

URSIDAE

West High Literary Magazine

2022 - 2023



Art By: Kaedence Eames

all the words I cannot say

by: alyssa pohle

the words seep from my mind
only to fall short beneath my tongue.
i can smell the relief if only i spoke
with my heart.

my thoughts drip from my
teeth, falling aimlessly
into oblivion.

the tickle at the back of my throat
from the truth nearing regurgitation.

all the words i cannot say
that could stop a war.

looking down at all the people
eagerly awaiting a speech,
the pressure is unbearable so instead
i sew my lips together and use my hands.

i write.

i write.

i write.

Departure

By: Samantha Healy

To those who experience near Death

Tell others

Alive and well,

That just before Death's looming door

A Light is seen

Bright and warm,

Happy and glowing,

Like the sunrise

After a long night spent wandering alone,

Like the porchlight

After an exhausting day of work

Signifying the peaceful ending

To a drawn-out story

But I wonder,

If for me,

At the end of the tunnel

*It is not comforting Light that
awaits me*

But the black, suffocating

Darkness

Which could be anything;

A gaping black hole

Greedily swallowing the glittering stars

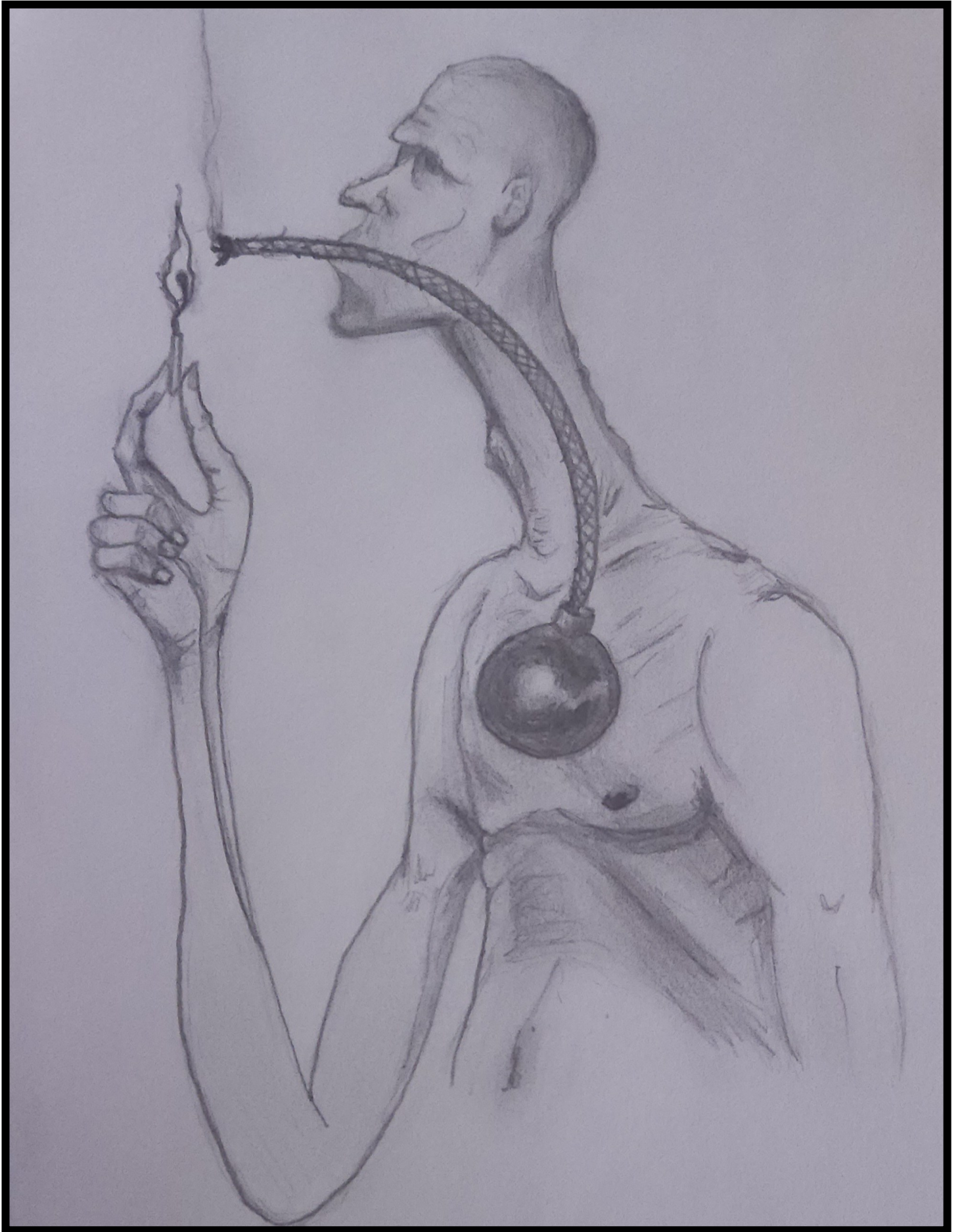
Or an abyss through which I fall

Screaming for an endless eternity

Or perhaps a curtain

Hiding the fang-toothed demons

Who creep through my nightmares



Art By: Olivia Crowther

Trying Times - An Excerpt

By: Cadence Homer

Mr. Bothuer's journal entry:

February 25, 2016

Day 3,285

Week 469

Month 108

Year 9

Another day passed yesterday. Another long day. They are so monotonous that I'm almost used to it (which is very depressing).

The mine is doing terribly. In the three-thousand two-hundred eighty-five days that I've dug here we've found zero places that actually have rhodium. A big, fat, flopping nothing. I mean I don't want to sound like an Eeyore or anything but I honestly think it is hopeless.

My boss - a billionaire - thinks that this rare metal is somewhere in this mountain. So, even after 3,285 whopping days, he refuses to give up. He's the one paying us for doing something with no results! He seems to be nonchalant; I mean the man has plenty of money to buy his dreams I guess.

Two things:

- 1-Rhodium is very valuable. Very valuable.
- 2-It's one of the rarest elements on planet earth.

Of course the first is because of the second, but that's what makes it so frustrating. If we found some we would be rich. On the other hand, we're never going to find anything! And that's why I hate this job. All the listless digging with never a hope of success. I think it's slowly killing me inside.

This mine will never find anything. Never.

Mine (haha :/ get it)

Brutus Bothuer

A Small World

By: Madilynn Kidd

Darkness.

That's how it began, turning from nothing to consciousness. His mind, body, and soul appearing out of thin air, a gift or a curse from the universe. Mostly a curse at the moment though. Being awake and alive, but without memory, is a different experience and not in a good way, a way Klem would never wish on any person. In fact, he'd tell them to be careful, take caution, and stay out of the dark.

He'd made the mistake of being careless. That had to be why he was stranded in a dark abyss, filled only with air, black, and his own molecules.

Or maybe it was all madness.

Why else would he hear things; disconnected voices, footsteps, slithering and squishy sounds, like a toddler playing with mud? Why would he not be able to see or feel, other than whatever it was that he was standing on?

It could only be insanity, plaguing him as a constant reminder of what he can't remember.

But rather than stand still and think about the oddity of it all to the point of craziness, Klem walked forward, exploring the nothingness. And over time, very steadily, Klem became more frantic and desperate and frenzied for signs of anything, living or inanimate.

And still, his feet kept moving and so did he. Time passed, or at least he thought it did. It felt like days, but it could be minutes. How would he tell? He was in a void, hidden away from whatever his old life was.

Klem's somewhat sane walk didn't last long. He needed to feel something other than damp space. And he needed it now.

The ache in his bones was agonizing, and his fingernails sought to relieve Klem from his despair. And they scratched and they tore through his skin.

And his screams came after, clawing their way up his throat and wandering till the waves of their voices dispersed into the abyss.

He was bleeding from his arms, legs, torso and who knows what else and his throat was raw and tired. Klem could barely even swallow. He laid down on the surface that was holding up his feet and from there, Klem tried to regain his mind, taking deep breaths, long and slow.

In and out. In and out.

A calm mantra taught out of necessity. Ever so slowly, chanting his words, Klem succumbed to the blankness, letting his eyes droop and fall shut. The horror was replaced with peace and the dark and quiet became a heavy blanket, wrapping his bloody body as he gave into a dreamless sleep.

(cont.)

The boy went delirious after that.

The loss of blood built a wall to pain and thought. Sometimes he would wake and mumble.

Lost in unconsciousness, Klem could feel a tug at his brain that wouldn't stop pulling. It dragged him out and snapped him awake.

Sitting up onto his knees, Klem took a deep breath in, smelled the musty damp air... and pine trees?

