.

I must have also forgotten my eyes in
the previous lesson, the one about
limits.

by Eleni Aneziris, E. Setauket, NY



Photo by Katie Ehrlich, Glendale, CA

Solo Interval

In the silver trumpet
mute
an iridescent reflection
of the galaxy
gleams.

The body
of the horn
is like sun
shining through stained
glass.

The player
sweats
hues of blues and reds
as he blows
the blues.

Silence
Is the only
sound
that follows
the soft
buzzes
of the solo interval

Like the Friday nights
in the bass-filled bars,
eyes barely open,
watching the patrons
cut the rug;
I feel the bass
pluck,
the snares
sizzle.

I haven't a care in the world,
watching the solo interval.

by Karissa Red Bear, Mt. Horeb, WI

Seeing right through.

I am not a poet
I am a jigsaw
Breaking laws of rhyme and diction
I am a crafter of mixed metals and
Mixed metaphors
Your high school English teacher would
hate me
And boys would never date me
So I built myself a wall of books
Threw together line and hook
I'll slip this note under my Sylvia Plath pile
And hope that you will be the one to
deshelf me
But as I recall
You never were a huge fan of fishing.

by Harshita Kushwaha,
Delhi, India

Shared Space with a Desired Lover

you reach for me, your hand
sliding across the cold veined bus seat
leaving a sluggish trail of warmth.
that seat is approximately fifty inches
long. that's enough room for me, you
and friendship on any given day.
but sometimes when we're alone,
you squeeze friendship out,
entirely submerging it in elongated eye
contact and sarcasm, and press
your slender, khaki-clad thigh
against my black tight-veiled thigh
(usually the left one, the one with the
birthmark I'm self-conscious about, until
you intentionally unintentionally graze it
with the backside of your hand.)

half of me is iced, pressed against the
chilled metal wall, and then there is
the side of me that's touching you, the
surface of the sun wedged between
our shoulders,
space and time in the open air between
the curve
of my body and your one-eighty torso.
meteorites
falling from our mouths and crashing
into each other,
everything is loud! we are loud! I am
not loud alone
when I'm with you, we are loud together
and you
swear with all your might at me for
annoying you
and you then you might send yourself
into a silent laugh, the quick blip of a
shooting star,
before we are silent again.
and then Nabokov or Fitzgerald lulls me
to sleep on
your shoulder. and you reach over and mark
my page for me, trying to keep your
shoulder stiff,
because I do not annoy you. and it's
only when
I'm sleeping that you'll admit
I'm your intergalactic dream girl.

by Reese Fischer, Charleston, SC

Nomenclature

Lia Mia No Good Catastrophe,
with scarred-up skin spilling over your jeans
how did you think you could please
his brilliant anatomy?

His scalpel bones will scoff at you;
the knees of
Hades Hell Bent Vitality
bend and break at your helpless pleas;
marble statues cannot save you
if you cannot unfreeze.

You'll always be more than him,
Ana Marie Sweet Tea:
he's our,
Alaska to your Alabama sweet shade tree,
he's
Bonaparte Black Coffee, Please,
with his eyes fixed forward
as you're on your knees.

Don't fall for him, please,
you aren't looking to marry your disease;
oh, how his bones feel, though, against
my cheek,
how his blood runs cold,
and his darkness runs deep.

by Megan Williams, Pittsburgh, PA

Sun Sijo

The sun falls as I have felt:
brightly sanguine, not seeming set.
Field by fire, no more than myself:
dangerous red, burnt cigarette.
Slowed by dark, but light mind and eyes:
stretched as stars, bursting sunrise.

by Tom Maslan, Hartland, WI

Stolen Bibles

sometimes I wonder if all the good parts
of me are gone

last year I started putting pictures up on
my wall to cover up the spot from where
I lost my temper
and I started wearing more turtlenecks
because the boy in my art class said
he liked them
and I wore more blue velvet because it
reminded me of the movie
and the glasses were fake, and they
pinched my nose a little, but sometimes I
felt like I need something to hide behind
because all this time I spent trying to
make up for in personality
what I lacked in beauty
seemed pretty wasted when I stayed
around other people for too long

so I started to steal Bibles
and I can't remember why
I think I just liked the size and the weight
of them all in my hands

and I stayed out with strangers
because I knew they didn't owe me anything
and my friends made me feel lonely
but I needed to know if I still had a
good heart –

I know I had one at some point.

by Maya Caulfield, Boulder, CO

Bone Echoes

If we stand here long enough
We'll see the past
Old bones of the echoes
That couldn't last
I am a sea under your devoted mast
A line catching fish which couldn't cast

by Justyna Maria Kedziera,
Stalowa Wola, Poland

Night

Night is like a mother who never lets go.
I do not know why this is or why this odd
thought has slipped into my mind, but it is
there, it has come. I once rode through the
night in a broken-down car with a dress so
pink and so big that my little cousin was
smothered by the skirt. this occurred only
after dancing with various strangers. another
time I rode past the starry sky in a bus, a
kitten tucked into my coat and bags under
my eyes. I thought, this is what it must feel
like to be an adult. I step further into the
abyss and feel my stomach sink lower and
lower into its pit. I willingly slithered my
way to the place I am today. I crawled with
my belly sliding on cold ground, with my
chin still raised high, neck craning to the
sky, to the night. pitch darkness decorated in
dots of life. how my love never seems to die
for the night. with danger and shiver, it is an
oppressive love, an abusive love. bruised
and battered, I gaze up, my feet only
occasionally rising a few inches off the
solitude of the ground. I wonder when I'll
ever see the break of dawn.

