

Crocus Vernus



Carolina Day School
2022 Literary Magazine





Crocus Vernus

Carolina Day School's Literary and Art Magazine, 2022



Editors' Notes

Welcome to the Editors' Notes!

We are Holly and Mac, and we are so excited for you to explore the 2022 Literary Magazine. This is our first year leading SLAMM (Society of Literature, Art, Music, and Media), the group of students who creates our high school's Literary Magazine.


Carolina Day School has published this magazine for 20 years! We're grateful that we were able to put our spin on this rich publication, and we look forward to doing so in coming years.

Our theme this year, which you will experience throughout this collection of art, is the growth we can achieve through some of our generation's darkest times, just like the Crocus Vernus—thriving throughout winter and even blossoming through a layer of snow.



One of our favorite things, that admittedly has brought tears to our eyes, is seeing people enjoy their passions. Witnessing community members focus, zone in, and edit little details only their eyes can see, is truly the fuel that keeps us creating.

Sometimes it's hard to see purpose, but when you find your craft and continuously refine until you achieve the next level, life is so much more fulfilling.

All that being said, we couldn't have done this without our fearless, orange-boot-wearing "Syllabus Driver" and staff leader, Swhite, to whom we dedicate this magazine. 

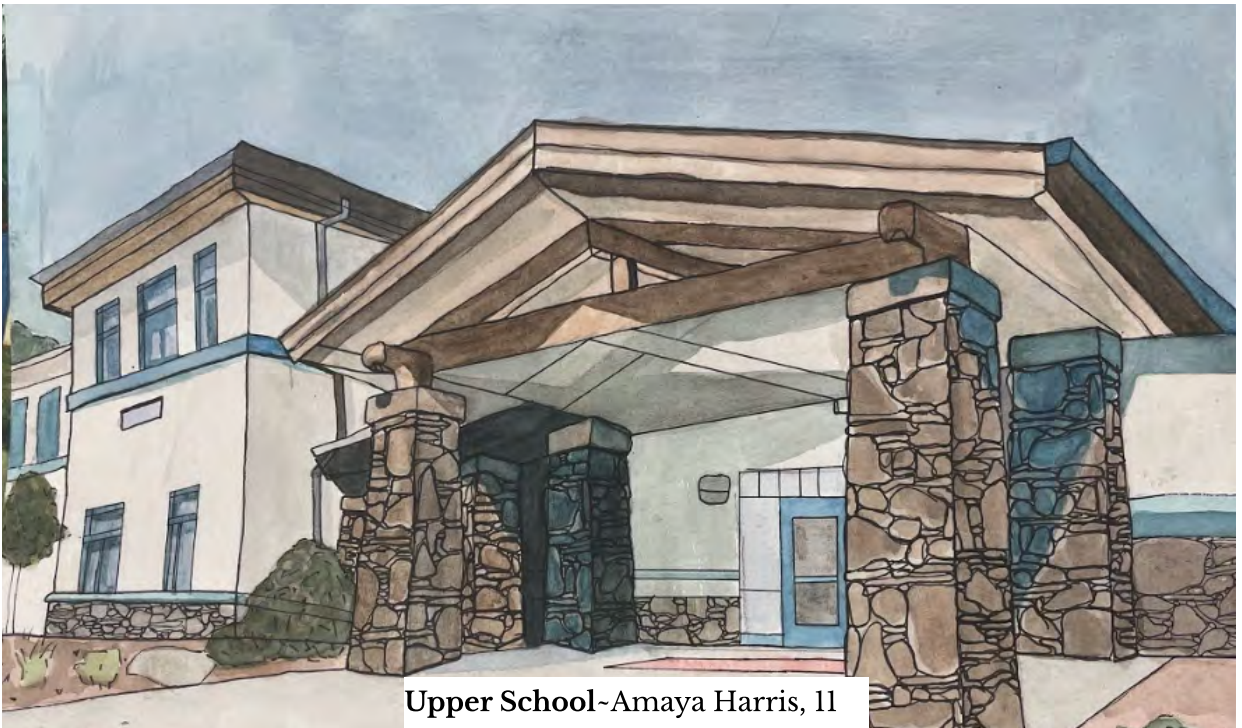
We are so excited to present to you...

Crocus Vernus

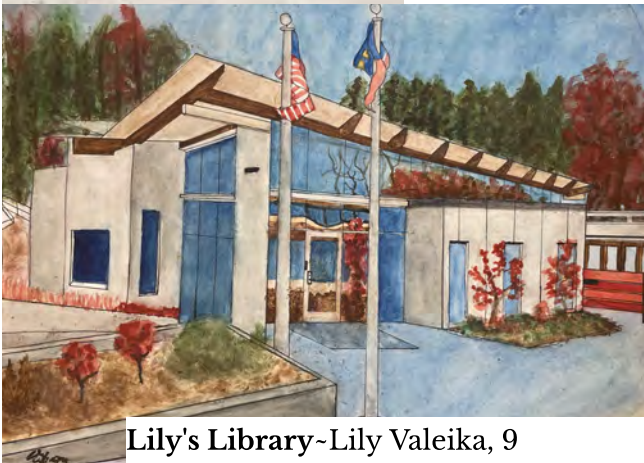


Our School: CDS

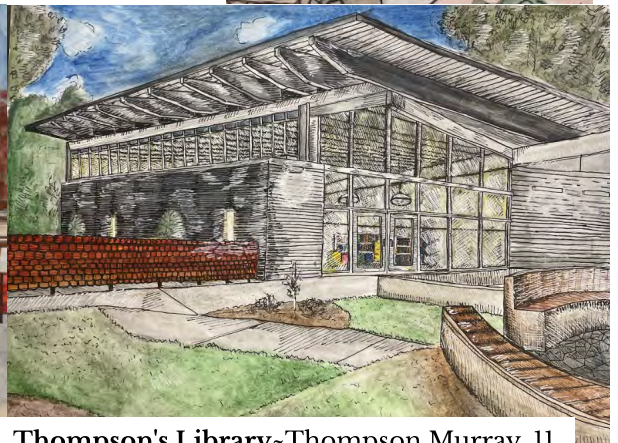
Carolina Day School has loads of fun and interesting school spirit days for our many reigning victories in the world of sports; it's time to lift our artists up and celebrate them! CDS's close-knit community of creative, ingenious people made this magazine possible. This is a tribute to our school and all who make it what it is.



Upper School~Amaya Harris, 11



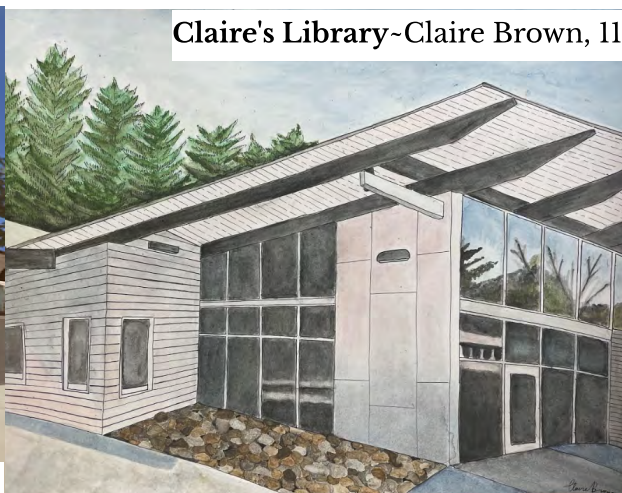
Lily's Library~Lily Valeika, 9



Thompson's Library~Thompson Murray, 11



Rowan's Library-Rowan Howell, 12



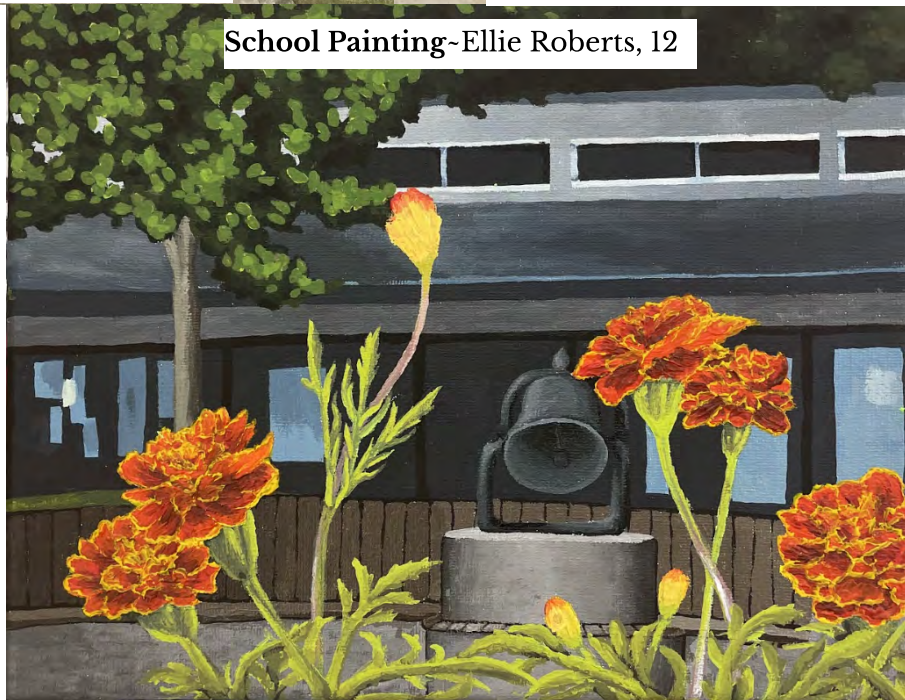
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Stuck



One Day

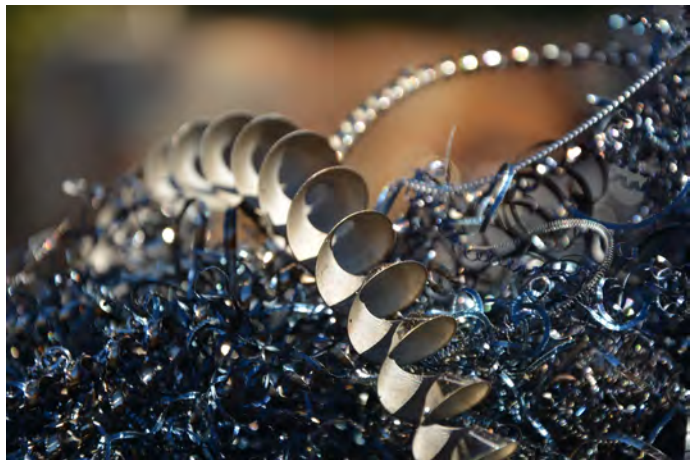
Caroline Barton, 9~Nonfiction

You're really insecure. Full stop.

You question every single little thing you do. You hate it when people laugh at you because maybe they're right. You don't take pictures of yourself because you think you look bad. You think you look bad because *you're not perfect*. Not like the girls you're friends with. They're all so *mature*. So *confident*. So *pretty*. They always have their shit together. It's hard to accept that you're not like them. So you try to change yourself, just a little bit. Just enough to be like them, to be enough for them. Maybe you start to wear eyeliner or you start to smile more or you pretend you're something that you're not, but in the end, you know you won't ever be enough.

You can't really talk to anybody about it either—because you think they won't understand. I mean, you inherently know that there are plenty of people out there who are also insecure. Just like you. But it feels like you're all alone: like you're the only person in the world who feels like you do. Eight billion f**king people out there and you're the only girl who's insecure. Bullshit.

The problem is, you can't really cope either, because the world has insecurity and anxiety so stigmatized that you can't do anything.



Never Ending Sprial~Penny
Trudrung, 9

So you listen to sad songs nicely put together in a playlist innocently titled something like “Night Car Rides” but it's really your “I Need Help” playlist, and you cry in the shower, and you cry late at night, and you worry, worry, worry, and you wonder how to be perfect, and you look at pretty girls on Pinterest, and you write your feelings down to try to help yourself, and

you develop anxiety because you worry about it so much, and you order clothes to make yourself pretty, and you buy makeup to hide your face behind fakeness, and you read little inspiring quotes about being enough and living your life and not regretting it but during all that time, you think that you're never enough. But most of all, you just pretend that you're okay.

Even if someone does see through your smiles and your eyeliner and your pretending, they just say to hang in there, you're gonna be okay one day. Maybe you will be okay one day. Maybe one day you'll love every part of yourself, including the smile you once hated. Maybe one day you'll take bad pictures of yourself and laugh at them and love them. Maybe one day you'll notice that you haven't heard the nagging voice in your head in a while that tells you that you're never perfect; you'll only notice the one that tells you how beautiful you are. Maybe one day you will understand the little inspiring quotes people write about being enough and living in the moment and doing stupid spontaneous stuff that makes you feel alive.

But honestly, it feels like that "one day" won't ever really come. Sometimes you feel just a bit closer to "one day," maybe when someone compliments your clothing or when someone laughs at your lame joke, and then you think that maybe sometimes it *is* gonna be okay one day. But most of the time, you feel so very far away from that "one day." Maybe you didn't feel pretty in that outfit you thought was cute or you got a bad grade on something that should have been a no-brainer.

But "one day" always seems to stay a hazy shape far, far away in the distance. And if by some miracle that you actually get there to that "one day" where you're finally, thankfully, okay, it won't be what it was all cracked up to be. Maybe no one ever makes it to that "one day."

But you're not sure how to get out of your insecurity. So you stay the same, day in and day out, doing the same shit that you've been doing your whole damn life. And you'll never get to that "one day." Ever.

Mask Mandate

Jeff Kalil, Staff~Poetry

We've all had to get better at eyes.

Grins and grimaces hidden,
We now scour for subtler sign,
The light lift of brow, an inkling,
The deepening crow's foot, a whisper.

Soul's window, now sole insight,
A pair of limpid clues,
Peering through the two-year fog,
Our only hint at the halting resolution
Of mysteries we used to understand.

Rose-Colored Glasses

Mia Armieri, 12~Poetry

I am beginning to wonder if red flags always look red.
maybe some are crimson,
and some are light rose.
perhaps some even have sparkles,
reflecting away the deep truth within their color.
for I know what red flags have looked like in the past,
but I think I've spent too much time looking for the kind of red that leaves
deep stains of blood,
and not enough at the small ones that fly at half-mast.

Reunion in the Underworld; Anticlea

Louisa Koon, 10~Poetry

From behind the awesome shade of lord Tiresias, I stood

Dead and gone

Washed away by the waves of grief that tumbled over me when you were
dragged out to war

The current slowly pulling me from the shallow water to where I could no
longer touch

I drowned in a sea of sorrow

There you stood in the land of the dead

Vibrant and full of life

Full of fame

Fame I will never have

My sweet Odysseus

Much devoted to return to Ithaca

To your kingdom,

your title,

your wife

Your homesick longing courses through the air,

Disappearing behind the house of death

To where the awesome shade of lord Tiresias now rests

He may be blind, but I am not

I see past the mask you wear

The walls you've built

The conflixtions with which you struggle

Temptation; your achilles heel

Around every corner, the sly shadow of temptation, disguised by a delicious
aroma of fame lays,

Waiting for the moment when it can wrap its arms around you

And claim you as its own

My son,

What brings you here?

Down to the world of darkness and death?

Sing to me like a bard, bursting with song and tale

And sing to me your journey

I bring the dark, clouding blood up to my pale, ghostly lips

I've recognized you since the moment you stepped foot into this joyless
kingdom of death

You cried when you saw me

A million tears I cried when you left.

Sand in the Wind

Clancy Penny, 12~Fiction

It's following me. It won't leave me alone. The howling gets louder, chasing closer and closer. I have spent my entire life escaping the wind. Wherever I go, it's always a step behind me. I know it will get me one day, I know it will. Everybody thinks I have Ancaophobia, but it's much more than that. Ancaophobia is treatable and this is not.

I urgently walk the school hallways because if I don't, the wind will catch me. People stare and whisper; I am a friendless, broken clock; but I have my reasons: nobody will be friends with a girl who lives in fear. During class I can barely keep stationary. My legs shake, itching to stand up and take me to a new place, further away from the wind.

I sit next to my chemistry lab partner, Nora, who also thinks I'm strange. Our chairs are positioned as far apart from each other as they could be within the confining measurements of the table. I am the last person on this planet she'd want to be partners with. As usual, my legs quiver in my seat. A faint howling wind sneaks through the back window, invading my left ear. My shaking intensifies until the table vibrates.

"Uh, are you okay?" Nora says in a monotonous voice, disgust in her eyes. I try speaking but only noises came out of my mouth.

"Uhhuhh ummum," I say like an idiot. My voice shakes along with my legs. I decide it would be best if I save myself from any further embarrassment and don't answer. I can't focus on anything other than the wind. It's here. I look back down at my paper, trying not to meet Nora's gaze. The words on my paper levitate off the page. The letters detach from their assigned words and scramble in the air. Can anybody else see them? The upper-case R from the element Rubidium arranges itself on the far left of my eye sight, followed by the letters U and N. Slowly my brain registers the word: RUN. I stand abruptly and the entire class focuses on me. "Uh, can I," I say to the teacher while rushing out of the classroom, "I have to—" I dash

out the door. As I race down the hallway, the wind tries to take my cheeks from behind me, pulling the thick skin back off my face, peeling my lips behind. It grabs my head, tugging my hair strand by strand. I burst out the door. I hyperventilate as the wind surrounds me. The air between my fingers is sucked away, replaced by the wind. I look down to my right hand. My pinky finger is slowly dissolving, trickling to the ground as sand. My ring, middle, and pointer fingers follow, scattering with the wind. The wind is like waves on the beach, washing up on my hand, carrying it to the ground. The wind fills my lungs, crumbling me from within. My head grows heavier, dissolving with the rest of my body. I am sand. Sand. So useless, only mobile by the grace of the wind.

This is Your Warning

Isabel Blackford, 12~Fiction

They share one eye and in their hands a string and your fate. They spin the webs of destiny and cut the string of life. Hold your breath and hope they don't choose your string. Pray to the gods. Maybe they are listening. Appeal to Zeus, king of the gods, beg the fates to have mercy on you. Let me introduce you to the three who control life, death, and birth. Clotho will spin your fate; she chooses your birth. She is a symbol of hope, rebirth and new life. You can see the blonde that once ran through her hair and the beauty she wielded in her youth. Lachesis chooses your life; she is the optimist, small in

stature yet stern. She carries herself as a being of infinite knowledge. Antropos chooses your death; she is the realist. You can tell she was once tall and lanky but taking lives had taken its toll on her, her once dark hair, which is now more salt than pepper, hangs just below her shoulders. Listen closely when they cut the string. you can hear the scream of another life lost to the will of three little old ladies. You've heard the screech before. It stirs up the feeling you have as someone's life slips out of their body at your mercy, as your hands tighten around their throat, as they draw their last breath. You might love someone, but hold on tight because the fates can take it all away. In the underworld you will be punished for the crimes you

Sentinel~Dana Tipton,
12

and your love have committed, the adultery, treason and murder. Your life seemed complex—you felt invincible, uncatchable, and brilliant—and, yet, you can be cut down by unhinged ancient women. When they catch you, dead or alive will be up to the string, the scissors and the fates. They will take your life, but only in the tangible world. Once the string is severed, join Hades in the underworld, but just know that's when the torture begins. Rejoin your "love" and suffer perpetual damnation in Tartarus. Remember, your life is not in your hands. This is your warning, live better, die better.



