



***ONEIRATA***

**2017**



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This magazine was put together by this year's editors, Jonah Fried, Ulani Salazar, and their advisor, Ms. Walters. We loved reading your work and pairing art with these pieces. Thanks as always to Mr. Scotch and Ms. Ferrera for help with formatting and printing this magazine.

Hope you'll join us in the fall for Write Night, Hastings High School's Creative Writing Club which meets after school every other month, and please continue to submit your work for next year's magazine – [hastingslitmag@gmail.com](mailto:hastingslitmag@gmail.com)

**ENJOY THE SUMMER AND KEEP WRITING!**

## Wrath

Ten in a schoolyard,  
hitting, making her pay  
for hitting me first, because

nine and it's after school,  
teacher, teacher, did you know  
certain students are smoking cigarettes?  
He didn't have to know, but

eight times later and  
I'm laughing in her face  
for a college she didn't  
get into. I didn't get in either, yet

seven and it's after dark  
in a dimly lit hotel room.  
It's not like I cared for him,  
but she did, so

six and she got a job,  
so I did too, and now  
I'm making sure she'll leave  
in shame before me by

five when I moved into an apartment  
and she's next door, isn't that  
some silly fate? I mean,

four and she's found another man  
this one is mine,  
not just for spite, but for

three and he won't want to be seeing her  
anymore, he won't even want to  
get close. Why does he hate me?  
I only meant for

two and why would you do that? She yells.  
Upset? I murmur, I'm telling you, girly  
there's no point,  
you know that I'll only

one and she's saying please  
just leave me alone, I'm sorry  
I hit you but I can't help it so

none left and she's on the floor  
and my hands are wet  
and red  
and it feels  
Good.

ZOLENGE BORDWIN



Liv Ferrari – AP Photo

**The Ashes of Troy,  
Or Another War with My Brother**

Alone under  
my upturned throne,  
beneath a blanket,  
my cheeks are raw  
from tears.

Ten years from now,  
will we remember  
lying in this room,  
staring at chipping white paint,  
smears of red crayon,  
listening to the creak  
of my bunk bed?

All we know is that  
we have both lost the battle,  
been exiled to this empty room  
with its naked walls,  
looming windows,  
for quarreling one time  
too many.  
We are left  
to drown in our own frustrations,  
choke on the screams  
still clinging  
to our throats.

My brother lies beaten  
as a ripped ragdoll,  
only a tuft of ebony hair  
revealed.  
Splattered like Hector,  
his wounds stain  
the bloody battlements  
before me.

Our mouths had inevitably boiled over,  
our words now lie  
like a puddle  
on the floor.  
Silence hovers over us.  
We fight the urge  
to pick up our swords  
and duel once more.

Like the windowless monstrosities around us,  
his eyes admit no light,  
though I remember  
how they flicker green  
when sunlight pricks them.  
The fury that dwells beneath,

burning,  
fermenting,  
erupts in his voice,  
his bulging lips.  
He is trapped within  
the walls  
of his own words.

Like a rollercoaster,  
he rides the turmoil within.  
His feet get tangled  
in his footsteps.  
He longs for the warm hold  
of our mother's hand,  
at the same time  
loathing it.

Black Ships before Troy  
stands on the shelf  
next to my bed.  
Did you know that  
a wintry mountain  
faced the balcony  
where Helen once stood?  
For the golden waterfall  
that cascaded down her back,  
black ships appeared  
before Troy.  
For her eyes, pellucid,  
swords clashed.  
For her face, angelic,  
men dropped like hail.

Sailing back from Troy,  
Menelaus must have asked,  
was she worth  
the men,  
the clash of armor,  
the sweet,  
raw smell of blood,  
the jumbled bodies  
on the ground  
of Troy?

Menelaus caught the thief,  
reclaimed his bride,  
but their love could never  
be revived.  
A pyrrhic victory.

We fought like warriors,  
but now we lie  
defeated,  
deserted by our horses,  
damned to this dungeon.



Liv Ferrari – AP Photo

## Sanctuary

As the sun rose  
above the horizon,  
and passed  
through the diameter of my eye,  
I breathed a sigh of relief.  
Disembarking on my journey,  
I walked  
Miles through grassy,  
dew-covered fields.  
Away  
from the rest of the world,  
I knew I was finally safe.  
I had nothing but a satchel on my back,  
And the sun's light  
and encouraging warmth  
to guide me.  
I found my hidden refuge,  
Untouched,  
and unseen  
by anyone but me.

JOSEPH MONTAVLO



Ben Wan – AP Photo

## Picking at my Fingertips

If I was given the chance  
I would ask for nothing except possibly for  
Stronger, larger, and steadier hands.

When I was 5 years old,  
I leaned my hand against my father's,  
Splaying my fingers and pressing my palm to his,  
fingertips barely reaching his first knuckle.  
I have the smallest hands in my family.

Hands are personal copyrights.  
Burn scars from bad cooking, clumsiness,  
and slightly pyromaniac-like tendencies.  
fresh scars on stubby fingertips, physical evidence of  
the biting of my skin,  
like alternative nicotine patches to heavy smokers,  
eating away at myself, anxiety.  
A girl singing, presenting, informing, smiling on a  
podium,  
controlled and calculated, as cold fingers tremble  
behind her back.  
A girl confident social, friendly, shaking hands, faking  
the rest  
she can't produce  
while grasping at the hem of her shirt.  
These aren't the hands I need.

Peeling back my nails, underneath, forgotten things are  
uncovered, mingling with my blood.  
The colors from past acrylic paintings, grains of dirt  
from all the places i've been to, clips like little souvenirs  
from all I have done.  
From all I have touched, clawed, punched, caressed,  
from asteroids and chemicals to humans and pianos,  
lodged pretty deep.

I've thought about breaking my hands to see if they  
might grow differently.  
Or should I place my hands in molds and see which suits  
me best?  
Should I buy gloves that are one size fits all?  
People say surgery works too.

