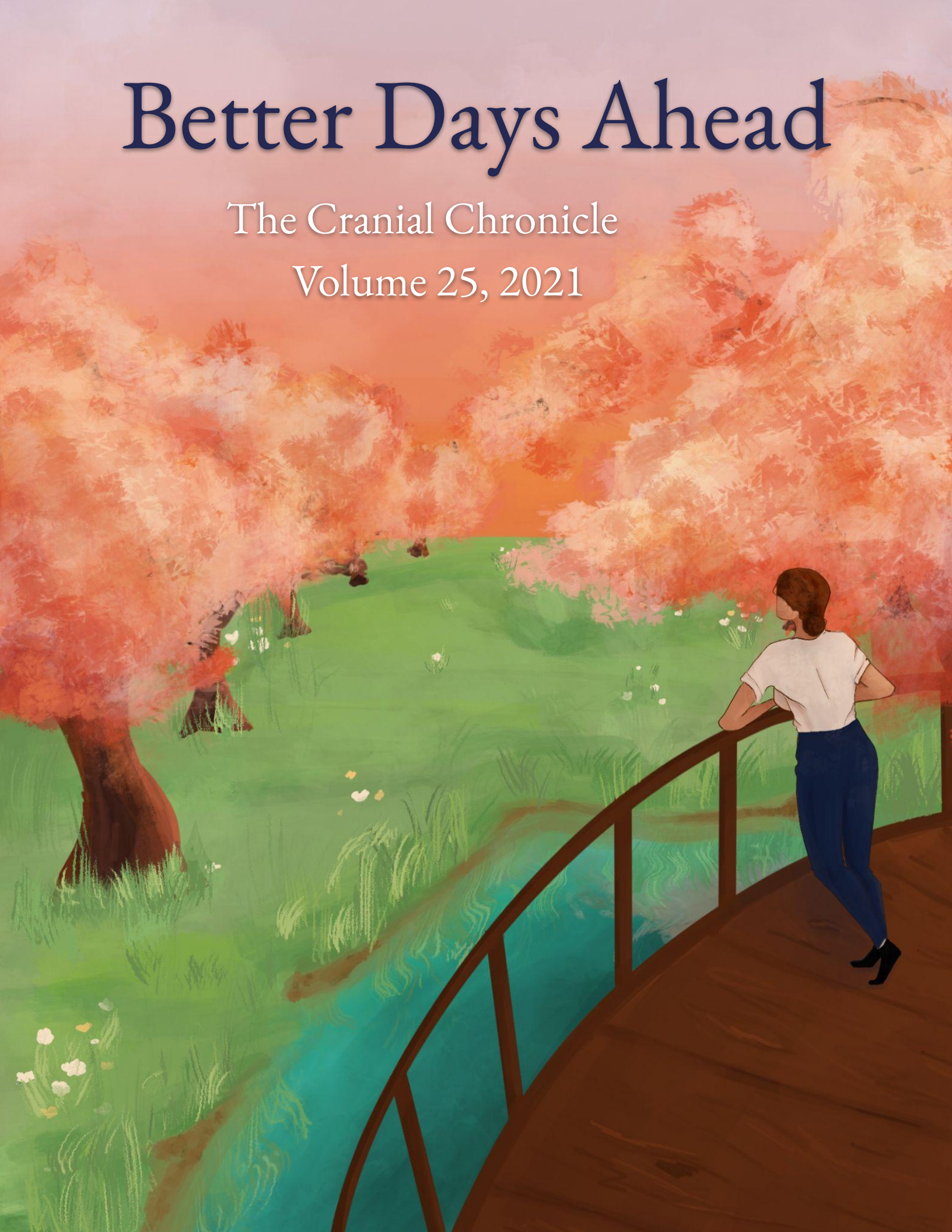


Better Days Ahead

The Cranial Chronicle

Volume 25, 2021



Cranial Chronicle 2021

Volume 25

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in *The Cranial Chronicle 2021 Edition: Better Days Ahead*.

