

imagine

"IMAGINE" Literary Magazine Harrison High School Harrison, New York 10528 2017 Edition

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Letter from the Editors

2017 was the year of change for our literary magazine. We reached out to other schools and traded literary magazines; through our "lit mag swaps" (as we called them), we found magazines that presented as professional publications, but still encompassed the content and efforts of high school students like us. It was a bit of a wake-up call to say the least. We wanted our magazine to look and feel authentic. To *be* a student magazine, but to *look* and *feel* like a professional publication.

As such, you might notice the significant size difference, as well as the greater focus on each and every piece as a result of our efforts to evolve. Also, this year's publication is focused on breaking boundaries with tasteful controversy and giving our readers access to a raw, authentic perspective of the high school experience.

But, what truly makes *Imagine* special is how it is completely student-run and student-made. We received many submissions from many talented writers and artists, all from our fellow peers. Afterwards, the members of our magazine go through each and every submission with care and excitement. And with more members joining every year, we look forward to the ways that *Imagine* can and will improve with an even more dedicated crew.

While we are happy with *Imagine's* makeover this year, we know there's plenty more to improve upon. These improvements are only the beginning, trust us. So, as the door on our cover suggests, welcome to the 2016-2017 edition of Imagine - the start of something great. Take off your shoes and stay a while.

Sincerely,

The editors of Imagine

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Untitled

My name is unknown. I live in a society where that is who you are: Unaccepted, unless you have a perfect cheekbone.

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Ideality is leaving people with scars.

Ignorance: the most beautiful of all. People don't understand how uncared for they are, because of how they look like a doll and drive away from their problems in an expensive car.

> You're cool, you're not! You're rich, you're poor! You're ugly, you're hot!. Stop looking at me and stop saying "you're"!

> > My name is Unknown.
> > I'm not beautiful or perfect.
> > I'm not rich or poor.
> > To you, it's unknown,
> > To others, it's pure.

Ellie Eiff

Jessica Sosa Verza

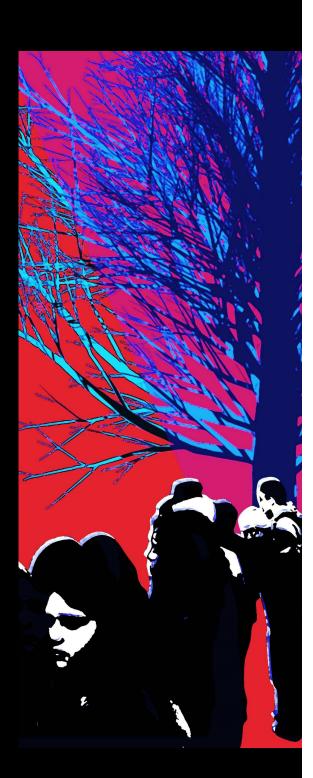
Social Wars

I'm not someone who likes to make waves. I prefer to let things slip away, to be pulled by the tide, to be tumbled, washed smooth, and slowly erased as if stones softened by the relentless back and forth until all that is left is a single grain, and then that grain becomes nothing.

I'm not used to this kind of thing. These kinds of emotions, so raw and undeveloped, so rabid and wild, are tearing savage holes in me. I know it's not right what happened, but I choose to forget

because those feelings hurt and that is a type of pain I would never wish Upon anyone.

I just wanted it all to go away. I tried to pretend it never happened and go back to how everything was before.





I don't like arguments. I don't like conflicts. I don't like having to put up walls.

I choose not to engage in these petty social wars. If it looks like I'm letting people stand on me, or that I'm letting myself recede submissively into a shell of safety, a shell of silence, I want you to know that I actually walk away the bigger person.

I will not let wordsoh those backstabbing artistsdrag me to a state less than my true self. I will not let people belittle me to a game of power and manipulation. And I will not allow myself to ever feel those emotions again.

Darya Khodakhah

Excerpts from *r/o/y/g/b/v*

The absence of vehicles concerned me, as did the flickering street lamps. I grabbed a pen my father threw out the window and began drawing on the soles of my shoes. High and low, the ink flowed. It followed where the ridges of the rubber led it, curving in accord to the shape of my feet. I was merely doodling erratically, following no true form, yet I found myself entirely entranced in the musical shapes and patterns I was creating. It was so hypnotizing I did not notice my father leaping out of his beaten, forest green truck and stomping toward my general direction. He kicked at the pillars of the metal fence surrounding our home to earn my attention. I rushed to my feet and immediately expelled the pen with which I drew my master-piece into a rabbit hole. For just one moment, I hated myself for doing that.

Leaving my sister's ajar door remaining that way, I went to G. Destler. The door was fully open, as though a nurse had just been there and forgotten to shut it. I saw a man with very unkempt, jet black hair, like that of a raven. I could almost hear him croaking "Nevermore." That was all I could see, as he was facing away from the door. I stepped into the eery room, noticing that it had a thick and sweet mist, almost like I was breathing honey. The man did not respond when I knocked on the door-frame gently, so I called out, "Hello?" He stirred, revealing his face to me, and then opened his eyes just as a butterfly would unfold its wings for the first time. He asked me, "Who are you?" In the midst of all my confusion and bewilderment, I simply returned his question.

"Gabriel Destler," he replied.

At home, I threw myself onto my bed and began writhing at the developing gloom I had in my spine. It travelled through my ribs and felt like a dark creature had latched onto me. I began growling like an enraged beast and lashed out, tears welling up in my eyes as I bit my cheek until I tasted blood, frustrated with myself for being a coward. I lied on the floor, which was free of blankets and pillows, for about three hours before sleep conquered me.

As quietly as a dead bird, I raised myself onto my elbows and took to moving myself one silent step at a time. When I reached my room, I lifted the bag I packed myself when I was nine years old onto my shoulders and took one last look at the room. The faded map on the wall had grown on me. I was almost quite sad to leave it behind. I told myself that I could buy one just like it, but I knew that was not true. A new map wouldn't have the holes through the Pacific Ocean where I had thrown darts years ago, a new map wouldn't have the edges frayed from age, and a

new map would not have the memories etched into its parchment from my staring at it until I found something comforting in it to fall asleep to. A new map would not have been the same.

I held Gabriel's shirt in my fists to ground myself and for once, I did not feel as though he was the pile of ashes that so often disintegrated in my hands. I did not feel as though he was a memory that was good at following directions and would leave me right when I say to get out of sight. I would always, always, want the memory back.

And there we were, grown up to be adults, sitting in a cheap hotel room with our hands locked and minds bound.

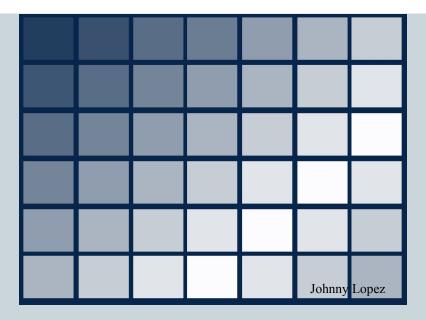
There we were, speaking a language that not even the skeletons in our closets could have deciphered.

There we were, in silence. But that was okay. The thing that made sitting in silence okay, the language we were speaking, what made me realize that I was not merely a mind in a vat, floating in empty space...

That thing was good at following directions too and I told it to move in with Gabriel and me and to live with us down in a quiet village away from pubs and drag and love.

And from there, we were swell.

Hahnbie Kim



Trust

Lies spill out of mouths leaving a scar; each time harms just as bad as the last if not further.

The knock on the door opening to an offering of roses; what we don't know is roses can have thorns while seeming, looking, like harmless roses.

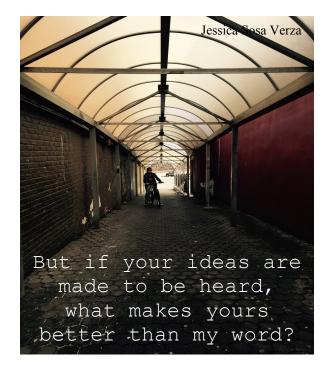
Eventually the door seems harder and harder to open; receiving roses without pain becomes preposterous.