A wish for  
larger hands so that my punches sting,  
stronger so that scratches will scar,  
and steadier so that my creations overwhelm.  
Just the tiniest bit, not to make a significant difference  
but to make others scrub a little harder  
to make my fingerprints disappear.  
But you never know, I still may not be done growing.

GRACE MOON





Nell Pittman – AP Photo

## Water the Plants

Here I sit sticky-taping photographs and colored construction paper to the windows like stained glass of ancient cathedrals but slapping "Caution" to our doors, opening none. Neon lights of entrances start to flicker on and cars turn on their headlights, illuminating their license plates. I weigh and measure out grams of the cosmos that fall from my hair. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, coughing, diseasing all around me. With blood lodged deep within my lungs, my brain keeps hemorrhaging, but I'm still alive and alright.

Photographs are unheard of.  
"Restricted Area" "Private Property"

I do my homework under the streetlamps.  
I water my plants at night,  
when colors cannot be distinguished.  
I stand in seven inch heels, towering taller compared to worn out sneakers.  
I inside-out the pockets of my pajamas to make them look like little wings.  
I venture to planets of acid rain and fields of permanent ice;  
I travel with the Little Prince.  
A radio rests by the window-  
it has been there since childhood, signaling to aliens.

Waiting for a response amidst the crackling,  
a static dance.

You can't really see rain as it falls.  
Only feel each drop as it hits, when it hits, if it hits.  
The thunder is a little louder when it doesn't have to shout over the roar of industrialization,  
as it rolls over each building to the distant mountains.  
My chest tightens in response to the air,  
which constricts as it wraps around, envelops, under armpits, around knees,  
embracing, while on the borderline of suffocation.  
Oceans conforming, pooling around my ankles.  
But the beauty of midnight summer storms is how the lightning seems to be brighter and  
certain days, the sky, a sky that's constantly fracturing,  
seems closer to earth.

Rapidly everything caves in, loose pieces from the broken atmosphere, nicking my arteries  
as I have to open eyes,  
pupils contracting, adjusting.  
Hey, but the plants are watered aren't they?  
They haven't died yet. They're still  
alive and alright.

GRACE MOON



Nell Pittman – AP  
Photo

## Ode to a Door Handle

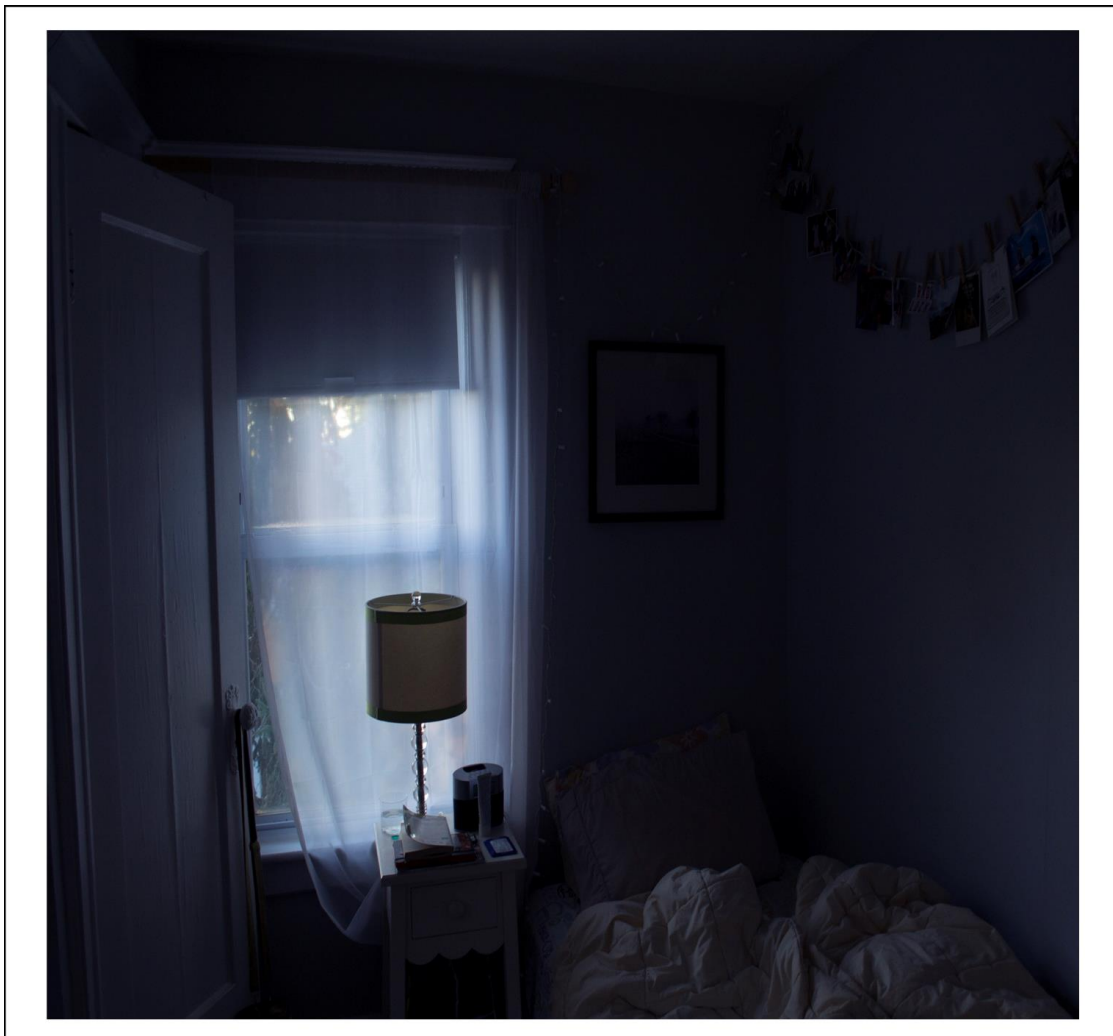
You are a simple machine  
amongst simple machines  
you come in many shapes.  
and sizes,  
With every twirl of your handle,  
You are a book  
taking us places.  
But  
without a key,  
a mate, you are nothing.  
you can lock yourself out, too.  
When you are locked  
You need  
the key.  
but  
What is the key without you?  
A Forgotten about thing.  
Left at the bottom of a kitchen drawer.  
Have you ever heard a person say  
“I have too many door handles.”  
Probably not.  
Losing a door handle is very hard,  
as opposed to losing a key.  
Think of all of the useless things

doodads  
thingamajiggers  
whatchamacallits  
in your life.  
You didn't think of the doorknob.  
It is a silent hero.

