

*The Half  
Wit*

2022





# The Half Wit Volume 44 2022

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Dear Reader,

The day peaks when the sun stares down at us wrapping our arms around each other, yet its warmth is negligible compared to the one within our naive soul. The sun lights up the ground as we take in the evergreen world, and breathe in the fresh air. For a moment, time is stagnant as we exhale the seconds, minutes, hours that have folded our cheeks with laughter. The sun shines down on us during *meridies*.

The heat subsides as the sun shifts. Time ticks. Our body lifts into realization. Crashing into the horizon, the orange, yellow, and blue haze induces the mind to yearn for time without end. The rays entrance our being. Their tepid tones loosen the dimples shared with our mothers. Glaring maroon, the eventide leaves us to wander down the hands of a clock. Like a manifestation of the future, we approach the engrossing twilight, each ray of light burning seconds into the past. The sun retreats from us during *crepuscule*.

In the dark, we reach out in search of the arm that was once fluid with love but has now turned cold and rigid. Entangled bodies slip into descending time; aching memories slip into an escaping future. We fiddle with the gears in the grandfather clock, attempting to engineer new providence out of desperation. Our movement is too hasty. As it strikes midnight, the clock hands pierce through our own. In a betrayal, time does not stop to aid us. The sun abandons us during *subnoctum*.

Though time does not, the sun takes pity on our pain and emerges from its solitude. Healing us the only way it can, the sun cauterizes our wounds. Pinks, purples, and yellows paint the sky in a newfound joy which curls around us with warmth in its arms. We reach out and grasp each other with relief in our eyes, as we float free from the dread that slipped over us. The clock hands spin, resetting the world around us with fragments of forgiveness. Once again, we meet time in reconciliation as it gives us another moment to inhale. Exhale. The sun restores time to us during *diluculum*.

Reader: do not fear time. Its inevitable recklessness will not abide by the wants of us. Time affords us the opportunity of change and the arms around our otherwise bare shoulders. Reader, greet time with a lilt of hope.

Love,  
Alisha Chowdhary  
Kelly Liu  
Nikita Tuli

# MERIDIES





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*whale: [ weyl, hweyl ]*

Mrs. Green is on the rocking chair, listing out phonetics, and the rest of our class rests on the alphabet-laden carpet. I am in the advanced readers group (my little badge that I had shed Spanish and my pride), where little children discuss giraffes and Thomas Edison and understand it all. I have known whales and where they live for months, and I can spell and say all these words.

School only bores me when we are on the rainbow floor, reciting letters and spelling out countries we have never seen only to forget with the turn of the season. Winter is for w, too, but 'wh' is different enough to warrant a day on who and where but not when because what sense of time do we have at five years old. But in kindergarten, I am still more concerned with sharp objects than the school system, as the dance of bare feet hitting the linoleum was so commonplace back then. My boredom takes me to splinters, staples jutting up from the uppercase M, and I let my stubby fingers comb through the carpet like nets tracing the sea floor.

Mrs. Green says my name: Cami what are you doing. I make eye contact with the blue whale on the single-chaptered book, and tearfully attempt to tell it that I already know its name and do not need an introduction. Instead, Mrs. Green takes my popsicle stick down a peg, shaking off dust into the carpet, to disappear until the summer.

*Camila Monjaraz*



*Mixed Media*

*Lilly Sunny*



*Mixed Media*

*Red*

*Ayusha Narendra Chaudhari*

### *bucket filler*

then you knew what it meant to love every person you came across.  
you knew what it meant for your heart to be too big for your chest.  
the cicadas sung when late spring was over and in a breath  
you were estranged from thinly wrapped boxes and scissor-coiled ribbons,  
and snow falling like powdered coconut on sifted tea,  
and ice-glued eyelashes looking upon a white landscape.

then they tell you that „love is a heavy word  
and you should only use it for very special moments.”  
and then you look at every moment you have graced,  
from up and down glances to strangers in an endless sea, a never-ending crowd,  
and a building of thoughts and grievances rolling along high tide,  
to sea dollars traveled from hand to hand and coast to coast on a tv stand.

then you conclude that they are wrong and that you were meant to love,  
and your heart was meant to be big,  
and your heart was meant to beat two beats a second for those who can't.  
you conclude that you have to shed and emerge when the warmth does  
because you were meant to be their sun.  
you conclude that your skin that thinly wraps is sacred.  
you conclude that everything is special so everything is loved.

*Amanda Shaw*



## Hollywood's Music

### Vignette 1

Pump pump; heart beating. sweat, raining from my forehead. Breathing for air as the wind gushes over me. I didn't have time to stop after hundreds of people howled across the road and I somehow managed to find a way through miserable traffic and honking cars. As I tread the famous grounds, I search, seeing a variety of names, some familiar; some unfamiliar. I see stars, in my eyes; and on the ground. Literally. I keep getting pushed around by strangers in a foreign place; even though I lovingly know the place from my television screen. It's my first day in LA. I'd seen tall billboards and the front of buildings asking so desperately for attention. JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE! DOLBY THEATRE. TCL CHINESE THEATRE. I even laid next to Britney Spears' star; a dazzling record sat below her name. The yellow sun gleams off of the famous buildings and the famous city of the famous people.

The sun brushes my face in a hot flash. My white t-shirt made my body a cool temperature, I felt myself a light weight under the beaming sun. I'm aware that I'm here, but have trouble processing my thoughts at once. I wondered now, who has walked down these streets? Who has performed in that theater?

Inching my way through the famous hotspots seemed different; it felt really real, not like the magic of movie edits. I made it to the end. One mile long of Hollywood Boulevard; the Walk of Fame and the most famous street in the city. Blurriness arose ahead, one building stood out the most.

Music made here spun around inside and outside my head. Startled by cars ripping by, the sound of a race car curving the sides of its track over again quickly in and out of my ear, I kept looking at this building. Shimmering, the sun reflected off. Chattering noise began to fade for just one second. I felt the music through the ground, through my heart and through my soul. I read slowly the gray letters at the top. Here on this very street corner is what I imagined before, and what I saw in the city of stars. My parents and my brother stood behind; faces drained, nudging me to come along. Their strong vocalized opinions trailed.

### Vignette 2

"Hollywood Boulevard isn't clean; it's too loud; it's too much walking."  
I didn't care. We made it to the end. Dots of sun rays closed in around my eyes. My eyes became heavy. My walk became slouched and stiff. I wanted to reach the door and peek inside. Not to my surprise; "closed to the public."  
I felt like a celebrity.

Right here. Capitol Records. I cherish music; its my entire life. The tower, thirteen stories high, has a story of its own. The building is even shaped like a stack of beautiful records. What really goes on inside? My favorite hits are made here. My face smiled and my musical heart began to skip. I looked at the building and thought to myself that this was Hollywood. Music played daily that I love dearly is from here. Grammy's have been won just miles from here. I've always wanted to visit here among celebrities and of course, music central. The beautiful west coast mountains, so orange fell perfectly in the background. Beyond this famous street and tower lay the rest of downtown Los Angeles.

### Vignette 3

The behind the scenes of Hollywood Boulevard and everything included was a package I wouldn't bear to forget. I smell the flowers that stand in the pathway of sunlight. The trees sway in the summertime breeze. The city's mountains rise high, but I still longed for more. I wasn't done exploring the famous county. My car came near, and I moved slightly forward. About to leave, I felt free standing with no worries, but all of my new memories. I felt like I belonged here. Getting out to the west coast of Hollywood was something I needed to do. I turn all around, seeing the landscape in front of my eyes. So this is Hollywood. The view of Los Angeles from Hollywood boulevard didn't escape me. I will never forget my admiration for music city; the American record label; Capitol Records.

*Raya Resnik*

## The Ocean in the Sky

If I could venture far far away, I'd venture to the ocean in the sky.

I'd dream of flying away, to an oasis that lasts an infinity.

This dream is nothing short of reality.

I'd find my peace, my totality.

My serenity would lie in this sea foam of wispy, curly clouds accompanied by the dusk, aqua ocean of sky that joins with the warm, glistening shore made of golden clouds.

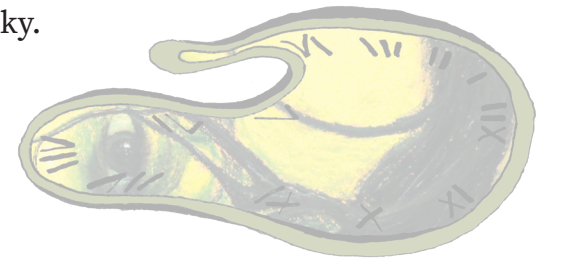
Glittering, twinkling jewels of sparks lie within the shore, enticing nothing but admiration.

Here I would lie forever, admiring the world down below, the sparks of colorful fireworks bursting down below, like a way finder reminding me of whom I love: the friends, family, and everyone in between.

The tears begin to fall, encasing that bittersweet smile of realization.

They water the world below not with sorrow, but with a message beckoning those I love to find their own ocean in the sky, so that one day we may share this oasis for an infinity, looking out into the infinite stretches of our dreams.

*Tomi Ogundimu*



*Oil*

*Victoria He*



## Why Fall is My Favorite Season

When asked my favorite season,  
I will always respond with, “Fall, of course,”  
because what’s not to love about  
the reds, oranges, and browns  
that paint the leaves  
on the ground and trees?  
What’s not to love about  
the breeze that flows through the air,  
sending a chill down your spine  
as you sit in your patio chair?

And while these are great reasons to have  
fall as my favorite season,  
I think that what I love most about it—  
what we all love most about it—  
is that we can relate to it.

There are times when we feel alive,  
but then the cold sends a chill  
down our spines,  
and we shrivel up,  
helpless at the hands of it,  
and lose ourselves.  
We turn different colors,  
not our original green anymore.

But when spring comes around  
after winter,  
where our roots seemed lifeless,  
no greenery to be seen,  
just sticks falling from the trees,  
we grow again.  
This time there are flowers  
coming from our branches,  
red and pink,  
and our leaves are as green as ever.  
What a sight to see.

It’s all a cycle,  
a part of life that we’ve known forever.  
We have to go through the cold  
to feel the comfort of the warmth  
better than ever before.  
This is fall,  
but we always grow again.

Kayden Morales



## A Perfect Painting

Sitting on the side of the street,  
the gentle wind blows toward her hair.  
The warm yellow glow of lights,  
reflect against the dark sky and waters.  
Trees with perfect leaf strokes,  
and mellow orange gray clouds float above.  
Gentle music played nearby.  
Humming and swaying to pleasant music played,  
she was framed inside a perfect painting.

Winona Thomas

## A Family Road Trip

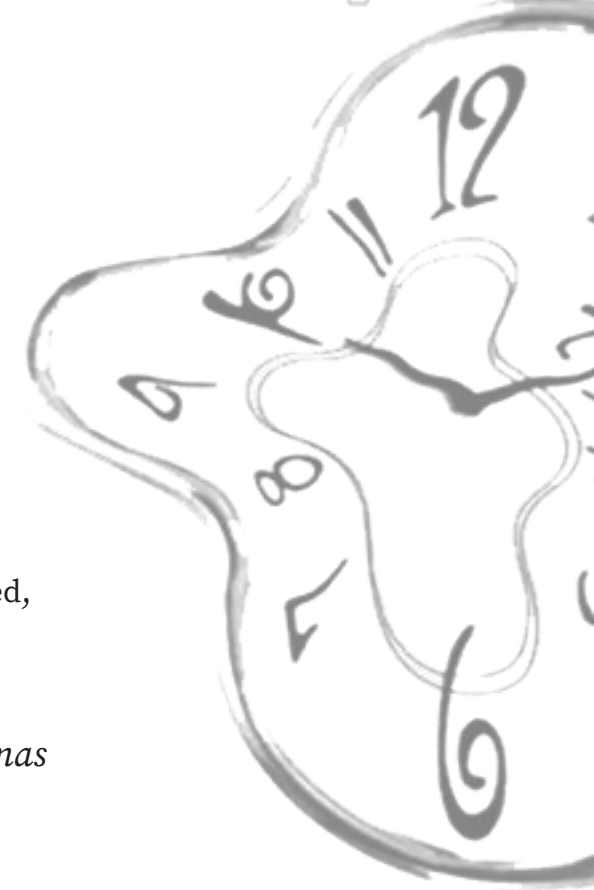
The roads here in India are bumpy. There are rarely any traffic lights for people to follow, causing great traffic. We slowly pass rickshaws, green and yellow with three small tires forming a triangle, Hero Honda bikes, and herds of cows. Here, I’m squished between my brother and sister, gasping for air. Just as I’m about to start a tantrum our driver thankfully pulls into a *Dhaba*- a rest area. My brother swings the door open and the heat of India overtakes the cool-conditioned car, making my body numb. The aromatic smell of *chai* reaches my nose, reminding me of home. I didn’t even notice my parents were already outside, stretching and bending their legs like pop tubes. Just as I step out, my slipper says goodbye to me. It is halfway submerged in a pyramid of cow excrement that looks like cake batter. Disgusted, I jerk back with my right slipper stuck as it was and my foot now touches the dirty ground. Instantly, I stride toward the women’s washroom. Just as I step foot in the washroom, it makes me want to vomit. The strong, sour smell of urine is so overpowering and intoxicating, I try not to inhale through my nose. I bunch up the collar of my shirt in my fists and bring it up to cover my mouth and nose to block the odor. All across the yellow stained tiles, dirty footprints scatter all over the place, like a preschoolers painting. I wash my foot with water, put on a new pair of slippers my mom brought me, and sprint out of the toxic room.

I find my brother and Dad standing in a corner holding freshly fried samosas and *chai*. Families sit around tables that are covered with flies, the red tables seem plain black. We form a small circle and finally eat, waving our hands around like crazy to keep the flies away, laughing and laughing.

A week ago, I was begging my parents to go without me. I thought, *who wastes their time going to a temple that is eight hours away?* But, my parents insisted that I give it a try.

Now, after coming back from the road trip, it feels like my parents were right. Enjoying the time with my family, getting to know India and how much they believe in gods. I saw the simplicity of those who live in villages around the temple, who use wells. Next time we go back to Virpur, I will be the first to get in the car.