by Zulma Martinez,
Santa Rosa, CA

Heavens

my grandmother's hands
are rough around the fingers
stained purple
because of the eggplants she likes to cook,
mama says
but I think it's because of the flowers
violets she touches
lilacs she picks
jasmines she lays on the dining room table
or used to
before she left home
before she left the sea
before she left drawers full of photo albums
behind
to come live with me
and now I am the flower
the lines on her face
soften when she sees
an opportunity to rearrange my ruffled petals
gingerly making everything right
her stained hands on my shoulders
her delicate eyes closed in prayer
so that when I go to sleep I am smiling
and when i close my eyes
I see purple

by Khulood Fahim,
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Coffee Break

you invited me in
for some coffee
last night
and i happened to see
the glint in your eyes.

i hope you didn't kill me
but i'm not quite sure why
the breeze was silent
and the air was still.

it's money you seek
i'm not up for that
so find someone else
to watch
to listen
to hold
to kill.

by Daphne Moraga,
Jackson Heights, NY

The Red Roses

A deep unknown color.
With spines for each day of the lost.
A single tear slides down my cheek.
The days tick past, each growing longer
than the rest.
A single splash of color that can be
interpreted a million ways.

The red roses bloom with an
unnatural light.
Wind blows and sweet scents swirl
and dance.
Night comes with a gentle nudge.
Moons shine brightly in the paper sky
far away.
Not looking back.

The universe's dark eyes stare back.
Cold and hard.
Never backing down.
It's funny how things look different
when you look closely.
If you took apart everything it would be red.
Red is everything.

by Chyna McClendon,
Pittsburgh, PA

My Eternal Universe

And I could have held your fingertips,
like stars,
in my palm for hours.
And I could have stood mesmerized
for years
by your pupils dilating,
like black holes,
sucking in my soul.
And I could have watched your smile,
as bright and explosive as a supernova,
for a millennium.
And I could have waited forever,
for your heart
like the moon,
filling me with light
and then leaving me in the dark.

by Bianca D'Antonio,
Natick, MA

Petrichor

this is how i call my lost love poems:
the scent of dust after rain
you cradle thunder in your collarbone
and it crashes in your voice, your hands
trembling with bones shaped like lightning,
your lips don't tremble, already drowned
by the storm that has moved to your fingers.
the skin over my hips has cracked open
for you: an earth sharp and empty,
violently blooming drought.
when your hands pull my hips with a tremor,
i wonder if the storm begs
for forgiveness, feverish and unspoken.

i always conjure you as water,
the color of your arteries quenching
and dissolving,
as if you were named for the river in me
eroding my ribs to cello strings reverberating
under your trembling fingers.
together we are vibrato:
deep notes shaking in our throats
with a sting like salt water,
waves of water, waves of sound.
we play each other pizzicato,
and when our strings snap back
we spit up chords like broken prayers
we hoped we'd never need to say.
the last time i confessed
(i am always thinking
about negative space and unmeasured
distance)

i was assigned three hail marys;
i found each one searching
for the bright flashes in your bones
till you sighed – thunder, the echoes
of my penance. you trail kisses
on my neck like rosary beads,
and i know my guilt won't wash away.

i am all burning
sand, all dust storm, the uprooted
pieces of me rolling into your rain.
collisions like these aren't meant to last.
even though we are painting each other
in whisper of love and stay,
our hands are not holding one another;
we are anchoring ourselves.
when we know forgiveness cannot be coaxed
out of bodies or tongues, our storms
retreat. inhale our closest attempt at
reconciliation for silence,
exhale without the words
we meant to say and needed to hear.
when i leave, my mouth is full of dust.

by Kelsey Schmitt, Dallas, TX



Photo by Gabrielle Amar, New York, NY

Blank Canvas

please
stand on me
squish my body between your toes
like grapes made into wine
sliding warmly down the
throat

drink me
out of a special cup
that you made with your bare hands

mold me
like cold clay
that you said felt like
skin

push your fingers into my face, form a
mouth
that will only speak
to you
ears
that will only ever hear
your voice
eyes
that will follow you
and only you
until I am
dust

by Zoe Webb, Felton, CA

The Curtains

The crystal curtains around your heart
No one can sneak
Have you pondered about letting
someone in?
Nothing more than a feeling detergent
Bleaching happiness and color
Roll the curtains up once in a while
to let the sun shine through

by Nicole Zlatokrasov, Brooklyn, NY

Under the Waterfall

I'd never forget how I dropped
From her unprepared arms;
Like the rock from the mountaintop,
I stumbled down, she never cared.
The pearls in my eyes, I kept,
Under the waterfall, I wept.

Besieged was I – I realized,
By her, by this love she ignored.
Like the rock, I was paralyzed,
But the pouring water restored,
And awakened the pearls that slept,
Under the waterfall, I wept.

My head was bowed, my body bent,
As I received the mountain's tears.
Pearls of mine followed the current;
I freed all that I hid for years;
And this heart on which she stepped,
Under the waterfall, it wept.

The water braced my pearls' crystal,
And dried the flood that soaked my eyes.
My love ought to be eternal,
But the water did wash my cries.
If only I stood when you left,
Maybe I'd laughed, I hadn't wept.

by John Michael Londres,
Iloilo, Philippines

Passion

Today I was faced with a question
An unforgiving sting to the face
As I read that sign on the subway
"What is your passion?"
Well, I missed my stop in the east
And that job interview along with it.
I caught myself sitting on that seat
For another 30 minutes.