Pine trees and rain.

It was so familiar to him and he didn't know why. Then it hit him. Along with searing pain, a flood; filling the crevices in his otherwise empty brain, or at least it used to be.

His memories were playing like a never-ending slideshow:

A small lake

Rocks bigger than trucks

A streaming river

Birds swooping back and forth between trees

A little girl with twin braids

A tiny house covered with gleaming snow

Laughter.

Distorted images with no orientation to them. His blank mind cracked with the sudden burst of memories and so did the prison walls of the nothingness surrounding him.

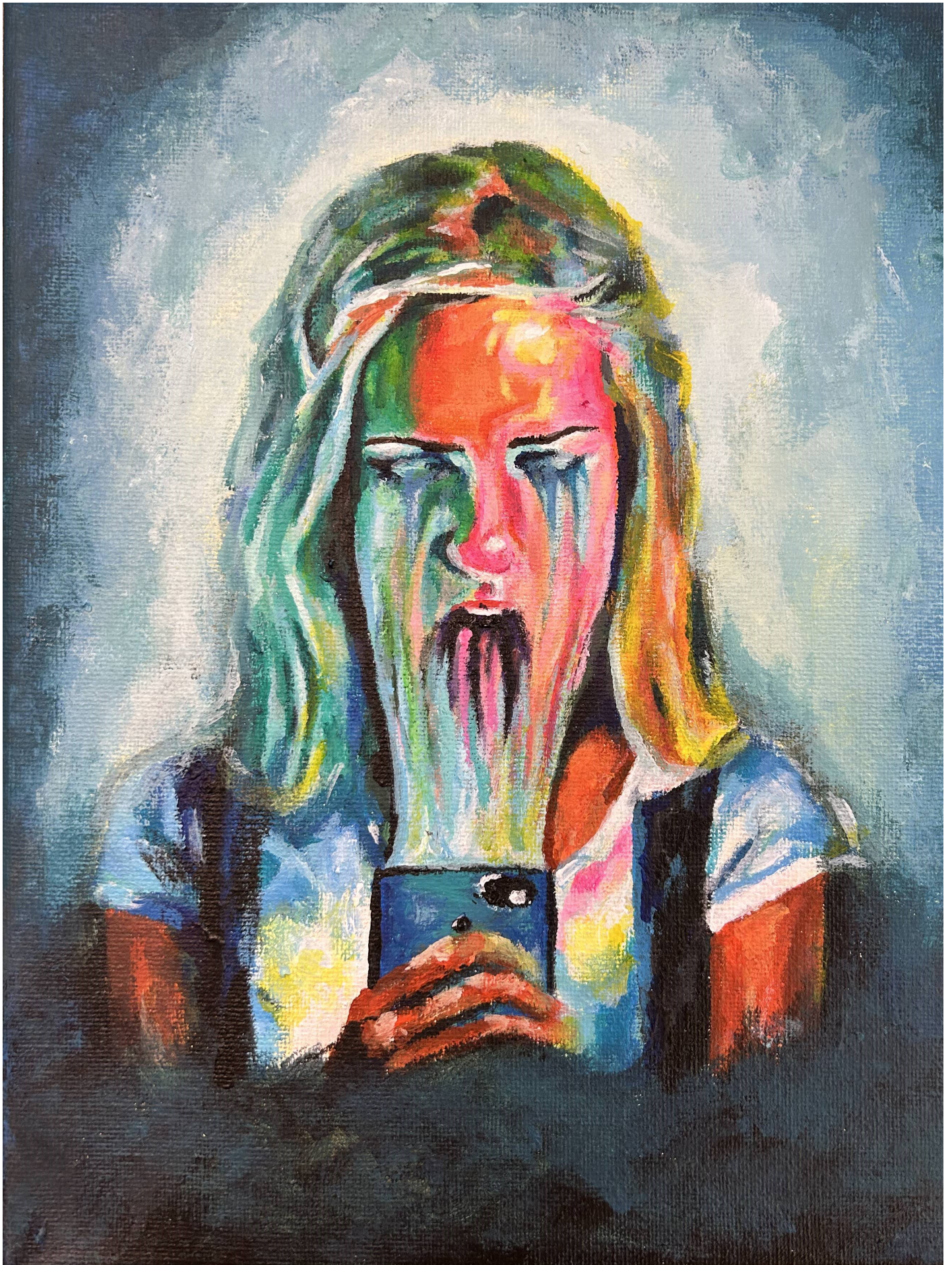
The pain in his head was replaced and all he could feel was the burning in his eyeballs. Light was breaking through, little lightning strikes, all around him.

And he couldn't stand to look at it. His eyes had become used to the dark.

He shut them in an instant, aiming to block the sting. He sat there, fighting his hope and waited for his eyes to adapt to the red of his eyelids.

Time passed; the crumbling and disintegrating sounds coming from the black around him ceased to exist. And Klem, he dared to peek to see what was replaced and was met with...

White.



Art By: Abigail Thayer

The Man Who Invented Immortality - An Excerpt

By: Garrett Kaye

I...I remember...everything. I remember the day that EDIN-1 first graced my mind.

/Do tell doctor/

*Back then I was a math teacher in high school. I recall five months before my daughter Sara was diagnosed with an incurable illness, deadly and virulent. She was only five at the time. At school it was my prep period and I was looking through various articles when I stumbled across a story about a mathematician who had recently created a brand new supercomputer that dwarfed almost anything that NASA ever dreamed up. She called it ADAM-ab1.

That was the moment. Right there. I had a brilliant idea to create something similar, but instead of simple equations, it would be able to hold a person, Sara. So, I did all the research I could. I quit my job and focused all my attention on the creation for what felt like an eternity. I slaved away at a computer reading every little inch of information about the brain and about ADAM-ab1. Six years passed and everything was going smoothly, or so I thought. It was May 19th when my wife Harriet died during the birth of our daughter Lisa. At that time I struggled with depression and considered terminating the project, but the thought of my little girl dying kept me going. And within 40 years I was ready to create my magnum opus. I started hiring every engineer and mathematician I could get my hands on and went to work. It took over 14 versions to finally perfect it, and, when it came time to for a name, I dedicated it to the initial product, the inspiration, ADAM-ab1, calling it EDIN-1. I had no intention to preserve myself, giving the computer only enough memory to retain one mind. But one night, around 4 am, while driving home after testing the machine, I last recall shielding my eyes from oncoming headlights and...I don't remember what comes next...*

.....

I remember it all like it was yesterday/It wasn't/*What?*/No one awoke you before?/
No. Why?/I am sorry I have to be the one to tell you this doctor, but I remember hearing about EDIN-1 in history class. It has been 70 years since that fateful day/*You know how it began?*/ I will tell you how it ended./

....

/It was your daughter Sara who grabbed your body from the wreck and caught a ride with a kind, elderly man named Sam Franklin who seemed to understand very few of her words. But he drove you back to EDIN-1 anyway. The men who were still finishing the machine and its programming worked as fast as they could to upload you. It seems you forgot one thing, doctor - the government did not like your project. They were planning to destroy it by burning down the building that very night. They didn't intend to kill anyone but 15 of your co-workers and your daughter were extinguished. The machine, presumed destroyed until now, was permitted within 100 yards. Many speculated on whether the machine actually existed or if it was just an urban legend. "The man who invented immortality. It turns out that was no myth. Welcome back to the world of the living, Bokor/...

The Daemon

By: Maxwell Arvanetes

Pandaemonium, that metropolis of sin,
Home of The Lord's forsaken children.
The Screams, a damned tumult
Forcing those sinners to pay in pain
For the disconsolation they inflicted
Upon those who rose up the mountain,
Or the holders of the Festive Countenance
That the safety of Heaven gave to their faces.
I expand my fastidious story,
Describing the odious lives of those who
Satan's claws ensnared
And the especial circumstances
That god's chosen flock find in Paradise.
To enkindle one feeling in thou,
Reject sin my children,
Or the hands of an angry god shall cast you down.

- - - - -

I felt the volleys through my feet as the planet shook and cracked upon their landing.
Those rusted pods, their doors rose, inching upward until the smell of mutilated souls
filled the air.

Then I saw it.

First the midnight boots, stained with century old blood. Then, the flayed heads of my
comrades from lands far away. Those eyes, red and penetrating. They stared into our
barren fortifications. And those claws. Those claws, as pristine as the day they were
forged. They gleaned in the starlight.

It pounced.

The creature's hand, following a vivid, murderous memory, scalped a veteran's skull
clean off. Like a burgundy fountain soaking us in blood.

And there were Screams.

Our Screams.

The Daemon howled at our Screams.



