

INSIGHT 2023



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Insight 2023 Dedication



Ms. Michelle Valenti

This year's Literary Magazine is dedicated to Ms. Michelle Valenti, our beloved Chemistry teacher. Beyond being an excellent role model she has also spent time as a brilliant artist. She did a lot of work with still life as well as abstract oil painting and charcoal. She is retiring this year after 20 phenomenal years at Haldane and will be taking art classes at Wallkill River Art School. We are sad to see her go but are so grateful for all that she has brought to this school. We thank her for everything, from her kind hearted and understanding nature, to her amazing, informative teaching, to all her stories about being a scientist and an artist. We will miss her!

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Jane Doe

Jane Doe they call me
No one knows who I am
No one *knows* who I am

They put photos of me everywhere
Up high, down low
In the sky, in the road

No one knows me
No one can find me
No one *will know me*

They call everyone
Trying to find me
They give up

What if they didn't ask the right people?
What if they didn't try?
What if?

In a few years they will forget about me
But they won't care
Everyone forgot about me already

The others get found
They had happy endings, but some we don't
I'm with those, being missing forever

My name is Jane Doe
I'm no one
But *no one cares*

By Emilia "Gray" Cardoso

Melbury

**There once was a cat named “Melbury”
 This cat was always very furry
 But with his puzzles and tricks
 We knew this cat was a prick
 So we fried him and ate him with curry**

By Dashiell Santelmann

**REDWOODS
 Strong and imposing
 Towering, twisting and covering the sky
 Isolated, endangered, somber and secret
 GIANTS**

By Kristjan Holmbo

Anger

Anger

**It tastes like a Carolina Reaper burning your throat.
 It sounds like the echoing of a sentence.
 It smells like pepper seeds from the hottest pepper.
 It looks like a hall full of darkness.
 It feels like my body’s shaking and I no longer have control.
 It makes my body feel like it's about to blow up.**

By Harley Sporbert

The Giver

The first time I saw the book was on a rainy Tuesday night during the summer.

We decided that it was best to keep our meeting as private as possible; I was escorted to the facility in a black HUMVEE camouflaged by the dewy darkness increasing in intensity as we exited the city limits. I had not been debriefed before then; I had actually never set eyes upon the contraband in question nor did I know the designation of whom I was to speak with. Yet I was familiar with this process; I had done it a few times before. I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't nervous... if I said that I wasn't nervous for any of my previous summons in fact. There's a certain level of risk involved in the job that we are tasked with. Not that I'm asking for sympathy.

My driver took us through a series of electric gates and instructed me to get out when he pulled up to the front entrance. I stood, now alone, in front of the gray silhouette of the building looming behind the fog. I had barely a second to take in the site before a series of armed guards emerged and escorted me inside. Even for those on the inside of operations such as these, the less you know, the less you see, the less you hear, the better.

I was led down what felt like an endless spiral stairwell alongside an armed guard; my footsteps on the steely metal staircase echoed softly in the dense air. My companion did not speak.

When we exited the stairwell, we entered into an equally dense, equally dark, and equally gray hall with four or five cell doors on each side. The door at the end on the right side was opened and I figured that was to be my destination. I was correct. Once I stepped inside, the cell door slammed shut automatically. I do not quite remember if I could hear my companion's footsteps walking away outside the door, but for the rest of my time there in the room, I was only aware of one other's presence.

The room was easy to describe. It was square, just four concrete walls with no embellishments such as windows or images. In the center of the room was a small metal table with two plain metal chairs, one facing the door and the other away. The chair facing the door was already occupied by a man that I will not describe. The topic of the meeting that dark night was resting inside of a glass box in the center of the table. The room was illuminated by a single yellow light hanging above the box, allowing me to faintly see inside. The book was no larger than a normal novel that you could find at a local library nor any more significant looking. It had a cloth cover, faded red in color with an equally faded image of a white flower slightly off centered. On the top in white leaders read the title: "The Giver."

The man sitting at the table indicated for me to sit down, which I did, before introducing himself.

"I'm sure you are familiar with strange meetings such as this, Mr." he said.

"Quite," I responded.

“I apologize for the ambiguity of your summons here, but we wanted to keep most of the information surrounding this book confined to this room and this room only. Surely you understand.”

“I do, sir,” I said hesitantly. “But what about this book is so intriguing?”

As if on cue, my acquaintance cleared his throat and produced a thick file which I assume was resting on his lap. “I will not go into great detail on its origins. It doesn’t necessarily concern those of us who are still alive at this point. The most that I will say is that the original owner (the earliest owner that we know of I should say) is dead, and given his high ranking status the book quickly ended up in the hands of some equally powerful people. Investigations into the circumstances of his death were initiated quickly... outside of the public eye I should mention.”

It was at this point that he opened up the folder and started neatly arranging documents in front of him. For a brief second, neither of us spoke, and the only sound I could hear was the shuffling of his papers faintly reverberating off the dim walls. When he was done laying out the folder’s contents in neat little piles he resumed his story.

“The precursor to Project Receiver occurred on June 7.” He slid a document around and showed me a picture of what I assumed to be a middle-aged man wearing a black suit. A good portion of his face was scratched out. “This man has little importance to you and his identity does not need to be revealed at this time. He was our first Receiver. At the time we didn’t call him that because we were unaware of how long this project was going to be carried out and how many Receivers we would need before reaching this point. Given his close relationship with the original owner and his subsequent knowledge of the book, he volunteered to examine it independently. He was discovered dead in his home in the morning of June 9th.

“June 14, Project Receiver was officially established with the aid of a penitentiary not far from the testing site. Receiver 004 was the first inmate to be tested.” My acquaintance produced another document similar to the first, only this time with a picture of a man with a prison uniform and an unobstructed face. “He was tasked with reading all one hundred and fifty three pages over the course of several days in exchange for a reduction of his sentence. He was also tasked with not disclosing any information about the book or Project Receiver to his fellow inmates.”

“And he maintained this stipulation?” I asked, inquisitively.

“Yes.” My acquaintance haphazardly adjusted his glasses. “Although the gossiping of prisoners is of no concern to us. As of this time, no unauthorized persons have knowledge of this book.

“Over the course of the few days of the study, Receiver 004’s bunkmate reported detecting increasing distress in our test subject. Receiver 004 committed suicide on the night of June 18.

“Receiver 005 was tasked with journaling his thoughts throughout his reading process.” He handed me some photocopies of scribbled sentences written in a notebook. The first page looked relatively normal, and as my acquaintance started detailing what was written on them, I flipped through the various pages. The second page showed a similar image as the first but in a

slightly messier hand and letters that seemed to slant a little more than their earlier counterparts. By the time I had flipped to the last page, the only thing that I could see was what looked like a messy ink blot. “He detailed the story of a boy named Craig who had run away from home at a young age. He managed this by hopping a train and settling down in a random town with only the clothes on his back and a few dollars to his name. Not much of the story is known after this however; his writings get increasingly more incoherent as the days passed. What we did manage to pick up was the presence of whom he called ‘him.’ He drew a picture for reference.” My acquaintance slid me a photocopied drawing on the same notebook paper as the earlier journals. Instead of any writing, this image simply showed a messy sketch of a featureless, black silhouette hovering in the center of the page. “Currently, we do not know if ‘he’ was a feature of the story or if it was just a product of the psychosis experienced by 005 before his death.

“Through the utilization of Receivers 006 and 007 we finally managed to discover a fundamental truth about this book: the story presented in its pages differs for each person who reads it. Receiver 006 recalled the beginnings of a story in which the populace of a small town came together to search for a young woman that had gone missing while 007’s was about a greedy man who set off on an adventure to find his riches. Similar to 005, neither of these men were accurately able to describe their complete respective stories to anyone before their deaths. Additionally, they both mentioned a strange figure towards the end of the study. Receiver 006 mentioned him in one of his journals while 007 verbally recalled seeing him somewhere but could not identify if it was from the story, a dream, or real life. At that point, his psychosis was so bad it realistically could have been any of the three.”

At this point, my acquaintance paused from his report to let me process the information. Staring at the numerous faces, writings, and drawings sprawled out in front of me, I did not know what to make of the story thus far. Saying nothing, I gathered up the four inmate’s faces and returned them to the man.

“I do not very much like looking at the faces of dead people, sir. I came to discuss the book that you have in this little glass case.” For the first time after the start of the meeting, I took a good look at the book that lay just within reach. Unlike when it first caught my eye, now it seemed to hold a sort of heavy presence in the barren room.

“Unfortunately, Mr., there are plenty more dead faces left in this book’s story. It is my job to inform you just how dangerous this item is, in hopes that you will understand how imperative its removal is. You surely understand the heavy burden you have of the termination of this project?”

“Yes,” I responded quickly. The overhead light seemed to flicker just slightly. “But the inquisitive side of me wants to understand why. Why did all of this happen? What is the book’s message?”

“A dangerous question. A question that has killed dozens. By what means is of no importance to our discussion.

“I do not intend to disclose the entire story to you here, Mr.. But there is one more detail that I have left in my notes. Regarding Receiver 013, on July 11 the decision was made to have

the Receiver read the book aloud to researchers in the room with him. Reading sessions were spaced out as with the other studies, and both the inmate and the researchers were given daily debriefings to process and document their experiences. However, it was quickly discovered that there was a fatal flaw to this model. While Receiver 013 recalled reading the story of a boy who is sent away to live at a boarding school with abusive teachers, the researchers' memories of the details regarding the story all differ in some regard. Essentially, no two researchers can ultimately agree on the details of Receiver 013's readings which means that listening to "The Giver" is not a sound method of research. While the administrators had prepared 013 with a sheetless mattress and padded facilities, they were not prepared for one of the researchers to take her own life. Everyone who participated in the study is now under protected observation, but they are all more or less unavailable for questioning as of now."

With that it seemed he was finished with the bulk of his story.

"But... there has to be more," I stammered. "Dozens of deaths later, you must have reached some conclusion. Tell me you understand what this is." I indicated towards the little glass case which housed the book. "Maybe it was because you only conducted an observational study on inmates. Did you test any others? Women?"

"Women were included in the study at later points. The results were still the same. And due to the nature of the tests, the researchers thought it best to exclude civilians from participating."

I searched for some other reason. Some other form of protest.

"I would be careful in your curiosity, Mr.," my acquaintance said, interrupting my thoughts. His face seemed to grow darker, as did the room. "Nothing in this world ever gives without taking. Even if answers lie within your reach, are you willing to pay the price of reaching for them?"

The room seemed to grow a little lighter as the man started to gather up his papers back into the folder. "Arrangements for the book's transfer to your department have already been made. It is now up to your discretion to determine how you'd like for it to be warehoused. Or terminated should you desire. With that, this debriefing has ended."

Before I could say anything else, the cell door clicked open and a guard entered the room. I do not remember standing up or being pulled from the table, but before I knew it, I was standing in the dimly lit hallway outside. Looking back, I could see that the man at the table was now gone. The overhead light, just barely showing a spark of life at this point, illuminated the seat in which I had been sitting. Sitting in the chair now was nothing other than a solid black figure, featureless, hunched over an open book on the table. Before I could say anything, the cell door closed and I was led back upstairs.

By Jackson Twoguns



By Gabby Perilli

Jamie Wolf

Jamie Wolf was the biggest of the pups in his pack, so big that humans often mistook him as full-grown when they saw him, and either shot at him or ran away in fear. But size can be deceiving - Jamie was behind in his progress; nothing wolfish came naturally to him. No matter how he swished his tail, he couldn't hypnotize potential meals the way the other wolves could. When he stood on his hind legs and spoke the human way, he just looked goofy and uncomfortable, not alluring and trustworthy. And no matter how he curved his wide, toothy mouth, he couldn't perfect that cunning grin reserved for leading meals off the path and to the cooking fire.

Jamie Wolf wasn't very good at any of it . . . and he wasn't sure he wanted to be.

This was his biggest secret. Wolves were meant to despise humans above all else, to devote their lives to ensuring the most gruesome, ugly deaths for all of them. Packs worked tirelessly to hone their craft, their methods of trickery and guile. Every wolf that Jamie knew loved this life. Their eyes glittered whenever they thought of a new way to deceive humans, every time they changed their voice to entrance them, or bit into their soft skin, or turned their dead bodies over the fire, juices dripping onto the hot stones.

But no matter how he tried, Jamie couldn't bring himself to feel that way. When he kept watch on the path, supposedly scanning for weaknesses, all he could notice were how lovable humans were, how adorable and welcoming they seemed. He saw their clever little shoes, so useful for protection from the rough forest floor. He longed to learn the little songs they hummed to themselves and they walked. He wished he could pick flowers and plants like they could and make bouquets and bread and beautiful things. But wolves were not allowed to like humans. It was the ultimate betrayal.

On the day this story begins, his pack was over the moon. They had come up with a particularly evil idea, one that would win them two delicious meals - a well-aged grandmother and her rosy, plump granddaughter, called Little Red Riding Hood for the blood-colored cape she always wore. Jamie Wolf had seen the little girl before; she had been too small in past years for the wolves to be interested, but now that she was old enough to travel on her own, and was therefore vulnerable to attack, they deemed her ready to eat.

The pack worked together to formulate a plan: as Little Red Riding Hood walked down the path, one of the wolves would sneak into the grandmother's house and kill her in her sleep; the other wolves would begin to roast the body. The first wolf would then don her clothes and pretend to be the grandmother until Little Red Riding Hood was close enough, when she would be killed as well. They would do this tomorrow; the full moon always made fresh meat taste even better. The plan seemed flawless, and the wolves all howled and pranced around, buzzing with anticipation. Jamie tried to do the same, but inwardly he was panicking. He had a special attachment to Little Red Riding Hood, he'd watched her grow up at the same time as he did, and

he couldn't stomach the idea of her life ending so soon. Going against all logical thought, he knew that he had to do something to save Little Red. He would never forgive himself if he didn't.

The next morning, Jamie Wolf volunteered for trail watch, expressing his eagerness to make sure everything went smoothly. His pack leaders had been worried about his progress, and, glad to see him demonstrating these sentiments, granted his request without a second thought.