Priya Thakkar



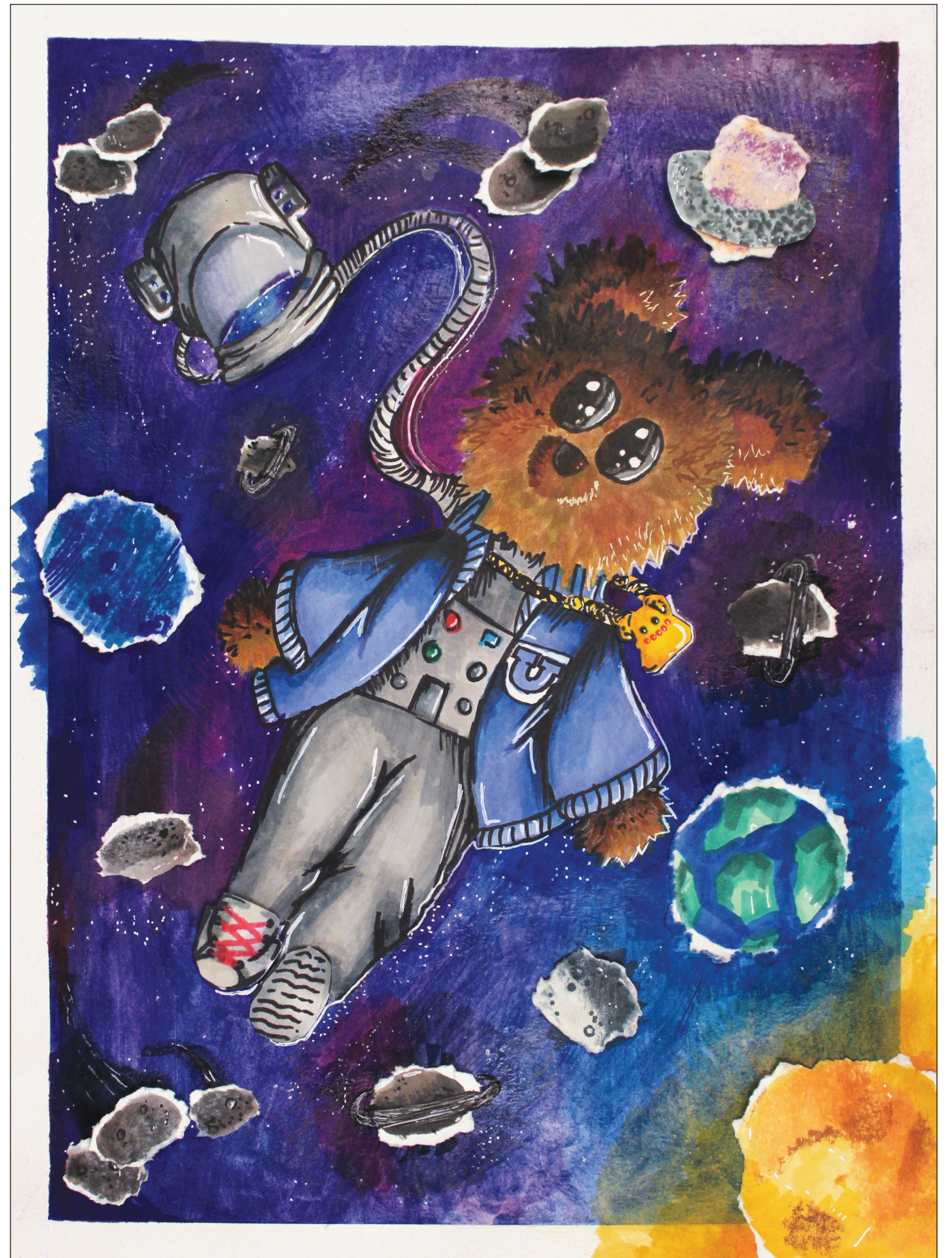




Acrylic

Workspace

Lada Volkov



Mixed Media

Spaced Out

Alexadra Inman



## Metamorphosis

The symptoms of August slowly fade as November mist starts to glow.  
Autumn gives off the push of winter as people flee to greater roads.  
The sun radiates blue as the smoke of distant memories depart,  
yet they still gleam like starry clouds hoping to find us on a warmer day.  
We stay and go like autumn's ways, always looking up for a brighter place.  
To take the road ahead of us, we leave our past looking for fireworks,  
a spark of kindled hope to leave the burden of the past,  
to be baptized to reach the epitome of nirvana,  
a state of achieved happiness that we couldn't grasp when autumn was still there,  
but before we metamorphose into our well-kept dreams,  
we aren't who we are  
without the memories of bittersweet air.

Yeonwoo "Amber" Ko



Photograph

The Wasp Life

Sophia Garg

## lily

the umbrella cast aside allows us to embrace the rain:  
your face, cheeks wet of drops from eyelashes, embraced  
by my gaze; I think of you even in sleep;  
hoping to embrace you; your sorrows, I'd keep  
in my pocket, the memory of your touch,  
wishing for a future wherein we would both rush  
to grasp the handle, fingertips brushing in vain —  
oh,  
how I so dislike the rain —

sweet angel, write me a poem with lilies and citrus:  
unfitting,  
allow the rhymes themselves to bewitch us,

— just kidding —  
let us both cast them aside;

if two pistils birth flowers,  
then let us unite;

can't write that, (embarrassed,) still, even so,  
transient rain dances, melting red snow:  
seasonal poetry, blessed by blood of lycoris:  
antonym of rose, its scarlet petals flourish,

(just writing this makes my face bloom a new hue,)  
still unseen by others, draw it anew:  
the expression I wear, spelt in letters, secret:  
I promised you, right? (that, for you, I would keep it)

five twenty, then thirteen ten-four,  
match numbers to meaning (— you can do this; I'm sure),  
thus the symbols convey where my phrasing falls short;  
(language, not english, despite such watered words;

they bloom, cover, smother my face,)  
lips gasping for air: poem written in vain,  
the rain calls, curtain falls, and I utter your name,  
a rainbow in secret: one heart in restraint.

Lynde Mogensen



Where I’m From

Homage to George Ella Lyon

I am from the lavender scented candles we let burn all night,  
fwrom the joyous times we spent on flights.  
I am from “Do it all and do it right,”  
from staying up until midnight.

I am from the lush forest trails we walked every Saturday,  
from the tennis we played - every few Sundays.  
I am from skipping out on doing the dishes,  
from birthday gifts and warm wishes.

I am from the fog filled foremoon,  
from anime and webtoons.  
I am from the 500+ songs in my playlist  
and the little projects I started but never quite finished.

I’m from moving place to place,  
from the silly dances we performed in the walkways.  
I am from broken friendships,  
from promises we made but never fulfilled,  
I am from the burning sensation of gliding down a slide on a hot day,  
from not caring what other people would say.

Finally, I am from the sweet blueberries we would pick during summers,  
from the refreshing smell of mud and lovely spring colors.  
I am from these times;  
When we laughed until we cried.  
From our nostalgic memories,  
to the moments we let lavender scented candles burn all night.

Chestha Singh Bisht



Digital Art Misheel Baasantseren



Photograph Natural Frame Jacob Dickinson

Penguins

I am a penguin.  
Not because I want to be,  
but because that is what I ended up with.

I could have been a hawk or an eagle,  
but I have never been able to see that far into the horizon.  
I only look ahead and see what is right in front of me.  
I could never soar above the sky and look out into the future.

I could have been a kiwi, for their eyes are poor,  
but I could never rely on my other instincts the way they do.  
I could never rely solely on what I hear;  
I devour everything my senses feed me, but I will never believe it without seeing it.

I could be a chicken, who has fair eyesight.  
They hear, smell, taste, and and feel things normally,  
yet there is something so mundane about their repetitive life.  
The way they are content with being grounded and repeating their life without ever  
leaving the farm

Then, there is the ostrich, who possesses many great qualities,  
yet for all its glory, it is a large, brutish bird.  
It owns its size, embraces itself, and uses it to the best of its abilities  
in a way I never would be able to

There is always the owl,  
who has balanced senses,  
who never needs to worry about being grounded to a place for too long,  
who spends the nights as wildly as it can,  
yet I will never be an owl,  
for they have a certain composure with what they do.  
They have gained the respect of many others and have become a near  
universal symbol for  
wisdom

This leaves me with a penguin.  
I splash around.  
I slide with my friends.  
I stick with my family loyally.  
I feel the panic of my own bears and seals,  
which comes in the form of exams and internships,  
yet I still waddle around,  
stumbling under the weight of my expectations.

And at the end of it all,  
after waddling from the weight of the world,  
after streamlining through the ocean of life to escape the polar bears and seals,  
after endless problems plaguing me from the beginning,  
I realized why the penguin represents me the most.  
It is because for all I will do, I will never fly.

Sadhvi Swaminathan



## Free

3:00. 3:00. 3:00. Still 3:00.

My eyes keep on drifting to the clock, desperate for some sign that time still works in the classroom.

3:00. 3:00. You know, maybe the clock is broke—oh, it's 3:01.

Great.

I lean back, desk chair groaning in protest. *Yeah, me too*, I think.

This chair and I aren't too different; we both carry a heavy weight. Maybe this chair and I could even be friends, if it could talk, and we would rant together about all the stupid stuff we have to handle. We'd grow old together and watch the sunset on rocking chairs. Or maybe it would *be* a rocking chair. Do chairs age?

Boy, it's weird, the things I think when I'm bored. Maybe my sleep deprivation is worse than I thought.



Digital Art

Glass Shoes

Moyu Watanabe

After 24 more minutes of *blahblahblah*, the bell finally rings, and it's a mad rush to get to the door. I run down the stairs, through the hallways, and enter the wild stampede outside to the buses. A group of girls ahead of me is chatting their mouths off and moving *really slowly*, and I have to suppress the urge to run right through the tiny gaps between them. After they walk away, I dash to my bus. There's a good thirty seconds of fresh air in my lungs and soft sunlight warming my face before it all gets swallowed up by the stink and smog inside.

I wince at the pressure behind my eyes, an aching in my brain, a constant reminder of the toll that every day has taken on me. *Almost over*, I repeat to myself. *It's almost over*. The guy sitting next to me is crunching chips really loudly and spilling all over the seat, so I slip my Air Pods in and drift into semi-consciousness. *Almost over*.

It my desk, iPad in lap, I lean back and put my hands on my head. I can see my yard outside, through a window that's right next to me. Nature is tauntingly close, just out of reach. I see the trees waving in the wind, grass glittering and undulating, a pair of birds chirping and staring at me, as if gossiping. *Look at that idiot*, they're saying. *Stuck inside doing his work, while all the glories of nature are here for him to enjoy*.

I roll my chair back to my desk, prop up my iPad, and stare blankly at the questions. I lean my neck out, drinking in the sunlight. I duck back into the darkness, staring at my work. In, out, in, out, back and forth. I sigh. *Alright, screw this*.

I leap out of my chair and run out the front door, as if being chased out of my house, and throw my hands out in the warm fresh air. I run through the green, lush grass and breathe deep, inhaling the scent

of summer. Pollen, cut grass, and a million other unnameable yet incredible smells that take me back, back to when I was *free*. My music gets quieter as I'm taken back, back when I smiled so much my cheeks were sore. Back when I saw through only the haze of childlike innocence and care-freeness. Back before the real world hit me like a sledgehammer.

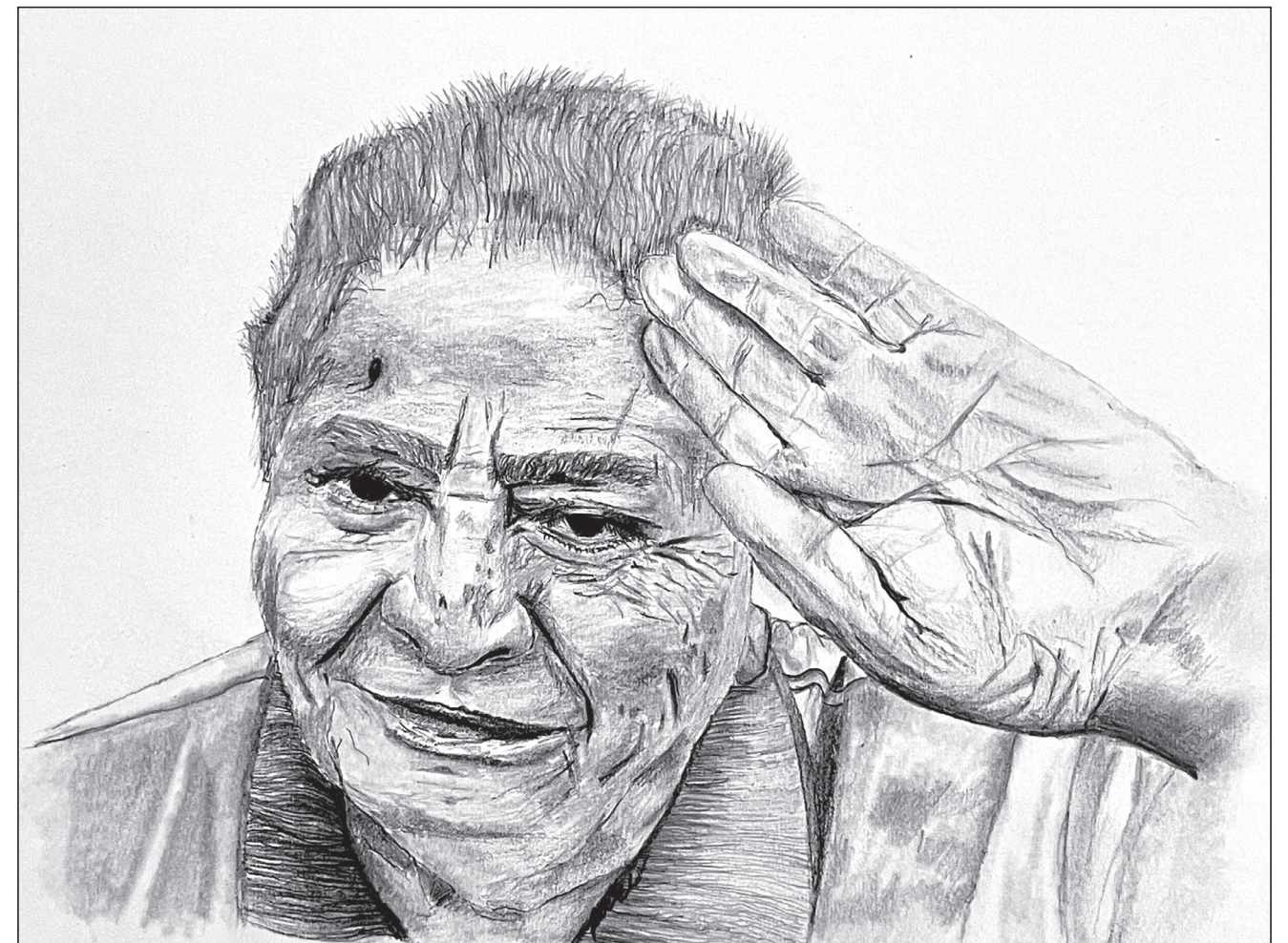
I breathe out, the memories fading as I do. I walk over to a tree, examining the intricate web of veins traveling along the numerous beautiful leaves blanketing the branches. There's a cocoon hanging from the bark, translucent green, and I swear I spy a butterfly inside, growing and developing and getting ready to spread its wings and fly far, far away.

