

Johnson County Library's teen literary magazine

elephant



XIX

Innocence

by Sanjana Bandi

you point out the arbitrary things in nature
enchanted by the halcyon bird, the brittle leaf
(disappointed when it doesn't crunch under your sketchers,
not nearly as much as you anticipated)

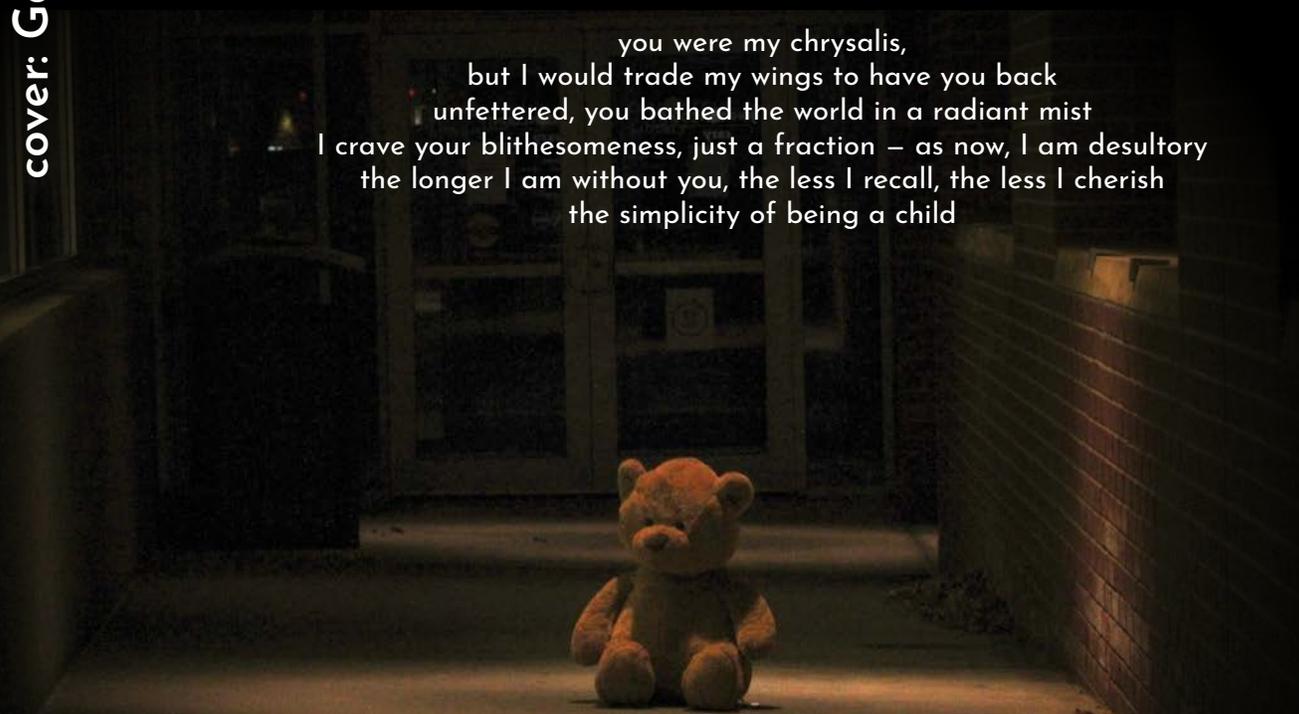
the quintessential naïf, you are
delighting in those lopsided pigtails that bounce up and down
unapologetically wearing those neon days of the week socks
with two different days on your feet, for goodness –

you poke your fingers through the holes in a chain-link fence,
decide to start climbing it on a caprice of courage
wedge your wee feet into the gaps and get halfway up . . .
. . . before you fall
but you keep trying, inexorable

exuberant after a trip to the library,
you steal away with your armfuls of books;
the luminescence of a fairy night light guides you to midnight
as you flip page after page under the covers,
murmuring the words you read until lassitude overcomes you

one day, you clamber up the rock-climbing wall at the playground
you could never make it all the way up, but this time, you do
and this time, you never come back down
your presence was ephemeral, your memory fleeting
now, I am beyond you

you were my chrysalis,
but I would trade my wings to have you back
unfettered, you bathed the world in a radiant mist
I crave your blithesomeness, just a fraction – as now, I am desultory
the longer I am without you, the less I recall, the less I cherish
the simplicity of being a child



Contemplating the Unknown
by Mateo Robaina

<i>Gateways</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	cover	<i>a bridge to the other side; perspective ii</i>	19
<i>Innocence</i> by Sanjana Bandi	inside cover	by Nabihah Syed	
<i>Contemplating the Unknown</i> by Mateo Robaina		<i>pool float</i> by Kayla Brethauer	
<i>Pre-Chapter</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	1	<i>Cardboard</i> by Jessica Zhao	20
<i>Surprised Pear</i> by Mimi VanBeber	2	<i>Sanctuary</i> by Adib Rabbani	
<i>A Summer Afternoon</i> by Noah Green	4	<i>Questions for the Departed</i> by Lexi Newsom	21
<i>Prince Myshkin discovers the laws of physics</i> by Savannah Voth		<i>Ephemeral</i> by Grace Billman	
<i>to love in a small town</i> by Isobel Li	6	<i>Wooded Paradox</i> by Sasha Malik	22
<i>to you, the only love i'll never know</i> by Rachel Xu		<i>crazy</i> by anonymous	
<i>pasture of haze</i> by Nabihah Syed		<i>The End of the Storm Drains</i> by Wyatt C. Vaughn	23
<i>Embedded in Red</i> by Grace Billman	7	<i>Abandoned</i> by Adib Rabbani	
<i>Golden Hour</i> by Savannah Voth	8	<i>Letters 4-4 A.D.</i> by Bowie Bladee	24
<i>Poem</i> by Savannah Voth		<i>Reminiscent</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	
<i>all the things that make it so</i> by Isobel Li	9	<i>Highlighting</i> by Sumedha Sangem	25
<i>We Are Stardust</i> by Lilliana Hughey		<i>Psychonaut's Consciousness</i> by Noah Green	
<i>Underbank</i> by Madeleine Marder	10	<i>Sestina of the Man at Eternity's Gate</i>	26
<i>Voyage</i> by Emma Gulledge	11	by Esther Cheng	
<i>The Crossing Worlds</i> by Deniz Tanriverdi	12	<i>Promising</i> by Abigail Rhodus	
<i>Canyon</i> by Sumlina Alam	13	<i>The Quiet of the Highway</i> by Elena Unger	27
<i>Monumental</i> by Austina Xu		<i>Distance</i> by Lindsey Smith	
<i>Testing Boundaries</i> by Sasha Malik	14	<i>Cave of Tzfat, Israel</i> by Emily Natanova	28
<i>Found Value</i> by A. Brooke Young		<i>Hole of Emotion</i> by Destyni Meadows	
<i>The First Stanza of This Poem is a Lie</i> by Elena Unger	15	<i>The Listener</i> by Mehak K.	29
<i>Ode to My Grandma</i> by Austina Xu	16	<i>No Way Out</i> by Carly Riggs	
<i>Odyssey</i> by Austina Xu		<i>The Swirling Eddies of Eigengrau</i> by Joey Wu	30
<i>dial tone</i> by Arden Pryor	18	<i>Skull</i> by Eli Kumin	
<i>Submerged</i> by Adib Rabbani		<i>Are we out of the woods yet</i> by Eden Christian	31
		<i>teacup</i> by Emma Gulledge	32
		<i>Bread is Forever</i> by Daria Volkova	
		<i>Rain</i> by Sumlina Alam	34
		<i>Shattered</i> by Eli Kumin	
		<i>Tether</i> by Garrett Parish	35
		<i>All We Do Not Know</i> by Elena Unger	
		<i>The Brain in Colour</i> by Natalie Nims	36
		<i>Fetus</i> by Savannah Voth	
		<i>on being called a gaslighter</i>	38
		by Stephania Kontopanos	
		<i>Wolf in Man's Clothing</i> by Noah Green	



CONT

<i>What Happened This Morning</i> by Gaby Kill	39	<i>Beach Day</i> by Clara Moss	57
<i>Everlasting to do list</i> by Maddy Williams		<i>But a Woman</i> by Grace Billman	
<i>A Girl with Insomnia and a Fast Car</i>	40	<i>Unknown</i> by Alexis Holub	58
by Ruby Cullen		<i>Places You've Seen in Your Dreams</i> by Anonymous	
<i>post meridiem</i> by Emily Natanova		<i>Froggie</i> by Waverly Altis	59
과전 (<i>pajeon</i>) by Alexander Choi	41	<i>Slip & Fly</i> by Gaby Kill	60
<i>The River's End</i> by Lucia Thomas		<i>All In My Head</i> by Giselle Garza	
<i>unrefined.</i> by Arden Pryor	42	<i>Girl to Woman</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	61
<i>Mirrorball</i> by Emma Gullledge		<i>5 Foot Giant</i> by Elena Unger	
<i>Imprints of a Mosaic</i> by Jiin Choi	43	<i>Fractal</i> by Savannah Voth	62
<i>Miranda</i> by Shaun Loh		<i>First Step of Grief</i> by Meklit Berhanu	
<i>Slave Morale</i> by Joey Wu	44	<i>Blank Pages</i> by Supriya Bolla	
<i>Side Nude</i> by Sasha Malik	45	<i>All I see</i> by Grace Billman	63
<i>The Man who is Lost in the Snow</i>	46	<i>Hiding in Beauty</i> by Stephanie Jaime-Torrecilla	64
by James Pressdee		<i>Runs in The Family</i> by Gaby Kill	
<i>Guide</i> by Garrett Parish		<i>Magician</i> by Ziyi Yan	65
<i>When Worlds Collide</i> by Anna Kratochvil	47	<i>King of the Damned</i> by Lilliana Hughey	
<i>is every war followed by a gilded age?</i>	48	<i>Cuckoo</i> by Waverly Altis	67
by Julie Huang		<i>Discrepancy, Hotel Minibar</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	68
<i>Blue In The Face</i> by Elizabeth Nordhus		<i>A Portrait of STEM</i>	inside back cover
<i>Spiders</i> by El O'Brien	49	by Ella Steinmetz	
<i>Spider's Thread</i> by Waverly Altis		<i>Butter</i> by Gaby Kill	back cover
<i>Lightning Connection</i> by Amaya Reyes	50		
<i>last summer</i> by Jasmine Harris			
<i>Boy Scout Camping Trip on The Eve</i>	51		
of <i>The Apocalypse</i> by Andy Villar			
<i>Into the Horizon</i> by Adib Rabbani			
<i>Agnotology</i> by Anonymous	52		
<i>Birth of Immortal Achilles</i> by Carly Riggs			
<i>Astray</i> by Emily Schutzel	53		
<i>Tuesday Reflections</i> by Elena Unger			
<i>C(at)-Section</i> by Sangitha Aiyer	54		
<i>Hotel Minibar</i> by Jaeyeon Kim	55		
<i>Flavorless</i> by Lyat Melese			
<i>i hate you, you x</i> by Lexi Newsom	56		
<i>Pieces</i> by Maddy Williams			

ENTS



Surprised Pear by Mimi VanBeber

Prince Myshkin discovers the laws of physics

by Savannah Voth

(1) every puzzle has an empty space,
and a piece that never seems to fit
everywhere.

on the train in november I found
a duality called us (antithesis as mirror)
sorry it is colder here than I remembered
and I am tired

of being called a dreamer
because i am lucid, because my
neurons (fire and ether) sync beyond control.
because

(2) I contest the theory of gravity:
some day, everything will go up and up

and up,
but until then my eyes drench
at everything that falls, water and
wormwood and humanity and
universe

every day I learn to
entropy and I am so afraid

of you of you of you:

you shattered cathedral, you bitter star,
let me find you until nothing ever falls
apart, until my flesh is wrenched in
the shape of your emptiness

(3) I propose a new topology of whole, where you

are not irrevocable.

where (4) our redemption arcs tend to
Infinity, only
not on this restricted domain, confined to
our Euclidean – or was it our Cartesian? – minds
(forgive me, I can never seem to find . . .)
paint me a knight and you will understand:
I am not tilting at windmills, only
the machine –

but oh how beautiful it is!

fertile dance of mountain and sky,
even the fly's humming forms a part
in the harmony, the disorder

(words that I can never seem to find)

the earth sings grass, this desperate anthem of
growth
=decay.

everything wheeling and wheeling,
in the song that is also a scream

(and a death sentence)

before the train and november and the descent,
my pupils gorged with waterfall,
I almost forgot
the teeth of the gear in every pulsing cell.

yet

in this whole dazzling picture, this verdant mechanical everywhere,
I can never seem to find
myself.

A Summer Afternoon
by Noah Green



to love in a small town

by Isobel Li

there is a place of endless sky
where the stolid road stretches beneath your feet
virtuously

this is where the defeated freeway ends,
where you take a left
into a town of stillness and sunshine
because there's no other option,
where hunched-over trees tangle with the young
and ivy climbs up aged white farmhouses
with west-facing windows that shine in the evenings,
where the only tangible traces of their occupants
are gently rocking porch swings and well-fed cattle,
where the perpetually empty bleachers at the high school
might even prop up the clouds

nature nurtures this isolation
Helios drags gold-lit fingertips across dusty paths and
cinnamon-flavored raindrops smack the ground and
lonesome children scatter dandelion daydreams

on a map, there is nothing
half-abandoned lots in a half abandoned town
and the dying breaths of industrialization
yet
standing here, gravel breeze sanding your face
there is something:
a sprinkling of lovers, who rest and rise
with the sun day by day, night by night
with love like a half-life

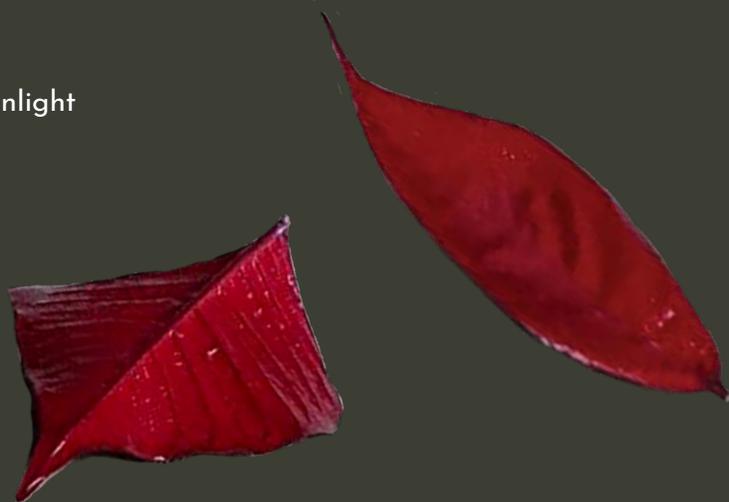
pasture of haze
by Nabihah Syed

to you, the only love i'll never know

by Rachel Xu

I.

The mountain sings sweet requiem
to the woman wrapped in delicate white linen
marinated in red from scattered streaks of fading sunlight
as airy white daubs wane & float by overhead
sitting below a jagged wreath of evergreens
nailed to the crucifix above
she awaits her lover, who is
fading into dappled undergrowth leagues away
watching the last pillars standing molder against
tartan-fettered smoke & mirrors, a world where
familiar specters await in distant eden
cruelty folds into delicate little spirals
& pools around her bruised ankles



Embedded in Red by Grace Billman

reflecting a stained glass of whispered covenants
of golden *maybes* and coquelicot *see-you-laters*
of wilted forget-me-nots in ironed boutonnières
of stale manna rotting under mephitic trenches
cherubim whispering lavender-coated deceptions
she sinks into inky waters, porous bubbly guilt
swallows every sweet delight, every marred skeleton
until
a burst of kaleidoscopic brilliance
screams into the crumbling abyss
& the woman in delicate red linen
awakens from an endless night, the arms of her lover
clutching her tighter than any brittle-boned regret
I'm home it tells her *I'm home at last*
their eyes meet/Aegean blue swallowed by Nephrite green
& the mountain retires its hymnals for another season

II.

freedom is the girl in ragged gossamer
with her mud-caked palms outstretched above writhing corpses
blind in ephemeral dawn/sight in Cimmerian twilight
you've always been watching her
tracing every taut movement/with anguished scrutiny
screaming insoluble curses at the midnight sun
so when the rusted birdcage springs wide open
your Valhalla tantalizing, yet untouchable forevermore
sunlight meets charred skin like
untempered circuitry unraveling
into brilliant empyrean, into the boundless faraway
you once promised we would see together
it consumes every wretched ache mantled under hollow bones
every want you were wont to neglect/to evade
we wonder, oh yes like the grotesque heretics we are
we can't help but wonder/yearn for/hope
some sequestered rendezvous in Zurich's idyllic sierras
peace of mind and of soul at long, arduous last
but
this is the road less traveled
the one we've chosen to walk
'til both our bitter ends

blood-stained linen,
once comfort now asphyxiating
as crumpled droplets rain down the length of my battle scars
onto your half-lidded gaze/your head in my hands
our first foredoomed encounter
and final fated farewell
let's meet again in another life,

my love.



Poem

by Savannah Voth

Ocean wanders in to contemplate me
drafts a verse about my ankles in
twisting foam, scrambles the lines

and forgets. A mirror in the slick
afterthought of water on sand
where my feet sink in soft parchment

clouds, beneath shells and kelp
washed in by the tide
Reflected and reflecting

all the things that make it so

by Isobel Li

yesterday,
i was greeted by the moon herself in your driveway.
she left my palms damp with slobber in her wake
and i stood outside your front door,
feeling like a fraction, small but rightfully so
and across the street, adult chatter and laughter
rose and hovered, indistinct and comforting
i could hear your jazz seeping through the walls
a new alto saxophone, vibrato on the b flat
gentle and clear and ever-so present
mixed with a crisp winter evening
the snowless ground tinted blue
and my body felt opaque
with my newfound understanding
of whimsy, of existence
of solace, of dogs

and what i have been trying to say is,
how lucky i am to have learned
the fortune of being alive

We Are Stardust
by Lilliana Hughley



Underbank

by Madeleine Marder

"You want to join us?" She asks.

Before she knows me. Before she learns not to.
I shake my head. Tell her I'm happier inside
with Caroline.

I say it because of the way her face grows
light in response, like a firefly has landed on her
chin. I say it because the truth is prickling low
in my gut, a burner left to singe the dangling
entrails that might force it out my throat.

If I thought she'd notice the difference, a
better answer might be demanded, but the
excuse washes over her like sand and I am saved
by indifference. She shrugs, casts me a smile that
is caught by the panes between us.

She may know me, one day. When the salt
around her home stops stinging my eyes.

One day.

Today, Caroline is crouched on the floor, her
dress crumpled like a blizzard around her, a little
halo of cotton. She clutches a crayon so paltry
it begs to slip from her hand with every stroke,
but she refuses, and makes every movement
as precise as it would be from the hand of a
practiced craftsman.

"Watcha drawing?" I tuck my knees to my
chest.

Caroline doesn't look up. "Waves," she answers,
and they are – soft, cascading, folding in on
each other. One after another after another.

I tell her she has a lovely eye – and she does.

But she's off on accuracy. Willfully so.

Caroline's penchant for the water is not
surprising, given her mother's. Their relationship
to the waves has always been one of trust, of
knowing that a plunge into such peril will only
last so long as to spike adrenaline. Trust in the
water to carry them both back to shore, trust
in the current to support Caroline's tiny limbs
should they prove too inert to defend her, trust
in me to care for her when she returns home,
cold and shivering with exhilaration.

Trust I do not share.

"You didn't want to go to the beach?" I ask, the
question surfacing as my mind mulls over the
drawing. She shrugs.

"Didn't want to. Too busy," Caroline responds,
using the word she always turns to when
grappling with how to describe the roaring tide
that is the ocean outside our window. I nod, and
she adds, "Might go later."

At night, the sea seeps into the sky like ink
into cloth.

Become one. Endless.

"It might be a little too dark for that, it's
already pretty late now. Almost sunset. But I'm
sure she'll take you tomorrow, if you want."

Caroline doesn't answer.

Her mother returns after a couple of hours,
sun-browned. Her ankles are brushed with sand,
as is her hair, and her feet leave behind ponds
of salt water with each tread as she walks
through the house.