The Shopping Mall High School

to get them to talk was to talk about something other than the subject.

Passivity rather than intensity predominates. The lecture method is popular in classes for the unspecial. One teacher said that middle kids were "desirous to have the lead"; they liked to "just sit there and listen and take notes." They also liked to stay with facts and details. "They'll get edgy when you start to get in," said one English teacher who encountered resistance to posing questions. "They say that you're destroying the story." Since they preferred to "stay on the surface," he accommodated by giving classes and tests that dealt with "pretty much fact." "I want them to know me that they read the play and they understand what happened." They often preferred "busy work" such as worksheets because it's "controlled and structured" and they can get immediate feedback and build up marks." Their teachers rarely mentioned looking as a class objective.

Why do teachers settle so readily for these traits? In their classroom practice perpetuate rather than alter passivity. Mr. Cleveland, for example, saw no contradiction in his behavior, only inevitability. How did he explain why his class of 100 treatises for regular students were so dominated by avoidance?

First of all, he said he was constrained by the reality that these students *would* not do more. They were "unenthusiastic about learning and 'won't sit up and talk.'" Discussions did not work because "everybody just sits." He couldn't stay with any one story for long because, having been raised on TV, they would "tune out at the end of the first act." He could not make more demands because you try to overwork them, and teachers with high standards had low enrollments.

Teachers in general often do not push for more. They, like Mr. Cleveland, believe average kids are "just what you get." They almost feel the alibi of "not being extraordinary." They did not have the "drive" to get the kids. A teacher who expected there was "job" in sports? Students didn't seem to be working hard at school, "going to influence their future." For their future? The teacher said, "I don't know. I don't know what they're going to do. Another report said they were as much." Another teacher claimed that the kids just didn't "get the boat. They

Live Oak~Ellie Roberts, 12

Soldier of the Sidelines

Greyson Henry, 12~Poetry

An ill-omened battery grew in the town square
Electric with ancient indecency
The dirt cultured goosebumps and the sky-paper folded
The sunlight shone onto only me
When the cat's twisted brain spread an orderly lie
We heard it, denied it, rethought it, and went
Slickened by oil and handcuffed by syrup
Our pressure-cooked mind had its scaffolding bent

At first it was made up of fruit-flavored plastics
A second passed by and it blossomed with mold
Eyes bloomed from beanstalks and camouflage puzzles
The curious flame turned a cynical cold
Whirlwinds of acid and tendons of boredom
Tore through his humors and gravitas skin
Bright purple curtains made sweeter the danger
Of many years later his life can begin

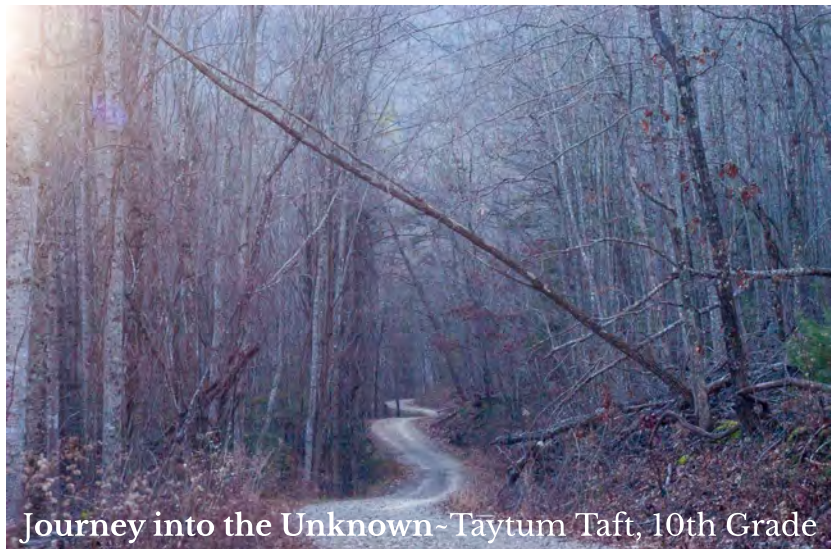
The yes-manning lawyers of Nero and Jersey
Swam in a school and were slaughtered by ink
Two turns to one turns to too big to fail
Turns to too big to swim so they started to sink
While the barefooted baroness living in glass

Bustled her fingers and chiseled her will,
The eyes of the night crowd got crossed and went cloudy
The day crowd was ready to run but stood still

One freshly born soldier of new-age invention
Broke off from the anthill and mosied towards age
With a suitcase containing the data of freedom
A trillion pieces of one simple page
Cenotaph thunderstorm concerts applaud him
Moksha escapists amusedly wait
Agents of heaven place bets on his madness
The soldier ignores them and walks through the gate

A broken commandment fell into the town square
The needle rain moaned and the plunger grass sighed
The midday train's schedule was covered in mud now
The hedonists laughed and the journeymen cried

Streetlight savannas
reward stolen valor
And tourmaline
bubbles guard houses
of clay
Golden horns blare for
a self-aware doomsday
Their guts of nostalgia
have withered away.



Journey into the Unknown-Taytum Taft, 10th Grade

The Blues

Trip Cogburn, Staff~Poetry

The Blues consume Everything.

Look closely at a

Flame.

You can see The Blues.

Feeding.

They move in silence

Nibbling

At the edges of a

Mind, or a

Heart.

Fraying the fabric of your

World

Careful not to tear it

for they really want to

Become.

Walk to the edge

of existence

where the sea meets the sky.

Nothing

but The Blues.

With escape impossible

Embrace is the whispered answer.

Icy cold?

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No.

Acceptance brings warmth

like the flicker of a Flame.

The Blues are feeding again

and they are —

Happy.



Midnight Salamander~Catherine Bolton, 10

Her Name

Dana Tipton, 12~Fiction

Listen, I realize she was young and naive, but we all were. I've known her since the day we were born. I'm not kidding, our parents met and bonded while giving birth to us in the same hospital. When we were children, we were inseparable. She was always the pretty one though. Her flawless blonde curls and perfect complexion would glow in the sunlight—caught all the boys' attention, and made all the girls jealous. We didn't need anyone else in our lives, just the two of us together was perfect. But I guess the attention got to her head as we grew older. She attempted to always include me, but now she had other friends. She introduced me to a new person—usually a boy she was talking to or a girl she suddenly became close with—every other week. Not one of them was someone I got along with.

We used to find each other every time the school bells rang and walk down the hallway together in middle school. In highschool, she mostly walked with her new friends. So every time for us turned into a quick smile when it was convenient. But our connection, the forever lasting childhood bond that allowed us to tell each other everything, never faded. She caught me up with her new endeavors and relationships over coffee about once a month.

She told me about this one boy, Brandon. Her eyes remained set on the table below us when she spoke of him: "I don't know if I like him very much, but he's sweet I guess. He calls me pretty. He took me for a walk in Blue Field park once, I made sure to leave plenty of distance between us. He had to reach kind of far, but still forcibly grabbed my hand. I guess I didn't really stop him though. Oh my, you haven't seen my new puppy yet have you?" Her stare turned vacant for a moment. But through her quick subject change she returned to the bubbly girl with that same bright smile I missed seeing everyday. Then her unusual silk-white gloves that gripped her vanilla latte stood out to me.

“That’s an interesting choice of accessory for humid 90-degree weather.” I didn’t want to sound rude, but the rash tone in my voice was probably mistaken as mean.

She nodded her head and took them off. On her right hand, the name **Brandon** replaced a section of her skin.

Why would his name be there? I didn’t actually ask her though. Maybe she wrote it there with a sharpie. Except there was something uncanny, like the skin was no longer her own skin. The font of the letters was soft, but the name was slightly raised above her skin like a strange birthmark or mole. I didn’t want her to think I was being judgmental so I kept from looking directly at it.

“You know there’s a party tomorrow night if you want to come?” She discreetly slid her hand underneath a napkin.

I thought about the people who would be there, her new friends. “I’m so sorry, as much fun as that sounds, my parents are out for the night and I have to watch the dogs. Also the sun seems to be going down. Maybe we should head home.”

Her only words before we parted ways was, “I agree.”

A couple days later I watched her play volleyball in our gym class. She jumped to spike the ball, causing her shirt to lift a little. Her skin revealed more black letters from beneath the band of her bra. It was the same font, but this time the letters were in all capitals. All I could make out was “**N-D-O-N**.” Then I saw more. Multiple black letters—if you looked close enough—were visible through the white color of her gym shirt and shorts. The period ended and she changed into her black leggings, a loose dark-grey shirt, and a bandage over her hand.

I passed her a few more times in the hall. All she wore then was turtleneck sweaters, leggings, and lots of bandages. I wasn’t able to wait until our next coffee date to make sure she was okay. The next time she walked by me, I called her name to pull her aside, but there was no response. Was I even saying it right? I gently brushed her arm for her to hear me. She

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Piper's Bones~Piper Foote , 9

flinched at the touch of my fingers. I apologized and asked her if she had time to talk for a second. We went into the bathroom, she pulled her shirt off and a few of the bandages. She was constantly flinching, her voice was shaky, and for the first time, she was hesitant to talk to me. She was clearly scared so I let her speak in her own time. She explained that a new name would appear when they touched her. Boys' and girls' names were listed.

I started off pointing to a name that I hoped would be the easiest for her to explain. **LYNN**, in a sharper font, probably about an inch wide, larger than the letters beneath her bra, was written across her forearm.

In the most soothing voice I could conjure through her distress, I asked her, "Who is Lynn? When did her name appear?"

"Well there was Thomas, you know one of my close friends for the last few years, until Lynn came. She was so nice to me and tried to be friends. Every time we hung out, all she would talk about was Thomas. One day the three of us were about to go to dinner together. She and I walked out the door together before she grabbed my forearm, yanked me back into the

house and demanded that I stay.”

The next name I pointed to, Tyler, was written across her waist line, a little to the right of her belly button. The letters were the biggest, boldest, most intense font of them all. She went quiet for a moment, but that was fine, I waited. She whispered, maybe to keep the sound of her voice cracking from being too obvious: “I don’t know. A few friends and I went out one night. I remember I was dancing, and some man grabbed me by the waist, and I don’t remember much else.”

I wanted to help. But she was already shaking, so I just hugged her and told her to be careful.

Every time I saw her, there were more names and less skin. Eventually her whole body was just scribbles. Her hair, eyebrows, nails, everything had been replaced. I couldn’t remember her voice. I knew she had an important impact on my life, but what even were our core childhood memories together? Why did I love her? One day I heard people yelling for everyone to come watch, something strange, unnatural, was happening outside. I walked to the steps in the front of the school. I couldn’t recognize her at first without the hair, the glow of her normal skin tone, but then she looked at me. I could remember her beautiful eyes. She stood in the parking lot. Black letters lifted into the air, leaving nothing but empty space where her hands and wrists should be. Next were her arms, shoulders, feet, legs, everything. The students, teachers, even some random people walking by, just watched. Some even recorded her until the second she had completely vanished, dissipating with the wind. I could no longer remember her name.

Red Ghosts

Erin Hovendon, 12~Fiction

A woman in a rainbow shawl shuffles uphill, one strong knee weight bearing and the other following close behind, aching. Her pale fingers clutch a small bouquet, white daisies and salmon peonies and two red roses. The tiny collection of plants, once artfully arranged, now appears haphazard, twisted.

On the road behind her, a shrill car horn blares. Brakes screech, and the woman halts, braces herself for the sound of the impact of metal on metal on flesh. A sharp pain jolts her knee. Instead, a single curse word floats over, soon drowned by a calm breeze and the steady hum of traffic. The woman shivers and pulls the comfortable colors of her cloak snug around her shoulders.

She turns shakily toward the street. She watches vehicles pull to smooth stops at a red light, waits for SUVs and sedans and the occasional showy sports car to pass, and then continue merrily when the traffic lights flash an unnatural, neon shade of green.

The woman wonders how color can dictate so much. She looks left, back toward the rundown grocery store where she'd purchased her prearranged bouquet. She can still read the sign, its splotchy red LEDs shaping what was supposed to be a dove. A few dimmed lights around the tail make the bird look more like a large, smiley boulder surrounded by a collection of pebbles. The sign proudly displays the temperature and the incorrect time of day, proclaiming an early morning even in the last throes of afternoon sun. The woman knows that bright red color makes hearts beat faster, speeds things up, and she suddenly feels angry.

She's angry at the store for advertising with its terrible sign, for manipulating color to encourage unsuspecting customers like herself to purchase meaningless flowers and overpriced avocados and plastic-wrapped bread loaves. She's angry at the drivers for their smooth commutes, for their happiness as they listen to the radio or talk to friends, for their ability to

navigate intersections without a battered red truck barreling through a traffic light that matched the color of its exterior paint.

She's angry at herself for her journey from the grocery store, for having no option but to walk, for taking so long her bouquet has gone limp. She looks down at the flowers, rips the two red-petaled monsters from the center, and begins to run. Her knee screams in protest, a phantom haunting her though the injury is long healed.

A worn, bumpy, grey stone interrupts her steps moments later, and she lands heavily, face-first on the grassy soil. The woman quickly stands and brushes the dirt off of her shawl. She pauses, scanning the garment's many stripes, and freezes at the rows of crimson thread that line the base and top. She shudders, throws the shawl off, and continues on, quickly closing the gap between herself and her destination.

Her forlorn bouquet finds its home on a different stone, this one smooth and glossy black and much cleaner than the one that had tripped her. It lacks an engraving, appearing meaningless, and the woman cannot bear to glance at its blankness. She drops her flowers and turns away. She hears another horn from the road and runs in the opposite direction, away from the pavement and painted lines paralleling it, away from the families and teenagers and happy smiles driving every which way.

A closer look past tinted windows might have revealed a man laughing from behind the wheel, the young girl sharing his features turning to share the joke with someone behind her, only to whirl sharply back around with welling eyes at the forgotten sight of empty seat belts. In the truck behind them, a woman goes to twist a ring on her left hand, shuddering when her fingers land not on metal but on cold, lonely skin. And a few lanes over, a well-manicured hand belonging to a man's model-worthy face flips a turn signal, the blinker flashing in time to a beautiful song, one he can't bear to hear without its second singer. He presses skip with a red acrylic nail, steeling himself against the upbeat starting notes of the next pop song about summer and love.

Now far from the road, the woman runs on, warmer now without her rainbow jacket and oblivious to her kinship with the drivers she'd envied. Both her knees now take an equal load, the sharp pains ignored, irrelevant. Imagined.

Sometimes, ghosts inflict more pain than the living.



A Different Perspective ~ Taytum Taft, 10

We Lost Light, Lost Color

Pine Cones~Thompson Murray, 11



Lost City~Nika Karlova, 11

Value Practice #2~Sarah Wren
Robinson, 11





Forest Friends~Nika Karlova, 11

Horse Skull~Grace D'Angelo, 10



Bird Skull~Ellie Roberts, 11

Disculpa

Erin Hovendon, 12~Fiction

I have no idea how I'm supposed to make you trust me.

It seems unfair I should have to fight for something I'm supposed to be given, the one connection we earn from nothing. The bond created when new life arrives after hours of tears, hours of screaming, even more blood.

Aún más sangre.

It seems unfair you could sever this, sever us, so quickly. So quickly, matching the ninety seconds of panic for the doctor to free my neck from our cord, the sterile scissors slicing as fast as they could. When I breathed, *cuando respiré*, you wished I hadn't.

Green eyes, my eyes, your eyes reflected back at you. How did you look away from open, wondering pupils?

Where are you looking now?

Cosas malas pasan en abril, you tell me, your tone as distant and still as the little bugs and wasps dried up on my dashboard, their brittle bodies curled by the hot spring sun. I pick one up, toss it out the window as we drive, watch it tumble away on the wind's gentle arms. Flying again.

Bad things happen in April.

Like my birthday, your father's birthday, your grandfather's birthday. Like the time we ran through sprinklers in the yard until the bright sky fell to dark clouds, conquered by the rapid shifts of *primavera* weather.

Like how we kept skipping over the streams of water even as new droplets poured down from above, satisfied with our own small source.

Confianza. Trust.

Noun. Firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

A word I learned for myself, in both languages, a word I define on my own, not through memories of support, of love. Trust is movable, forgetful, lonely.

How can I believe firmly in your truth, in your strength, if I can't see it?

April 6, 2018. Humboldt Broncos bus crash: 16 people dead in highway tragedy.

Saskatchewan local news displayed a dismal headline four years ago. A hockey team killed in a crash, many injured, nothing but wreckage. You cried when I read it to you, interrupting your detailed work on the flowered cardstock of my birthday invitations. Genuine shock crawled from your mouth to your eyes until a trail of wet streaks glossed your cheeks.

Qué vergüenza.

I couldn't cry. I shivered.

Your empathy is visible when you want it to be. When you need it.

We ended up in the garden, digging our hands into dark soil until we couldn't recognize the traces of our fingers, until the only color was my neon pink nail polish and the crimson varnish of fresh tomatoes. The scent of damp earth drowned me, flushed my senses.

The tomatoes were more alive than either of us.

The shiny silver choker around my neck has dyed my skin a dying green.

You asked me once why I wore it, a cheap chain from a big-box store, probably replicated on the necks of hundreds or thousands of girls who just wanted to hide, to fit in, to fade away, *para desaparecer*.

When you bought me pearl earrings, a gift in your wretched April, I asked why you'd spent money on something I already had. I regret the way your face fell, regret your curved brows as I showed you the five dollar "pearl" studs in my room, their ivory sheen the same as your expensive offering.

You wanted me to wear a piece of you, to carry something shiny and bright, to filter your words through my ears with beautiful adornments. You tried to give me bliss.

I should've been grateful.

I was. I am.

Madreperla. Mother-of-pearl.

Why do we pay for invisible luxury?

Years ago, you chaperoned a civil rights field trip with my class. I only remember one moment: our chipper tour guide, smiling in front of painful museum memories, asked if anyone knew who freed the slaves.

I raised my hand. *Lincoln*?

She nodded. I was gratified. You seemed proud. *Mi hija tan inteligente*, you said. Happy.

I learned later it wasn't Lincoln at all, that Lincoln only tried to turn the tide of the war, that the slaves freed themselves.

Sic semper tyrannis. Thus always to tyrants.

We are all tyrants.

April 15, 1865. A gunshot. A death. A war's end.

April 15, 1998. Your end.

Lo siento. Qué vergüenza.

I'm sorry my birth killed your freedom.