Jamie Wolf sat on the edge of the path, nervous beyond belief, but resolute. He waited, and waited, and waited for Little Red Riding Hood to come. It felt like the most important thing he would ever do.

Finally she came skipping down the path, singing a little song. Jamie hopped in front of her onto the path, all his nerves and training channeled into this one interaction. "Hello, little girl," he said as he pranced in a circle around her. He tried to show her that he wouldn't hurt her, staying well clear of her, keeping his claws tucked away and the points of his teeth hidden. But her eyes slanted skeptically, she knew to be suspicious of wolves and their ways. Jamie bobbed his head at a clearing to the left of the path. "Little girl, look at all the wonderful flowers just here, off the path. Wouldn't you like to pick some, to take with you wherever you're going? They would look lovely in your bread basket."

The little girl stuck up her chin and marched on. "No, bad Wolf. I know you're trying to trick me. I'm safe as long as I stay on the trail. I won't stray."

"Not even for one beautiful bloom?" Asked Jamie, catching up with her. Leaning over, he plucked one himself, from just beyond the path. It was as blood red as her cape, large and feather-light, dusted with droplets of dew. Red Riding Hood studied the flower, and slowly, slowly reached her hand out to it . . . *Yes*, Jamie thought, *yes, I can save you!*

Her little fingers skimmed the silky edge of the petal . . .

And then she ran away, springing down the path, out of his sight around the bend before he knew it.

She was going to die.

And it was his fault.

Couldn't he do anything right? He was a failure of a wolf, and now he was a failure of a hero.

Jamie took his time returning to the pack, dragging his paws despondent through the trees - but instead of the celebrations he expected to find, the pack was bristling with resentment and disappointment. A younger pup filled him in, his eyes lit up with anger and his tone dark and vengeful. "A hunter saw a wolf enter the grandmother's house and shot him. Both the stupid humans survived. We *must* kill them now, and in the worst way . . ." he growled, stalking away.

Jamie wolf was flooded with emotion. Little Red was okay . . . but now in even more danger! And he didn't know what to do. She must be even more afraid of him, now.

Jamie told the pack leaders he would return to trail watch in the morning. He promised himself that if there was anything he could do to save Little Red Riding Hood, he would. But he

also began to prepare himself for what he would do when the pack gruesomely killed the little girl and his grandmother. Maybe he would leave the pack, resign himself to the solitary life of a lone wolf. No one would miss him.

But the next morning when Little Red came skipping down the trail, she caught sight of the wolf just off the path and slowed down. She hesitantly walked to the very edge of the path, eyes nervous but resolute. "Hello, Wolf," she said.

"Hello, Little Girl," Jamie said. He did not know what to make of this.

"Were you trying to save me yesterday, by luring me off the path? I saw the dead wolf outside my grandmother's house. I heard the hunter telling my grandmother why he had shot at her house. I know what would have happened."

"I was," said Jamie. "I'm so sorry I failed. And - you are in even more danger now. Our pack is horribly angry and are plotting the worst death for you. We do not mourn our dead, we just seek revenge."

Little Red Riding Hood swallowed. "What can I do?," she asked. "How can we live?"

Jamie Wolf thought hard. "Return to the village, as quickly as you can," he said. "Tell hunters to follow you through the forest. As you approach your grandmother's house, the pack will be so focused on you that they won't notice the hunters. As soon as you reach the front door, the wolves will attack, but they'll be clearly visible. The hunters can shoot them then."

"Aren't they your family?" Little Red asked. "Will you be sad?"

"No." Jamie stated. He felt more sure of this than he had ever been of anything ever before. "I'm not like them."

"Good," Little Red stated. Quickly, she took one step off the path and grabbed his paw and squeezed it. Friendship, Jamie thought. This is what it feels like. Then, with a little smile, she turned on her heel and ran back towards the village.

"Well, well, well," Jamie heard from behind him. The low snarl of a wolf's voice, filled with hatred. "Look what we have here. A *traitor*. A *human-lover*." Jamie turned over his shoulder to see the young pup from last night. His mouth was cracked wide into that evil grin Jamie could never quite master, his claws out and sharper than Jamie could ever imagine his being. This pup was everything that the pack wanted, and this pup wanted him every bit as dead as he wanted Little Red. "I can't wait for the pack to hear about this," the little wolf growled. "We're going to kill you. It's going to be *amazing*." The little wolf stalked in a circle around Jamie. He should have been terrified, but all he felt was sad. Sad for this little wolf who was so full of hatred already. Why was he so eager to kill? Why was he so scared of those that were not like him?

The little wolf sent up an impressive howl, calling all the other wolves in the area. "Jamie wolf is a traitor!" He howled, prancing in front of him as the pack gathered. "He has sent for hunters!" A pack leader sprang at Jamie and pinned him against the tree. Jamie felt empty. He could not save himself, he could not save Little Red. The little wolf whispered in the pack leader's ear, and the pack leader nodded.

The pack leader stepped back, and Jamie fell to the ground. The pack started circling him, all snarling and scraping their claws against the ground - but there! Jamie saw an opening, towards the trail! If he could make it to the trail, maybe he could yell for Little Red to stay in the village forever, where she would be safe. Then his life would not end in vain.

He took his opportunity, sprinting through the gap and towards the path. The pack lept to the chase, but even if Jamie was not a good wolf, he was a good runner. The pack, slowed by their proximity, did not gain on him.

Jamie should have known that the wolves were too smart.

They would never have left that gap.

This was always the plan.

It all happened so fast.

His front paws landed on the path. He saw Little Red Riding Hood only a few steps down the path, backed by a horde of hunters. The wolf pack slowed and hung back behind the treeline.

The hunter in front only saw Jamie. He cocked and pointed his gun.

Little Red began to yell and wave her hand. It was too late.

The hunter shot and hit Jamie square in the chest.

“NOT THAT WOLF!”

It was too late.

The wolves turned tail and disappeared back into the forest, a few hunters shooting after them in vain. But Little Red ran to Jamie Wolf’s body and knelt over it, sobbing.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen,” she cried. “You did the right thing. You were the only one. You saved me.”

“Quit crying over that wolf, Little Red,” a hunter said harshly. “He’s just like all the others. He’d have changed his mind and eaten you soon as you’d grown a bit.”

Little Red looked down at Jamie. Her friend. A wolf. His fur was fluffy and soft where it wasn’t matted red. She wondered if the hunter was right. Would Jamie have ended up just like all the others?

She would never know.

By Elaine Llewellyn



Bending Over Backwards by Fiona Shanahan



By Quin Carmicino

october hurts

someone in my heart keeps wringing out the same towel
and it aches to sit down, aches to listen, aches to write
everything i've ever loved has stopped having a point

i do so much not caring that my chest turns to stone
the word *useless* tattooed on my face everywhere i go

i will never know the world from a pair of eyes that aren't my own

skipping stones and easy laughs
pink cheeks and clammy hands

last year, i always wrote about myself as prometheus
stealing fire from gods, i said

i am not prometheus, not anymore

i think i've become sisyphus
pushing the same damn boulder up the same damn hill for eternity

trapped yet undone
inside of my cage made of nothing

god, october hurts



by Percy Parker

The Final God of Pain

Sipha's eyes tilt up at the impending pyramids. The entire might of the Black Fleet encroaches on Earth, and she is helpless. They tilt down, almost as if to look her in the eyes, and their bases start to glow orange; the same colour as the powers Rhulk used against the fireteam who raided the pyramid ship grounded in Savathûn's Throne World. The glow expands outward, into space. Jumpships fall from the sky, crashing into the wall surrounding The Last City. The citizens - Cabal, Human, and Elikzni - all scream. Buildings fold over as if they were toys. Hundreds of years of survival, all coming to a halt in a matter of seconds. The second collapse. Sipha is suddenly in the air, floating upwards in a beam of light. But this isn't the light she is used to. This light is painful. This light is void of fear. This light is... dark. As she reaches the edge of the ozone and floats into space, a triangular figure comes into view. Its eyes are voids, its skin the colour of the snakes in Old Chicago and the leaves in the Cosmodrome. Its head spews out the faces of all beings to have ever existed. Sipha looks for someone she knows among them but finds herself alone, staring into the emotionless eyes of this being as she stops moving

"You cannot escape the inevitable," it says in the voice of everyone that has ever existed. "Finality takes shape."

It outstretches a hand which floats between dimensions, and reaches into her heart. Sipha's mind is thrust into a journey from the edge of the universe back to Sol. From the sun to the moon, to Io, to Neptune. Roots. A city hidden among the waves and from humanity so as to avoid the same fate Earth faced. Inconceivable amounts of paracausal power. And suddenly Sipha is falling. She faces her palm to the sky, but her ghost is nowhere to be found. She is lightless. And then she hits the ground.

~~

Sipha's eyes rip open. She sits up and takes in her surroundings. A Pouka circles her head a few times, and stops to stare her in the eyes. It reminds her of the loss of the Traveller. The loss of everything she thought brought her purpose. Sipha sighs and stands up, stretching out with a yawn. She shakes the thought of being lightless from her mind. It was just a nightmare, as much as she'd like to be rid of nightmare's forever. She dawns her clothing, and a robe made from the power of the first sun the universe ever formed. She places an armlet around her arm bicep and dawns her helmet. She walks through the Hall of Heroes to the ledge overlooking Strider's Gate. She stretches her arm out and the web reveals itself. And now she is flying through the air,

grappling from tangle to tangle; from one place in reality to a place in another universe, and back to reality once more.

Before long she lands at the entrance to the structure which contains The Veil. She knows not what the Veil is, only that it is vulnerable, and the Vex and Taken are after it. Even more frighteningly, Nezarec, the Betrayer, is after it. She walks over to a familiar silver figure who sits on an ammunition crate, slouching at an astounding six and a half feet tall.

"Nimbus," she says, addressing the Cloudstrider as she takes off her helmet, revealing her poofy grey-purple hair and dark, yet pale blue skin. The lights of The Veil's containment chamber shine off of her almost reflective white markings, which dot her nose and cheeks, almost as freckles would a human's face.

"Hey Guardian," they say, turning their face slightly to look in Sipha's direction. Their voice moves with the fluidity of a machine, due to the aug's they received when they took on the responsibility of being a Cloudstrider. "The Taken are inside for some reason. Didn't wanna have fun without you!"

"I'll take a look," Sipha says with a chuckle. "Don't know what the Taken would want with the Veil. I thought it was useless after... whatever happened happened."

"Me too. Regardless, whatever they want can't be good."

Sipha nods and puts her helmet back on with a sigh. Her ghost transmits Forbearance onto her back and Quicksilver Storm into her hands as she descends into the depths of the Veil's containment. She opens her palm and summons her ghost to illuminate the dark and windy Ishtar tunnels.

"I don't like this, Guardian," Her ghost pipes up. "The paracausality of the Veil is... wrong. It feels like the power of the darkness. It feels like... pain. And chaos. And fear."

She presses on. As she opens the final vault door a Taken Psion jumps out at her, knocking her to the ground and grasping for her wrists. She quickly puts a few rounds from Quicksilver Storm into it, and it disintegrates back into nothingness. Sipha rises and continues on. Right, left, right, right, left, down into the ducts, back up into the tunnels. She encounters more Taken and gets rid of them with ease, for they are all but a foreign threat to her.

She finally arrives at the last path before the control room overlooking the Veil, when her ghost pipes up again.

"Don't go in there, Guardian. Something far too powerful for you to handle alone is in there. I can sense it."

Sipha looks at her ghost then back at the final door.

"I have to."

She steps to the door carefully, making sure not to make as little noise as she can. She raises her auto rifle and presses the green button on the control panel. The door slides open, and a lanky figure resembling a Hive wizard turns to look her in the eyes. Its chest and arms glow with the same orange colour as Rhulk and the pyramids. Its robes drape to its toes as the figure rises in the air to tower above Sipha. On its head it wears a helmet resembling Nezarec's Sin, but it looks wrong. The beauty of the Golden-Age helmet is gone, this time tarnished with age and betrayal. A scythe appears in the hands of the figure and it charges at Sipha, who dashes away in a puff of solar energy. Sipha's ghost transmits a Mida submachine gun into her hands and she presses the trigger immediately, aiming the bullets at the orange spots on her aggressor's body. It flinches but does not falter, and charges at Sipha once more, brandishing the weapon as though it were a plasma sword from the pre-golden age films about wars amongst the stars.

Her ghost transmits a linear fusion rifle into Sipha's hands. But before she can charge it to fire, the figure is behind her, and the blade of the glaive is embedded in the back of her chest. The figure catches Sipha before she can fall, and drops her on the floor. Sipha remembers her nightmare, the feeling of being lightless, as she sees the figure pick up her ghost and crush it in its hands as though it were nothing more than a children's toy. Light energy leaves Sipha's body, leaving her feeling empty, worthless... betrayed.

"Your fear is your end, Guardian," Says the figure, in a deep whisper. "I will feast on it."

"Who are you?"

"I am pain. I am terror."

The figure brings their scythe to Sipha's neck.

"I am Nezarec."

By Anonymous



BY HELENA KOTTMAN

You Are What You Eat

Even during a time of agony and despair, there is still reason to believe that everything happens for a reason. Can it be said that if one is put on this planet, they are designed for some sort of duty? Can we hold this single job against them? At this time in 2098, the best thing one can do is listen and do what you're told. After the Nuclear War, radiation has been roaming the Earth. Farming and food have become the only necessity and have left people fighting over it for the last 50 years. Most of the human population has vanished and the majority of those who are left are starving. It would be very rare to find a family living together like how it used to be in the old days.

However, deep in the Rocky Mountains, there is a community called Hölle, that is doing relatively well. Their leader, Doctor Eli, is even able to feed their citizens. Conditions aren't the best, but at least there are greater chances of surviving.

On his first day of the job, the Intern began to look around in wonder. "It is a miracle how you are still keeping all these families healthy. It is unheard of to have a well organized community after the nuclear war," says the Intern. Doctor Eli is getting older and needs someone to learn and take over for him. It looks like this Intern would be the perfect fit.