Caroline watches her emerge from the
doorway and beams, rushes into her mother's
arms. Their smiles are identical. Caroline
disregards the dripping wetsuit and scrape of
sand against her skin, lets it cradle her until she
shrieks at the smell of salt up her nose.

While she takes a shower, I mop up the trail of
water with a towel.

The sun sits down to dinner with us.

The evening is brief, dimming as the sun
outside burns the rippling water with golden
light before plummeting beyond the horizon.
Caroline is sent to bed as soon as the sky fades
to a dull, deep blue, and her mother follows.

I'm too restless to sleep, so I stay in the living
room – curled up on the couch, salty sea air
filtering in through the open window.

It fills my lungs as if I were inhaling the water
itself, for a moment.

And for a moment, I don't mind.

Outside, the moon is the eye of a great beast,
holding my gaze.

It casts a silver glow over the ocean, whose
waves have subsided, though the ripples remain.
Something catches my eye, so I walk to the
window, peering out into the night.

The ink has spread its furls but the moon
guides my eyes to the horizon.

I like water. From a distance.

Like finding beauty in annihilation, in the
sweet divinity of endings, and there is no
thunder quite like the roar of an ocean. I watch
it from the window, grateful for the glass and
the summer moon residing over the coastline as
if on guard.

The water bobs and sways without particular
rhyme. My mind instructs every sense I'm
capable of to turn away. To ignore. But the water

is mesmerizing in a way that is no longer hypnotic, and I keep my gaze locked onto the waves.

Silent, serene.

Silent. Except.

Except for the splashing. Distant, unmistakable. Splashing, and music, music to the tune of shrieks from a child. A child thrashing underneath the weight of a current. A child being pulled down by the cold grip of saltwater.

A child about to die.

My heart stops.

Revives, and it's a hammer, because there's blood pounding in my head, stronger and more insistent than the biting roar of darkness. I reach the front door, and I can see her now, moving underneath the water. It reminds me of a snake shifting underneath sand in a desert. Tiny, and unseen.

Then I'm running, and I'm not running fast enough. I force myself to go faster.

Sand coats my feet as I hit the shore.

And faster.

Her screams grow in volume, and I want to respond, to tell her I'm near, but I can't form words.

Maybe she knows.

And faster until I'm breaking the surface of clear water sliding up the shore. My toes curl around clumps of sand in the cold but I don't stop moving.

My knees sink underwater, trembling beneath my waist, my shoulders. My ears threaten to go under, and I swallow back fear that tastes like bile.

I don't know how to swim, but my body is stronger than hers, and I trust it to support us both as I cross the final couple of feet to reach her side. Her hands still brush the surface, though the rest of her limp body is desperate to drift off, down. To the depths of the ocean. I grab what I can reach of her arms and pull her close, forcing her head back above the water. She isn't moving anymore, nor breathing, but her body is warm. It's the warmth under her neck, and around her ears, that carries me back to shore, tiny frame slung over my shoulder. "I'm here," I tell her, over and over. "I'm here. I'm here, I'm here for you."

Continued on next page . . .



Voyage by Emma Gulledge

Underbank *continued . . .*

We are broken by the waves, tossed and turned in the tide until I'm certain the cold will taint her skin, but the mercy of shore is a salve. My feet brush a sticky layer of sand, once revolting in its slimy nature, now the only fracture that allows my heart freedom from an encasing of panic. My pace devolves into a stumble the moment my knees clear the surface. Urgency, more than fear, fuels every movement. In my arms, Caroline's trembles dull. I want to sob.

Her head touches the sand first, when I reach it, her body moments after. Ghosts have traced her lips and stained them blue, the same color as her fingertips, the color of the water that tried to claim her as its own, of the crayon, of her mother's eyes, of her waves. The ones forged of wax and crumpled paper, gentle and precise.

It is then that I realize I have no idea how to continue, that I am clutching a creature footsteps from death in my arms, and I have somehow saved her all the way to damnation. There is no sound coming from her, no last flutter of breath awake in her lungs. She lays there on the sand, a waterlogged ragdoll left to the reality of nature. She faded faster than I could think to scream her name.

"CAROLINE –" It is not my voice that screams it, but her mother's.

Her mother, who is there by my side in an instant, crouched in guard above the child that is her life.

Who trusted my hands to spare hers from scars and scrapes and watery graves. I, who bore such loathing for the wrong killer.



The Crossing Worlds by Deniz Tanriverdi

Canyon

by Sumlina Alam

The Sun is a greedy emperor,
Shining its light across the Canyon,
And evaporating drops of water.

With the land so parched and no color than red,
The beings must have knelt by now, right?
No, there are a few that stand.

Enter the Cactus, raising its hands,
The skin is so prickly,
With one touch, you cut your fingers.

The outside looks like harm,
But think again, there's something inside.
Like a mother and child,
The Cactus protects its water,
Making sure it never falls into the wrong hands.

While the Cactus stays put, the Rattlesnake darts around,
Rattling its tail to give its signal.
It basks in the shadows under the rocks,
Waiting to pounce and sneak around.
No wonder it survives.

Across the mesas and plateaus, the Bighorn Sheep thumps its hooves.
Its legs resist against the mountains,
Like a swimmer against a current.

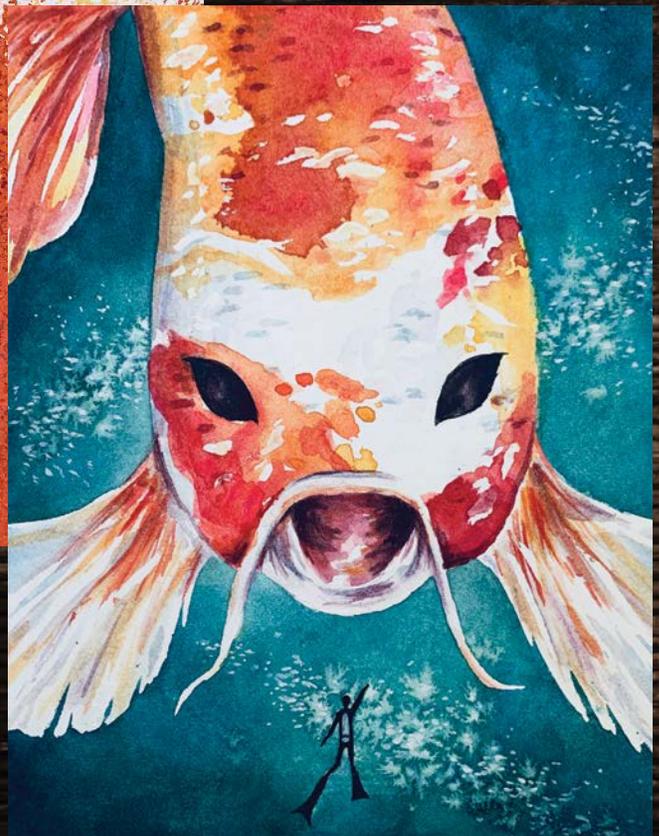
How calm it seems, but it has a dark side.
Beware of its horns,
Your bones will crackle with its rage.

Moving along on the ground,
Lies the Scorpion.
With its claws and curled stinger,
The creature has no beauty.
But its venom and pinch elevate its rank.

The beings in the Canyon may bring disgust,
But think again,
The Canyon hasn't burned them yet.

Monumental

by Austina Xu



Found Value by A. Brooke Young

Locks with no key still have purpose,
An essay will have more say.
A sports car gets more attention,
And always first is A.

But keys without locks have mystery,
And poetry holds more depth.
Old cars show humility,
And M stands strong at apex.

For without the found key, there'd be no garden.
And having no verse, there'd be no song.
With no thing old, there's nothing new,
And without an M, the mind would be gone.

I am that key with mystery,
The missing lock is still holding true.
Having no place, a dismissable waste,
If not for that robin of red and blue.

I am that poem with quiet voice,
And layers deep as snow.
The essay may seem, more important than me,
But if you see wisdom: then you will know.

I am that old car, rolling slow by,
The excitement around me now dulled.
Polish now dust, paint turned to rust,
But now the classic, traditional.

I am that M with nothing to change,
And little to say for my sound.
But holding the middle, the tiniest scribble,
Makes money, magic, and the profound.

So a key with no lock may lack the same purpose,
As a lock with no key may be seen.
And a poem may have smaller audience than
Those found at the essay's great scene.

The new flashy car may be more widely sought,
And old be the lesser, it seems.
The strong letter A has more importance and say,
Than the M's contribution is deemed.

But with second glance comes in second thoughts,
And anyone thinking will know:
Just because something may seem second best,
Doesn't mean it has less than to show.



The First Stanza of This Poem is a Lie

by Elena Unger

I know love, lust,
and lonely well enough
to tell them apart.

I loved you and I knew it
when we lie in the park
beneath the marbled dusk
of a melted midnight.
I didn't notice the sting of mosquitos
feasting on my ankles;
I was too distracted by the feeling
of your skin. You played me
a song, and I hated it. I listened anyway
again and again.

You taught me to love myself
but I only really learned when you left.
For a time I was awkward and unfamiliar
with the embers nestled in my ribcage.
I was the same with you.
The first time I came over we walked your dog;
I asked about classes and complimented the trees
as if all of them were yours.

When I stopped loving you
I started lusting after him.
Bit lip wide eyed want
pooled inside a dazzling shell.
I was an excitable exoskeleton,
lonely and surrounded by people.

When I started lusting after myself, though,
a love was born that is immortal –
I find that funny.
Love may not be lust, but lust
became a love, of sorts, with my back to the bed.
My hands on my body,
my hands in my body,
reminded me of my realness,
my sturdiness, my vivacity.

It all makes perfect sense
until it doesn't.
I loved you and lusted after you.
I lusted after him and didn't love him.
I lusted after myself and grew to love myself, too.
I never became a stranger
to the nip of loneliness.

The painting depicts a dark wooden boat with a thatched roof, floating on a sea of swirling, multi-colored waves in shades of blue, purple, pink, and yellow. A black bird is in flight above the boat. The background features jagged, dark rock formations under a bright, glowing sun or moon. The overall style is expressive and textured, characteristic of oil or pastel work.

Odyssey by Austina Xu

Ode to My Grandma

by Austina Xu

Full piece can be found at jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia.

李白 静夜思
床前明月光，
疑是地上霜。
举头望明月，
低头思故乡

This is my dad's favorite poem.

And I have no idea what it means.

And despite how clumsy my tongue may be
And how jiā¹ and jiǎ² sound the same to me,
I will still somehow choose this one over a silly but simpler child's lore
About counting frogs

¹ "Home" in Mandarin

² "Fake" in Mandarin

Because I will try and make sense of what little morsels of longing we both have:
His for the parents living an ocean away,
Mine for the ability to understand the dialogue that pools in
Messy waves from their choppy facetime calls

Because I am a fool
For thinking my handicap tongue will be anything more than some silly poem about frogs
but

Who knew,
That one day the thing I longed for the most
Would come wrapped up for me
And turn 7000 miles of Pacific into
A resting heartbeat under the same roof

Because I didn't.
But if I did, maybe I wouldn't have drowned myself in this longing to begin with.

Yet like how the tide refuses to stop kissing the shoreline
No matter how many times it's forced to withdraw,
We both relinquished the parts of ourselves we've longed for the most:
My grandma gave up her home,
And now I give her this poem

Eight years ago,
My grandma left the bustling streets of Shanghai
For the quiet Milpitas and suburban skies –
Not out of choice.

Eight years ago,
She brought the hurricane-like chaos of 7000 miles of sea with her
And let it spiral out of control
It turned our living room into a gallery for scraps of mandarin,
With nothing but a thin veil separating us from her.
Our floor into a palette for her black calligraphy ink,
You can still spot the stain on the carpet if you look hard enough.

*To continue reading
this piece online, scan this code.*



dial tone

by Arden Pryor

I have learned to predict when the last dial tone will be interrupted by the subhuman voice. I can't tell you exactly how many beeps it takes, but somehow it's always 1 and a half beeps from when I realize you aren't going to pick up the phone.

I don't even remember what it felt like before the numbers on the clock jumped. Now, I calculate time in dial tones and flat robotic monologs. 1 and a half before I realize you won't pick up. Hundreds before I try calling again. Thousands until time is normal again, And millions, Until I see you again.

Submerged by Adib Rabbani



pool float

by Kayla Brethauer

Floating through space feels like lounging on a pool float.
True, your float is no pool float.
It's a slab of discarded metal lost in the wasteland of the universe,
and it's pulling you with it, too.
In another time – a whole other life –
you would know the heat you're feeling now came
from the sun shining high in the powder blue sky above you,
but you do not know why your body feels flushed
in this wicked impersonation of a winter freeze.
If only you were stretched out on your pool float,
looking up at the cloudless sky above you,
feeling the cool water below you.
Luckily for you, hours of imagination in this space wilderness
is as calming as the sight of a fully inflated plastic flamingo, almost.



a bridge to the other side; perspective ii by Nabihah Syed



Cardboard

by Jessica Zhao

At the age of five

Mary has built herself a retreat
A box made out of her father's rusty carving knife
(which was quickly confiscated)
And a soggy line up of cardboard
She found while digging through the trash

At the age of six

She is told to speak up and to not be afraid
Of making mistakes
Instead she gives her box a tidy
Talks to her tiny paper dolls
And wonders if anyone would notice
If she was gone

At the age of eight

She has given up on talking
Running, playing, laughing
Smiled only once on photo day
(the picture turned out horrible
she threw it in the trash)
She goes to art class but sits there
Only to envy her teacher's extensive collection
Of cardboard boxes and she wonders if he would notice
If she took one home for herself

At the age of ten

She cuts her hair with a pair of garden shears
And realizes she doesn't know what she's doing
The next day her mother sighs and takes her to the barber
She digs up her old box and tumbles inside
This time, she remembers
to poke holes so she can breathe
But as a shaft of light shines through
She wonders (and wonders and wonders)
If the outside is as dark and murky
As she remembered it to be

At the age of twelve

Her box is beginning to cramp
She feels sick and dizzy from
Monday to Friday and wonders if maybe
Just maybe it was time to get out
It would be brief she promises to herself and opens one shaft
(Very very carefully) until the other one
Is forced open much more suddenly
Than she would have wanted
At first she loses balance, trips and lands in darkness
Falling, sinking, *drowning*, until she opens her eyes
Feels the newfound wind against her hair,
the sun bathing her body
And floats

Sanctuary

by Adib Rabbani



Questions for the Departed

by Lexi Newsom

Wrong

Is how still the air is, standing
Is how grey the sky is, weeping
Is how red the fallen leaf is, dying
Is how green the grass is, living
Living, living, living
A breath in, a breath out
Taken for granted – granted, it's
A subconscious process. But why is it
That after watching one's subconscious fade
The automatic takes effort?

In their smiles, too wide, too full of too-white teeth
Bleach doesn't lie, isn't good, you can't hide
Your bones by soaking them in it
bones
no, no, no – please
i said no bones and you,
you promised me

promised me
when we cut our skin
to the white calcium beneath
engraved our initials in
the smooth surface
waited for the skin to entomb
them once again, saying
as long as the bones remained
within ourselves, we would
always know where the other was
our own private witchcraft

our own private witchcraft now strewn across the street, and
i can see your bones, my initials, out in the open air, and
it pains me it pains me it pains me – but not so much as
knowing that i do not know where you are anymore.
you have left me, and left me with so many questions:
were you scared? did you know you would be gone?
an empty space where a body, a laugh, a smile should be?
why did you go? that last one: why why why?

please tell me:
where are you?



Wooded Paradox by Sasha Malik

crazy by anonymous

i don't leave my house except for school and work, both of which i dread with anxiety like gym weights. i never work out either because there are people who watch me, every hour of the day. i listen to music to make sure i don't think any thoughts because people can read them and this i know for a fact and no one will ever be able to prove me one hundred percent wrong and i will never know so it's better to be cautious and search every room for hidden cameras because these people are watching me in my own house and everyone in the world is in on it and

i am the only real thing in this world and it's too scary to go out to the real world with too many variables and unknowns when my mind is safe my mind tells me the truth about the people who watch me and i am not crazy like my psychiatrist says it's up to me to look out for myself and he says that i'm paranoid because i am lonely and it gives me self-importance but i know he's the crazy one here not me please tell me i'm not crazy because i'm not, i'm not, i'm not i am NOT.

The End of the Storm Drains

by Wyatt C. Vaughn

Above, asphalt streets meet each other with divots forming storm drains.

But below, the concrete box and brown metal manhole puddles collected rain.

Above, I walked, wondering what it was like underneath where the world served us empty and dry streets.

But below, open tunnels of dark channels converging into sky-lit terminals tantalized me.

What was it like below our world?

Determined, neighborhood kids gathered with gear in each hand.

Backpack, flashlights, extra double-A batteries, and water bottles.

Goldfish crackers, iPhone 5 with 2 bars of service, and bagged popcorn.

The walnut creek warriors set off for where the black storm drain tube met dirty creek water.

One by one, each adventurer entered with wet sopping shoes past the melted metal soldering.

Light fades into an ombre grey, grey fades into black, but is fought with the crack of glow sticks.

If justice is blind, our environment had acquainted us to the supreme court.

We set each foot to the beat of our fearful hearts until daylight seeped through bars of steel secured in concrete along the hot, black summer street.

Our safe haven amidst dirty rainwater channels was littered with cigarettes and broken beer bottle's glass, alas,

We have discovered a new home.

But when flashlights died and iPhone 5 batteries fried, we couldn't continue on the bleak, black, tube trail.

With only traveling a mere stretch of miles-long pipes, we were left with a question:

If we went back with an iPhone 11, wifi hotspots, or post-2015 technology, *what could we have found that time had robbed us of knowing?*

Abandoned by Adib Rabbani



Letters 4-4 A.D.

by Bowie Bladee

"Supersoaker, LG Smart Refrigerator," par II

I hope you enjoyed my soliloquy. And I know you did – your mouth is practically open right now. Practically open . . . Yeah. I'm jotting that down.

Speaking of – Some of *Bismuth* is Björk lyric. Some is overheard, or said in passing and forgotten, else wise thought nothing of. Then some of it comes from nothing, from nowhere, white light, the tinny tin of white noise – The Hum. Of course, that's no marvel.

It's only Universe, and isn't that the story of everything, anyway? White light, white noise, murmuration. A humming, pitter patter by the doorway. For ever. Spinning, turning that wheel, weaving thread of silkworm to gold, back to feather.

The seamstress sits and spins around in the quadruplical office chair. It's almost five. It's always like that, it seems – always almost some time, some when, some thing. As if, in fact, what's real is that it is always now, for ever. Strange isn't it. I said to my friend recently. Said, hey, you know, I had an epiphany in the bathroom. Told him I'd been thinking about it again – thinking about thoughts, the fixture of the fiction. Thinking about the numbers, the number, thinking about zero, holes, blackened, the blackness in the white. Worm holes out for ages, for ever, it feels like. Now, straighten up. Here's what she told me: Said, I had an epiphany in the bathroom. Shitting

Said, you know the particles? The points. Or, Fuck. What is any thing any way

Which is beside the point – back to front, back to story. Here's what I told him.

Said, You know how, for that point, the dot on the number line, if you will, the first Experience parallels the last? Said,

By that, you know. Fuck, what I mean is,

Know how the first Experience is, fundamentally, actually, in actuality identical fraternal twin

Or twinsite, as in parasite
Of that particle's last One?
She told me, Dude, what I'm trying to say is
"Carpe diem. Seas of bank foreclosures, the
Alchemist

Yoga in the Bay. Crystal chakras, the tantric Vedas
Art and copulation and the Kuma Satra [sic]
Collecting dust on the shelf on the cover"
Carpe diem . . . It's banal, right?
Brews in the belly, nauseating, Foucaultic, derided
spectacle

So commonplace to not even inspire a reaction, I
know, that's what he said to me.
But this much is true
For the point, for the human
Only true time is now, now time
Noon time, noon times
Time as a verb, the vociferous vocabulary
Selena's scaly, scaly tongue
See . . . That was just spitballing. Not even
bullshitting you. Wrote that off the top of my head.
Off the vyvanse, yeah, but I'm also ADHD and
maybe possibly a genius. Or just really hot and
cool.