I Miss You

Lauren Dennis, 11~Fiction

"Your call has been forwarded to voicemail. No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Hi, Dad. It's me. Ummm, I wanted to say sorry. I was really busy. I had a lot of work so I couldn't come see you. I know that isn't an excuse. Bye.

"Your call has been forwarded to voicemail. No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Dad, you know, I've been thinking about this for a while now. When did I become so busy? I can't remember the last time I saw you. Haha, you're probably really angry at me. I'll call you later, bye.

"Your call has been forwarded to voicemail. No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Hi, Dad. I regret not going to see you. I really do. Please forgive me.

"Your call has been forwarded to voicemail. No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Hey, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I ended up growing apart from you. I shouldn't have let my emotions get the better of me. At the time, I was scared and depressed. I lashed out when I shouldn't have. I, I wish that I hadn't left. I should have stayed or at least kept in touch.

"Your call has been forwarded to voicemail. No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Hi, Dad. I just wanted to tell you, I've been looking through some old stuff from the house. It all had to be moved out since... since you're not

living there anymore. I found some old photo albums. There are so many pictures in them. I don't remember who took all the photos and arranged them into books. I know I didn't.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Hey Dad, I've been looking through the photo albums. I know I just called a couple of hours ago, but I found another one. It was buried in a corner of the attic, underneath piles of old clothes. It's filled with pictures of mom. She's there smiling, laughing, sleeping, frowning. There are so many memories in this one little book.

There's one picture that I like. We're all together. It was when we had a picnic under the big tree in our yard. The one we planted together? Well, it's big now anyway, but it's been 20 years. At the time of the picture, it's tiny. I'm almost taller than it, and I was only 8.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

Good morning, Dad. Does that sound weird? I haven't said good morning to you in a very long time. I wanted to apologize again for leaving at that time. I know that you were doing your best and that you really cared. I was barely an adult then. I didn't understand how you felt. All my life, you were an expressive, happy person. To see you so cold, so closed off, so indifferent to mom's death, scared me. I thought you would be more emotional.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

I understand now, that there are times when being too emotional won't help. Like when I handled your, your... Well, I need to go now. I'll call you this afternoon.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you've finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options."

You know, sometimes it's okay to have emotions. Sometimes crying is okay.

Is it okay for me to cry now? I think so. Right now, crying is definitely okay.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message..."

You're kind of mean. You didn't even make a custom voicemail. Why not?

Oh right, you never liked those things. You thought it was too much trouble. Still I wish that you did, then I could hear your voice again.

"...No one is available to take your call. At the tone, please record your message..."

Dad, I wish that I could have talked to you more after I grew up. I wish that I hadn't let this grudge rip us apart. Why does life have to be so unfair? It only lets you understand how much you care for someone once they're gone.

Well, whatever. I'll call again in a bit.

"...No one is available to take your call..."

Hey, Dad. I miss you. I really, really miss you. I just wanted to say that. Bye.

"We're sorry; you have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service."



Isle-Elle Roberts, 12

Rose Petal Chevy

Sara Grace Dalton, 12~Fiction

Even before he died, Mama always complained that the crumbling Chevy pickup was an eyesore. Not to his face, for we all knew that Grandpa loved that truck more than his own children. But she nagged: “Park behind the garage, Dad, we’ve got company coming,” or “Do you really need that old thing anymore? Surely it’s more trouble than it’s worth.”

For my part, I loved the truck. It was a sanctuary for a girl whose family was too big and too loud in a house that was too small. Sure, the burgundy paint was peeling, the left window was missing, and it carried a permanent odor of cigarettes and beer. But Grandpa adored it, and I adored him. Every morning, we’d jerk open the creaking doors and climb in. I’d pull a cigarette from the glove compartment and pass it to him. Grandpa wasn’t supposed to smoke anymore, but I didn’t know that yet. Later on, I found out he had lung cancer. But back then, my days were filled with nothing but long drives through the countryside with Grandpa, singing along to “My Girl,” by The Temptations. It was our special song— I was his girl.

“I’ve got sunshine on a cloudy day with my girl,” he’d belt, gesturing wildly with the hand not steering, “I’ve even got the month of May!” We laughed at that part— my name was April, almost May but not quite.

For fourteen years, the truck was my home.

We stood in the kitchen in our black dresses, arms dangling uselessly at our sides. No one was quite sure of what to do. What is one supposed to do after a funeral? Mama knew. She plucked Grandpa’s keys from the kitchen counter and tossed them to me.

“The truck is yours now, April,” she told me, and she said *truck* the way you might say “heap of rotten trash.”

The keys felt heavier than usual, weighed down by the pain of Grandpa’s death. I’d never been in the truck alone, let alone driven it

without him. Even thinking about it hurt beyond measure. “I can’t,” I whispered, “it belongs to Grandpa”. I belonged in the passenger seat, passing along cigarettes and hanging out the missing window.

“Baby, either it’s yours or we take it to the dump. He’d want you to have it.”

He wouldn’t. The keys hit the floor as I ran to the bathroom, struck by nausea. Later, they hit the back of my closet, hidden under a pair of flip-flops that would never see the light of day. It would be wrong to drive the Chevy without Grandpa, so I swore that I’d stay far away. The truck would remain behind the garage, where he parked it last, burgundy paint flaking away like rose petals decaying into the wind.

On the morning of my eighteenth birthday, I brought home a pack of cigarettes. Mama was livid.

“I will *not* allow you to turn into him,” she shouted through gritted teeth. “You watched your grandfather die of lung cancer.”

“I’m not going to smoke them,” I yelled back. It was true. I just missed the smell and wanted to be reminded of him.

“Like I believe that for an instant,” she said. Mama could be hot-headed at times. She had a warning sign, too: a vein in her forehead always stood out when she was about to lose her temper.

“Grandpa would believe me.” I hoped it hurt her as much as it hurt me, that the one person who understood me had been dead nearly four years.

“You know what, April? I’m getting mighty sick of your “grandpa this” and “grandpa that.” My father wasn’t a saint, believe you me. He couldn’t hold down a job to save his life, honey. He spent every penny he earned on cigarettes and liquor. Did you know that your grandmother and I had to steal from his coat pockets to pay the bills? I’ve been taking care of him ever since I can remember. So don’t you dare compare me to my father.” Her words struck me like arrows to a target. My mother never missed the center.

“Mama!” It was a whisper, meant to be a scream. She just stood there, the fire fading from her eyes, fists still clenched. Villain-like, even though she wasn’t evil, not really.

Mama took a shaky breath, her eyes closed tight like she needed to force the words out. “He wasn’t always a good person. I don’t want you to remember only the beautiful parts.”

That’s when I fled. It was too much to simply stand there and allow Mama to spew such cruel words. I tore down the hallway, the image of a faded pair of flip flops the only thought in my mind. Yes. They were still there, a glint of metal poking out from under the shoes at the very back of my closet. Without thinking, I seized the keys, rushed out the front door, and after a few minute’s struggle against the stubborn engine, I started the truck for the first time in four years.

For a moment, I felt fourteen again, soothed by the hum of the engine and the stench of cigarettes. The truck was just as he left it the day he died: a few bottles littered the floorboard and his ancient leather jacket was still in the passenger seat. I’d searched long and hard for that jacket when he died, and I put it on. It almost fit, which was disconcerting, given that it had fit me like a dress as a child. Suddenly, our screen door banged open, and Mama appeared, the telltale forehead vein visible even from across the driveway.

“What do you think you’re doing?” she shouted. “You gonna run away, just like him? You gonna disappear into that useless hunk of metal and leave me to deal with your problems?”

Trying desperately to ignore her, I pulled out of our driveway as fast as the Chevy would allow. Habit forced me to insert the Temptations CD into the small boombox we kept on the dash and press play. I turned the volume up to muffle Mama’s rapidly fading curses. Within seconds, I slipped back in time.

Every Sunday night, Grandpa turned onto a thin gravel road heading straight up the mountain. Long ago, there had been a cottage at the end of the road, but it burned to the ground when Grandpa was a little boy. The

forest had reclaimed the lawn, but a tiny clearing remained where the house had been. Grandpa would pull into the clearing, and we'd lie in the back of the truck and count the stars. He didn't know any constellations, but we made our own. My favorites were a dinosaur named Rory and the witch from Hansel and Gretel, who only appeared in winter.

Often, we came home far past my bedtime, but Mama never scolded us. She liked having the house to herself, she said, but I knew it was more than that. When she was very young, before Grandpa lost his job and everything went sour, he had taken her to the clearing, too. I think all she really wanted was to be a little kid in the back of the Chevy again, oblivious to Grandpa's struggles.

I turned onto Hawthorn Street, the first place we went when Grandpa taught me to drive. In his last few months, Grandpa was so weak that Mama wouldn't allow him to drive anymore. One day, I heard an odd noise coming from behind the garage. Turning the corner, I came upon an unsettling sight: Grandpa, hunched over the steering wheel, his head in his hands and his body heaving with sob after sob. Predictably, liquor bottles littered the passenger seat, and I brushed them into the floorboard as I climbed in beside him.

"Leave me alone, April," he slurred.

I couldn't leave him alone like this. "What's wrong?"

Grandpa took a shaky breath and choked out, "I'm trapped here. Can't drive. Can't escape. Nothing but this house." With that, he let his head fall onto my shoulder. That's how I knew it was serious— granddaughters are supposed to rest on their grandfathers' shoulders, not the other way around.

"What if I drove for you?" I offered, desperate to stop the sobbing.

He sat up and wiped his eyes on his leather jacket. "You know, that's not such a bad idea."

So we did it: Grandpa taught me to drive in secret, on lonely roads while Mama was at work. It seemed to help him for a while, it really did. Once we were confident in my ability to stay on the road, he'd roll down the

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windows and stick his head all the way out. We blasted the Temptations, of course, and he screamed the lyrics to “My Girl” into the wind. You could tell he liked being a passenger, waving out the window at birds and squirrels and anything that looked even remotely alive. When we came home, his hair was always windblown and tangled.

“You oughta brush your hair more often, Dad,” Mama took to saying, and Grandpa and I would share a secret grin.

Turning a notoriously sharp corner, I returned from memory lane a moment too late. Before I could scream, the beloved Chevy flew over the guardrail. Pain clouded my vision as I slammed forward, then backward in my seat.

“Grandpa,” I cried, but he wasn’t there to save me, hadn’t even been able to save himself. My ears filled with the voices of The Temptations as I slipped deeper and deeper into unconsciousness.

I came to in a cramped room tainted with harsh, fluorescent lighting. Mama was holding my hand, which felt unnaturally heavy when I tried to lift it. Immediately, she leaned in to kiss my forehead.

“Oh sweet girl,” she whispered. “You and that damned truck.”

“The truck?” I croaked, my throat dryer than expected. Mama helped me take a sip of water, and I tried again. “What happened to the truck?”

Mama shifted nervously. “Totaled. I’m so sorry, April. We’d repair it for you if we could, although I hate the thing, but it’s beyond fixing. One wreck was more than enough to ensure that.” She took my hand once again, probably expecting me to cry or lash out. Strangely, I didn’t feel like doing either. That was the thing about Mama and me— we both got angry quickly, but it never lasted.

A wave of calm passed over me. Somehow, I was relieved that the truck was irreparable, that I had put it to rest. Maybe Grandpa and the truck weren’t meant to exist without each other. Without him, maybe the truck was just a ghost, a shell of the sanctuary that was really Grandpa’s flawed love.

“Maybe so,” Mama said, and I realized that I’d spoken aloud.
“Sometimes you get love for a person mixed up with love for an object until you can’t tell the difference anymore.”

“Yeah,” I answered, even though I disagreed. For now, it was enough to be here, wrapped in the memory of Grandpa.



'ello Love~Nika Karlova, 11



Golden San Francisco~Nika
Karlova, 11

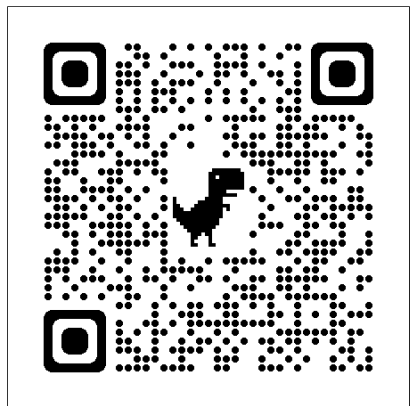
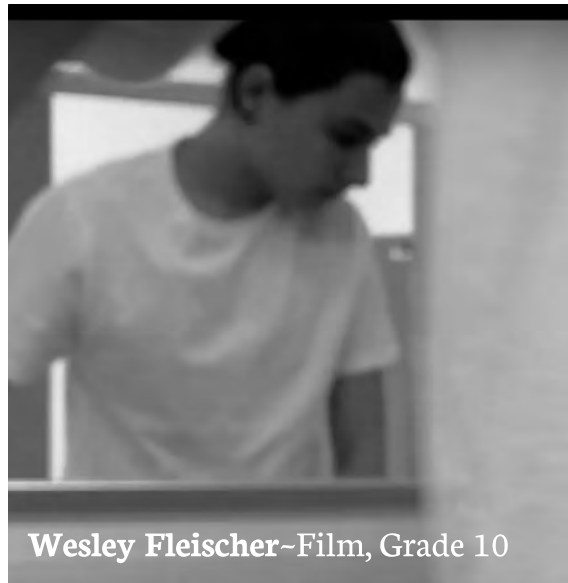
Broken Mirror

Samuel Jenkins, 12~Nonfiction

Chaos is like a broken mirror. For some it's a loss, showing new bitter ugliness. It can be seen as evil, unproductive, and unnecessary. It can wrench out the worst in us. But it can also be beautiful. The fractured reflection allows us to see our lives from an exciting, new viewpoint. For a brief time, we are set free from worry and responsibilities, and we charge without constraints. We have clarity—only the electrifying moment occupying our minds. The consistent inconsistency drags us from our normal to something new, an outlier in our constant lives.

I love chaos in its entirety. There is meaning in its unpredictability, there is solace in its savageness. The sour shock it sends through your body—screaming for attention. The sweet, overpowering scent of smoke scolds your mind into a frenzy as it tries to process what is happening. The life juice burns as it reaches new speeds with explosive adrenaline cranking the body power plant into overdrive, producing new, unknown strength. The hairs spring to attention.

But I love that it makes a difference in my life, something I can point to because it's so different from the rest of my consistent life. For the good and bad, chaos drives me because the days have meaning. I can never rid myself of the scar the shards of the shattered mirror left in my memory. The scars are long, jagged, and distinctive. Each scar tells a



different story in vivid detail. Some sing songs of times that neither need or should make sense but bring joy regardless. While others still sting and bleed, singing the bitter notes of loss and pain. But these scars are what define the structure and story of your life. You can either avoid the mirror and the possibility of chaos, living tranquilly, but the days will blend together, leaving an unscathed yet undefined story—or shatter the mirror, creating a new, fractured reflection of the world you knew, which you dive headfirst into, open to whatever this new perspective will bring.

Room 201

Olive Francis, 11~Fiction

As I move through the concrete playground, it seems like everyone is moving like me: unaware of our surroundings while pushing each other aside, just trying to reach a certain destination. Every person I pass looks oddly different. I have always been very observant. Always noticed little things. About anything. The happiness or pain behind someone's smile, the shapes and depths of someone's eyes, and the many lines on a person's skin that reflect their life's voyage. Some people seem focused, ready to take on the world, some seem sad like they have just been told the worst news ever, and some, a very few, actually look happy, like they have just seen their first child take their first steps. The smells of freshly baked donuts rush into my nose, and I am reminded of Sunday mornings when Mom would get up before anyone else to pile fresh donuts on the table for breakfast, especially my favorite, the cinnamon-sugar powdered. Oh, how I miss those simple yet joyful years. My reflection disappears then appears in each window I pass. Each window depicts a different version of myself. I stop at the corner store to pick up her favorite flowers, orange tulips. I also bought her a necklace. It took me forever to choose between two pieces of jewelry, but I settled on a necklace with a gold butterfly that reminds me of her strength. My heels on the sidewalk sound like the Rockettes' synchronized taps. I see the building. I walk through the sliding glass doors and talk to the lady at the desk. She directs me to go up the elevator, take two lefts, and one right. Room 201 will be at the end of the hallway. I do what she tells me. I go up the elevator, take two rights. Wait, she said two lefts and one right. I correct myself. I find my way through mazes of hallways. As I walk closer and closer, room 201 seems farther and farther away. Two nurses walk out of the room with solemn faces. As I go to open the door, one of the nurses glances over at me with tears in her eyes. That's weird, am I in the right room? I walk past the curtain. Oh she must just be asleep. "Wake up, Mom", I say as I shake her body slightly. I set her flowers and necklace at the end of the bed. I glance to the window. All the different versions of myself appear once

again, but this time it's different. I look different. Tears stream down my younger self's face as I see her ghost-like figure come from the window and walk over to the bed where Mom lies, kiss her softly on her forehead, and suddenly disappear.

A decorative border made of green, swirling vine-like lines with small purple flowers and leaves. The border frames a central light blue rectangular area. The word '~BLIZZARD~' is written in the center of this area in a black, serif font with a thin white outline.

~BLIZZARD~

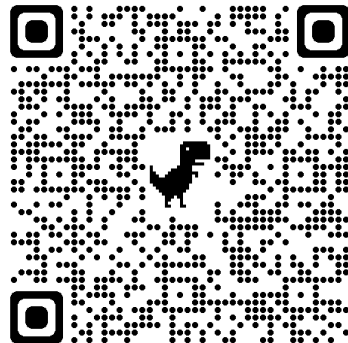
peas for dinner

Ellsworth Sullivan, 11~One-Act Play

My one-act play “peas for dinner” explores the ways in which people attempt to shape their own reality in order to see what they want. Even when proven wrong, people fight to maintain their idea of reality. This show focuses on the character *Pam* and her subconscious battle to understand the traumatic death of her parents. At first, Pam chooses to believe that both of her parents are still alive, but as the show progresses, she begins doubting her reality as her mind fights to remember the truth.



World's Collide~Robbie Francis, Staff



Sprout



Clipped Wings

Samuel Jenkins, 12~Fiction

BAM BAM BAM BAM

“Jerry, stop grabbing the ammo! You couldn’t shoot water if you were standing in the damn ocean. Let *us* shoot,” said John.

John, Marcus and Jerry had been sitting in their hunting stand for about two hours. John and Marcus had grown very bored of looking over the pond and surrounding swamp, though the view they had from their hunting stand in the tree was not bad in its own respect. It overlooked a pretty sizable pond surrounded by a dense field of reeds, and beyond them was a forest. Although the hunting stand was not wide enough to support two shooters at once, it had enough room in the back for both John and Marcus. John had jam-packed the stand with beef jerky, Bud Light, soda, and ammo—and just about all of them were in low supply due to extreme boredom and Jerry’s hogging the ammo. It was 5 p.m. and the sun was starting to go down

Jerry said, “Oh shut up, I don’t see any of trophies on your end, mister high and mighty.”