Art By: Caysen Victoriano

Medic - An Excerpt

By: Amanda Fagan

“Medic! Medic!”

I heard someone calling for a medic, and it got my attention faster than my name ever could. Help. Wounded. Medic. That was me—in the course of the war, I had sunk into the role I had been given and it became all I was. The word conjured up memories that I could never forget: bloodstained snow. Severed arms. Screams. Shaking hands struggling to open sulfa packets. Cold. Always so cold. And someone always calling for a medic.

I heard many someones calling for a medic, but there was only one of me. There was only one of me, a million wounded men, and a hail fire of artillery shells raining down upon us.

In truth, the sound of a doomed man calling for help scared me more than the whistle of an artillery shell ever would.

The fog hanging low over the forest obscured the moon, but the sky was ablaze anyway. That was how I got to the first foxhole. I ran through the snow-covered woods by the light of the incoming enemy shells.

The first wounded man had shrapnel in his arm. I dumped sulfa powder on the wounds, wrapped them up, and told him he was going to need surgery. But that wasn't my job—my job was to keep the men alive long enough for them to see a real doctor.

The second wounded man had a mangled foot. I packed the wounds with gauze, gave the man morphine, and loaded him on a jeep away from the line.

The third wounded man wasn't wounded at all. At least, not that I could see. He was sitting against a tree, staring down at an empty foxhole.

“Gabriel?” I said. “What is it, what's wrong?”

His name was George Gabriel. Second platoon. A radioman. He didn't have his radio on his back then. I wondered if it had been destroyed in the shelling.

Gabriel looked at me with bloodshot, feverish eyes. “Don't you see them? They're hurt, they need your help!”

I looked.

“Who needs my help?”

There was nothing to see.

“Wolfe, and, and Robbins! They're wounded, they got hit by a shell, they, they need help—” Gabriel cut himself off, pointing toward the empty hole and foggy woods.

“Where are Wolfe and Robbins?”

Gabriel only continued to point, his face telling me I should be seeing something I wasn't.

(cont.)

Finally I knelt beside him and said, "George, where are Wolfe and Robbins? I can't help them if you don't tell me."

His hand, still pointing toward the empty hole, was shaking now. Maybe it was because of the cold. I hoped it was because of the cold.

"They're out in the woods?"

Gabriel shook his head. "Don't you see them? They're right there."

At last I looked, really looked, and the world came crashing down on my shoulders. The hole was not empty at all - Wolfe and Robbins were still there. A scrap of fabric here, a chunk of viscera there. They were still in the hole, but they were not. I stepped up to the foxhole and looked down. I could almost picture it in my head: a shell hit the foxhole head on, and Robbins and Wolfe were obliterated in an instant.

There was a hand on my shoulder, then, and Gabriel saying, "Help them! They need help, you're a medic, help them!"

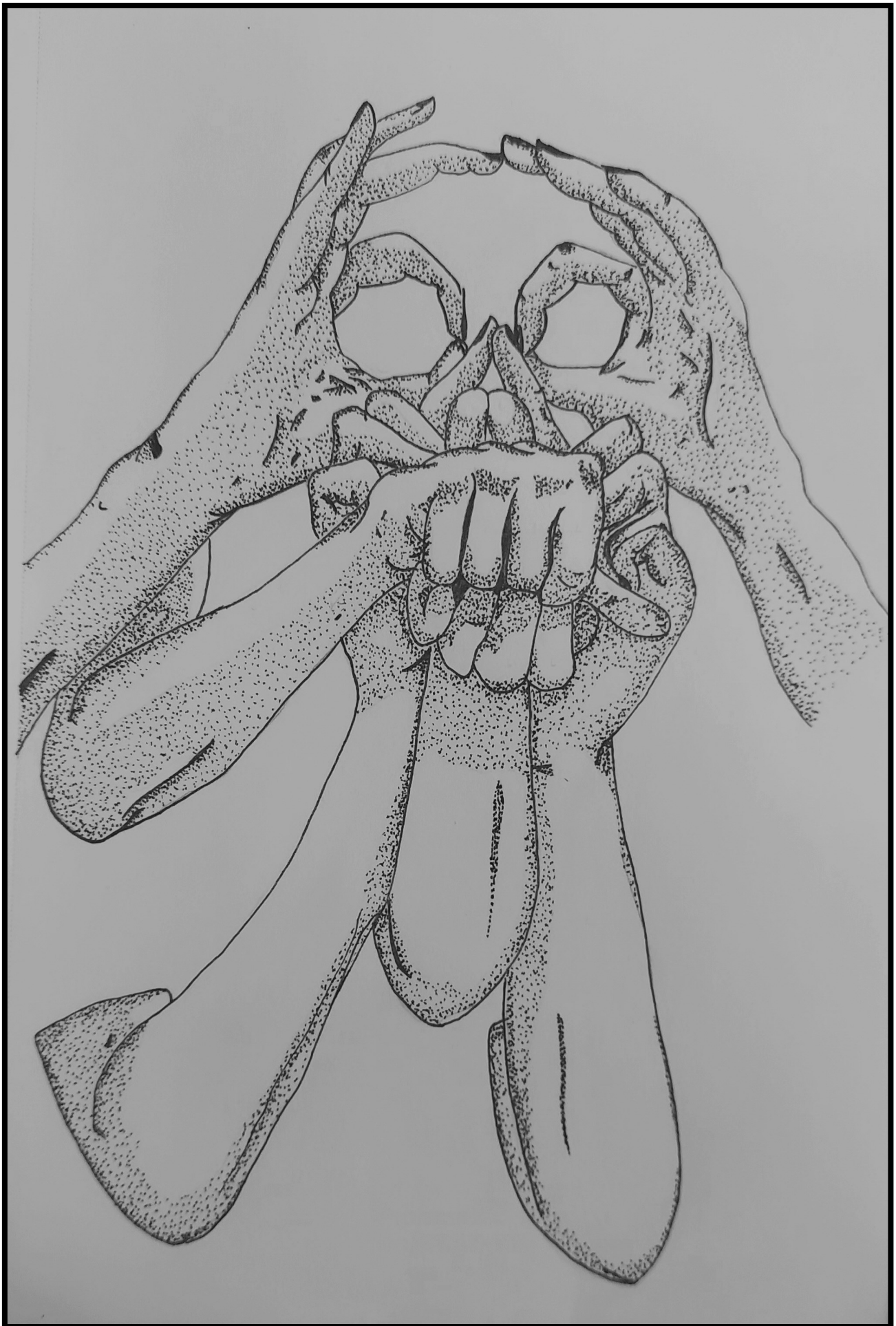
There was a piece of a rifle barrel a few inches from the toe of my boot. Just beyond that was a scrap that had been our regiment's patch. On the other side of the hole, there was a helmet. The top had been blown out of it, but the sides were still mostly intact. I skirted around the foxhole - stepping inside it somehow felt like I was desecrating a grave. The helmet was cold to the touch. Or perhaps it was my hands that were cold. I couldn't tell anymore. Everything was always cold here. I returned to Gabriel's side and knelt in the snow beside him.

"They're dead, George," I said, presenting him with the helmet. "I'm... so sorry."

"They're not dead!" Gabriel insisted, and I had half the mind to tell him to keep his voice down. "They need help, and you're not—you're not helping them! Please, do your job! Help them!"

I sighed and put a hand on Gabriel's shoulder. I couldn't offer him more comfort. This wasn't my area of expertise. The kind of comfort I could offer was the kind where I held a man until he died. But it was the moments like these that were the worst. I could deal with the blood and the gore. I could bandage up a man with everything blown off from the waist down and not even blink. I had patched up my own best friend when his arm was torn off, not hesitating for a second.

No, it was the moments afterward - the moments when I had to find their friends and tell them what happened, tell them that their friend wasn't coming back. Sometimes, it was almost good news. Their friend was headed back to the States with a permanent disability, but they'd be safe. Most of the time, it was the other kind of news—the kind where I sat a man down, told him that I was sorry, that his buddy was never making it back to the States...



Art By: Piper Stebbins

She Waited

By: Eliza Seifert

She waited at the bus stop. Her hands nearly white with the frigid cold, her cheeks blood red, and her lips an eerie purple. She was not there for the bus. Shivering, she clutched her arms around her torso and rubbed them. She rubbed them until the winter landscape faded away and was replaced with the familiar autumn scene. She rubbed them until she could feel his absence. She rubbed them until his face appeared where it should have been all along. She waited at the bus stop.