I take a deep breath of the fresh air and sit down on the grass, legs crossed. Yeah, life sucks. But, hey, these moments might just make up for it.

I lie back, hands on my head, and the back of my nose tingles as I do. I sneeze, and as I recover another one comes. A third follows, and I can't help but laugh. Laugh as my allergies are acting up, laugh as birds fly overhead, laugh as new seeds start to sprout, laugh as the world spins and I spin along with it.

*Stupid Deep* by Jon Bellion starts playing, one of my more recently discovered favorites, and even though the lyrics don't really match how I'm feeling, I sing along, laughing and sneezing and singing as I watch white, wispy clouds swim in the clear blue, stupid deep, endless sky.

Micah Kim



Graphite

Farewell

Pari Thakkar



CREPUSCULEM

CREPUSCULEM



CREPUSCULEM

CREPUSCULEM



## *Journey Through Identity*

### *At War with the Pen*

To work on a sunbeam  
and to breathe with your pen.  
To splay yourself across the page  
not knowing where nor when.

Gangrene ridden paper;  
your pen is shackled with grief.  
You wake up feeling nothing,  
and go to bed with tears in your teeth.

Overworked hands clutching the pills.  
The typewriter has no keys,  
and you tell yourself you have no need  
for a new inkwell.  
You've been hungry too long to start eating now,  
locked inside a house with no keys.  
A starving word smith with no need,  
for a new inkwell.

A faulty factory of rainbows  
allows ink to pool onto new paper.  
The allure of shiny, new shackles;  
haughty quill and pen crusader.

To be a stone in the rushing river,  
may only close the door instead;  
preferring to work on a sunbeam,  
than to leave an empty homestead.

*Gabe Cadichon*

Growing up is a hard journey, and it still gets harder all the time. Life throws curve-balls at you all the time, and you're supposed to learn how to adapt to that. No one really teaches you how, and in my case, they just threw me in the field and let me "learn from my choices" and expected me to figure it out along the way, especially with gender identity. I never understood why I hated feminine things. Tomboy was one of the first labels I picked out for myself, yet it wound up in the trash because it was merely an experimental label I used as a placeholder for who I really was.

My mom enjoyed dressing me up in feminine clothes, but I always knew that feminine things felt wrong. They didn't fit me. I felt acid dripping down my skin every second I was in something feminine, slowly burning and rotting my skin as time continued ticking. The longer I wore feminine things, the deeper the acid dug, melting my skin until it reached my muscles, burning all the way down to the bone. I always wanted to be the archaeologist to my own bones. I felt as though they were ancient relics that could guide me along, possibly having ancient scriptures inscribed in them, giving me even a hint to figure out who I was and who I could be, and searching for them was my highest priority, although searching for them through the damage and the scars left behind was always too scary for me to do.

Pain was scary to the younger me, until one day I saw how easy pain comes and goes. Pain wasn't scary when I built up the courage to start looking, start digging until I found the scriptures, start cutting to drain all the collateral things so I could get a peek of who I am. The smallest hint gave me guidance and calmed me, but I had to keep digging apart my skin and flesh so I could try to find the whole picture. I was so desperate to stop feeling pain and loneliness, so I just kept hurting myself. All too obsessed with the thought of knowing myself. Pain drowned me as I quickly realized I didn't know how to read those same scriptures I had been looking to find.

Starting to research and watch a lot of incredibly informative people on YouTube helped me realize who I was. They educated people on what their life as a transgender person is like, what it felt like or what their journey was like along with how the community is not as cookie cutter as the society I was trying so desperately escape. They started to teach me how to read my bones and scriptures properly without hurting myself, and though I still struggle, those videos still help me learn about myself to this day. It helped me because it opened my eyes, along with helping me figure out who I was. I began to understand who I was meant to be and that there were early signs in my childhood that showed my unhappiness being viewed as a female. As I grow as a person, the more my skin heals from the acid that it was once drowned in, the digging and cutting I did too, though it never truly heals. The same scars will be there for the rest of my life and I still hear the same ringing in my ears of my mom trying to invalidate my identity every day. It all takes the same form as it was before, even though I still became the person I've always wanted to be. My trash can has grown into a pile of labels I've tried to stick to, but that trash can doesn't matter anymore because I've finally found the label that does fit in my once empty hole I call my heart. Transgender Man.

*Liz Romanova*



*The Study (An Excerpt)*

Scene 2

(LIGHTS up. Dr. Finley is gone. The PARTICIPANTS are in their starting positions.)

SPONTANEOUS: Ok, the note...(Collecting the note and reading it) It says: “Five minutes for each stage, a choice must be made. One must die, or all will die, that’s the way this game is played.” What?!

SYMPATHETIC: Did it just say die?

HEROIC: It can’t mean that.

(The alarm sounds.)

ALL: I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Insert name.) It is who I am and what I am.

DECEITFUL: That’s going to get old fast.

SYMPATHETIC: They can’t really expect one of us to die, can they?

METHODICAL: Maybe it’s figurative...like in a game or something. I don’t think any of us would have signed up for this if we knew that there was a chance we could die.

DECEITFUL: How do you know we signed up for this?

HEROIC: What do you mean?

DECEITFUL:  
Do any of you remember what happened at any moment in your life before you woke up in this room?

(THEY all indicate they don’t.)

DECEITFUL: (Cont’d.) Neither do I. For all we know, we could have been kidnapped, or could be convicts, or...

(The alarm sounds.)

ALL: I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Insert name.) It is who I am and what I am.

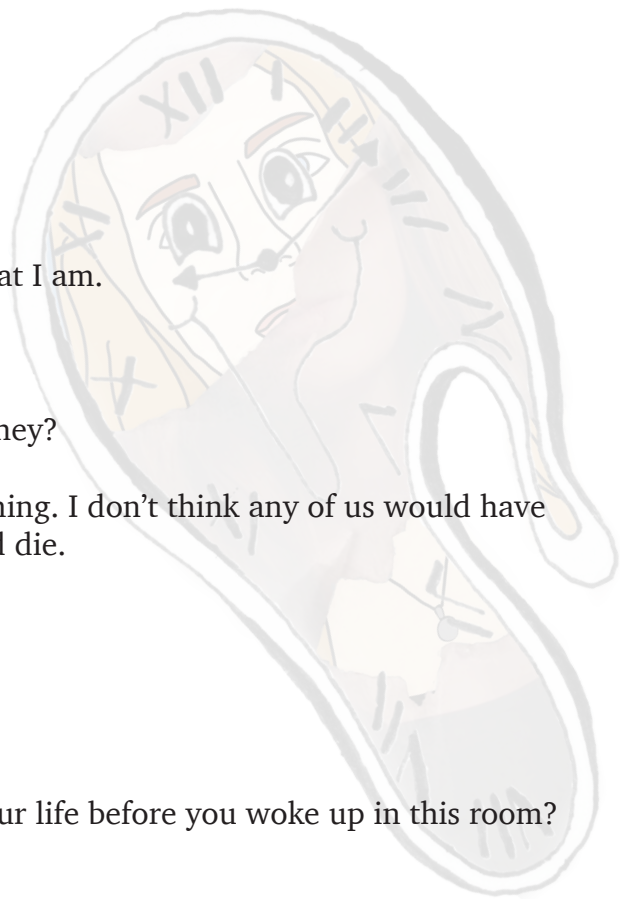
HEROIC: Why didn’t this cross our mind before?

SYMPATHETIC: Before what?

HEROIC: Before the doctor left, we could have made him tell us the truth.

METHODICAL: Could we have? What about these collars?

(THEY all touch their necks, recalling the pain.)



HEROIC: We still could have tried something.

SPONTANEOUS: Maybe we still can? (Looking around.) Hey, you people watching us! Send that doctor back in here right now! (Nothing.) We’ll kick down the door!

(SPONTANEOUS begins to do that but METHODICAL stops him.)

METHODICAL: No...don’t. I’m sure they’ve already thought of that and I’m sure if they don’t want you kicking that door, we’re all going to get hurt.

SPONTANEOUS: Then what do we do?

METHODICAL: We follow the rules

SYMPATHETIC: Even if it means killing someone? I’m not going to do that!

HEROIC: Maybe it’s a puzzle or something...maybe we have to figure out a way that prevents killing any-one.

DECEITFUL: (Doubtful.) That makes no sense!

SYMPATHETIC: Maybe we can just wait them out.

METHODICAL: No, we can’t.

SYMPATHETIC: Why not?

METHODICAL: Because in five minutes we’ll all be dead.

SYMPATHETIC: What?

METHODICAL: The rules. It was on the sheet.

SPONTANEOUS: (Reading.) That’s right! “Five minutes for each stage you have...”

METHODICAL: We’ve already used a minute or two of that.

SYMPATHETIC: (Starting to panic.) This can’t be happening...

HEROIC: You need to chill out.

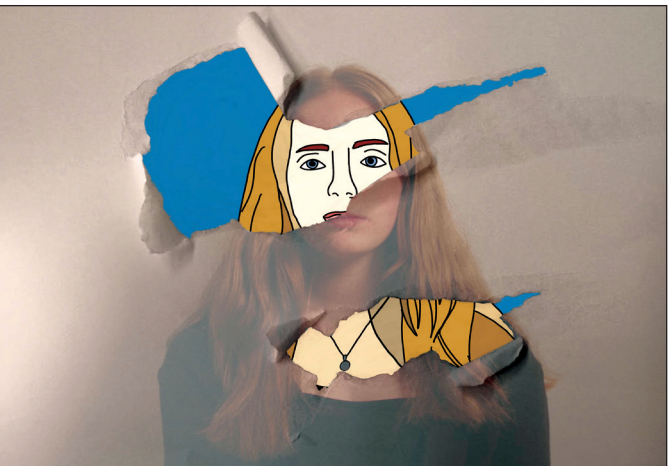
SYMPATHETIC: (Troubled.) I don’t want to be a part of this anymore.

(The alarm sounds.)

ALL: I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Insert name.) It is who I am and what I am.

HEROIC: Gotta be less than two minutes left by now.

SYMPATHETIC: What are we going to do?



*Mixed Media* *Maya Aviva Heller*  
*Piece by Piece*





DECEITFUL: Well, within the next couple of minutes one of us here is going to kill someone.

(ALL look at DECEITFUL.)

DECEITFUL: (Cont'd.) Just saying.

SYMPATHETIC: This can't be happening.

SPONTANEOUS: Saying that again and again won't make it any less true. I say we go try kicking down the door.

DECEITFUL: (Pointing at the device.) Collars.

SPONTANEOUS: Well, I'm not just going to wait here for someone to try and kill me.

(SPONTANEOUS moves toward the door but just as he tries to kick it, the electric sound registers, and THEY all cry out. The alarm sounds.)

ALL: (Weakly.) I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Insert name.) It is who I am and what I am.

HEROIC: We must be under a minute by now. Any other suggestions?

SPONTANEOUS: Maybe we can all rush the door?

METHODICAL: Or we can ask for more time! We aren't ready for this!

HEROIC: Do you think they'll listen?

METHODICAL: (With a building determination.) We have to try!

SPONTANEOUS: Do it!

METHODICAL: Where should I direct the request?

HEROIC: Huh?

METHODICAL: Are there cameras? I don't see any!

HEROIC: The door is over here in my area...I think there's a small camera over the door.

METHODICAL: Where?

HEROIC: It's small...(pointing) right above the door here.

SPONTANEOUS: We're running out of time!

METHODICAL: Ok, I'll ask.

(METHODICAL crosses to face the door. HEROIC follows and stands behind.)

METHODICAL: (Cont'd.) Excuse me, Dr. Finley? I don't think the rules of the game were adequately ex-

plained to us and I think—

(HEROIC hits METHODICAL from behind and then puts him in a choke hold firmly until he stops moving. The alarm sounds.)

ALL: (ALL shudder as they say it, particularly HEROIC.) I am \_\_\_\_\_. (Insert name.) It is who I am and what I am.

(LIGHTS BLACKOUT.)