As we leave behind a challenging school year, we are looking to the future with a hope that is present in these pages. This edition reminds us that even in desperate times, hope, beauty, and creativity can still be found—it is just a matter of looking for it. The search is worthwhile, as it is in searching for beauty and creativity that we make way for hope, and hope is what gives us the courage to press on and believe that there really are better days ahead.

Thank you to all the students and teachers who have made this edition of the literary magazine possible.

Sincerely,

The Editors

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Addiction

She's gone
because of you—
you took her insides and
spun them in a circle.

You watched her life
sink into nothingness.

As her life sunk,
his did too.

But that wasn't
because of you—
it was
because of her.

The bad habits she had,
he took from her.
Even though she loved me,
she loved the feeling more.

Ladybug

I told you
you remind me of a ladybug—
the red ones,
with different shapes and sizes.

I told you
you remind me of a ladybug—
everyone has their own,
no ladybug being the same.

I told you
you remind me of a ladybug—
but you
didn't understand.

You told me
I
was your ladybug—
but she was.

-Allie Ferguson

Solace
Amber Dolunt

The spitting rain hit my face with unwelcoming force; yet, it wasn't the only thing to wet my cheeks. I pedaled faster, like I could outrun the horror my life had become. It was a sickness that took hundreds of thousands, but in my selfishness I thought, why her, why now? My surroundings, though familiar and mostly the same, felt wretched—a personal mocking of the world built so high that came crashing down with the removal of one brick.

The only lights in the suburbia around me were the yellow street lights, like wild spotlights, unforgiving and highlighting everything you wished it wouldn't. Though nothing in suburbia was wild—everything was controlled and regulated—tragedy still struck.

But that didn't matter to me. I hadn't a thought in my head. I just wanted to escape. She's all I have. All I *had*. My mother hated me going out at night, but she was more afraid of telling me no. I wasn't a disobedient child, but I would've gone had she forbidden it or not.

Finally I stopped and with heavy breath, realized there was nowhere left to go. The ride home was slow, and more sad than before, though my tears had stopped. I was like an animal after being caught in a net, realizing there is nothing they can do, slipping into an eerie calm.

I got home, put my bike in the garage, and sat on the patio. There was nothing left: nothing to feel, nothing to do, nothing to say. So I sat there in the rain until my mother, a worried mess, spotted me and collected me into the house. Sometimes she looked more broken than I did.

I woke up late the next morning, with nothing to do, nothing to say. Everywhere there were sympathetic looks passing pity on me and my "situation". Food was tasteless and social media and TV seemed more shallow than usual. People didn't have anything new or interesting to say. So I did what I do every time the world was uninteresting: I rode my bike to the woods.

I sped past the tenements, over the highway bridge, and made a few sharp turns, ducking under low hanging branches and dodging overgrown brush until I was there. I parked my bike before the open field and the trees that looked upon me, saw everything, and said nothing. These woods were a strange thing tucked in a corner between a highway and what I am fairly sure was a water purification plant. It even had a billboard on the perimeter.

Looking from the outside, it looked very small and even boring, but when you took a few steps in, it was huge. The highway from the outside was droning and loud—you could hear it from a far ways away—but in the woods, it disappeared. The loudest sounds were the chirping of the birds and the skittering of anything four-legged that lived there, as well as the bristling of leaves as the season permitted. The strange thing about this place was that it was always shifting and changing, save a few things, which made them sacred and nearly holy.

I walked into the embrace of the woods, walking its small trail, and headed for one of those sacred and nearly holy things in the heart of the woods—a tree with the base of its trunk hollowed out. It stood tall and proud for reasons that I'm sure weren't meant for me to understand. No tree dared to impede on the space in which its branches spread out—but for me, it seemed welcoming. I sat before it, on a dried out log lain in the dirt, and cried.

Pinocchio

I take a look in the mirror—
“I love myself” I say;
I pause in anticipation,
But my nose grows again today.

I try to fake a smile—
And tell everyone I’m fine;
But if you take another glance,
I think you know I’m lying.

But whenever I’m with you—
It’s never quite as hard;
I know you really love me,
And you’d never break my heart.