Thoughts boil to the rim of your skull, but never do they over flow. You stop receiving the roses In agony Laceration The most chilling question, that steadily taunts to overflow your skull:

What about the day when someone brings you roses without the thorns, will agony shut the door for you?

Sofia Guaraglia





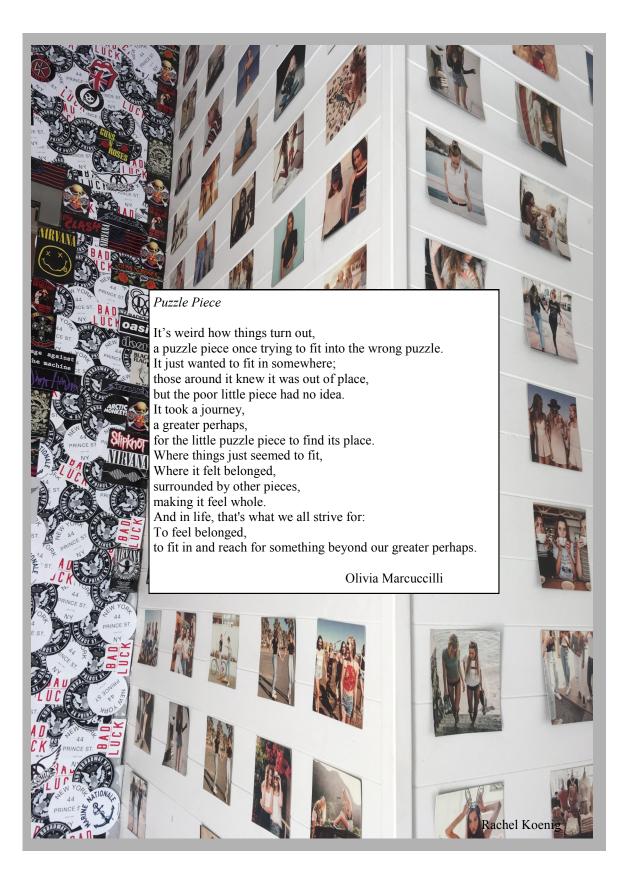
Better Than Me

I am wrong, you are right, my opinion is useless as my means to fight. you rise above the rest of the class, they avoid your eyes when they timidly pass.

You have more followers than the rest, that clearly means, you are the best. Your peasants follow at your call, your slightest words will make them fall.

Plastic followers, with plastics lives, recognition is all that drives. Can one mortal be the king? As all their followers pretend to sing?

The enlightened minds may change our thought, may appear as what we thought we sought. But if your ideas are made to be heard, what makes yours better than my word?



Robot

You can live your whole life like a robot or you can live like an eagle. free and ambitious. Which would you choose? I would suggest you choose very carefully because what you choose will determine your fate and how others perceive you. If you listen to the voices around you and choose to follow them, you will be accepted and praised for how well you listen and follow orders. If you choose not to listen and do as you please, you will be ridiculed by others. They will try to



clip your wings and tie you down. Your friends and family will also try and "knock some sense" into you. In order to be an eagle, you'll have to be knocked down so many times before you can get back up and fly again. You live in a world where being just a little bit too creative will cost you your life, but just the right amount can win you the Nobel prize. You live in a world where there isn't really freedom of speech. You don't live in a free place; you live in a place that creates an illusion just to keep you sane. Every right you have is thrown out the door when you aren't the same as everyone else. They will say "Just listen and follow orders. Everything will be okay." Little do you know, they put you in a place for eight hours a day, five days a week that drains out all the creativity in your brain. When you're done with this place, you will live to follow orders until the day you're six feet under. Now, that isn't a problem for many people: to live a comfortable life taking orders. But for an eagle it is because it contradicts everything they stand for. Eagles are the ones that are despised, the ones that always get into trouble, the ones who have no reason to listen to anything higher because they are higher. Every robot will call them out for being the way that they are. The robots will try to drag the eagles down so they can't fly. Robots will always try to limit their power because the robots know they can't be like the eagles. The only way they can stay sane is to drain the creativity from the eagles' brains and persuade them into living a life of following orders. Being an eagle could cost you your life, but being a robot could steal your will to fight. An oppressor or a fighter? Which would you choose?

Kathleen Lino

Masked Soul

I am seventeen and I only truly feel One emotion. The sickly pallor of my cheeks Turn wet with salty tears cascading Into my mouth, A familiar taste. Yet still repulsive, I glare at her, That devil smirking As she turns her back. But imagine if she died.

The end is approaching, An hourglass Running out of sand. Our patience running thin, I argue with her. We yell. We scream. We cry. It is a relationship torn apart and a hopeful dream crushed. I watch her get drunk on her pain and agony. And imagine her dying.



No one knows. Under this mask, I conceal my shredded heart, Silently waiting for help Yet in a way, still resisting it. No one understands An endless cry Out to someone who won't come, who isn't there. Will help ever come? I should have rebelled Earlier When I was younger. Is it too late now? I wonder As I wait And imagine her dead.

Claire Kidd

Darkness

Darkness is always there. From darkness emerges thinking, From thinking emerges fear. Fear is inevitable. Neither age nor height, Religion nor gender, Status nor ethnicity; Fear will come to all. Where there is fear, There is hardship. Hardship is inevitable. Inevitability is the one thing Humans cannot escape. It is the one thing That provides a sense of unity On this planet. This planet consists of life. In order to live, you must Fight the hardships. Fighting is inevitable. Neither age nor height, Religion nor gender, Status nor ethnicity; The world is set out to challenge you. If you are not challenged, You are simply not living. However, every challenge Pairs with a solution Only you can discover. If, and only if, You set out to find it. We will all overcome what is set In front of us as long as we think. We will all overcome our fears. We will all overcome our own darkness.



Amanda Fameli

American Dream

Maybe, maybe, maybe... Maybe your dreams will unfold fully. Maybe fulfillment is really filthy: Big house, big cars, big business, and big money. Capitalism is beautiful ain't it, when you win big and get lucky. It's lonely at the top and overcrowded at the bottom. You know you're living the American Dream when nightmares are all you've got. Eighty percent of people in poverty, but hey, at least it's payday. Live life to the fullest, party hard; less work, more play. Passing that homeless guy from across the way, Economy crashed, on the streets the next day. Vagrancy and irony fulfilling the vacancy. Faceless business attire walking by you daily, Thinking "Maybe, maybe, maybe ... "

Angel Maldonado

Sugarcane and Coffee Beans

She smells of sugarcane and coffee beans with sunkiss freckles dancing on her cheeks in unfathomable constellations. Her smile is warm, though it is a distant memory of mine. She herself was a rarity. I wanted to give her the world and devour her with kisses all along her spine.

I wanted to clear the wicked tears from the forest in her eyes. Her skin was a marble slate with a slight flush of pink. I took a rope and lassoed the stars that had been stolen from her eyes, which were now pale skies. Every day without her, a part of me dies.

The only blemishes on her body were bruises left on her neck from previous nights and poisonous boys who shot their venom into her beautiful veins. She hides herself away so the world can't see her turning into a mystery, drowning in misery. Brutally, she was torn from me, leaving nothing behind, but pain, destruction, and vile jealousy. I was wrong for falling.

She was the most melodic, perfectly placed collection of stardust and moonlight. And I know that god's no writer but I swear she was pure poetry. The purest form of anything I'd ever seen.

She left me, because I was not a "he" and "it was wrong." I was crushed, beaten and bruised. All because she never really loved me.



Marisol Hansen

PC Language is Terrible

1, As time has gone on, I've begun to grow more aware of impending issues that would impact me in the near future or even impact me in the present. One of these issues remains on the topic of free speech and PC culture.

3. Based on observation PC Culture appears to be gaining strength. Though our (American) government is not quite ready to censor people, the policies of private institutions like twitter and countless universities have made sure that we, as Americans, are also facing consequences for daring to have the 'wrong' beliefs. As someone with fairly unpopular opinions- the idea of being punished for my ideas, like ail time or gaining a fine, does scare me quite a bit.