When you open a door,  
think,  
where will it lead you?  
then,  
thank a door handle.

OWEN ROUTHIER

Louisa Carey – AP Photo





Isabel Siebert – AP Photo

### **Puppet**

Miles Harding

You're a puppet, a figurehead.  
You're just pulled around by strings.  
You are not in control.  
You're thrown around by a king,  
Taking the role of a distraction, a pawn,  
Simply used to hide a greater motive.  
You're a tool, a wrench,  
A doll that I play with.  
Don't worry, you're not all useless, though.  
You're one of the sharpest  
And most dangerous tools that one can have.  
You're like a living army knife.  
You're pawns on a chessboard  
I have no need for a queen, rooks, knights, or bishops.  
All I need are my pawns.  
Who knows?  
One day, my life may depend on your actions.  
Even though I am in control of you,  
Sometimes a puppet has to destroy its strings  
In order to make an impossible decision.  
A decision that transcends life and death itself.

Then again, with an army of puppets,  
Do decisions really matter?

MILES HARDING



## Rhythm

I still remember the sweltering June day you came to my door, small and unassuming, the joy of peeling away your primordial cardboard eggshell, which read "Shimano Shifter".

There you were, curled up and ready for the next step, strong but unfocused.

I picked you up and stretched you until you could reach the bicycle's gears and chain.

There, I tuned you, next to the gleaming, thin-spoked rear wheel, toiling for hours, calibrating every screw for maximum efficiency, teaching you the language of my thumbs, until you were ready for the trail.

Your mechanics allow me to wind gracefully through the hilly woods crouching into the lowest gear as I slow down into a hairpin turn, only to pounce as my lanky legs decide to turn up the power,

and back up the cassette you go, until you hit 9th on the way down a grand and swerving asphalt summit, faster than I would dare to in the dull and gray Impala from Driver's Ed, still putting power to that drift-worn back tire, past 35 miles per hour.

While my life may be in the hands of disc brakes, my spirit is in yours, the raw thrill of speed calming my constantly flitting mind.

You know when to relax, setting a reasonable pace for the longest journeys, letting me find the right gear for lakeside cruising, never overstraining my hard-worked knees. You are so much better than the derailleur of my own mind, where the chain slips between the day's activities, too often veering into a world of distraction, always a step behind, spinning uselessly in a gear that is far too low, sapping my energy as I lay my fingers on the keys of a piano, or leaving me tossing and turning deep into the night. LEONARD MEENAN-PAKIN



## Ode to a Colander

Good from bad  
Useful from useless  
Uncoupling the bond  
of pasta and water

Its job may be unwanted  
But nonetheless it is done  
Gorgeous separation  
Tasteful segregation

Like me in the process of writing this  
Unfastening lines that were fused  
Parting the good from the bad  
Cross that, too cliché

A colander is  
Ancient armor of a child  
A helmet from a battle  
Part of a suit bound for space  
Sanctuary of imagination

I wish I had a colander  
To alienate me from the perception of me  
A magical bias eraser  
Removing all assumptions people may have  
Allow my essence to be experienced  
Undiluted, unfiltered, unbiased

I wish I had a colander  
To filter the unwanted  
An impenetrable shield  
An open gate  
Allowing me to exist carelessly  
Unknowingly impartial  
Struggles held back from my knowledge  
For the sake of my innocence

Its simple existence  
A thank you is unheard  
Fulfilling its “singular” purpose  
About 2-3 times a week if your mom doesn’t want to  
cook meat or other non-starch based dishes

MARCO KNEZEVIC

## Ricochets and Deflections

Either they love you

Or they hate you

You are judgement  
The tangible boundary between  
perfection and failure

We meet Tuesdays and Thursdays

Your cold, white metal  
reflecting the fluorescents, your scratches a rough  
history of  
ricochets and deflections

We do not give you credit for  
the hits  
the beatings you take.

You remind me of  
the rainy September Saturday  
as I fired the ball like an arrow from a bow,  
watching it dart towards you,

an ultralight beam.

BANG

The ball recoiled off your glistening iron  
as light reflects off a mirror.

The shot was almost perfect  
but you stole it from me,  
ripped it from my grasp.

A shot hitting the post  
is a relationship cut short,  
a sudden change of direction.

Years from now,  
I'll walk by Tibbetts Brook Park  
and see your cold metal again.  
I'll look at your scratches and bumps  
to find the one I created  
but I cannot.  
I never will.

ELI BERTAN



Ben Wan – AP Photo





Ben Wan – AP Photo



**Patrice Baltimore**

She'd sit me down before lunch,  
teach me how to pray before  
I was taught to count to twenty.  
The prayers remain hidden  
Deep inside,  
like anglerfish in the  
ocean's basement.  
I would recognize them a heartbeat if I heard them  
again,  
But it's been years.

I smell rice-a-roni and banana bread,  
the bumpy backseat of  
musty rivertown taxis.

Her daughter and I  
- Simba and Nala in our own  
"The Lion King" -  
Siblings one day, strangers the next.

She speaks kind words to the other nannies,  
but I cannot find any softness in her tone.  
My friends and I talk to animals,  
crows respond to our squawks before we are  
told to be quiet.

The rules are strict,  
the list on my wall.  
once any of us learn how to read,  
we will finally learn how to break them properly.

But of course,  
we would never break the rule of drinking  
juice before lunch.  
That one was sacred.

Like an heirloom, she is passed between families, and  
leaves as quickly as she came.  
If she stayed for too long, the magic might wear.  
Mary Poppins from Antigua.

Things change.  
Now, the same hands the held mine in the back of the  
taxi,  
grip their own wheel,  
drive their own car.  
The kid in the back doesn't know what he has missed.