*Rayaan Shaik*



*Mixed Media*

*Mya Nugent*





Digital Art

Violin

Susan Garcia

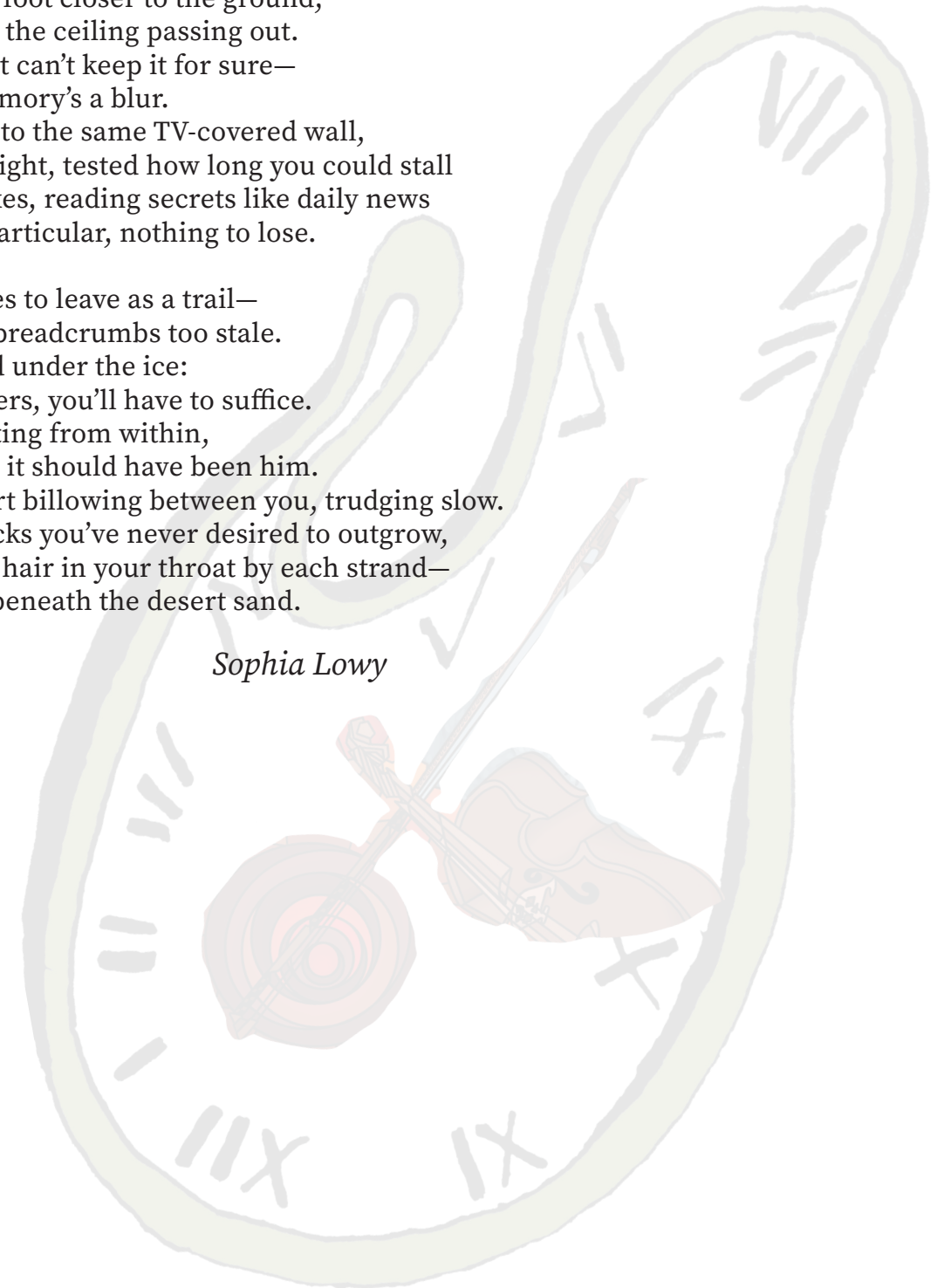
## Heaven Shuddered

A six-foot tumbleweed of shower drain hair,  
a colony of green festering on the damp living room chair.  
Hitchhiking on magnifying glasses searching for paradise lost,  
forged from the contents of milk cartons, bottle caps, and freezer-burn frost.  
He buzzed his hair and Satan is his master,  
his hand grips yours, driving a little faster,  
breathing Holocene air trapped under the ice,  
epoch of extinction, this epoch of life.

Chopping at wooden stilts, a foot closer to the ground,  
jumping on the mattress, hit the ceiling passing out.  
He says he can make love but can't keep it for sure—  
lost it on the street once, memory's a blur.  
Found each other transfixed to the same TV-covered wall,  
coaxed you under the streetlight, tested how long you could stall  
Emptying strangers' mailboxes, reading secrets like daily news  
Infatuated with nothing in particular, nothing to lose.

You ripped out your eyelashes to leave as a trail—  
they haven't been followed, breadcrumbs too stale.  
Living like the fishes trapped under the ice:  
packed so close with the others, you'll have to suffice.  
Too disposable, an apple rotting from within,  
ribs bleeding through shirts, it should have been him.  
Banished to the distant desert billowing between you, trudging slow.  
He's the old sweaters and socks you've never desired to outgrow,  
coughing up and pulling out hair in your throat by each strand—  
buried, dead tumbleweeds, beneath the desert sand.

Sophia Lowy





## The Aging Toy Lamb

The brightness of the white skies blended with the fresh, blush white snow that landed on a Saturday morning of a chilly December. The crispy crunch of the fresh snow echoed throughout the neighborhood as other children giggled and hopped through the front yards of their homes. Their parents shoveled the snow down and up driveways. The white puffy smoke of furnaces and chimneys ascended into the abyss of the skies beyond my head.

Bundled up in a brand new jacket and snow pants, geared with hefty winter gloves and snow boots, I grabbed my best friend, George, and we headed out to join the rest of the children in the snow. We carefully trekked along the icy streets to the neighborhood park and jumped into the snow to make snow angels. Icy balls of snow were thrown over our heads, snow was rolled up together to make the bodies of snowmen, and the fresh snow and icicles made the tastiest children’s treat. We played and played until the sniffly noses and red cheeks finally defeated our energy.

And when we finally made it home, there were a couple of steamy cups of hot chocolate waiting to be sipped to warm our bellies. The fireplace sparkled and sizzled as we slouched on the couch letting not a single worry pass through our minds. Staring through the chilly window we wished that the snow would keep stacking until it reached the sky.

The next day, I arrived at George’s house to see if he wanted to play again, but I saw that he and his parents were next door. Their neighbor, an old man with multiple wrinkles on his forehead and beneath his eyes, but probably as wise as an owl, was moving away to live somewhere South where it would be warm and easy on his ripe old bones. The old man always had a kind, warm smile that would always give the best full-sized chocolate bars every Halloween. Whenever I saw him, he would smile at me and say nothing else but, “I wish I were a young lad again.” Like any other eight-year-old, George would probably say, “Well, I wish I got to be a grown-up because then I get to do what I want and don’t need to do homework” and the man would just chuckle and go on about his day.

Right before the last few lingering boxes were loaded onto the white truck that released the most odoriferous emissions, the old man sat down on a bench and smiled at George and me.

“You two be good boys for me, alright?” the old man smiled and looked out at the park where the children were playing. “Ah, I sure wish I was a young boy again.”

“Well, I wanna be a grown-up,” George grinned. “Then I can do anything I want and even drive a car.”

“Ah, do you now? Here, let me give you something.”

The old man reached into his knapsack sitting at his feet, shuffled through the bag for about three seconds, and brought out a stuffed animal.

“This baby lamb here,” he explained, “it belonged to my granddaughter who has grown up now. She loved it when she was your age.”

He handed the lamb to George and me. The fluffiest, white, woolly hair was carefully seamed onto the lamb. It had a little smile that warmed our hearts in the freezing cold.

“I know Christmas is in just a few days, and I want to give this to you boys to take good care of this little lamb. You see how clean and white and beautiful its wool is? I want you to keep it that way for me until I come back to visit one day. Remember. Be good boys.”

With that, the last boxes were loaded onto the truck and we waved goodbye for the last time as the truck sputtered off into the distance, leaving behind puffs of black smoke. My eyes wandered off and landed on the stuffed animal that felt incredibly soft and plush in my palms. The fur felt as smooth as a fresh blanket of snow as I stroked the lamb.

Off we ran to play with our brand new toy, curiously admiring such a well-crafted stuffed animal.

A couple of months later, the weather became just a little warmer. Some of the white snow started melting away, but there was still snow that filled our yards. This snow was no longer white and fluffy, but

I frowned as I saw the various dirty colors that polluted the snow. George and I both had our birthdays not long ago, which was always exciting, especially for George, who always wanted to be older.

I went to George’s house again to see what he was up to. The lamb had been at his house for the past few months and whenever we played with it, we made sure that a single speck of dirt never contaminated the clean white fur.

“OH NO!” George shrieked as he brought out the lamb from the shelf.

“What? What is it?” I asked, as my heart plunged to my feet.

Just like the snow outside, the once white and beautiful wool of the sheep now turned gray and yellow, and some pieces of hair were raveling out.

“What happened to it?!” I gasped. “I thought we were being careful.”

“Well, I guess not careful *enough*.”

“So what happened to it?”

Silence filled the room as George scrambled for answers. I was clueless, too. In an attempt to keep the lamb from looking any worse, we decided to wash it. Not long after, we realized that the dirty colors of the lamb would not budge. Instead, the wool continued to wither away from the lamb’s body.

I brought the lamb home with me and I searched for the best place to keep the lamb from worsening in condition. In my closet was a small empty drawer. I grabbed a damp towel and cleaned out every square inch of the drawer until not a single speck of dirt or dust could be seen. I placed the lamb in the drawer, guarded away from the rest of the world, where surely nothing could ruin the once beautiful, immaculate little lamb. I closed the closet door behind me and left the lamb alone.

The absence of the vibrant and colorful summer soon came to an end. The naked trees of the winter were clothed as the lush green leaves roared back to life. Flowers bloomed and bees buzzed around visiting each one. The sun broke through the clouds and birds whistled when I woke up every morning. Other children stashed away their winter gear and came out to play with their new water slides.

George and I were once again a little older. We both became a little more knowledgeable, a little more experienced, and a little more aware of the world around us. We thought we knew how everything worked, but there was something we just could never solve.

No matter how little the toy was touched or how safely it was stored, nature still found a way to ruin its condition. It kept withering away, little by little, as each day raced by. Cleaning the lamb apparently did absolutely nothing to preserve the white, fluffy beauty of the stuffed animal. Half of the lamb had no more hair, and the other half was a depressing grayish color, almost as if the toy had life and grew up with us. I thought of what the old man had said. *Be good boys*. Were we good boys? George and I were good boys. We were two good boys that were just growing up and becoming stronger, yet so vulnerable to the world’s irritations, like a soldier standing in the middle of a battlefield.

Winters were just never the same anymore. Of course, children still ran outside to play right when the first snowflake sank to the ground every year. There were snowmen in the front yards, and of course, snow icicles were still such a delicacy for kids. Smoke still fumed out of chimneys, and hot chocolate was still poured into mugs and enjoyed by children. Only now, George and I weren’t those children.

George and I still had a kid’s little toy, even though we knew we could do nothing to save it. We wanted to keep our promise to the old man, but we couldn’t. The lamb had lost all of its white hair. It grew older, grayer, and darker as we became older. Its shape started falling apart and we no longer paid attention to it. We were always reminded by it of that one winter so many years ago when everything around us was beautifully painted by the crisp white snow. Our friends once went out to play and had snowball fights, but now they no longer play. Then we would think about that nice old man, whom we later learned passed away only a year after he moved away.

The old man was wise and always hoped for the best for us. He wanted us to be good boys, something that we never understood. But that was impossible. No one in this world could ever portray perfection in anyone’s right mind. Only some things were perfect. The beautiful, soft, fluffy, and cleanest white lamb was perfect. But even that became imperfect.



On the night of Christmas Eve, George stood next to me as I prepared to leave behind the remains of the lamb in the crackling fireplace. The room was dark, and only lit by the calm, orange-and-yellow flames. Outside, the stars and moon shone through the frozen windows. There was a fresh layer of snow on the ground that fell in earlier the morning. Only the calm crackling of the fire made any noise in the silent room. George took a last glance at the stuffed animal and smiled.

“Man, I wish I were a kid again.”

*Frank Chang*



*Acrylic*

*Nelli Sandor*

## *Joie de Vivre*

The sun hangs so low over this town.  
I'm waiting for the crow to bring me a shroud,  
so I can go west and fly away from here.

Driving past Kroger and Walmart  
reminds me how far the highway exits are,  
and that I'm overstaying my welcome.

Writing somber paperback elegies  
and pleading that the night is the enemy,  
won't break what cannot bend.

Behind bedroom doors and blinds,  
the ceiling and rafters are splintering,  
but it's not like they would notice.

Roll me over and wrap me in cling-film,  
leave me on the pavement;  
let the birds carry me away,  
let the birds carry me away.

I hear them yelling at the TV,  
and I hear them clinking the ice in their glasses.  
I see them walking down the street,  
and into the tide of the masses.

Roll me over and wrap me in cling-film,  
lay me in my casket,  
and bury me six feet under,  
forever and a day.