Because I racked my brain for an
Answer and I just couldn't find one
other than him.
See, a couple months back
You could've caught me preaching
a sermon
Of his words on a Sunday morning
Or interpreting the ideologies in
The lines of his hands
I could play the melody of his sighs
Like the strings of a violin
And our love was my cross-country match
It took work, but we always seemed to reach
the finish line stronger

Some people breathe prose
Or praise literary works
Like the heavens
But he was my passionate moments
I never believed in anything but him
We were fire
Gasoline and a match
An imminent disaster
But isn't burning skin
Afire with another's touch
Better than the one shriveling
without it?
Didn't they always say there was
beauty in the destruction?

He was my sun
My oxygen
My turning world
A poet's words
An artist's canvas
A scientist's long-sought equation
There for all of my phases
My scatterbrained thoughts

So no, I've never stuck to one thing
I've changed jobs like I do outfits
I've never had a passion
That has consumed me
That I've sacrificed to
But boy, did I have you.

by Paola de Varona,
Miami, FL

mortal tendencies

give this old man a childhood
we say there is no beauty in
deteriorating flesh
no character in scars
nothing fascinating about ghostly eyes
that watched everything dissipate
he does not want to die
say it now, say it does not end
break what is left of his failing body
when you lie like you have a choice and say
not tonight, there is no time

by Chinasa Okezie,
Hayward, CA

CrunchFreeze

The heart
is a metronome,
slowly breaking under stress,
its tempo decreasing
in each instance
you find
a shorter pedestal
to stand on
in the corner of your mind.
Every time
my heart skips a beat,
I feel a stone
skip across
the ocean of despair
in my stomach,
sending ripples
and waves
across the surface.
This relates to
how tongues
tie my attention up
like a cherry stem
in rehearsed,
precise movements.
As affection
melts in my mouth
like ice,
caffeine and anthrax
slip their way
into my veins,
which are so withered
and tattered
on account of
my body's systems
always working
so damn nervously.

Some days
I ponder
if the succubi
that occupy
my imagination
swim downstream
and hijack the abomination
that lies in my chest
and start banging on
the timpani of hell,
concocting a clamoring,
chaotic trainwreck
of sound,
derailing
the orderly rhythm
my heart maintains.
After each avalanche of emotion
I am left to shiver
under a thin blanket
of the left brain
and hoard oxygen
in desperate lungs.
Hades tosses me
into the River Styx
derooting the
seeds of faith
planted in the
soot of my brain,
resurrecting
my muddy flow of consciousness.
His fingers cradle
my heart
and squeeze;
I feel in my chest
the crunch,
and I freeze.

by Michael Spell, Lemont, IL

Carbon Under My Skin

Our bodies are made of carbon,
But our bodies are individually pigmented.
I never understood that.
Because when I was putting carbon pellets
into a filter bag,
It stained my fingers black,
And the only part of my body that it
matched
Was the bruising of my knuckles
From trying to put your memory into the
drywall.

by Nikki McComiskey, Uncasville, CT

Frozen in Time

I remain unaltered at
A hectic street curb.
Lacy spiderwebs climb down my torso
Toward the earth below.
Auburn curls tumble from my crown.
Static cars and jagged buildings behind me
That you can no longer see,
With an aperture as low as 1.3

by Max Goldberg, Madison, WI



Photo by Lillian Cates, Los Angeles, CA

History of a Day

Hunchback lamplight,
chairs spinning dust in the air,
eyes floating on puffy clouds,
dancing to the morning pulse.
Humming along the tracks of
swallowed stars,
dizzy among the blank walls of the world.
In the beginning, there was nothing –
or rather,
there was something,
just above the morning sun's reach.

by Chloe Barreau, Hong Kong

The Pretender

she weaves her words in tangled webs
of moonlit dances, silken beds
secrets dwell inside her head
that won't escape
until she's
dead

by Mikaela Bell, Los Osos, CA

Diagnosis: Lovesickness

When the love-goggles slip on,
The line between reason and wild abandon
All but disappears in favor of infatuation.

Lovesickness is
Empty stomachs hungry for something else,
Green-tinged vision,
Sleepless nights trying to drown out
the static city,

Is fear of seeming subpar
Listening for the "see you soon"
Rather than the goodbye,
Waiting for a secretive smile:

For skin to skin
And then heart to heart
Because exteriors are simply not enough;
They never will be.

Take caution, lover!
Because when she drags a knife
Through the heart
That beats for her
All you can do is smile and kiss her again

by Kyra Anaruk, Littleton, CO

open skies

open skies,
i am surrounded by stars,
those things which
dazzle us with their
secrets.
the velvet night bleeds true,
broken and bringing
some soft self.

by Hannah Newcomer,
Austin, TX

Backyard Portraits

The hum of planes carving
machinery into blue atmosphere,
frames chirps and rustles as
leaves scratch surface like paper –
a natural image, a backyard's portrait.

And I'm reminded of sprinklers
feeding grass.
Or else feeding children in pink
bathing suits–
stretchy spandex textures that cover
the stomach.

There's Popsicles pinched by clear plastic,
Dirt tangled in hair or smudged on taut skin.
And they smiled with cheeks plump like
peaches dangling near tree swingsets.