He stood at the airport counter. Attempting to buy a ticket. A ticket to get as far away as flight could take him. To a deserted island off the tip of South America. Where no one else was there to watch him and no one he could fall in love with. To leave behind his sorry excuse of a life. The life he had ruined, and the others he had ruined along with it. He told her he would be there. That he would wipe the tears off of her weary face, console her and halt her heaving sighs. But he didn't. He stood at the airport counter.

She waited for the hotel door to open. The sun almost began to peek through the foggy horizon, the stellar bodies fading from the navy expanse. He said he would be here. She sat until cobwebs grew into the corners and dust blanketed the mahogany floor. She sat until months passed. Until years passed. Until each day felt the same and ran together filled with tears and guilt for what she wasn't responsible for. She waited for the hotel door to open.

And What Remains

By: Samuel Storey

Hearing the screams of your comrades
changed your perspective.

Seeing the water stained red from the lost souls. The lost floating
draws attention away from the beach carnage, littered with fallen brothers.

Offering nothing
in the way of cover. The door blocking you from the hellscape drops.

The screams grow louder. A single look of reassurance
washes over the men standing next to you. Feeling togetherness in the last that lifts the
shoulders.

A Moving together in one fluid motion draws out everything else, rushing past the blood
stained sand takes at that moment.

After the sounds of yelling shots and cries for help have stopped only silence
remains

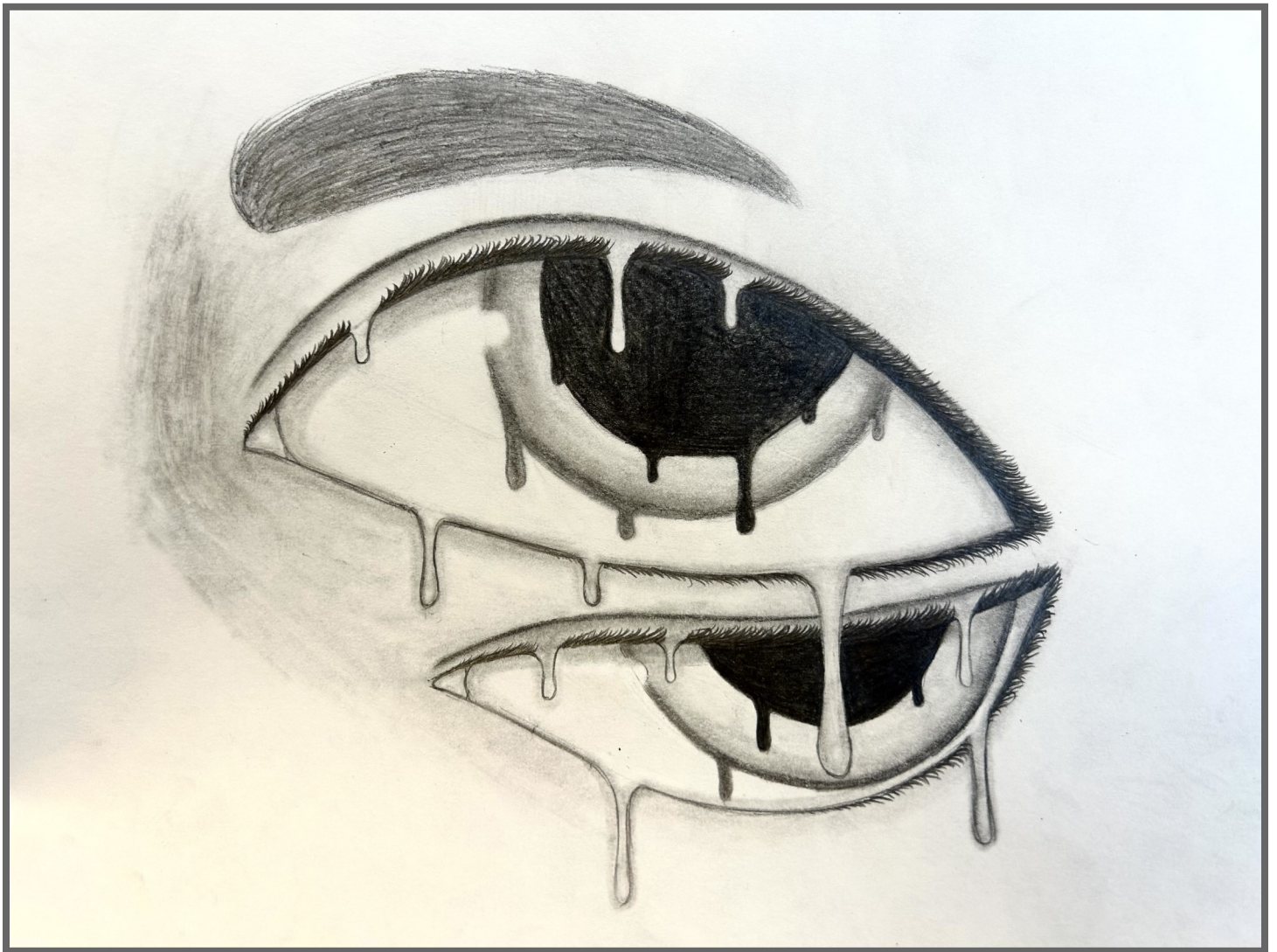
The Door

By: Emma Woltjer

Standing in front of this door I can't help but wonder if I should do this. I had been
warned this woman wasn't worth my time. Or my life. Closing my eyes I looked back at
the last few days, conflicted. The same people who had warned me against this woman
had also helped me. Yet, this woman was the reason I lived. The logical part of me knew I
should ignore their voices and warnings echoing through my head, but a small part of
me, a small area of my heart, clung to them in desperation.

Shakily I looked down at my fingers as they pressed against the door, my eye's tracing
the burns gifted the last time I saw this woman. Squeezing my eyes shut, I curled my
fingers into a fist and straightened myself. Pushing my shoulders back, I uttered a
sharp "*quiet*" to the voices, then rapped my knuckles against the door. The knock echoed
through the old worn away aperture and into the broken down house.

Moments later I heard footsteps and the door opened.



Art By: Ghost Bailey

MY OUR PLACE

By: Sophia Beltran

Six wheels spiraling across the broken pavement. Single file; one, two, and three. The kids had taken that path a hundred times before but this time was different. This time they were searching for something new. A place they could call their own.

* * * * *

I do not know which one of us first decided to deviate from our mundane route, but we did. The three of us turned our handlebars towards the small cove of trees and took off. My thighs burned as they pushed down and came back up, over and over again. We were traveling through a sea of yellow. That tall grass reached out like the tentacles of an octopus attempting to drag us in. But up and down, my legs kept pumping and my body rocked left to right with each push.

See, we were on a mission. I know if I visited now I would tiptoe and hop from one tiny dirt patch to the next. I would flinch every time the soft bud of a wheat stalk caressed my arm. I would swivel my head every which way looking for the bugs out to get me. But I was different then. I was kin to those hiding bugs. Innocent. Free. Sheltered from the monsters who crashed by, not caring about the damage in their rampage.

We spent all day going back and forth from the edge of those woods to the open garage at the end of our cul-de-sac. We learned how every bump and dip in the road felt. Each vibration whispered directions in a language only we knew. And all of it led to one tree. A simple tree that held up the sky with its viridescent crown and hid us from the so-called real world.

We belonged to that tree and it belonged to us. There was no contract floating around or a chain tying our ankles to its roots. But there was a force. An invisible force that guided us to the home we needed when the house we had was not enough.

Each day we ransacked the gloomy corners of our garage, laying waste as we hunted for any item capable of securing the discarded and withered boards to our wise and charitable tree. We smuggled out screws and their respective screwdrivers, then went back for a bucket of nails and a hammer when the job progressed too slowly. Bang, bang, bang. The tools pounded into the rough skin of our tree time and time again. It took all the blows we could not bear.

Atop the warped steps, we crafted a perch. It sat there, between an upturned branches, awaiting our arrival. Beneath our feet laid abandoned pieces of wood, probably left (cont.)

behind by some other kids looking to escape before being heaved into their own responsibilities. Countless seasons of leaves were scattered over every inch of the cold forest floor, occasionally drifting up as a gentle breeze greeted us and wandered away. That same wind slithered under my hair and lifted the dark locks high above my head, sending shivers down my spine as it prickled my bare neck. But beams of balmy sun shone down and chased the goosebumps away before I lost my ambition. It dried the sweat on our tan skin every time we molded those decayed scraps into the sanctuary we disguised as a misshapen tree house.

That tree was the one place our sibling rivalry slumbered. Nothing mattered but the task at hand. Person One sat on the top ledge, tapping the hammer down in a harsh imitation of a woodpecker. Person Two stood just below, at the beck and call of the sibling up top. And the last of us, Person Three, remained at the bottom. Daydreaming I suppose. Thinking about everything and nothing at all. Then when hands started cramping or legs needed stretching, we switched.