Marcus smirked. “Yeah, because every time a duck comes in a 2-mile radius, you’re off emptying the whole damn clip. Now the ducks won’t come near us because captain rambo scared em off.”

John got up out of his chair. “Just get off the stand and let us take a crack. You’ve been at this thirty minutes, gone through half our ammo supply and HIT NOTHING!”

“Fine,” Jerry said, rolling his eyes.

But before Jerry could stand down, a flock of ducks flew up from the reeds—so many, it was like a cloud rising from the water.

John yelled, “Jerry, get down, it’s my—”

“I GOT EM!!” screamed Jerry.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM. Jerry about emptied his gun, hitting all of no ducks. Jerry stood there still pointing his gun to the air, not turning around, for he knew the verbal massacre that was waiting for him. John and Marcus sat there shocked. They eyed their drinks, wondering if someone had spiked them.

"Jerry, please, for the love of God, tell me you hit AT LEAST one," said John.

Marcus laid a hand on John's shoulder. "Come on, isn't it obvious? Jerry has turned into a pacifist and is intentionally missing. I mean there is NO WAY HE'S NOT INTENTIONALLY MISSING. That would mean that he actually never hunted before and bullshitted us about being a hunting veteran."

John said, "Marcus, do you know what I smell coming off of Jerry?"

Jerry stood unmoving, like his pride was trying to convince him that what transpired never happened.

"What do you smell, John?" asked Marcus.

"The hint, no he REEKS OF BULLSHIT!!" said John

John and Marcus doubled over cackling, while Jerry stayed locked in place.

"IT'S NOT MY FAULT. THE SUN WAS IN MY EYES, MAN!!"

John howled. "OH MAN, NOW THE BULLSHIT IS POURING OUT OF HIS MOUTH! It's 5 p.m, and we're facing east. The sun is directly behind us."

Marcus looked at John. "Buddy, let's pray for our friend here, he'll need God's help to hit something today."

"Of course," John said, putting his hands together in prayer. "Lead our service, Father Marcus."

Marcus cleared his throat. "Please join us in prayer. Oh Lord, we come before you to ask for mercy on our friend here. While we know you haven't

blessed him with good aim, smarts, or much of anything honestly, we ask you to bless his aim just once so he hits something. IN JESUS'S NAME, AMEN!!" Marcus and John fell out of their chairs laughing. Jerry whirled around, apparently not getting the holy energy from the prayers.

"I'M BULLSHITTING?! WELL HOW ABOUT YOU TAKE A LOOK OVERHEAD," Jerry turned back around and pointed at where he said the sun was. "I CAN SEE IT PLAIN AS D—Guys, does the sun have wings?"

John said, "Oh come on, Jerry, the sun didn't sprout wings to come and personally ruin your shot. Just admit it, you've never hunted before." But Jerry wasn't deterred; instead, he started slowly raising his gun like he could catch the sun by surprise.

Jerry mumbled, "Maybe if I shoot it you'll believe me."

"Jerry, you can't shoot the sun. Just get off the stand and give us a shot," said John

Marcus walked in front of the stand. "No, let him go, but I gotta see this winged sun." He looked up to where Jerry was aiming his gun and froze.

John asked, "So, Marcus, does this sun have wings?"

Marcus stood there, his face a mix of confusion and terror. "Marcus?"

"J-J-Jerry ... lower the gun," said Marcus, whose legs vibrated like jackhammers. He slowly reached for the gun, but before he could reach it—BAM!

Marcus looked at Jerry in disbelief. A second later, a glowing object dropped from the sky, its light flickering like a shitty firework. As they watched it fall, they could make out a vaguely human figure and a massive pair of wings. Then a loud thump reverberated across the pond as whatever it was landed in the reeds. John and Marcus stood there too stunned to move. But Jerry turned around with an obnoxiously big smile. "Well, looks like your prayers paid off, I did hit something."

"Jerry... I... what the hell did you do?" said Marcus.

"Shot a bird!"

"THAT LOOKED LIKE A MAN!!" screamed John

Then a pair of massive wings sprouted from the reeds.

"SEE, BIRD!" said Jerry triumphantly.

Then, a voice rang out from the reeds: I BESEECH THEE FOR THINE ASSISTANCE."

"Jerry, BIRDS DON'T TALK!!" said Marcus, who was now holding Jerry by his collar.

"Oh come on, it's probably one of those parrot things. You know. the ones that repeat what you say? I mean it has wings, what else could it be?"

But then a bloodied hand poked up from the reeds. PLEASE, I COME DOING GOD'S WORK. I COME TO ANSWER THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO ASK!" said the so-called parrot.

"THAT'S A *MAN*. COME ON AND HELP HIM!!" said John, already descending the hunting stand.

Marcus threw out his arms. "Jerry, you... YOU FREAKING IDIOT!! YOU SHOT A MAN!!"

It has wings, that means it's a bird," said Jerry, "but, either way, we should probably put it out of its misery."

John and Marcus hit the ground and sprinted toward the man, while Jerry chambered another slug and leisurely climbed down the ladder. John and Marcus reached the winged man and stopped dead in their tracks when they saw him. Before them was what can only be described as a perfect specimen draped in a white robe. His hazelnut hair fell down to his shoulders, his face was without fault. Perfect jawline, skin so smooth. But his eyes were the most striking: bright gold, like 24 karat gold. But something was wrong with this picture, something that snapped John and Marcus out of their awe session. A pair of massive, majestic, white wings were attached to this man's back. They were so beautiful. They would usually make one

fall down and cry for joy. But then, the reason John and Marcus were there became apparent: the white robe became a dark shade of red as blood pooled under the man.

Marcus said, "Is that—is that an angel?"

John replied, "Does it matter what he is? He is dying and I don't want to go down for murder," then knelt down next to the angelically perfect man.

"Thank heavens thou camest to mine aid," said the winged man.

"Hey, you're going to be alright... I... I'm going to apply some pressure to the wound to see if we can't stop the bleeding," said John.

"Do you know what you're doing, John?" asked Marcus.

"Well, Marcus, I'm treating a winged man for a shotgun wound using medical knowledge I got from watching TV, SO, NO, MARCUS, I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING!!" He addressed the winged man. "OK, umm. Well we should see if you have a concussion,. Do you remember your name?"

"My nameth is Azriel,"

Then Jerry showed up looking smug as ever. "Y'all put it out of its misery yet?" asked Jerry.

"What did he declare?" said Azriel.

"Oh pay him no mind," said John. and glared at Jerry. "Marcus, take Jerry on a walk, and take the gun away from him. I don't want him shooting anyone else."

Marcus wrenched the gun out of Jerry's hands. "Yeah, LET'S GO, JERRY."

John returned to treating the wound. "So, Azriel, are you...real?" His hands were covered in blood.

"What dost thou ask of me?" said Azriel.

“Are you a—a real angel?”

“Yes. I am one of the messengers of God, and I cometh to bring his will.”

“Did you come to answer our prayers about Jerry?”

Azriel paused, and looked away.

“I cameth to do the Lord’s will, but answering his prayers could be my father’s doing. It’s all according to his plan.”

“Your dad planned for you to be shot?”

“He works in mysterious ways.”

“Well, I don’t think he’ll be getting nominated for father of the year.”

“Do not speak of him in vain.”

“It’s a joke, sort of, to lighten the mood. But let’s hope your dying isn’t in his mysterious plan.”

“Oh, we angels possess potent healing powers. The bleeding shall cease soon, but I beseech thee for aid in closing it, as I am too weak”

“Well, just for the he—just for safety’s sake I’d do some praying that this does close.”

While John desperately tried to remember all of the medical scenes he’d seen on *Miami Vice* and *Criminal Minds*, Marcus was walking Jerry on the opposite side of the pond when he noticed a light in the reeds. He went to investigate and found a faintly glowing scroll. “Jerry, you seeing this?” said Marcus.

“Yeah I see it? Why? You need glasses or something,” said Jerry.

“Just making sure, I’ve had one or two to drink and I don’t know if this is real or some messed up dream”

“Well, open it up, let’s see what’s inside”

“We shouldn’t. It’s not ours”

“Oh come on, nobody’s coming to look for it”

Marcus hesitated, but then his curiosity got the best of him and he opened the scroll.

“Well, what's it say?”

“The Ledger of Azriel”... “Frank Vance, collect at 4:30 PM...Sally Johnson, collect at 4:42 PM...”

“What's up?”

“My name’s on this”

“You don’t say, Maybe someone wants to come pick up a debt you owe. When does it say they collect for you?”

“Well... Marcus Armstrong... 5:32 PM”

“Better keep and eye out, Marcus,, the debt collectors should be showing up soon then”

“Wait... He said his name was Azriel... hold up”

Marcus pulled out his phone and searched Azriel, and the top result was a document titled "Info on Azriel, The Angel of Death." A grim expression overtook Marcus's face. But then a smile appeared, not of joy, but of madness. He turned to Jerry. “I just looked it up and there is a bird that matches the description of the one you shot down. It was a bird, Jerry.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it's called a gold speckled parrot. It’s a type of parrot, just like you said.”

“I KNEW IT!”

“But you know that things probably been in pain since you shot it.”

“I know, that's why I wanted to put it out of its misery, but you got the gun.”

“You know what, Jerry, you shot it, it's your trophy, go finish the job. But remember, the best way to end it is to shoot it in the head. It's the

quickest way”

Jerry grinned. “Don’t gotta tell me twice.” He took the gun from Marcus and walked over to the opposite side of the pond where John and Azriel were.

John stood and wiped his brow. He looked relieved as Azriel started to get up. “Man, you were right, that wound is all of closed up now.”

“Dear mortal, I most humbly thank thee for helping me. Your good will inspires,” said Azriel

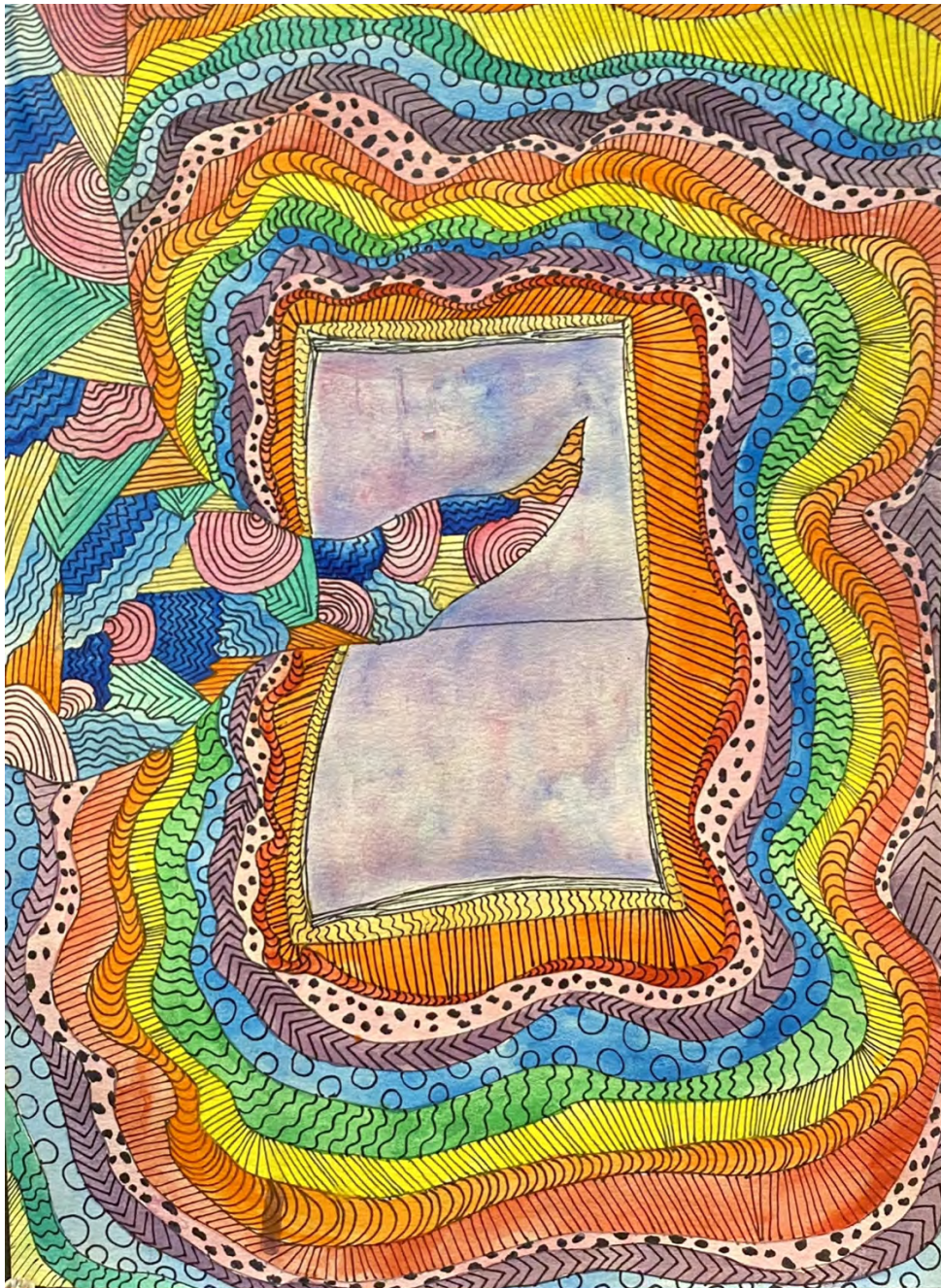
“Well, do me a favor and put in a good word with your da—” John noticed the end of a gun leveled at Azriel's left temple. He had been so focused on Azriel he didn’t notice Jerry coming back with his gun

“JERRY, NO!”

BAM!

The once perfect face splattered over reeds and John. The body of Azriel fell limp, due to the lack of a head. A silence fell over the hunting trio. John was too shell-shocked to speak, as he was covered in the holy blood of an angel.

Meanwhile, Jerry admired the kill, and then he turned to John. “Hey, think we can get it taxidermied?”



Vivid Stories~Mia Irving, 9

Infection

Dana Tipton, 12~Fiction

I run. I run so fast the wind holds my face and hair back as though someone were pulling me from behind. There is someone behind me, many people behind me, but they haven't gotten me yet, only the wind. The air creates a frosty layer inside my lungs as I attempt to breathe. I keep running, my feet drifting over the morning dew while the pure white color of my shoes vanishes under the grass stains. The warm blood rising to my face, the pit in my stomach expanding. A pounding of drums gets louder and louder as the footsteps approach behind me. The leader speaks; his voice vibrates like a bee's nest I had taken one step too close to. He calls out, directing everyone to split up and circle around. He claims that is their only chance of finally turning me. The sharp pain in my gut, the anxiety of someone chasing me, makes my head spin. The leader starts with the disease, and spreads his germs to the other children. I'm known for being the last one standing almost every time. They think I win because I'm more athletic, but as soon as we compete in a side-by-side race, I lose. But I win Infection because of the adrenaline rush, the tingling that starts in my head and rushes down to my fingers and toes. The adrenaline rush that won't allow my legs to stop moving, that distracts my mind from the exhaustion. They keep trying—to corner me, to outrun me—but that adrenaline rush won't let them catch me.



Little Flames ~Aidan Schneider, 11

Some Body to Love

Amaya Harris, 11~Fiction

"I had sex with your sister," confessed the man to his loving girlfriend. The two were seated on the couch in the living room of their shared apartment with *Maury* playing on the TV as their dachshund sat below them on the floor, begging for nonexistent food. After his admission of guilt, the man sat silently, waiting for his girlfriend's response.

"Oh...." the woman paused for a second. The man wondered what was going on in her mind. He expected a slap, a punch, or maybe a thrown vase. She put her hand on his thigh, looked him in the eyes, and said, "We can get through this together."

"It's just ..." He tried to think of something more explosive than his first fib, but he was so caught off guard by her response that he couldn't think of anything else to outdo himself. The truth was he had only met her sister briefly at her family's quadrennial reunion three years ago. Reading the vibe of the room, the dachshund stopped begging and retreated to his crate. The woman followed behind the dog; however, she took a detour to the kitchen to continue cooking their dinner.

The man knew she had the most insufferable habits ever since they began dating. He just believed that she'd grow out of them as time went on. It all started on their first date. As the woman finished her meal, she smiled at him. The man smiled back, not expecting her next movement. She opened her mouth and summoned the loudest belch the man had ever heard. It was as if she summoned the spirit of God to help her deliver that burp. After her outburst, she glanced over at him for approval and laughed. The man was horrified and looked around at the nice restaurant they were at, wondering how many other people were disgusted at her. And ever since then, without fail, at every meal the woman had belched at least once. After running their two-year anniversary meal at the nicest restaurant in their city (reservations had to be made at least three months before with a security deposit of \$100), the man wanted out, but he would feel too guilty if he just

came out with it. He had to get her to break up with him.

That night, the man stayed up browsing r/AskReddit and r/RelationshipAdvice, looking for all the possible ways to get a clingy woman to break up with you. He eventually stumbled upon a post asking women what their relationship horror stories were, and he drew inspiration from the answers he read. The man turned off his morning alarm and fell asleep.

He woke up the next morning to his worried girlfriend shaking him awake.

“Isn’t it time for work?! You’re SO LATE!”

“Babe, babe. Calm down,” he said.

“But isn’t your work super strict? What if they fire you?” she asked.

“That wouldn’t matter anyways because I quit,” the man paused, “to pursue my real dream of being a twitch streamer.”

The woman paused for a second. “What ... the f**k?” she responded. The man saw the look of disappointment and anger on her face and held back his smile. All his research and hard work was finally starting to pay off! She was finally going to break up with him! “That’s fine. As long as you’re happy, I’m happy,” the woman said with a smile.

After his defeat, the man retired to their living room couch and turned on the PlayStation. This was going to be his spot for the next few months as he searched for a new occupation. The man quickly realized he quit his six-figure job as CFO of a growing tech company for no reason.

Learning from his past mistakes, the man devised an infallible plan to get the woman to break up with him. And it was the perfect time for this plan because Spirit Halloween had just opened in the otherwise vacant shopping mall in their small town. As the man left, he told the woman he was going to meet up with her sister again and closed the front door.

As he entered the Spirit Halloween, 9-foot robotic models of clowns,

zombies, and Pennywise from the hit film *It* sprang up to try to scare him, and although he would normally cower in fear at the animatronics, he was a man on a mission, too busy to show weakness. He darted to the back of the store, searching for the one thing he needed.

He found the tub he was looking for near a pile of discarded plastic that once served as the packaging for over-sexualized Halloween costumes. One was titled “Sexy goldfish costume,” another called “Hermione Grinder: the top student at Chogborts.” The man figured these were the remnants of a group of teenagers’ “borrowing” spree as there was no alluring goldfish nor studious scholar costumes to be found. He grabbed the largest jug of fake blood he could find and made his way to the cash register.