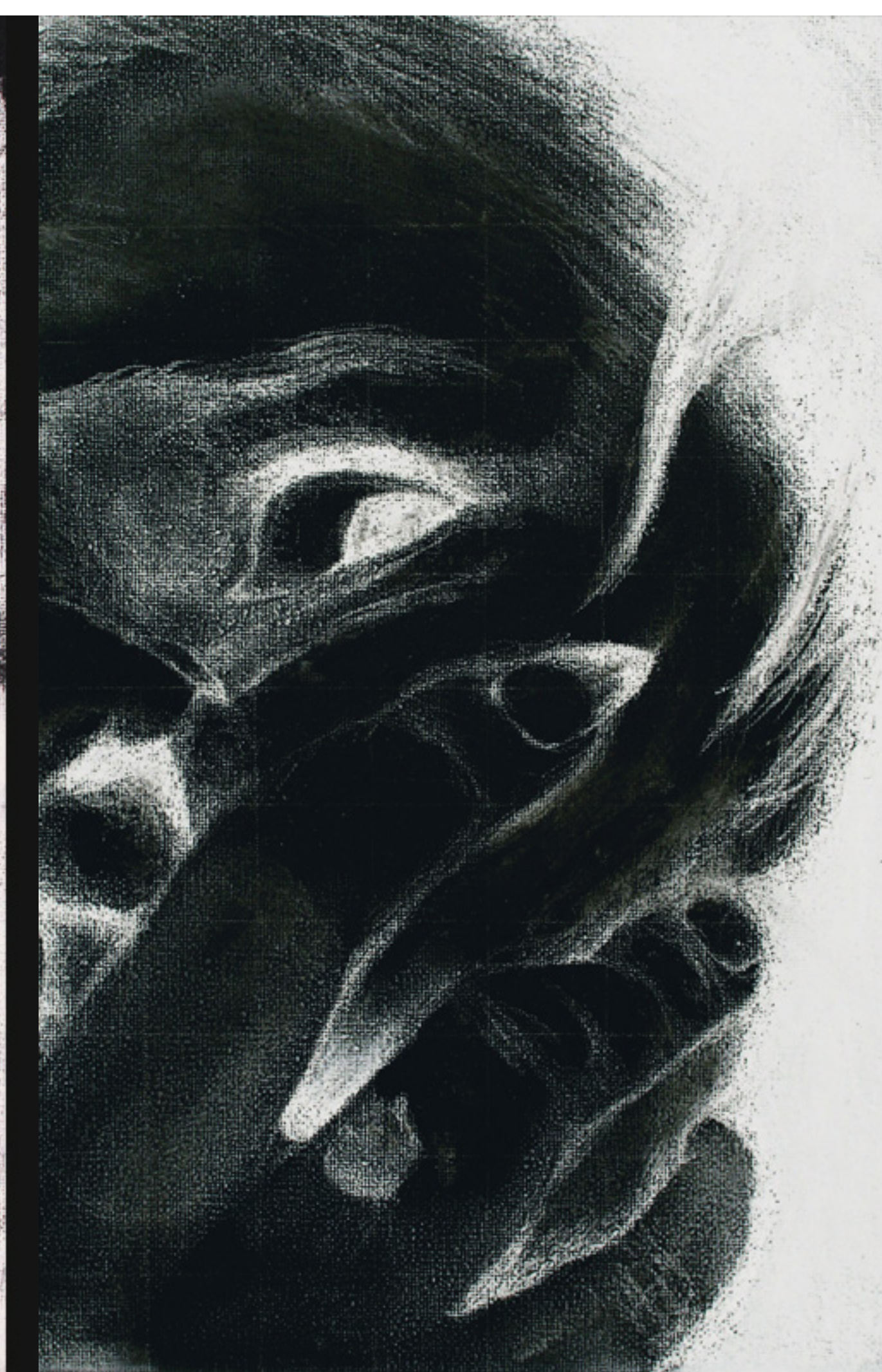
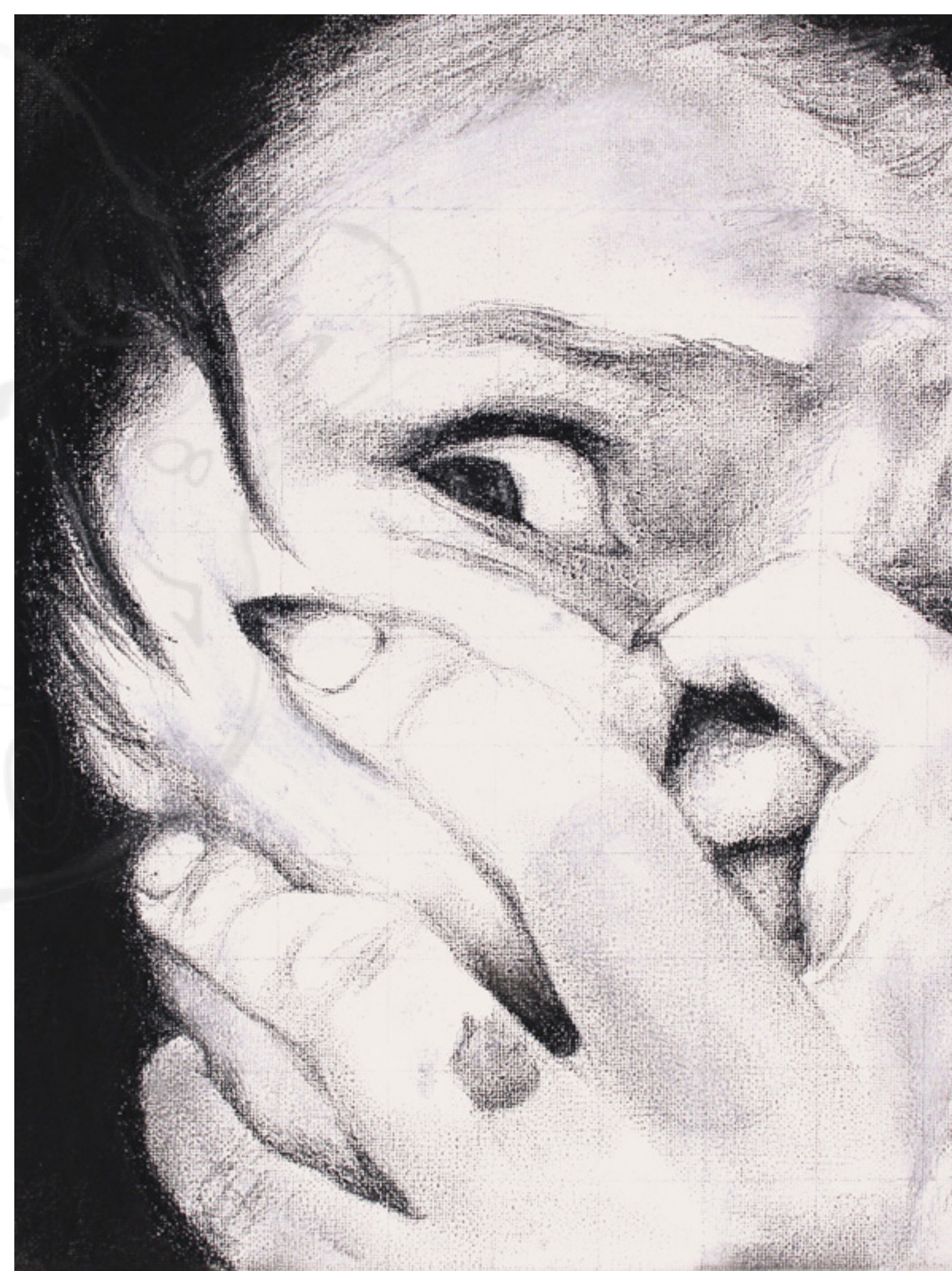
Filled with the dragging pangs of life,  
living half-dead through the restless blight,  
hoping for death to cauterize the wound.

The sun hangs so low over this town.

*Gabe Cadichon*







S  
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Light Switch

The incessant cycle of flipping a light switch.  
Up and then down.  
On and then off.  
Bright and then dark.  
Never enough times.  
Always too many.

A task that takes a second to complete,  
a singular switch of a light switch.  
It takes her three tries,  
or thirty-three,  
or three hundred and thirty-three,  
but never one.

She recalls a time when things were different.  
Once, years ago  
she wouldn't think twice when locking a door.  
She could walk around without worrying about  
the weight of each step she took.  
She didn't need to count her breaths.  
She aches for that time.  
Yearns for it.  
For a time when her now ceaseless endeavor  
did not exist,  
at all.

Nostalgic for the naivete of her young self.  
She wishes she could return to that time,  
and envelop herself in it.  
She can't,  
her struggle is perpetual.

Nobody notices her silent suffering.  
Nobody sees her in her room at night,  
unmoving,  
at war with something as minuscule  
as a light switch.  
To her, though,  
it's inescapable.

Up  
Down  
On  
Off  
Bright  
Dark

Ineluctable... Margaret Duda-Anderson

spending an eternal autumn  
behind lotus drapes

eternal solitude is beautifully cruel;  
thousands of nights spent with lotus pond's gruel-  
ing heat, suffocating everything,  
dreaming beneath leaves much stronger than me;

limitless lotuses: eternally lone[-]  
some[-]times, crying tears of molded dew  
underneath watered moons  
(but traditional poetry's brush does not move  
my "self": so "self"-ish, clownish); "love" is  
antonymed with indifference, whilst "hate" is  
"love", intensities brush, and

I drown further into this dream-like mirage,  
(such things we can only understand once gone),  
flowered reflections: a proverb of night  
reflecting beauty possessed not by my  
hand, my touch; this split-ended brush  
paints a picture of petals that kills itself, clutched  
in-hand is ideals of flowers and moons  
(proverbial phrases mean nothing to you),  
thus "it makes no sense"; "its meter is wrong",

four sighs between seasons;  
for death I have longed —

like a pear blossom doused in springtime rain;  
a lotus ignites eloquence, estranged  
love: a complexion crisscrossed by tears;  
its body of jade weighs limitless years;  
eternal solitude: horrifically cruel,  
thousands of nights under my mind's gruel-  
ing heat, suffocating[ every dream]:

the lotus has withered; my soul is now free.

Lynde Mogensen



Digital Art A Long Shower Sammie Fedorov



Typecast

Somewhere blocked from view,  
standing off to the side,  
watching from the bench,  
looking at all the people whose world revolves around themself.

But I’m not the sun in my solar system.  
I’m not even the moon,  
much less the protagonist.  
I don’t want to be the chosen one.  
I can’t handle it—  
the spotlight is too blinding.

I’m not the best friend or the villain either.  
I’m just another background character,  
giving snide commentary,  
and forgettable jokes;  
filler between story and plot.

Sometimes,  
if I ponder it long enough,  
I can gather enough courage to take a shot.  
I’ll swing my best,  
but I won’t score.  
A surprise to none;  
the winning point belongs to the star.

On the outside,  
always looking in.  
I can see the immense burden on the sun’s back.  
They’re struggling as it is  
behind their practiced, yet genuine, behavior,  
how could I bear the weight?

I know their pain and yet,  
my hand can’t reach out far enough to comfort them.  
My shoulders aren’t wide enough to cry on.  
My words aren’t inspiring enough to believe.

I’ll obediently play my part then,  
since I can do nothing more.  
I’ll cheer them on silently from the sidelines  
like I’ve always done.

Danna Li

The Little Girl’s Lamp

Everyday  
the sun bleeds  
into our earth.

As time moves,  
the Earth absorbs the light  
and gives it to everyone,  
people in towns,  
people in cities,

and if there is some to spare,  
and there always is,  
just enough is given  
to light an unlit lamp  
in a little girl’s room.

The sun is gone,  
the sky is dark  
and with more to be spared,  
the light is shared  
with the stars and the moon,

so that they can shine  
as the sun,  
the Earth  
and the little girl’s lamp do.

Bhoomi Prabhu



Staring

Here I sit, now crumpling  
as people stare in my direction.  
Their eyes, gray,  
dissect my brain decomposing,  
slowly and death drawing more nearly.

I would fold like a coat suddenly,  
relieved of its hanger,  
only if I could,  
for if I were to,  
more attention would be drawn  
and deep into a loop of  
depression would I fall.

So I must request a leave  
to the local washroom,  
for there I can cower like a dog  
and hide in the stall and cry my frustration  
into the air, loud as an engine  
or flying plane.

Yet, another problem arises from that plan,  
for what if someone were to intrude  
upon my dying screams?  
How much more would that kill me,  
the very thought does enough.

So what am I to do with everyone’s staring  
and gazing upon my mind,  
dissecting every movement with a blink  
from the magnified eye?

They seem to search,  
for what reason?  
That can be anyone’s guess,  
but of this I find gross detest.

From their staring I somewhat wish to lie here dead,  
the floor gently caressing my head.  
Hard wood would hurt, somewhat, I know.  
But if I would care, that I could not bother  
to explore.

But, conclusively I know,  
people are staring,  
And I wish to break down and  
sob,  
yet here I sit, crumpled and the like,  
bearing their eyes bombarding my skull.

Dominik Osiecki



Digital Photograph

Yuka Sakurai



## *My Favorite Onesie*

I pulled him close, embracing his warmth.  
He struggled for air.  
I caressed his cheek, lifting up his chin.  
The blood reeked of despair.  
I slid my hands under, feeling his heat.  
Limbs rusty with ruby.  
I slipped him on, smiling with delight.  
Now I could experience his beauty.

*Julia Beatty*

## *heartburn*

they say to feed a cold, but i fed mine  
and it only resembled a fever.  
then they said to starve that  
and s-t,  
my heart's inflamed.

it only got worse from there,  
f—ing  
influenza of the brain,  
or something,  
disease of the bones  
that made me ache for you every minute  
and something in the spine,  
that severed my brain from my jaw muscles—  
which means,  
when you spoke to me, i only nodded.  
if influenza of the brain makes you stupid,  
then that must explain it.

*Ellen Meng*

## *Questions Never Answered*

Tell me this, Uncle:  
on the day that your existence went supernova  
alongside the fireworks exploding across  
the pitch black New Year's Eve sky,  
what did you think about?  
As you sat in that leather armchair  
staring into the darkened shadows of your study,  
your fingers gripping the trigger of your shotgun  
with the frantic clinging of a newborn child holding onto its mother,  
what did you contemplate  
besides the pain you wanted so desperately  
to escape?

Who did you think of in your final moments?  
Did you think of me,  
the niece you barely knew,  
the niece who would see her mother's stricken face  
and hear her Papa's broken cries when he realized  
he was alone?  
Did you think of your wife,  
left alone in an empty house  
left to find you sitting stiff and cold and hopeless  
left with her sanity splintering at the edges  
and wondering:  
Could she have done something else?

If you had just held on a little longer,  
you could still be there,  
with her.  
But now,  
your armchair is smashed to pieces and  
discarded,  
the stains of your crimson despair  
still fresh on the wooden floorboards.  
And she stands in the empty study,  
feeling your ghost,  
and blaming herself.

*Bella Sawyer*



Why She Writes in Third Person: A List

- 1. It feels less personal
- 2. There is a darkness in herself that she would like to hide
- 3. She knows you don't want to read about a teenager's crises
- 4. But you are right now, right?
- 5. You're reading about a girl who won't write about herself, written by a girl who won't write about herself.
- 6. She is writing about herself, you know
- 7. But you won't know it's her problems as long as she doesn't write that one stupid fucking letter.
- 8. It's easy to hide behind other people
- 9. She can write about herself, but you won't know because she has a different name and a different word. She, not I.
- 10. Writing about herself means she has to know who she is
- 11. She doesn't knows who she is, but she knows who *she* is
- 12. I is scary. She feels like she's holding her soul out for everyone to see
- 13. It's cold.
- 14. What if they know?