Before dinner, the adults would have
preserved the tantrums, the round smiles,
the grass and asphalt landscape
on Kodak films

so that on a day like today,
I can turn album pages and watch plastic
pinching an old backyard's portraits,
instead of Popsicles –
which I know by now
are probably long melted.

by Victoria Gonzalez,
Kendall Park, NJ

Woman with Button Earrings

My grandmother dreams of the ocean
and chooses to waste her time
with clementine cut flowers and crossword
puzzles,
brow thin and furrowed.

My grandmother keeps a telescope by
the glass door,
but the trees are growing into her view
of the water
and the bird feeder needs refilling –
squirrels again.

My grandmother fills up cavities with
sugar water
hummingbird food.

My grandmother laughs like the moon
and the Mississippi River. M I double S I
double S I double P I,
she taught me to spell and read:
words are genetic.

She sells seashells by the seashore
Toy boat toy boat toy boat
When we drive to the zoo I help her read
the street signs

And we always take the same path.
There's a plate with my name on it
below the dancing feet of a painted pony,
bears and otters and elephants, oh my.
Aquarium, aquarium, sandpipers sing
to the snakes.
To the eagles, now, then across the bridge,
puddle-hopping.
Around the corral on the back of a
soulful nag

We still hold hands when we cross
parking lots.

by Lily Hicks, Dover, MA

Confession

I did something evil today
today
I stole from God's garden.

she was a flower,
lilac petals,
exposed pistils
outstretching.
Mary's fingertips
touched her lips.

but I didn't kill because I thought she
was beautiful.
I killed her because she was the closest
flower to heaven.
I thought, if I pick this flower,
God will notice.

I don't care that I stole from God.
that is not the sin I will remember.

the sin I will remember
is the flower
and how easy it was to tear
her delicate body from the stem,
how dusty pollen specked
the hues of blue
and how I didn't stop to admire her beauty
while she was still alive.

by Maria Menendez, Miami, FL

Burning the Word of God

In one hand I have my passport

and in the other is God's exclaimed word
and I cannot hold both much longer.

Blue pages will give me golden peaches
and amber apples;
the other is a gamble
but if it pays off, diamond pears await.

But frankly, white fruit is an acquired taste
and my genes can't acquire something
so bitter;
my intestines reject it like vinegar.

So my happy medium is a pearlescent
pomegranate
which lucifer's little brother offers in his
manicured palm,
and I'm fenced in by eternity, christ's
sweet mistress.

But once a year, when nature's sighs climax
and peaks are white and ice drips down
saddles into valleys,
eternity creaks open and ushers out me
with my kin, and we go wandering
relishing the imperfections nonexistent
in a palace carved without mistakes,
statues for the clergy.

The seventy and the seven guard
menageries,
but my kin traverse the wild
and cry when harpy eagles fall from
babylon nests, their siblings reaching
for god.

I choose my passport, my pomegranate,
and burn the word of god.
I'd rather have his handiwork than
his rhetoric.

by Sariah Bunker,
Provo, UT

I Found My Poem

I found my poem
within emerald green circlets
There in the bitter cold,
when all was dark,
I found two lights;
in her sockets, in her skull.
In a bus, in a classroom
a specter haunts me,
I feel its gaze every day
I found my poem in pearlescent teeth,
a warmth washed over that banished the cold
a friendly smile to help me get on my way,
I will find my poem in time,
but the time isn't now.
I am left to wonder when I'll wake up
from this prison of slumber,
I will find my poem in time
but the time isn't now.
I wonder when my poem will have
its chance
to sing to the skies.
I am lost
I will find my way back in time,
but the time isn't now.

by James Lee,
Highland Village, TX

Rotting

Her skin as smooth as fresh snowfall,
with eyes that have the depth of outer space;
complete with all the constellations
and undiscovered galaxies.

A golden waterfall cascades down her spine
and rolls in waves to her waist,
Where it gracefully flows back and forth
like waves crashing on a sandy beach.
Each delicate finger of her elegant hands
knows nothing but a soft touch.
Her mind is full up with
charming ideas and dreams
about lush gardens.

But as the years go by, the soft touch
becomes rough and calloused,
her eyes turn into slits,
and the bright stars get dim
and wane to black.

Her hair dries up and fades to a soft silver
that lies delicately over the brittle bones
of her curved spine.

Her fresh skin becomes as papery
as the leaves that litter the ground
on a forbidding mid-October day.

Every day that passes she rots,
blending in with the earth that surrounds her.
The more her body goes,
the more her mind goes,
until it's dried up like a dull rag.
Her mind is floating in the stars.
Her body has no use anymore,
except for the inevitable decomposition
back into the soil where she came.

by Maisie Inskip, Shoreline, WA



Photo by Cori Schimko, Orlando, FL

Miles

I could write a poem
that no one could tell was for you.
It would be about
light pink powdered protein,
heavy lifting,
and time spent dining and dashing.
Black and white flip movies,
coffee-stained,
torn, and wrinkled.
The sorrow of the pits, the violin pits,
along with the cellos' drift.
Drift over the miles,
over the open country roads,
the ones that separate two apart.
His sweatshirt, wet with tears,
left to dry in the chill, lonely breeze.

by Payton Anderskow, Mt. Prospect, IL

Shut You Down

My love for you is as strong as the blue light
that is suppressing my melatonin
and disrupting my sleep.

I can't rest after seeing you;
my mind is up all night, and even in sleep
I have less rapid eye movement than usual.

I take nearly 10 minutes longer
to slip into unconsciousness,
and am not fully alert when you're near.

My circadian rhythm is delayed by an hour,
and I feel tired in the morning
and less sleepy before bed.