As he neared the register, he saw a teenage cashier behind the counter. “Good afternoon, how are you?” said the man, going through the dialogue he’d memorized for conversations with cashiers as he placed his item on the counter. However, instead of getting up from the swivel chair they were seated in, the kid continued to sit and type on their cell phone. This sent a wave of fear through the man. Why didn’t the cashier acknowledge him? Was he magically invisible? Did he even exist?

“Hello?” said the man questioningly. The teenager finished typing a sentence on their phone and acknowledged him this time with a sigh. The kid took their precious time rising from the chair and made their way to the cash register.

“How are you doing today?” asked the man.

The man was shocked. This was not a part of the script that he stuck to. What was he supposed to respond with?

The kid snatched the fake blood and scanned it, sighed once more, and asked, “Is that all for you today?” in an annoyed tone.

“No, I want all the invisible shit I brought up here too,” replied the man. The kid paid no mind to his sarcasm and handed him his plastic bag. After the man took it from the cashier, they went right back to where they were before, behind the counter sitting on their phone, paying no mind to

55 Crocus Vernus - 2022

the other teenagers who came in all day to pilfer the merchandise.

Before he entered the Spirit Halloween, the man had second thoughts about the morality of his plan, but after that slight altercation, he needed to do something drastic to relieve his anger. He had to kill someone.

The man pulled off a few exits before the road to his apartment. He carefully unscrewed the cap to the jug he had bought and poured it over himself and the interior of his car. He mixed it around a bit to make it look messy and continued his drive back to his home. Once he reached his apartment, he threw on a coat so as to not worry any neighbors and swiftly made his way up the stairs and into the front door.

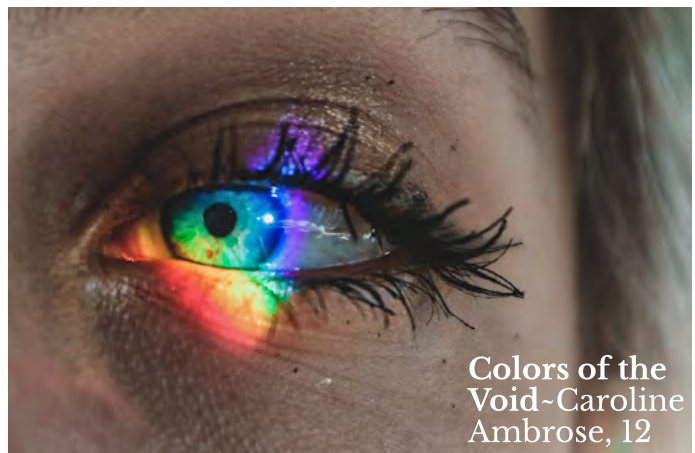
“Hey, love, how was my sister?” asked the girlfriend. She rushed to see why her boyfriend didn’t answer. She paused for a moment. “What is that ...

“What did you do?!”

“I did something bad,” responded the man.

“Babe, this isn’t like you!”

the woman grabbed the shoulders of her boyfriend and shook him. “Look at me. Look at me in the eyes. This isn’t like you!” The woman stared deep into his soul, searching for any kind of answer. The two sat staring at each other for a



minute before the woman spoke again. “But if it’s absolutely necessary, I can help you hide the body. Or any evidence. Anything you need me to do,” she offered.

As the man listened to his girlfriend offer to help him cover up a murder that never actually happened, he wished there actually were a murder, and that he was the victim. That was the only way he’d ever get out of this relationship.

Time felt as if it were moving so slowly.



Pine Tree Trip~Sara Grace Dalton, 12

It felt like I would never wake up.



Day of the Midnight Sun~Thompson
Murray, 11



Drugs~Anonymous



Bad Daydream~Elliot Ross, 9



Shadow Road~Thompson Murray, 11

Supple Sphere

William Gay, 12~Poetry

Born from breath, it swells to life,
The membrane wobbling until finally released,
Free to take the shape of a polished pearl.

Too delicate to hold, fleeting like a dream,
I peer curiously into the crystal ball.
A distorted face that's not quite my own looks back at me through the
raspberry glimmer...
The face that resides beyond the spherical portal.

Shimmering shades of wonder bloom from its surface,
Swirling hues dance across the gossamer globe.

The wind whispers in its ear to turn and it listens
Gusts grunt for it to spin and it obeys...
Ushered by the breeze, the supple sphere meanders like a lost traveler,
Its demise impending as the transparent shadow ever nears the deadly
ground.

It inches closer, closer, closer to the leaf litter until a twig snags its delicate
surface.

The orb bursts...
And the portal is destroyed in a glittering firework as dewdrops scatter near
my feet.

Pink Olives

Evan Brooks, 11~Poetry

I walk a path of muddled colors

Pigments I dream to understand

My thoughts dance wildly

A primrose path through my memory

At some point, it stops

It all does

But not like a victory celebrated by fireworks for years to come

It doesn't stop neatly in the way a period will stop.

My sentences

are a thin line,

Then an explosion!

It grows and dies out

Like an olive branch

I am in disagreement with myself

Perhaps wearing rose-colored glasses caused me to become blind to reality

Whatever that is.

Olive Branch

Chandler Wagner, Staff~Poetry

You pick up on the third ring
and I read you what I scripted:
I'm sorry for my tone that day.
It's just that I'm concerned.

I hear your voice take one step back
in anger, fear, self-preservation;
I never could discern your motives
and now I never will.

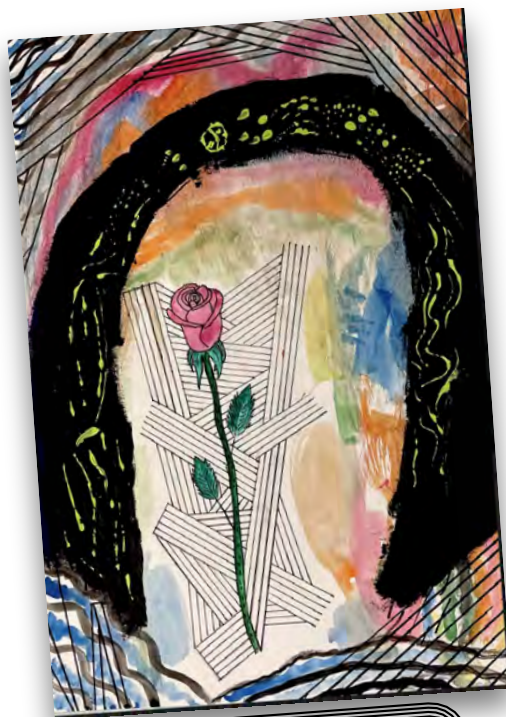
You pull away, I hold on tighter,
my olive branch now a wishbone.
Meant to mend, it snaps in two
and you keep the bigger half.



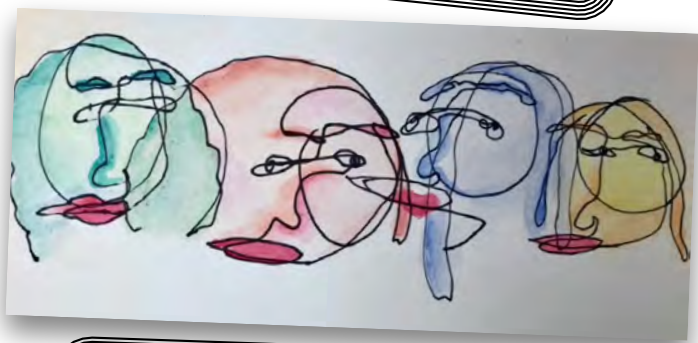
forever green~Zach Ryan, 10



Flowers and Fungi-Louisa Koon, 10



Mess-Ellis Brunk, 10



Emotions-Claire Brown , 11



Interpretation #2-Elliot Rosse, 9



Interpretation #1-Elliot Rosse, 9

Samantha's Bell Talk

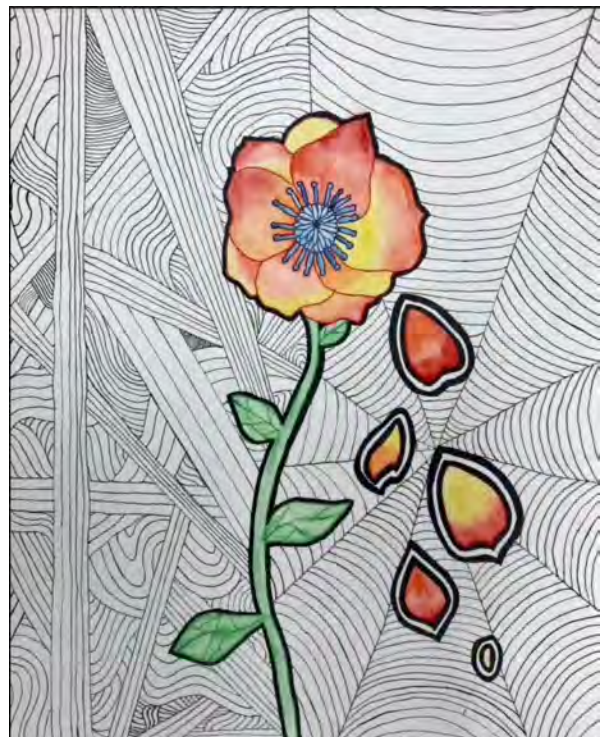
Samantha Penny, 12~Speech

The house felt quiet, as if I were the only one awake. I stayed tucked tightly under my sheets like I was glued to them, but I knew before long I would have to peel myself from them and put myself together for the day ahead. Usually on the first day of school, music would bellow throughout the house, but that wasn't the case today because Clancy couldn't withstand loud noises. I trudged into the bathroom to see only one reflection in the mirror; I brushed mascara onto my eyelashes and blinked excessively to ensure that the tears building up in my eyes wouldn't smudge my makeup. Eating breakfast even felt abnormal, as I looked over to the bar stool next to me, and no one was in it practically inhaling cereal, so we wouldn't be late. Nothing felt normal.

My mom, gazing at me with sympathy, walked over and kissed me on the forehead. "Don't hate me," she said, "but you know I *have* to take a first-day-of-school picture." I let out a

defeated laugh and walked to the couch, not normally where the annual first day of school picture is captured. I leaned down and pressed my cheek up against hers to feel her weak smile form as our mom counted to three. Once *three* had come and gone, those minimal muscle movements in Clancy's face she had worked hard to maintain relaxed, and her head returned to the pillow. I kissed her forehead and said goodbye for the day, feeling stripped naked without her walking outdoors beside me.

Webbed Illusion ~Izzie Hamilton, 9



In July of 2020, my identical twin sister fell profoundly sick—so sick her muscles couldn't support her own body weight. While seeing her in this state felt like I was a piece of glass with a spider web of cracks ready to fracture, seeing her personality fade was what caused me to shatter. I had not only lost my sister, but I lost a half of myself that I undeniably relied on.

Being expected to go about my regular life on my own hit me especially hard; I was sweating out nights in the dance studio, belting ballads late at night in the car with friends, setting new records for how late I stayed up completing assignments, all without a major part of me. The weight of the realization that she was gone paralyzed me, and I concluded that I didn't know how to function on my own. I spent the first months of the prolonged seven-month period she was sick confused and looking for answers, bewildered by all the doctors' inability to identify her condition.

I experienced my first “first day of school” of 17 years feeling bare without her there, walking blindfolded into the building most familiar to me.

Before Clancy fell ill, I was one of two, merely a piece of a set. In the following seven months, I evolved from dependent to independent. I realized what it meant to take responsibility for myself, quickly understanding I could no longer linger past my alarm with the assumption that she would have made my lunch and pulled together my dance necessities for me. I understood that I could have my own things, engage in different activities, and have different friends than she.

Eventually, Clancy regained her strength, and I finally saw her personality spark brighter. We now have a relationship of respect for each other's personal endeavors and an understanding of our individual identities, as well as a connection stronger than we had ever experienced before.

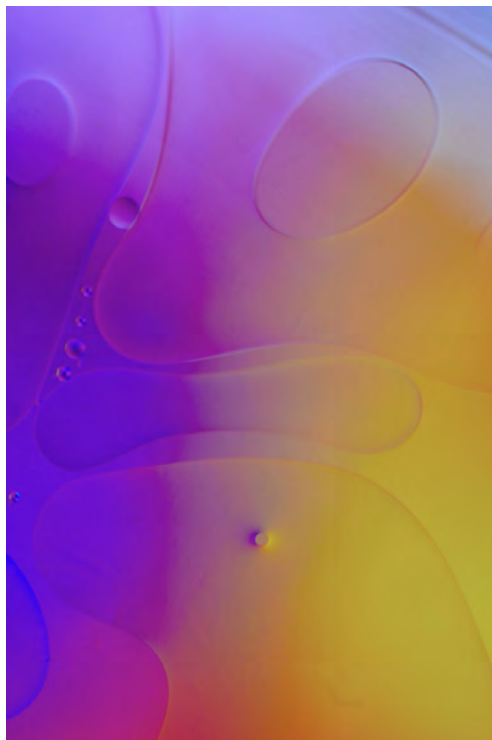
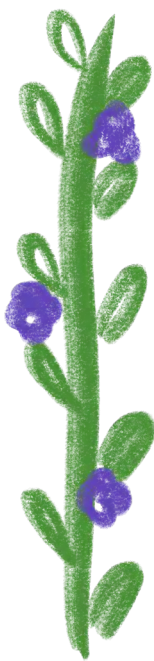
Now, I walk on the sidewalk with the leaves falling overhead, looking down at my feet. I glance back to no longer see Clancy toiling behind me; instead, she's by my side, pestering me to pick up my pace.



~SNOW~



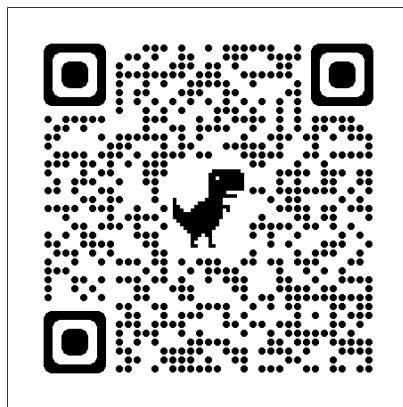
Penny Trudrung,
Grade 9



Colors in Motion

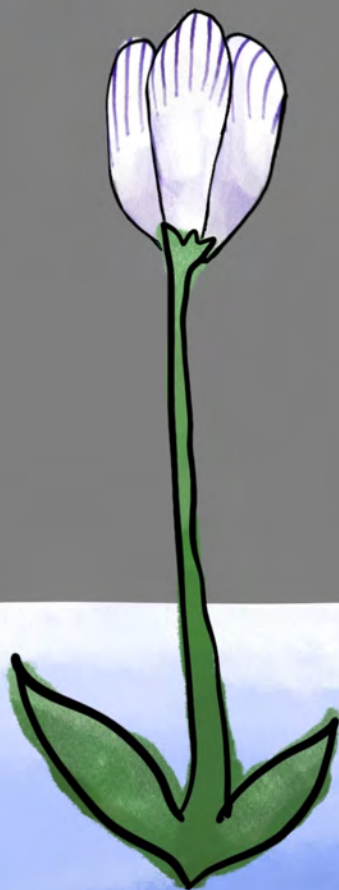


Vaporus Mushroom



These images are connected by bright vibrant color and texture throughout the photos. Many different techniques were used in the process of creating these images. In this compilation of photos you will find abstract images that were created by use of different lighting techniques, materials, and subjects. These photos represent the color that is all around us and how we can look at things from a different perspective. A lot of these photos connect shapes and color to galaxies and outer space. Almost all of these photos were taken with a macro lens, which helps capture up-close detailed images.

Budding



Midnight on Forestdale

Sara Grace Dalton, 12~Fiction

It was after midnight when we crawled out the window onto the roof, the gritty shingles stinging our feet because we never wore shoes in the summer. The stars were mostly hidden by streetlights on Merrimon, but Forestdale was dark except for the Moravian star hanging in your window. I jumped from the roof onto the plastic barrel that always tipped halfway to the ground—you swore it was safe, but you were always covered in scratches and bruises, so I don't know why I believed you. Probably because my judgment was no better.

I liked Forestdale when everyone was asleep. The night here felt like chamomile tea: peaceful and kind. Darkness was comforting, not frightening the way it was at home. Though your face was hidden by the night, I could feel your smile wrapping me in sunbeams. We made our way up the steep hill, bare feet warmed by the pavement still hot from a long August day. We could have gone to Charlie's house, or Ella's, or even Nadia's, but we always just walked instead. It was the sort of neighborhood where kids could play anywhere, so we scrambled over fences and ran through the neighbors' backyards. Sometimes we'd lie in the grass and look up at the sky. Neither of us ever spoke. I think that would have broken the spell. We just listened to the cicadas, cars on Florence, and Ella's chickens. When I reached out, your hand was always waiting. After a while, we'd climb back onto your roof and through the window. I tiptoed back to your sister's room and fell asleep the moment my head hit the pillow, the memory of cool night air and warm pavement following me into my dreams. Even though it was pitch black outside, those nights felt like sunshine.

Tonight, we huddle around our dying campfire, basking in the comfortable silence only old friends can understand. I don't have to guess at your features; the fire casts you in shades of orange and red. Your familiar smile still feels like a sunbeam, and I wonder if you still taste a little like peach tea. How do I tell you that sitting beside you makes me feel whole

again?

We recall memories eagerly, asking, “Do you remember” over and over. You tell me you miss me more than anything, that I’m the only reason you can’t quite let go of your old life. I miss you, too—just not your stubborn way of tiptoeing around your true feelings. There’s a gap between us now: you grin while telling stories about people I’ll never meet, and I admit to irresponsible things I’d never have done with you.

Finally, the last ember flickers and dies. Like always, you fall asleep quickly, lulled by the hushed murmur of a campground at night. Softly, I reach out, but for the first time, my hand falls on nothing but grass.



Feathered Kiss ~Ellie Roberts, 12

Carbon Giant

Lauren Dennis, 11~Poetry

They are born beneath the ground.

Digging upwards from the soil,
they overtake the light-world.

Tall, proud, majestic, they walk the land,
feeding on earth-swallower and planet-aura who are consumed with little
resistance.

They seem to be indomitable, these carbon-giants, but they are not.
Sky-shatterer and home-burner can destroy them, but they have a greater
enemy.

World-crushers come with their iron-teeth and iron-claws and iron-jaws.

They topple the giants and feast on their flesh and blood.

The carbon-giants are resilient, but they cannot live forever.