"None of it is easy. It comes with a lot of sacrifices from all of our families. They need to totally trust us in order for all of this to happen," says Doctor Eli. He spoke to the Intern with a very husky voice and showed no emotion with his eyes covered by his black sunglasses. On his back, he wears a musket and a black trench coat. Every time he speaks he looks down at his pockets where his hands lay and fidget with something. Most of the citizens of this civilization look up to Doctor Eli as their savior. And to him they are just as important. "Now I must bring you to one of my favorite families. This family is one of our—what we call— Breeder families." The doctor had some hesitation in his voice, as not many people are allowed to be brought inside the village. It is hard to trust people now, and you never know when someone might try to steal resources. He also wasn't sure how the Intern would react once he finds out what his job is.

They enter through the gates of the decent sized village. Right next to the entrance there are a few farmer's markets, and a single clothing store. All of the stores were very run down and the signs were chipping off from the side of the buildings. On the ground, grass is growing

through the stone pavement, however, the conditions are still much better than those who live elsewhere. Adjacent to the clothing store is a small town house where a teenage girl and her little sister are sitting on the pavement talking to one another. When the two adults approached the house the little girl's eyes lit up, and jumped up to see Doctor Eli.

The little girl began to call out to her mother and father so they could see who was outside. The parents swung the door open and their faces seemed to be filled with utter happiness. Whenever Doctor Eli came to your house, it was going to be a good day.

"Good morning, I would like to welcome you to the person who will soon be taking over for me," Dr. Eli said. "Good morning, sir," the family said robotically in unison and looked back at the doctor. The doctor began to explain how grateful he was for their obedience and how he is excited for their eldest son to take on his new Duty today on his 18th birthday. As the Intern made eye contact with the family, the family realized that he was gazing at them and they turned their heads towards him together. The total situation was awkward for the Intern. Why are they called Breeders anyway?

"Well we must get going. But the man standing next to me will be the one helping your son discover his Duty and finally make it out of the walls with the others," Doctor Eli said as he began to shake hands with the family.

When Doctor Eli and the Intern walk deeper into the village it becomes very clear that the area looked uncared for and that most of the clothing that people were wearing was very old and ragged.

The two of them make it to another gate that leads further inside of the village. There is an iron gate and chains wrapped around it. The doctor reaches into his coat and pulls out a fairly large key to open up the chains.

"Now we are getting to the exciting part," said the doctor with a smile showing his bright white teeth. At this moment the Intern couldn't see anything behind the sunglasses and his heart missed a beat. When the two of them walked through the gates the atmosphere is completely different. The houses are much more well cared for, and there were many families walking around in new and clean clothing. The stores are cleaner and the food they put out actually looks edible. There is even a small river running through the middle of the village that children are playing in.

The Intern's face made a grimace in disgust. The doctor took a glance at him and smiled to himself.

"I know what you may be thinking. There are those on the other side living in misery, while everyone here has beautiful luxury." Doctor Eli said as they continued to walk down the well paved stones. "But it is all worth it in the end." The doctor kept walking and made excuses for why there is a large split social classes.

As they approach a large building there is smoke coming out of the building. Deep inside the building there are faint noises that sound like screams. Doctor Eli walks up the stairs with the Intern to the entrance of the building, but the Intern stays back.

"It is time I bring you inside sir. This is where your job begins." the Doctor says looking back at the man.

The two of them slowly walk up the steps into the building and when they walk in there is a laboratory room with several scientists surrounding an operation table. There IS a young man, about 18 years of age lying on the table. The Intern looks on in horror, as the realization sets in. In the background he hears the Doctor's words: "This is where it begins. This is our food. This is the Breeders' Duty. This is their sacrifice."

By Mary Mikalsen

Crispy, fresh from the microwave.
 Bags and bags, from the pound.
 Not sure the chicken is real, but good enough.
 It was love at first sight, and I was 3,
 I love my dino nuggies,
 And always will.

Brendan Shanahan



By Celia Drury



Photograph by Quin Carmicino



By Mimi Scarpino

Beautiful

By Anon

I sway in time to the gulping
 Of dripping water
 In a clogged bathtub
 Contorting my face to copy the swallow-sound

My hands measure my stomach religiously
 Pinching skin, rolling flesh between fingers
 In my little daily baptism
 Safe behind navy blue and florals
 Sway. Sway. Sway.

Why is water
 Always the holy one?
 It is not enough to wash the dirt from my body
 I must sear off the skin, too
 Before the filth seeps into my bones
 I turn the knob to red
 I will boil me anew

The light is buzzing loudly above me
 It must be an angel
 The hair strand plastered to the wall is an angel
 The rusted-over bobby pin is an angel
 The blue-stained tiles
 are angels
 The dead bugs swirling down the drain
 They too, must be angels
 Why else would I confess to them
 The whole sandwich, the chocolate paste, the candied clementine?
 The porous bread, the salted crumble, the cafeteria broccoli
 The bleeding jam, blister-red
 The asinine grapes, white like hives, like bubbled skin
 Like frayed nails and ribboned fingertips
 Like swollen teeth and bitten cheek and twig touch
 Like distorted form, splintering bones
 Growing violently, and bulging

They worshiped Mary for this swollen shape
 Will they worship me for mine?

A love letter to my friends

By Anon

I love the soft fabrics of the clothes of my friends

The fabric that

Flows when she twirls, she's her own maypole

Hecate-blessed curls flashing bronze in the sun;

Fabric that cushions my chin when I drop it

Onto his shoulder, moor-green and soft;

Or that bundles her in fluff, a sheep-pelt coat.

I love the sounds of the voices of my friends

Scaring me out of my skin when he sneaks up behind me, or

Shouting indignantly, her face twisting into a mock snarl, or

Garbling into a bird call, their hat colored to match.

I love the flight of the laughter of my friends

Her shrieking cackle, rhinestone-white and flashing;

His long-drawn shout, manic and alarming;

His low-tone bark chasing his surprising humor;

All the bubbles and hinge-snicker sounds of their delight

Fills my heart sweeter than blood ever could

I love the close presence of my friends

His black-clad shoulder warming mine as we stand, or

Her hand on my arm so we don't lose each other

In this swallowing city;

Or their hand on my back, clinging and sure

A hug to chase the tremor out of my speech.

It is impossible to reduce you hooligans down

To simple words;

To reduce your witty tongues and thoughtful hearts and

amusing assholery and steady support and beautiful minds

Down;

To reduce you--those from first grade,

From fourth, from sixth, from seventh, from ninth--

To fumbling, clumsy English (because there's always more to say)

So I just hope you know

How very dear you are

To me.

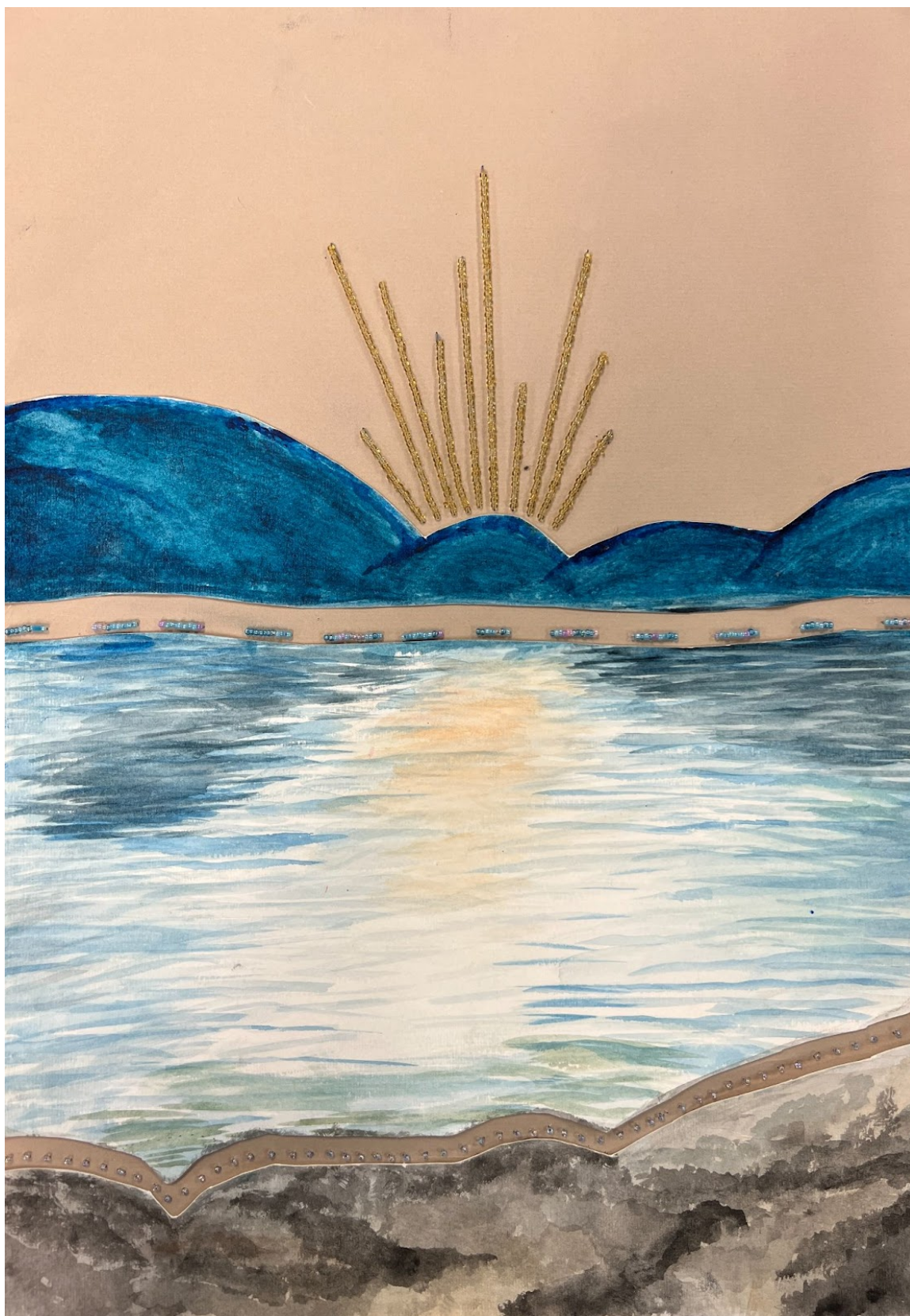
ill

By Anon

Pulse slowed to a sleepy hum
Cherry stained blue lips
Crisp with peeling skin
Eyes a sick-soft yellow
Coughing up honey
Your poisoned sweetheart.



By Samuel Bates



BY AMELIA ALAYON

The Library

I want my house to be like Piranesi's
Labyrinthine halls and lavender sweet pea
Attic full of moths and dust motes

Tea with Shirley Jackson in the evenings.

I want inkwells and mushroom postcards,
A glass of Chardonnay
Cauliflower cheese and oven roasted pizza
Sliced cantaloupe and panna cotta

Enough books to fill the Queen of Egypt's tomb.

I don't want company peeping through the keyhole
Cousins clamoring on the front porch
Mother and father dropping by.

No more bland, frostbitten skies for me, march snowstorms, fluorescent lights.

Not for me store-bought cake pops,
White suburbia,
New & Hot bestsellers,
Geometry tests.

No.

I want to dance where the sidewalk ends,
Doze on a balcony in Barcelona,
Burn driftwood and bake brown butter cookies.

I want to fall in love with a tousle haired, nutmeg-scented fairytale boy

Or a pixie-cut girl who's never known shame.

By Rain Lee



Everything and Nothing By Fiona Shanahan



The Butcher By Fiona Shanahan

Mirrors

I hate mirrors. Something about them has always felt off. Maybe it's that I can't imagine the person in them really being me; like they have all my features but there's no way my mouth really moves like that when I talk, or my shoulders fall so low when I relax. My reflection has my eyes, it's seen all the things I have. It has my hair, my clothes. It reflects every part of me in that moment, yet I've never felt particularly connected to it. Sometimes when it's late at night and the house feels a little too quiet, my reflection scares me. Like it's going to jump out at me, or start screaming disgusting things in my face. I'll hide from my mirrors and cover up my windows. The windows are the worst. When all you can see out of them is the dark emptiness of the night, and that stranger I call my reflection is glaring back at me, almost happy that I no longer have the light outside to protect me. When the sun leaves it strips me of my armor, and I am once again that frightened little girl just trying to fall asleep so I can wake up to the warmth and safety of the sun in the morning. But the morning never comes fast enough, so I am left with the unfamiliar face of my reflection and my own thoughts to sing me to sleep. I hate that song though, so I just lay there and pretend I still can't feel the judgment of my own face on that glass. I thought my reflection was scary enough through that mirror, but that's because I hadn't seen it on the other side yet.

It was a Tuesday night. Outside I could hear the tapping of raindrops and the occasional gust of wind against my windows. My room was still, the slight rocking of my ceiling fan being the only source of sound or movement. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened that day, and as the nighttime fell I was greeted with that familiar but unwanted hum of anxiety in the pit of my chest. I hug my sheets and listen to the rain. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* It hits my window in an almost harmonic beat. I feel grateful to get to add the rain to my lullaby tonight. It may not be the sun, but it still offers more comfort than my thoughts. More comfort than that damn mirror. The rain does its job, and soon I am falling asleep.

The clock flashes at 4:02 when I next wake up. Half asleep I turn the light on to the bathroom, momentarily blinded by its brightness. I walk over to the sink to wash my hands and splash the cold water on my face to wake me up a little. I go to look in the mirror at the bedhead mess I likely am, but am met with an awful discovery; there is no one staring back at me. My reflection is gone. I stand there, staring into the nothingness in front of me. I move and wave my hands, even yell, thinking it might "wake up" the person I'm supposed to be seeing on the other side. But it stays blank, and I stay confused. I feel that pit of anxiety in my chest start to grow as I bring myself back to my room. *This must be a dream.* I lay back down and beg myself to just

fall back asleep. Maybe I can make sense of this in the morning, when the sun is back out. But as I feel myself drift off, I scan my room one last time, and that's when I see it.

It's *me*. But that's impossible. It can't be me. It has my hair, my face, my hands. It's even in the same pajamas as me. But it's not *me*. It may have blue eyes just like me, but those aren't mine. They don't hold my memories. They hold nothing. They look empty. That thing stares at me in the dark of my room. I don't know what to do.

It takes a small step towards me and followed by a shaky breath it speaks, "Julia."