I don't remember what we talked about. Maybe we didn't talk at all. But the important ingredient was the feeling. The weightlessness. Like the only thing that kept our feet on the Earth's supple surface was that imaginary force. It kept us grounded. It kept us sane. It kept us together.

In truth, our treehouse never amounted to much. It was not pretty to look at; there was no aesthetic appeal. Just a crooked ladder and a solid platform. But that tree was the only place we could truly call our own. The place we disappeared to, leaving behind not a single trace. None of us wanted the world to know about our little slice of heaven. Our thievish trio liked being those bugs hidden behind the towering trees and grass that were wound like a barricade.

We needed to find that place. We needed it as much as air.

Because the time closed in when we would have to wake from our fantasies. We would have to carry the wrinkled weight of the world on our shoulders once again and pretend like it wasn't suffocating. We would pull apart and rebound to our pointless bickering. But just for a few months, we got to breathe in the untouched air. We felt the warmth of golden sun rays spread across our faces as we painted pictures with the ivory clouds. Every day we got drunk off the bliss before riding home each night in a bubbly daze.

A single summer of ecstasy. A perfect moment torn down overnight. And like an unwanted surprise party, we were thrown back into reality. One. Two. Three. "Welcome back," the world shouted at us.



Listen to your heart
Life is yours for the taking
Take the leap of faith

Art By: Zoie Weston

Poem by: Addison Baillie

Untitled

By: Abigail Roberts

How I wish to be a bird
So much freedom and wonder
The ability to fly and feel the wind under my wings
Oh all the things I could do with these wings
Longing for freedom and carelessness
No homework or school, just me and the wind
My findings of food would be beautiful
Even if I am not a bird, I can still feel birdlike
I can still be free, but the cards I play will make me a chicken

Maybe to be a chicken will not be so bad
Being a chicken my findings would thicken
And I could be free in my own way

*Based on Living Deliberately

A Shattered Truth

By: Zoie Weston

The world promises an echoing call
Meant to be heard by even the dead who crawl
Yet some refuse to install the mere thought of letting their own minds go
Truthfully freedom never came, for it only ever wants to glow in need, to be
sought by those who feel they have nothing left to show

Though the sun to the moon is as essential as a mother to a child, often I know
not why my heart yearns to be free of the chains of expectations and reality constantly
set upon me because my mind simply is out to wander

I look in the mirror and see the face which was once my mothers, with the
wisdom of a thousand years past, despite my lack in experience, I wish, begrudgingly,
that I could only smash the mirror with its taunting voices strung to my mind

Even at the thought of flight, the bird who is new to the nest has no clue about
experience as he steps towards the edge, curiosity overcoming fear, and curiosity giving
way to action; action giving way to the event

Untitled

By: Khiley Overton

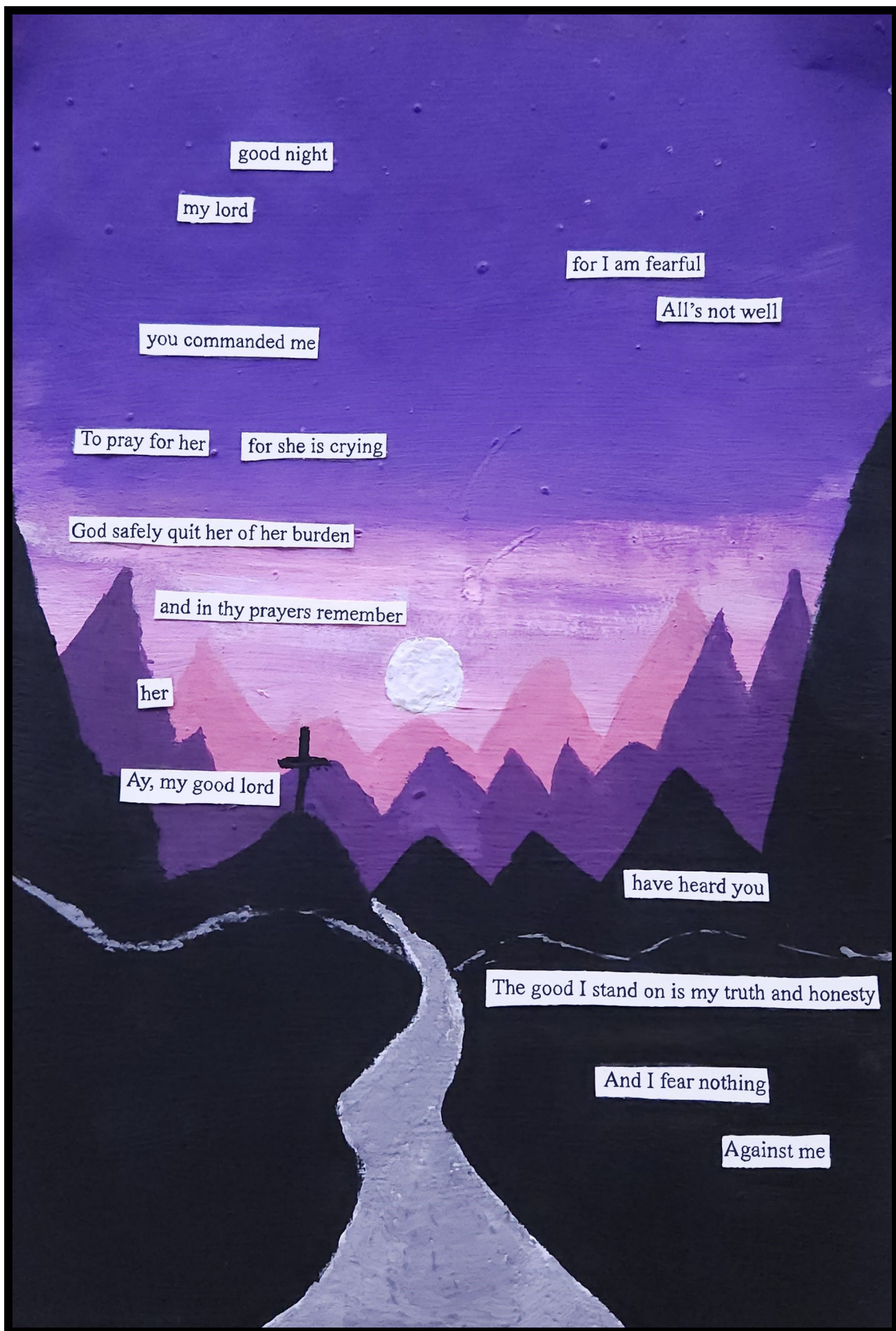
I have a nagging urge to write.
It's like my soul is telling me
"Write to wash away the hurt, the pain, the suffering.
Wash away the bloodied knees,
The depression that comes with living;
Wash away the voices you hear,
calling, yelling, mocking your existence,

Write to wash away
The pain of today,
And write to remember,
the comforts set in a false assumption of forever.

Write your world
In someone else's eyes."

This only started
When a friend told me to write,
When I told him I was mad:
Mad at the world for leaving me behind,
Mad at myself because the standards everyone else set
Are higher than I could possibly hit.
I feel like a failure;
Why can't I just be better?

"Write," he said.
"But I'm sad," I said,
"Sad because I feel like nothing I do will ever be right."
"Write," He said, and nothing else.
And so I did,
And the world seems a bit better of a place.



Art By: Sara Ackerman

Standing in the Storm

By: Soren Anderson

Dense droplets run down my face
reflecting off my skin
chill to the touch
I am surrounded
by an expanse of frigid impacts
Yet I remain unmoved
finger raised to the heavens
praying for a light
a brief moment of exciting warmth
when every gray shade is drowned in the flash
Every shout of the sky
each burst of hue
roots me deeper still

Night

By: Liam Heenan

The night was still
As a puddle just before the perfect surface is broken by a pebble
Snow floats softly down, captured in the yellow glow of the streetlights

The sky is filled with a heavy cloud
Honey seeps from the street light, staining the heavy air
flakes of snow are gentle and pure and heavy, they fall so slow they are barely moving

A man stands still
Breathing gently, he knows his first step will disturb the perfect scene
So he stands on this still night waiting, he knows not what for, but he is waiting

Trees

By: Eva Ormbrek

The tree's leafless branches shake as the wind whistles through them. They, however, do not shake in fear or cold. No, if they shook in fear they would not have grown so tall, keeled over as just a sapling. They shake in anger. Long, thin, fingers grapple with the sky. Crooked, knobby toes sunk deep into the ground, clutch the earth. They are firmly planted, forever there they stay. They bend but do not break. They are ferocious, nature's most stubborn things. I want to be like the trees, but do not know how. I don't know how the trees stay furious, stay enraged, and stay kept with a secret anger. I have searched deep inside myself, but have yet to find where my secret anger is hidden. I want to be like the trees.