Knowing this, they create soul-capsules,
so that others may live in their place.



magnificently cursed ~ Zach Ryan, 10

Maybe

Caroline Koon, 12~Fiction

Strictly speaking, my name means ‘like the early morning sun.’ 若曦 is supposed to be a blessing, an auspicious name bestowed upon a beloved daughter. But really, I wonder if my name is a mistake. If my birth mother, exhausted and delirious from a long labour and an even longer social ostracism, breathed out ‘ruòxī’ and someone wrote down the wrong character. There are hundreds of ‘xī’s’ in Chinese, dialects aside; surely she could not have meant to grace the daughter she never wanted with a name millions of girls covet. In any case, I will never know—she is gone and I have no memory of China. Now, my name is Rosie. Rosie doesn’t have room for interpretation. Rosie doesn’t have any tonal nuance. Rosie is a perfectly fine American name for a perfectly fine American girl. But then again, maybe Rosie was a mistake, too.

i. 若昔 (ruòxī), ‘like the past’

I am not a terribly introspective person, which is to say I am too scared to look too deeply, afraid of what I might find. I keep my eyes trained on the horizon, on what is to come, because I do not want to know what came behind me. Perhaps, though, this is a betrayal to what my mother wanted for me. Maybe she meant to give me a name that would teach me reflection and honor, a name that would bind me to her no matter what became of me. If that is the case, I am not being a very good daughter, I’m not being very ruòxī. But I keep my chin lifted and don’t look back.

ii. 若夕 (ruòxī), ‘like the dusk’

If anything, I would prefer that my birth mother named me 若夕 simply because I would not have had to suffer years of teasing from my father—“For someone named after the first rays of sunlight, you’re never up to see them!” But for all his quips and jokes, I know he’s just deeply

affectionate. It is his way of telling me ‘I see you’ and ‘I love you,’ words he rarely says otherwise. My dad, a reaching-middle-age white man, always said that I was his favourite souvenir because my parents adopted me during my father’s posting to China. But between the bowls of fruit placed on my desk whilst I study and the un-American lack of loving words, I think he might have picked up more than he realises.

iii. 若西 (ruòxī), ‘like the west’

One rainy day, I attended a meeting for my school’s International Student Association. It wasn’t something I would have normally considered doing, but I was fresh off a high from Asian diaspora novels and I had a little more courage flowing through my veins. Maybe I would introduce myself as 若曦, an otherwise well-kept secret from my classmates. But as the meeting dragged on, it became clear that I wasn’t like them. I didn’t know what the public transportation system was called in Singapore or any of the best *jianbing* spots in Taipei. I couldn’t even really speak my own language. The plastic folding chair beneath me creaked and groaned, echoing the ‘ABCs’ and ‘香蕉s’ of the others.



iv. 若唏 (ruòxī), ‘like a sob’

Winter's End-Zach Ryan,10

I do not know what happened to my birth mother. I do not know if she lived or died or was married or had other children. Maybe I was just the second child, doomed from conception. As she expelled me from her body, though, I imagine she was crying. Either from pain or from exhaustion, I don’t know. But I wonder if she could only breathe out 若 before collapsing into

another fit of tears and, whoever wrote down my name, changed the xīs of her sobs into the xīs of the dawn.

v. 若希 (ruòxī), ‘like hope’

I have loved to read for as long as I can remember: I had a room full of books with parents who read me bedtime stories in a country not touched by war¹. One day, I had been about to leave the bookstore when I stumbled upon it. It was grey and muted, a serif font overlaying an image of arms and shoulders caught in an embrace. I had heard of neither the author nor the book, but something drew me to it. Without even reading the blurb, I grabbed it, stuffed it in my bag, slapped thirty dollars in mishmash bills and coins down on the deserted counter, and fled the shop. I couldn’t tell you what, but something—or perhaps someone—was there, breathing hot down my neck, prodding at my heart with a needle threaded with greyscale embroidery floss.

I do not know who my mother was. I do not know her mother, or her mother before her. I will never get to hold the hands that look like my own or kiss the temple of my own face, looking back at me. I will never know her story. But maybe she never wanted me to. Maybe she, resigned to her fate, pushed her last hopes and dreams out with me, swaddling me with them, grinding them into the ink that would write my name on my birth certificate. Maybe she didn’t even mean to name me and instead uttered her only confession—hope for me to become, to be more, hope for me to be.

¹. “Maybe you’ll be a girl and maybe your name will be Rose again, and you’ll have a room full of books with parents who will read you bedtime stories in a country not touched by war. Maybe then, in that life and this future, you’ll find this book and you’ll know what happened to us. And you’ll remember me. Maybe” (Vuong 240).

Work Cited

Vuong, Ocean. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. Penguin Press, 2019.

Nextdoor: Local Neighborhood™

Clancy Penny, 12~Fiction

Smileykitten354:

Hello fellow Sugar Hollow residents!!! Kathy Karsen here! I hope you are all having a splendid morning! I wanted to make everyone aware of the danger lurking in the neighborhood! Yesterday evening I witnessed a silver 2015 Toyota Prius XLE speed through our beloved neighborhood! Based on my judgment, I'd say the car was going 27 miles an hour, 7 miles over!! In my humble opinion, I think this is disrespectful to our community and I would like to see something done about it, #drivelikeyourkidslivehere.

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Smileykitten354:

Hello fellow Sugar Hollow residents! Kathy Karsen here! I hear yesterday was a big day for our neighborhood resident Tommy Morris!! Turning 7 is a big deal! I would just like to ask if maybe next time you have a gathering to not be as loud! I have a bird sanctuary in my backyard and the ruckus of 7 year old boys disturbed their peace. Birds have feelings too.

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Smileykitten354:

Hello fellow Sugar Hollow residents! Kathy Karsen here! I wanted to make sure all of my fellow Sugar Hollowinians were aware of suspicious activity in our neighborhood this afternoon! I was watering my petunias in my front yard when I saw a hooded figure approach the mailbox of the house adjacent to me. He carried in a large package to the home and it seemed extremely suspicious. You never know what could be in the box! Everybody

be on the lookout!

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

joeolsen1949:

Re:smileykitten354

Calm down Kathy, that was me. I ordered a new toaster and it came in the mail today.

Smileykitten354:

Re:joeolsen1949

Thanks for letting us all know, Joe!! We wouldn't want a potential danger to go undiscovered! Next time you get a suspiciously large package, make sure to take your hood off so we all know it is you! Have a blessed day!

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Caroline.wallis13:

Hello everyone! I came home from my weekend trip to see that my lawn had been mowed and my front lawn furniture rearranged. I appreciate the thought of whoever did this but please never trespass on my property again. Thank you,

Caroline Wallis

Smileykitten354:

Re:caroline.wallis13

Hello Caroline! That humble courtesy was provided by me! Your lawn decor was not quite matching the aesthetic of mine; our yards were clashing. I had my husband, Richard, mow your lawn (it was looking atrocious, dear) and I

took it upon myself to rearrange your porch furniture. I did this out of the kindness of my heart.

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Caroline.wallis13

Re: smileykitten354

Wtf.

Smileykitten354:

Hello fellow Sugar Hollow residents! Kathy Karsen here! I have noticed the flower population in my front yard has been dwindling recently and I know exactly why. The neighborhood children need to stay far from my beautiful garden that I have worked so hard to tend. I would like to ask a small price for every flower taken, shall we say five dollars a flower? They are very precious to my heart. Little Johnny and Sue, I know you are the main culprits and so I will be asking you to dump out your little piggy banks and hand it over. No hard feelings!

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen.

Annnnnnastarrlll

Re: smiley kitten354

Kathy, I think you are overreacting a bit—seeing as they are only children. There is absolutely no need to be this harsh with them.

Smileykitten354:

Re: annnnnnnastarrl11

I expect to be compensated for my lost flowers, Anna. You would feel the same way. I have changed my price to 8 dollars a flower. In total, Johnny and Sue have picked 13 flowers from my garden in the past year, bringing your total to \$104. I hope you and your family are well!

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Smileykitten354:

Hello fellow Sugar Hollow residents! Kathy Karsen here! I would like to organize a group effort to buy a new bench for the pavilion in the center of the neighborhood since it (so sadly) was destroyed by the hurricane earlier this year. I found the perfect bench and it is only a small price of 5,700 dollars!! Since there are 18 houses in this neighborhood, I will be asking each of you to Venmo me \$335.29 dollars, but we will round it to \$340 to pay for shipping and handling!! My venmo is: @petuniaprincess123.

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Joeolsen1949:

Re: Smileykitten354

Great idea about the bench, Kathy, but I do have some issues with the plans. For starters 5,700 bucks is way too expensive for a bench,. I don't know where you're shopping but no way Jose is that in our budget. Also, 5,700 divided by 18 is 316.67. I see you did not include yourself. Was that purposeful?

Smileykitten354

Re:joeolsen1949

Hello Joe! I did leave myself out from paying because I organized this! My time is my contribution! I need the Venmos by Tuesday at 3 pm!

Smiles!

Kathy Karsen

Brett.chase77

Re: smileykitten354

God you're annoying.

Caroline.wallis13

Re: smileykitten354

I could buy a boat for less than that!

Annnnnnastarr111

Re: smileykitten354

I am not giving you any more money. Use the money you took from my kids, you prune.

Joeolsen1949

Re: smileykitten354

Like this message if you are in favor of removing Kathy from this chat.

Message liked by 27

Smileykitten354

Re:joeolsen

I

Smileykitten354 has been removed from the chat

The Shot

Aidan Schneider, 11~Nonfiction

The constant string of cars blew wind into my face, intensifying when a tractor-trailer rolled through, like a slash of frigid water. The sidewalk of the bridge was nothing more than a tightrope of concrete—parts of it unfinished, sticking up like what I used to do on Crazy Hair Day in elementary school. The spiky concrete hurt my knees as I leaned over the short railing, staying as still as I could. Thirty seconds doesn't sound like a long time, but this thirty seconds is the same thirty seconds that you count down on the clock before getting out of school on Friday afternoon. I could feel the lactic acid building in my arms until I thought they were going to drop. Finally, the camera made a cheerful snap, and a screen popped up saying "Processing." For once I was relieved to see that incredibly annoying loading screen. And just like that, the long exposure loaded its picture and everything—the wind, concrete, and pain of holding the camera—became worth it. How far would you go to get a shot that you've always wanted?



Wandering Lights ~Aidan Schneider , 11

Mother Nature Led

our

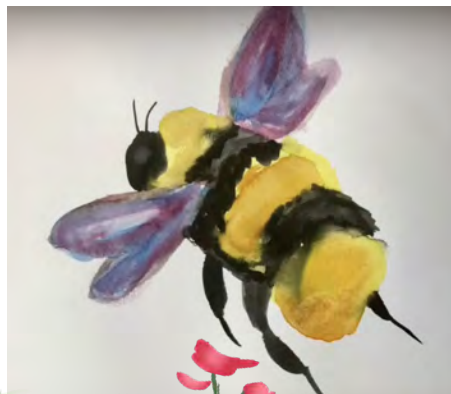
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Beautiful Bee-Jemerson
Andry, 12



Frogs at Play-Ellie Roberts, 12



Sad Salamander-Nika Karlova, 11





Jornual Entry~Marbie Kollath, Staff



Cute Cluckers~Clancy Penny, 12



Woober~Amaya Harris, 11



Journey to Bliss

Elliot Rosse, Grade 9~Poetry

To be young and free as sparrow

My wings glide, grazing the purple hues of sundown. Air fills my chest, cool and crisp and my song rings out among the beauty. I feel her presence, she surrounds me and embraces me with the sweetness of the sun, her eyes gazing upon me lovingly. She brings my smile, painted on with her own fingers, granting me my confidence. I thank her as she glides my wings through the fear. As I shutter I feel protected from the protectors, and it all makes sense. For the first time I am of love. Yellow hues fill my vision, dancing like dandelions in a breeze and she delivers me to the promise. A promise of kindest, a promise that will remain fractured, but never broken.

And there it is. A paradise. Tears roll upon its appearance, I'm finally home. Something so simple and magnificent it brings my heart to life, filling my blood with bliss and excitement. And I thank her for this gift oh so generously. Though it causes me sorrow from time. When speech does me wrong and I feel the hollow it gives me, I remember your promise. The fact I've come so far from the valley to be above the tallest peaks now. A few gusts of wind will never break something so fractured and gorgeous.

They have bastardized your generosity, cursing my brothers. So much, ripping the wings off, seeing the gloom and the valley swallows spirit, belching up bittersweet, tempting more to join him. They try to steal your present! They switched it with poison and then asked for gratitude. Wanting, wanting, wanting, that's all the valley wants. The valley is death, and yet the shadows avoid his divots.

But you delivered me, mother, my wings molted and decaying feathers disintegrate the further I head towards this rainbow you've set before me. My flock, my exquisite flock is of the world and I join them. The grace and marvel they show me. When I tell them his lies, they chuckle at it, watching the glass shards of a mirror splinter, relieving me of my grief.

They surround me with aubudent gifts, giving, giving, giving, the

flock gives me more than he ever was willing to even attempt to spare me. Oh how I feel treasured and whole, just more of the extraordinary awards she provides. They hold both sides of my face, allowing my stupidly large grin to peer through the curtains. When I'm with them all, the valley is a near memory. A steam that covers mirrors, wiped away to show my beautiful soul. An unbreakable part of me, that is littered all around me.

Leaving the valley was a tremendous pain. Being in the valley in the first place was hell in sheep's clothing, yet, thank you. If it were not for this journey, this journey of bliss,

I would still be his obedient daughter .

But now I am your petal, your son.



Mitosis~Nika Karlova, 11

Sweet 'n' Sour

Trip Cogburn, Staff~Poetry

Sweet 'n' sour for my nuggets
Sweet 'n' sour is the boss
Sweet 'n' sour ain't jus' for dippin'
Sweet 'n' sour is more than sauce.

It's the Sunday morning snuggles
Followed by Sunday nights of dread
It's feelin' somethin' in your heart
You know ain't right in your head.

It's moments you wish would last
And ones that won't never end
It's findin' your favorite place in
the world
And wonderin' if you'll ever see it
again

It's a brush of lips on the
forehead
Angry words we can never take
back
It's the way of the world, like it or
not
Until it all fades to black.

Caverns-Elle Roberts, 12



Sweet 'n' sour for my nuggets

Sweet 'n' sour is the boss

Sweet 'n' sour ain't jus' for dippin'

Sweet 'n' sour is love and loss.

33¹/₃

Jeff Kalil, Staff~Poetry

The cat washes beside me

His ears twisted and scarred, his breath foul.

As he finishes, he curls into a tight spiral,

Like a furry, couch-bound nautilus.

When he first appeared at our back door,

His head had a hole in it—

A deep puncture behind the right eye,

Bloody and concerning.

And when you peered into the cavity,

All you could see was darkness.

Sometime,

Take a look at a picture of a cat's skull.

The orbital holes are massive. Huge voids,

Far too big for the eyes they hold,

Open at the back, they don't even form

A complete circle of bone.

What looked like a horrible injury

Had nothing of consequence behind it.

It was the facial equivalent

Of poking through sheetrock

Into the emptiness between the studs.
And once skin and soft tissue healed, free of infection,
He was perfectly fine.

From the looks of him,
And what we can surmise of his history,
He's got roughly three of his nine lives left.
Which means that he and I are traveling together,
With initially frightening but
Ultimately irrelevant scars,
And just about the same percentage
Of precious time remaining.

Stupid Face

Waker Spence, 12~Fiction

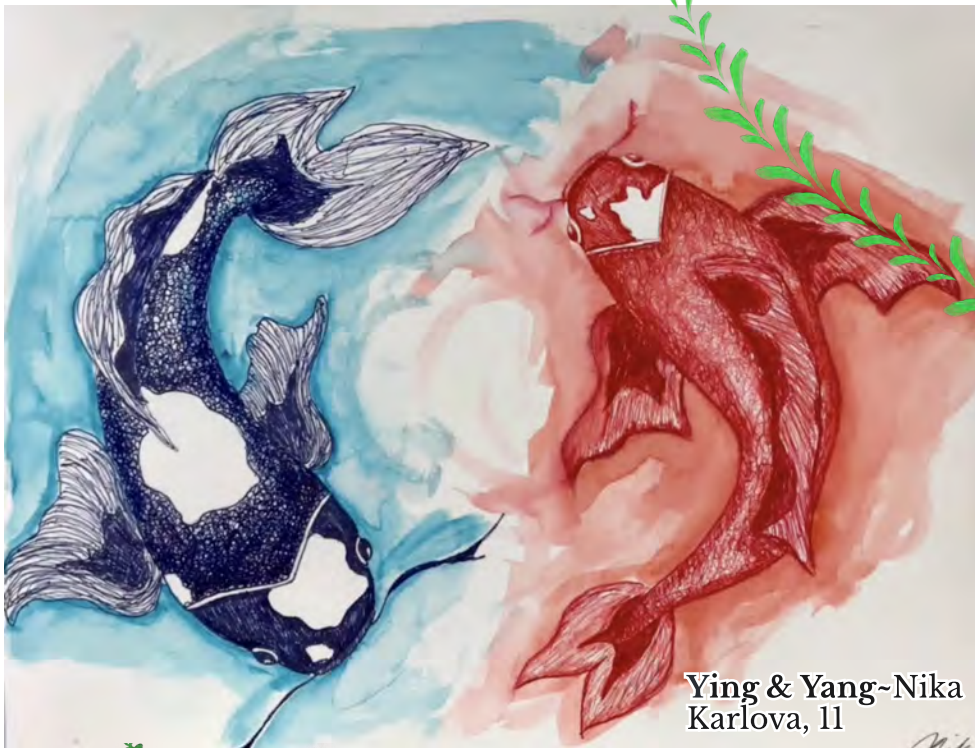
The waiting room at a Doctor's office. Probably one of the most boring places of all time. There are only so many *People* magazines you can read before you start hating your life. I was sitting in the Urgent Care waiting room when a fantastic idea crossed my mind: I'm going to make the stupidest faces at people and see what they do—if they can even *comprehend* what is happening the moment I flash them with a wonky face. I considered all the faces I knew. I had to select the perfect one to get the best reaction. I had it. A classic. I had been making the face for years. It starts with a grin, that spreads from cheekbone to cheekbone. One of those creepy grins that the ART bus driver made when I showed him my yearly pass. A type of grin that brings an uneasy feeling inside you and sticks with you all day. Next are the eyes. Both eyes must sit lazy, almost closed. Like how your mom leaves

Foot Monster~Leah Pommerer, 12



your door, even though you tell her to close it every time she walks out. Also, you have to cross your eyes. This makes the person concerned for their well being: the sole purpose of the face. I saw a lady looking at her phone and decided to make the face at her until she looked up. She looked up, looked around, then froze when her eyes looked my way. It was exactly what I was hoping for.

Then she pulled her phone out. She tapped it a couple of times, and I heard the slightest ring from across the room. A voice said, "911. What's your emergency?"



Greyson's Bell Talk

Greyson Henry, 12~Speech

One thing that's become very clear to me over my high school journey is that people *do not* shut up about school. It sometimes feels like it's the sun that everything else in my life orbits around. It's present *everywhere*. Want an easy conversation starter? Talk about a class or a teacher. Want to hang out with friends or catch up on sleep? Better hope you can make some time for it between all your work. Relatives trying to connect with you? Prepare to be asked question upon question about your grades, sports, social life, and college plans. In my life, and I'd be willing to bet in a lot of yours as well, school is the universal constant, the bedrock that underlies so many other things. And, for me, at least, this got really old really quickly.