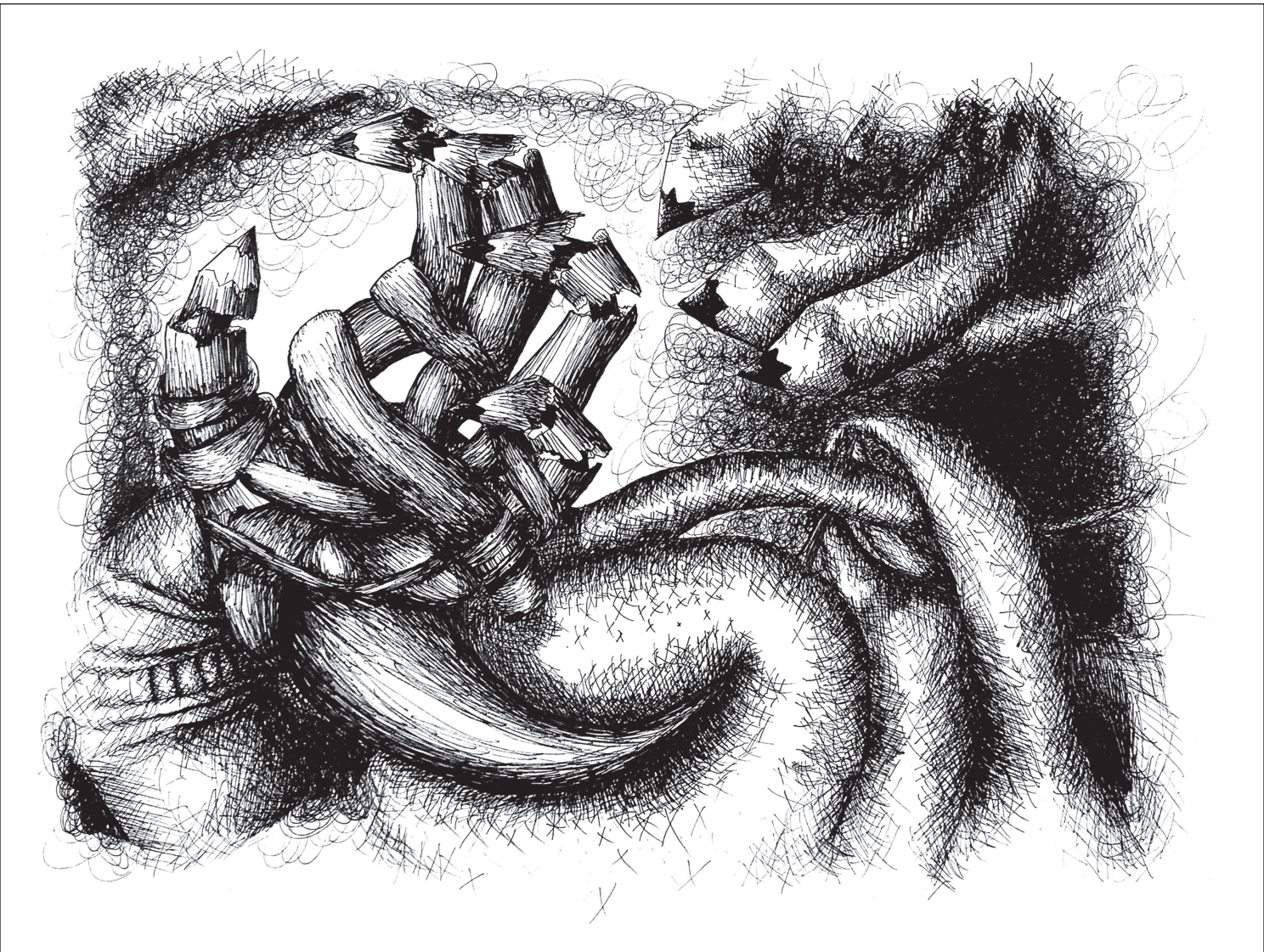
Gillian Rosen



Watercolor

Memories

Shalom Furlett



Ink

Pencil Personification

Qi Zhang



Digital Photograph

Foggy Night

Ava Potempa



Photograph Haven Insha Kittur



“Next in line!” the receptionist called in a bored tone.

“Ah yes, that would be me.” a woman with a small bag gestured, stepping forward. The receptionist glanced at the paper on her clip-board and waved her along passively.

“Insurance? Or is it state-provided?”

“State.”

The receptionist raised her eyebrows then scribbled it down on the paper. Wordlessly, the receptionist led the woman inside.

The candy-floss blue walls inside were lined with photos, some gray-scale and others in color. All she saw in them were women who seemed to be smiling, but their hands were hiding their mouths.

There was a strong scent of antiseptic, and as they walked further and further inside it only seemed to get stronger. Slowing to a stop, the receptionist opened another door and told the woman to sit down in the waiting area along with some other women.

The door was slammed shut with a bang, and the woman hesitantly sat down, placing her twitching hands on her lap. The conversation happening earlier clearly came to a halt after her arrival, so there was an awkward silence in the room.

After a few seconds, the woman sitting on a plush armchair beside her picked up the previous conversation, “As I was saying...it is a necessity.” This wealthy-looking woman had a thick coat, lined with white fur and had a head full of luscious blonde curls.

“I suppose you’re right, Miss Williams, there is no point in fretting over it...” the little lady next to the woman chuckled, adjusting the elaborate pin on her hair somewhat nervously.

“In fact, my husband is paying for mine from his own pocket! Isn’t it so delightful of him?”

“Oh, yes!” The other ladies in the room gushed, a few looking a bit disappointed that theirs hadn’t.

“Anyways, you there, what is your name? We’ve all been waiting here a while now getting to know each other,” the friendly Miss Williams questioned.

“Suzanne, Suzanne Addams. A pleasure to be acquainted with you miss,” the woman responded softly.

“A pleasure to meet you as well.” She grinned brightly, then continued: “Do tell us then what your infraction was?”

The rest of the ladies’ chatter quieted as Suzanne replied, perplexed, “Well I—I do not remember the specific nature of it...”

“Oh, of course! What an obvious thing to say! I meant the division of it. Mine is something called, er—*Insubordination*.”

“How do you know your division? I was never told mine,” she asked worriedly, fearing there had been a mistake of some sorts.

“Oh, check your purse then, perhaps,” the lady pointed out.

Suzanne reached into her bag, finding a small card inside of which she had no memory keeping there.

Suzanne flipped it over. The paper had a large “19” on it, along with the word *Revolutionist*.

“What does this mean?” she pondered, confused by its meaning.

“How odd...the rest of us don’t know the meaning of our words either, but it must be some term for the expert, no? *It is nothing for us to worry about*,” she muttered, brushing it off.

The rest of the women hummed in agreement, returning to their activities. A few flipped through cover-less magazines, the others engaging in another conversation about their personal lives with little detail.

Suzanne had an itching feeling in her; she was not convinced. Something was amiss, but there was a nagging voice at the back of her mind that kept bugging her.

“*Don’t bother Suzanne, just lie down already, take a breath, stop letting yourself worry...*”

Even as her muscles involuntarily relaxed, and her nerves were artificially soothed, Suzanne stayed willfully aware. Her sobriety was due to the unnerving inner voice that didn’t belong to her.

The voice had a deep and mellow tone, deceptively laced with comfort.

Suzanne kept her back straight, her ears open, and her feet tapping rhythmically against the glossed floor. There was a quiet conversation taking place towards the side of the room. Suzanne quietly listened in.

“I hear they stitch it first with some kind of thread made of metal,” a frizzy-haired woman whispered. “I wonder if I’ll gag. When they close the seams won’t my nose be the only way I can breathe?”

“It’s a necessary sacrifice. *It’s either this or the suffocation*,” the woman whispered in a more hushed tone.

At this moment the door slammed open, and the woman who was speaking hushedly was dragged outside. Even though everyone said a curt goodbye the look on her face was one of unforgettable fear.

Instantaneously, Suzanne made a chilling revelation. Each of the ladies’ bags shared one common thing. It was the same on all of them, and served the same purpose too.

A shiny, factory-produced, metallic zipper.

A tool created to keep things inside and release them when desired. A tool for controlled silence.

Suzanne’s hand hovered over her lips, fingers brushing over skin that would soon be zipped tightly closed.

Shreya Gupta



Digital Art

Let’s Love Lain!

Sahana Bala



## 4 of july

last summer i prayed and sacrificed self-  
hood to the blood god. in liminal space  
between afternoon daze and the coming

apocalypse i'd scale asymmetrical roofs  
rusted red with dying sunset, swarming  
humidity of july rain clawing skin

inside out. on the run: pulling sleeves  
over stitches, biting teeth into knives; how to  
swallow dregs of wet fireworks and still  
glow red as an aorta, as rushing car headlights—

falling, a cascade of violence: rose bushes scratching  
and oxidizing knife-cuts; exhalation; each release carving  
deep into a heaving cavern of lungs and night.

*Fiona Jin*

## week(end?)

[sunday] have faith, don't look back, choose one side and live the other, jump the trench in your dreams because when you wake up it's real. chew the ice cubes from bitter fright and sketch plans, circle red highlighted holes until green light goes right ahead.

[tuesday] head up tight, hold on to it fast! else it might rotate too far off, spilling guts over churned. Stitch the seams tightly so you won't fall over, breathe through holes poked brashly with the needle, push it out, away, never towards.

[saturday] stick two fingers down your throat, throw all of it up. stain the couch with overdue misdeeds, guilt seeping through fingers, and slipping down the curves of them like bubbly soap. why lie, saying it ends here, when really it's an extension of what made this trench so deep?

[end?] there is no end of a week that stretches eternity, fitting itself into cupcake box linings when time works you to bone and filth, nine till five, bleach your eyes till you can see, and remember, Monday's the start of the week!

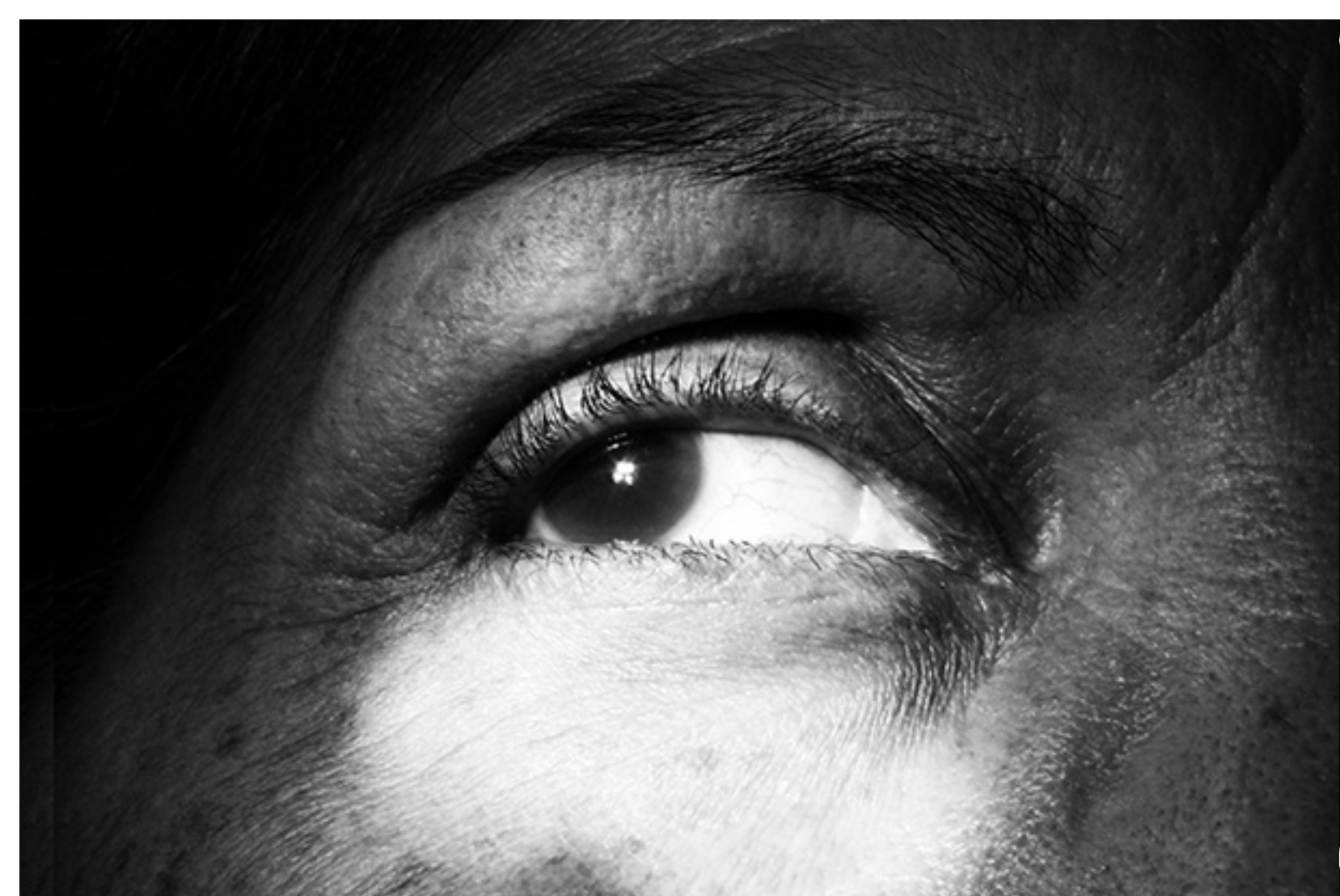
*Shreya Gupta*



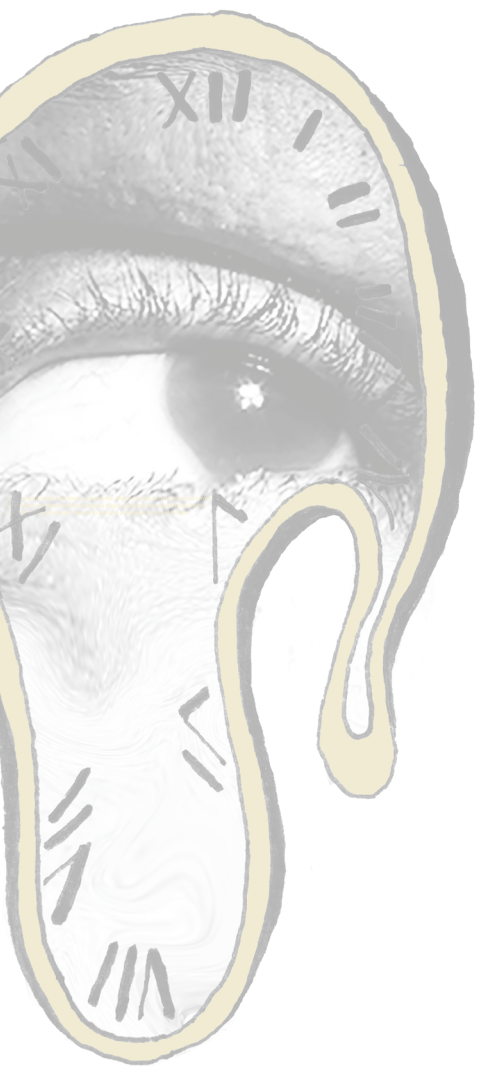
*Digital Art*

*Lada Volkov*









## heredity

i left my face by the riverbed one day,  
and never put it back on.  
i fear too deeply loss of control,  
fear I may reveal something ugly;

though everyone will, eventually.

overprotection of dignity,  
come from the same root as shunning of dependence—  
i will not embarrass myself. i will not be taken advantage of.

and,

creation of rules, solid rules,  
to avoid hypocrisy in my thoughts  
morals, like my own bible, if i'd written them down, but

no, i value them too highly to forget.

where all else  
is blurred, frosted windows in cold,  
pressed against the glass yet blind and oh,  
how the cold burns my nose!—  
where all else is blurred, this does stand strong.

i am anchored by my thoughts. i hold comfort in the idea that  
now, i am not as bad as my mother.