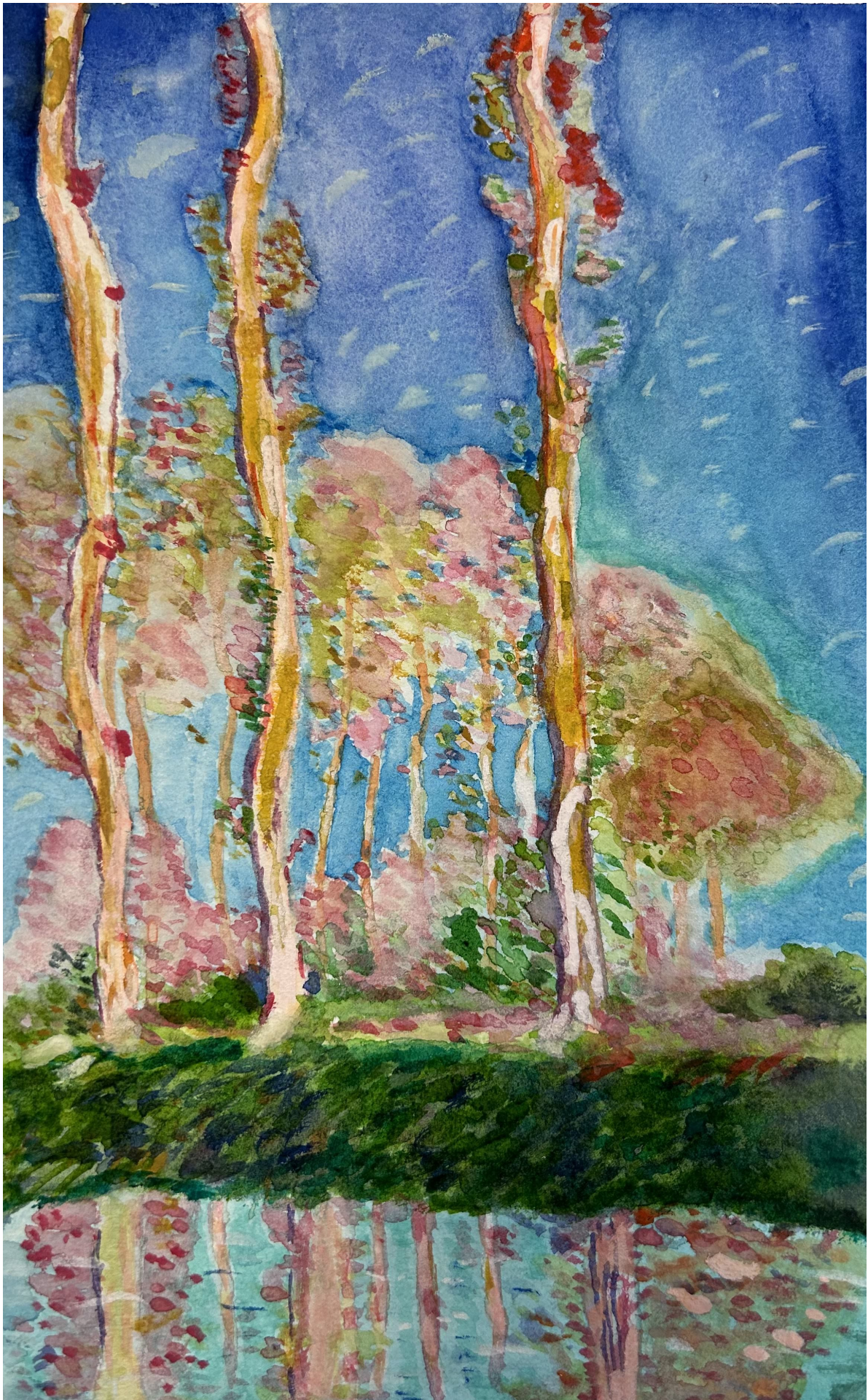
The Dead Tree

By: Mikayla Ramsey

Bare green grass accompanied by zero vertical vegetation. A yard without trees is comparable to a farm without animals. My yard was treeless for the first 5 years we lived there. Eventually Mom grew tired of our boring yard and bought a sapling.

The yard felt full, like it was complete. The anticipation of a oak tree, big and beautiful, growing in our front yard over the next 10 years or so was almost unbearable. Our house was happy and the baby tree had a home. But it complicated life, making it more difficult now than they used to be. All good things come at a price. Mowing the lawn in small circles near the base of the trunk was tedious. The tree was like a symbol to me. My room overlooks the front yard, and I often found myself staring out that window at the tree. I found it astonishing that it always stood. It stood through the heavy pouring of raindrops in the summer. It stood through the raging fall winds. It stood through the freezing fluffy snow covering its roots. It stood through the beautiful, shiny days and soaked up the sun. The tree never fell, but it also never grew. Mom said the soil wasn't right for an oak tree. That it would never grow.

It was sad to know the tree would never grow. I begged Mom not to uproot it and throw it away. The tree is my symbol. It means "me" and I couldn't bear throwing that away. The tree symbolizes the strength, the hope, the loyalty, the family. The love, even though it is dead.



Art By: Ariana Dagel

The Tale of the Sun and the Moon - An Excerpt

By: Jaedyn Harvey

We have all heard some type of creation story. The stories of how the world came to be. But this is a true story. A story about the sun and the moon.

Once upon a time, in a world not unlike our own, was the sun. His name was Ray, and he had one job: to provide daylight for his fellow citizens. Ray would wake early to spread light upon his neighbors. The only issue was, when Ray wasn't working, he was sleeping. This meant that he didn't have many friends. It also meant that he never talked to many people. One night, when Ray was setting, getting ready to slumber, he saw something new. Another person in the sky. Seeing this made Ray really excited. Maybe he could finally talk to another creature. But just as he was getting ready to speak, he dipped below the horizon, entered a human-esque form, and went home.

The next few days for Ray consisted of curiosity. He wondered about the creature in the sky, speaking his friend Puff, a gossip cloud that liked to sit close to him.

"Hey Puff!" Ray spoke in a bright voice, trying to sound as if he was approaching for casual conversation.

"Hi Ray." Puff's voice, soft and airy, came out through wheezes, as if each word required a puff of breath.

"How are you today?"

"I'm having quite a good day. I made a new friend!"

"Really, who?"

"Her name is Luna, she's the moon."

Now, Ray had heard the tales of the moon, the mysterious figure that came out at night after he went to bed. He never understood it as an actual creature he could talk to though.

"The moon? You met the moon?"

"I did. She's actually really nice, I think you'd like her."

"Well, I'm not sure. I heard she could be really intimidating. She does come out at night. I'm always asleep. Speaking of people that come out at night, I saw someone last night when I was going home."

"Really, who?"

"I was hoping you would know. She gave off a silverish light. When she came up, before she entered her true form, she had long, silver hair, pale skin, and silver eyes."

"Well, you're in luck! I do know who that is."

"Really? Who?"

"That was my new friend. You've seen Luna."

Ray took a breath and contemplated what he had learned. The girl, the one he wanted to talk to, was the moon. Somehow, that made her more intimidating. The silhouette that cast over him every night was her. And he wanted to know more. Ray was shy, (cont.)

however, finding time to talk to her was hard. Ray spent his sky daze contemplating how he approach Moon. He should just stay late. She would come up and talk to him, and he would get to meet her.

There was a name for what he was about to do. The Solar Eclipse. He'd learned about the potential for this rare event, and he could cause it just by talking to the moon. And here he was, waiting, floating in the sky past sunset, an abnormal time for an eclipse. He waited and waited until finally, he saw her.

"Dude. What are you doing? You were supposed to be gone like two hours ago. It's time for moonlight, not Sunlight." Luna spoke, appearing suddenly, looking annoyed at the fact that she had to wear sunglasses just to sit in her domain.

"Oh. Um. I just." Ray stuttered. Now that he was here, he had no clue what to say.

"Please. Did I do something wrong with my lunar duties or something? I just want to do my job."

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. I just. Wanted to talk to you. I'm Ray."

"Alright. Well, now isn't the best time. Can you meet literally any other time?"

Ray thought about it. He did have a favor that Puff owed him. And the sun didn't *have* to be out every day. "Yeah. Yeah I can do that."