It's not like I hate school or anything. A lot of the time, I like it actually. But being constantly surrounded by academics this, academics that from your friends and your parents and your mentors . . . it's exhausting, and I know all of us have experienced that. And that's why I wanted to take this time up here to celebrate the fact that we're all more than just students who do work to make numbers go up. We're people with lives and perspectives that go far beyond this campus. Cause, honestly, sometimes that can be hard to remember.

It's true, I *am* a student, but I am so, so much more than my academic career. I'm not Henry comma Greyson—like it says on the attendance sheet. I'm Greyson Henry. And I'm gonna tell you a little bit about myself beyond what you might see through the lens of school.

I like visual art, even though I'm truly terrible at it. I like music, from punk to folk to hiphop and all the stuff in between. I like playing games, both digitally and in real life. I like writing, even though most of my ideas come from stupid daydreams and never get finished. I like TV and I like movies. But what I really love is that little hot jolt you get as you step barefoot onto the sand of a beach. What I love is when I spit out my water from laughing too hard at one of my friend's jokes. I love it when I go to

sleep with a headache just to wake up with it completely gone. I love it when I'm curled up on the couch watching TV with my dad or grabbing a bite with my mom. I love it when Wyatt groans at Arturito's antics when we're watching *Money Heist*, and I love it when Silas saves the last pancake just for me. I love it when I screw up and I come back, smarter and humbler, ready to tackle the problem again.

I fear death. And inadequacy. Insects, too. I'm pretty calm in real life but get way too mad at video games. I talk to my dogs in an Elmo voice when I pet them. I sometimes sit with my eyes closed, not because I'm sleepy, but because I just wanna focus on what's being said. When I skip class, I send my teachers ridiculous excuses involving colonies of dead snakes in my walls or my mustard-themed tour at the University of Farmington, Michigan. I know they don't believe me; I just want them to get a kick out of it. Even though I don't say it nearly enough, I'm in awe of my peers, the skills they've learned and the things they've done. I'm confused and ignorant, but I'm patient and excited. I am more than what I seem, just like everybody else here today.

If I were to give you a piece of "senior advice," it would be to try your best to look at the big picture, to take a step back and appreciate life for the sake of life. Because when I look past the drama that will come and go, past the failing grade, past the tedium of the classroom and the judgment of my peers, I see a world of romance and complexity and wonder that's just waiting for me to dive in.

Take this all with a grain of salt if you want. I mean, at the end of the day, I'm just, like, *a guy*. Some rando you might have seen in the library a few times or something. I don't know your life. I don't know your situation. But I do know that we're blessed to have a loving and forgiving community here that is eager to give support. Because school's hard. Adolescence is hard. And failing is hard. Life sometimes feels hostile, and disappointment inevitable. But you don't have to face it alone. You can do it—and we've got your back. Thank you.

It's Always Nice to See Ya

Maclane Griffin, 10~Script

The right side of the stage is set to look like a diner, with a teal and white checkered backslash, a silver diner table, and red, swivel stools. There is a clear door to the left of the diner. The lights come up on a skinny man wearing business pants and a white, button-up, short-sleeved shirt tucked into the pants. He wears big 80's glasses and loafers. A slick, black briefcase is by his side. He taps his foot on the stool. A bigger man stands behind the counter, wearing a greasy, white apron and black chef pants. He's sweaty. A coffee pot, condiment bottles, mini fridge, and a grill are behind him.
**Please Note: All Characters Except for John Have Country Accents.*

Ron: What can I get ya?

John: Coffee. Coffee's fine.

Ron sets the mug in front of John and turns around to get the pot.

Ron: *Over his shoulder.* Let me tell you we have the best coffee in all of North Carolina. Fresh from the pot.

John: I doubt it. Can I get some cream in this?

Ron: *He turns, comes back, and begins to pour the coffee in John's cup.* Oh it's true I take pride in my Folgers coffee I make it the best. You know what, this one's on the house. *Suddenly he looks up and puts the pot down on the counter.*

John: Um hello? You only poured this half way. *He hears the door jingle and turns to see what Ron is looking at.*

A woman opens the door; rain sounds are heard from outside. Rosey enters; she wears a spring dress and holds a bright pink umbrella, which she struggles to close..

Ron: Hey there, darling. What can I get ya?

Rosey: Oh, Ron, stop. You know I'll have my usual. If only I could get this darn umbrella to close.

Ron: Lemme help you with that. *He walks around the counter and takes the umbrella from her, with a grunt he closes it.*

John pulls his briefcase out and gets a newspaper. He reads it, trying to ignore the flirting.

Ron: It's always nice to see ya. Come stay awhile. Take a seat.

Rosey: *She walks toward the stools.* Ron, you always say that.

Ron: Because it's always true. *He turns around. Sizzling sounds are heard .*

Rosey: *Turning toward John.* It's day out there it'n it. *John doesn't look up but she continues.* I just love the rain it's so refreshing and gives the beautiful flowers I love water to grow. *She waits for a beat, and when he doesn't answer, she continues.* I see you've got yourself some of the best coffee in North Carolina! Ron makes such a good cup. I could drink only that and nothing else for the rest of my—

John: It's Folgers for f**k's sake. It's not God's tears. And I only got half a cup because your boyfriend was too focused on watching your country ass walk in here to pour the rest, and I'm still waiting on my cream.

Rosey and John both stop then blink at him.

Rosey: Well I never, I ought to—no, you know what, the Lord would want me to be kind to you—

Ron: Here you go, darling: one western breakfast wrap—scrambled eggs, ham, peppers, patatos, and onions.

Rosey: *Light* on the onions? You know I'm not a big fan of tho—

Ron: Do you think I don't have a brain in my head? *He laughs.* Of course light on the onion.

John: When you love birds are done, can I get some cream for my sip of coffee?

Ron: Oh yes, of course. I'm sorry I got caught up. *He grabs the creamer out of the mini fridge and places it on the counter.*

Rosey: Well Ron, what do I owe ya?

Ron: *He smiles at her.* How s'bout a kiss?

Rosey: Oh, Ron, you flatter me. *She stands up and walks over behind the counter.* I don't know if now's the time for—oh! *He grabs her and starts to kiss her.*

John: Are you kidding me? *He turns away from them in his chair and pours the cream into his coffee.* What the? *He lifts the cup to his nose and looks away*

disgusted, then stands up and screams to break up the kissing going on behind him.
Ex-EXCUSE ME. *He pulls out a badge and flashes it in their face.* I'm from the Buncombe County Environmental Health Department, here to do a routine health grade check, and, well, you have failed, sir. I'm shutting this place down.

Ron: Sir there must be a mistake. *He laughs with his arm still around Rosey.*
This place is clean as a whistle. I'd eat off the floor if ya paid me.

John: Clean?! *He laughs maniacally.* Excuse me but if you ate off this floor you would get E. coli, not to mention that this cream is chunky, and, worst of all, you are making out where you're making the food.

Ron: Oh well I—ya see here. Rosey was just helping me add a little sugar to our restaurant.

John: My God, what is wrong with you people?

Rosey: I should be asking you the same question. THIS place, this place you claim to have E. coli is a family owned establishment. This wonderful man built this establishment from the ground up, earned penny after penny from scrubbing floors, prayed to the Lord that one day he would be a businessman—

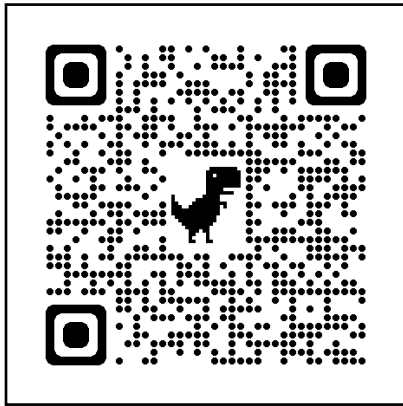
John: *Stops watching Rosey and looks on the counter.* Is that a cockroach?

Rosey: Wha—oh, oh dear god, Ron, kill it! kill it Oh, I'm gonna pass out.

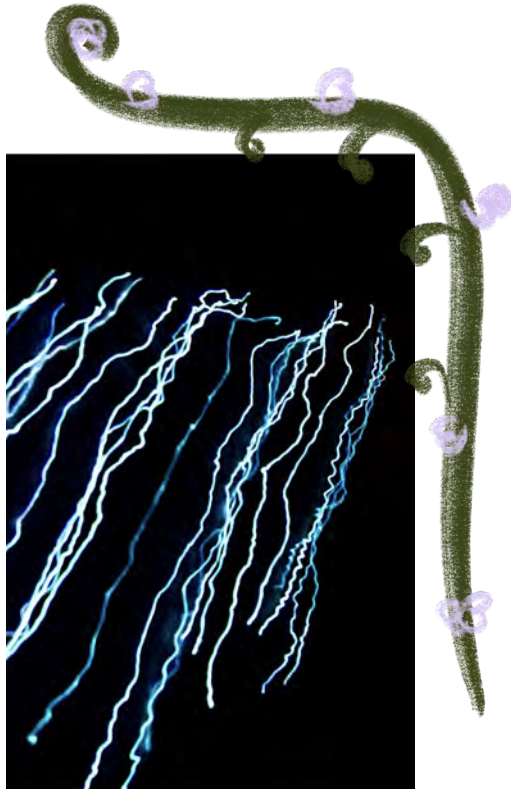
Lights fade



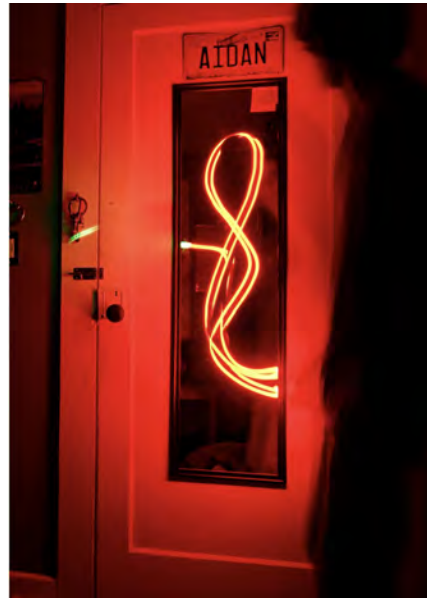
~FLURRIES~



Aidan Schneider, Grade 11



Lighting



Reflection

Long exposures show the abstract and creative side of photography that isn't normally explored. These photos use that creativity to show abstract lines in bright, bold colors that complement this year's theme of rebirth and growth. Photographer Aidan Schneider uses the absence of light at night to capture isolated lights over extended periods of time in the same picture. These abstract light sources show growth through the evolution of these lights, captured in one frame.

Blooming
+ Rebirth



How Words Interrupt my Femininity

Sophia Smith, 10~Poetry

The Fragility of Modern “Femininity”

Is my femininity fragile,
or was there not much of it to begin with?
It's mood swings on my period,
or shaving in the sink at six a.m.
It's things that make me sick to my stomach,
because I wish I could tear off my breasts and
replace them
with knowing the world could view me as strong without having to prove it.
It's saying sorry when I should be the one receiving apologies,
or being mocked and ridiculed for being human.
The things that make me bend over my own flesh and bone,
as if I am ready to bleed out of every pore on this body.
Because truly,
whose body is this?

Selfishness in contradictory

I wish my words didn't matter to you.
I wish you wouldn't listen when I say that every day my hands shake a little
more,
that I look upon my future with heavy-lidded eyes.
Walled in by the colors of a selfish artist
Restlessly drawing out a beautiful picture that I am merely one drop of ink

as part.

If they lost a drop of ink, if it fell to the floor and seeped into the cracks of the tiles, they would replace it

with another drop.

I really don't matter,

so don't listen to me.

As soon as my words don't matter though,

I wish my words mattered to you.

I wish you listened to my voice,

I wish you weren't so cherished because then,

you would be able to only care about me.

The rest of the world doesn't matter if it hates you.

I am important if I am alone in my love for you.

Childhood Atonement

Do I owe the stars an apology?

I was a child for as long as I could,

Promising them that I would walk up into the sky one day

A fleeting goodbye to school, occupation, having children, adulthood

would leave my lips so fast that I could never look back

Oh stars, shall I adopt you instead of ripping my body to pieces

To selfishly bring a child into this hell of a world

Into a world where they will look up into the sky at night

without the star's reflections in return

But these hips, these hips are made for babies

You're my ticket to fatherhood

I'm your ticket to a miserable marriage,
to childhood trauma spilling out of my eyes and into yours when you kiss
me

Young lovers turned bitter, strung together with the shame bestowed by
society

Where I look up to the sky at night

And say

I'm sorry I couldn't keep a promise

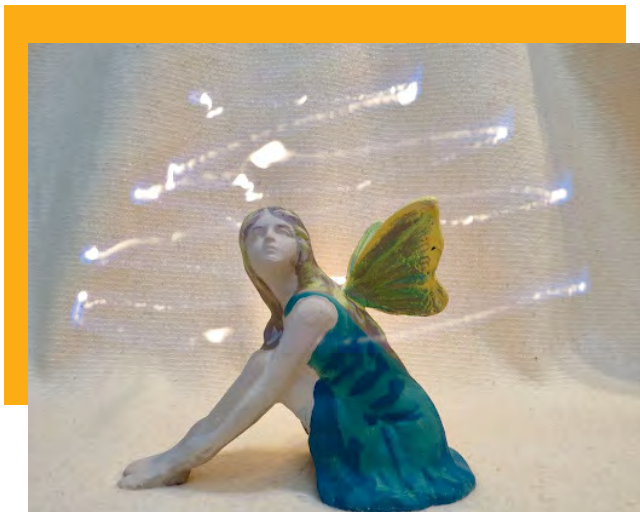


Tangle of Light~Taytum Taft, 10

Golden Flight

Nika Karlova, Grade 11~Vignette

We fly on the rays of sunlight, wind crashing around, our gentle wings withstanding the strong gusts blowing from the cold north. Our orange and black patterns melding together like a pot of gold as we journey up, up, up to the tips of Canada, an icy thrill. Milkweed—poison and pleasure—provides for us and protects us, a flower toxic to all other creatures. And yet, we have adapted to overcome this toxicity. I suppose that is our nature. That is to extract the nutrients with our long, penetrating tongue, coiling around the sweet nectar, immune to the harmful venom milkweed supplies. We make the best out of these situations, it's in our essence, just as our wings bend and twist with the breeze, pliable to the elements, we too are pliable when hardships arise. But sometimes we break. Dead monarchs scattered across the forest floor, delicate even in death. They don't deserve to die, do they? Fragments of wings fluttering, *almost* flying, so close to recreating the flapping of living wings. But the wings are broken and air drafts through their cracks, simply floating instead of flying. Flying, I think, is the best part of being a monarch. Some fly for freedom, some for discovery, some for migration, but it is my escape. To be so weightless while carrying the entire universe on your wings.



Sparkly Circle~Taytum Taft, 10

Syllabus Driver

Susan White, Staff~Poetry

I'm an English teacher, half a century old.
"You must have read *that*," I'm often told.

I brace for their shock, and then their disdain
when I admit "No," then try to explain.

After climbing a mountain of essays—
finding my footing in each rocky phrase—

the school-stamped book is my last chore:
a work that I've read many times before.

Two decades I've traveled the wine-dark sea;
I'm on my *third* translation of *The Odyssey*.

I'll never reach Daisy's elusive green light;
I'm borne back to the past—with my arms outright.

I keep playing *Mahjong*, resenting the phony,
summoning rain through *Ceremony*,

listening to Hamlet berate his mother,
and being policed by Big Brother.

My "Theme for English B," you see,
Reaches to eternity.

And Alfred J. Prufrock's coffee spoons
have measured out my afternoons.

Like *A Raisin in the Sun*,
a dream burns in *Fahrenheit 451*.

But along come Chaucer's April showers,
and up spring Celie's purple flowers.

Even *On the Road*, I listen to these stories—
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reliving desires, conflict, and glories.

Is teaching a *Crime and Punishment*?

When I retire, shall I repent?

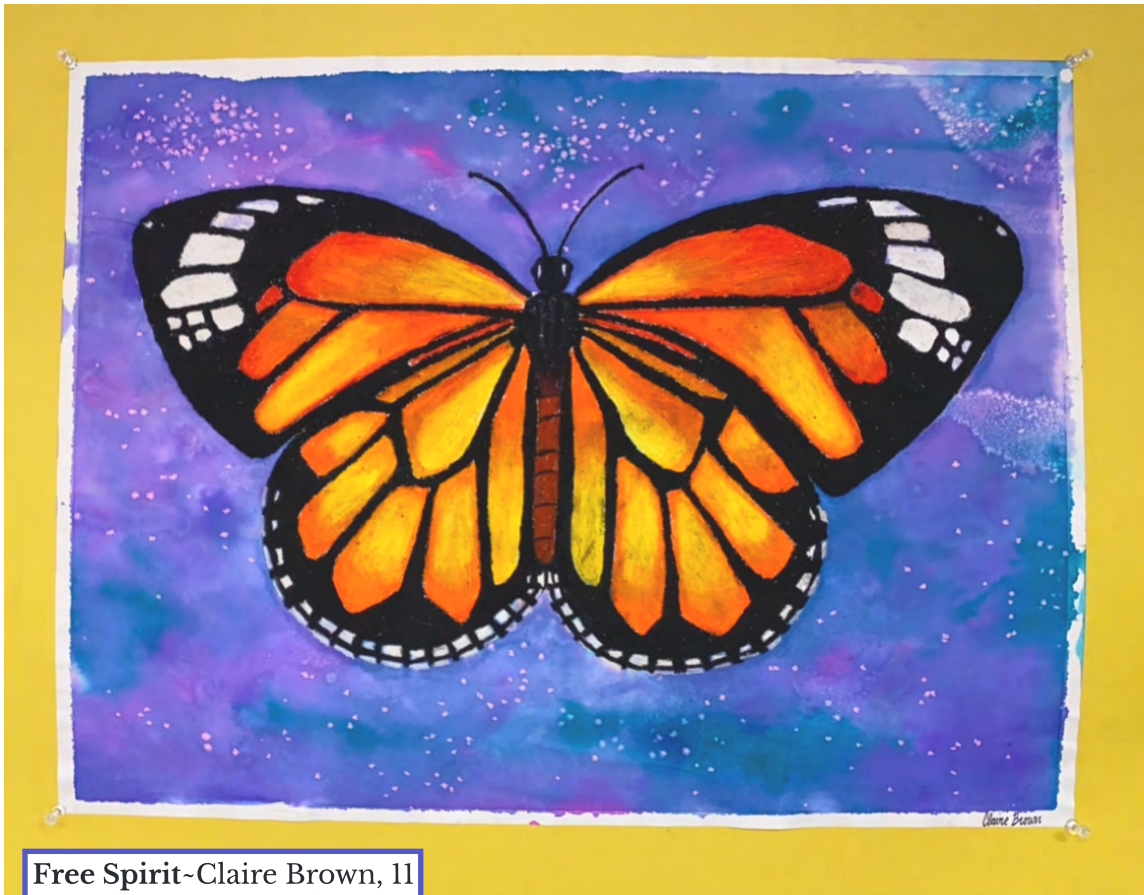
Perhaps the non-English-teaching jury
will understand *The Sound and the Fury*

of making “The Road [Most] Taken” my choice,
while listening to each student’s voice.