2. Countless times I have gone to look at different points of view on this topic from both sides of the argument. Something that bothers me is how this particular issue involves the very aspect of speech...

4. Our culture needs a refresher on what free speech is. Free Speech is the right to express any opinions without censorship or restraint; and, unless someone communicates intent to harm me or my possessions, they have the same rights as I do to state their viewpoints. Free Speech is a very straightforward concept; it allows others to share opinions even if others disagree, or if it offends others...

...You should be challenged to defend your views. That is the only way you can grow as an intellectual.

Kiera Cutri

A Note To All Astronauts

I'm heading straight for the unknown, down a wormhole of curiosity; but the distance and strides that I gradually achieve make it worth, it. Even if something goes wrong, and I become the next Apollo 13, I will learn from it. No matter how catastrophic things may go, one thing may go right. I will try again and again. There may be a couple methods in-1 volved in finding a solution. Attempting to find the answer that will assist me in reaching my destination. I may pass upon a mirage of vibrant clouds, as gaudy as a rainbow but swirled into one, with flashes of sparkles and hopes only present in dreams. Is this a nebula or just clouds judging and laughing at me? Despite laws of nature, not even gravity can hold me down. I will break the scientific barrier in the quest for a prominent and radiant future. No matter how peculiar the choices I make may be, they may allow me to soar past the exotic planets of a galaxy and past the long rings of Saturn through the glossy and glittery tail of a comet itself. I will find the most precious gem in all of outer space and bring it to everyone's sight. It will be so bright, even the sun will be jealous.

Lauren Barbulescu

She Sees Her

She sees her.

A model human being, Surrounded by others who soak in her flawlessness.

Ideas of aesthetic perfection overpower the screen.

The places this girl goes, The people this girl meets, The things this girl does:

Otherworldly.

There is little detail about who the username *really belongs to*, Who this girl is as a person, a friend, a companion. But this girl is hanging out with them, But this girl is wearing that to prom, But this girl is going there for school.

This girl is something to talk about. So does any of the detail really matter?

But she is just staring at the screen in bed alone Scrolling through as her eyes glisten with admiration, as her mouth drops in awe, as her mind wanders with questions of "what if?"

She just wears leggings and a sweatshirt Going through pictures of months ago, nothing fancy, nothing out of the ordinary.



She is nothing to talk about.

I am she, and that other girl sees me.

That girl sees my leggings and gasps; That girl sees my sweatshirt and marvels.

As that girl gazes at my feed, her mind wanders with questions of "what if?"

But that girl is just reading her book in her backyard Taking notes, nothing extraordinary, nothing thrilling.

But nothing is always something to someone.

So, Is she something to talk about?

Samara Lipman



Kiera Cutri

I Am His

It isn't hard for one to say that the boy isn't the best that one has seen in their day. For his eyes are wave crests, unpredictable and stormy, while darkness circles underneath, telling last night's story for me.

> Yet by the skin of his teeth he has drawn me in. There is something about him that makes him a blessing, or a sin. However grim his eyes, however dim, I am his, no matter how pointless the idea is.

> > Sofia Goldstein

Kiera Cutri

Thoughts on Human Empathy (Part 1 of 2)

Today, smoke greeted my nose, Resultant of an abandoned bonfire A moon before the solstice. Robust and alert, I charge towards the scene Searching for pulses. With black ice and a black sky Warning me to turn back, Wind and adrenaline carry me to black.

Upon the scene came an injured cry, Calling for attention and love But receiving none. A little girl lied before a blackened home, With glass shards draining What's left of her, crimson on black. Despite her stained, limp appearance The child cried a mighty roar, Fighting her pain.

Reaching the child, a fractured amalgamation. The interview begins: "What happened"? I demand, flustered. "Daddy..cheated again, Mommy...cried" she responds, Meek and broken. "Daddy...left, Mommy...got mad". As she recalls her last moments, She beckons me closer to her, With her tears running to black. "Mister...a favor" she says, Wincing with every word, Like glass in her throat. "Child, hold your breath, You may live the day yet!" I beg, panicking. But a shake responds, And the bleeding child Offers her final words.



28

"Mister...may I ask... For...a promise?" She pleas, coughing blood with it. "Child, please! Don't speak!" I say, Praying the black won't be Her death bed. A crowd quickly gathers, But unsure of an action To take charge of. Sirens fill the streets, Deafening those around slowly, Like the red and black rivers before us. Her voice challenges them, In hopes her final dream is fulfilled. "Cry...for me, mister. That is all...I ask. Please. Don't disappoint...a little girl Down...on her luck" she throws, With a painful, begging grin. I've been holding her hand Long since arriving, But only now does the cold, Unforgiving winter settle in. She stiffens, and her gleeful expression fades. Embracing the child's empty shell,

Embracing the child's empty shell, I whisper my final words to her. "I'm sorry." Letting go, I merge with the crowd, Losing familiarity with the red. Days later, I would stand by her final bed, To pay obligatory respects. But I would not cry, For the girl's promise Was recognizable, but childish. "Forgive me, child" I say, A parting gift for the dead stranger.



Adolfo Viruet

As White as Snow (Part 2 of 2)

As the girl slumbers in bed, Aware of her future with maggots, She recalls a living dream Of paper and ink. She would tell tall tales Of her adventures with Gods and aliens. All with innocent glee. With every discovery Did her paper happily bleed ink, Meticulously recording her Happy, care free world. She would catalog her stories, Fixated on sharing them with The whole school, An open friend to her.

The young storyteller Would recite her tales, Excited to spread her joy with others. But only mockery was thrown To the whimsical girl, Alone to her own fictional world Of "devoted" friends surrounding her. She, the oddball of the playground, Grew numb to her pain, Determined to believe in The tall fantasies herself. And with each new story Did the ink bleed more and more, Until her stories were soon lost To it all, drowned in black. The little girl kept the act up, Adamant to smile bravely At her painful ignorance. She failed to see her delusion, and grew to protect herself In all white.

Every day she struggled with herself, Un-wanting and afraid to see her black Appear in her dreams, offering complete union. Her white delusion denied the ink, Determined to the resistance. In truth, she knew her front was for not, Drawing false hope from her paper heart.

But on her final days The black finally took hold, Revealing a character of Indifferent qualities, A being of all she despised In her paper world.

The girl, once innocently ignorant To the harsh realities of the world, Now bled ink with every pang She felt, losing her war on truth. And oh, the ink would run, Consuming the Gods and aliens, And whatever friends she held dear In her unknown world of white. The mocking laughs and snarls Haunted her white dreams,

And her bubble world ceased to exist. The blinded girl seeked refuge, Yet found none anywhere But in a fistful of pills. Little miss oddball found no comfort In that world any longer. Her black hands rob this chance, However desperate her desire was, Choosing life over death. An alliance forms, And new, grey paper, Greets a life reborn. A God of her own world, Black in wisdom, And as white as snow.

Adolfo Viruet

Rachel Koenig



The Madman

When he sees others, the triumphant ones only,

there creeps a belief that his crown has been stolen

and that he is bereft of the wealth and riches that could have been brought from it.

So, it all starts with an appetite to become better,

A desire to become someone who could gloat without days' end whose dinner table is set with an assortment of meals,

A meal suitable for royalty that is. In search of subduing his desire, he learns. And he develops. And he transforms.

Yet his hunger is unceasing. O if there is mercy, save him!

But every effort augments his hunger, his hunger leading to starvation, His starvation leading to insanity. With this insanity, he learns. And develops. And transforms.

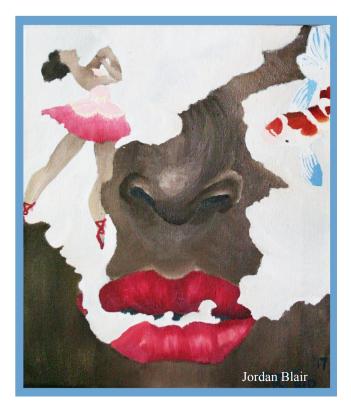
In despair, he is now a madman who believes his crown has been stolen, and his dinner, never enough.