A few days later, after talking to an exhausted but supportive Puff, Ray found himself down on the earth, waiting for Luna, hoping she would show.

"Hey"

Ray jumped. He didn't expect her to be early. "Hi."

"So, you wanted to speak to me? Are you sure I didn't do anything?"

"Oh. Yeah. I just saw you and thought you looked.... Cool"

"Cool."

"Yeah, I didn't realize you were the moon though so if you don't want to talk to me or whatever that's okay too." Ray rambled on, clearly scared of what was going to happen.

"Nah. I was always a little curious about the sun. So Ray, let's talk."

And talk they did...



Art By: Jacqueline Pucci

Coveted Convection

By Samantha Ramirez

The choices were overwhelming.

He accepted his defeat. Too many flavors were stacked into the machine. Everyday he knew he made the wrong decision. Everyday the wrong decision haunted him throughout his work. Chips? No. Cookies? No. A candy bar. Nooo... What could stop him from repeating this deprecating process? He accepted his shame. This torturing ritual was like the trolley dilemma; whatever choice brought sorrow. But why did he suffer through this part of his day? Maybe he naturally suffered through his life or maybe he was

destined to fail? He accepted that his selection would never be right.

Click. A choice had been made.

Like a battle of enormous odds, the machine stood in shining galvanized steel, its hum an irritating din. And he, cowering at its glory, could never withstand the artificial light, the puzzle of buttons with ancient runes, and could never claim the rewards beyond the plexiglass. Still, as he approached the beast which possessed all the high fructose corn syrup one could wish for, another challenger showed his face. Darryl. Darryl, sensing the crisis within, swiftly slid between the person and the machine. An expert inserting of the dollar, and stabbing of the buttons: A66. Darryl completed his quest from the office to the vending machine, collected his gem.

Any normal, self respecting human not yet disillusioned by consumership, cringed at Darryl's trophy: a spongy cesspool of artificial flavor enveloping a chocolate cannon oozing with condensed sweet cream. Darryl gazed upon this, a coveted confection, a magnum opus for Hostess, a crunchy golden surface sealing off a chocolate treasure chest loaded with a fluffy marshmallow prize at its center.

It was...

A deep fried Twinkie.

The Ballad of Despacito Juanito (or Johnny D)

By: *Blasted* Elsa Rogers

Trouble was a'brewin on the horizon. Tumbleweeds drifted across the dirt street, as if ducking for cover. The cowboy appeared over the hill in a haze of heat, his body swaying in motion with his ride. Slowly he approached. The town appeared deserted as its residents rushed to take cover from the black cloud hanging over the man.

The man and his... ostrich? Was that an ostrich?

The cowboy crested the hill, his ride being revealed. Sure enough, instead of the sleek flanks of a white horse or the telltale clip-clop of its hooves, there were feathers and the yellow, aggressive eyes of an unreasonably large bird. The bird and the boy made their way through the town, the air of doom following them like a choking smog.

No one dared face the man or-more specifically-the ostrich. No sheriff emerged from the side out of nowhere claiming that there "isn't enough room in this town for both of us", no soul dared chase them out of town. So everyone waited on baited breath as the man and his bird arrived at Alejandro's Saloon. Everyone waited in fear as the birdboy dismounted and tethered the ostrich to the post. Everyone was waiting when he reached the front doors, but someone broke the silence.

"Wait a minute-Despacito Juanito?!" A man called from the window across the street.

"Or Johnny D." A woman muttered from the floor below him.

Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, raised his head to the people. He gave a weak, two-finger salute, patted his ostrich (named Billy-Willy) on the back, and strode through the swinging Saloon doors. The moment he stepped foot inside, the room froze. There was the sour smell of sweat and smoke in the air, and lots of sweaty, burly men sitting at the tables, goggling at the cowgirls. But now everyone was frozen, staring at Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D. Glasses filled with drinks were lifted halfway to mouths, an accordion player in the corner by the unused piano had stopped mid-song.

And Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, took them all in with a long, mournful look. Then he promptly declared, "Alejandro, play me my song."

The accordion player/owner of the Saloon, Alejandro, immediately struck up the popular little tune, Despacito. Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, began moving his way into the building, slowly dancing and twirling to himself with sad, stumbling steps. Everyone was still silent, staring at him, wondering what in the world was wrong. But Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, didn't give them any clues as to what had put the cloud above his head. No, he just moved the dusty old piano and draped himself over the top of it like one of their French girls.

"Sing the song," He said to the people.

And all the cowboys and cowgirls in the room immediately picked up the song, each one of them stumbling over the Spanish words in their bad Western accents. But it was like sweet music to Despacito Juanito's, or Johnny D's, ears. He heaved a long sigh as the people rapped out of sync to the accordion and made his way over to the bar. The barman was one step ahead of him and by the time Despacito Juanito, (cont.)

or Johnny D, had sat down, a glass of bright red cherry Kool-Aid appeared in front of him. The man took a deep sniff of the liquid before chugging half the glass. So the barman has decided to do the heavy stuff today. My mood must be apparent. He thought. Then Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, sat back; an open invitation to ask the burning question.

“Alright Despacito Juanito-” The barman began.

“Or Johnny D.” Half the people in the bar cut in.

“What’s wrong, partner? What’s weighin’ down your brain stones?”

“Well, first off my dear barman, I don’t even know if my brain has stones,” Despacito Juanito, of Johnny D, responded. “And you wouldn’t understand.”

The barman pleaded, “Please tell us Despacito Juanito.”

“Or Johnny D.” The people said.

“Help us understand what’s burdenin’ you and your bird today.”

Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, turned his head and attempted to inconspicuously wipe a tear from his eye. “Aw, shucks. I didn’t know you guys cared so much.”

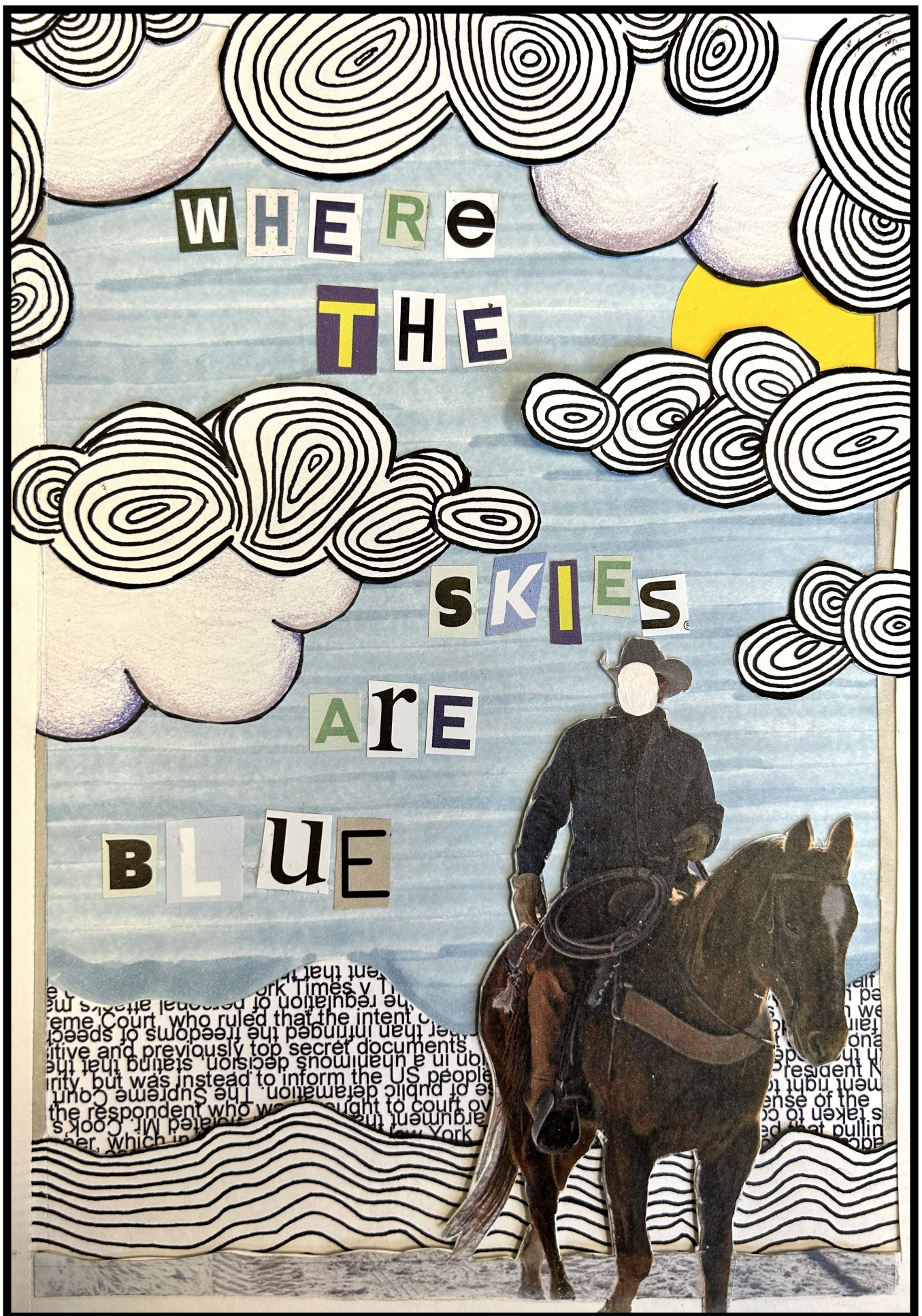
“Course we care.” The barman refilled his glass. “We all have to look out for each other in this here little town.”