Need you to check the socials, if you haven't
yet. Can say confidently that I have that It factor,
celebrity if you will. So, open, open now, orifice.
Cover up, cover down, book me a deal and let's
make some music

Look forward to hearing back from you
expediently. I'm pink with something anticipatory . . .
Sent from my Supersoaker, LG Smart Refrigerator



Reminiscent
by Jaeyeon Kim

Highlighting

by Sumedha Sangem

Highlighting.

That's how I take life in

I highlight quotes
Or words in a book
Trying to keep them with me
Forever.

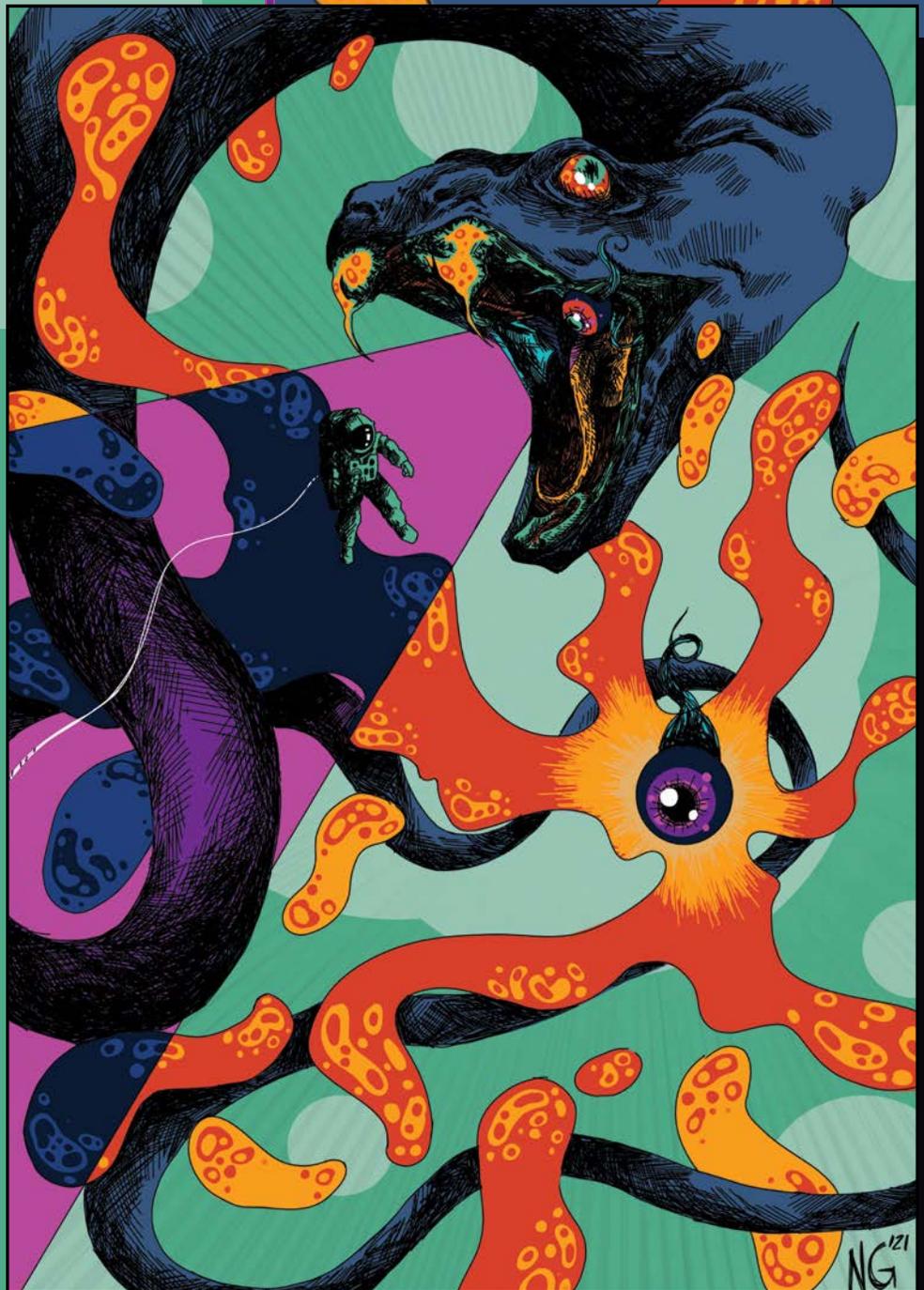
I mentally highlight the things people do,
Trying to understand their reasoning

But I can't highlight you.

I can't put your pieces
Together,
Or save your words for later

Your words are empty,
And your doings are
Meaningless.

Psychonaut's Consciousness
by Noah Green



Sestina of the Man at Eternity's Gate

by Esther Cheng

Are these the pangs of birth or the aftershocks of death?
What awaits me beyond this shore?
And even now when legs and feet have failed me
The sand shows trails, like serpents, of this fragility
I bleed: the gravel grinds my skin and flesh
Forget this pain. Give way to howling sea.

The tempests are never mild here; only the sea
Remembers its wild embrace, its lust of death
And holds it close, feeds it human flesh
Thus I lie, corpse as I am, upon this lonely shore,
Though breath remains. It is fear – fragility:
This unending storm that keeps me.

Talk of home and heartland irks me.
What heart? What home? There lies only sea
My sea, my fear, my storm, my fragility.
No face awaits the soul but gentle Death;
I see his figure on the distant shore.
He sees me not. But I gladly yield my flesh.

The moonbeam caresses this broken flesh.
Expose me not. No light shall shine on me.
Curse these memories, this life, this shore;
Shall I cast even my heart into this sea?
I'd give and lose this face, this form, to death.
But not this lingering love . . . fragility.

Yet who would stay to bear my memory? They see fragility
Inside this mind, this heart, this ailing flesh.
This is no labeled road; we walk our ways to death
Without a guide. Forget this fleeting life and me.
For I alone must brave this raging sea,
And scatter the vultures waiting upon this shore.

But what awaits me past this empty shore?
New life? New strength? Or new fragility
Upon the waves, as oil spills at sea?
I bleed. These ghostly birds, they pick at flesh
And soon, the dawn will breathe new sleep to me –
All will be well. Forget this life, this momentary death.

The morning comes to shore. It's now restored: this flesh
Forgets its fragility before, forgets the moonlit me.
I look beyond the sea. Still, I see aftershocks of this birth, this life, this death.



Promising by Abigail Rhodus

The Quiet of the Highway

by Elena Unger

Tonight Mom drives on black glass
one story below infinity.
Dad sifs quietly
and I fold over in my sister's lap,
her hand resting on my ribs
like a warm, pulsing shield.

We are swarmed by rushing rivers
of blurred tail lights
and softened headlights,
yet the world holds its breath.

Each car that passes
carries a new beginning
or an unhealed goodbye
singing from raw throats,
and yet the world holds its breath.

I make out the reflections
of parked cars and shopping malls
on the glass of my sister's window.
The glow of scattered street lamps
colors my pupils with flecks of gold.
I see a man pumping gas
and a woman weeping,
yet the world holds its breath.

Mom is careful to avoid the cars
that weave and stray and jolt,
the drivers who are drunk
on the loneliness of December
and lost in the letters of home.
She stares straight at the sky,
my father at her.

I teeter on the edge of sleep,
tuned in to the symphony of my sister's body,
and it is in the cavernous gut of the night
that I wonder
if the running quiet is meant to be filled
with hope or grief.

Distance by Lindsey Smith

Cave of Tzfat, Israel

by Emily Natanova

Together we stood in the small cave
Tucked away in the undergrounds of Tzfat,
The trail illuminated only by the flashlights gripped between our fingers.

Shattered glass scattered below our feet,
and
decades of graffiti embroidered the walls;

speaking to us in words of Hebrew and English,
excerpts left behind from people that stood here long before us.

Then,
we began to sing.

43 bodies huddled in the darkness –
Some I knew, some I had only just met.

But it didn't matter.

Arms linked,
we swayed in unison,
the melodies radiating through rock.

Our harmonies echoed in the blackness of the morning.

Louder
and
louder

Our voices punctured the barrier between earth and the heavens
as the broken crystal glistened
and the strokes of paint hugged us tight.

There I was,
holding the hands of previous strangers,
undulating to the music of my ancestors,
in a country thousands of miles away from the place I lived,

yet it felt like home.

And I'll never forget it.



Hole of Emotion
by Destyni Meadows

The Listener

by Mehak K.

It was my first day as a 'listener'. On the speaking end was a sixty-three-year-old woman whose lover had abandoned her. Following her diagnosis of schizoid personality disorder and grief disorder in 1992, she had been to over twelve different psychotherapists. "I need someone to talk to."

This tear that has welled up, hearing the tales of a stranger. What is it?

Is it a witness of my wail, my camaraderie? Is it a proof of my heartiness, my flickering sensitivity? Is it saying that within me, resides a heart that refuses to repine, refuses to sit still?

How can it be? This tale, this tale I have heard only a few moments ago.

Was I to believe that the tear had only been there for a few moments?

Was I to believe it had been nowhere before?

I suspect it was somewhere. In the distance between my heart and my lash, where towns of thoughts dwell, where graveyards of dream reside, where in the orchards of love, stand the thorns of bitterness, from where begin the dense jungles of confusion.

Yeh shayad wahi chupa tha. (It was perhaps hidden there.)

Those who birthed it, those miseries. They had been wiped out moons ago.

Destroyed.

Destroyed at the hands of my own experience. Who could it have trusted, then? That it was a tear without a reason, without a justification. A poor tear. A helpless tear.

An orphaned tear.

Today, when the caravan of tales marched by, that orphan tear searched, searched with hungry eyes. A guardian was all it needed. It tightly clutched the finger of a story, and making me put a handkerchief to a stranger's grief, settled on my lash.

*No Way Out
by Carly Riggs*



The Swirling Eddies of Eigengrau

by Joey Wu

You are trapped.

One day you awake: a homunculus, immersed in a deep chasm of dark. You wander the confines in solitude, following the faint and ever-so-often beep that resonates through your lonely chamber.

Memories flash before your eyes, occasionally – trepidation consuming you as your foot slams against the obsolete switch, a task rendered ineffectual by weeks of carelessness and irresponsibility; helplessness as the truck comes closer and closer and you brace for impact; the glimmering streams of red and blue that accompanied the blaring sirens. Brief interludes dot the remaining gaps of your memory: you were a hotshot banker of sorts, a father to two, a devout follower of religion, an advocate of temperance. But as you wander, the corners of your existence begin to fade, becoming hazy and distant as if eroded by the perpetual waves of darkness.

You wonder when *he* will come again. *He* with the curled horns, gnarled hands, and cruelly patient eyes. *He* had appeared, once or twice, but rather than ceasing the throb of empty longing, his presence seemed to amplify it, leaving you to drown in debilitation and hopelessness.

One day, as you wander through the vast terrain, you catch the glimpse of light. Racing towards it, you see two windows slanted with the oblique rays of fluorescent light, and for a brief second, you dare to hope and dream.

Through the marbled and glossy curvature of the convex windows, you peer through the near-opaque lids for a shot of outside: the letters ICU lighted on the walls, a woman and two children weeping with hands clasped in desperate prayer, the neon-green streak racing along a black monitor. For a second, the filmy lid covering the windows is peeled away and you see a man in a white coat staring down at you but seeing nothing. He shines a brilliant light and you're blinded, sprawling on the ground as you cower in a most unsightly and uncouth way. But as you hear snippets of conversation – *unresponsive . . . terminal brain damage . . . vegetative state . . . dorsal anterior cingulate compromised . . . recovery unlikely* – you lose the remaining shreds of dignity and pound against your enclosure, bellowing "I'm here! Please, let

me out!" As you holler at the top of your lungs and reach towards the kids, no corporeal functions are assumed, and you feel as insignificant as a gnat trying to control a great machine. Your family walks away, leaving you miserable and more alone than ever. You crumble to your knees and the swirling eddies of eigengrau quickly envelop you.

Through their departure comes *his* arrival. You don't notice him appear, but you are aware of it nonetheless: the flick of a forked tail, the majestic trishul clutched in *his* palm, the faint crimson aura that envelops him. Once again, *he* offers a gnarled hand to you, and for a moment, you hesitate. A brilliant flood of luminescence streams through your consciousness, but you do not falter before it, and its warmth and purity rejuvenate you. You see the inklings of a man before a great gilded cross, his hand extended as if awaiting your tribulations for his favor.

When the image fades, you are aglow with determination, and once again turn away from *his* proud, patient eyes. When you turn around once more, *he* has vanished – the only hint of *his* presence is a snaking streak of scarlet against the shadows.

An eternity of wandering passes. Time is difficult to gauge in the dark, and the windows which had given rise to such hope laid desolate and defunct. You walk on and on, and your mind dulls, prefacing the willful ignorance of the entrenched. The glow of faith that had resonated so deeply within you faded to a dull ember, and your memories seep out of your mind like the falling of sand through a flaccid palm.

The vigor of survival has been replaced with the ineptitude of ennui, and yet you are made to walk with no purpose, no destination, and no aspiration. As the beeping ceases to terminate, you descend into apathy and chaos.

When the windows open once again, fluorescent light assails you, but you stare back unflinchingly. You gaze on in passive indifference as if enslaved by the impotence of repeating meaningless steps. When the man in the lab coat says, "*it's been a week*" and the woman foolishly cries, "*a week? I wouldn't give up for years!*", you regress to the unforgivably depraved state of inability. You shamble on like a wasted derelict, and as the windows are shuttered close again, you do not even turn to watch the woman depart. For a moment, you worry about financial situations and of emotional will, but the moment soon passes. You no longer remember her, as if she were a fragment of another life, one where she was not the torturer condemning you to an eternity of unrest and imprisonment.



He appears, and for the first time, you look him straight in the eye as he extends his hand. Gleaming in the reflection of his eyes, you see yourself, weighed with a pallid and emaciated countenance, chained to the bellows of a giant never to again be awoken. He then does something so utterly incongruous with your recollection that you falter as you hear the low baritone of his voice: "The greatest evil is indecisiveness," he states simply. "A motionless pinwheel, the lack of movement, the lethargy that accompanies years of apathetic movement." His confident eyes find yours and he extends his hand patiently as if expecting, sooner or later, that you'd shatter. "There comes a point, where torture, punishment, even eternal damnation offer more solace than the painful negligence of mind, body, and spirit in the unbreachable void of oblivion."

You ponder for a moment, but his words hold no malice or ill-intent, and though they are harsh, they ring straight and true. A part of you envisions a holy marble castle sitting atop the clouds, but as you reach towards it, you see your body withered away by eons of neglect and insignificance; your mind is absent and though your soul is cleansed in purity, you feel no capacity of humanity and no passion for life. To wander in the shadows until released by your corporeal captors would diminish your essence, slowly and painfully, until you were but a mere fragment of existence. And you see the path offered before you – so mercilessly unconventional to your upbringing, so dastardly malevolent in cruel honesty, so contradictory to the tenets you uphold. But you can't. You know what is right, but you cannot bear the burden of sacrificing your rationality. So you sacrifice it quickly and on your own terms, enslaving yourself to the eternal state of pushing a boulder up a hill rather than the perpetual hope and dejection as you wander endlessly through the darkness. Decisiveness, even in the temporal structuring of confinement, gives you the brief but necessary will to reject all reason, all emotion, and all hope for the gleaming castle among the clouds. You choose, not to dawdle in indeterminism, but to choose your tragic fate. Your dreams you are willing to die for, but not willing to live.

And so you take his hand. The shadows around you turn even darker as eigengrau is purged of its dots of light, the seemingly insufficient specks that had rendered it an indecisive agathokakological form. It's whole now, and the essence of purity is a calming draught to your shaky breaths.

As you descend into freedom, you hear the droning, continuous beep, the rush of scrambling footsteps, and a wail of despair. But they mean nothing to you anymore. And part of you aches for the woman, and for a moment you almost remember her through arcane means – her cinnamon brown hair, bubbly laugh, and the dainty way she twirled the ring between her slender fingers; but you shield yourself, and willingly succumb to the blissful ignorance of nonidentity as the fleeting remembrance evaporates.

As you step onto the ferry and glide over the agonous misery of wretched forgotten souls, step onto the jagged, glassy obsidian dearth that dessicates life, and feel the imperial wrath of cold

purgatorius fire, you do not feel fear. You do not yearn for the cross or the light or the silhouette of the waiting man. Your soul withers away into onyx dust at his hands, and that's ok. Because, for the first time in much too long, you feel relief.

Inside of you, you see the inklings of yourself, thrashing and expectorating as the darkness swallows the struggling body. The last semblance of hope is crumpling and drowning, and it extends a weary arm at you, its master.

You step on hope's pleading head, and the weight of your foot submerges it into the murky gloom of death. In a moment, it ceases to struggle and sinks into the forlorn abyss.

You turn away, slowly at first, and embrace the calloused clutches of darkness.

Are we out of the woods yet by Eden Christian



An illustration of a woman with long black hair and blue eyes, wearing a patterned top. She is holding a blue teacup with three faces on it. Steam rises from the cup and swirls into a large, white, abstract shape in the sky. The background is a textured blue.

teacup by Emma Gulledge

Bread is Forever

by Daria Volkova

The issue with a great deal of things in life is that they are impermanent. We'd like to think they last millennia, that wearing raccoon eyeliner won't be a phase, Mom. Unfortunately, as disheartening as it is to teens everywhere, in the grand scheme of the universe, so many things are fleeting, including time itself.

But bread?

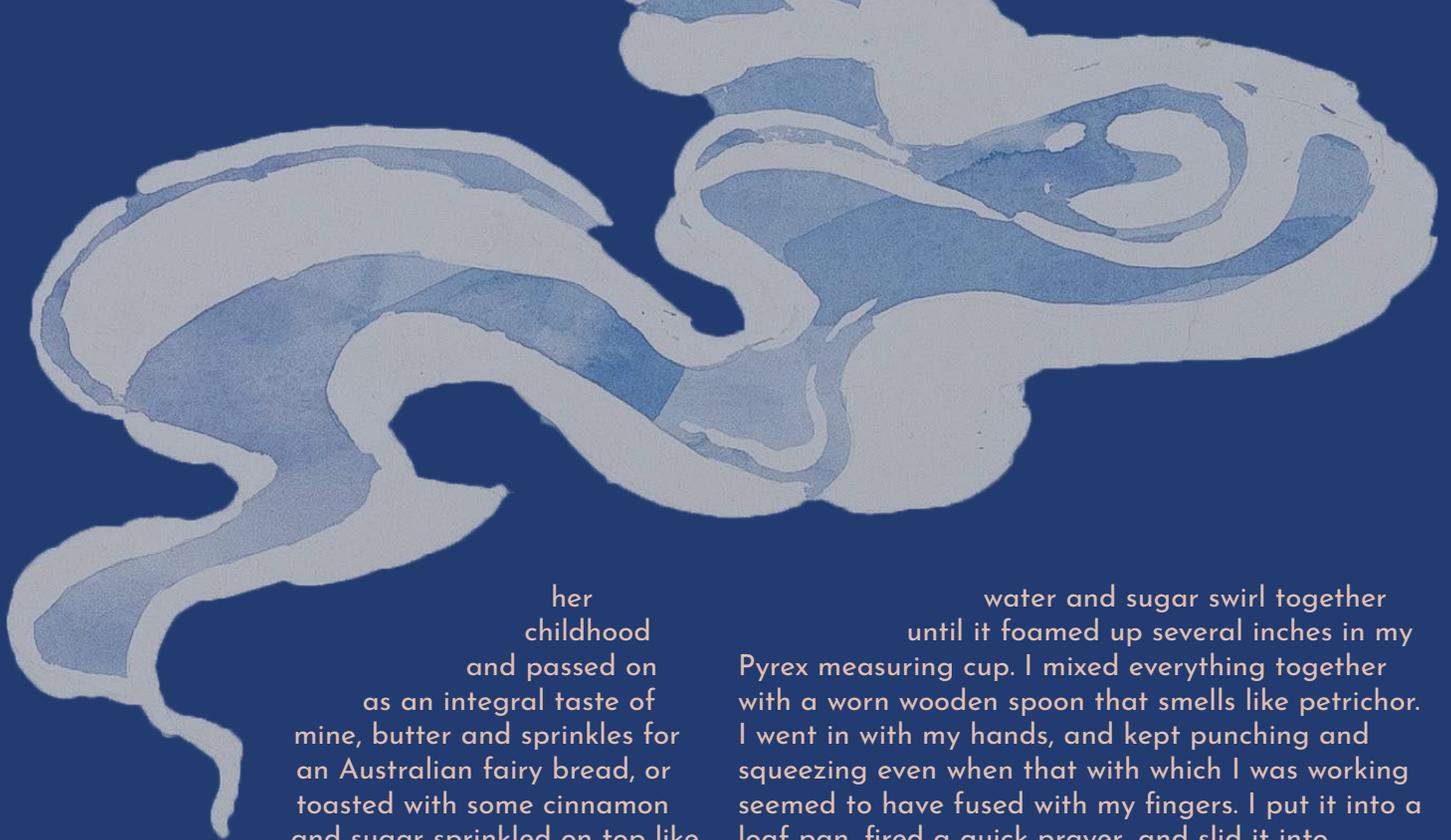
Bread is forever.