It's hard to see how bad you are for me,
but it's time to shut you down
before these short-wavelength emissions
get to me.

by Kathleen Baber,
Nashotah, WI

The Chopping Block

I would cut off my fingers,
the part that points, blames
someone other than myself,
but my hands would remain,
and they initiate the motion.

So instead I will cut off my arms
in their entirety,
but then my breast remains,
the part that desires impurity.

Rather, I shall cut off my breast,
the part that desires to sin,
yet still desires will remain.

So I'll cut off all of me from the waist up.
Though my feet remain intact,
the part that goes walking toward sin.

If I cut off one more thing,
I'll be gone, no more of me
to bring pain to others.

Except the memory of what I've done.
So I guess I can't do any chopping:
my imperfections make me whole.

by "Kari," Omaha, NE

cigarette

it's a selected poison, perhaps –
the devil lit between her fingers,
devouring the youth from her skin and
the spark from her eyes.
but it's a comfort all the same:
a warmth against another broken day
of crumbled dreams and empty nights.
the fiend at her lips is her savior, and
it's a pleasure, she thinks –
what an honor to burn,
to feel the snaking curl of
smoke as it inflates her lungs
beyond the will to fly.
let it choke her like icarus' sun,
but let his illusion of freedom
free her first.

by Shannon Maag,
Temperance, MI

What a Woman Was She

poetry
whisked around her ankles
she stumbles with elegance
and grace

i cannot believe i was once
attracted solely by her beauty
when it really was her soul
that radiated such a infectious, infatuating
taste

and a great shame
in that the men she's in love with
keep her hidden
i cannot believe that anyone would
stop her from dancing

i would let her whirl around this entire earth
before halting such a majestic woman

by Jackie Joy, W. Orange, NY

Because you wondered

you wondered
why
I spent the morning anxious
just because
someone had given you some pills
so they wouldn't be tempted
to swallow them all

why?
because I am selfish.
I am selfish
and I want you to stay here with me

even though I know
every square inch of air presses down on you
and long ago they stole pure happiness
from you

but still
I am selfish
and I couldn't handle it
if you reached into the front pocket
downed the pills
let yourself be a slave of death
then

I would never forgive myself
and I'd know
I could never breathe again

while you were gone
I stared at the pocket of your backpack
and right before I unzipped the pocket
you walked in.

I wanted to take the pills

and try not to assimilate them myself
(we both know how easy it would be, and
how nice nothing would feel)

throw them away

forget

I wanted to save you.

but more than that,
I needed to save
myself.

by "Mercedes," Los Osos, CA

Broken

They were broken children
Their scissored minds ran them
In spirals
Until they sat with crossed legs
And crossed lips
Trying to press themselves flatter
Under the paperweight of depression

They were cut-strings marionettes
Who danced
In an attempt to wring calories
From their balsa-wood bones
Which refused to give
And who pinned their painted smiles
A little tighter each morning

They were snapped-spines picture books
Who'd been warped too far by society
And had had their pages torn from the crease
So that words hung like razor blades
And spliced from each vertebra

They took them to the circus
Where they were the butt of every joke
But when the clowns speared them
with dripping eyes
And artificial mouths that stretched
over grimaces
Like dust-jackets from a different story
They stared back glassily
Because how can you be afraid
Of the broken clockwork of your reflection?

by Catherine Sleeman,
Horsham, England

Chasing Stars

if the grass could take flight, hitch up
its roots, and speak with the stars
what remarks would they exchange
how the stars yet long for to be entrapped
by earth
yet the grass stretches to be liberated from
the very same –
which it has ensnared itself in
there comes a funeral for the dreams of
both parties
but never in strangest extremity does come
a tune as sweet
as that of the first lullaby
of each

when We feel our mother's lap has failed us
and it crumbles crying into clay
We build a tower of babel
to keep ourselves away
We ignite ourselves and leap and climb to
get to higher ground
but no matter our impressive altitude
ground will be ground
when our cloud dreams dim
and eyes begin to see that in this
planetarium show
dreams masquerade as real when they are
projected onto the
void, the blank canvas We have made
for them

By the time We want to leave
our tickets have expired

by Jacob Eggert,
Harrisonburg, VA

Would Have

She washes her windows
Just to see her reflection
Stare back at her
Like she wished every person
Would have long ago.

She doesn't like to do Mad Libs anymore
Just because they aren't really fun
To try to make sense of the sentences
Unlike what odd words and odder spaces
Would have caused in worth of unruliness.

She used to have bright colors
Just in her smile and through her hair
That used to wave in the wind
Like those girls in the movies
Would have projected on the screen.

She doesn't want to make progress
Just because it hurts too much
To make herself do so
Unlike the pain of angst in her fingertips
Would have to make her jump.

She's lost and irretrievable
Just because she made herself so,
To do the things that make her leak
Reminds her of the black ballpoint pen
she could have signed with
Would have bled onto the paper.

No one will ever be able to help her
Just because she's in so deep
To retrieve her would mean unworthy
exposure – to the world
And the person she used to be
Would have disappeared.

by Paige Thibault, Charlotte, VT

Stationary

We could've been magnificent, you know.
We could've gone anywhere we wanted to
go or been anything we wanted to be. We
could've lived forever if we wanted to. But
you had other plans, I guess. And here I am
with my door off its hinges and all the glass
in my house broken. It's been a week and I
still haven't moved from where you left me.
I don't think I ever will.

by Leena Irving, Belle Mead, NJ

Life Notes

It waits patiently in the far corner
with keys of ivory and ebony.
Silence dominates the still, empty room
until slender fingers strike the first note.