I feel disconnected,  
until I smell the  
baby oil, pastrami, and aquaphor and I get sent back in  
time.  
Back to Baltimore.

CHRISTIAN HEALY

## Ode To A Honey Dipper

You lay on the  
kitchen counter as the rays of  
the sun makes you look  
like a bright light of fire.  
You enter the glassy jar like a submarine  
submerging under the beautiful Atlantic.  
The honey wraps around you like a blanket.  
As you begin to rise up the honey trickles down  
into the jar like water  
that flows down a stream.  
Then you begin to drizzle  
the honey over a warm  
piece of bread with butter.  
You perfectly collect honey like a swish in basketball.  
You can make foods even more tasteful with every  
savoring bite.  
You are the best at what you do.

TASO BAROLAS



Emma Jacobs – AP  
Photo

## Ode to Pickled Red Onions

I unfold the onion  
layer by layer  
exposing its ugly truth  
I place you in a china glazed bowl  
full of vinegar and pepper.  
I wait 10 minutes,  
impatiently  
and then  
I carefully pour you in  
a pot passed down through evolution.  
The tart smell wafts from the kitchen  
to my room.  
You sizzle and transform  
into bright pink blossoms.  
Your pepper imperfections  
reveal your beauty.  
You comfort me,  
I hover over the pan  
Your scent begins to burn my nose,  
a bitter smell  
with clouds of golden mangu, you go well together,  
like Beyonce and Jay- z,  
you replace the missing pieces of  
of my heart.  
You're not trapped in a jar or categorized.  
You do not spill or purposely crunch.  
You're always there for the times of  
violation  
The time I was questioned about my race  
Disappointment  
The time people assumed my ancestry  
Confusion  
The time I was flustered  
Happiness.  
The time I learned to accept it  
for moments like these , I inhale your pungent fragrance  
and hold you close.  
Your fumes coat my throat

MELODY LACOURT

## Suicide Doors

Lincoln Continental,  
paint drips from the grill  
on to the gravel.  
as it comes to a halt.  
You're hinged at the rear  
rather than the front.  
Suicide doors,  
ode to the American 30's.  
Where you could toss a witness  
right out of the car  
and then do more gangster shit.

I rub my fingers  
against your glossy handles  
I see myself in you.  
You open to me,  
and creak your siren song,  
lucrative,  
seductive,  
deadly.

How you open completely,  
how you show everything.  
I am you.  
Look inside and you see  
every nook and cranny of me.  
I have nothing to hide,  
I swing myself open.

Now you're irrelevant,  
you've lost your luster.  
No one wants to open your doors,  
because no one wants to fall out.  
That's understandable,  
but I will miss the sense of ease you brought.  
The way passengers enter you by turning  
to sit and exit by stepping forward.  
You let people come in so easily,  
only to let them out just the same.

I am you.

ALESSANDRO deNOVELLIS

## In Days of Velvet Dolls

They were sickly when the boat was docked,  
swaying dully in industrial breeze.  
All wrapped in scarves,  
some red, some onyx,  
they spilled forth as if  
mottled wine when the cork is pulled, still stained  
with remnant brew.

It was strange to watch them shuffle out,  
like words of a hymn, muttering strains we may have  
known  
or that were of a different tongue, maybe.  
They were costly, undulating secrets,  
pulled from memory to mouth;  
Humming, dissonant, unforgotten.

Their sodden trunks were pulled away by the end of it,  
and they left in iron fleets towards the boroughs,  
Men sobbing, some women near hopeful.  
The children frowned.

And their houses,  
not homes,  
because they swore they were temporary,  
were dirty  
but swept.  
With wishes growing in the windowsills,  
floorboards soaked to rot,  
there were no fixtures or estates;  
And the children wept often.

And the soup was never truly warm,  
nor were the socks like new with so much mending,  
nor was the city bright  
nor did the room look cleaner when the bed was made  
like Mam said  
nor was it better than at home like she had guessed  
it might be.

My grandmother likes to tell other stories she knows,  
of coins passed between sisters,  
a toll at the gates  
that meant New World Work.  
In her eyes, bluing more now in age,  
there is a gilded dream of time departed,  
of something missing from  
now, when  
Poverty  
means you get the chance to eat, when

newcomers are so often welcomed,

Defended.

They were ailing then, with  
ivory cheeks turned sallow  
and Irish eyes of grey, with  
shaking shoulders full of hunger pent,  
teeth of dying white roses.

And there are no potatoes here either.

Perhaps beneath their dirt-steeped fingers,  
the children's sweat, there  
is a beauty, lost to lens--  
It simmers there inside them,  
heats the cross against Mam's chest.  
It is her last silver,  
was, in days of velvet dolls,  
of china teacups,  
of meat left to spoil,  
a first bit  
of shining  
gold.

RUBY PUCILLO





Louisa Carey – AP Photo

## **The Evening of Comforting, Terrifying Delights**

The young bird sat on hill  
And waited for the sun to go down,  
But as the shadows of the trees started to grow darker and stronger  
She found that it was hard to stay.  
Without a companion to watch over her back she pondered  
The thought of being alone in the Tuscan dark,  
Urban hill with long grass and a rainbow sky.  
Never knowing what the simple joy of a sunset looked like,  
She stayed.  
Alone,  
Surrounded by the blissful flatulence of a summer evening,  
And without the worry of a physical companion.  
She gazed, with orange in her eyes,  
And with a chest filled with satisfactory delight.

ULANI SALAZAR

## **Writer's Block**

I am reading a blank book.  
The walls are white  
And they share grey lines.

Everywhere I wander,  
I get stuck  
For I do not know where to go.  
Up is down, down is sideways  
And sideways is nowhere.

My book is quiet and enjoyable,  
For only I know how to decipher it.  
Two colors are staring directly at me,  
And although I am lost,  
They follow.

Alone,  
I am never really alone.  
I want to keep going, but I am contemplating  
The contradictions that revolve around  
My very existence.

Down is now up, sideways is down,  
And up is nowhere.  
But I am breezing through it,  
Easily.