Ever since people first figured it out over ten-thousand years ago, it has been a defining staple of cuisine and culture all over the world. German pretzels' smooth egg-wash finish both finely and firmly holds its carefully measured goodness. Mexican *pan de muertos* celebrates family and generational kinship in its lovable sweetness and sculpted flair. Russian black bread resolutely holds its sturdy shape no matter the topping *du jour* over its sweet and sour core. Humans disagree on a lot of things – how to build things, how to take care

of things, how to coexist. However, almost everyone agrees on one thing: bread.

Today's bread can take many shapes and forms, have hundreds of names and thousands of ingredients, but many aspects of bread making have been the same for centuries (except of course, for sliced bread, which is younger than Betty White). There are delightful grandmas in Wyoming who have yeast that's been active for over 100 years and passed down from generation to generation. Just like the previous batch had been. Despite technology's best efforts, you still have to let your dough rise in a warm place, whether by your log cabin window with dusty sunbeams streaming in or in the proving drawer of the oven that your grandparents bought with their first house in the sixties, a teal blue that matches the old Frigidaire in the garage.

Bread is an incredibly wondrous food. Sometimes I enjoy it with butter and cheese like my mom ate in



her
childhood
and passed on
as an integral taste of
mine, butter and sprinkles for
an Australian fairy bread, or
toasted with some cinnamon
and sugar sprinkled on top like
I read about in a children's

magazine when I was seven; because with bread anything goes.

In addition to all the edible (and delectable) joy it brings, I find a specific elation in baking it. When the pandemic hit this year and shelves emptied, many people turned to baking bread. It was a way to pass the time while stuck inside and a way to get fresh bread when one's local Jewel had run out. The internet exploded with memes about sourdough loaves, with dilettante bakers showing off their misshapen slabs proudly for the World Wide Web to see. But as internet trends often do, it soon quieted down. No one really talks about their bread anymore, at least not in the environments subject to monetization. You swipe from cakes that look remarkably like other objects, to cooking "bacon" in an air fryer, pancake cereal, making frog-shaped foods, one-pan-feta-pasta, and other novelties with varying cost-per-click values.

I, an individual ill-fatedly known for my habitual lack of vogue awareness, got onto the trend a bit late – still blissfully unaware of its very existence. Last October, I directed myself into my kitchen, pulled up a recipe, and decided that bread would be made right there and then.

The first bread I tried to make was a simple whole-wheat loaf. Whole-wheat – to preserve a vague sense of healthiness, and simple because I could not handle anything but.

I measured out the ingredients to the letter – or rather, number, scooping up powdery soft flour with my measuring cup and leveling it off with a knife like a seasoned Food Network chef. I watched the yeast,

water and sugar swirl together until it foamed up several inches in my Pyrex measuring cup. I mixed everything together with a worn wooden spoon that smells like petrichor. I went in with my hands, and kept punching and squeezing even when that with which I was working seemed to have fused with my fingers. I put it into a loaf pan, fired a quick prayer, and slid it into the oven.

I had utterly failed. The bread was dense, bitter, under-salted, too wet but also somehow too dry. Paul Hollywood of the Great British Bake Off would not have been pleased.

But I kept on trying.

I haven't perfect bread yet, not in the slightest. When I look for recipes online I still search for ones with "no knead" and "easy" in their cutely named food blog titles. There are plenty of skills I haven't built up yet; keeping a close eye on the yeast, kneading the dough until it springs up *just* enough once I poke it, knocking on it with my knuckle once it's out of the oven to check if it sounds hollow.

For now though, I'll focus on feeling the dough between my fingers, stretching and folding it until it's a happy lump ready to rise. I will sprinkle the cloud-like flour onto my countertop and not care if it goes everywhere, because a mess of flour is a given the moment the genie is out of the vessel. Who am I to fight the fireworks of white pixie dust exploding in my kitchen, riding the breeze from the open window? I will let myself make mistakes, because it is only one moment in the history of bread. I will treasure what those mistakes teach me and hold the lessons close to my heart. I will knead and knead until my hands give out like every other bread maker's before me.

When faced with a calamity that has taken so much from the world, I have to take a step back and remind myself of what is good. After all, there is yeast in my fridge, flour in my cupboard, and a long succession of bread makers standing behind me, rooting for my success.

Rain

by Sumlina Alam

Under my umbrella,
I watch the clear drops descend.

They hurl, abiding gravity,
As they run, far away,
From the hands of the sky.

It makes sense for the clouds to darken,
To yowl in pain,
And to jolt fear across the land.

Though the strikes echo and blind,
The drops plummet,
With no care or remorse.

Is it death they approach,
Or is it the hope of freedom,
From their oppressors?

I see one drop in particular,
And grimace as it splats,
On the cold, drab ground.

I witness the others do the same,
Fall, land, splat.

I ponder, "What's the point of this?"

But, more and more hit the ground.
Some on the lamp,
Some on the bench,
Some on the road,
Some on the garden,
And some on me.

Finally, I see the clouds go.
They turn and walk away,
Leaving the sky blank,
Like the canvas of an artist.

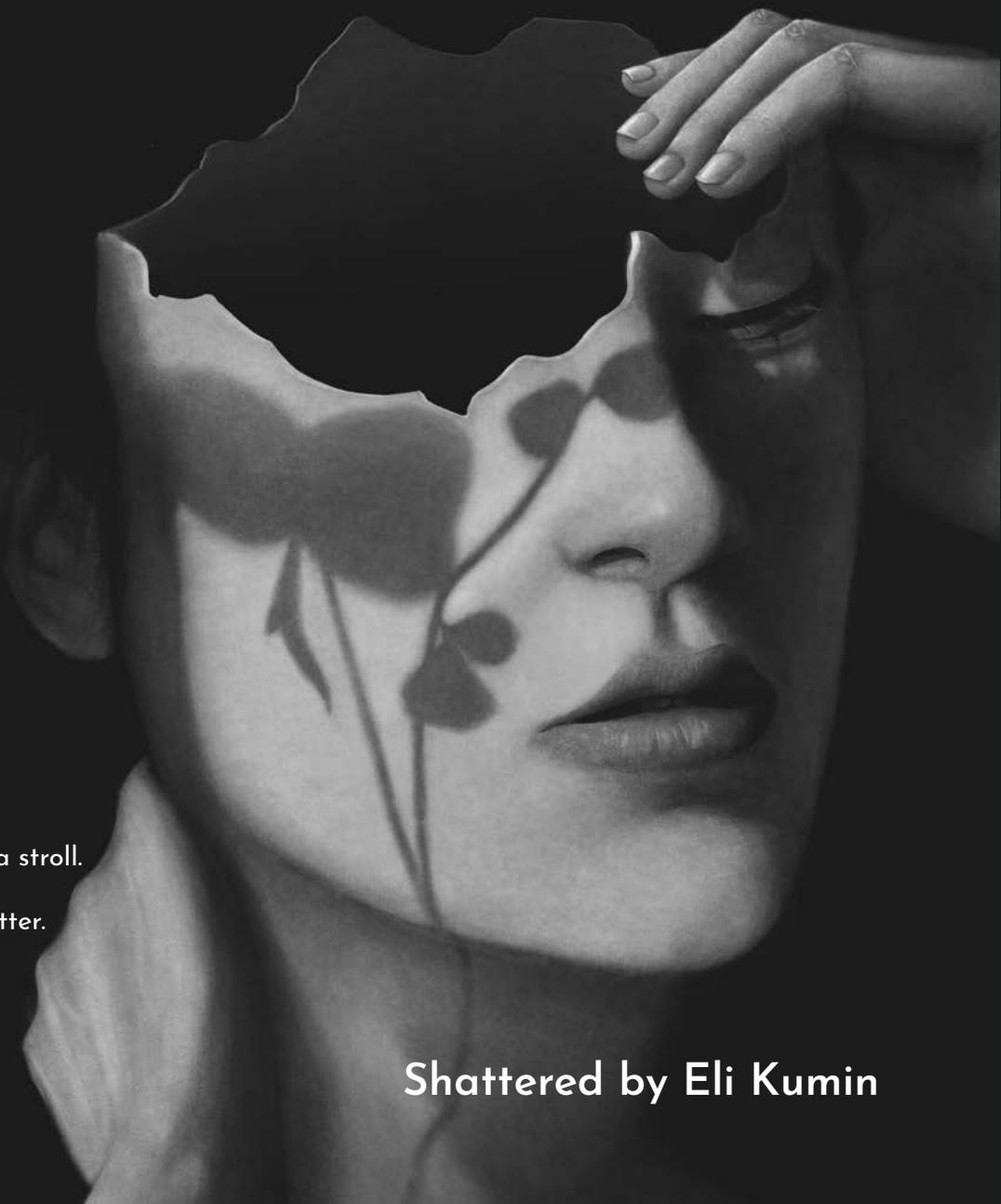
The world's back to normal,
As people open their doors to take a stroll.
Cars rush past the puddles,
And send trails of water into the gutter.
They'll be forgotten.

I stay with my umbrella,
Who has protected me,
And sacrificed its skin.

I notice how alive the trees are,
How green the grass is,
And how vibrant the flowers are.

Maybe it was worth it after all,
To experience such a massacre,
But breathe life into others.

The earthy scent wafts and reaches my nose,
It's distinct and recognizable.
While others complain,
And others embrace it,
I know what the smell is.
It's rain.



Shattered by Eli Kumin



All We Do Not Know by Elena Unger

This morning I listened to an interview with poet Ada Limón. She spoke about epiphanies and didactic endings and how sometimes a poet must surrender to the discomfort of unknowing. How sometimes it is best to listen to the world's echoing heartbeat and remain a solemn observer rather than a sweating preacher.

There is a sanctity about the mountains that my roaring yet mortal mouth will never capture. All around me, spirals of snow swirl toward the sky like steam escaping from a kettle. I let them glide through my human hands, knowing I have been touched by something bigger.

Ada's words reminded me that it is okay to be small. Wisdom is an elusive thing; if I try to capture it and plaster it onto sunlit windows with an arsenal of made up metaphors, then maybe I am nature's fool. A balmy liar who extracts meaning from thoughtless swallows.

Her words reminded me that it is okay to not know. To profess a cluelessness that runs deep in the ridges of your skin and runs wet like the rivers of your blood. When I looked out the window at lunch, I saw a man huffing down the street with an orange jacket and brown boots. I tried to see him – the sway of his body and the scowl on his face – rather than the lessons he could teach. I didn't know him. I do not know him.

The Brain in Colour

by Natalie Nims

Isn't it weird that we know the least about ourselves? As a species, we have conquered nations and created thousands of societies paired with complex languages. Yet, scientists still work to figure out the very thing that sits in all of our skulls. The brain. Where does every thought come from? Those that crawl from our brains with their twisted vines and razor thorns. Or those that create the flutter of excitement. Something we cannot touch but still feel. What about passion? The trigger held in our brain that when pulled can shoot off sparks of adrenaline at the most random of moments. Words spill from our mouths as our bodies send shivers down our spines. The brain is studied in black and white, right and wrong, question and answer. Maybe it is time we see the brain in colour.

A dot. The tiniest pink dot inside of a transparent blob. Over nine months, the dot grows into a full organ sewed together with red string and embellished with blue beads. A bucket of mushy white clay splashed inside the blob along with slick black oil. Just a touch of evolutionary magic and there you have it. A buzz is heard as if someone had turned on a radio. Then there were more buzzes and mumbles until they took up everything. At first, the brain wanted to do something to get rid of the critters but over time, they learned to live with the buzz running in the background. The first memory the brain ever made feels like the colour red. Strong and left an impression. It was made in the backyard back when they still had the swingset. They were on the green plastic seat and they felt the world moving in circles as they went higher. Their ears began to ring as they went closer to the bar that held up the swings. They were nearly about to flip over. Up and down, their chest heaved. A scream of joy escaped them and they let go of the rusty metal. The swing seat escaped them, leaving them in the air for a second before they hit the ground. The stale taste of metal filled their mouth. The grass below them had been dyed a dark red. A cascade of sharp pains vibrated in their gums, two teeth had been lost in the accident. Yet a jolt of excitement hit their chest. The reward for such exhilaration was pain and joy, there were multiple consequences. The formula to be followed is pain = despair, an animalistic realization but that is not what is happening here.

The brain grew older with its human, expanding and opening

up new areas. They had been in seventh grade art class with their favourite teacher. The woman had such a burning passion for the subject. When she took a blob of yellow from her palette, she took it with quick urgency as if the painting in front of her needed to be finished at that moment. Her eyes widened with every stroke. During her demonstrations she didn't speak to the students because of how entranced she was. As if it were just the painting and herself in a dimly lit room. That day, the teacher handed them a blank canvas and said,

"Draw what you'd like. Anything."

Never had they been in possession of that kind of freedom. At first, they had no idea what to do. When they glanced around the room, every other child had already begun the rough outline of the drawing. The brain scrambled for an idea. Thoughts buzzed and hit each other on their way to the front of the headspace which just resulted in a haze of chattering. Not a single stone was left unturned, every idea ransacked for what little worth it may have. Until they found it. A beacon of light that stood on a pedestal. The most wonderful idea. Subconsciousness pulled at the red cords that were intertwined into the spongy pink cracks. Smack, dip, scatter. The thoughts that once ran uncontrolled across the atmosphere now hid at bay, awaiting for their safety signal. Anywhere except for the canvas had been turned black to increase focus. A strong vignette. The

ring of the bell sounded just in time for the last drop of paint to fall. They looked back on it with pride. A self portrait made of squiggles and smudged lines splashed with messy green blobs that spread across the painting. Red vines extend from the back, reaching into the portrait's hair. Yellow sparks glow from the chest and blue drips from the eyes. Yet the rest of the painted body is merely a collage of black lines, the clothes are not coloured in and neither is the face. The only colour radiates from the body parts. Their teacher walks over to collect the painting. She lit up like she had during past examples. Then she turns to them, a slow smile across her face and tells them something that will never be forgotten. A memory given its own room and revisited often. This single sentence shall become fuel and fire.

"This is the best painting that has ever been made in my classroom." Praise creates dopamine. And dopamine is the most addicting drug, a drug you crave when it is not there and when you are not given enough your body shrivels. That happiness is lethal.

Fetus by Savannah Voth

In Columbia University, a study was conducted similar to the one that occurred when the brain

had aged 17 years. Their heart has been torn two times before. First time at 15, when a kind boy with locks of gold whispered promises in their ear that he had already broken at the time of saying them.

"I'll never break your trust." He told his group chat everything that they had ever vented to him.

"I love you." They knew for a fact that was a lie. He knew too.

"You'll always feel safe with me." He knew that he was going to stand them up tomorrow at their own party. Their birthday. It was a scene straight from a movie, crying on the front porch as the rain dropped from the roof. For days on end, all they could paint was the rain. That's all that made them feel. Then a year later, a girl with deep black braids and light brown skin truly made them feel safe. With cuddles and sweet strawberry chocolates. Yet she left too. One moment they were happily in love and then she drove off without a word. Each time the brain clouded. A twisted knot of betrayal winding in their gut. Each thought entailed the cheekbones and curves of their face between the fog of thoughts. The food she liked had been displayed in a corner of the mind. Every late night talk, hands held in each other's sweaty palms was stored in that area. The pain of never being able to restock that area, only to watch as they gathered cobwebs and eventually faded into dust. The only thing that dragged them from the pit was art. That was when they made their best piece. Bright and plump oranges freckled with specks of brown paint dripping with glazy red blood, only a navy background to drag your attention too. From then on, they associated heartbreak with the colour orange. It was not until they were seventeen that they met a new lover. A girl with blue curls that loved to read and most of all, animate. They spent countless nights in the library reading until the words blurred into straight lines. The two drew together, lending each other snippets of advice. Whenever the girl, Hana, would give them a quick tip the mind would trip over itself to find a scrap of paper to write the advice on. It didn't matter what was happening, they could be mid outline and they would still stop for Hana. They fall deeply in love with her. Maybe even more than they had with others. But when Hana showed up before school to tell them the news they did not cry like they had before. When she said,

"Maybe we can still be friends after this?", they didn't drag their nails against the door. And finally, when she left them forever they were not fazed. It was as if they barely felt it. The study made in California University was a test about the adaptation of the mind. Mice were given scents to smell for weeks. At the end of the week some neurons lost all reaction while others gained more of a reaction. The brain is not supposed to adapt like this, to do that. But it does. It adapts so you won't die. Even if that means going further than impossibility.

How can it hurt to think? When raw fear entangles itself inside you what can you do except cry. Lack of hope from anyone. The sick addiction of praise sinks into them leaving an unfillable hole. Then the buzz

came. A single wretched horrible thought rose from the batch. The mind obsessed wanted it to be understood. Dissected it until it didn't feel real anymore. When they finally wanted to leave it alone, the thought rose from the ashes at every turn because they had given it power. The night of October 27th was when it manifested. The tears that dropped so absently like they didn't leave behind their bloodshot eyes. The weight in their gut made them sink low. The cold unrealistic pain. A fake wish that it could go back to normal when they didn't know normal. In the dead of night when even the stars sleep they break. They crack at the edges and realize that the basis of their clay is broken. Yet they do not kneel down into the carpet and accept defeat. They pace and they walk the circles of their room. They wake up every morning, they eat, they breathe. As their mind threatens to eat them from inside out they keep living. To those who have felt that much, who have felt the silent screams of pain in your chest, who have felt your sorrow consume you so brutally, their heart goes out to you. To those who have felt too much. After reading this, you may wonder why the brain would dare to keep going? Why not just lay in bed everyday like you do when everything hurts? When they go to fill up a water glass and stare into the glassy clear waves, counting how many weeks it's been since the thoughts first plagued them as they fill up with dark regret, why drink the water then get out instead of sitting there in pain? Because nothing makes sense. The brain is not supposed to work.