Steven Kwon

Hope in the End

She lives in a world where danger is all Around her, circling her, and eating her; A shark in the ocean waiting to maul, With one goal in his mind, to cause a stir. A girl traveling alone met a man, who used her to steal her money and pride, so the girl ran out of Afghanistan and for the rest of her poor days she cried. With no money and nowhere to go, realizing the danger all around her, she stayed in New York and looked at the snow, with her miserable life as a blur. But, when she met another man, falling deeply in love and never stopped smiling.

Ariane Guyonnet



The Change

Ever since I was little I was blind to what had happened, But as I got older I started to see.

It was always you.

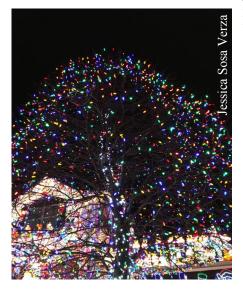
You were the person that interfered with my life This whole time.

It was you that made him change. It was you that made him forget. It was you that made him not want me.

It had always been... you.

All the neglect I've felt, the thoughts that ran through my head, The pain I first felt. What I thought was normal, Now I see, was not.

The competitions he missed, The recitals he never showed up to. The father daughter days lost!



I tripped my heart; I felt worthless. All this time I blamed myself When really I should have blamed you.

You barged in! You tore them apart! You made him leave!

He had forgotten, He had moved on, He had vanished... to be with you. Piece by piece, you took him from us

It's always been you. But why?

Slowly the anger grew. I exploded, I rebelled. But in the end, I was sorry. Because I realized It was not you. It was not me. It was not him.

It was really nobody. Nobody tore him from me, Nobody made him forget. It was inevitable...it was fate.

Brianna Martinez

Casual Conversations with Bigotry

In case you were living under a rock for the last two and a half years, I came out as a gay trans kid. A conversation piece for people to argue about. "No, that gender doesn't exist," says boy number one.

"So... what are you, really? I mean, you know..." she says after she points to my pants. These casual conversations over breakfast and quiet morning sunlight. These talks about how I'm not a person. Once, my friend invited me to lunch, and she briefed me before asking me about if I wanted a sex change with "I don't want to offend you in anyway." I told a boy that I was also a boy and he told me that he didn't believe me. I was so sure that after I came out my school would be swarming with questions about my body, as if my sex was the most interesting thing about me. I have been bullied online and everywhere else. I was not born in the wrong body; I was born in the wrong time, with the wrong people. And it is easy to call me binary because everybody has the same voice when you stop listening.

"You foolish girl, this is not your decision to make; it never was because you have always been mine." Adults calling me woman, she, girl, and hers. I have learned to answer to a dead girl's name rather than my own. I have learned that I am not marketable, not attractive enough for other men, not allowed to exist. I have learned that I make other people uncomfortable. I have also learned that I am expendable by nature and a lot of work for other people. Which is to say that my struggle is now minimized because you can't remember something. Too much, too big. Not "passing" enough to satisfy a cis-centric society. I have been here before. I mean I have seen the moon and darkness, and counted the seconds until the light comes in through the windows. I have waited for the sweet warm embrace to fill even the darkest of corners. It comes in intervals, yes, however short and timeless. I mean I have been to every part of that room and seen every hole and crack in the wall. I have run my fingers over the wreckage. And what is that but loyalty? Dedication to a promise of something brighter and bigger than yourself. Dedication to the house, however broken it is.

Alex Marsh

Anna Cahn

Sense of Summer

I lay on the couch staring through the skylight As the bright stars gleam proudly. The open window allows crisp air to flow into

my home.

My lungs fill with refreshing, summer air, While my mind remembers the summer days. An amusement park.

Several airplane flights.

Fireside songs and jokes alongside my best friends.

Morning hikes.

Sunrises.

Barbecues.

Beach days.

And yet my favorite moment of the busy summer was this single one.

As I laid there becoming mindful of the nature and simplicity around me,

I couldn't help but appreciate the tiny, powerful stars.

The fresh, chilly air from outside.

And then fireworks began to sound.

The bright blasts of energy surged through the sky,

And were distant enough to calm my mind. Children next to me smirked since the sound wasn't thunder, but rather a light show.

A burning fire outside filled my nose with nostalgia.

I closed my eyes,

And instantly felt peace and happiness.

Although this feeling would come to an end, I welcomed fall... a season to create more memories and value every moment.

Megan Margiotti





Distant Love

Angelina, how do you look so fine? Your beauty comes not only from your eyes. However, I do wish you could be mine. We should not have only digital ties. Remembering the day I first met you, your beauty rivaled that of Athena. As for what your name is, I had no clue. I soon found out your name, Angelina. You know you are the perfect girl for me. Even though our hearts have a connection, your face so perfect never will I see. How I wish I could show my affection. Someday I may meet you much like a dove. But now we must remain a distant love.

Michael Barletta

The Jacket

In the first grade it was a widely accepted truth among me and all of my friends that the kindergarteners were to be feared. I couldn't exactly tell you with any real certainty why, and I'm not sure any of us could have back then either; maybe we had had some sort of altercation in the halls that escapes my memory, or maybe we just decided to for the sheer unadulterated thrill provided only by the illusion of danger, but for whatever reason we did.

The way the elementary school was set up was that grades in pairs would have alternating recess and lunch at the same time everyday, meaning that when we were on the playground, the kindergarteners were in the cafeteria and vice versa. Other than the occasional smacking of tiny hands against the lunch room windows, this did not prove to provide much interaction between us and them. On a day to day basis, we could go about our business with a general sense of peace and tranquility. Except for the one day where this all changed.

Me and my cohorts began bustling into the cafeteria after our time on the playground and started our usual jabbering. I remember very clearly looking across at my good friend, Dylan Fitzgerald, who had just unzipped his worn NY Yankees lunch box, and pierced a straw into the insert of his cartoon of chocolate milk. Also beginning my usual settling in routine, I stood up to put my jacket in one of the cubbies along the backwall, and promptly ran into a problem. My jacket was nowhere to be found. I had left it outside. There was only one thing I could do.

"Dylan, come get my jacket with me."

"Where is it?"

"Outside." He knew as well as I did what this meant. We both took a glance out the window adjacent our lunch table. We could hear their harsh shrill screaming faintly even through the glass barrier separating us. He set down his chocolate milk, and looked me dead in the eyes.

"Okav."

After explaining our predicament to the lunchroom aides, they rather sadistically offered us absolutely no help in retrieving the abandoned item but rather opened the large metal door separating us from the uneasy autumn winds. We stepped outside cautiously, concocting a plan that seemed nearly fool proof, practically ingenious. Rather than enter enemy turf as a lone pair of quivering prey we would disguise ourselves, each one of us tucking our legs beneath our shirts in what seemed like a more than sufficient way of masking any height or age differences that would make us stand out from them. Utilizing this technique we managed to successfully creep just inches away from the jacket until we heard a loud, booming cry. We had been spotted.

"HEY LOOK! *GET 'EM*!" Now in this moment I couldn't help but ask, why? What made us the desirable target for this cat and mouse chase by these blood thirsty kindergarteners? Our fears of them up till this point had been mostly made up.And to that I have confidently come to the simple conclusion that kindergartens smell fear. Had we not curled ourselves into makeshift disguises and anxiously shuffled our way across a significant portion of blacktop, the result may have been much

different. But we did. Kicking our legs out from our shirts and snatching the jacket all in one swift motion we found ourselves in a full on chase back to the doors of the cafeteria.