You see, for them, this reading is new,
and through *them*, I see a different view.

So pardon my unfamiliarity
with new works of popularity.

This syllabus driver has her route;
“The wheels go ’round and ’round!” I shout.



Free Spirit-Claire Brown, 11

Modern Haiku Submissions

Michael Hill, Staff~Poetry

spring breeze helicopters in my lunch

dwarf iris long walk shorter

two geese how big they fly

the cool hour before dawn bullfrog

summer deepens all night long katydids

garden dinner best of summer again

pre-dawn full moon brightens sunflower patch

early autumn first chili

jewelweed bobs weight of bumblebee

faded monarch on her last wings old mountain



Cherry Blossom Fae~Holly Gill, 10

New Orleans

Eva Schneider, 9~Poetry

I reached out a hand
towards the city
into the streets
lined with plant-draped galleries
and when night finally fell
a thousand arms
reached out in return
gnarled hands that snared
caught on my wrists and clothes
pulling me
toward life flickering on
past the shadow on Saint Louis
under an effervescent sky
footsteps keeping time
with pulsing neon lights
a kaleidoscope of colors
and a thumping bass
like fists on the bar

*We bloomed into
beautiful beings,
Rising from our
fall.*



Bits and Pieces~Rowan Howell, 12
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Zinnias~Ellie Roberts, 12

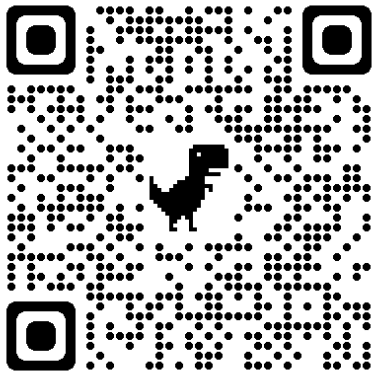


Mother's Day Flowers~Sara Grace Dalton, 12



Golden Girl~Rowan Howell, 12

Video Interpretation of Robert Frost's "Neither Out Far, Nor In Deep"
~Delanie Ross, 11



They cannot
look out
far.

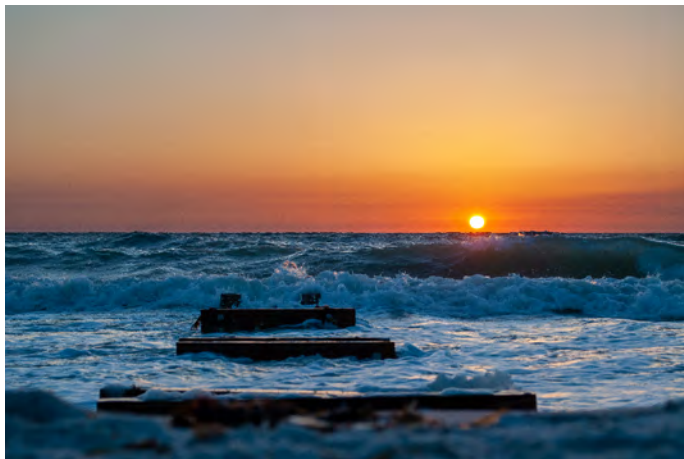


They cannot
look in
deep.

Watermelon in Winter

Sandra Pyeatt, Staff~Poetry

In winter when icy wind
whips between skyscrapers
I retreat—as if to a cabin
in the woods where I knit
colorful yarn, following
as it loops easily-peasily
along a primrose path
to someplace warm
like a waffle off the griddle,
a sand dollar on the beach,
a sweet sweater of sunny
summery hues.



Sunset~Wesley Fleischer, 10

The Posh Parade World Tour

William Gay, 12~Nonfiction

From Paris to Gatlinburg

What happens when you send two curious siblings with overactive imaginations on a trip together? Well, they come up with some pretty interesting ways to occupy their time. No matter where we were, from the nicest hotels with marble bathrooms to the filthiest where there's still pizza in the room from the last tenant, my sister, Rachel, and I had some kind of "game." Some of our games elicited glares or disapproving head shakes, while some made people think that our mom ought to have bought two of those child leashes to keep us reined in. Other games made adults tenderly smile at us and bat their eyes at our antics, which is how most people reacted when they saw what we did at the Hilton DoubleTree Hotel in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Gatlinburg can only be described as a mishmash of shops and attractions that should never be within ten miles of each other. On the main street cutting through the town's center, there's a moonshine distillery with an Indiana-Jones-themed putt putt course a few buildings down. Continuing down this street, there are several Ripley's Believe it or Not establishments, including a car museum, a world record museum (in which my mom almost broke the world record for fastest typing speed), and an aquarium. We knew we approached the turn-off for our hotel when we passed the chairlift with an artisanal honey shop directly beside it.

Up the mountain road, the Coke-can-shaped building—our hotel—appeared from behind the kudzu-infested mountainside. Our mom moseyed the car to the back of the lot, knowing we had arrived far too late to get the primo spots right at the front of the hotel. Our plan *was* to leave the house at 3:00 PM to arrive just before people flooded back to their rooms; however, our departure plans never went too smoothly, and a few mental breakdowns later, we left our house around 7:15 PM.

Rachel and I—about 16 and 10 respectively—stepped out of the car.

We both buzzed with excitement because we knew that we got to assume our alter egos for a whole ... entire ... week!

Our caravan—consisting of my family and two weighed-down luggage carts—walked through the sliding glass doors. A box of cereal tumbled from a pile of snacks balanced inside a laundry basket. On the verge of another mental breakdown, we stopped to clean up the rainbow mess. I stooped down to fill my shirt, kangaroo-style, with Fruit Loops. As I stood up, I came face-to-face with Dolly Parton! Not actually, but there, on the wall, a cardboard cutout of her face blossomed from behind a display of brochures. Nearly all of them were emblazoned with Dolly herself wearing different outfits and unique facial expressions. “Dixie Stampede” one read, with “Dinner and a Show!” plastered in obnoxious, red lettering across the front of a horse jumping through a ring of fire. Dolly’s picture was in the top-right corner with her arms crossed, like a goddess looking down upon her realm. I know from going to one of these shows that this “dinner” is an artery-clogging train of cardiac destruction that includes a whole bird, endless mashed potatoes, and a minuscule helping of green beans to balance out the carbs and fats that you’ve just guzzled down. All of this is to be eaten the way God himself intended: with yer hands.

At the check-in counter, our mom said, “We’re checking in under the name Gay, G-A-Y”. We always have to spell our last name when checking into places because usually, the employee will glance at us with an inquisitive look as if to say, “Did I hear you correctly?”

“Alrighty,” the desk worker with blindingly white teeth said, “your keys should be ready in a moment.” The desk worker turned her back to us, then whipped around again offering two aromatic paper bags to Rachel and me.

“Would you like a fresh cookie?”

“Oh, that would be absolutely delightful,” my sister said in a posh, British accent.

“Thank you so very much,” I followed, my words as sweet as if they were dunked in some of that artisanal honey. We were about to take the

bags, but then, the moment of realization hit us: our mom had just checked in using her *American* accent, and here we were, two clones of her, speaking in *British* accents! We had to think of something quick or our cover was blown before our vacation even began.

“She’s our aunt.” I scooted up to my “aunt’s” arm.

Rachel followed. “Yes, we stay with her every summer here in the US.” A convincing performance so far.

“Oh, I see,” the desk lady said in a pristine, customer-service voice. I’m sure she was really thinking, *I don’t really care. Just take the damn cookies.*

Now, most hotel pools are pretty grungy and grimy, but I’d give the one at this hotel a solid 6/10 on cleanliness! There was only one corner that was slick with algae and mildew, and I can only remember two times that the pool had to be drained because of a little accident. So, all in all, pretty good stats.

“How do you do?” We said as we walked past hotel guests lingering near the pool. “Cheerio!” we waved at the fellow kids and teenagers. Rachel and I thrived off the kids’ reactions, their little minds so excited to not only hear, but see real live Brits! It’s like a poolside show. All they needed was a whole chicken, and they’d be at the newest attraction advertised on the brochures: “Posh Parade” scrawled across the top of the brochure with “Marvel at their British Ways” written in elegant cursive underneath the main title. Up in the right-hand corner, Dolly—dressed up as Queen Elizabeth II—sitting with a shocked expression—two hands pressed to her cheeks. A tacky speech bubble exclaiming, “What refined young folk!”

We first passed the lower level of the pool—a shallow oval where kids flit and play as they please. Then, we strolled to the upper level—a one-foot-deeper, grown-up pool where fathers carelessly fling their children’s bodies, or their own bodies, into the water. On the edge of this pool was Rachel and my favorite feature: a pudding-brown slide shaped like a silly straw.

The way we chose to go down the slide was one of the safer ways

compared to other guests. We liked to crouch down on our hands and knees and maneuver down like agile huskies. When we reached the bottom, we would leap off the base of the slide and fall face-first into the water. I had a habit of making contorted, exaggerated facial expressions at my mom before hitting the water. These expressions often resembled bewildered, 1950s cartoon characters: an unhinged jaw and bugged-out eyes. Thus, I often got a mouthful of pool water, but the chlorine killed the germs, right?

After the pool, Rachel and I explored the whole hotel from top to bottom, hoping we'd discover a chamber of secrets or maybe a nickel in a drawer. At this point, it was usually around 11:00 or 11:30 PM, and our mom settled into the room to watch some quality hotel programming. She gave us a 12:15 AM return time, and we were off.

One night while exploring, Rachel and I felt particularly parched, so we decided to go down to the hotel bar and order some Dr. Peppers, which also gave us a chance to practice our accents on the barkeeper. We walked up to the counter, two children surrounded by the late-night hotel bar-goers who, in a Hilton hotel in Gatlinburg, were usually tired husbands fleeing from their families to eat wings and drink beer.

"Hello, What can I get for you two?"

"Two Dr. Peppas, please." my sister answered.

"I love your accent! Where are y'all from?" The bartender dug around behind the bar for two plastic cups.

"Britain," my sister said, thinking that would tick the "small talk" box in the bartender's head.

"What part?" the woman asked, seeming genuinely inquisitive. Thinking that I should also carry part of the conversation, I answered with one of the three European cities I knew. Confidently, without the slightest HINT of hesitation, I stated, "Paris—"

"LIVERPOOL," my sister frantically interjected, "we live in Liverpool. My little brother is a bit confused because we, er-, used to live there. But we

don't now, isn't that right?" I nodded. I thought that Liverpool sounded like a made-up place—who would want to live in a pool of liver?

"Oh, no way! My dad served overseas in Liverpool."

"That's so cool!" Rachel said with a tight smile, cutting off the bartender before she could ask anymore questions. I smiled too, but I didn't say anything more because I took it that my answer of "Paris" was somehow wrong and Rachel's answer of "Liverpool" was somehow more acceptable.

The bartender probably would have asked more questions, but at this point, she had the two cups of *Dr. Peppa* ready. I immediately plunged my straw into my drink and took a few slurps. Rachel presented the money our mom had given us, but the bartender said, "Oh, don't worry, it's on the house! Your accents are just so cute," Wait, what did she say?

"Oh, you're so sweet; we really appreciate it." This was my *worst nightmare*. My sister and I had just *lied* to someone, and that *lie* got us *free* drinks! The Dr. Pepper started tasting like dirt. I opened my mouth to let the truth spill out like a convict whose gig was up, but my sister grabbed my hand and dragged me away.

"Cheers! Thanks again," Rachel's sweet voice carried as she wrenched me around the corner.

"No problem!" the bartender called back.

I ... was ... horrified. Stealing Dr. Pepper was the real deal. This is something that people *pay* for, and I had just taken it.

We stepped into the glass elevators, and I slowly turned to face my sister. "We just stole," I switched back to my American accent. I felt too disgusted to use the voice that had unrightfully gotten me a free beverage. I couldn't even take another sip because it would just taste like crime and deceit.

My sister and I returned to the hotel room, and I dragged my feet behind her like a tired old dog.

"What happened?" my mom asked.

I explained my overwhelming guilt, and the fact that we were lying con artists. “Oh, I’m sure she knew you weren’t from England. It’s OK. She just wanted to give you the drinks because she liked you guys.” On one hand, I wasn’t sure I believed her; our performance was far too convincing to see through. However, on the other hand, I knew that moms are almost never wrong, so with that in mind, I took a hesitant sip from my straw. The syrupy flavor of Dr. Pepper melted the taste of lies away, and I started to realize that my mom was probably right.

We left the hotel a few days later, lugging our bags back to the car fifteen minutes past the check-out time. We passed the brochures of attractions one last time before going back home. I realized that our trip’s brochure had transitioned from the “Posh Parade” to the “Soda Scandal.” Although, this time, instead of being on a brochure, it was a two-page spread in one of those dramatic magazines you see in the grocery store check-out line. However, just like these magazines, the scale of the “scandal” was blown way out of proportion. The events, seen through my childlike, warped scope felt like a jail-worthy offense. Though I sometimes still feel a little guilty, as I’ve grown older, my views have aligned more and more with my mother’s, and I can now see that what happened wasn’t a scandal at all; it was simply two kids getting a sweet treat for their bizarre imaginations.



Lost at Sea-Rowan Howell, 12

Fettuccine Alfredo: A Thank You to My Mother

Asher McKinney-Ring, 11~Nonfiction

A good meal can fix anything: that's what you taught me. From an early age, you instilled within me quiet respect and appreciation for food and the process of creating it. When I was five, you would pull up a step ladder to our little gas stovetop and guide my hands as we cooked one of our favorites, Fettuccine Alfredo. My small hands would wrap around the cracked, wooden spoon—yours placed gingerly around them as we stirred the sauce, letting the cheese melt and the spices simmer, the sound of James Taylor's "How Sweet It Is" and Simon and Garfunkel's "Cecelia" mixing with the smell of fresh herbs and the slight must of my childhood home. You've always shown your love through food: homemade birthday cakes every year, apology cookies, celebration sandwiches. But our Alfredo is at the forefront of many of my happiest moments.

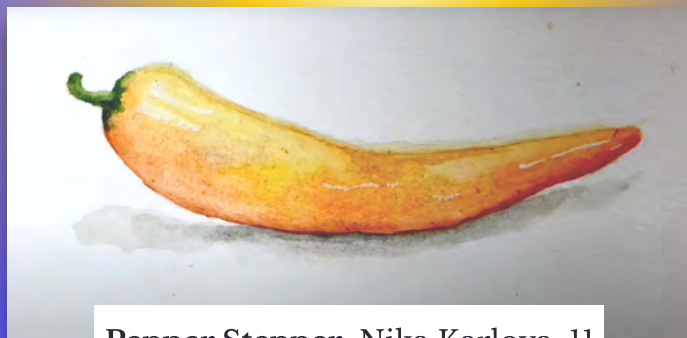
When I was twelve, we were driving home from our yearly spring shopping trip where we would take advantage of all of the sales Target was having on school supplies and new summer clothes. It was mid-June, and the air was thick with that heavy midsummer heat. I can still feel the cold from the AC and my anxiety from the words I was about to say mixing into a bone-chattering feeling. This moment is crystal-clear in my memories because how can you forget the moment that you finally become the person you've been hiding away your whole life? That was the day I finally voiced that I was a boy. That the daughter you had known had been a front, a mirror of what everyone assumed I should be, and that I, your son, was finally ready to be seen. The silence was excruciating, and though I had prepared for your confusion, the clouds of my own uncertainty came on like a hurricane. But then, like an exhale, you gave a simple "okay," and that one word was enough. That night we again stood in the kitchen cooking the pasta dish. We sat down to eat the first meal I shared with you as your son.

You taught me that the best things in life are better when they're shared, which is to say you taught me that all forms of connection are what make our lives richer and brighter. Because of this. I've made a habit of cooking Alfredo for people as my way of offering this connection.

It's about 11:45 pm. I have just gotten back to my friend Mia's house, returning from a grocery store trip where we picked up ingredients for the dinner I had insisted on cooking for everyone—and where William and I discovered that the most efficient means of transportation was skipping along the fluorescent-lit aisles laughing to ourselves, feeling like the only ones in the whole store. Where William stopped the car, and he and Sam genuinely told me that there's no need to apologize for the parts of my personality that I push down in fear that some people may not like them. And that was the first time I've fully believed it. Now I'm in the kitchen with Mia, Evan, William, Sam, and Luci, the familiar smell of freshly chopped basil and slightly burnt cheese mixes with the sounds of music and laughing. We chat amongst ourselves, and I have full conversations with Mia without saying a single word. Singing along to songs I barely know the words to, I'm filled with a sense of sleepy wonder, and all of the world's edges are soft and blurred. As William and I dance about the kitchen, chopping fresh herbs, stirring the thick cheese sauce, this moment is the only thing that exists. While we wait on the garlic bread in the oven (a necessary addition to any pasta meal), we gather on the couch and listen to Evan play guitar. It's comforting to feel the familiar connection through the sound of his playing. Knowing that we all hear and feel the same thing as one. The food is ready, and it has enough cheese and heavy whipping cream to give you a heart attack, but any food that makes you happy is healthy food, as Mia says, and this meal is filled with the most genuinely unbridled happiness I've felt in a long time. And, Mom, though you aren't there at this moment, the lessons you've taught me extend to this new family of mine. We sit at the large dining room table as a family and talk and laugh and love over Fettuccine Alfredo.



Apple Amaya Harris, 11



Pepper Stepper~Nika Karlova, 11



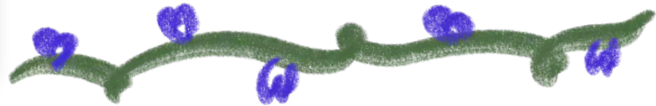
Ripe~Rowan Howell, 12



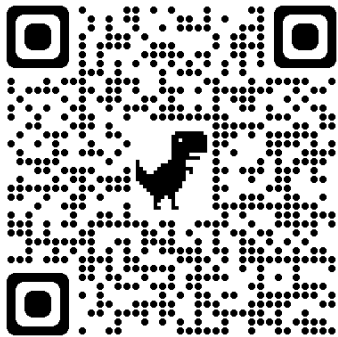
~RAIN,
REDEEMING
RAIN~



Unraveling Sun



Taytum Taft,
Grade 10



Forget Me Not

Floral pictures are some of my favorites to take because there are so many perspectives, options, and colors to experiment with when taking photos of flowers. My floral photos are mainly taken in my front yard, the gardens around Lake Junaluska, and the wildflowers in the woods of Bent Creek. In many of my floral photos, I use the bright colors of the flowers against the contrasting background to make the subjects stand out. I also utilize the bright colored flowers surrounding the center flower as a frame to make the subject flowers pop.

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