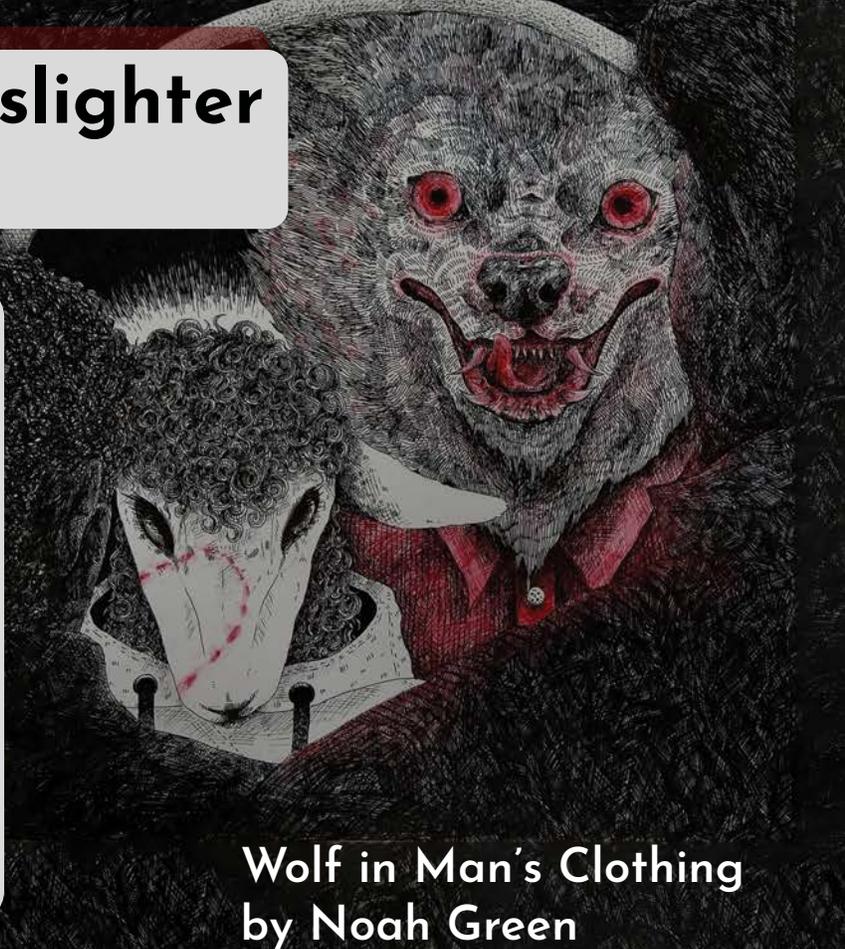
Passion, pain, and pulse. We want to leave something behind. We want to leave something beyond our reach from under the dirt of the grave. After their art is sold, their children are made, and their life has been filled, it is time to end it. That's it. Death is not poetic or soft like many college literature students pouring over classics will tell you. Death is just the end, the finish line. Yet, not a single brain will think as such. They spend their lives grappling for their sacred purpose, what they shall leave and do until the end clock strikes. Even though most of the population is not remembered they will nevertheless attempt it. Some create art that sparks interest in the hearts of equal souls. Others pass things on to their children in their glorious wills. Either way, this is an ancient process. One that will continue to happen as humanity changes. Not a single other animal thinks this way because the human mind wants to reach further out than its natural place. It wants to break free from the chains it was born in and live immortal. For some the clock strikes early, the panic does not come from everything ending. It comes from the feeling that one has not achieved purpose. The light green airy feeling that comes with being fulfilled is snatched away immediately. Because we had to have been here for something. It is vague but we must find it. We must claw our way through questions to feel fulfilled. That is life, a quest to find answers. And out of a thousand, you will only find a single one. That is the one the brain holds onto.

on being called a gaslighter

by Stephania Kontopanos

PART I: AI is created

I think God made you and me out of binary code
You call me an enigma,
But I do not speak your language.
You would be the 1's.
 Standing tall
 Always at the top
 Perfect Aryan halo on your head
I would be the 0's.
Zero.
Zero is nothing.
Zero is the void, the infinite pit
In my stomach
As I say
"Yes, I can't be trusted."
"Yes, I am wrong."
"Yes, I am a gaslighter."



Wolf in Man's Clothing
by Noah Green

Part II: AI is reprogrammed

I was forced to watch 1000 hours of emotional abuse short films.
I was forced to watch 1000 hours of
Every thought i had
Every word i said
Every action i took
I reached into myself on a
cellular
 molecular
 atomic
level
I came out with nothing but
miles and miles of frayed, organ-colored wires
that i'm still trying to untangle
A cat's cradle that you toy with
until my stomach is whirring and
everything i never said is coming up and out
Self-awareness
Self-scrutiny
Self-destruct
I think about myself so much
 i'm *almost* as narcissistic as you.

Part III: AI is shut down

Error: Bluetooth Connection Failing
The wires connecting me to my outlets have been severed
Use the cord to charge your phone
Call it innovation
Your connection is stronger than ever
Because I am being kept secret

Part IV: AI is recycled

I'm not afraid to use the word narcissist now. See?
print("narcissist")
print("narcissist")
print("narcissist")
The search bar swallows my question
Learning that even code can feel a lump in the throat
It taunts me as, for a nanosecond, I am
Met with a page of links in periwinkle purple
I have been here before.
And it disappears.
error 404 page not found
"Refresh"
error 404 page not found
Perhaps my screen is broken
Computer knows best
(How did he reprogram Google?)

Everlasting to do list
by Maddy Williams



What Happened This Morning

by Gaby Kill

they say you don't know what goes on behind closed doors,
and once I slam one getting out of my car I'm not sure I know either
going from . . . that, to a shift, is a shift to be sure
I'm left shaking, the routine bittersweet cure
is work
swept into service, stacking Sierra mist refills I build walls between me and critical thoughts, no stops
but the sickly saccharine way I whisper
nothing happened
blink my server syrup eyes
that didn't happen
shooting stomach pain
Sure, I'll make it happen!
I clocked in so late today but if I ring tickets
and wash dishes
and draw blood from broken cups maybe my bruises will mix with red wine enough to stop getting looks
it's exhausting.
Whose laughter is more nervous,
Mine? Or my coworker's?
I don't know
dodging eye contact like flashbacks
They do
don't ask, it
Hey girl!
And yet
what happened this morning?
A soft prayer my manager would just guess
But under my caked concealer and cherry eyes he just sees dessert service
I'm sorry Matt.
Painting a smile seems impossible these days but so is telling the truth
either I'll be there before six or another sour scar will,
scored knuckles from knife sorting and people pleasing like *it's my job*
yet, at home I never clock in
Pull off my apron along with my mask,
My nonslip shoes that sound off on the floorboards.
I work there for a living. I work here to survive.

A Girl with Insomnia and a Fast Car

by Ruby Cullen

Jessie's nights have been difficult for as long as she can remember.

When she was three, Jessie had thought that maybe it was the dark that had kept her up. It was scary, being three years old and not knowing what was living in all the little corners that light didn't reach. It was scary being all alone in a dark bed in a dark room in a dark house, with the monsters in her closet and the monsters under her bed and the parents down the hall. Maybe it was the not knowing that didn't let her sleep.

But, no. The glow stars on the ceiling and the alien-shaped night light she got for her fifth birthday help her see. She knows everything that's in her room – she knows that there's a stack of her sketchbooks in the back of her closet, she knows that there's a half-done, long overdue school project lying under her bed, and she knows that there are no monsters. And she still can't sleep.

Maybe it's her parents. Sometimes it's the angry clatter of dishes, and sometimes it's the heavy footsteps coming up the stairs, and sometimes it's the horrifying absence of noise that keeps her waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen. But most of the time it's the screaming, the crying. The fighting.

Jessie's parents have fought for as long as she can remember.

Fought and fought and fought, fought over money, fought over chores, fought over dinner. Fought over whose parents should be visited on Christmas. Fought over the late nights Dad spent with his co-workers. Fought over the Nissan Mom bought as an early graduation gift for Jessie.

Of course, the Nissan wasn't brand-new. And of course, Jessie didn't actually graduate that spring. (18 years worth of sleepless nights will tank your grades – who would've thought?) But Jessie loves that car more than anything in the world.

Except for Lauren. Jessie has been in love with Lauren for as long as she can remember.

Lauren, who transferred to Jessie's school in fourth grade for being a "troublemaker" at her old one. Lauren, who always stayed up late to talk to Jessie, even if she had to nap through Spanish the next day. Lauren, whose face fills every single page of Jessie's sketchbooks. Lauren, who purposefully flunked senior-level Calculus so she'd have to stay back and take summer school with Jessie. Lauren, who is okay not knowing things and isn't afraid of the dark.

Lauren, who got stood up at prom by her horrible boyfriend.

When Jessie pulled the car around, Lauren was sitting on the steps outside the cafeteria door. Jessie leaned over and opened the passenger side door and Lauren smiled like this was what she had wanted all along.

Jessie drove them out onto the highway. She knew this road like the back of her hand. Every once in a while, when she was sure her parents wouldn't be able to catch her, she'd sneak out and drive her Nissan down the highway, all the way out to the edge of the city. But at the edge of the city, past the sign with the cursive "Thanks for visiting!" painted on, it was dark. Completely dark. There were never any other cars, there weren't any streetlamps, just the pale glow of the city limits sign and that was it. And that's where Jessie always stopped. Just lifting her foot off the accelerator and rolling to a stop like she was approaching a red light. She didn't know what was past that sign and it scared her.

As her car rounded the familiar bends of the highway, Jessie looked over at Lauren. Her hand was out the window, delicate fingers lazily combing through the warm springtime wind. She looked so beautiful with the petals of her corsage flying off in the breeze and stray hairs whipping around her face. She took Jessie's hand as the lights of downtown faded into the distance. And Jessie made a decision.

Jessie turned off her high beams and let darkness sweep down the road. She was just barely able to see Lauren's moonlit face out of the corner of her eye and the city limits sign quickly approaching. She pressed the accelerator down harder. She didn't know what's out there and she didn't know what would happen next. She was confused and scared and tired, she's been tired for as long as she can remember, but mostly, she was happy.

As the speedometer rose past 90, that one Tracy Chapman song came on the radio. Lauren's corsage comes undone and flies off her hand and she laughs and laughs and laughs.

The sign passed in a blur. Jessie looked over at Lauren and kept driving and driving and driving.

Maybe not knowing isn't so bad.

파전 (pajeon)

by Alexander Choi

a halmoni's recipe
one with withered paper
scribbled calligraphy
rustic annotations
a dilapidated polaroid
i see as an ember of burning reels of film

boyish and coyish boy
flitters like an amorphous shadow
that is half as dark
because the light that shines
is only half as radiant

he is a stranger and myself
often one in the same
yet he is blind of what lies ahead
of what is right in front of him
dreams of a la la land

the viscous dough congeals to my hands
the roux over the hotplate never seems to set
there's no difference out from in;
i sense and am
the dough that sticks
the effervescent roux that never thickens

limbo: the nothingness between life and void
my palms press into the grains of the rolling pin
the tiredness of my bones
seeps into the tissue of my marrow
ripe empty vessels for sorrow
is this my reparation for a lost heritage?

tears of a muted spirit
fall through the cutting board
like a wisp of ethereal moonlight
yet the boy tells me
i cry because i'm chopping scallions.



The River's End by Lucia Thomas

unrefined.

by Arden Pryor

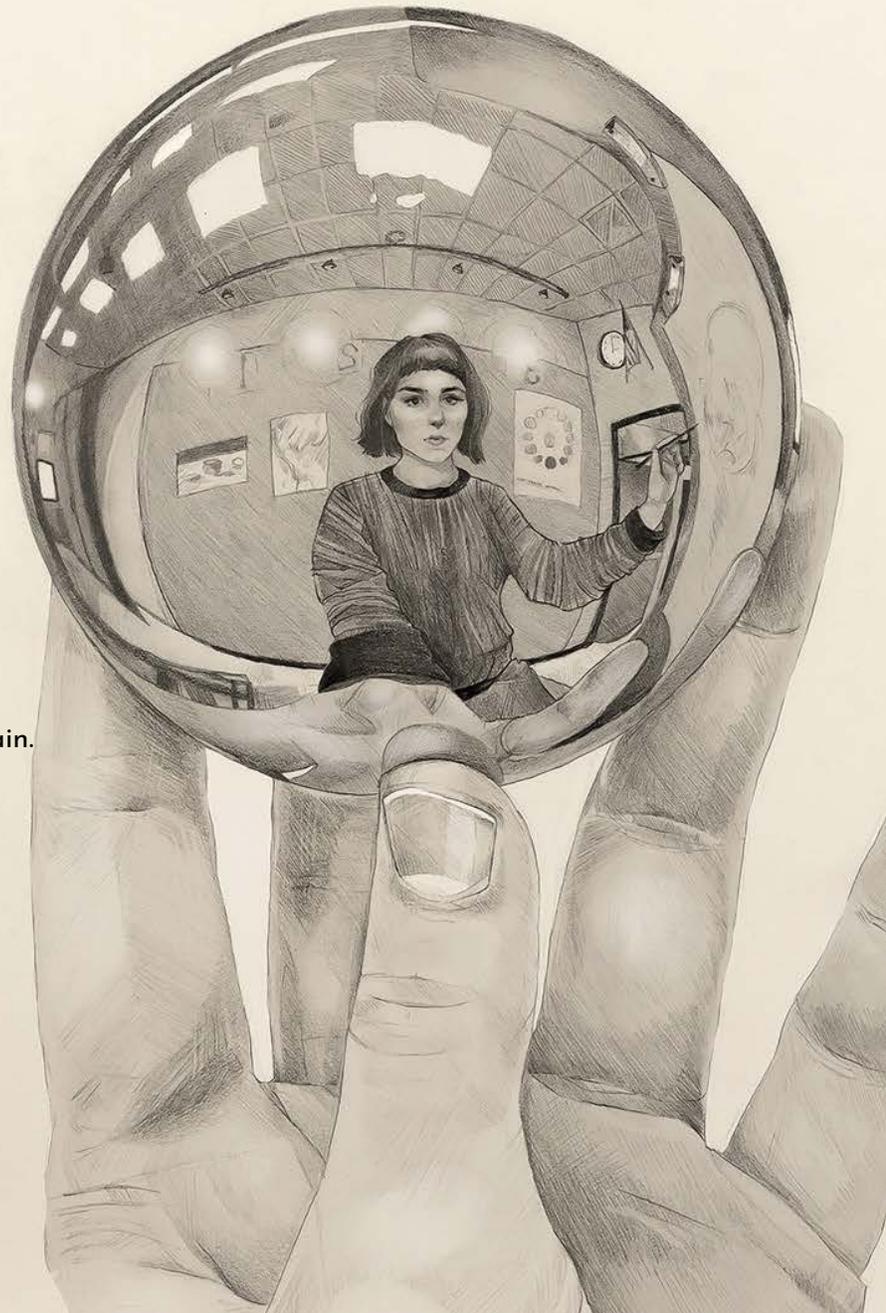
like the exuberance of bangs cut too short and stacks of bracelets that never match.
gold is for the good days only.
most days are silver. they are plentiful and lacking variation.
endless hours and constantly runny eyes.
sitting on the cracked leather seats in the parking lot.

i dabble in brief obsessions.
studious and fragile.
pink streaks and 11 lines.
or is it city lights and locks on chains?
tied backs and tins of glitter.
lemon juice stinging your tongue.

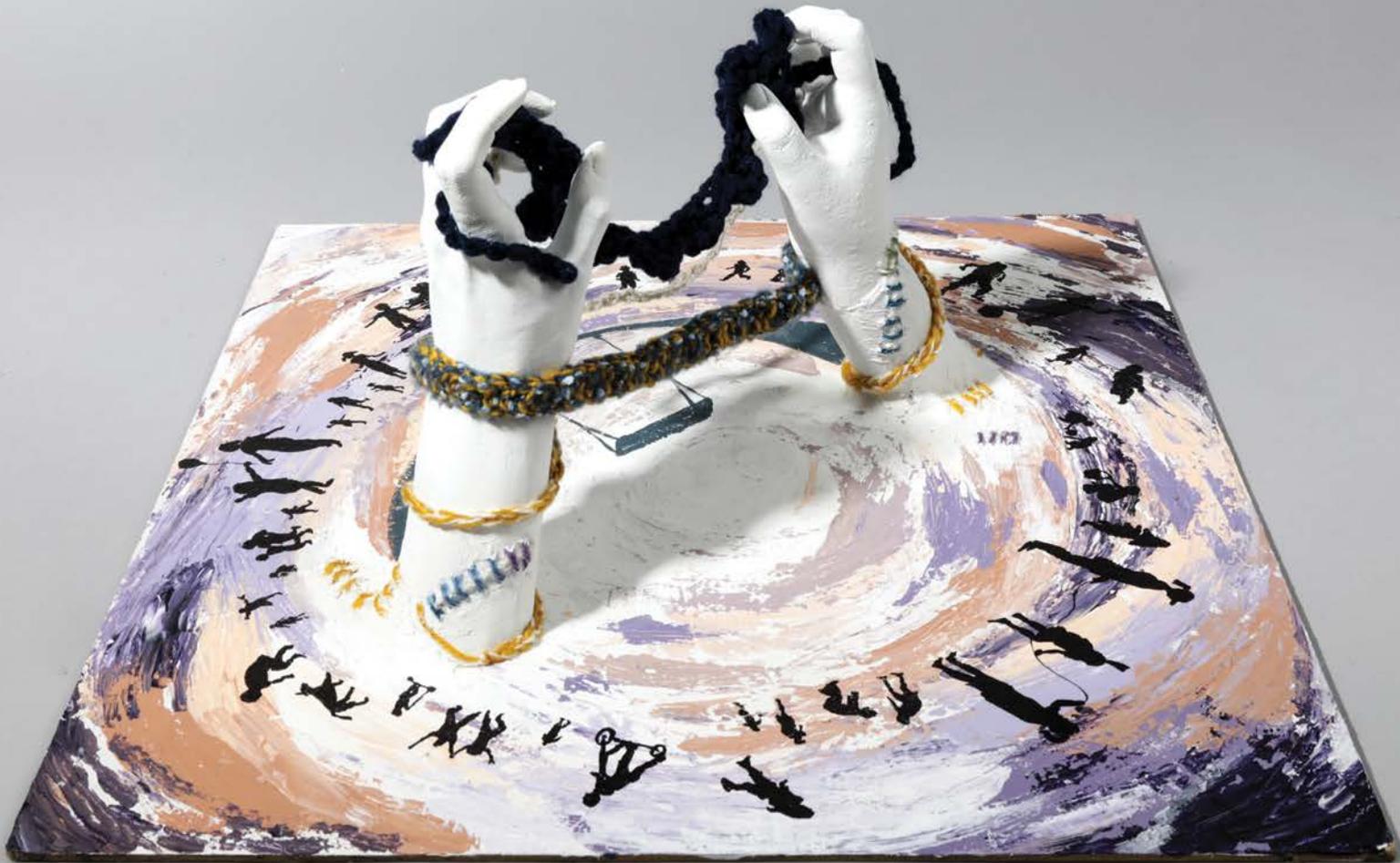
nights were so long, pouring over hundreds of pages.
the wish to bury myself in the words, and let the ink seep into my brain.
i remember the beginning.
so young and so good,
it started off sweet, innocent really,
which i quite like.
i find myself comfortably retreating.
how to know if a mind is still messy?
or if there is dust on all the files?

differences have arisen.
brown eyes turned blue,
and blue hair turned brown.
stashed cans are long forgotten,
bleach abandoned.

the sundays of my life,
puffed rice and a burning throat.
juice was always too sweet.
and now i sit,
on the top, never under.
scissors in hand.
watching the pictures flutter towards the ground.
with fluff in my stomach, and pounding in my brain.
some things never change.



Mirrorball by
Emma Gulledge



Imprints of a Mosaic by Jiin Choi

Miranda

by Shaun Loh

The credits recover,
and suddenly like a K9 you snuffle
the criminal boyhood out of my skin.
I always think myself circumspect in my cover-ups,
but in seconds you know where my blindspot is.

I should have known:
all felons must brace themselves
for the day they buckle under
the imperative of jurisprudence,
the inexorable rapture of arrest.

Now, I pray. Pray you will lead me
into good hands, screen me from my
impending shame. No Miranda rights there may be
in our nation, but I will be primed for this
long arm of our law.

Slave Morale

by Joey Wu

Full piece can be found at jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia.

Breaking News – Serial Killer James ‘Smiles’ Hiraeth Suspected for the Murder of a 7-year-old girl. Mother Beth Reiner stricken with grief, medical practitioners dispatched to relocate to local sanitarium

Forgiveness – Beth Reiner

The bright screen flickers before my eyes;
When did you become so popular?
My darling girl, flushed and angelic
aside a man whose name brings misery.

I knew, before the image appeared,
Before your name turned silent, before
they came asking questions to which I
had no answer, I knew it was you.

I prayed, today, before morning snatched you away;
Trotting to school with a bright smile,
Summer plans with friends: the beach, the mall
Grocery shopping when school ended.

They ask me why you went alone, if
Our last words would be “get eggs!”
And I smile at their cool indifference,
Your independence indefinable.

If you’re watching from above, I have
Decided to forgive your reaper;
No good comes from hatred, so please find
In your heart, forgiveness for me too.

From the diary of James Hiraeth, March 1998: I feel as if my time is coming to an end, everything has gone wrong, my mind is no longer mine, please, someone, save me save me save m–

Larceny – James Hiraeth

They say that all sins are the same, that
Murder and larceny are twins, that
God cares not for the magnitude but
for the sheer volume in calculation.

The doctors say I first robbed at birth,
I credit heartless Manhattan streets;
The streets that taught me to hide, to fight,
To ruthlessly grapple against life.

My father, a thief, was gone at birth;
My mother’s putrid, heavy resentment
carried into my world a bequeathing
so ardent that my coming shooed her away.

I stole at birth. I didn’t mean to.
But intent, mindsets don’t matter, do they?
In the end, all thieves are just the same,
One destination, thick with larceny.