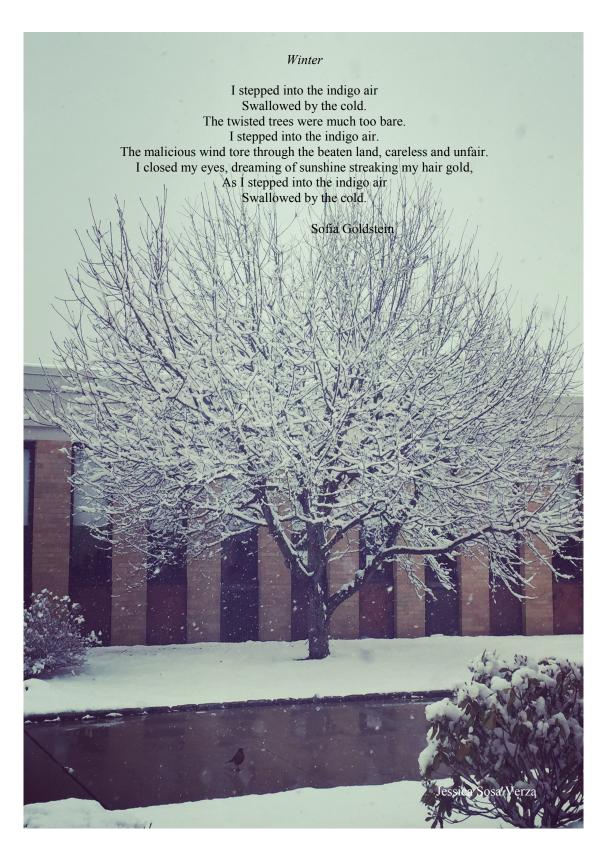
The majority of the kids on the playground had abandoned their previous activities to join in on the heist and behind us could be heard what felt like the sound of thousands of tiny foots, all screaming in an aggressive chorus of blindly focused energy. Now I've never been the most athletic kid on the block but boy did I run. This was probably the single most terrifying and exhilarating thing that could happen in my six years of life. Dylan made a daring leap for the door, going as far as to hold it open for me at the risk of his own safety. After slipping inside we let the door fall with a thud, the screams of our pursuers falling to the distance. Jacket now in tow, we calmly sat back down at our table and continued our lunch time routine.

At this point in my life I've revisited this story numerous times, including me and Dylan co-writing a comedic poem about the event in seventh grade as well as numerous retellings to any willing audience. In reality, there isn't much to the story, so I had to ask myself why it was something I was so continuously drawn to. For me the story epitomizes the purity and happiness I felt as a kid, hanging with my friends and just getting involved in any crazy stupid adventure together. We grew close in these moments, the bond of running together from a pack of kindergarteners or really anything of that nature. Becoming a teenager and moving into high school, these are the kinds of things I miss; in that moment, I'm not worried about if the kid running next to me genuinely likes me or if what I'm doing is stupid or irrational.



It's the simplicity of thinking and doing. I don't think it's something I'll ever forget, and I'm very glad for that.

Harrison Sakai



My Body, My Rules

I decided to make a purchase one day of a sticker, which read in bright pink letters: "My Body, My Rules." I did this because I consider myself a feminist and this was one of my views that I felt proud of and was unafraid to show to the rest of the school, or at least my classroom. When Trump was elected, the halls were littered with students of all ages and all genders sporting TRUMP propaganda, proud that this man was their new president. Their happiness and excitement was spread all through the halls and so I decided to have my own little rebellion just for myself. I bought that sticker and smacked it on my computer with pride, unafraid and strong. But soon my newly found confidence began to falter as I



walked into my classes that next day, sat down and opened up my ancient 2012 Macbook. All of a sudden, the people near me in my class who could clearly see my bright pink sticker had looks on their face, one of confusion, another one of mocking righteousness, and even more faces of unacceptance. There were a few who looked at me with support, yet the bad outweighed the good. My confidence began to wane thin. A few of my friends and students even asked me about my sticker, saying "Why'd you get a sticker of this?" (because it's something I believe...duh.) or "Yeah....no, I'm pro life." From there, they began to start a discussion with me about abortion and how I was wrong. I didn't buy this sticker to be questioned, to be talked to like I needed a lesson on life. I had bought this sticker simply because it had made me feel empowered. I, as a young person, am oblivious to many of the characteristics that people may obtain, always seeing the good in others. Yet the need to put other people down who don't share your certain belief is something I saw that day that I had never experienced before. It shocked me. Because of judgement, I had become (sad to admit it) shy and insecure. I felt ashamed of myself that I had let other people's opinions and words get to me, but to pretend that you don't care what other people think of you is impossible. From that day and from the days following, I learned from my sticker that people are opinionated and sometimes these people are jaded, unable to see another person's perspective or to even accept that someone thinks differently than them. In those moments, I became weak almost to the point of removing that sticker and placing it somewhere in the shadows, but in the end, it made me stronger and gave me more confidence. My pink sticker is still on my computer, and it will stay there as a message to others and to me; for them, it shows that there are people who exist with opinions that differ, and for me, it tells me to stand strong no matter the oncoming thoughts.

Anna Cahn

Blank

Once upon a time, there were social, creative children, who didn't need an iPhone to have fun or communicate. Who pulled at the grass that made their legs itch, who rolled down hills to see who could get their mom the angriest, Who read comic books and traded baseball cards.

Once upon a time, I was a child. I learned to ride a bike without training wheels... it took weeks. Now I am learning to drive a car without an adult... it's taking months.

Once upon a time, the holidays were more exciting. I woke up on Christmas morning ready to see if Santa took my "thank you" note to him. Now I wake up and thank my parents for their generosity, Even though I feel empty from receiving things.

Once upon a time, I played with my pet rabbit and sang her to sleep. Now I can't even find the time to enjoy a home cooked meal.

Once upon a time, I sought to attain the simple things. I practiced tying my shoes every day. I sat in the corner and learned to snap. I whistled as well as the seven dwarfs.

Once upon a time, "I grew up." 16 years of memories and suddenly they were slipping away; focusing on the future prevents presence. Focusing on the past makes me want to shrink and do it all over again.

Once upon a time, I was lost; sometime soon I'd like to find myself, but once upon a time, this time, I just don't know.

Megan Margiotti



A Horror Forgotten

I gaze at The night sky overhead Lit up with hundreds of lights. The lights are like shooting stars, falling and falling towards the ground. Until, They hit, Panting, running, screaming, crying.

The city

Instantly spirals into a world of chaos. I see a child lost, hugging herself in fear, crying for her mother to come rescue her. But she doesn't come Panting, running, screaming, crying.

The city is engulfed in flames. Everyone is running, desperate to reach water; The bombs don't stop. I run and run, endlessly, like a maze, Panting, running, screaming, crying.

The skin on my back tears away painfully, As a bomb attacks me. I feel my raw flesh sizzle, Like raw meat roasted on a spit, Panting, running, screaming, crying.

But I keep moving. I have to. Searching for water, I move with the mass of people in front of me, Running for their lives, Panting, running, screaming, crying.

Claire Kidd

Twelve Hours

On a daily basis, we are approximately twelve hours, thirty-six minutes, and forty-five seconds away from each other at all times. But right now, for the first time, I'm looking directly at her, not through a screen. Eye to eye. Face to face. A measly two seconds away.

"Um... Hi." I'm the first one to speak, and it's odd to think about how differently my voice might sound now that it's reaching her through open air and not whatever intricate system of wires and satellites is usually involved. She opens her mouth to reply but closes it before saying anything. I can feel how conscious she is of her own inability to edit, reread, and revise what she's about to say. She pauses before meeting my gaze.

"Hey." She's smiling and I laugh at her.

"Don't be so nervous!" I tease.

"Your first words were 'UM HI' I just wanted to make sure I didn't sound *as stupid* as you!" We both laugh, possibly a little too hard. The tension is gone, at least for the most part. We remember who we are together, to each other. How we're supposed to act.

"Now come here and give me a hug, you little shit." She giggles and I give her a standard guy type of patting-the-back kind of hug even though she's my best friend and I want to give her a much better one.

"Alright. Shall we get going now?"

"We shall indeed."

It is four hours later, as my feet kick the pebbles along the boardwalk, that I'm revisiting this memory in my head, backtracking to make sure I remember every, even monotone detail exactly as it was. I back track through the amusement park too, and the late lunch, and all of it. My eyes glance over at her, despite still hearing her footsteps (they're soft) and her breathing (that's soft too) to make sure she's still two seconds away. Always two seconds away, never three, and never four. For just today, two seconds away.