It begins with a melancholy tone
of old regrets, stormy days, and lost love.
Before changing into harsh pounding chords
filled with wrongdoing, bitter lies, and hurt.

High-pitched chimes and tremolos take
the stage
expressing first days, waiting rooms,
and sweat.

A lively and heartening tune concludes
with summer nights, cloudless skies,
and new hope.

A final note hovers in the quiet –
Anticipating a new composer.

by Calli Pollock, Cedar City, UT

Process of Writing

At this moment in time I am writing and
in the process
wringing my mind like a wet washcloth
in search of complex thoughts.

Thoughts that, on their own,
could live in beautiful homes
with beautiful wives;
thoughts that went to the top universities
but dropped out
because they had something bigger in mind.

These thoughts, I think, could change
the world,
could cure all illness and hunger,
but they're lost.
They've left the beaten path of my
consciousness and now
exist only in dark alleys,
in vacant parking lots,
listening to false and tenebrific idols,
sucked into the vacuum of squandered
promise, and now,
I cannot for the life of me think of what
to write.

by Jeremy Ramanathan, Miramar, FL

Hair I'd Whisper Prayers Into

There's this girl (and isn't there always?)
and i swear on my mother's smile
that if the ancients saw her
they'd know just what to do with her
hips like Earth, hips like providence
she's the perfect size for worship

Put her under your pillow and you'll
bear twins
make her a statue and place her in
the marketplace
you'll know good fortune like never before

She's the kind of girl who glows,
and this must prove she's H O L Y
her smile is better than any afterlife

by Maia Irwin, Keaau, HI

Stars

They said i was a star.
i agree:
i died years ago too.

by Hannah Lomas,
Manchester, England



Photo by Maggie Rymsza, Muncy, PA

The Moon and Her Silver Army

I've always found comfort in the moon
She watches over the night crawlers
The misfits
The criminals
The lonely
The numb
Anyone who happens to be wandering
aimlessly through the night
Anyone who is wide awake at 3 a.m.
Anyone who is searching desperately
for something to numb the pain
The sun shines a blinding light that picks
the less fortunate apart
Illuminating their flaws for anyone to see
But the moon shines only a small glow that
envelops their scars with a silver hue
The moon watches over everyone from
time to time
She was there for me then
When no one else was
She sang me the night's lullaby
While drizzling liquid silver into my veins
Maybe that's why everything bad goes
down at night

Maybe we are all just doing her bidding
All of us her army tied together by silver
Is it wrong?
Probably
But I owe it to her
The moon gave me a home
And that's something the sun could never do

by Catherine Wagner, Easley, SC

It's Time You Knew

it is time you know that my love is like
the weather.
(both fleeting and fickle
don't try to make me predictable.)

i'm sorry i can't be more consistent.
i know you wish for consecutive sunny days
with warmth and blue skies
daffodils that bloom each and every spring

i'm sorry i throw a hailstorm at you
when you have to walk to work.
i'm sorry i'm the blizzard that cancels
your flight.
or the tornado that turns your house
upside down.

i'm sorry that my love is like a
tsunami
with tidal waves
that knock you over
my ever-changing affection blows swift
like the wind
one moment it's there
it's yours
and the next it's not.

you tried and that's admirable.
you tried to weather
the weather.
but i ruined you
like
a
mudslide
uprooting
your whole life.

by Mikaela Harmsen, New City, NY

Ode to the Flowering Branch

Don't gaze at me, little flower –
your sticky fingers taste of the
sweetest auburn, and no less –
your head hangs heavily on
demure shoulders, tiny feelers
weaving through gauzy summer
nights, sweating softly in the dark –
steady yourself, close your silken eyes,
the upset dark will chill your bones
when the moon loses her way, so stay –
sail through waves of panting heat,
laugh at the blackness that inhibits you,
no doubt –

by Sydney Shavaliar,
Byron Center, MI

wish on me

i am alone
on an old, wooden dock
with ice-crystal
stars
below me
(twinkling in an abysmal sea)
i lie with my cheek pressed
to the very
edge,
arms folded pleasantly
(waiting)
and close my eyes,
but stay
facing whatever lies beyond
this fragile bed
(hoping)
to roll off and
fall
into a dream
where i'll join my
sisters
(in their heavenly dance)
i am a solitary
beacon,
a glowing figure up here
among onyx
skies
(ripe and ready)
this white nightgown
makes my pale skin even more
ghostlike,
it's as though
(i'm already one of them)
and the freckles
dusting my nose
betray the nebulas
writhing inside
me
(imploding)
so when these ancient
lullabies
finally call my name,
do not mourn
as i fall off
this dock
(a shooting star)
because i'll be walking
amongst angels,
and like a prayer you may
wish on me
(and i will answer.)

by Callie Zimmerman, Fishers, IN

Cliché

Dear John,
Yeah, I know you love her,
but she loves him,
he loves her friend,
she loves my friend,
he loves me,
and I love you.
So how exactly
will this love hexagon end?
Well, I must murder her,
her blood running down my knife
like the tears down my face.
Oh, the teardrop glistens
like a beautiful star, such as AF-128 –
oh, AF-128, what a gem,
sparkling atrociously in the moon's
luminosity.