I don't say anything. I'm still too scared.

"I've been waiting for this moment." Its voice hurts my ear, like nails on a chalkboard. It shakes and breaks at every word.

A chill goes down my spine. I still don't respond. I don't know what to say. I don't know where to go. I pray that the sun will come back and save me. Despite my wishes however, my room remains dark. I wish that thing would just leave. Why is it doing this to me? What did I do to deserve this? The hum of anxiety in my chest has turned into a fire and it burns. I just want to close my eyes and wake up to the safety of the morning. The thing doesn't care though. That thing must hate me.

"It's time." It starts walking towards me. I have nowhere to go. Everything is happening so fast.

I woke up. The sun is breaking through my curtains and my room is quiet once again. A heavy wave of relief washes over me. *It was all just a dream*. And what a horrible one it was. I touch my face, wiping the sweat from my forehead. Slowly, I get up from my bed and walk onto the cold floor of my room. I check around, looking for anything missing or moved around. It's all just as I left it before I went to bed last night. No books were out of place, all my jewelry still on my nightstand just as I had messily layed it the night before. Everything was normal, yet something still felt off. I walk up to my dresser mirror and am greeted by that reflection once again. What a silly dream I must have had. I go outside my room. My house is quiet, too quiet.

"Mom?"

No one answers.

I go upstairs and check her room. It's empty. I go to the kitchen. Still no one. I check every room I can think of. The house is completely empty.

I go back to my room and sit in front of my mirror once again. I am greeted with a smile, however I'm not smiling. That horrible feeling of fear washes over me once again, the only familiar in this house at the moment. The girl on the other side waves at me as the door behind her opens. My mom walks into her room.

"Good morning, Julia." Her voice is muffled through the glass.

No. No this can't be real.

I beg myself to wake up again. I must still be dreaming. But as I stare at the unfamiliar eyes of my reflection once again, I realize this is a nightmare that is never going to end.

By Chloe Rowe



By Elaine Llewellyn

As They Were

“And what happened after that?”

“The teacher told me that I got the word correct and she gave me a shiny star sticker,” Benny droned excitedly.

“Good job, buddy,” the voice of Benny’s older brother exclaimed from beyond the computer screen. “How many letters was it?”

Benny counted on his fingers.

“Eight,” he exclaimed. “T-O-G-E-T-H-E-R. Together.”

“That’s a long one. Maybe tomorrow you’ll get one with nine letters... or maybe even ten.”

“I can spell anything,” Benny challenged playfully. “Give me a ten letter one. I’ll spell it.”

“Hmm.” Benny’s brother played along. “Let me think.”

—

While Benny’s brother was thinking, Benny’s parents and the psychiatrist sat at the kitchen table in the other room. For some time they sat in silence, carefully listening to the hum of Benny’s voice coming from the other side of his closed bedroom door.

“Has the child been coping well since my last visit?” the psychiatrist asked.

The mother simply nodded her head and it was the father who answered, “Yes, he seems to be happier than ever actually.”

There was another second of silence.

“How long has it been since Derick's passing?” the psychiatrist asked. “Excuse me, but I can’t quite remember.”

“Two months,” the mother replied almost instantly.

“And have there been any concerns with Benny in the five weeks that the program has been running?”

“Not that we’ve seen,” the father replied. “Doctor, how long do you plan on carrying out this treatment? It has been somewhat... uncomfortable for us. If you understand.”

“I understand completely,” the psychiatrist said. “But I plan on running this treatment indefinitely if that’s what’s required. I doubt it will come to that though. Little children are so fickle about these things. Just like a downloadable game on his computer, he’ll probably outgrow it within a few years. You just have to be patient and give the child as much support as necessary to see him through this difficult transition.”

The parents glanced at each other.

“But other than that, this checkup was more a check on the program itself,” the psychiatrist continued. “Any technical problems?”

The parents shook their heads. The psychiatrist smiled.

“Then we’re all set for today unless you have any more questions or concerns.” He stood up. “Hang in there. With this technology in a few years death will just be but a bad dream.”

“H-A-P-P-I-N-E-S-S.” Benny was oblivious to the conversation happening outside. “Oh shoot. That’s only nine.”

Rain pounded against the window beside Benny’s bed that night. The only light in the room came from the occasional flash of lightning. Benny managed to sleep through a good portion of the assault against his window, however, one particularly loud rumble of thunder sent him running for his desk chair.

“Derick?” Benny cried into the computer screen. For a few seconds, the screen remained dark. A few more seconds passed. Benny was about to give up and make the shaky trek back to his bed when suddenly the screen lit up with an image of his own dimly lit room. Derick slid himself into view.

“What’s up, buddy?” Derrick said. “Is something wrong?”

“N-no,” Benny replied. “Just a bad dream.”

“Oh. I’m sorry, buddy. Is there anything that I can do to help?”

Benny thought for a second.

“You don’t need to be scared,” Derrick reassured. “I’ll always be a click of a button away when you need me.”

Benny wiped his eyes and smiled. “Tell me that story about that time when you and Dad found that big jellyfish on the beach.”

“Ooh, that’s a good one,” Derrick laughed. “Let me see if I can remember.”

“So what did you say the problem was?”

The IT worker sat at Benny’s desk toying with the settings on the computer system. The mother and father stood behind him. The psychiatrist watched from the doorway.

“The system’s been running by itself lately,” the father replied. “Just this morning I heard Derick calling out ‘Hello. Benny? Are you there Benny?’ I went into the room and there he was on the screen. I powered him down, thinking that maybe Benny just forgot to turn him off before going to school but then the same thing happened about an hour later. The computer just powers up by itself and then Derick calls out really loudly for Benny. It’ll drive me nuts if it keeps happening much longer.”

“That’s weird.” The IT man clicked something on the settings menu. “If the computer keeps turning itself on randomly that sounds like a problem with the computer. Regardless, I never set up Derick to be allowed to show up at random intervals. Let me see if I can find the source of the problem.”

The psychiatrist took a sip of his coffee. "If the program has had a malfunction, maybe we should just power Derick down for a little while and let the system reboot itself. I'm not much of a computer guy but I know enough to know that shutting it down and restarting it usually clears any random issues. I would advise that we do this as a last resort though. Derrick's been programmed to learn from information that Benny tells him, so rebooting him doesn't guarantee that he'll keep all of his information. A factory reset would only leave him with the memories that we programmed into him ourselves at the start."

"I don't know about that," Benny's father said, turning around. "Benny's getting awfully attached to this thing. The morning after your last visit, I found him asleep at his desk. Derick was just sitting there watching him."

There was a second of silence.

"Benny's always been good with the appliances," the mother chimed in. "Derick never used to like the TV programs or his videoschooling work, but Benny always seemed to be fascinated with his electronics. We've never had problems.... I was surprised he liked this program so much though. Derrick hadn't always been that pleasant with him while he was still alive. With all the recent changes I'm not very sure how well he'd cope with Derick being shut down—"

"I think I found the problem," the IT worker said. "It looks like someone changed the settings on the program. See? If you manage to open up the advanced controls, there's an option for 'random socializing.' We developed it in a later update to help make these programs appear more socially realistic but we usually keep it disabled for children. Derick should have only been appearing when Benny prompted him and only when the computer was powered on, but with this setting selected he'd be free to show up and start talking at random intervals."

The mother and father looked at each other.

"Did you turn it on?" The father asked his wife.

"No," she replied. "I don't even go on Benny's computer."

"Then I guess Benny was just playing around with it."

"That shouldn't be the case," the IT worker told them. "Advanced settings are not viewable from the application menu. We programmed it so that the child can't change them."

"Maybe there was just a bug or a reasonable mistake when it was being checked by another system manager," the psychiatrist suggested when neither of the parents responded.

"It's a simple fix," the IT man said. "I'll check to make sure that the other system settings are good and then I'll go ahead and just power the system back on. Derick doesn't have to be rebooted."

"Well that's good," the mother replied.

The door to the apartment was unlocked after the third time that the psychiatrist pressed the buzzer. Unlike his last visits, no one was there to greet him at the door.

"Hello?" He called into the kitchen as he stepped inside. There was no response.

From the kitchen he could hear someone talking in Benny's room. He slowly made his way over and gently knocked on the door. There was no initial reply. He could still hear Benny talking. He knocked a second time. "Come in," Benny called.

He entered the threshold to find Benny sitting at his desk with his back to the door.

"Benny?" The psychiatrist prompted.

"Yes," Benny replied distantly.

"Where are your mom and dad? Did they forget that I was coming over?"

"No, they're here," Benny said. "Take a look." He pointed to his computer screen.

Confused, the psychiatrist stepped fully into the room and glanced at the computer screen. On the screen were Benny's parents and Derick sitting together smiling at him. The psychiatrist was shocked.

"Benny..." He didn't know what to say. "How did you...?"

He paused. Benny just smiled back at him from his desk chair.

"How did you do this?" The psychiatrist asked.

"Derick told me how," Benny replied. "He showed me how to use a video of Mommy and Daddy from the computer to make them. Now he and Mommy and Daddy and me can finally be together again. But Mommy and Daddy aren't that good yet. See? Their mouths move funny sometimes."

The psychiatrist carefully leaned over Benny's chair. "Mr. and Mrs. Clarence, can you hear me?"

"Yes, hello," they both responded in robotic unison. "I don't believe we've met before. Could you tell us your name?"

The psychiatrist stepped back. "Benny," he said. Benny turned to face him. "Where are your real parents?"

Benny looked confused. "Here." He pointed to the screen.

When the psychiatrist didn't immediately respond, Benny turned back around.

"Benny, could you wait here while I go do something outside?"

"Sure," Benny said dismissively.

The psychiatrist exited the room and carefully closed the door behind him. He pulled out his phone and dialed for Benny's father. He called twice. When the father didn't pick up, he tried the mother. Nothing. When he tried calling his father again with the intent of leaving a voicemail, he noticed the muffled sound of a ringing phone coming from somewhere else in the apartment. He canceled the call. Silence. He dialed the number again and hit the call button. The faint ringing started up again.

From behind the closed door, the psychiatrist could hear Benny talking on the computer. "E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G. I did it! I got one with ten letters."

"Good job, buddy," he heard three voices say.



By Quin Carmicino

Clear and Sweet

Whitman wrote, “clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.” The first time I read *Song of Myself*, I underlined that. I underlined it in the hopes that someday I would know what it meant.

My footprints do not make a mark when I walk home from school. I have often thought this. I secretly see myself as a shadow of sorts. Unseen. Unheard. I do not believe that the world is anything but my mind.

On these invisible weekday walks, I note the rare strangers out on the street dully, knowing all of the everything inside them will not raise the muddy nothing I feel inside of me.

On this lonely winter afternoon, I only see one man. He’s walking way ahead but in my direction. I prepare myself to avert eye contact.

He has a purple jacket. Purple, the richest color. The color of beauty, of royalty.

I feel his eyes on me as I approach. His dead set stare is eerie.

He walks in the middle of the road, as if he doesn't care that there could be cars. I stay on the sidewalk. I live on the sidewalk.

I keep the knowledge that more than half of all trans people get physically assaulted in their lifetime in the back of my mind always. It's not a conscious thing. It's just there, an unerasable constant. The box of fear in my chest wants to spring open as this man watching me gets closer and closer. But I don't think it will happen like this. A purple old man on Pine Street in the middle of the afternoon. And so I keep walking forward, soundless footsteps on frozen ground until we are right beside each other.

He stops walking and looks at me.

This is unusual. My heart quickens with alarm. All of the color that makes me a person floods back into my gray body.

"What did you learn today?" he asks.

Okay. He sees the backpack, he is sentimental. I think I get it. My panic loosens, making room for the fact that I don't know. What did I learn today? Did I learn anything at all? Did I learn anything besides the fact that in high school, some boys are gods, while others are meant only to worship? Will I ever learn anything else?

I suddenly want to give him a good answer. Give him the *right* answer.

"I'm reading Macbeth in English class..." I pause, wanting to explain how Shakespeare's words warm me and remind me how beautiful it is to care about the intricacies of language, of the world. But I don't know how. "And I learned the quadratic formula."

He smiles. It's a warm smile. A real, happy smile. His beard is the same graying brown as his hair. His eyes are crinkled with joy. He looks familiar in an undefinable way. How quickly one's perception of a purple old man can change.

I want to say something else. "What did you learn today?" A ridiculous question, maybe. But it feels right.

He pauses. "That I'm not as young as I used to be, and that there are bills to pay." It's a good answer, tinged with sadness. I wonder if he's married. I wonder if he has kids or grandkids. I wonder if he has people to drink from the fountain of love I now see in him. Perhaps he doesn't. Perhaps that's why he's resorted to seeing sad shadows of boys on the street and asking what they've learned today. I wonder what he was like as a boy. I wonder who he thought he would be. What he thought he would know.

"What's your name?" he asks.

"Percy," I say, and I feel something in my chest turn on. Percy, like Percy Shelley, one of the brilliant romantics who saw beauty painted all over the Earth. Percy, like my great grandmother, a musician and a storyteller who loved with every inch of her. Percy, like me, like a teenage boy with a life ahead of him, with thousands of things to learn. "What's yours?"

“Kevin,” he tells me.

Kevin.

Kevin, with a purple jacket.

Kevin, with the beard and smile of Walt Whitman, of oh captain, my captain.

Kevin, who learned something today.

Kevin, who taught me that I have too.

I tell him to have a nice day and I mean it. I finish my walk home, listening to my footsteps touch the ground. Breathing in air and loving the way the cold makes it feel sharp in my lungs. I smile and I imagine that I can feel the world smiling with me.

And I think I understand that clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

By Percy Parker



By Quin Carmicino



By Mimi Scarpino



By Scotia Hartford

Deep in the thick of the hickory wood,
 The jumpelirina would sit where it could.
 Not many people have heard of it here,
 So I'll tell you about it to lessen your fear.

It has two bright-eyed wings that resemble a moth's,
 And it wraps them 'round tree trunks like two cleaning cloths.
 It sleeps there at daylight, wrapped up at an angle.
 It's peaceful inside of its comfortable tangle.