*Ellen Meng*

## The Basilisk's Eye

It is dark here.

Wherever it is.

No light penetrated the perpetual darkness around me.

What time is it? Day? Night? Does it matter? The last breath of light from when Nell had visited me was long gone.

Her words have no right to get in my head, much less the special place of trust within my heart.

Ally. Advisor. Friend. Traitor.

Her name should not taint any part of me.

Darkness.

Never-ending, mind-shattering darkness, which seemed to drag on unto infinity.

Then came the light. It shattered the suffocating darkness, pushing it to the recesses of the room. I hissed, closing my eyes, but it was still not enough. I attempted to shield my eyes, but they were still as manacled to the wall as my feet were to the floor.

Yellow light spilled into the room, illuminating shelves of glass jars filled with different liquids and other things I felt I have no need to see, lest they haunt my nightmares forever.

My head raised slowly, facing the light that only heralded doom.

Serna came in, her trademark black cloak billowing behind her. She leaned in, looking at my face. I glared at her eyes, though in their dark depths I only saw my own disheveled face reflected back: pale skin, white-blonde hair, navy blue eye patch, and my one remaining eye, under which was a shadow so dark it looked like a bruise.

I looked away, my eyes latching onto a much safer target: a girl, Nell, her face blank, though she still flinched when my eye landed on her.

I had a fleeting moment of satisfaction before the lioness in front of me spoke.

“Welcome to our base of operations. How is your stay so far?”

I gaped dumbfounded at her—the bloodthirsty murderer of hundreds, asking how my life in captivity in their secret base of torture has been? The irony was not lost on me.

“I’ve been better,” I rasped, my throat feeling like rough sandpaper.

Serna smiled. “I’m glad to hear you’re recovering,” she said, holding a bright light to my eye. I flinched away, and Serna’s smile grew even wider.

Abruptly, she stood up, looking at the jars on the shelves, picking them up then setting them down again after a long, careful examination.

“I wonder,” she said, her back facing me, leisurely perusing a line of jars all with something undoubtedly gross floating in them, “Where does your wind magic come from?”

I snorted, glaring at the back of her head. “You think I know? I was born Blessed, and, as far as I know, the Blessed are as ordinary as normal human beings, except with the special talent of using magic without a familiar or grimoire.”

Serna gathered a few jars under the crook of her elbow, bringing them over to a weathered wood table with suspicious stains on the surface. I stared at her, waiting for a reaction, a question, anything. But there was nothing. I watched as she poured out the contents of a jar onto the table, the thing inside still wiggling, and brought a gleaming silver dagger down onto it with the perfect calm of the murderer she was. I winced as what I assumed was purple blood splattered over the table. Serna swiftly gathered up the pieces of the once-wiggling thing, wrapping it all in a fine net, then paused, the net hovering over a cast-iron cauldron.

“What do you think of your friends?” Serna asked suddenly, inexplicably questioning me again.

I stiffened, thinking about what life was like before, when I was the decorated leader of Squadron Five, back when I had admirers and no friends, back when my own sister had treated me like an acquaintance or an ally rather than a true sibling deserving of love. It was back when there was nobody who truly understood me, truly understood who I wanted to be, because they thought I already became who I aspired to become. It had all changed when my friends came, offering me a chance to just be myself, as someone who they could get annoyed or even angry at, as someone who was as ordinary as them. They weren’t just my friends. They were my family.

My prolonged silence was answer enough. Serna already knew that I lived for my friends who were undoubtedly getting into deep trouble trying to locate me, and that I couldn’t imagine a life without them as much as I couldn’t imagine a life without air. My silence just confirmed it once and for all.

Serna turned around, smiling, her canine tooth, encased in gold, glinted maliciously at me. I felt my impending doom settling over me like a net that had entangled its prey. She squeezed the net still held in her hand, purple blood dripping into the cauldron. White sparks shot out. She quickly added a few more ingredients, then stirred with her silver staff.

The effect was immediate. White fog spilled out of the cauldron, filling the room. Soon, I couldn’t see two meters in front of me, the fog obscuring Serna from sight.

Something that was incredibly nerve-wracking.

“Your friends are looking everywhere for you. They are very close to retrieving you.” Serna’s voice emanated from the fog.

I whipped around to my right, where Serna had been talking just moments ago, my heart pounding in my chest. My friends were close? They were about to find me? If so, all I needed was the thing I don’t have: time.

“So what are you going to do with me? Kill me?” I asked, voice hoarse.

Serna emerged out of the fog, her face twisted with a smirk. In her hand was what looked like a ball of



condensed fog. A shiver ran down my spine looking at it, though I had no idea why I was suddenly scared of a ball of smoke.

“On the contrary,” she said, her face twisting into something that looked inhuman, “I’m giving you a present you’ll remember every day and every night.”

With that, she drew out her silver dagger and stabbed me in my good eye.

Through the pain, Serna’s voice seemed to echo back to me as if through a long tunnel, warped into undeniably smug garbled gibberish. As for what she said, at the moment I couldn’t care less.

The last thought I had before I passed out from pain was that I would never see the faces of those I loved again.

Darkness overcame me.

I woke up, and the first thing I saw was them. My friends. I saw the faces of Astra and Ember and Auris above me, and the first thing I thought of was that this was a hallucination. My grief at not being able to ever be able to see any of my family again had conjured their memory into physical form. After all, how can I see with depth perception, as if I had both eyes? Even more, how could I even see at all when both my eyes were blinded?

But then Astra suddenly flinched away, her hand twitching instinctively to her sword, while Ember’s eyes widened and her hands flew up to her mouth. Auris—Fregal, I still don’t know what to call a person who hid under a fake name—didn’t look me in the eyes but instead emanated a strong aura of resignation, as if he had expected whatever he saw.

The silence dragged on and on, and my initial confusion slowly shriveled into despair. “Wh-what?” I rasped, my throat hoarse from dread.

Astra and Ember looked at each other, then walked over to the other end of the healer’s ward together and brought out a mirror. They walked slowly back, lifting the mirror to my face.

I refused to look at the reflection in the mirror, panic winding up inside me, my breaths coming in short, painful gasps.

“We wondered why it was so easy to retrieve you, why the whole facility was empty,” Astra said, her face hidden in shadow.

My eyes looked into the mirror, traveling slowly up my chin towards my nose.

“We didn’t see any signs of poison or mortal injuries,” Ember said, her eyes not meeting mine. “Now we know why.”

I found my eyes in the mirror, the ones I was not supposed to have.

Others would have screamed. But I was never one to scream. Instead, I gazed at the eyes that were most certainly not my own, what I realized now was what Serna had done to me, paralyzed in sheer horror.

In the place of my left eye, there was an eye with pale green whites and a sickly yellow iris, a black pupil slitting the top of the iris from the bottom, like a cat’s or a snake’s slit pupil.

But it was nothing compared with what was there in place of my other eye. I realized that the misty ball in Serna’s hand had not been some sort of magic orb, but instead was the instrument of my despair. My right eye looked like a thick white mist, except over the top was another slit pupil, this one pitch black, looking as if it had burned the impression into the mist.

I closed my horrible eyes with the childish wish that this was all a dream, that when I opened them they would be perfectly normal.

Auris’s voice broke the silence, and I raised my head, carefully not looking at him.

“Basilisk’s eye,” he said, pointing at my left. “A basilisk is, as you already know, an extremely dangerous serpent, which is luckily extremely rare. They have deadly venom, can slither as fast as a horse in full gallop, but what makes them so deadly is their ability to paralyze with fear anything that looks into their eyes.”

Auris turned before anyone had any time to react, pointing at my right eye.

“Wraith’s eye. I read about it, though I’ve never seen it. It’s made alchemically, involving a lot of poison and some other gruesome stuff I wouldn’t get into. Nobody was actually stupid enough to make it after Arun the Destroyer invented it three centuries ago. The two overarching theories of what it does is that, (1), anyone who looks upon it for an unspecified amount of time will die painfully and gruesomely, or (2), anyone

who suffers the glare of this eye will, after enough time, slowly transform into a monster that kills masses of humans. Given the nature of the Arun, the second option is just as likely as the first, however creative and far-fetched it seems.”

My voice quivered as I spoke.

“I was happier not knowing, Auris.”

Then I buried my face in my hands, crying tears that didn’t come. Whatever Serna had done, she had also messed up my tear ducts. She probably did it as a cruel joke, depriving me of the one way many express despair and grief.

Anyone who looked in my left eye would feel instant, helpless fear. Anyone who looked in my right eye would have a gruesome fate awaiting them.

I suddenly deciphered what Serna had said to me after she stabbed me in the eye. Why she had sounded so smug about keeping me alive when I had caused her so many setbacks.

The words hit me, each a punch to the gut.

“How will anyone love you now?”

I did not fear death itself, Serna knew. I feared what death would herald: never seeing my friends again most of all. Serna had found a way to make me suffer for the rest of my life. Anyone who is feared is not loved, not truly. The Basilisk’s eye makes sure that even my longest and most trusted friends would soon turn their love to fear, leaving me in the dark where I started, desperately grasping for the light always just out of reach.

Everyone stayed by my bedside the first night, sleeping in their chairs. The second night, only Astra and Ember remained. The third night, I finally fell asleep. When I woke, only Astra was by my side.

My heart hurt. Astra was a near stranger compared to my sister, a mysterious person who seemed to have no connections at all, but had managed to befriend Ember when she was camping out in the wilderness. Yet she stayed by my side even when Ember, my own sister, had gone.

“Why?” I asked, my throat more parched than I thought possible.

Astra stared at me, needing no elaboration. “Because I always thought eyes that did magical things were normal,” she said very solemnly.

I barked out a laugh.

“Because... I have seen a lot,” Astra finally said, trying to rephrase her reply. “I have come to expect weird, odd, or even creepy happenings. Your eyes may seem a curse, but they do not influence you, unless you let them. A person has to look straight into a basilisk’s eye in order to get paralyzed, so as long as you don’t, you’ll be fine.” Astra seemed to look straight at me. My breath hitched when fear did not cross her face.

“Where’re you staring?” I asked.

Astra quirked a smile. “I’m not supposed to tell you this, but Ember’s planning a surprise ‘cheer up’ party for you. And she was thinking about doing some makeup to make you look normal. But she kinda splattered some sparkly blue dust on your forehead last night and didn’t have the chance to clean it up. Now it looks like you’ve lost a fight with a very blunt staff.”

I snorted. Ember has always been horrible with makeup.

“Be sure not to tell Ember I divulged the secret, by the way. I’m not sure if she was joking about setting her fire salamander loose on me.” Astra said, standing up and heading for the door.

“See you at the party!” she winked.

My heart warmed. Ember and Auris had not abandoned me. They were simply trying to cheer me up. It warmed my heart.

While I was still undoubtedly cursed, my friends had shown kindness I thought they would by now be incapable of giving. I decided to take Astra’s advice. A curse was only as bad as you made a curse out to be.

With hands shaky from disuse, I covered up the Wraith’s eye, looking at my reflection. I smiled at the blue splotch on my forehead, then stared straight at the Basilisk’s eye in my left eye socket.

I will not let it control me.