And yeah, I read your texts
on your iPhone (newest model)
and yeah, I saw the emoticons
and the tweet and the #instapic
Hell, I even saw the Vine.
So you're in love,
represented by a dove
sent from the man above –
known, I should've.
AND YEAH, I might flirt with other guys
AND YEAH, I might only love you
'cause you're attractive,
AND YEAH, I might check your
online profiles
every 2 minutes.
But this is love, isn't it?
Or am I just cliché?

I love you from the bottom of my heart,
the depths of the sea,
the sparkling diamonds in the beautiful
earth,
yours forever,
till death do us part,
Alyssa

P.S. I love you

by Will Simoni, Cornish, UT

A Student Breakfast

Bill-buttered toast and deadline-stuffed
mushrooms,
a dollop of stress with a harsh tint
of mustard.
An overcooked night and an
undercooked essay;
the fire alarm wails at the burning
depression.

The sweet pungent smell of sweat-fried
bacon
and the frying pan sizzling with potential
that's wasted.
The grease spots have stained on last
night's dress
but today's excuse is that "grease
compliments stress!"

You've cooked up a feast; there's too much
on your plate.
By the time it is served you are hours
too late
and the fry-up you longed for and missed
lectures to create
is a classic student breakfast: the food's
all out of date!

by Fiona Bell, Bath, England



Art by Lacey Vanderpool, Monte Vista, CO

The Pot

Spin the wheel
and varnish a pot
with a crooked lid, a chip in the interior.
Fill it with past memories, past faces,
aged places.
Coat the pot in its funeral colors –
gray-scale – gloss it like a waning moon,
a moon who witnessed the death of a star,
a moon whose surface was coated with
emblems of conquest,
footprints,
flagstuffs,
debris.
Watch from behind your helmet as it
crash lands like a comet into the oven,
watch as the glaze that coated its grimy
surface, halfheartedly giving it charm,
melts away
Nothing left but the demolding clay that
cleanly packaged the wisps of thought,
that tried to let the rain douse its interior,
overflowing the dirty water
letting it
run down
the sides
of the pot in streams,
drying by the morning,
sitting on the sidewalk, isolated,
simply existing as other forms of life glance
at its cracks with disregard.
Like an imploding Sun, the pot ERUPTS,
the memories coat the walls of the oven,
they burn and fizzle out, leaving the air
strung with the scent of smoke and iron.
The odor peels the paint of the other pots,
their cracks begin to show,
yet they roll in shades of indigo, never
thinking
to pour their contents and lessen the weight
that comes with being a mold of clay.
They hope that the collecting water will
merge their voids,
smooth their creases,
and dry in a more solidified form,
come morning.
As the Sun arises in a heat wave
as the moon shies away,
back to its hiding place.
As another pot orbits the moon, hoping
to catch gravity,
yet plummeting
and burning
in the atmosphere.

by Aaron Blackburne,
Hendersonville, NC

Tropicana

Your name is the capillary line
of sugar on the rim sweating
blue fizz, the truth is
orange soda is sweet like your name
splashes water onto my face
like a cold "good morning."

It shrieks neon
strawberry essence,
like purple pressed
on nectar necks
through the peach fuzzy spectrum
of ballroom dancing to techno music.

AFTER:

Your name is a text over a gas station
sandwich:
"It's not going to work out"

by Gabriela Mancuso, Rivervale, NJ

More Than Matter

My body
is not a single noun
with a five-line definition
on page 128
in Webster's Dictionary.

I am not a reflection
in the mirror.
I am a flawed portrait,
a mysterious Mona Lisa
with sliced-up lips
and hair turning into ivory ash.

My skin is not stretched
over frail bones
that are ready to break
like an abandoned jungle gym in
blowing wind.
I am a physical map
of soft dips
leading into valleys
with green-brown grass.

My body is not a shell
and my milky white ribs
do not form a cage with a steel lock
but rather a safe house
for my heart to escape.

I am not a sack of matter
divided and dissected
into hair, skin, eyes, organs, cells,
atoms, subatomic particles.
I am not a broken cardboard box of
mismatched puzzle pieces
superglued together
pretending to create
a beautiful picture.
And my veins are waterfalls
raining over a sea
of safety vests and life boats
helping my blood travel to my heart.

My body is not just thin skin
stretched over frail bones.
I'm not a glaring reflection
or a weak sack of matter .
I am not a physical structure
or a shell.
I am not four letters
and two syllables.
I am not a simple noun.
I will never be a simple noun.

by Emily Dehr, Louisville, KY

The End of the Pier

Do you know what lies at the end of
the pier?
There is some speculation that there is a
carnival on 165th Street
modeled after a California-style boardwalk
at the end of the pier.
Some time ago a movie was shot in this
location in which a car crashes through the
crowded chaos of a happy day in the falling
action. Thus, some believe that there
is a car submerged under the docks at the
end of the pier.
The fascinating fact in all of this is what
followed in an interview with the stuntman
who drove the car used in the movie.
“An ’06 Honda Accord. Nothing
fancy, actually,
something you’d expect your angry
middle-school teacher to drive.
Handles like an
upright kitchen power-mixer. But in the
scene in which I administered havoc upon
the set of the boardwalk, I lost control of the
Accord as soon as I hit the glistening
boards of two-by-fours laid so
carelessly, and I assure you that nothing
in that scene was planned.”
An interviewer then went on to inquire as
to whether he escaped the car unharmed.
“I don’t remember as to whether my
physical state was harmed; that is as
much a mystery as is
what lies at the end of the pier.”

by Tyler Couch, Woodinville, WA



Photo by Sam Davis, Surrey, BC, Canada

pit stop.