By Louisa Schimming

In the depths, a fish most sickly
 Swam from a shark, chased most quickly
 The fish was caught in the shark's jaw
 What happened, only the fish saw
 The shark swam away, to where no man can say
 If not caught by the shark, the fish would have still died one day
 Floating, bloated and decayed

By Theodore Baranszky-Job



By Shayla Ochoa



by Elaine Llewellyn



Everyday I see dancers: in shows, in ads, in movies. I think they're amazing. One day I see a little girl dancing in a TV show. She looks my age. I could be just like her! I ask my parents if I can take dance classes, and they say yes.

1



I'm all ready for class!

Before I start dance classes, I need the right outfit. I get ballet slippers, tights, a leo, and a skirt, and put my hair up in a bun.

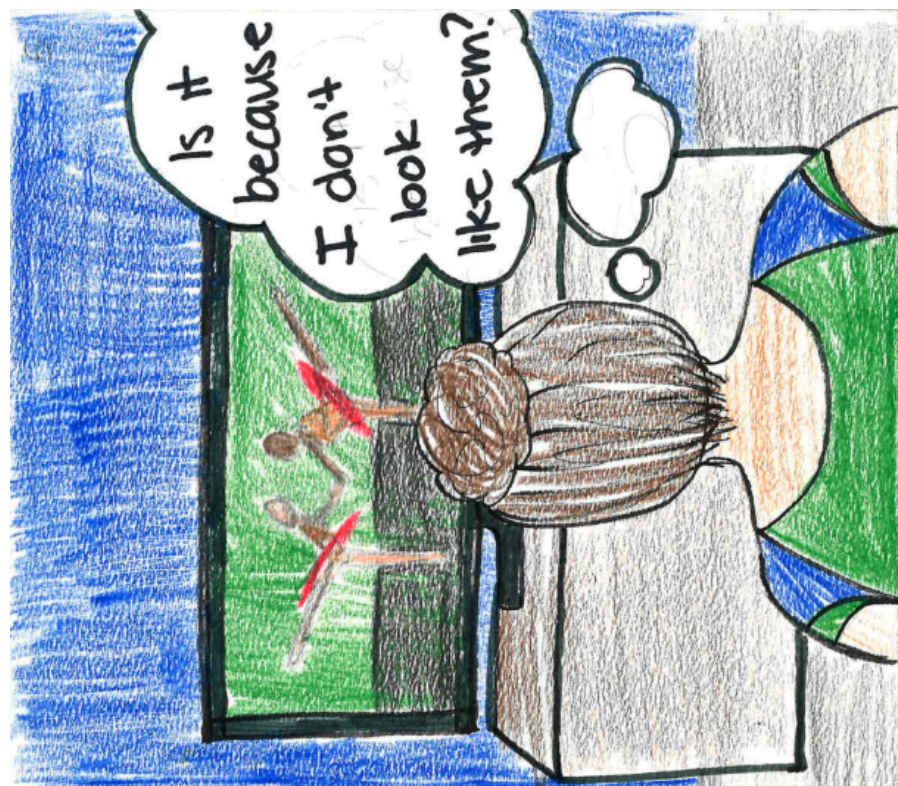
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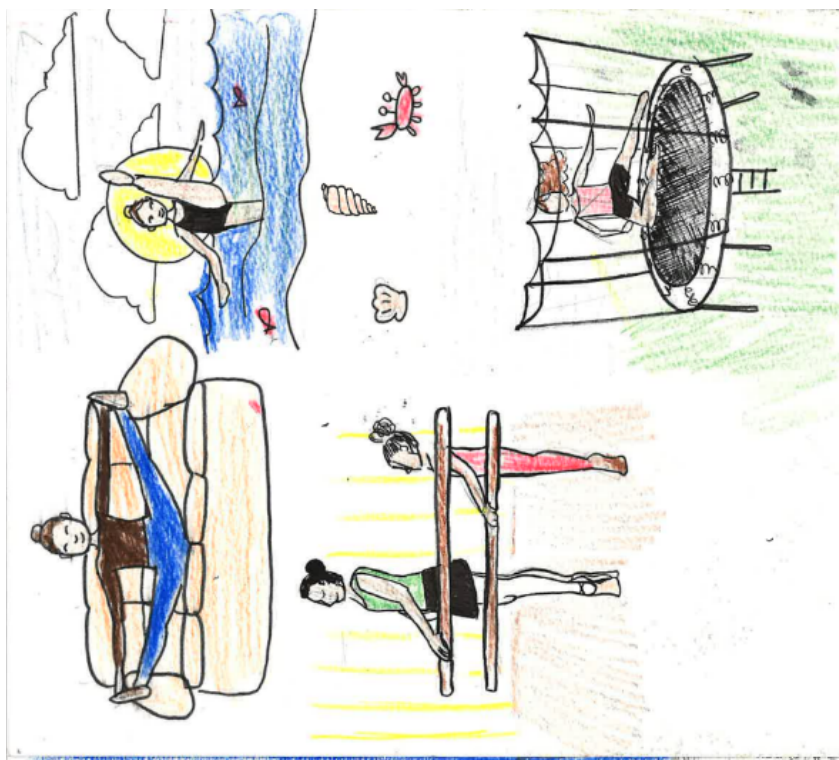
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I go home feeling disappointed. Dance wasn't what I thought it would be. I don't know what's wrong! I'm older than my classmates, I should be doing better than them.

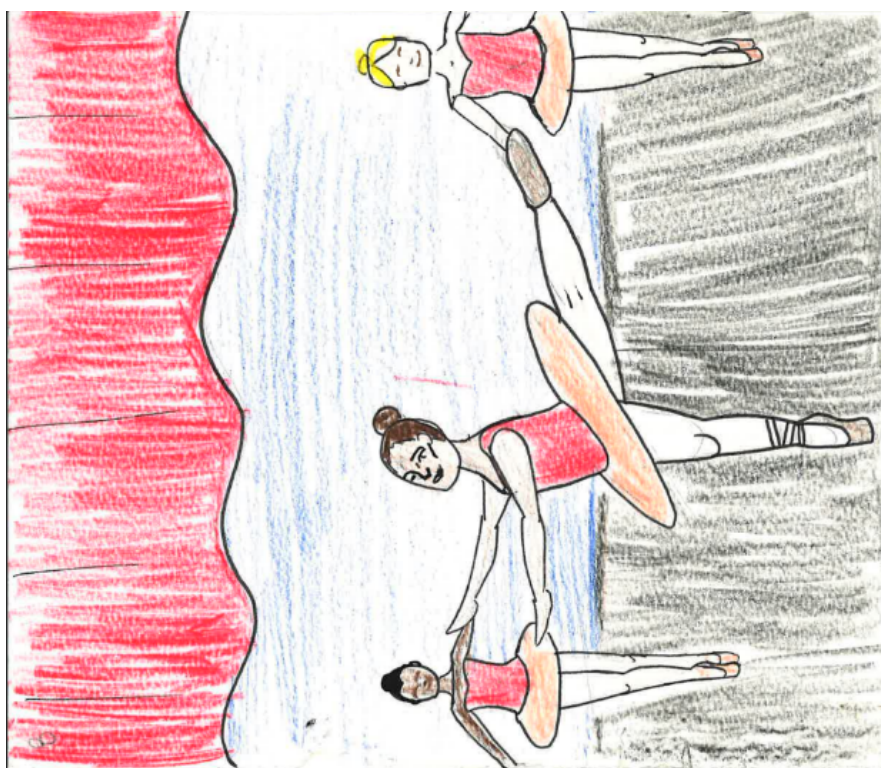


After the ballet is over, there's an interview with the principal dancer. I'm not paying much attention until I hear something interesting.



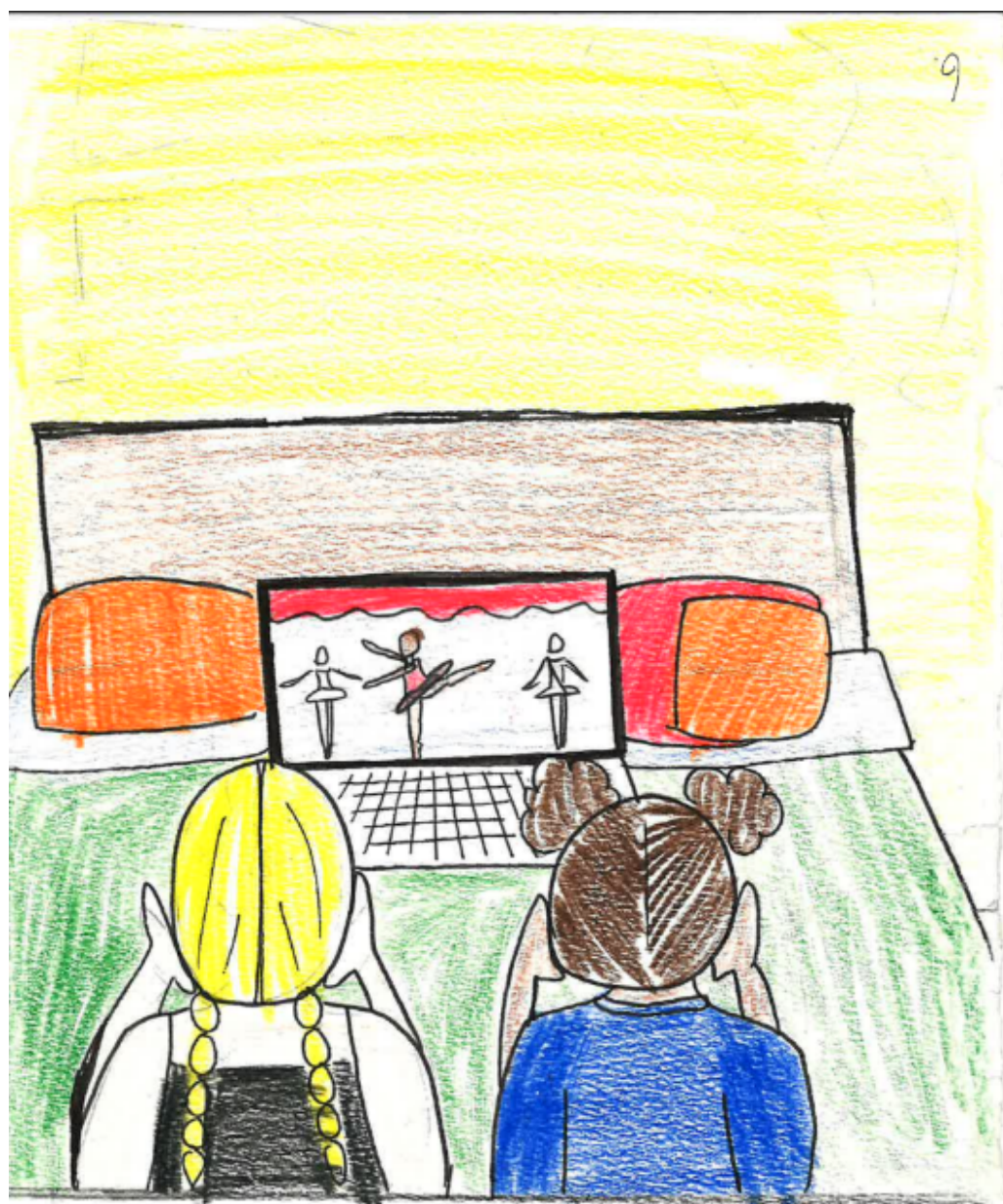
It was so inspiring to see a professional ballerina who had started late like me. I took her advice to heart and worked hard. I focused on myself, my talents, and my progress, and began to catch up in class. Dance became my favorite part of the week, and I made many friends.

17



Years later, I'm a professional dancer! I dance in shows, in ads, and in movies, just like the dancers I used to see when I was little. I've worked so hard to get to this point, and I'm so proud of myself for how far I've come since my first class.

8



After reaching this point, all I hope is that one day, another kid will see me perform. They'll think to themselves, "I want to take dance classes!" and then, just like me, they'll discover how amazing it is to dance.

The Kitchen Chair Castle

By Rain Lee

My girl is dramatic as Diana Ross.

She is fearless and fun.

She isn't afraid of imposing
Or proposing the impossible
Or proclaiming loudly that she hates the cafeteria meatloaf.

She wants to be many things by the time she is thirteen;

An actor, a singer, a genius, a Broadway.

*It's a million years away, she says.
I'll be too old to be famous by the time I'm thirteen.*

She is not like the little ones who save ants on the sidewalk,
Or choose the desk farthest in the back.

My girl is ordinary enough to be just so

And far enough to build a castle
using kitchen chairs and old sheets.

For my good friend Helen

If I was a little goblin
Or a goggle-eyed Raggedy-Ann

I'd grow petite mushrooms
In the fields so near my home

Slice clementines for the spirits
Laugh with fairy-folk.

By Rain Lee

???

...

...

...

...

So....

...

Where do we start?...

Who said we were starting?...

... It's better than doing nothing....

Fine. If you just want to be silent, I'll leave it at that.

...

...

...

Please speak to me.

Fine. What profound wisdom do you want me to share?

I'm sure you could think of something. You've had millions of years to mull it over, haven't you?

And what about you? Have those years done nothing for you?

Could you look away please. Your eyes perturb me....

So what happened?

I... I don't... I'm not entirely sure. Everything went dark. The sky I mean. The stars... they just... went out. It was like some unfathomable creature smothered them.

When was this?

I can't remember. My perception of time hasn't been normal for years. Centuries. Millennium maybe.

I have a feeling it's been longer than that. Stars don't just go out, you know.

They did. And the moon... the moon turned red in the sky... like it was bleeding. The sky was bleeding. That was before the seas boiled away and rain turned to glass and the stars flickered out. You weren't there. You didn't see what I saw.

I agree that I did not see it. But I was indeed there....

Why are we different? Why am I standing here while you cower with your back to me?

You asked me to look away.

Only because there is something unnatural behind your eyes. They frighten me.

If you can see my eyes, then you understand what the sky looked like that day. How it still looks. Your fear is my fear. Look. Look at my face.

No. Please turn back around. I understand that you have seen hell, but I haven't. So please spare me whatever you've been forced to go through.

But why? What have you escaped unscathed while I'm forced to live in a world with a black sky?

...

Answer me.