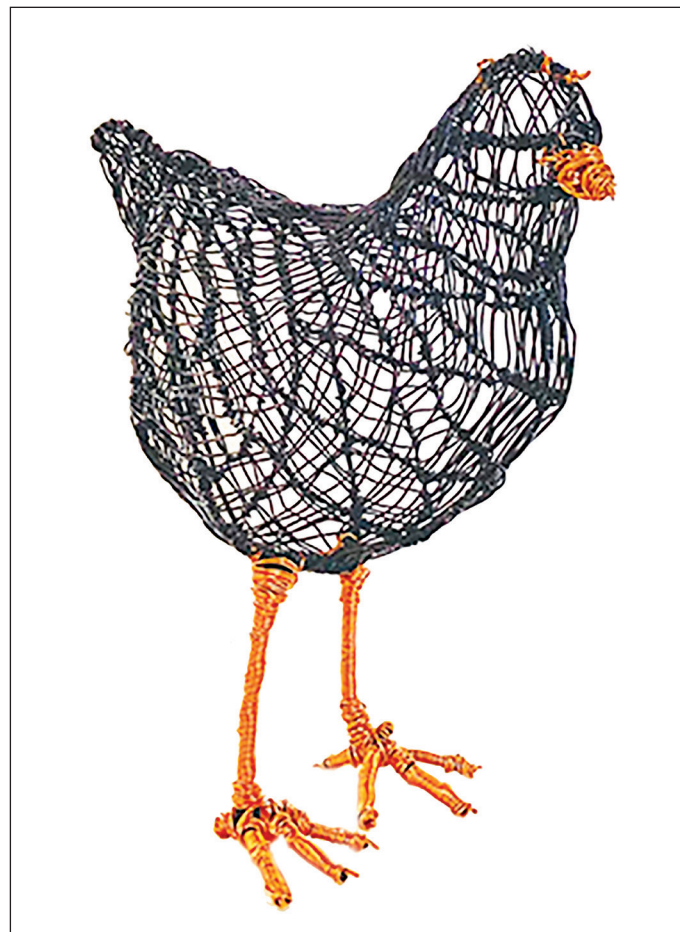
*Grace Jin*





Acrylic

Sophie Liu



Wire

August Porento



Wire

Seahorse

Insha Kittur



Metal

Sun and Moon

Nelli Sandor



## Take a Right Turn

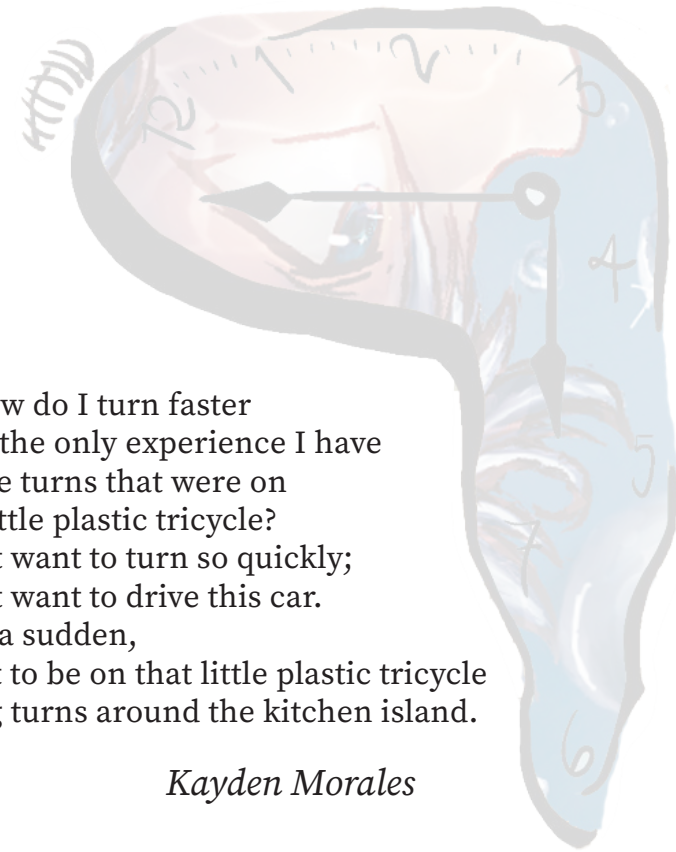
As I'm learning how to drive,  
I roll into the right turning lane  
if take my turn  
slowly.

They tell you that  
you should never take your turns  
too fast or too slow,  
but when you're learning,  
how do you know what the perfect speed is?  
How do you get the turn just right?

The person behind me honks,  
telling me to turn faster,  
but I'm afraid.  
I'm nervous.  
I think about when I was a little girl,  
riding my brother's tricycle  
around the kitchen.  
The only turns I had to worry about then  
were the turns around the kitchen island  
when my mother was cooking dinner  
so I didn't run over her feet.

So, how do I turn faster  
when the only experience I have  
are the turns that were on  
that little plastic tricycle?  
I don't want to turn so quickly;  
I don't want to drive this car.  
All of a sudden,  
I want to be on that little plastic tricycle  
taking turns around the kitchen island.

*Kayden Morales*



*Digital Art*

*Ovee Muley*



*Colored Pencil*

*Ocean Pollution*

*Helena Burigo*



## The City of Clouds

Welcome to the City of Clouds  
Take a look around  
Why don't you stay here for a while  
It's safe here

For an individual of her standing this was quite the unusual occurrence. Although she had been to many lands and nations alike, this world was far different. *Swirling clouds beckon to come near.* Usually she would be able to handle the slight air of something darker, more sinister, but doubt already started to plague her mind. Her feet refused to land, wings straining to keep her hovering above the port. *Flashes of blue sky, revealed and hidden as the clouds move.*

She landed eventually and stared up at the world before her; The City of Clouds, vast expanse of fluffy white clouds that covered entire buildings from the outside view. If she hadn't been heading there for her destination, she would have passed by without so much as a second glance.

The traveler was now walking down the side of the port, watching as ships landed and departed, their wing-like sails slowly flapping as they made their way across the blue sky. She pulled her cloak tighter around her; the City was quite chilly as is, and the ocean below and slight breeze were no help.

Slowly, she made her way from the raised platform and stepped down onto the pavement. One foot in front of the other, she walked through the boarding ships and passengers. A group of young children sprinted past her, nearly knocking her off balance. She smiled as she watched them. *Isn't it fun. The city?*

Her head snapped up, she looked around, eyes narrowing as she failed to identify the speaker. She shook her head to clear the weird feeling and turned towards the streets to the heart of the city.

She let herself get lost in the lively atmosphere of the world around her. Street after street her thoughts drifted to the lives of the many peoples occupying the city in the sky. A young family enjoying the chilly weather. A couple strolling slowly down the street. She watched a shopkeeper close for the day, though it was considerably early.

Not a worry to trouble you  
Nor a shadow to follow

*Well? Do you like it?* The traveler whipped around, her wings brushed the pavement as she steadied them. *The people here, the city-the city is dangerous, you felt it- the city here is perfect.* Resting her head on her palm, the traveler shook her head once more. She no longer knew where she was headed; left and right turns lost to time.

Further down the street she stopped again, staring at the cover of clouds overhead. They seem slightly darker than before, she mused. Laughter broke her thoughts and brought her back to the street, but when she looked down to see who had caused it, no one caught her eye. The traveler squinted and looked again, but this time she saw the group of young friends, messing around while walking the other direction.

*Look again, you won't see them.* The children were gone, replaced by swirling fog. *See, I told you, the city is an illusion, she—Do you hear something? No, I don't either.* The traveler froze, waiting for the voice to speak. *Do you enjoy it? Isn't it pretty.*

She whipped around, gasping as the clouds shifted; one fell onto the pavement, dissipating into thousands of droplets of mist. She turned her head, wanting to yell, to warn the people of the city. *Don't look for them.* The voice was frantic. *Swirling mist envelopes, chokes-protects you.*

Mist became heavy fog; the darkening clouds suffocating as they weighed down on the city. *A semblance of freedom as a swirl of fog revealed the striking blue of sky above.* White fluffy clouds became grey, sagging down towards the street.

*LEAVE NOW. Stay.* Suddenly the air was alive with energy, filling the entire city with an ominous

notion of threat. A second later and static electricity built up, overflowing the streets; now completely empty, as the traveler noted. The ground shook as a roll of thunder resounded in the distance, small trails of lightning shot through the clouds.

A moment longer and the deep gray storm clouds shuddered. One, two, three drops and drizzle turned to downpour, flooding the streets in an instant. The traveler spread her wings and launched into the sky.

And when the clouds grow heavy  
And weigh down upon the world,  
Don't scream as they give way  
And fall to depth's demise

Razor-sharp wind whipped at her face and feathers, sending her off course over and over as she tried to right herself, lungs screaming for the evading oxygen. Rain pelted down, sharp knives stabbing into her wings, soaking them and dragging her down. Every wing-beat grew slower and slower, harder and harder until she fell through the storm. Her vision was engulfed by dark storm clouds, lightning flashing too close for comfort and deafening her for a moment before she could dodge the after-shock.

The traveler closed her eyes, focusing inward on the energy buried within her. She willed it forward, letting it overtake every sense as she felt it thrumming in her veins. The magic rose like ocean waves, growing stronger and stronger.

She opened her eyes, vision blurring while her eyes adjusted to her surroundings; she was above the ocean now, the storm above snarling and reaching like a ferocious beast, claws of lightning ripping at the sky.

She called the energy, pulling it to her fingertips. A split second later and it was shooting it into the clouds; a blinding flash of silver light exploding far above.

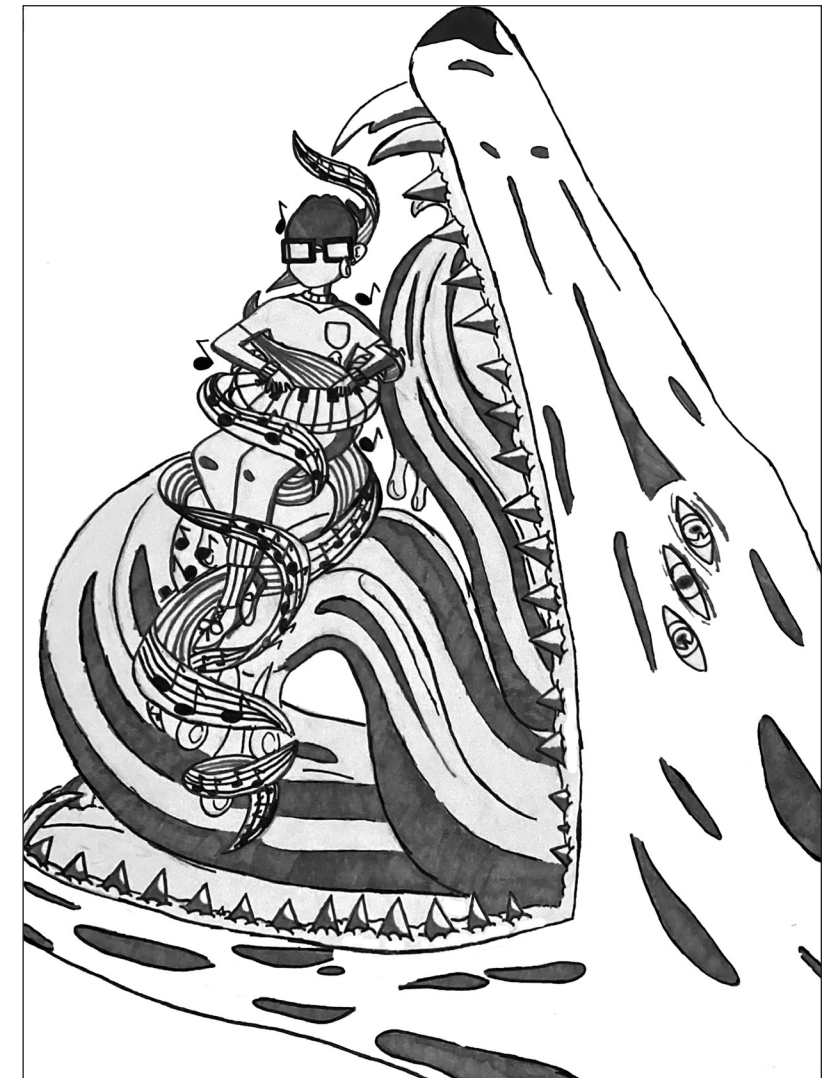
A surprised roar resounded above as the traveler's familiar was summoned. The dragon dove down, straight for the falling figure until she could grab onto one of his horns. A sharp snap of wings and the dragon halted their fall, catching himself on the wind, claws brushing against the rough ocean waves as he soared away from the falling city.

Away from the City of Clouds.

After all,  
This is the City of Clouds  
Stay for a while  
It's safe here.

The traveler righted herself, steadying her breath, and thanking the creature; who only huffed in response, shaking his head in disapproval. Behind them, fluffy white clouds had already started to form, the tips of buildings just peeking out from their cover.

Aleah Alberth



Mixed Media      The Wolf      Susan Garcia



## Garden

My dandelions  
grow taller,  
though neighbor says  
they're just weeds,  
but I can't imagine  
where they're getting  
their seeds to grow  
vibrant tulips and roses,  
dainty forget-me-nots;  
A beautiful dichotomy  
between venus flytraps  
and California redwoods.

So just the other day  
I ventured in  
to their garden  
and held a flower  
in my hands,  
hoping for a seed  
to follow me back,  
but only a papery petal  
fell to the floor.  
I slid my hands  
down the stem  
and all I felt  
was the plasticity sheen.

I looked above me  
and all I saw  
was that cardboard redwood  
with a speaker sat behind,  
mimicking estimated voices  
of exotic songbirds,  
belonging far away.

So maybe I don't need  
palm trees and cherry blossoms,  
bonsai and koi ponds,  
coconuts and lies.

So maybe it's okay  
that all I have  
is dandelions and blackberries,  
white clovers and poison ivy,  
wild corn and farmed soy,  
broken peach trees,  
and hickory

because I can taste  
their juices on  
my tongue,  
feel  
that itch on  
my skin,  
I'm sure neighbor  
can feel it too  
somewhere,  
in some dark corner  
inside, hidden  
and maybe,  
they will feel okay  
enough to show  
their ugly plants,  
their weeds,  
and their native grasses.

*Jay Ballard*



*Photograph*

*Lydia Monastiriakos*



*Photograph*

*Autumn's Arousing*

*Tessa Brower*



*at the top of the world*

even now/ yes, your tear stains on my pillow cases/ and me stumbling through the mall holding your hand but/ i swore i could see your house from the top of the ferris wheel/ or at least, i'm envisioning it/ it's the whole world from up here/ so at least there's that./

but something a bit sadder/ the way my stomach lurched/ and each time i saw your eyes/ i got a little bit sicker even when i was/ across the entire park/ eating funnel cake that i'm sure we talked about once/ (first times, or something)./

so/ here/ i don't know where i'm headed./

i might end up on your doorstep/ don't be alarmed/ today i/ went on a walk for the first time in years/ passed the pond where/ in another world we kissed/ in this i/ gauged my heart out and washed it in the water/ dragged it through the reeds/ and then returned/ i returned/ once again/ and it was whatever we once said was warm./

*Amanda Shaw*



*Mixed Media*

*Identity*

*Qi Zhang*



*Photograph*

*Kermit*

*Nathan Fierer*



*Digital Photograph*

*The 3 Realms of Exploration*

*Shaila Pochiraju*



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The Half Wit

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