ULANI SALAZAR

**Surgery Palindrome  
(After Nate Marshall)**

I walk into the car,  
We drive back to the hospital.  
I put on the paper gown for the last time.  
I get back into that mechanized bed for the last time.  
I finally manage to walk out of it.  
For the last time I fall asleep suddenly, and wake up in  
a cold room.  
I talk to the man about Marvel vs. DC,  
And then I am back at my house.  
It is January, fifth grade.  
I drive back to the hospital,  
Eating Ben and Jerry's on the way.  
For the second time I put on that paper gown,  
For the second time I get on that hospital bed,  
A dog comes to comfort me, and I let him, even though I  
normally don't like them.  
My eye hurts. I can't move it. He leaves and I  
Fall asleep, suddenly.  
I wake up, and my family drives home.  
I am now five years old.  
It is the first trip to that hospital.  
The first time putting on that paper gown,  
The first time getting into that hospital bed.  
This time I am crying, and my mother  
Comforts me.  
For the first time, I fall asleep  
Suddenly.

For the first time I wake up.  
For the first time, we drive home.  
My father says "He needs glasses,"  
After I smash into a glass door at the Burger King.  
I couldn't see the door.

NOAH BROUDE

Isabel Siebert – AP  
Photo



**Pink**  
**(after Dorianne Laux)**

Color of a newborn baby wrapped in a soft blanket,  
rose cheeks, luscious  
barbie doll lips, Pretty In Pink logo,  
creamy strawberry milkshakes, and  
ice cold strawberry lemonade. Color

of the center of a grapefruit, peachy boys and girly girls,  
fluffy sunset patterns disintegrating, and fine smelling perfume.  
Breast cancer signs, and that cozy feeling called love,  
candy hearts and dragonflies, cherry blossoms forming on china trees. Color

of the cartoon panther, pinky piglet, bubbly princess bubblegum,  
and dirty pigs in the mud. Sprouting cosmos,  
broken Valentines Day cards,  
carnival cotton candy, and innocent faces. Color

of flamingo wings, romantic first date jitters, hubba bubba bubble gum,  
and lollipop flavors.  
Life, or la vie en rose, Means Girls, spice rockstar hair, sticky nail polish,  
and funky makeup blush to put on her face. Color

of twirling tutus, ballerinas in costumes,  
juicy watermelons, and made-up princesses.  
Puffy eyes, runny noses, pink eye, utter silence,  
a slapped face, and beginner's frustration. Color

of tiny spaces, crooked faces, the rosy cheeks of a fake smile. Color  
when she sinks down on the wall,  
Tears trickle down her cheeks; her face smudged with makeup.  
She lowers her head to her knees;  
holding herself until the beating disperses from her broken heart.

ANA-SOFIA SARMIENTO





Ben Wan – AP Photo

## DTA

Don't.  
Trust.  
Anybody.  
Period.

why?

Good question.  
Don't ask me though, because it'll cost you  
a whole lot of hugs  
and tissues.

If you'd like to know,  
ask your heart.

But don't trust that either.

why?

If I told you, more strangers will come with,  
searching for the answer like  
groups of pigeons for part of  
your pretzel.

Don't.  
Trust.  
Anybody. okay?

Not the jolly little girl w/her  
red cowgirl boots.  
Not the scruffy Photo One boy that wants to take your  
picture.  
Not even the golden retriever that stares  
blankly into your eyes when you tell him  
"I love you"

Don't do it.  
Don't wish it.  
Don't want it.

Or if you do,

watch it;  
because maybe those pigeons will get more than  
just the crumbs that  
drop from your  
salted bread.

Focus again..

S  
I  
X  
Why can't I stay home  
with you,  
Mami,  
Could you buy that  
Barbie Doll for me? Her silvering blond tangles  
bounce as I grip her tightly by  
her plastic waist.

Papi be home now?  
Can I eat  
all  
the cookies?  
My  
eyes  
wander towards the moving jar;  
once far from my reach, but  
now on top of  
my favorite  
refrigerated friend.

What are these  
white thingies on my legs?  
I think  
it says T..U..K..Z? I can't see;  
blurry view of  
the system of letters  
like the glare of soapy water after a noisy car wash.

N  
I  
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E  
Where did Papi go?  
When can we  
go  
home?  
Mami speaks in tongues;  
the rolling and jumbled letters  
darting in every direction  
like my eyes after she says  
"No, espera un ratito, ¿quieres?"

How did you do that?  
What does  
this mean?  
The steely blue of her teacher's eyes

scavenge to  
help me understand the simplicity  
of the expression.

(They say math is easy, but  
it slips my focus  
as if the numbers were  
shredded pieces of paper, floating  
down a sewage drain.)

THIR

T

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N

Why are you  
crying now,  
Mami,  
could you tell me  
please?  
Tears breach  
swollen eye sockets,  
the small creases on her forehead wrinkle like  
old tobacco-filled lungs;  
shriveled and gasping for crystaline air.

Why do  
I  
have to act  
nice  
for you?  
Where were you?  
What have you  
ever  
done  
for  
ME? He sits across from me  
(then),  
in a prominent yellow room.  
Anger enters veins  
of his careless brown eyes.  
At that same time,  
his existence  
is not  
my doing.

FIFTH-

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Why is  
getting  
older so  
hard?

How do I  
get out  
of this  
mess?

Chaotic energy enters the core of my brain,  
streaks of pain vibrate down my smile.

It's  
happening  
again:

Emotions are unwanted pieces of  
crust from peanut butter sandwiches;  
no one wants them,  
but they're still good for you.

There are many unanswered questions  
I hold inside: some are  
rotting holes that crumble,  
or disfigured like a creamy-colored  
mushroom.

ANONYMOUS

Emma Jacobs – AP Photo



## Helium

There's a hole in my head,  
drilled deep and dark like the  
outer vessels of the  
moon's Maria clusters.  
Brain Cells that were once plain  
turn out to be blistering  
pain cells;  
zooming,  
booming  
every fucking  
direction until they make a pitstop. Memories drift  
ghostly past the wrinkles of my knowledge  
like cumulous clouds ready to consume  
the blue glad of the light sky.