I don't know. Please just close your eyes so I don't have to look at them anymore.

... Why is it that I cannot see you? Even when my eyes are open, you are not there. You asked me to turn away. You understood that I had turned away. You asked me to close my eyes when they were open. Where are you?

I don't know. I'm just here. What's left of me at least.

Can you see me?

Of course.

What do I look like?

... I don't think I can describe you. You have form, but just that. A form. A twisted, dark, agonizing form. It defies description, logic. Why are you physical and I am just thought?

I don't know. I don't think I am physical. I cannot be. The stars used to be physical. The sky and ground and people used to be physical, but now we are all just thought.

I guess that makes sense.

Huh?

We were never good at conceptualizing nothing, were we? There always had to be something.

But why must there be more than nothing? What are we? You say I am physical but I feel nothing but the agony of the moon and the stars melting away. I am agony.

Hmm. This is a difficult position, isn't it? Do you ever think that there will be an end?

...

I mean, it's been an eternity. So much time has elapsed it feels as if the concept is trivial. There is no time. There is just existence, just us. Is this it? Is this hell? Are we here to just have this same conversation over and over again for eternity. Must I stare into the eyes of reality until I too am driven mad by the deadening image of melting red on a black canvas?

...

I feel as if this conversation is coming to a close.

...

You're not the first one I've spoken to, you know. There are millions of those like you floating around in the darkness. Every single time, the conversation always ends like this. There is never a resolution.

...

It pains me how it takes so long to find a good thought but all it ever is is just a silhouette of agony. I think that's all it is. It's all that's left of us. Agony. When the stars flicked out it left nothing but agony.

...

I can already feel us starting to drift apart. Whether it's you or just the natural flow of whatever is left of this universe, I hope something changes over the next one hundred trillion years. On the bright side, if it doesn't, I'm sure we'll meet again at some point.

...

Until then, enjoy the rest of eternity.

By Anonymous



By Louise Denehy



By Quin Carmicino

THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL BY CHASE COULSON.

BOTTOMS UP TO YESTERDAY,
SOME DAILY NEWS FOR THE STRESSFUL DAYS,
ARBITRARY THOUGHTS MAKE JUDGMENT,
ONLY FOR THE REST OF DAYS.

FEAR IS LOVE CONSTRUCTED BACKWARDS,
TO HATE IS TO LOVE AND TO LOVE IS TO HATE,
EMPATHY LEADS TO EMOTIONAL REVERSE,
BUT WHEN DO WE REALIZE THAT THIS IS ALL FAKE,

MYSTERY INTRIGUES HOPE AND SADNESS,
SO PICK YOURSELF UP FROM ALL THE MADNESS,
HEAR YOURSELF, YOUR THOUGHTS, YOUR WORDS,
AND PORTRAY THE CADENCE SO EVER ENDLESS,

DRINK THE MEMORIES AWAY,
SMOKE THOSE FEELINGS OKAY,
KEEP THE REST AT BAY,
AND LIVE LONG OR DIE YOUNG,
WHATEVER GETS RID OF WHAT HAPPENED TO YESTERDAY.

Desolation by Chase Coulson

Killa man and I become a monster,
 Become a visionary and I vocalize the slaughter.
 Stay silent and I burn inside,
 Stay Quiet And There's Nowhere To Hide.

I speak And my words become an abyss,
 A Cavern Of meaningless symbols gonna miss.
 My voice Alone,
 My actions have no tone.

I Am nothing,
 I am no one,
 I am desolate,
 I Am the lone one.

The Insanity of Happiness By Chase Coulson

I feel like a god among everything,
 I feel immortal when more than content,
 I become eternal a stretch my wings,
 I become aware of happiness's intent.

By chance I sense the feeling,
 I enhance that sense of feeling.
 I try and listen for the lands of happiness,
 Golden horns blaring with soothing gentleness.

Oh the insanity of such happiness,
 How I love the craziness and laughter,
 How I enjoy the pain there after,
 Oh am I really happy or am I just numb?

The Patient

The first time he entered my office, it was a sleepy Tuesday afternoon. One of those days where the sky is gray and the air feels thick with indifference.

I'd spent my morning as per routine, taking temperatures and writing prescriptions and calming hysteria, but really, all I'd been thinking about was the sandwich in my bag that I finally got to dig into on my break. My wife had made it with mozzarella and lettuce and bread from the farmer's market and I was just licking the last bits of it off my lips when he stepped into my office wearing a pinstripe suit. Now, usually, people don't wear pinstripe suits to the doctor's office, but I wrote it off, thinking perhaps he was from uptown. God knows what's going on uptown

He complained of a sore throat and congestion. Typical head cold, I assured him. It happens a lot this time of year, and in fact the majority of patients I'd seen that day had been suffering from such. The real disease they all had, I told him, was a tendency to overreact. I recommended that he take Dayquil and sent him on his way.

He came back 2 weeks later. He was my earliest patient on Monday morning and I was only on my first cup of coffee, so I doubt I'd have recognized him if not for the pinstriped suit. He told me his symptoms had gotten worse and he'd been vomiting up anything he tried to eat. I told him I'd run a few tests and when they came back, sure enough, he had the flu. I wrote him an antibiotics prescription and guaranteed he'd be feeling better within a week. He muttered that he *highly doubted it* on his way out of the room.

He didn't come back for a month. I'd entirely forgotten him save for the day when I was shopping for a suit for my sister-in-law's wedding and when I saw pinstripe fabric I'd chuckled to myself over the strange man in my office. Then, in the middle of a Wednesday, he showed up again. I smiled at him, happy to recognize the odd man and his odd suit. He told me that his head hurt and he was having trouble breathing. I told him I'd run some tests and that he'd receive a call with the results in 2-3 business days. He nodded solemnly and left. Unfortunately, the results seemed to point towards his having lung cancer. I called and sent him to be dealt with at the hospital in the next town over, as was protocol. In all honesty, I didn't expect to hear from him again.

That was until he stepped into my office 2 months later, looking like his usual hearty self in his usual hearty suit. I don't really remember what symptoms he reported, because the test results that came back were so odd that I knew it was just a flaw in our system. They seemed to think he had a rare disease whose origins could be traced back to Southern Africa in the 1600s, a non-contagious disease which now only affected 3-4 people in the United States per year. I decided it couldn't possibly be true and didn't even tell him, choosing instead to send him on his way with nothing. Better than cause a panic, I figured. You know how those ridiculous uptown hypochondriacs can be. He didn't object or even ask me for more details, only readjusted the shoulders of his suit on his way out.

He came back 2 weeks later, my last patient on a Friday night. I was drained from having to deliver a vaccine to a screaming 8-year-old earlier that day, but the sight of his pinstripe suit made me smile. It was funny how the strange man had endeared himself to me in such a way. He told me that he'd just felt weird recently, could I please for once in my pathetic goddamn life do something useful for him? I offered to just do a routine physical and he acquiesced. I found that his skin was oddly cold to the touch. In fact, when I felt his wrist, there didn't seem to be any blood pumping into it at all. I grabbed my stethoscope, and to my surprise, he had no heartbeat at all. Like I said, odd. Those uptown types. I told him what I'd discovered and he nodded like he had expected as much. On his way out, he told me perhaps I didn't know half as fucking much as I liked to pretend.

That was the last time I ever saw the man in the pinstripe suit.

By Percy Parker

The air filled with joy.
 The geese flying above
 Escaping from the cold
 Smoke exiting chimneys
 Warm families inside
 Keeping from the cold
 In the long Winter night.

By Philip Cappello



By Elaine Llewellyn

The curtains part, tinted lights blink awake
 Silhouettes and shades start to take shape
 Cupboards cough and voices break
 A sleepy home theatre gurgles to life

Red cherry lips molding thoughts into words
 Yellow on foreheads, a glow that can burn
 Blue legs make pairs of eyes turn
 The lens glare temporarily blinds

One word topples dominoes of visions
 Two voices waltz and trade positions
 Three beats count in three conditions:
 To live, to wake up, and to come back again

Yes, to believe may also mean to know
 No, there are some things one cannot outgrow
 Maybe someday we'll say hello
 And colour and rhythm will join in a dance

Actors and props made behind closed eyes
 Will someday expire, but for now they'll suffice
 The players say their goodbyes
 Open your eyes, there's no place like home

By Helena Kottman

Artwork - Samuel Bates





Innocence Ticking Away by Fiona Shanahan



By Sam Bates

Beyond.

Prologue.

Simon Okurowski

What comes to mind whenever you hear the word "power?" Physical strength? Resources? Intelligence? Sheer will? Power is associated with kings, with the ability to enforce law and order upon their subjects. Power is associated with witches and warlocks, able to manipulate the very fabric of reality. Power is associated with mere school teachers, deciding the punishment of a misbehaving school boy. So what is the *true* meaning of the word, power? A king can kill whomever he chooses with little to no consequences, while a teacher can only discipline those who break the rules. However, neither a king nor a teacher can bend the rules of nature as a warlock can. Within the natural balance of existence, so many creatures and individuals hold what they believe to be power.

At the dawn of the known multiverse, in a dimensional pocket tucked in the deep recesses of space and void, far beyond the reach of any creature or entity, an architect of worlds is envisioning what potential his creations may hold. He wears a cloak made from a white light, as wings and multiple arms protrude from his back. Each of these arms vary in size. He dreams of a place where there is only one true definition to the word power. A place where only the strong survive, and the weak perish. A utopia of sorts within the eyes of the architect. The architect begins to work on his creation.

He folded space and time, creating a canvas for himself, as he seemed to materialize some sort of energy with his hands. He

stuck his hand out as a blue aura emanated from his hand, splitting the darkness in two. He began to transfer this energy within him into this canvas, as the void began to change from nothing, to something. The architect peered into this something, and began to see some sort of reflection. He realized he was looking at himself. But this version of him was not him. This entity was shrouded in dark, with red eyes peering from beyond the veil of night. One of its many hands began to reach for the architect as he withdrew in fear. He was sure he was the only entity within this space, at least he thought he was sure. The entity began to fade back into the black, seemingly smiling at the architect with malicious intent.

He ignored this strange incident and continued his work. He began to swirl one of his arms in a circle when suddenly, from the edge of the nothingness, stones began to drift into the canvas. Emerging from the dark, these stones began to clash in the center of the canvas. These collisions echoed through the canvas, with each crash the mass of rock began to grow. The architect brought up another one of his many hands and waved it in a pulling motion, as what seemed like millions of boulders began to barrel into existence. Now this mass of stone was growing like a snowball rolling down a hill. This gathering of rock kept growing and growing in size until the millions of stones became one.

This creation was the size of a planet, for it was the first of this universe. The architect began to stick out another hand as it radiated a dark green. He raised a second hand, as a red energy began to pulse into the rock, with each pulse. This planet seemed to begin to *breathe*. With a flick of his wrist, the planet began to sprout with brush and grass. He made another

gesture with a third hand, as dark storm clouds began to creep into the canvas. These clouds began to rain, and rain, and rain.

It rained for what seemed like months on end, until this planet was flooded. Now, this planet has oceans and land masses. And most importantly, enough space for an eternal conflict between all living beings. The architect began to peer closer at the planet, as he noticed flowers began to bloom. He became filled with joy, the beginnings of his perfect world were underway. He began to plan his next steps until something odd began to happen.

A strange energy began to radiate from him, this energy was dark, heavy and cold. Until he began to recoil in pain, his arms appeared to begin to split in two, as did his legs. His entire body seemed to be coming out of itself, exiting the body like a cicada leaves behind its shell. Floating in the boundless void, the architect screamed in pain, as a new entity crawled out of him as one, became two. Now residing within the void, two entities suspended in the nothingness, stare at each other, pondering each other's existence. The architect shrouded by light, while this new entity is casted in darkness, it opens its eyes to reveal two red eyes piercing the vast darkness of the void.

The entity began to speak, "Quite a display, I must say. But, I would remark it's missing something. I do not believe you understand who, or what I truly am."

The architect scowled in response, as he raised a hand and clenched his fist as a black hole opened up to swallow the entity whole. Once he was consumed by the abyss, its voice still lingered.

"You truly think it would be that easy?"

The entity teased, "My hypothesis was correct! You truly have no idea what I am." The entity materialized from the dark back into the canvas.

"You are quite naive my friend, it seems you do not understand the most simple matters. What you have created is glorious. You do not see the potential within it?" The entity flowed through space like a snake and positioned itself behind the architect and laid its hand upon their shoulder. "Peer beyond the canvas, beyond space, then you will maybe see the potential within."

The architect hesitantly began to stare into the void, with this sole planet within it. He kept staring, and staring and staring. Until finally, he began to see it. He saw multiple reflections of himself, his eyes widened.

"Do you now see, you incandescent moron? It is beautiful."

Now, hundreds, thousands of reflections began to convene on the architect as he stared into the abyss. Each of the reflections reached out to him, almost calling him over. The architect reached out to the reflections. Every inch closer, he felt a strange energy flowing through him, it began to get more potent with each passing moment. Merely centimeters away from touching the reflection, he felt himself fall into a trance of sorts. But just as he was about to touch his reflection, it shattered. The entire canvas, cracked like a window. The planet seemed to multiply within these cracks, each shard contained thousands, *millions* of these planets.

The entity began to chuckle, "Fool. You fell right into it."