"Today was fun," her words fall out of her mouth with a resolute sincerity; I smile and nod. Today was fun.

"Yeah," I say, "I sure had one hell of a good time."

"Do you ever think about... what things would be like if we could be together everyday? Like normal friends?"

"Every time we talk."

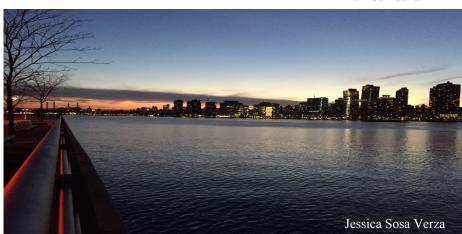
"Yeah. Me too." She pauses, "Do you think it would be like *today*? Do you think it would be this much fun?"

"I don't know, I guess it could be." It goes silent for a long time again, just the sound of the water sloshing up against the boardwalk and it creaking as we stepped.

"I don't want to leave." She's looking strictly forward, the moon's reflection in the water makes her eyes look milky and melting. I don't want to leave either, and I'm struggling to think of what to say. She's breaking character.

"Maybe... Maybe we don't have to! I've been saving up money from my job and I've got my debit card... We could find some cheap motel! We don't have to drive home tonight, we could stay, let's stay!" I know that it's dumb and unreasonable but I just keep talking because I don't want to leave and I want her to be happy and maybe if I keep talking it'll start making sense and everything will end up being okay. She turns back to look at me with her milky eyes like she really, desperately wants to believe what I'm saying is reasonable too and that I'm not grasping at straws. But I'm out of reasons, I'm out of ways to convince her and she needs more. She's begging for more. I'm begging for more. The pebble I'm kicking rolls off into the water with a splash. I wrap my arms around her, *tightly*. Not in the guy type of patting-the-back kind of way but in the real and deep and meaningful way. I think she's squeezing back but it's hard to tell now because everything is getting hazy and I definitely don't have time to catch every detail the way I did before. We're hugging and then we're looking into each other's eyes, and I'm leaning in and I pause to make sure she's okay with what's happening and now we're kissing. We are zero seconds away from each other, and for this brief moment, this moment where we are nothing but together, no distance, not twelve hours, not four seconds, not three, not two. I am convinced and so is she and everything actually becomes okay. Zero seconds. And than she's pulling away and she's looking at me and she looks terrified. We can't do this, this isn't what we are, this isn't who we are, we can't do this because we only have the ability to be this today.

I'm looking at her, eye to eye. Face to face. But I can feel our distance increasing as if one of us were shooting away out of a canon. We aren't two seconds we aren't four seconds, we aren't the six hours we both drove to get here, we aren't twelve hours away, we are much, much, much further and the distance just keeps increasing and all I can do is stand and watch as tears start running out of her milky eyes and I think they're coming out of mine too but I can't be sure. We were zero seconds, and then we were too far. Who am I kidding; we have always been too far.



Harrison Sakai



Mother Nature's Homecoming

A damp, charcoal street with newspaper scraps clutching the curbside. The angelic blossoms of the pear trees have been smothered with grocery bags. Their handles, wrapped around the ends of decaying, frail branches, As they whip like tethered ghosts in the contaminated wind. Fictile dividers slither through the rough swells of the ocean like eels. Coral reefs, once teeming with life, are now bleached white, As sea life roams elsewhere, searching for a new home. Smokestacks belching gray plumes replace the whimsical, Puffy clouds dancing in the inviting blue sky. Muck left by man coats everything in its path, leaving a trail covered in sorrows. The once vibrant sunset painted sky, now displaced with a bleak, grey pall. The only residue of plant life exists in the desiccated leaves on the ground, Their curled sides infected from fall crunch under the boot of a common man. The raging sky will roar with thunder and shoot sparks to the ground. Are they flashes of hope, or catastrophe? Sparks that have the ability to galvanize one's idea for a new era of cleanliness and purity. The encouragement from Mother Nature herself to present an idea for the impending future. It is up to mankind to utilize these natural inspirations if you will, To change what has been reduced to ashes. One will sprinkle drops of water to these ashes to create a firm platform, All for a possibility to thrive and build again.

Lauren Barbulescu

5 O'Clock

Before I rest my eyes, the sun it settles down, I look to see the sky, of this old quiet town. The birds chirp by the window, as the breeze flies through the screen, I smile at the songs they sing, though I don't know what they mean.

The sun, it shines so slightly, it's timid and it's shy, reaching for tomorrow, not yet ready to say goodbye. The sky of pinks and purples, with cotton candy blue, there are no words to describe this most exquisite hue.

It is peaceful without worry, it's silence and it's rest, as cozy as a home, as it greets me like a guest. If only to stay here forever, embrace the warm sun beam, so subtle, yet so vivid, it poisons me to dream.

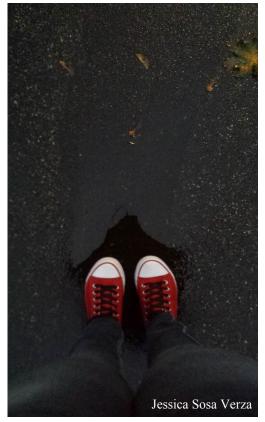
Jaclyn Ciaramella

Brianna Jackman

Abe and Ben

Two men walking side by side: Two different lives, but both men died. One was joyous, looking forward to tomorrow; The other was miserable, full of sorrow. One jumps out of bed, no food on his plate; The other sleeps in, his thoughts filled with hate. One has a true friend; The other with one who plays pretend. One laughs with his family all in one room; The other alone in a palace, surrounded by gloom. One says "Grace" for the little he owns; The other does not and only moans. Two men walking side by side: Two different lives, but both men died.

Alessia Mastrogiacomo

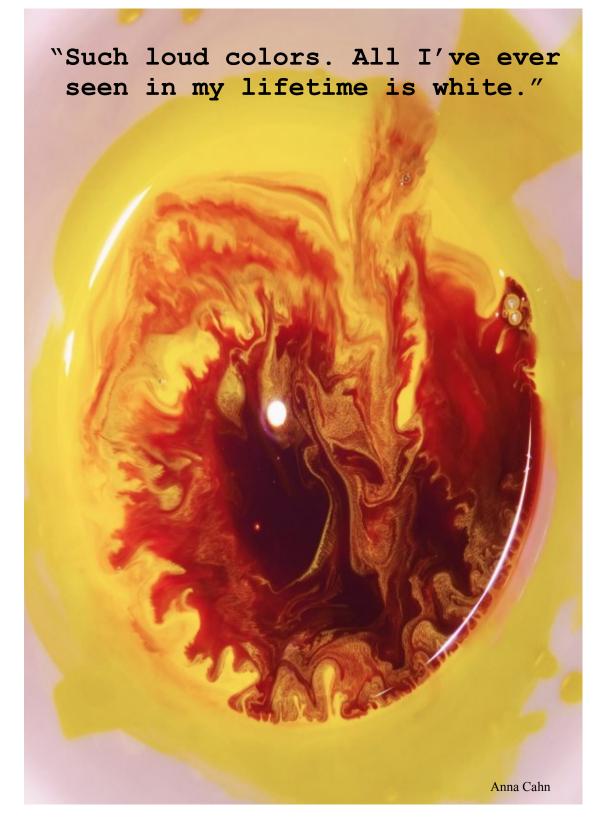


Wellington

You keep asking me why it is that I want to leave this place, and I'm trying to give you a strong answer: because you see, it's not just this town, with its tiny plastic people and their tiny plastic horses, it's this state with constant heat like the waves of anxiety that flush my cheeks. It's the absurd amounts of rain that flood my eyes every night before sleep. This untimely weather has eroded my already frail bones into nothing and my emotions into even less. I guess what I'm trying to say, is if I die, You'll see how it was this place that ultimately killed me.