There's a hole in my head and the thought of it's  
unbearable;  
like the blood that circulates  
under my skin,  
ready to escape from the wounds  
I'm bound to make.  
Or maybe it's just because I'm brain wrecked, and  
please excuse if I  
sound like a ninny,  
a pity,  
a trainwreck, but  
it splurges through my brain,  
shoots out like  
a busted pip

There's a hole and my head;  
I can't feel a thing  
yet,  
the lump in my throat presses  
deep,  
deep,  
deep down where air  
can't escape. Let me rub my eyes so hard until  
they can't see  
or breath in fresh memories.  
Maybe if I rub hard enough  
they'll turn into sore, red  
plump circles of rage.

There's a hole in my head and all I see there's grey  
and, hey, maybe it doesn't matter that  
my spinal cord aches as if  
mounds of bricks pressure it,

meant for the wall,

almost to the crevasse of my throat  
but I just keep wishing,  
hoping,  
dreaming,  
listening to hear that everything will turn over.  
Maybe even maneuver correctly  
if I don't let me down.

There's a hole in my head.  
Tension sinking,  
like a dead fish does when it's time to go.

There's a hole in my head and  
I know its core's broken.  
The veins and swerves of  
the past and future  
collapsing,  
dividing,  
subsiding into unpredictable stories.

There's a hole in my head,  
but I can't find the words to say, "I'm sorry."

ANONYMOUS

## Ode to my Bald English Teacher

Over slippery hills and spiky thorns, you put up with everything.  
And almost all the time your grumpy, but never illiterate.  
“Mr. Maturtle” I say to you;  
a trusty little fellow (though in real life you are much bigger)  
that roams around the halls,  
typing away his life, and going over hills until he falls.

Mr. Maturtle, you are a spectacle of things.  
You're a turtle that wants to be hated, yet you don't snap like the others.  
You want me to trust or you want me to follow.  
You want me to suffer, but you bring back the hope in this writer.

All I see is a small turtle, with glasses as fine as the end of my finger nail;  
and a mind so wide I wouldn't find myself going anywhere!  
I love you like a three year old loves an old nanny dog.  
But, alas, you are a turtle,  
and I could never ask for a better one.

ANONYMOUS



Louisa Carey – AP  
Photo





Louisa Carey – AP

## Midnight 12

The car,  
The door,  
The man,  
The running.

The number,  
The alley,  
The wall.

His shadowed hoodie,  
The running,  
The beating hard heart.

The cracking of brick wall,  
The missed bullets,  
The skimmed skin.

The limping,  
The second shoot,  
The next 10.

The heart screeches,  
The blood oozes,  
The body's silent.

The empty pockets,  
His blind eyes,  
Her fucked up fault,

He's gone.  
The running is done.  
Sirens blare at the corner,  
His silhouette stays.

When was there a time where  
children's chalk wasn't used to  
mark the body of a corpse?

ANONYMOUS

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## Marc Anthony

He swoops on stage  
shirt unbuttoned,  
dancing like the beat of a clock  
displaying a gold chain that matches  
the smile on his face which shimmer like the light of  
day.

The wrinkles around his eyes vibrate to the rhythm  
that ensnares his body  
transporting him to a space,  
in constant motion like fish in water  
as his voice tangoes with the pulse of the music.

On stage with his beloved microphone  
anxious to have her,  
passionately caressing her  
while tenderly confessing in her ear  
claiming her as his love.

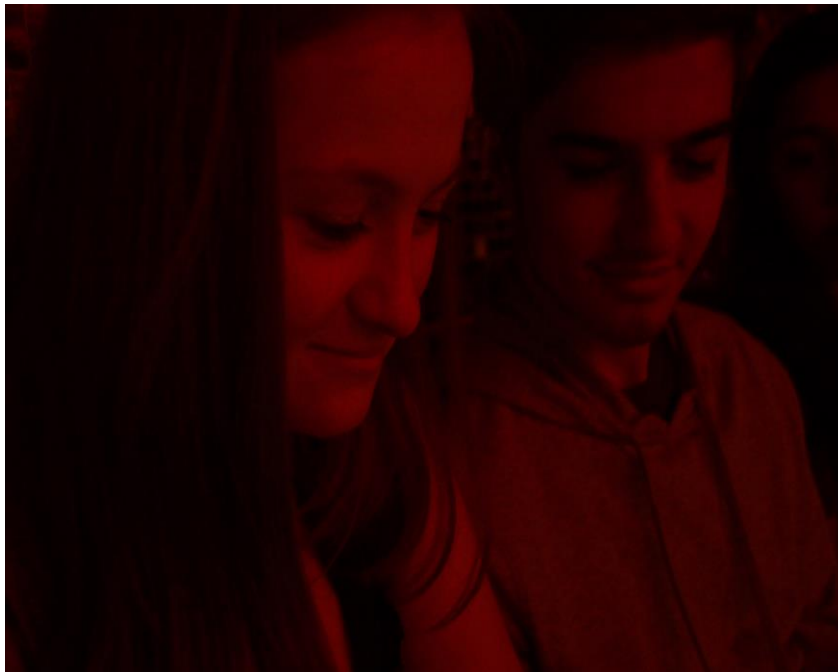
He connects with his public like an ocean wave full of  
energy,  
trapping his fans and pulling them in.  
His famous eyes are always closed;  
clapping his hands, grasping the skinny metal pole  
swaying from side to side  
like a snake gliding across his territory.

The people are disciples of his music.  
extending his arms wide, giving life to his public  
like Jesus of Nazareth.  
Deactivating the sound will disconnect them from life,  
expressing unity is for all;  
no matter which nation you're from.

## (NO TITLE)

Working Up the Scale  
Almost angelically, he sings,  
"Thinkin Bout You."  
Following every line,  
he takes  
a deep  
gasp of air, like a fish out of water. He  
hangs onto life by a  
small thread.  
Ocean grasps the microphone  
tighter,  
as his face shrivels up like  
a prune.  
Slowly working up the scale,  
getting higher  
and higher,  
the vein on his forehead becomes  
increasingly more visible.  
Sweat rushes  
down his face, like blood  
dripping from a wound.  
His teeth begin to grind,  
like two  
cinderblocks rubbing against each other.  
By the time he begins  
to sing  
his next line, it is almost  
as if this process resets.  
The artist confronts this intense experience  
once again.