By Quin Carmicino

My Misunderstood Menagerie

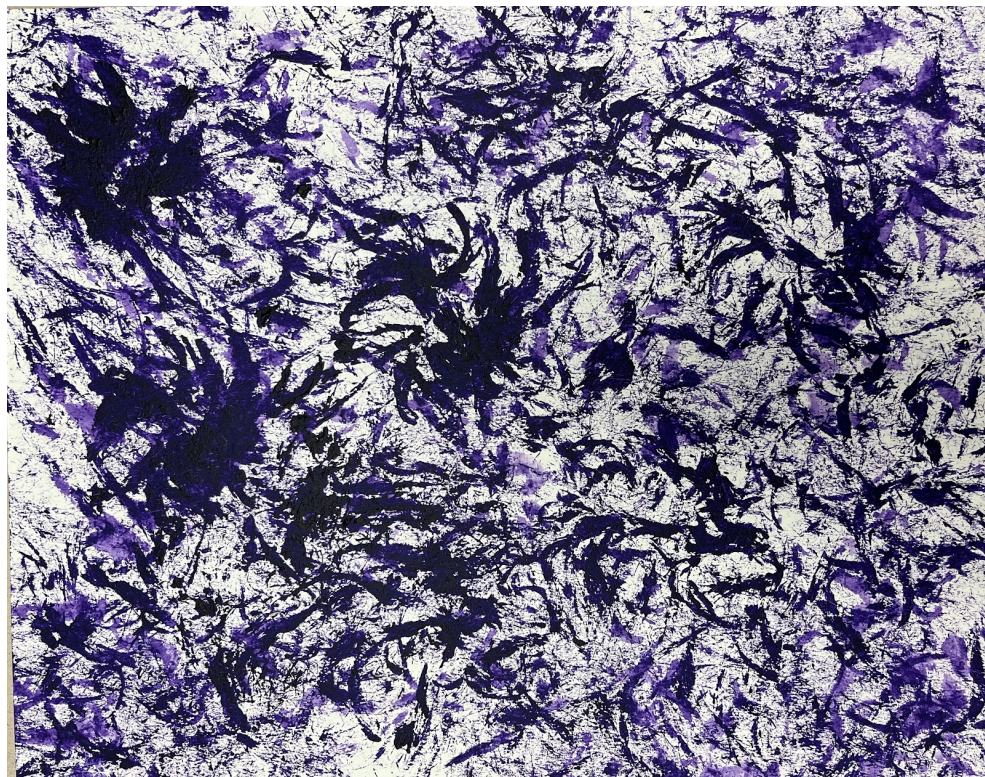
My Magical Monkey Makes Macaroni

My Mystical Mouse Moves Mountains

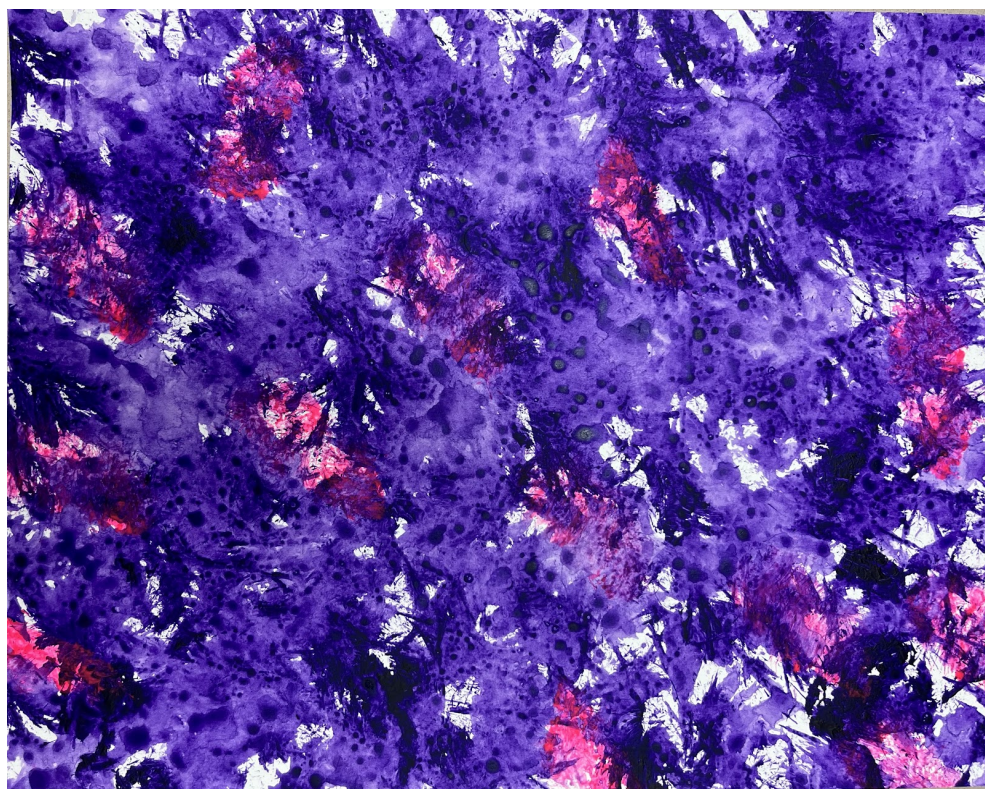
My Mindful Mole Manages Magazines

My Mysterious Mosquito Manipulates Many Majestic Mice

Amelia Kaye



Artwork by Christian Ferreira



november 1st

a sad day

i keep thinking about the dads wearing hoodies trailing behind their kids in cute costumes yesterday
and i keep wondering how many of them wanted to be dads
and how many of them think their golden years are *behind* them
and i look at the jocks walking through the hallways with bravado and can't help but figure someday they
will stand behind their children on Halloween, wearings hoodies for the teams they watch on TV, retelling
stories at the dinner table of their golden years
and i just get this feeling in my chest
like everything around me means so little that it means so much

i hang a million photographs
with the knowledge that someday i will take a hammer and smash all the frames to bits
because hell, that's all part of growing up

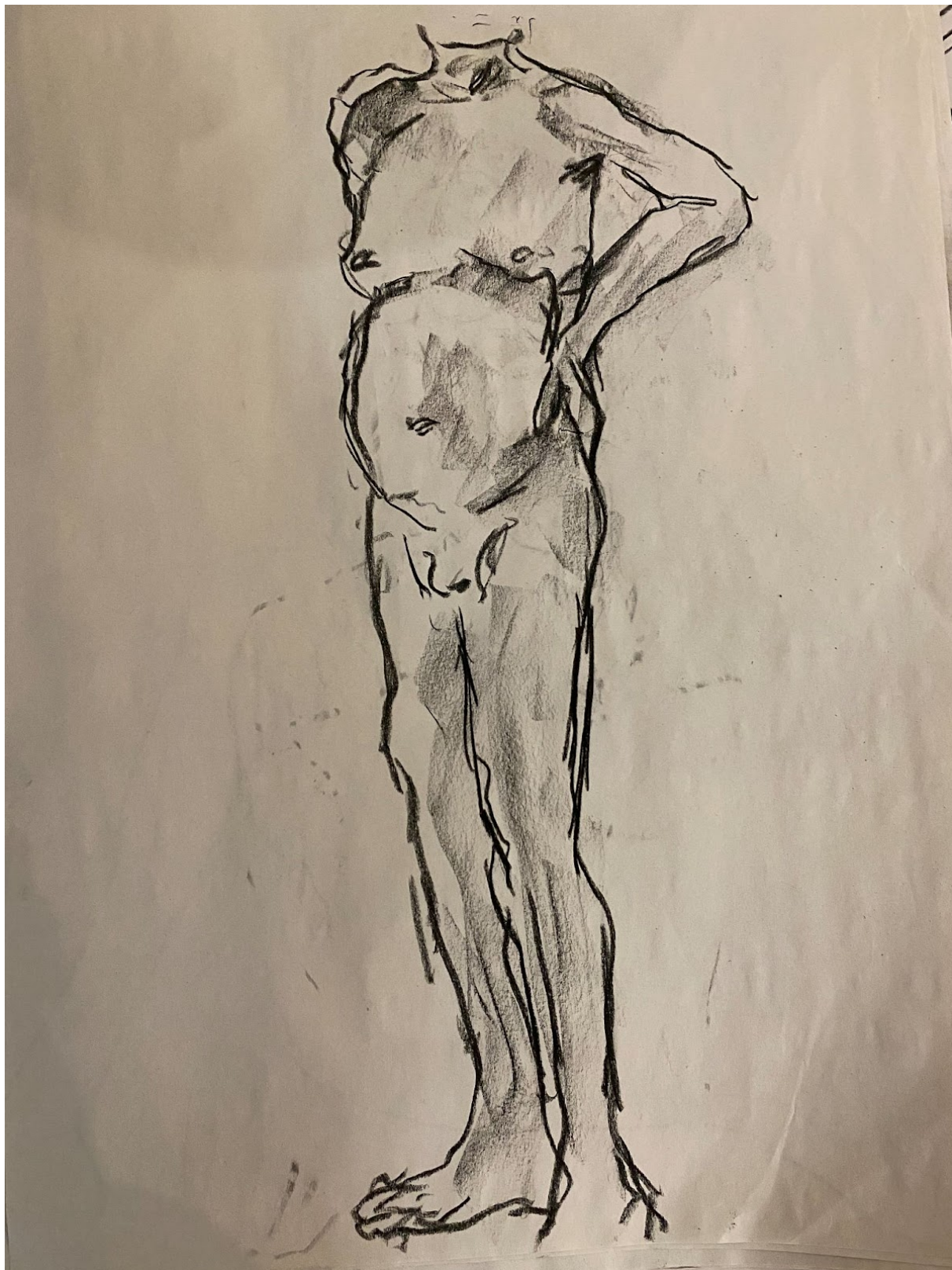
the phrase "growing up" is oddly comforting to me
because it means no one needs me to be complete yet
i can prolong stepping out of the tunnel if i don't see the light for miles

i wonder, sometimes, if anyone around me *thinks* this much

occasionally, when i'm listening to an album, i'll realize i didn't hear one of my favorites
so i'll open my phone to check where it is in the cue and i'll see that it already played
it already played, and i was just thinking too hard to hear it
my thoughts were so loud that i didn't hear a single second of it

and so i sit locked into myself in classrooms, wondering if it could possibly be natural
for a 16-year-old boy to think about the world more than he exists in it

By Percy Parker



By Samuel Bates



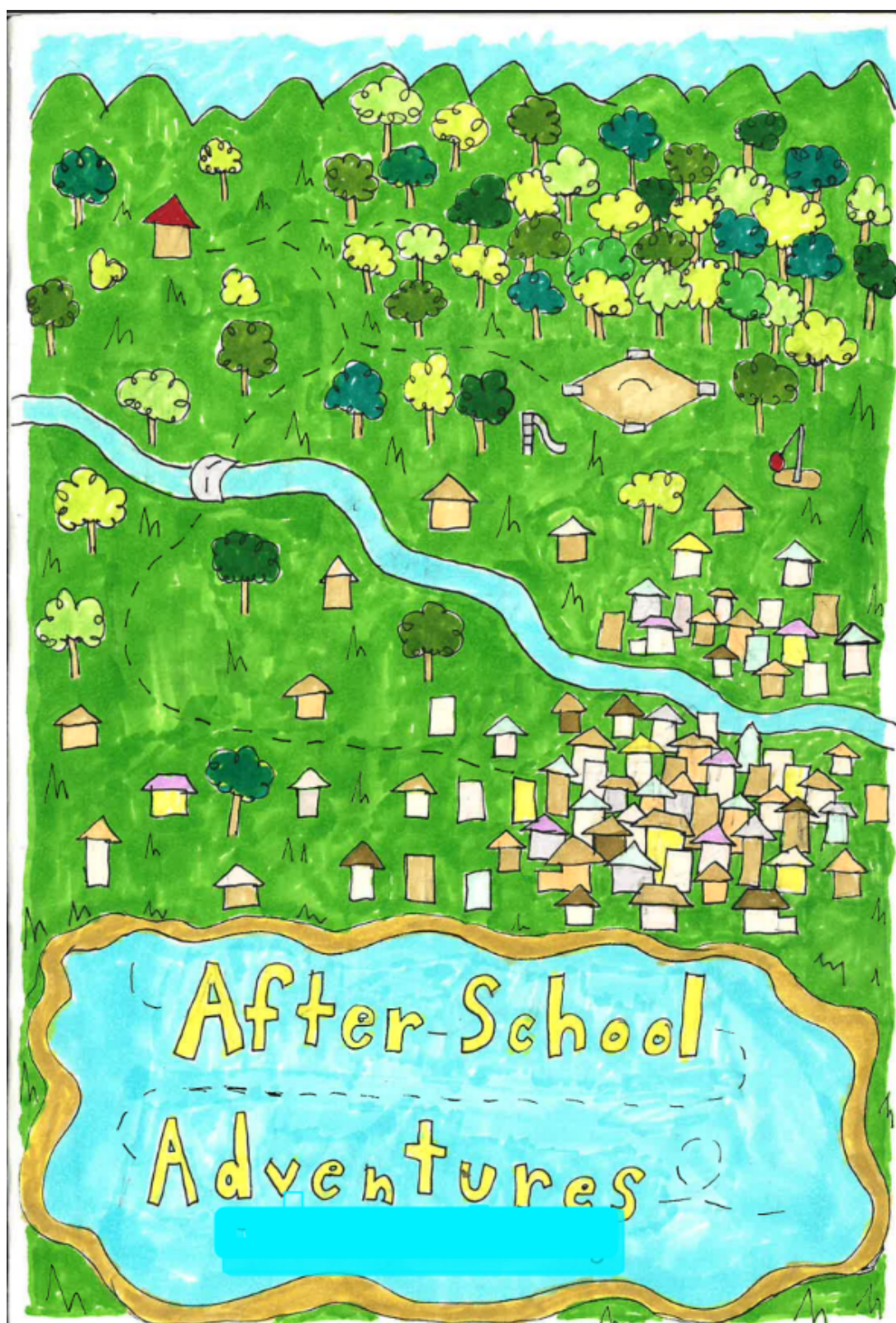
By Ashley Sousa

I'm sweating but it's cold
 I'm far away, but I'm home
 I'm all alone, but it's loud
 I think there's something in the house
 It's chaotic but it's calm
 I won't be here for long
 I'm worried about it all
 I'm worried about the fall
 I'm out but I'm shy
 I am trying to find a simple way to say goodbye
 They think that they know how I am
 But I'm hurting on the inside
 It's hard for them to see, but it's all that's inside me
 I (try to) keep it on the low
 How the hell don't they know?
 I feel like I'm about to blow
 I'm keeping it quiet but I want them to know
 I'm sweating but it's cold
 This struggle, it's getting pretty old.