the bagels taste
of gasoline
as it makes my nose ache
and my head spin hazy
the man with the hat attaches the hose
and a hum of a motor

the air is satin cigarette
and all about the yellow hue
of mountain dew
and fluorescent lights
with bug specks

Click
sixty dollars
Away

by Pam Best, Greenlawn, NY

Wounded

My father shot me in the chest;
blood and minor chords
Graced my vest,
A river deep and pure flowed from my
gentle cotton candy wound –
The words and cries and words limped out;
Sad and laughing
Wounded, sprout
A river dark and true gushed from my
murky secret flower bloom.

by Kylie Kelso, Mt. Washington, KY

Chemicals and Their Effects on the Heart

You loved chemicals. “Dopamine,” you said,
your eyes as bright as I’ve ever seen them,
“makes people happy!”
How could you not love a chemical
like that?”
I thought I should love it, because I should
like something
that could make you so happy.
But I do not remember a you without
bags under your eyes and a sickly tone
to your flesh.
I thought that was beautiful. I was a
romantic.
I thought that anything could be fixed
with a brush of the hand over the cheek,
and a gentle, barely felt kiss;
and that the strange rush of ice in my lungs
and the buzzing in my head had to be love,
for what else could it be?
Chemicals can kill you, make you happy,
confuse you, excite you, make you wish
you were dead,
but chemicals cannot be beautiful.
The rush and the buzz were not love,
but adrenaline. Another chemical.
You might still be romantic, but I know
better now.
The chemicals had me fooled.

by Heather Hunt, Gilmanton, NH

My Mother Told Me

“One step at a time”
Those slippery words slush in my mind
“Be there on the dime”
As I remember, it was Mother who said that
Whose mother, you say? Mine
“I’ll meet you another day” shines
Madame Present of *The New York Times*
“I see that you get paid, if you say”
says Mr. McNine
I just remember hearing the pitter patter
Of my cat who was getting fatter
And the squishy squeaks of the mice
in our walls
For I had nightmares that they’d eat my dolls
And my mother told me
Not to be afraid
Oh yes, she told me all right
I never once mentioned after that how
mice were little renegades

by Julie Hale, Astoria, OR

Inked

Pronged stabs puncture my skin;
the liquid marker sketches, outlining.
It is a memory not subject
to the effects of an aging mind.
A reminder permanently branded
into buried layers of my flesh,
tiny opaque domes of blood surge through
as the needle rhythmically whirs,
severing skin.

It is an intimate idea,
a thought, a moment,
my trademark permanently etched.
The insufferable pain of each individual
prick,
is not nearly as agonizing
as losing the memory marked by this ink.

The smell of disinfectant wafts toward me,
I feel the latex gloves
grazing and manipulating bare skin,
analogous to the antiseptic smells
and motions
of a morgue fitting a corpse for funeral.

When my remains are laid
beneath a damp, moss-blanketed headstone,
this illustration will still be there,
stamped on my frozen carcass.

With the sound of tearing bandages
ripping through the air,
I realize this is not intimidating me.
This is exactly what I need:
to peer intently at my reflection
and not take in every blemish,
every dimple, every wrinkle,
but to see a work of art.

My face contorts, grimacing,
eyes squeezing shut,
as they smear stinging sterilizing gel
over the freshly swollen trauma.

My body is transformed
from an imperfect specimen to a
painted canvas,
thoughtfully molded with care
and slow strokes.

Some cultures believe in symbols
to ward off evil.

Some carry them for luck.
My picture weighs on me
like a lucky cut-off rabbit’s foot secure
in my pocket.

Intimately pressing on my rib cage,
rising and falling with each breath,
my heart beating against it just enough
to irritate
with each movement as the cotton shirt rubs
just to the side of my breast,
branded across my side,
a memory delineated in a place
only a lover would see.

by Emily Geiselman, Kildeer, IL

wish.

at least I tried to
hold on to what we never
really had

by Amai Gensou,
Mercer Island, WA

Odd Find

The crumb trail leads to the rusted cars.
Broken jars scattered around them.
Had more rust than metal.
The middle of the woods ... how?
Someone must’ve used them, but why?
“Moonshine,” Dad said. “Desperation.”

by Tony Mei, Oconomowoc, WI

transaction

wasn’t informed
that a prerequisite to a
relationship was
openness

selfish enough to
want to meet your demons
without introducing you
to my own

attribute it to
unlimited expectations;
limited resources

did not know
you meant so metaphorically
inquire within

by Abby Johnson, Flemington, NJ

A Second

In the distance a pallid white elephant
balances on four flamingo-like legs,
a glass obelisk atop its back.
A bee buzzes in circles beneath a
first quarter moon.
Water droplets hover above the ground,
suspended within a second of time.
A pomegranate casts a shadow of Venus.
A coral fish protrudes from an open fruit.
Predators it’s once engulfed surface from
its mouth.
The sting of a bee,
like the stab of a bayonet,
awakens a sleeping dreamer from a more
than surreal world.

by John Feil, Port Aransas, TX

Momentum

There wasn’t a damn thing we could try,
a quick fix
for the awaiting tragedy
at the end of the road.
Young and blind,
we shifted into drive and
set fire to the asphalt.

Signs used to illuminate,
and the lights above cast shadows
on our doubts
that we left behind
in our rear view.

And now there are no signs.
And the lights have flickered
and died.

And we’re still blind
and lost
behind the wheel.

by Jake Adams, Gilford, NH



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