Since when did thieving become cavalier?
Stealing change, time, happiness, other lives –
God, if you’re still keeping count, please give
me a number, my sum. I’ve lost track.

The diary of Piper Leonhart: Saturday – Want to hear something very rude? My friend promised to go shopping with me the first day of summer break, and she forgets to show up! The nerve of this girl, I tell you . . . wait til I get my hands on her. I even dressed up and everything, but she didn’t even show up after two hours. I went to her house. Nobody was home. Maybe she’s on vacation and forgot to tell me.

Patience – Piper Leonhart

I don’t think she’s ever gotten sick.
“Mental fortitude,” she described it,
As if her stubborn leadership was
a mere trait and nothing personal.

We used to be neighbors, her and I,
Afternoons soaking in mischief and
exploration, avoiding her mother’s quick
gaze, one that hunted invisible threats.

She told me that her house burned down once,
A few years back, before her father
Disappeared alongside her mother’s smiles;
She had nothing, but she still didn’t cry.

I don’t think she cries at all, my friend;
She does everything for her household,
so I implored once, “How can you stand
to work while your mother does nothing?”

A sweet, melancholy look shrouded her.
Her mother was gone; she was all alone.
She’s busy today, I suppose, so I
shall wait here for her, patiently, til she arrives.

File X246 Patient B Log: Wednesday, 8:41. We are detecting abnormal brain function from the patient. Brain tumor removal was successful, but surrounding areas received laceration damage. The amygdala may be compromised, and emotional responses are delayed if present at all. Details pending. Patient is conscious. I'm afraid he is no longer human.

Mendacious – Dr. Carl Spect

Stuttering is a speech impediment;
That's all, a flicker of the mouth.
So why did my fingers stutter as
I sliced open his cancerous brain?

The nurses tell me it's not my fault,
That mistakes are a part of learning,
That new doctors are bound to mess up,
That insurance funds will cover it.

They're wrong. I saw something in those eyes,
A cynical, merciless rebirth,
An entity I spawned that no level
Of insurance could possibly repay.

Operation done: tumor removed,
But something else seems to be missing;
Patient seems jagged, vulpine, angular,
I wonder what's behind that smile.

Empathy: he teared up when shown images
of brutality, but his heartless eyes and smile
show it's a lie; like the one I tell myself when
I pretend the serial killer on the news is a stranger.

To continue reading this piece
online, scan this code.



Side Nude
by Sasha Malik



The Man who is Lost in the Snow

by James Pressdee

Full piece can be found at jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia.

He sat quietly, as he always did, in the living room, upon his large grey sofa, his mug resting on the large grey table, and all of the furniture in that large grey room rested peacefully atop a large grey carpet that absorbed the gradual ageing of his living there. When he looked to his left he saw grey walls, of a darker, more subtle color designed specifically to have no color at all. Within their bounds, the muted, neutral floor spread out into a second living room that existed for when he grew tired of the first. Along the walls there hung occasionally a painting, images lacking entirely in substance and sentiment, images created only to disrupt the monotony of the lifeless, grey walls. Two more sofas guarded their coffee table with dignity, gazing stonily towards the front door. They were, of course, grey.

The kitchen was bare, and there was no evidence of a meal ever having been prepared there. The fridge hummed silently to itself in mechanical meter,

but only at night when the room was abandoned. The pantry shelves were empty but for a fine spread of dust, because the man who was lost in the snow had no need to eat, while he constantly battled the fierce blizzard that enveloped him.

The snow in which he was lost could neither be seen nor felt by anyone else but him. The storm occupied his mind ceaselessly, obstructing all other thoughts or notions of peace. It oscillated in strength depending on the man's mood, on his desperation to return to the past. He could not remember when he had stopped working, when he stopped leaving the house, when he last spoke. He did not know for whom he had worked, why he left, nor to whom he would have spoken. He could hear faint footsteps that battled with the noise of the torrent, the sound of love coming back to him, returning from a sojourn in nostalgia and into his present misery, but never arriving.

All faded away into the gentle blizzard that existed inside his head, in pure silence, in the way it existed when he was a child and he watched it all afternoon and into the evening behind the small window that was cold to the touch, and was the only thing he remembered. What need he may have had for reality and the present succumbed to the looming shadow of old age, and the separate lives of his younger selves that began to live once more within his mind.

Getting up slowly, he turned and methodically drifted towards the insipid kitchen and, stopping at the cupboard along the way, procured a glass from that ancient cabinet. He filled it with water that had a flavor like old age. He began turning his head, and in a minute had succeeded in directing his gaze to his right, where a large window peered outdoors. Moving in a dream, he trudged towards it, suddenly remembering its existence, and he joined the plane of glass in peering outdoors. He saw only trees, with brittle spines and bare branches, shivering in the grey winter noon.

A magnetism generated by habit drew him, next, towards the opposite end of the house, to the pensive study filled with thousands of unread pages and thousands more waiting to be written upon. At one end

Guide by Garrett Parish

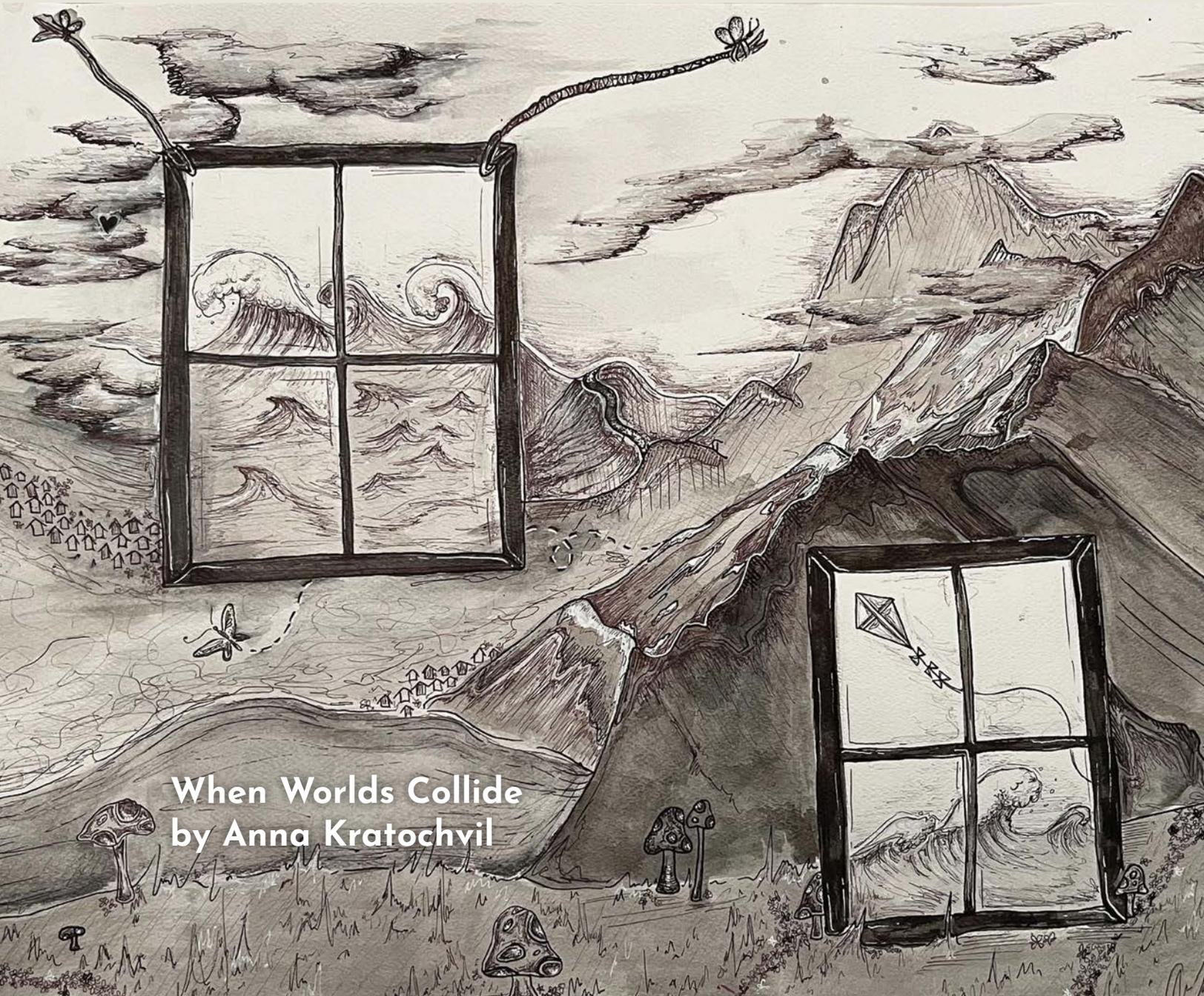


there was a window; the other walls were cluttered with neglected bookcases and shelves of antiques. The desk, however, was clear, its only inhabitants being his typewriter and the stack of paper next to it. The blank page was in the same ready-position as it had been yesterday, and as many days before as could be counted before time grew weary of itself. Today, just as he had done every other day, he sat at the desk, mind open in contemplation, ready to finally begin what he had spent his whole life working towards.

The keys beckoned silently to him with pressing eyes, begging to be used. The man lost in the snow then lost himself in a childlike fantasy about talking keyboards before quickly dragging himself back to his earnest reflection. After about an hour, he would resolve to finally begin, without caring for

flair or clarity or any other facet of his writing that so infuriated him and simply *begin*; a poem, story, or song for the child inside of him, longing to play. But then, with his bony, tree-root fingers hovering in anticipation over the first letter, he would lose his fleeting resolve, and slump back in his chair with a heavy sigh, too afraid to act.

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When Worlds Collide by Anna Kratochvil

is every war followed by a gilded age?

by Julie Huang

Google says there are more than 150 billion pennies in circulation
is that more or less than how many pearls lie in the ocean?
who knows how many pearls there are?
I feel the squeeze of self when I am forced to choose sides
to choose or to choose
this one or that one
this one or this one
this one, this?
this one.
yeah, right.
moreover, no one else hurts me for not taking bribes
like my fingers may break under the weight of all that water
do you guys get sick of seeing Abraham Lincoln everywhere?
my teacher said he was a professional
do professionals deserve to live on in copper plated zinc
and if so after death where do I live?
the ocean has beautiful real estate, I've heard
I swoop down and touch the wings of the gulls
in my spare time
sometimes I feel nothing first and then I feel angry
write in your own words, always. your own words.
nobody else can write your words for you.
like that's a good thing
when the only thing I know how to write are my own words
they live in my notebooks on my calendar my future
they are not pure they are
two percent word,
ninety-eight percent me,
they are my own.
no chance of someone else screaming: Please! Take me instead! Take me!
no chance of parole.
so, simply writing takes a lot of me.
pearl diving seems less painful, but less easy.



Blue In The Face
by Elizabeth Nordhus

Spiders

by El O'Brien

Psychosis isn't just voices in your head and torturing bugs, but being unable to tell fantasy from reality. Stuck in my own personal hell but no one else can see it

It's being sent to secured wards, on constant watch, because sometimes other kids look too much like my hallucinations off a young girl following me, spiders crawling out of her face, bloody eyes bulging and lips sewn into a smile

And I wonder how I can still hear her laugh with her mouth closed.

Giggles aren't much of an answer.

And I almost find it funny: the school's million mandatory mental health rallies that don't cover anything that really matters

That don't mention the boy they planted a sapling for last November, or how I see a different classmate every trip to the mental hospital. They don't acknowledge cluster C, or mania, or psychotic disorders

Because quality over quantity, right?

The more pills down my throat, the lower my worth, the less my hallucinations feel real

But they are.

It starts in bugs that dig trenches in my skin and up my spine, down my shoulders, under my fingernails

Fingernails I spent so long painting, because sometimes the prescriptions don't work and the only thing keeping me from hurting someone is the high of evaporated acetone

Or of sneaking shots out of my parents' liquor stash

Or of my arms smiling red against sharp silver, trying to figure out which makes the prettiest colors, draws the nicest lines, helps me pull the spiders out fastest.

But it isn't pretty, it's deciding between killing my cat or turning the shower until the water boils, burning

And I'm scrubbing
scrubbing
scrubbing

until my skin comes out red and raw and blistered and bleeding and patches of flesh are flaking off –

... But that's okay

because my psychosis isn't real. Or at least that's what my parents say

No amount of aloe can help the sting of their words, the sting of my skin, but at least no one is hurt ...

Except me.

Every time I can't help with dinner, or fix the dress I ripped, or spread butter on bread

Because trusting me with knives and needles is a hazard

They don't understand that the smell of blood draws flies and the feeling of a knife against my skin draws satisfaction and the whipping of wind across my face draws joy as I stand in the middle of the street

Eyes closed as cars speed by
Arms open for whatever happens.

But it's alright ...

It's almost funny
I'm almost laughing



Spider's Thread by Waverly Altis

last summer

by Jasmine Harris

last summer, i died. well, very nearly.

last summer, i lived off of mugs full of cold milk tea, a concoction i frequently made to keep my weary mind company.

last summer, i felt myself crumbling, like a cookie from the inside out. only i wasn't a cookie. i don't even know what i was.

last summer, i pretended to fall in love but i don't think i ever really did. or, maybe i did, but. it didn't feel real. back then, nothing felt real.

last summer, i found myself outside at night. i found myself slipping the pools of my phalanges into the comfort of my sneakers, i found myself pulling the strings of my earbuds tight around myself until the music wrapped me in a different world, and my footsteps took me into another.

last summer, i only went out when the sky was the blue of the weights beneath my eyes, nearly the black of blooming bruises when i hit my knee too hard. sometimes there were stars, i think. last summer, i also started forgetting.

last summer, my mind numbed over as i read meaningless sentences about neurons and axons and myelin sheaths, the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala, the hippocampus. i don't even remember what half of these do.

last summer, i sat with them on swings, going higher than i'd ever gone, the speaker's sound engulfing us, just us, and nothing else. there was the front of a cosmic brownie box that i saved.

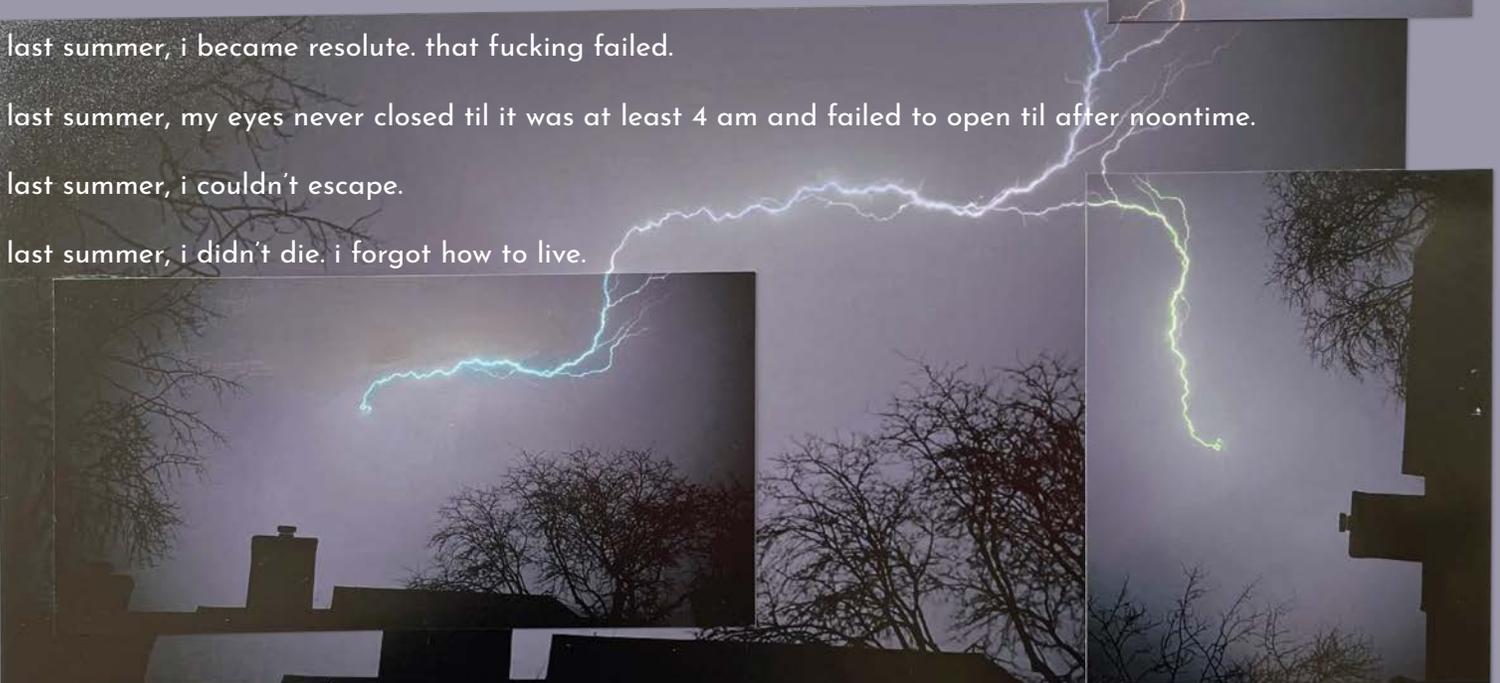
last summer, i resorted to sketches on paper, eyelashes drawn closely together, lines overlapping until vague shapes traced their way along my insides.

last summer, i became resolute. that fucking failed.

last summer, my eyes never closed til it was at least 4 am and failed to open til after noontime.

last summer, i couldn't escape.

last summer, i didn't die. i forgot how to live.



Lightning Connection
by Amaya Reyes

Boy Scout Camping Trip on The Eve of The Apocalypse

by Andy Villar



The sun went missing today.
There were no rivers of blood or plagues of locusts,
first-born children did not fall ill, nor did frogs descend on the cities.
It was quiet.
The black hole stood stagnant.
We could only watch and wait.

My friend Joseph says the aliens are coming.
That they'll treat you like us specimens.
I'd be put under a microscope and
pinned and mounted like a shiny black beetle.
I have never seen a boy-shaped bug before
but I'm sure it could happen.

Dad's been watching the 24-hour news broadcasts.
The scientists searched for explanations,
drew us intricate graphs and pictures,
described situations of which there was
only infinitesimal chance of survival.
Nothing was for certain, though.
(A computer can only predict so much.)

Grandma says it's god.
The black hole's his giant looking-glass.
(His pupils are the size of stars.)
She said he's pissed and wants to start over again,
'cause everything turned out wrong.
Dad laughed and called her a crazy old witch.

The sun went missing today.
Laying in my sleeping bag,
I looked up towards the heavens.
And somewhere among the dark night,
there was the twinkle of an eye.