CESIA MARTINEZ





Nell Pittman – AP Photo



## Amputee's Club

You brought fire to a long barren wick,  
and showed me a brand new game.  
We improvised a comedy,  
as a new dawn came.

But then the sun set,  
and you preferred a tragedy.  
You threw away the board,  
and pulled me to reality.

Your meticulous words  
destroy unabated,  
the edifice I built settles, completely obliterated.

My wardrobe of emotion  
lays desecrated.

I search for a proper reaction  
rummaging through debris,  
but you took so much away  
my soul is an amputee.

Blood seeps down the aisle  
by your pageant of destruction.

We sang a duet  
sweet as any other song.  
Our voices worked in tandem

but you sang for far too long.

We were once on equal footing  
but I have lost the passion,  
and like a college sweatshirt  
it simply went out of fashion.

Poison permeated through our shared heart,  
I tried to slip into the night.  
You clasped chains hard around my arms  
and your unobtainium held tight.

We convulsed in carbon monoxide  
and yet your face seemed bright.

I knew your accusations,  
as fervor stripped away your guile.  
By you I was sentenced to death,  
for sirens hold no trials.

A man once got himself stuck  
beneath a boulder.  
To survive he cut off  
his arm beneath his shoulder.

I left you mine  
although I doubt you noticed.

ETHAN POCHNA

Nell Pittman – AP Photo



## Cat Craze

The grey one sputters and wheezes  
as the black one calmly perches on her haunches,  
her sharpened claws lightly scratching the surface  
of the unfinished wooden table

until their pointed ears launch up,  
alerted by the crash,  
the shatter  
of delicate china.  
They scurry,  
unsure of the trek ahead.

This craze is a part of me,  
constantly reverberating in my nerves.  
My brain continues to tumble down a rocky creek  
as my mind anticipates the impossible,  
the unreachable,  
the untouchable,  
flustered  
like a sleepy eyed child  
surveying his bedroom for a long lost train engine.

A translucent curtain of disorientation  
suddenly sprawls over my reality.  
Confusion breeding hysteria,  
felines lurch in every direction  
like multitudinous beads of clouded ocean water  
wildly dispersing  
after an agitated splash.

But the cats' outburst is silent.  
A scrambling theater tightly imprisoned in saran wrap,  
foreigners lowering eyelids  
and crinkling eyebrows,  
unaware  
of my inner existence.

I have learned that felines scare  
as a result of the startle reflex  
caused by an object potentially impairing their safety.  
Perhaps my mind does the same,  
but is only instead kindled by a noir image  
of sickness and pain,  
of a delusional blackbird  
pecking  
at timid bones and fearful organs  
buried deep inside my chest.

Eventually, I retrieve the shattered pieces of china,  
cementing the cracked edges together.  
Still, crooked, slender lines linger  
on the glassy petals embellishing dish.

The felines return to their state of tranquility,  
the grey one twitching his ears  
as the black one calmly swishes her tail.  
Prepared to scamper,  
their hearts palpitate one hundred eighty beats per  
minute,  
while mine pounds only eighty two.

I fear the beasts,  
but not as much as the crash itself.

NINA SILVERSTEIN

## Dear Stranger

Dear stranger,  
I found your note.  
The one wrapped in a white,  
long envelope,  
the tongue tucked in but not quite  
Sealed, the address facing downward as if you  
had not wanted anyone to see it.  
It was buried beneath the pizza crusts  
From the teenage boys  
talking about broken families  
slipping through the fingers of the mothers  
who had tried to sew them all back together.

Dear stranger,  
I read your note.  
You loved her, didn't you?  
I loved once, too..  
We would watch the sun go down.  
Then talk for hours after.  
The only thing we saw was  
luminous stars dotted across the sky.  
She said she didn't want me to  
see her cry.  
But it gradually grew into  
hospital beds,  
Testing,  
Stinging shots,  
And coughing crimson red blood.  
I became  
A stranger to her ash-grey eyes.  
And now I walk the streets of a  
cramped town, occasionally stopping to  
rest, but also to watch.  
To watch the children  
Beg for candy from overworked  
Parents,  
teenagers who thought it  
Would last forever.  
The adults who spend more time  
Working then with family.

And the elderly looking into their  
Wrinkled hands wondering where time has gone.

Dear stranger,  
If I've learned anything from the forty years  
I've spent with the woman I loved,  
It's that time can trick you.  
It whispers it will last forever  
and suddenly you look into the mirror  
To see scars and folds,  
And everything has gone away.

Dear stranger,  
I've paid for a few stamps,  
And mailed out your letter.  
I don't know what'll happen now.  
But the only advice I can give you is,  
If she enjoys watching the sun lower into the trees  
And seeing the bright stars shine,  
Bring a flashlight.  
Even with the stars,  
You don't want to miss out on  
the most beautiful thing there.

SUN HWA TAMASHIRO

## This is Us

Now, she is one years old.  
There is cake all over her face  
She is happy and watching everyone take pictures  
The house is decorated with m&m everything.  
You and your sisters are crying in excitement.  
Mia opens her eyes,  
watching everyone looks at her.  
This is new to you and everyone.

And now I see you  
one year earlier.  
I see you.  
You are holding Mia,  
looking down at her  
like you just found treasure  
in the quiet room.  
You feed her,  
everyone taking pictures.  
Oh, how beautiful she is.

Now, you are 16.  
You're driving back and forth  
from Central Avenue to  
St. John's Riverside Hospital.  
You are hot, then cold  
Then hot again.  
You are in pain  
You are only a few centimeters,  
waiting to see  
what you're first child will look like.  
It is 3:45 a.m  
when I come.  
You cry and do not want to let me go.  
You feel relieved  
because it is over,  
I am her,  
the baby you have been waiting for  
for 8 months  
since you had started throwing up  
and had my Aunt Annie buy you a pregnancy test  
and you went over to Johnny's, my dad's,  
to look for those two lines and then you went  
home to  
to tell your mother, my grandma, who  
had cancer,  
that you  
were pregnant and she said,  
"You are keeping that child."