Marisol Hansen





Excerpt from Photo Justice

Erin stormed out of her apartment, and when she slammed the door shut, it made a booming echo throughout the hallway. She tightly clutched her portfolio and camera, as she took the wheel of her car. Erin lacked the faintest idea of what she was doing, but decided to drive just to clear her head. Her mascara smudged under her eyelids, which were red and puffy, but she didn't care. She drove on and on, with no specific destination, until she left New York and ended up in Pennsylvania. She fought with herself. "Ugh, I should have gotten the job! Way more than that stuck up mom who interviewed for her daughter! How is that even allowed?" Her mind shifted to a blank as she arrived on the outskirts of a town, sporting a massive arch that read, "Welcome to Leatown, Pennsylvania."

"Hmm, that's weird, I've never heard of this place..." Erin thought, parking her car and cautiously walked under the arch. She held onto her portfolio and camera for dear life, as she entered the unknown.

"I wonder how long this place has been around," Erin thought as she suddenly realized that she had to use the bathroom. She was at the top of a hill and saw two women wearing all white, just strolling by. They began to scamper.

"Excuse me? Um, is there a restroom around here?"

The women looked Erin up and down in disbelief, as if there was an outsider among them. After a few moments, one of them murmured, "Down this hill there is the main road of stores and restaurants..."

"Thank you so much!" Erin exclaimed in a friendly tone. She wandered down the hill and witnessed an entire main strip full of people dressed in white with white stores and restaurants. Erin felt out of place in a ripped styled long sleeve shirt, big red sunglasses, and high heels to match. "Since I'm here I might as well advertise my work, since I failed to get that job. But first, to a bathroom" she thought hopefully. Erin entered a restaurant on her right, and asked the first man she saw, "Excuse me, sir, where is the restroom?" He examined Erin as if she had three heads, just like the other women at the top of the hill.

"Straight back on the left," he said under his breath, his wild eyes scanning her face.

Erin entered the bathroom, and encountered a woman in there, washing her hands, also wearing all white. Erin flashed a warm smile, but the lady widened her eyes, seemingly in disbelief, and stormed out of the bathroom, her gaze not leaving the bathroom floor.

When Erin left the restroom, the entire restaurant was glaring at her. "Why does everyone wear all white in this crazy town," she thought, perplexed. "But before I ponder that I have to stay on track, and sell my work."

Erin walked outside of the restaurant and caught a glimpse of a teenage girl munching on what looked like a sandwich. She trotted over to where the young girl was dining. "Hi! I'm Erin. Would you like to see some photographs I have for sale?" Erin asked. The teenager blankly looked at her. She finished swallowing her bite of food, washed it down with a swig of water, and asked, "Who are you... and what the heck is a photograph?"

"Where am I? This girl doesn't know what a picture is?" Erin thought. "I'll show you what a photograph is..." As Erin and the teenager walked outside the restaurant, the teenager wore a perplexed facial expression and stated "I'm Tyler, and to be honest, I'm anxious to find out what a picture is... you seem very out of place, so I'm having trouble trusting a stranger."

"That's understandable, but don't worry. I'm trustworthy...oh here, look at this one that I took of the Empire State Building," Erin said while her eyes darted around the restaurant, taking in all the clean, white surroundings.

"Why is everything white? I just can't wrap my head around this! I'm gonna get to the bottom of this." Erin thought, determined to crack the mysterious code.

After Erin gave him a thorough explanation of photographs and a brief summary of modern society in New York City, Tyler seemed perplexed and petrified at the same time. "This is all news to me," Tyler said. "I mean, I've never seen anything like this! So there are cameras that make art? Also, where did you get those clothes! Such loud colors. All I've ever seen in my lifetime is white!"

"Well, yes, many people in New York City have cameras and wear all different kinds of clothing. Everybody is unique..."

"I just don't understand it! It's truly difficult to wrap my head around such a confusing..." Tyler was suddenly interrupted by an excruciatingly loud alarm noise. "Well, looks like everyone's got to go home now," Tyler said, brusquely. "I hope that when the Wakeup Alarm goes off tomorrow morning you will still be here! I would like to learn more about this so-called 'Yew Nork City'" Tyler said, as she started to scamper down the road where there were scores of identical white houses lined up in rows.

Erin pulled out her digital camera and snapped pictures of the symmetrical town. She used the "Rule of Thirds" photography technique to capture the strange essence of this town. Erin admired the beauty of the picture. As confused she truly was, this town had such great potential for her portfolio. Erin continued along the empty streets and saw the citizens of Leatown bolt into houses and lock the doors. "I wonder how they even know whose house is whose... they are all identical!" She chuckled to herself. The sun began to set and all Erin could do was take photos and admire the sun's perfection. In the distance, she heard footsteps behind her. "Who is still on the street? I thought I was the only one out here?"

A middle-aged gentleman, also clothed in white pants, shirt and sneakers, nervously marched up to Erin. He was quivering as he blurted out, "What could you possibly be doing right now?! Didn't you hear the Evening Alarm? I was just closing up shop and that's why I'm late...what is your excuse? And what is that bizarre contraption you're using while the sun is setting?! We don't have much time, follow me to a house if you can't find one to spend the night."

"What the heck is an evening alarm?" Erin asked. The man ignored her and practically dragged Erin inside the last white house on the lingering road. "It's unfortunate that we got the furthest house from the town, but tomorrow I'll close up my tool shop early enough to have the first house," said the man as he took off his beatup white shoes. "What do you mean you will get the first house tomorrow?" Erin asked, "And who is coming to check that we are in the houses?"

"You're a visitor? Oh my, I thought the wild colors on your clothing was in my head...the daily use of The Uniform in this small town can mess with the brain sometimes. You have to leave, I've said too much!" The man was chewing off his fingernails.

"Please, sir! Let me stay here tonight while you explain to me what is happening here!" Erin pleaded as she was determined to figure out what was occurring in this puzzling town.

"Alright..." the man said, but his head jolted back and forth as if someone were watching him commit a sinful deed. "Only one night on the couch, then I never want to see you again, not tomorrow, not ever. If anyone asks, you have never met a man named Mason Bernard."

"Mason, who's that?" Erin joked. "I'm Erin Starr, and obviously I'm not from here, so please fill me in."

Micaela Udell



Flames

They took us out of our homes, We didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. They took us to the place where joy was nowhere to be found. And when I close my eyes, I can still see the flames.

They used us like slaves, Just because of our beliefs. The smell of burning flesh can't leave my nostrils, And when I close my eyes, I can still see the flames.

We carried anvils for no reason. We ate little food. We would hear gunshots in the night. And when I close my eyes, I can still see the flames.

We walked in the snow, Without shoes, with torn clothing. Every day we thought someone would save us, but no one ever came. And when I close my eyes, I can still see the flames.

> But against all odds, I survived. I glance up, and see the vibrant blue sky. I stay filled with joy, I appreciate my life.

> > But when I close my eyes,

I still see the flames.

Ethan Piliero

Anna Cahn

One and the Same

She is the stars, Artful, quiet, distant. I am the sun, Intense, loud, jubilant.

She is the water of a spring, Cool, crisp, sparkling tinsel. I am the champagne at New Years, Golden, bubbly, cheerful.

She is an oak, Stubborn, rebuffing the option of change, Standing mighty in a storm, Thinking falling is out of range.

I am a reed, Willing to bend In an ever fluctuating pattern Knowing I'll be standing in the end.

Yet we are one and the same, An inseparable knot. I, her vigilant angel, And she, my heedless juggernaut.

Josephine Robb

Anna Cahn

If I Was Your Girl

If I was your girl, I would make nutella pancakes on Saturday mornings, But you hate nutella.

> If I was your girl, I would make pancakes on Saturday mornings, But you hate flour.

If I was your girl, I would hold your hand, And hold a cup of tea in the other While we sit under the stars And try to name them; But you hate tea, and think stars are mini-aliens watching us.

If I was your girl, I would yell your name from 60 feet away, But you don't want people to know we know each other.

If I was your girl, I would always ponder whether you hate the things I do for you Or the person who does these things for you.

Then I remember,

You do hate the person who does it for you And that's why I'm not your girl. It's because I was too much of a pansy to consider a life without you, And you were just a hypocrite.