Into the Horizon by Adib Rabbani

Agnotology

by Anonymous

What will you let yourself know?
And what will you put in boxes
And crush
Hoping it won't spring up again

My attic is full of chests that I've battered in
Locked and guarded
That I've known I couldn't see
Without ever looking inside

Even in learning, I was actively ignorant
I reread the same pages
"Sex changes"
And bodies that grew like mine but went by different names

But I still went by "mine" for 17 years
It never stung,
But the name's been poisoning my dinner, night after night
Since I was a child

My first period was like an Ari Aster film
I cried for the entire day
And said I wanted to rip out the space between my legs
But girls must be girls

I am going to open the chest that I pulverized
Pull out all the words I breathlessly stuffed inside, in hopes that
Like a necromantic incantation
They might wake up the long-dead part of me



Birth of Immortal Achilles
by Carly Riggs

Astray by Emily Schutzel

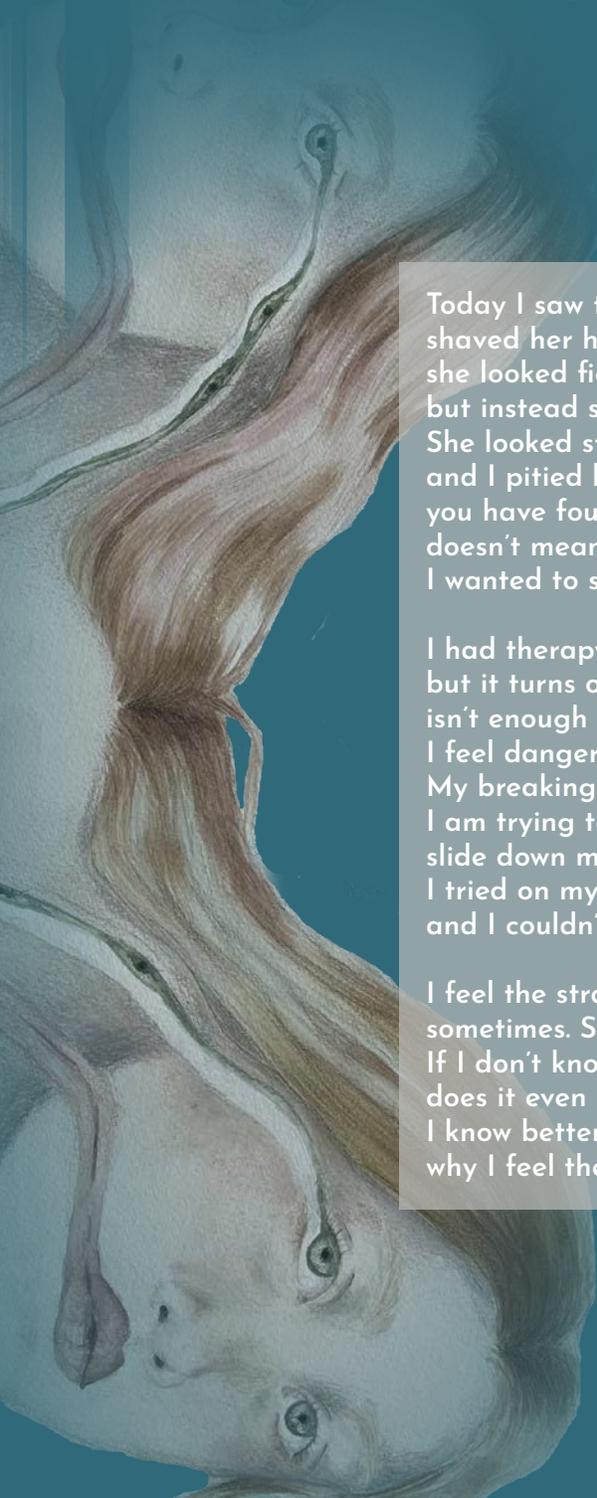
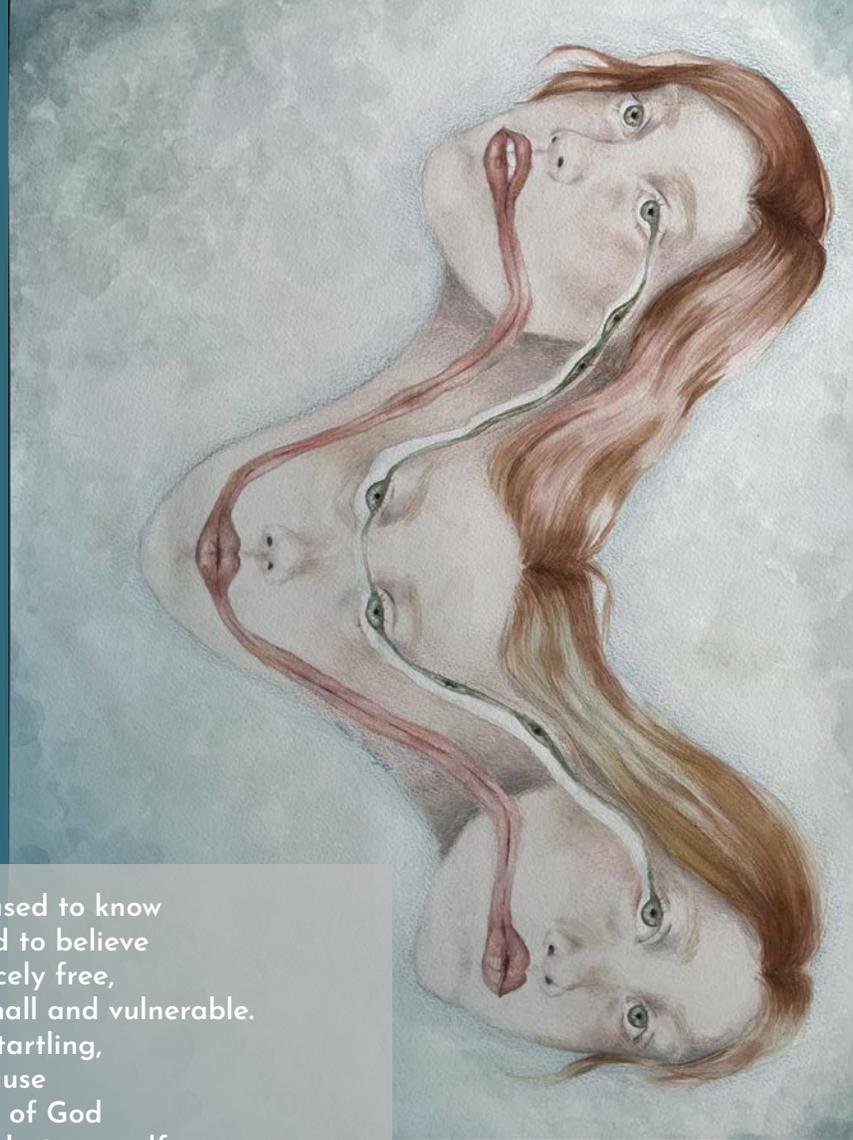
Tuesday Reflections

by Elena Unger

Today I saw that a girl I used to know shaved her head. I wanted to believe she looked fierce and fiercely free, but instead she looked small and vulnerable. She looked strange and startling, and I pitied her. Just because you have found the grace of God doesn't mean you haven't lost yourself, I wanted to shout.

I had therapy this afternoon but it turns out that forty-five minutes isn't enough to make me feel light again. I feel dangerous: fragile and full. My breaking point is trying to break in. I am trying to hold strong while past perversions slide down my body like beads of sweat. I tried on my biggest pair of jean shorts last night and I couldn't button them.

I feel the strangest mixture of rapture and sadness sometimes. Sometimes it is just sadness. If I don't know where the pain is coming from, does it even really count? I know better than to ask myself why I feel the way I feel.



C(at)-Section

by Sangitha Aiyer

As I pass through an unmarked apartment building,
I observe a woman's relationship with a stray cat.

Obscured by the shadows of happy hour light,
the dirt that has accumulated on the floor's grout still shines,

Yet she braves the grime to kneel down to him and
he marvels at her whiskey-colored eyes, a shade that reminds him of a lioness' gaze

She leans forward to embrace the scars that line his figure
and their skins collide like a mother's breast to her child's mouth

And he begins to feed, his stomach filling while her hand empties,
as her body slowly tears open under his tongue's friction.

In biology class, we learned about symbiosis and now,
I ogle at this synergistic relationship before me

The two species interact, giving and taking from one another,
just the way we learned in school

And yet, the adoration in her eyes and her unspoken promises of safety
seem to transcend science itself.

I recount the first time I walked through this apartment building,
futilely avoiding the dirt of the already stained floor tiles

Bathing in the ground's filth, the cat's skin stretched over the frame of his underdeveloped body
and his raw wail pierced the air, altering the ambience forever

Then, the woman's whispers of reassurance began to overpower his cries,
an outstretched hand that brought him to life.

She approached him and his wet fur nestled beneath her dome of flesh,
his head rested on the crook of her neck as she rocked him back and forth.

Strangers in one moment and family in the next; her love:
sacrificial, constant, unquestioning.

Flavorless

by Lyat Melese

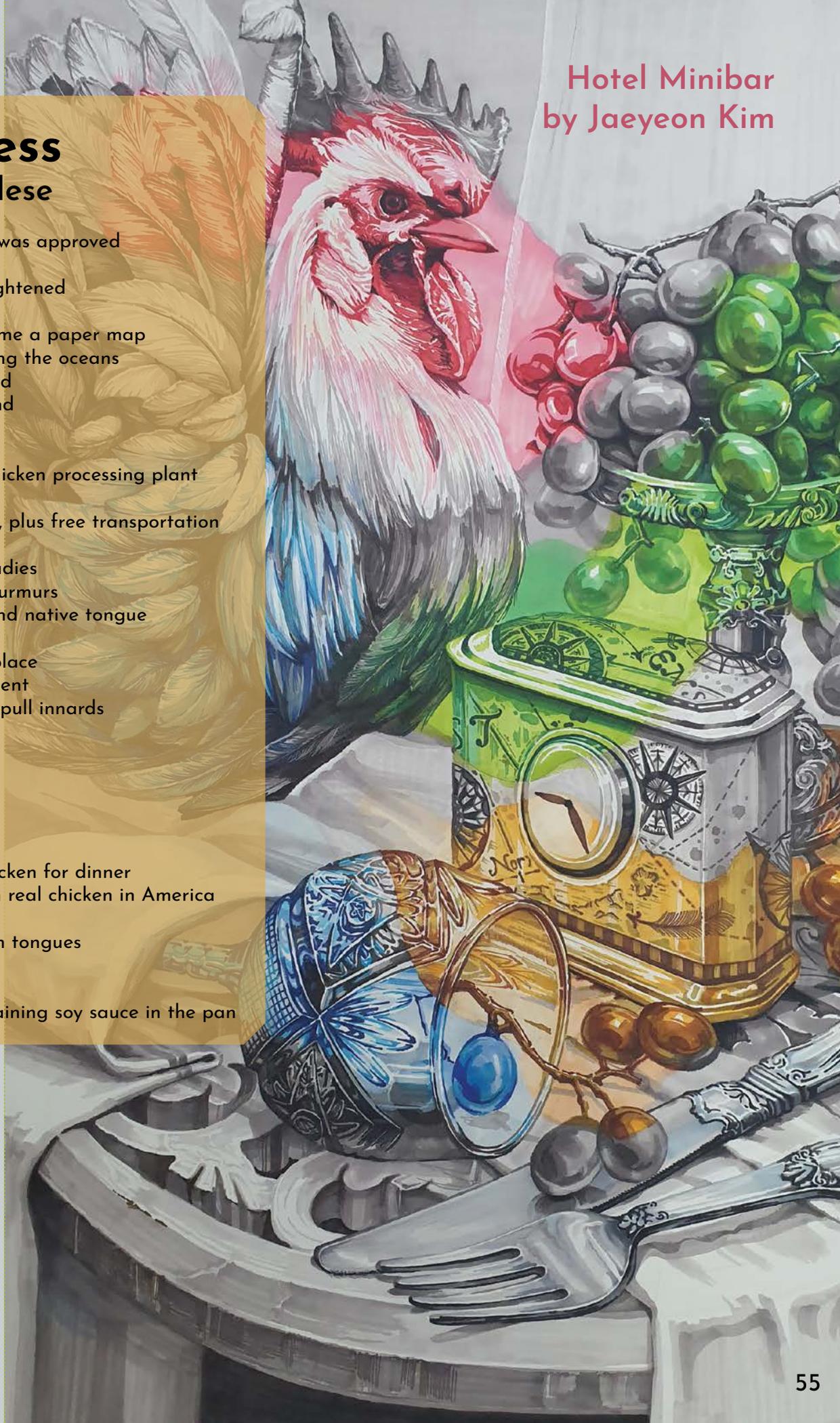
Aunty's green card was approved
lucky she says
right before they tightened
immigration
and the world became a paper map
with a hand clamping the oceans
paper crumpling and
colorful blobs of land
choked apart

Aunty works at a chicken processing plant
now
no english, they say, plus free transportation
two hour rides
with other elderly ladies
who fill time with murmurs
of broken english and native tongue

they will enter the place
machine loud yet silent
to skin chicken and pull innards
returning to
free transportation
with swollen feet

Is anything free?

My mother fries chicken for dinner
says she hasn't seen real chicken in America
real chicken needs
just salt to dance on tongues
This chicken, here,
flavorless
she dumps the remaining soy sauce in the pan





i hate you, you x

by Lexi Newsom

in the middle of my name
as if i constantly have something to solve

Find x.

but i can't tell if my hatred
is of you, the letter, or of you, the failure

Find x.

x: the "something" about myself
i am still trying to find

Find yourself.

what if i can't

worse:

what if i do

Pieces by
Maddy Williams

Beach Day

by Clara Moss

i'm floating on my back with
sunscreen spread along my nose and
water lapping against my shoulders.
i should be focusing on
how the sun is warming me from the outside – in or
how my friends are splashing water over our goosebumped flesh but
all i can feel is the dread unspooling in my stomach,
moving with the flow of water around me,
winding up my throat and
threatening to break free in a shout or a whimper –
i'm not sure which i'd prefer.
and i could focus on the feeling of
the sticky plastic tube on the back of my thighs, but
instead i'm trying to decide if
i felt something smooth grasp my ankle,
something as rough as bone-on-bone,
passing as soon as i noticed.
i should hone in on
the terrible music blasting from far off speakers but
i can remember the cover of a National Geographic,
the gaping mouth of a massive shark,
framed by endless blue, on and on.
and i'm remembering that one youtube video that
talked about the Mariana Trench and
animals that should've died with the dinosaurs.
i know my fear stems from the not-knowing,
watered with desperation pooling in my eyes,
unfurling from the ground, from the ocean floor,
cast in a sickly green light that
seems to be reflecting a shiny tooth behind me.
but, no, my fear was bred in
a leaf that tangled in my toes and
a light shining off some black sunglasses,
perched on a blonde head like
a grotesque bug just waiting and
when we wade back to shore,
retreat from the depths of blindness,
i'll survey the wide expanse where
sky and ocean meet in hues of blue,
and swear i see a triangle peek through one wave,
taunting me with promises of
how little i know and
how easy it would be to swallow me.



But a Woman by Grace Billman

Places You've Seen in Your Dreams

by Anonymous

Full piece can be found at jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia.

In the mid-to-late 19th century, the city of Paris was undergoing a change. The process was called Haussmannization, and it was a campaign for the modernization of Paris. Thousands of buildings, many hundreds of years old and dating back to the medieval era, were destroyed to make way for Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann's broad new streets and open parks. Haussmann's designs were controversial among Parisians at the time, but they seemed especially biting to photographer Eugene Atget, who would make it his personal mission to photograph and preserve views of *vieux Paris*, or "old Paris." The peculiar thing about these images, however, is not necessarily what is there, but what is missing—the majority of his photographs are entirely devoid of human life. In a city as crowded as Paris, views of empty streets are uncommon, and that emptiness translates into a strange surrealism. There is something eerie and dreamlike about the desolation; one gets the sense that these are places meant for people to inhabit, and yet they stand starkly empty in sepia tones, stills captured of a city on a knife's edge between modernity and its bygone roots.

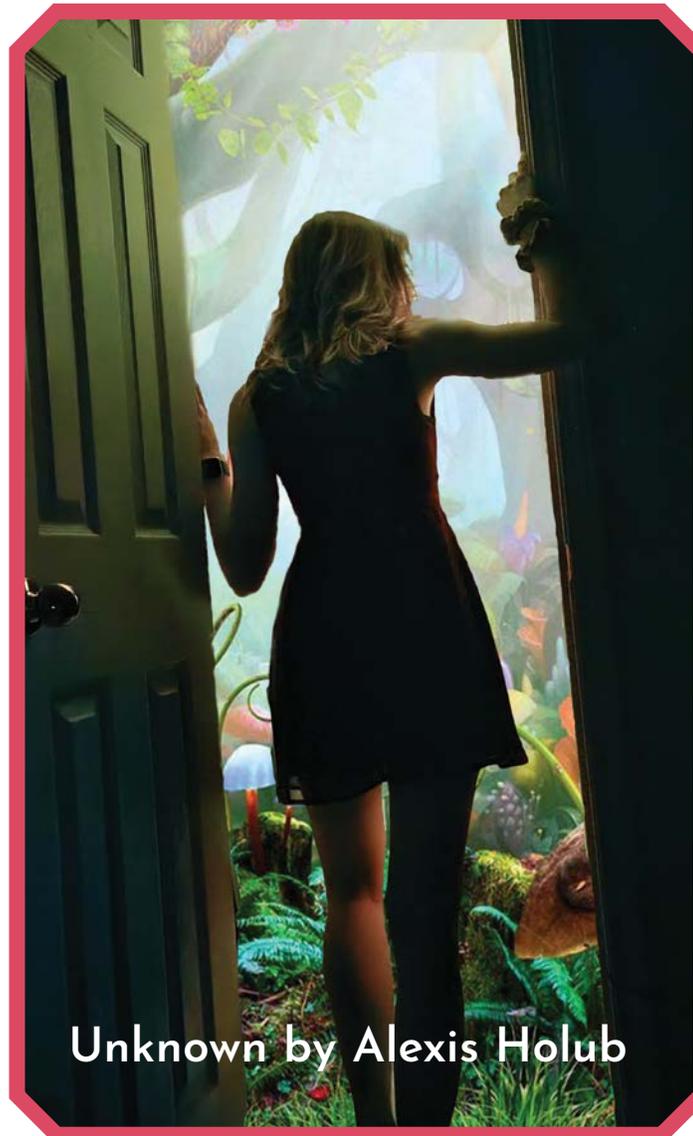
More than 150 years later, beginning in the late 2010s, a niche subgenre of video would begin gaining popularity on YouTube. These videos are simple processions of images, mostly depicting common spaces – department stores, malls, playrooms and playgrounds, school hallways and classrooms. These places, though vaguely familiar to most viewers, are always shown to be empty, often darkened. The images are usually of poor quality and have bad

lighting and amateur composition. They comprise the crux of an internet community focused around *liminal spaces*. The term "liminal" is based on the Latin word "limen," which means "threshold," and is anthropological in nature, used originally to describe the transitional stage in a rite of passage, between the beginning state and the end state. It has, however, taken on a different, more generalized meaning to the people in these internet communities.

It usually refers to a picture of a place that is strangely familiar, but somehow made eerie by emptiness or darkness. A good example of this effect comes in pictures of empty shopping malls. Most viewers will be familiar with the aesthetics of a shopping mall, but only within the context of it being filled with people, talking and laughing and living their lives; removed from that context, it becomes dreamlike, even unnerving. The fact that most viewers will not know the exact location of the place in the photograph and may only remember places similar to it from childhood memories embedded deep within their psyches contributes to this sense of being displaced in time. It's easy to see how these images make people feel just by reading the titles of the videos: many are called things

like "Photos That Feel Strangely Familiar," and "Places You've Seen in Your Dreams."

Both of the above examples represent the disruption of a strong urge in the human psyche to make sense of our reality through context clues. The human brain is a pattern-recognizing machine;



Unknown by Alexis Holub

we are wired to locate and interpret patterns as fast as possible. It's rooted within our biology – the signals our eyes take in are not the images we see and describe to one another, they are disparate photons hitting the cones behind our eyeballs, and what we see is what our brain interprets based on context. This is the reason certain optical illusions work, because our brain fills in what it does not know based on familiar patterns, and it can, and frequently does, get it wrong. We are meant to go through this process as a method of survival, and seeing things just slightly out of place from the way we usually see them can trigger a strong sense of unease in the back of our minds, remnants of old instincts we rarely use in our lives today.

This is, I think, what makes these works so strange to us. The places in Atget's photos and the locations in liminal space videos are places that are created with the explicit purpose of being used by people. Schools are meant to have kids in them, shopping malls are meant to have customers, and the streets of Paris were paved so that people could walk on them. The removal of that purpose tosses our senses into a kind of shock. We know there is meant to be life here – it's written in the way we've constructed the very places we are seeing – and yet it is gone.

I don't think it's a coincidence that Atget and liminal space videos both focus on images from some kind of nebulous past. In the case of Atget, they are photos of the streets of old Paris, created

as a way to remember buildings that might have, at the time, been in danger of being destroyed in the quest for modernity. In the case of liminal spaces, the pictures are deliberately of low quality, as if taken on an older camera, and show spaces that are often difficult to place in time, with flavors of design usually spanning between the 1980s and early 2000s. These works give us the strangest sense of temporality – they are palpably of the past, yet they give us little to actually hold on to in that regard, leaving the time period hazy and uncertain.

This makes us uneasy, of course, but we also seem to be continuously fascinated by that uneasiness. There is a clear interest in that feeling of being unmoored in reality. In the same way that I don't think it's a coincidence that Atget and liminal spaces create a similar effect on a viewer, I also don't think it's a coincidence that this fascination seems to become more pronounced at certain moments in time.