You name me Jonaysia  
I wonder if at the hospital, holding me  
if you were happy.  
how did you feel  
knowing you really were a mother?  
Were you worried about your future,  
about finishing the 12th grade?  
Was I the best thing  
that had happened to you?

And now I see you as a child,  
You are six years old.  
Your hair is in a bow and you are  
smiling like you are the happiest girl  
in the world,  
wearing your favorite shirt  
even though it has a stain on it.  
You're holding your hands together.  
Your clear face  
and big brown eyes,  
light brown skin.  
It is Fall.

JONAYSIA DUNNICAN





## Grape

The imperfect color of her smooth shell  
glistening in the light,  
It's gradients fading from red to white.  
The earthy tree-like stem sticks out like a ponytail,  
using all of it's tiny power to hold her steady in place.  
The firmness of her casing was like rubber,  
the stem course like rope.

Her slimy insides protruded from the opening.  
Embedded in her veiny, clear body  
were seeds that appeared as small pebbles.  
The honeysuckle scent filling my nose,  
it's smell changing almost instantly to freshly cut grass.  
The crisp sound of her shell braking against my teeth,  
all of her liquids flowing in my mouth.  
Her shell had turned into a wrinkled little tarp,  
the remnants of her skin left behind.  
Her sweet, savory taste still lingering.

MARIA-SIMONE SARMIENTO

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## Blue

Color of sapphire birthstones,  
the candy taste of my childhood toothpaste,  
a crisp blue corn tortilla chip, and the  
numbness on my fingertips. Color  
of my feelings, engulfing me in sadness, your tear stained  
blue eyes; washing over into a stream of worries and sorrow.  
Color of baby breath, your skin after death, of the soft cotton sweater  
you bought me for Christmas, "it's a boy," soft bleached hair  
the color of the ocean, the clear morning sky, and the songs we play on  
the sax or the bass.

Color of your favorite ice pop, the chlorine filled pool,  
a murky reflection from a small puddle, the color of Neptune, an endangered  
species  
of butterflies, the sweet but tangy berry, the monster that eats your cookies, color  
of torn up jeans, the gloves and scrubs from the hospital, the hollowness of my  
heart as it sinks, submerged in grief and longing, to hold onto you denim jacket,  
the scent of blue roses lingering on, the thought of losing my memories, just like  
Dory.

MARIA-SIMONE SARMIENTO

## Dark Coast

The girl lived with her parents in the Isle of Man, Scotland. Her house was nestled between the other plastered and wind-torn homes.

It was a Thursday and the girl began on her path to the oldest building in town, the school. It was neatly situated on the slope coming off the gravel dunes. It was part of an ancient church that had long since crumbled to grey stone. As the girl arrived, she opened the same small latch on the fence to keep the sheep out and strolled down the worn, dirt path. The creased, warm face of the teacher shined down on her average, sleepy day.

There was at least one thing that made the girl show her face at school, a friend, a girl, Lyall; they seemed to like each other. At lunch they talked quietly about the coast in the spring, and the gulls annoying the town, and their fathers who stay out too late searching for fish. Their window of school was shortening to dismissal. The little brass bell was rung by the teacher, and the kids snapped their legs straight and marched right out the door.

At the fence, Lyall said that they should go to the shore and talk. And they did, walking down the main street, reaching the end of the last building, arriving where cement turns to sand. The dunes were speckled with candied grass, with the yapping gulls scurrying away. The ice-frosted water reached up the sand and retreated and was pushed again by more of the deep blue sea. The sun had started to melt when they had left school, and now it was draining into the clouds, red and orange hot. Darkness seeped into their clothes and covered the gulls and laid a blanket over the town. They felt as if the homes drifted into the distant ocean and they forgot about homework or their worried

mothers. Lyall plopped on the chilled sand and the other girl followed. Lyall held out her hand and the other girl's hand clasped it. They sank into the sand and felt covered by moonlight.

SAWYER POLLARD



## Solitude

A nervous system digs into your bones and exceeds all tones of description. Just at this we can yawn, scream, all the rest. This, in breath and distraction, is enough to caw at and dance around, attack and defend, atone. I will move with currents as do all breathers, moaners and agreeers. But I will embrace the winds that carry me and kiss my doubting, coward soul. This soul, warm and imperfect, creeps into my thought when it best be left to rot, so fleshy. So private and irrelevant, yet focal, tonal and able, the only catalyst, that propels and collapses on its own volition, playing the puzzle of the universe naively. And this flesh stiffens into emotional patterns that carry their own weight and rest each pawn's fate. But this reliance, this rock, is fragile and is known to let ones slip through the cracks, and ultimately, these stare life in the face. And if they question it they find grace in solids, death, science, and try to understand life like this. But life is softer, can taste; bad and good, not know. Certainties are for holding peace and understanding movement. But randomness, collision, confrontation with less precision results in intent and meaning. Perspectives form and reform but death is concrete. So when the randomness filters in a dark tube, the tube is dark, for the world is only an entirety. But bursts of life, action and perception form an intellectual sense of the universe. It shows us wonders, horrors, abnormalities and systems. Romanticize and demonize its natures. Manipulate what we can, thoughtlessly. Consciousness goes untapped and we compete with our environment. Stop short of cooperation. Must tune into our surround-er, not flounder while each kicks the other's dumb-founder and bicker over details we are unqualified to recall. We must learn to separate pride and self from action as one pulsing body of now and write to brighten our worlds through atonement and peaceful, calculated, spiritual action. There is no perfection in our midst nor future, but we must forge our way to intentional life and movement, to a coherent lifestyle with open minds and multiple understandings of perspective, with a universal grasp on perception, its illusions and inspirations. And what will fall out of place? Haste and wasted space will be dark in front of human, conscious focus.

BENJI RATZKIN