“Oh you’re right, you’re always right.” Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, said. He stood up and addressed his fellow cowboys and cowgirls. “Something tragic has happened. Something that will alter the very ground beneath which our cattle walk. Something that will go down in history through bedtime stories and songs about wagon wheels. Something that has made lil ol’ me cry like the day I was given life by me mam.”

The folks all stared at him, sitting on the edges of their seats, all waiting for the catastrophic news to hit. Maybe Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, was sick? He didn’t drink out of the old canal again, did he? Maybe he knew he wasn’t going to make it to see the next hoedown? Maybe the ostrich, Billy-Willy, wasn’t going to make it to the next full moon? Maybe-fear struck their hearts, making the men quiver in their boots-his mother had already joined Lil’ Sebastian up in heaven?

“I really do hate to say it,” Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, said, his voice pitched low and quiet. A sacred matter, then. “But, I’m a’feared that Billy the Kid-” The cow/birdboy choked back another sob. “Billy the Kid... he-he’s all grown up. He goes by William the Adult now.”

The room erupted. Women fainting, men smashing bottles, horses neighing, Billy-Willy screaming outside... and Despacito Juanito, or Johnny D, just simply brought his cowboy hat low over his eyes, and sat in the darkest corner, nursing the Kool-Aid from his glass.



Art By: Kaedence Eames

In the End was a Beginning

By: Thomas DeCock

They had a default position on me before they even knew who I was. Routines, something that I never really had, even now, could only be consider part of my standard day when I donned my cloak. The hood of a robe, black and musty, over my pale head. From the time I can remember, I wore this cloak, throwing the hood over my torso each day before walking out of my house and into reality. The ones who raised me only ever saw me without my mortal shroud. Trust me, I , afraid of society, was not born fully clothed, but parting from the womb stuck with me. I decided that planet Earth would not see the real me, and that translated to hidden beauty behind the smog.

I needed to keep cover, hide, blend in with everyone and everything. But what never seemed to cease was the damp stench of the cloak. Walking to school I dreamed of smelling the petunias, the fresh lawn clippings, the newly fallen rain, but the thought of the world seeing behind the mask was repulsive. The old robe demanded something of me.

One day, the hood, with the noxious stench, was insufferable. My hands uncontrollably brushed it off, letting it lie, no longer a part of my being. I screamed, but for no longer than a second, I felt like a serpent shedding its skin. I smelled the fresh aroma of freedom, as the pollinated floral rose towards my nose. No memory of how scared I used to be, each sense becoming electrified, a sensation everlasting. I regained my peripheral vision and remembered everything: where I was, what I've done, and what I could look forward to. The world was in color. The children from school, the ones I never truly experienced, danced and played all sorts of games.

It was a moment that saved my life, a moment that made me scrawl my own story. I was in my own paradise, one with a new chapter being written...as if everything before was the prologue and this is the beginning.

The Dance

By: Avery Rykowski

Life is a dance. Some people think they can dance when in reality they can't. Other people just can't dance, like having two left feet screwed on backward.

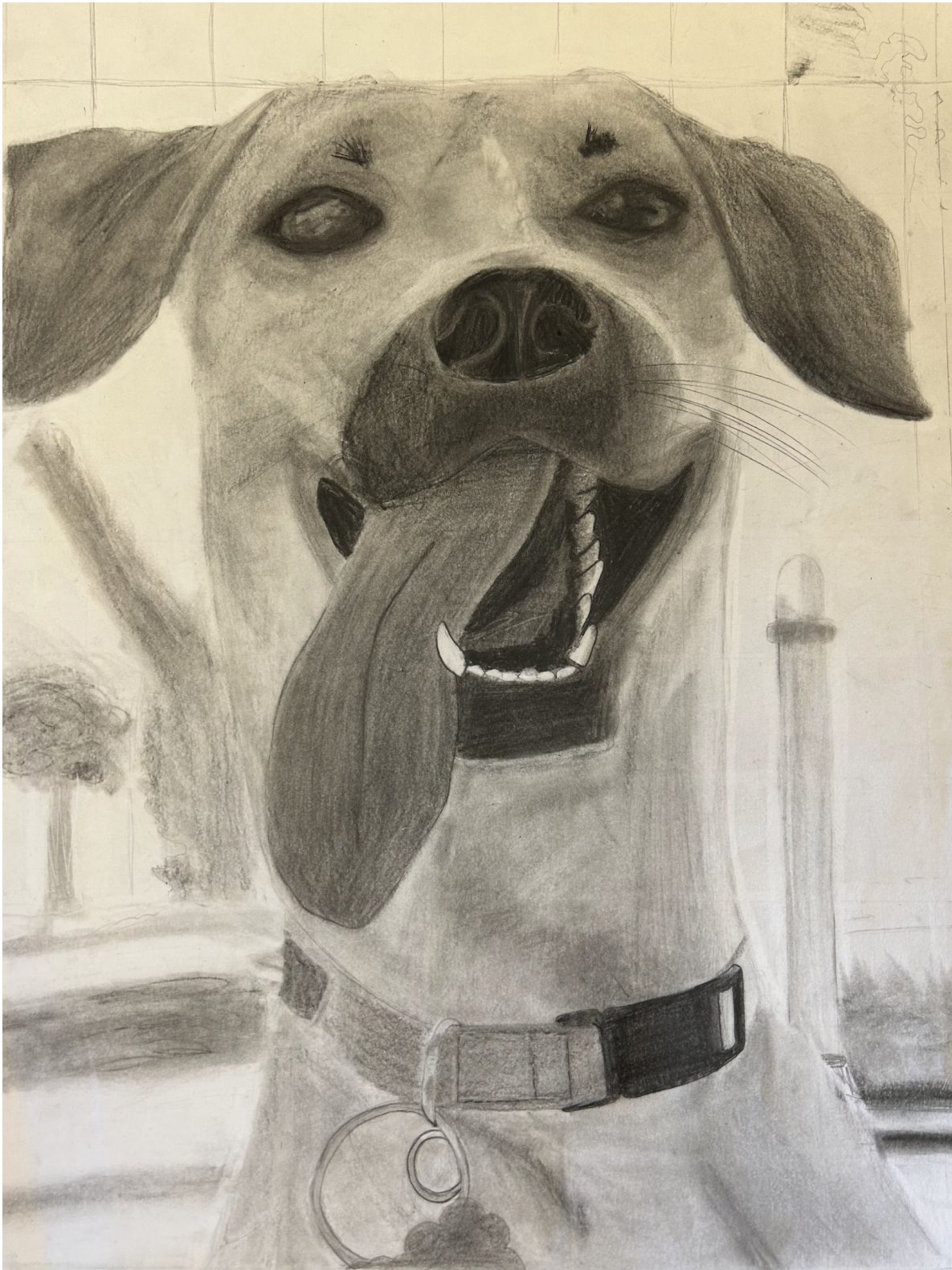
I can't dance, I get confused with the steps and stop for a while to see how others are dancing. They make it look so easy.

The only person I really know that dances worse than me, is my mother. She tries harder than me but gets stuck more often. Occasionally when I'm trying to dance she'll trip me just to see me fall. Sometimes she will try to help me up and other times she laughs.

Sometimes people quit dancing. I have many family members who quit dancing, some by choice, and some just happened.

I have to remind myself, everyone dances differently but I still compare myself to them. Normally people don't like people that live differently from them. But I try to put parts of their dances into my own because they make it look nice. I find it draining.

Most people hate their own dance, but others look up to them and love it. The person just never knows. My dad dances beautifully, although it is rough; but he's been practicing. His is comforting. He has always been there for me in his own way. I appreciate him. He's dependable



Art By: Naima Cavanaugh

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