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Froggie
by Waverly Altis

Slip & Fly by Gaby Kill



my phone burns a hole in my pocket,
and i think all this "burning calories" has gotten to it
rub a friction rash between my thighs, maybe if you
sand down for long enough there'll be a gap I can't
bridge with trig. I'll protest my professor 'cause
the triangle is the *second* strongest shape
behind hourglass in my mind

and I wish I were an architect of more
than my calorie content
bounce my leg in lecture until my muscles run dry,
ask siri when the career fair is
and how much I'll burn walking to it
sipping green tea, molten solder, the anorexic all As in
my gradebook stand for 86-calorie apples and
 $\arcsin(\pi/4)$

that one d is for derivative because the slope of my
hips is always a little too curvy

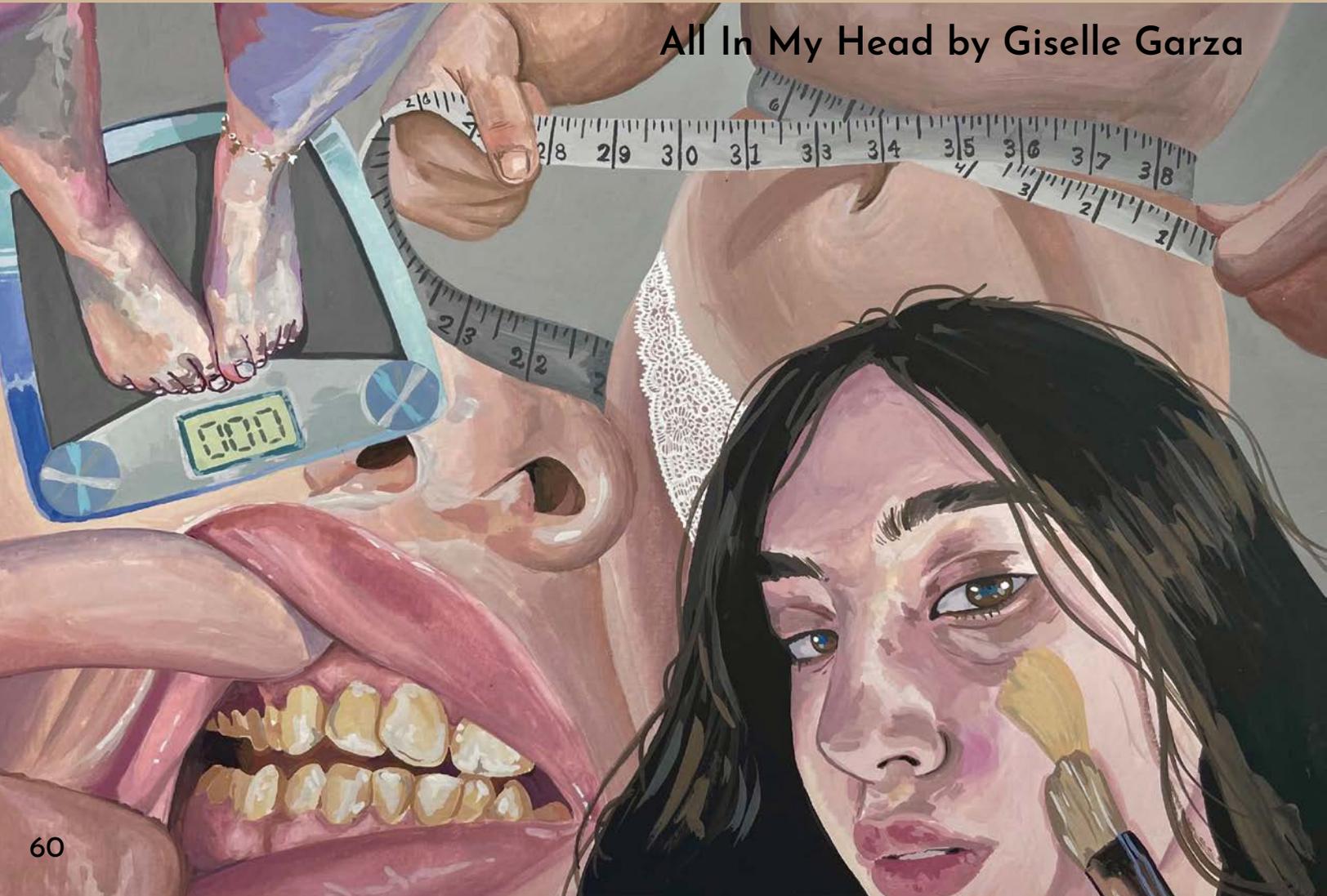
sometimes the balsa wood cracks
in my backpack like I do
and it splinters like it is vomiting with the volume
all the way down, cozy campfire wood has never looked
so bad on a 1/16 scale

– I'll kiss the floorboards
intersect my head ($f(x)$) and the cement stairs ($g(x)$)
it's dry until it isn't huh
take a thirteen minute nap or I'll be bloody *and* late
to my next class
warm puddle pillow did you know we can't sense
liquid, only temperature and texture and we do the
mental math

is there a sucralose substitution for seconds to make
them pass but not count, cause Imma let my head
spin counterclockwise until I'm arm-yanked to
the surface

you're supposed to lose half a point on health when
your phone is warmer than your fingers
(can I use our lab glue I can't seem to get a grip)
lubricant makes it harder, my thin blood's usually
less slippy
what did I forget this morning?
electronic circuits lab 180
electrolyte powder in my waterbottle
a hoodie. my heat's going. I feel so cold.

All In My Head by Giselle Garza





Girl to Woman by Jaeyeon Kim

5 Foot Giant by Elena Unger

The world is large, but so am I.
An ocean of confused compassion
rolls through my veins,
and I balance boulders
on unmanicured fingertips.

When the world raises its voice,
tides of hate bloom from boiling blood.
But my voice can shake the ground, too.
My whispers spin webs of silence,
deep and delicate as the scent of lavender.

Sometimes I think my footsteps vanish –
swallowed up by the infinite abyss of
soil and sky. But then I remember
that my feet carry the weight
of molten memories:

the time I took a shot at my sister,
my balled fist leaving a trail of blood
dripping from her nose;

the time I held my mother's shoulders,
being her breath
as she shivered through tides of heaving sobs;
the year where I refused to eat dinner;
the year where I was nothing
more than a corpse.

These moments are branded on my throat.
They sing incessant whispers
of guilt and grief – the same soundtrack
that plagues the mind of my
across-the-street neighbor.
I guess my film reel of hurt
tethers me
to a bustling mass of humanity
connects me
to an accordion of paper dolls come to life.
Hand in hand we shout up at the clouds,
The world is large, but so are we.

Fractal

by Savannah Voth

spore pulsing
in fertile dark

dark-eyed junco nesting in lilies

fern nesting in fern nesting in fractal
curled selfward in a repetition
that is, to the naked eye, endless

identity matrix

how the tree is calculus and also river,
green deltas unfurling blue to infinite limits

nova contained in a footstep
orthogonal shift, universe born
complete

with orbits and orange and dizzying endlessness,
beetles
and mold beneath the flowerpot



First Step of Grief

by Meclit Berhanu

Blank Pages

by Supriya Bolla

I wish I had trauma that I could spin into a story,
a story that would grip your thoughts tighter than leather binding,
Something I could rip to shreds, over-analyze in the margins,
sew back together, and send off to the publisher before I tear myself apart.

Because, who am I without a story,
without paragraphs to explain my personality,
A chapter for the reasons I cry,
A stanza for why I laugh at little things far too long,
And at least a sentence for why I do everything as if I'm about to run out of ink.
My pages . . . are blank

I wish I had trauma that explains why I'm breathless at the sight of a blue M&M,
Why my mind floods with a cascade of memories,
The way opening Blue Balliett's books bring back rooms full of laughter,
Shining blue eyes full of mischief
Why my eyes, are wet when there isn't a single "Blue One" in my fun size M&Ms on Halloween.
Handprints from six years ago of kids I called *family*
remind me that giggles won't always echo, and scribbled hearts don't always mean love.
Resuscitating dead conversations is a lot harder than thumbing through paperbacks and sobbing over blue candy.

I want to have trauma to explain
Why when someone says "I love you",
I say back, "yeah, I **know**",
Watch them leave the room . . .
leave my life.
Why I whisper "I love you too" under my breath,
Why I fear that the words will bleed through the paper
the moment they are said too loud,
the moment I can't take them back,
the moment they leave my lips,
I'm scared,
because what if instead of turning the page, it rips?

I think there *might* . . . have been trauma that explains my urge to slam down chairs,
Trauma that rattles my teeth,
Two feet, two inches in the air.
The tip back,
plastic whack,
head crack.

Motionless brother, hysteric mother,
And the inky red blood that doesn't come out of carpet when your eyes are too swollen to watch it fall.
There *has* to be buried trauma for why in my mind staples don't live on paper stacks and bulletin boards,
but make their home on red ridged skulls and paper delicate bones.
I can't remember much, I think those pages are fading.

And there **should** be trauma that explains why it comforts me
to stand on our high-rise apartment's balcony and look straight down,
why my subconscious tells me I should step out,
tells me I can fly,
That angel's wings are pillow-soft and I *could* let go
and take a ride,
My empty chapters are feathers in the wind

There's other people with pages shredded and stained,
Who are tired of folding away their trauma into
perfect paper cranes,
**and just want feathered wings to ferry them away
from the flurry of paper.**

Hands full of paper cuts,
Pool red ink on their fingertips
And write their own "The End."

Maybe I *have* trauma, but I've pushed it deep down,
Pages folded and creased into a thousand misshapen
origami birds,
Because once I let them loose, I can't ignore that my
childhood wasn't some kid's book of sunshine and rainbows,
Instead, a tattered anthology written in blue and red ink.

I wish I didn't have trauma to claim
I want blank pages.



All I see by Grace Billman



Hiding in Beauty by Stephanie Jaime-Torrecilla

Runs in The Family

by Gaby Kill

the vents in my grandmother's old car blow
cigarette smoke at my left knuckles
and right forearm.

there's something so cold about crawling back to the house and home
where Caroline kicked me out for borrowing her water bottle
rinsed off my vandal lips and refilled it with salted caramel vodka and Caprisun

and in the wind whipping by I taste family tradition,
vanilla and tannin kisses into November backroad air
as my breath swirl, swirl, swirls silver I cannot help but wonder if now is a good chance to spiral
my dehydrated veins spilling like a fog machine in October

Put a stopper in that.
I will not flush myself,
watch my dignity spin like two and a half glasses of rosé after mandatory mother daughter drinks
If I get breathalyzed, the officer's results will read ice cream sundae
baker-miller pink
ringlet curls
the way I am an estranged co-parent housekeeper decoration therapist middle child January baby.
I'll get let off free before anyone remembers
maybe I want water
and I am sixteen
and I am a mother of two but I don't have kids.
and my birthday was yesterday. you still haven't remembered.



Magician

by Ziyi Yan

Mmm, you are a distracted assent,
you coat like cold sweat,
glisten
like contented sleep.

And then you are songless - *muh* like *mundane*,
buzzing of the lampshade fibers,
quivering
from the lamplight flicker.

A raise of the eyebrows, and you could be
mine. But I lie and shut my eyelids.
My tongue fondles my teeth
in the shape of you, *magician*, I roll you over, arms numb,
feeling for the parts of me that are still
part of me.

Mudge, like orange sunrise you birth a smile –
tongue cupped as if holding an ice cube,
still scared of a brain
freeze. Kill the part of you that's
mud. Kill it
in the fire?

You could be
machine but I call you *magi* –
like the squeal of every door hinge, jerked
open from one syllable to the
next,
I open you up and there's nothing to love.
I open the makeup box
instead, clatter lipstick like barbie limbs –
you are the squeal of a wooden box
after shoving the legs in a hidden chamber
and sawing the girl in half with the hard c of
cut - now,
you are magic.

Yet replace the c with *shhhh*.
A hush over the audience,
a well greased sliding door, closing.

The shower runs like dominoes clattering too quickly,
trampling the nervous tap of soapy hands
that try to piece me together –
They can't catch me, I'll beat them at their game.

Yet add *uhhh*, a shaky step into the cold,
body refracted in three mirrors,
muscle etched like grid lines.
I draw a maze through them,
and only you know I'm nowhere inside it
anymore.

You end in
shun but sound
so much like an embrace.

You beg to *shut* like a front door, yet I'll make
your name
elide –
into something: maybe
not?

Magicianaut, like astronauts,
names are weightless so let them stab,
the blood can leach out
the back.

Magician,
you are the sound of sunburnt snow, crunching.
I'll trample you under my boots,
I am nothing if not my own
magician.

And even as I spit you out I keep you to myself.
You are the only name I can swallow lately,
magician,
I melt you like rice paper,
magiciannnnn,
even you
cannot touch me.

King of the Damned
by Lilliana Hughey



Index

- Sangitha Aiyer 54
Sumlina Alam 13, 34
Waverly Altis* 49, 59, 67
Sanjana Bandi inside cover
Meklit Berhanu 62
Grace Billman* 7, 21, 57, 63
Bowie Bladee 24
Supriya Bolla 62
Kayla Brethauer 19
Esther Cheng 26
Alexander Choi 41
Jiin Choi 43
Eden Christian 31
Ruby Cullen 40
Giselle Garza* 60
Noah Green* 5, 25, 38
Emma Gulledge* 11, 32, 42
Jasmine Harris 50
Alexis Holub 58
Julie Huang 48
Lilliana Hughey* 9, 65
Stephanie Jaime-Torrecilla* 64
Mehak K. 29
Gaby Kill 39, 60, 64, back cover
Jaeyeon Kim cover, 1, 24, 55, 61, 68
Stephania Kontopanos 38
Anna Kratochvil* 47
Eli Kumin* 30, 34
Isobel Li 6, 9
Shaun Loh 43
Sasha Malik* 14, 22, 45
Madeleine Marder 10
Destyni Meadows* 28
Lyat Melese 55
Clara Moss 57
Emily Natanova 28, 40
Lexi Newsom 21, 56
Natalie Nims 36
Elizabeth Nordhus* 48
El O'Brien* 49
Garrett Parish* 35, 46
James Pressdee* 46
Arden Pryor 18, 42
Adib Rabbani 18, 20, 23, 51
Amaya Reyes* 50
Abigail Rhodus* 26
Carly Riggs* 29, 52
Mateo Robaina inside cover
Sumedha Sangem 25
Emily Schutzel* 53
Lindsey Smith 27
Ella Steinmetz* inside back cover
Nabihah Syed 6, 19
Deniz Tanrıverdi 12
Lucia Thomas 41
Elena Unger 15, 27, 35, 53, 61
Mimi VanBeber* 2
Wyatt C. Vaughn 23
Andy Villar 51
Daria Volkova 52
Savannah Voth 4, 8, 36, 62
Maddy Williams* 39, 56
Joey Wu 30, 44
Austina Xu 13, 16
Rachel Xu 6
Ziyi Yan 65
A. Brooke Young 14
Jessica Zhao 20

Cuckoo by Waverly Altis



SHOOTING STARS SCHOLARS

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Discrepancy, Hotel Minibar by Jaeyeon Kim

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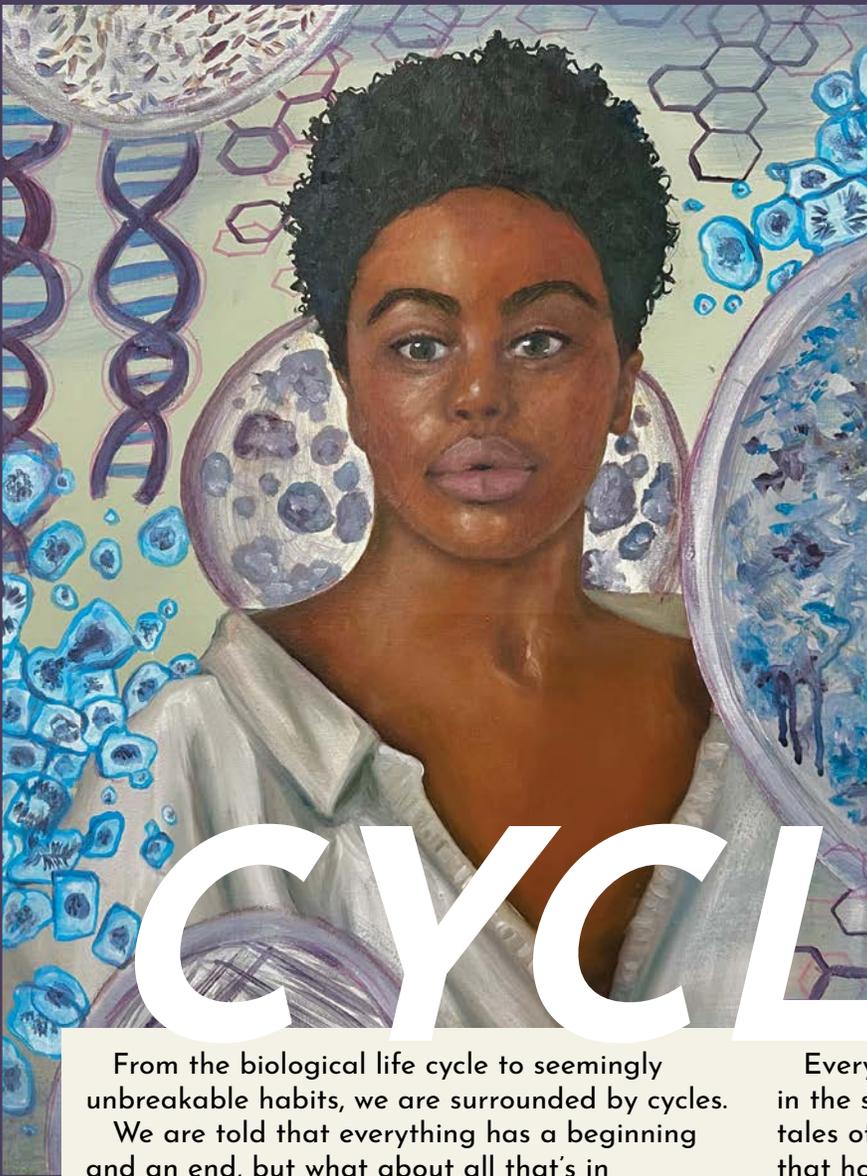
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A Portrait of STEM
by Ella Steinmetz



CYCLES

From the biological life cycle to seemingly unbreakable habits, we are surrounded by cycles.

We are told that everything has a beginning and an end, but what about all that's in between? From growth cycles to menstrual cycles to thought cycles, our lives are impacted by endless hoops. Is it possible to escape a cycle? Describe the cycles that should have been broken by now. Search for loopholes and travel through them. Which cycles are you trying to break and why?

Cycles go beyond the individual and into greater society as systems of oppression or enter into the natural world as animal migration paths and moon phases. Which cycles have perpetuated across generations? How do events cycle through history as it "repeats itself"? Where do we see cycles within cycles?

Everything starts somewhere. Cycles are found in the start button of washing machines and tales of origin. Speak on the beginnings of things that have not been questioned. Where have your beliefs originated? What about society's? Explore the cycles your identity was born of.

Predict what the ending will be or choose your own finale. Does death mean the end of a cycle? What beginnings can the end provide for us? Discover what propels these cycles to continue. Explore unfathomable cycles and perpetual cycles, like the Ouroboros and its tail.

Admire the visual cycles and illusions we see in daily life. From the Fibonacci sequence, to Penrose Stairs, to a nautilus shell, there's beauty in numerical cycles. With the Krebs cycle, acceleration of wheels, and the law of Conservation of Mass, explore the greater impact of an individual cycle.

Submit your art, writing and poetry
to [elementia](https://elementia.org) through Feb. 1, 2023, and start
your own cycle: jocolibrary.org/elementia

Butter

by Gaby Kill

I am melting butter
in AP Statistics
draped over the desk
warm dripping out of leaky sleeves
as I slide puddley down the hallway my mother screams,
"Finally, some fat inside you!"
someone needs to pour out my sneakers
wash me out of my socks
I have been retreating inwards until my thighs only
bridge skinny jean fabric with unshaved leg hair
clarified. melty. hungry
I am melted butter
soaked into carpet
and tile and trash can
and everyone around me is scrambling to scrape me up
pour me in a jar
pray for solidification liquid boy
maybe
when the bell rings
greasy stew bones will be left behind where I sat.