Jenniviv Bansah



Nothing

Even when closing my eyes to enter a void, I see a kaleidoscope of images, which destroys the purpose of "nothing." However, was there anything to destroy the purpose of it at all? The swirls of reds, blues, yellows, and everything in between, dances against against a bed of darkness.

The concept of "nothing," in its own ambiguity, can be as beautiful as the ethereal clouds shielding us humans from what lies beyond. What *does* lie beyond? A vacuum? Space? *Nothing?* No, not nothing. An absence of light is not nothing, for if that were to be the case, the minds of those hallowed by the acceptance of such philosophies would be nothing. An absence of air does not define nothing, for if that were to be the case, the lungs of all those who were tormented by their ignorance would be nothing.

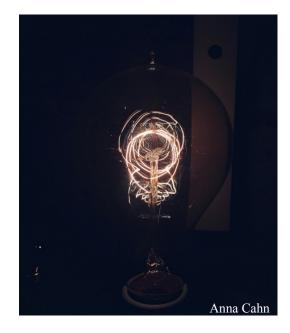
It is obvious that an absence of sound means silence. As an absence of light means darkness, not nothing; silence is not nothing. Silence is a mere invitation for one to stop silencing the voice in their head.

Why must the concept of "nothing" have the nerve to find itself in children's books or even in the mouths of people everywhere wearing a mask that says "I exist" when truly, it does not?

There is much satisfaction one can find in challenging a concept, or rather, a myth, such as "nothing," as it is the equivalent of boxing with a ghost. An absence of a human being.

Absence. Absence.

Hahnbie Kim



Excerpt from Rules and Regulations of Public High School

"Tell me again why we're going to this party?" I ask Noah as we walk to a part of town I have never seen until now. The lack of sidewalks and streetlights gives me reason to believe that we're entering the wealthier part of Jefferson Valley. The bare thought of it runs a chill down my spine.

"Because," he begins to walk backwards so he can face me, "this is one of the only ways to maintain your social status at South Jefferson. Everyone will be there."

"Even the girl who picks her toes at lunch?"

"Yeah," he snorts, returning to walk in the proper direction, "Even her."

"I don't understand. Why is this party so important for our social status?"

"I don't know how it worked where you're from, but this house is like one of those video games where every choice matters. Even walking there with you will spark conversation. Depending how much time we spend together at this party, you may move up to my social status."

"I'm not sure if that's a good thing," I joke, kicking a pebble, and missing as I did so.

"Well, it's not a bad thing. I'm one of the few well-respected nerds. Basically, I can walk past jocks without having to spend the next hour in a locker."

"And you moved up classes by coming to this party?"

He nods. "This time in freshman year, Reed Davis, the guy running all of this, made his break by throwing this party. He invited everyone except seniors."

"Why not the seniors?"

"I think his parents didn't allow it. The graduating class of 2013 was pretty wild, I guess. Anyway, he started off freshman year as a well-respected nerd like myself, but that wasn't good enough for him. Before the party started he and I were setting up, and he set the basement aside for myself and other nerds. Later that night, I won a game of Mario Kart against a jock which got me to where I am now. He and I don't talk anymore, but I know he's got my back."

"This entire thing feels like the caste system."

"Aurora, the caste system is a part of high school. You'll find out soon enough."

We approach the house, which should be referred to as a mansion based on its size. The driveway had a centerpiece of flowers in the middle, and large oak trees framing it. It was one of three at the end of the cul-de-sac, which has potential to be a peaceful area if this party didn't provide music to the entire neighborhood.

"This is it," Noah declares. "Before we go in, I should give you some advice."

"I don't know, this might hurt my social status," I say with a roll of my eyes.

"Seriously Aur, don't drink out of the punch bowl, and if you do, don't expect fruit punch. If you're gonna be a wallflower, make sure there are other wallflowers around you." He put his hand on my shoulder and put a serious look on his face. "Finally, always knock."

"Okay," I drag, feeling nerves settling in. I've been to parties held by kids from private school tons of times and never was it this stressful. "Okay, got it."

"One more thing," he whispers to me as we walk through the heavy front doors. Both of our social statuses were at risk, starting now. "I leave by eleven thirty, so if you want to walk home with me then wait outside. I never miss curfew."

From the foyer, he tells me the lower half of the caste can be found in the basement, and the upper class in the kitchen. People who were upstairs, he refers to having the golden ticket of the night, and I should avoid it as much as possible. There's a living room *somewhere* on the ground floor that he anticipates would be perfect for me, but since he's never seen much of the ground floor, so he can't tell me where.

"Try not to look lost too," he adds.

"Sure are a lot of rules for just a party, don't you think?" I ask, my voice competing with the music.

"I'm not saying you have to follow them. I'm giving you advice on how to have the most decent time here possible. It doesn't get any better past 'New Girl'." With that he descends to the basement before I can ask how worse it gets, leaving me without so much as a 'good luck.'

Being here is overwhelming, to say the least. There are too many things to remember, and people to look out for, and food to avoid. I forget all of Noah's rules, and on more than one occasion, I drink out of the punch bowl, only to be disappointed that it's not fruit punch. But for the sake of my social status I drink it all anyway. I start to feel hazy as I make my way to the second floor. The music starts to dim down and for a little it feels quiet, like I can breathe easy again.

Potential Label: Lightweight

In a perfect world I would rather be outside, breathing air in a similar fashion to before I came to this party. Instead, I'm playing a game of hallway roulette, opening every door until I find a bathroom. Quickly, I open a door in hopes of it being a bathroom. It is when I see a couple making out that I remember Noah's third rule: always knock. I slam the door behind me, furiously shaking my head in attempts to unsee what I just saw. I lean against the wall, where I can hear said couple murmuring to themselves in embarrassment, wondering if I'm still outside the door.

Potential Label: Bathroom Voyeur

"Hey," I hear a voice ring. "You alright?" I open my eyes to find Reed Davis, the host of this party. Under the low light of the hallway I can see his scruffy brown hair and brown eyes to match. It's legend that he scopes for a girl to bring to his bedroom and these parties. Not only will she have the luxury of spending the night with him, but also cleaning up the next morning.

It is now I become aware of my current situation.

"Y-yeah, I'm fine," I slur, cringing at how I sound. With all the parties I went to before, not once did I have to worry about getting buzzed or picked up by the host.

That may have been a result of chaperones, but I still heard stories of all the things the upperclassmen got away with. From the way they told it, it was like they did every disapproving thing right under their nose.

"Are you sure?" You look a little pale," he says, running a hand down my cheek. I try to pull away, but the wall limits me from how far I can go. He smiles and gets closer. Some girls get invited to this private after-party, but no one really knows if they RSVP'd yes or no. Some do it for the guaranteed increase in social status, others do it for the sake of doing it, and we don't know about the rest.

Potential Label: New Girl Invited to Reed Davis' Bedroom

Potential Label: Slut

"Lay off of Boston, Davis," a voice all too familiar says. Her boots are mute to the carpeted staircase, but she manages to make sound anyways. Reed backs away almost immediately, with his hands up and his smile remaining.

"C'mon Tess, it looked like she was having fun..."

"If that's what you see as fun then you need to get your eyes checked." She moves closer to Reed, and he avoids getting any closer to her.

"Leave the scarring to me, Reed," she grips his shirt collar, pulling him to her height and whispers in his ear, "no one does my job like I do."

With that, the host of his own party scurries away in fear. He's probably gone to the kitchen to tell all of his top-tier friends that Tess Greye nearly beat him up while standing up for the New Girl. At first his friends would make fun of him for being scared of a girl. But when they realize this girl is Tess they would be engulfed in a fear that could only be washed away with a few more sips from the punch bowl. They would plot a scheming plan for revenge through loose lips and loud laughs. It would be a silly plan that they would wake up and laugh about in days to come. In retrospect, that plan may backfire because you can't get anything past Tess Greye because despite her never showing up to her classes she knows everything. At least, that's what I heard.

"Uh....thanks for that."

Brianna Jackman