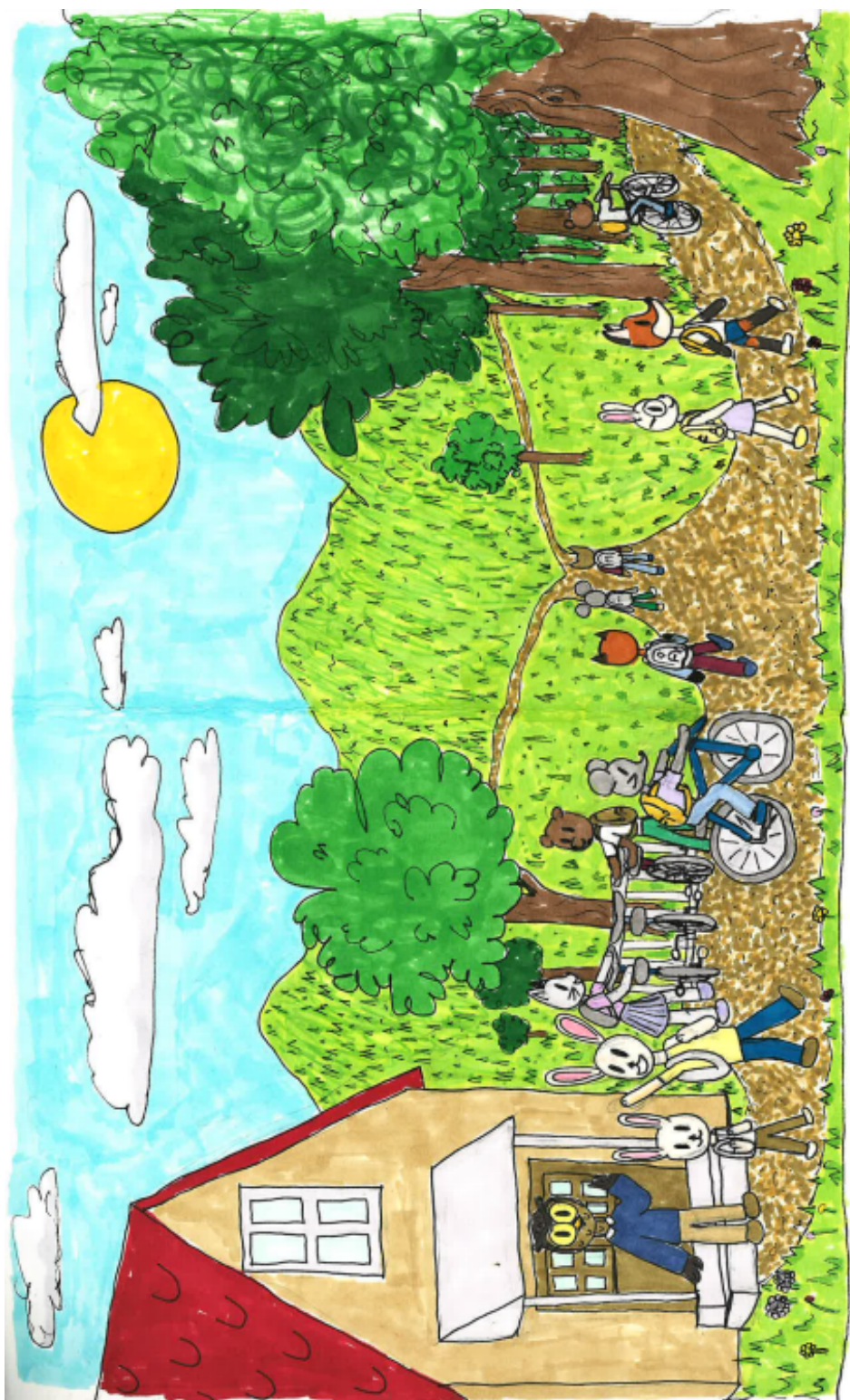
By Anonymous

Can you see me? Am I even here?
 Would they notice if I simply disappear?
 I wish I could fall away into the shadow and never come out
 They wouldn't notice
 The day would continue on
 My space would be filled
 I don't do what I like, I'm not number one
 What's the point when you always feel numb

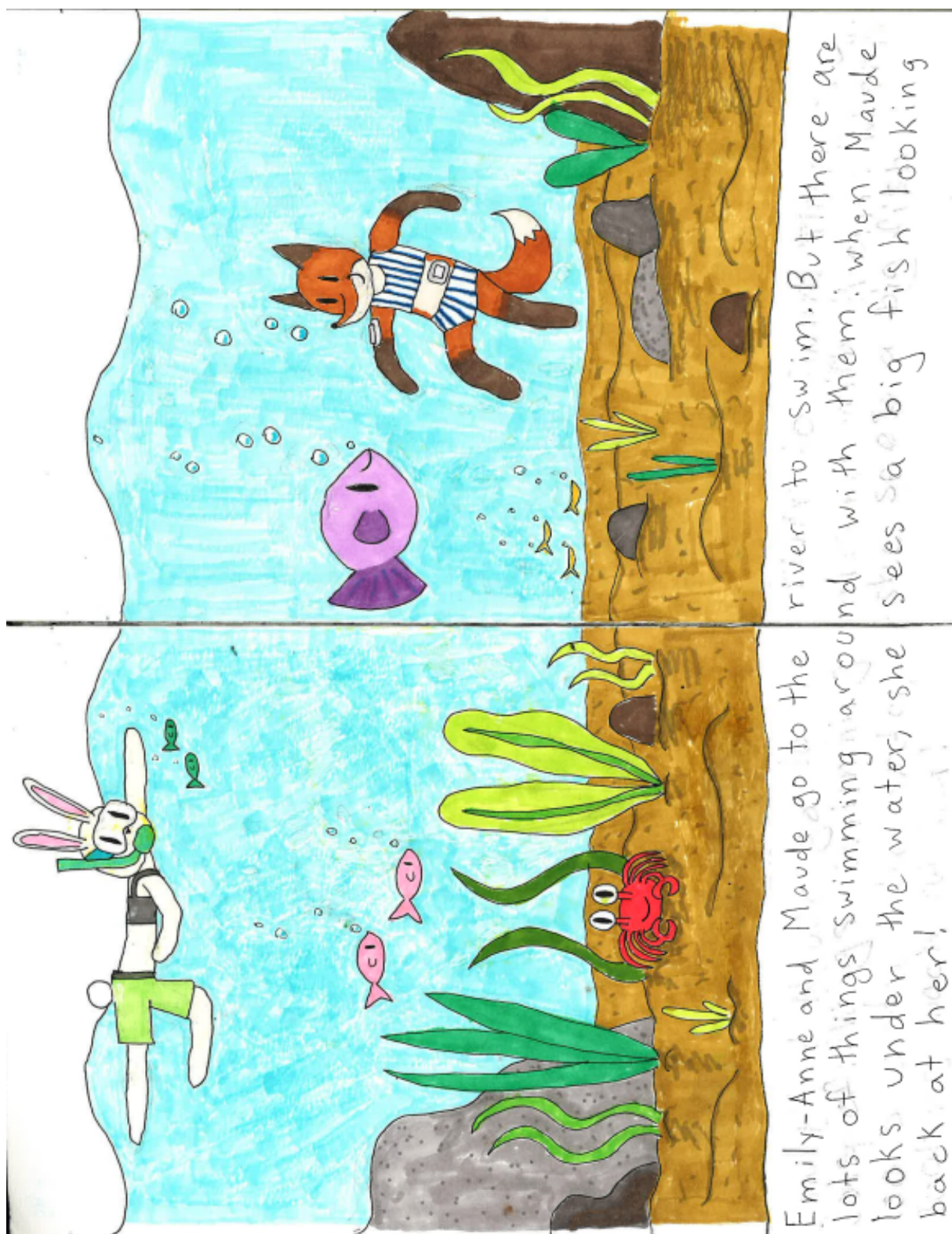
By Anonymous

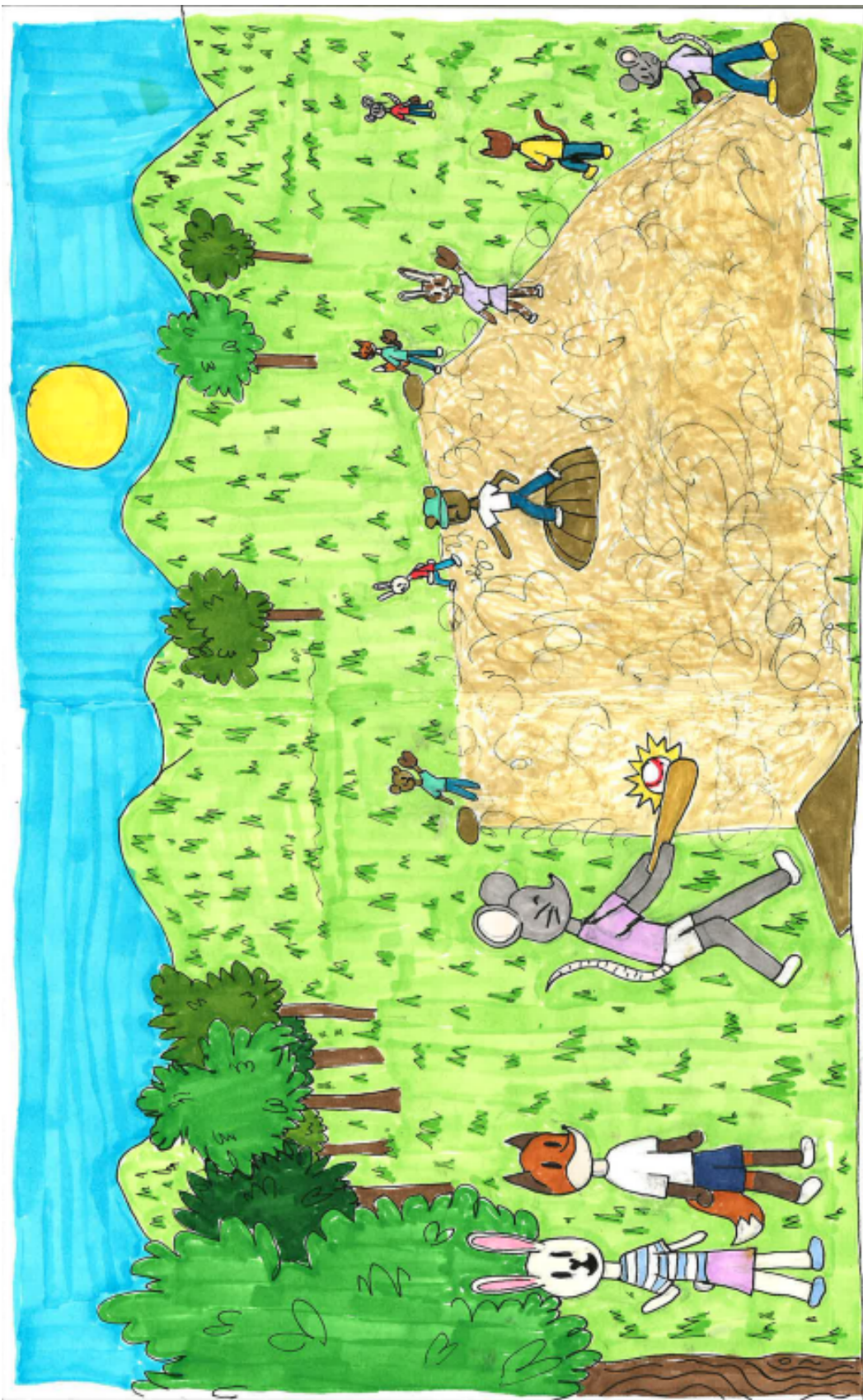


By Louisa Schimming



"BRINGG!" When the bell rings at 3:00 o'clock, all the students at Mr. Clifford's Elementary School stream out the door. Everyone's excited: there are so many things to do after school!





Anna rides her bike to the baseball field. She asks some other kids there if she can join their game. When she gets up to bat, she hits a home run!



Gabriel and Sofia go to art class. Gabriel paints some flowers, and Sofia paints a portrait of Gabriel. It looks just like him!



Lulu, Clara and Eva go to stretch and warm up, Mrs. Kat dance that they will perform beginning of it, Clara gets

ballet class. After they
ie starts teaching them the
at the concert soon. In the
to do a solo!



Sophie and Victoria go to play in the woods. They climb up the ladder to Sophie's treehouse, and from up in the branches they see a deer in the forest!

to play in the woods. to Sophie's treehouse, they see a deer in the forest!





But even with all those fun activities, Mr. Clifford is the most excited of all. After teaching his students all day, Mr. Clifford walks back home and goes to sleep.

Unhealthy Labs

Unhealthy Labs sits on the corner of 8th Ave. and 31st St. in New York City. The building is silver and metallic and has a bright blue door that is twenty feet tall, like a barrier between two worlds. Inside lives a crazy, old woman with ratty, orange hair and a hairless cat. In the kitchen lives a twelve-year old girl, who only wears black and has said six words in her entire life. Finally, in the lab room lives a nineteen-year old boy. Every part of his body is covered with tattoos, even his brain. These are the only three non-robots living on Earth. The steps of the robots are heard outside, alarming them like sirens. It always ends up being fine though; the robots' steps go away eventually. Except for this time. A shrill ring sounds. The non-robots realize they cannot hide any longer. The blue door opens and the barrier has been broken, "Welcome to Unhealthy Labs" says the crazy, old woman.

By Camilla McDaniel

The Butterfly Whisperer

I played outside in my backyard that felt giant at the time. My hands kept busy, imagining my water table to be a river filled with boats and whatever else I imagined my baby toys to be. The grass tickled my feet and the sun beamed. It was a beautiful, summer day, but it just felt like a normal day in my life at the time. I spotted a tiny, white butterfly in the water. I was old enough to understand that leaving it there would mean that it would die. I softly scooped it out of the water and laid it on the grass. Its wings were damp, limiting its attempts to fly. My pointer finger gently stroked its wings, drying them off. Suddenly the butterfly floated up above me, as I stared up from a crouched position on the ground in disbelief. The creature fluttered around me, swooping up and down. Did I have magical powers, I asked myself. I decided that yes, I was in fact a real butterfly whisperer. Years passed by, but butterflies still follow me everywhere I go. My backyard feels smaller now and my baby toys are no longer played with. But when I look up to the sky, looking for hope, looking for forgiveness, I still see butterflies.

By Camilla McDaniel