You say I’m everything I wish I was—
Except you think it’s true;
The more that I spend time with you,
The more I think it too.

I take one more look in the mirror—
“I love myself” I say;
I pause in anticipation,
And my nose doesn’t grow today.

-Hailey Lopez

Cars Jacob Coogan

As I turned the key and the motor rumbled and groaned to life, I will never forget the smile that came upon my mother's face. It was bright and wide, just like when my father used to work on his car.

The Saturday in August when I finally put the last piece of the puzzle together and completed every part I had in hand, I was eager to see just how quick and nimble the car had become.

With all of my exhaust work and engine modification, the noise and grumble of my classic muscle car was like no other I had ever heard. I had chosen the custom route and pieced everything together to my liking. Everything on the car was different from the others I had observed; it was tailored to me and my taste, which brought a unique and beautiful depth to the vehicle. In my mind that day, an overwhelming feeling of pride filled me as I recalled when I was once the one who supposedly knew nothing and was young and inexperienced.

I pulled the machine out of my driveway and began to run my courses, running it through every gear to see the bite and reaction of the clutch and drivetrain. Everything was as smooth as silk. Every city block, I began to open the throttle more and more to see how it reacted. The accelerator reacted to every little nudge of my foot just how I wanted it to. With all my blood, sweat and tears put into the building and work of this car, I finally gained control of the reins and let her rip. At full throttle, there was a sense of satisfaction. The speed and noise, the screech and wail of the tires combined with the roar of the engine, was a token of victory. I had truly done what I had dreamed of doing: build a car like my father did before he died.

I felt a sense of self-realization that I could truly do anything that I wanted to; I had worked hard to gain the knowledge and skillset to do many of the things my car needed. I went through periods of self-doubt and obstacles that seemed insurmountable, but I pushed myself to do what I knew I could do. Along the way, I realized I had something in common with the car: we both needed to work through the rubble. Like the car, I was struggling to keep up with myself, but the finished product showed me that I had the potential to do so much more than I ever imagined.

The Race
Frederick Hoback

Ducking around a rock, my heart shaking in my chest, I know it's coming. It's only a matter of time until the monster finds me. I've got to keep moving. There's no way I'm going back to that place. I spy a fallen tree trunk ahead over the canyon I'm in and duck under it. I can't waste time thinking about hiding—she'll find me. I must put distance between us.

"Alex, it's time to leave. You've spent plenty of time here," the monster's voice calls out, mocking me.

I spy some tall rocks and briefly consider climbing them to be safe from being taken, but then I remember they have height on their side.

I decide to climb the rocks regardless to see if I can catch a glimpse of her location. As I almost reach the top, I hear cumbersome steps coming closer from the direction I had just left. I spy a mop of gnarled hair and immediately begin making my way down the other side of the rock.

"Wait for me Alex. I promise I just want to explore with you."

The empty promises fall on deaf ears. I know as soon as I'm within arms reach my freedom is gone. So I run.

She must hear me because rapid steps suddenly pick up behind me. I can feel her closing in on me like a bloodhound slobbering at the mouth, tracking down its target.

Closer, Closer, Closer. Closer. Closer! CLOSER!

SNATCH.

"I've got you, you little gremlin. There is no escape today. Back to the car with you."

The words that leave my mother's mouth spell my doom. It's all over. I've been caught. I'll be taken back to that place. The place where nothing changes. The place where there is no escape.

"I hope you had a good run Alex, because the longest stretch of the driving is left," my mother says, one hand grasping my collar, making sure I don't bolt off again.

The Best Smells in the World

Mint;
Paint;
Candy;
Roses;
Coffee;
Flowers;
New car;
Gasoline;
Popcorn;
Chlorine;
Pine trees;
A new baby;
Watermelon;
French fries;
Strawberries;
Fresh cookies;
Banana bread;
Baseball glove;
The smell of rain;
Steak on the grill;
Pumpkin candles;
A spring afternoon;
Lavender tide pods;
My grandma's house;
A campfire by the lake;
A walk through the woods;
The scent of someone you love;
Smell of a freshly cut football field;
My dad's cologne that he only wears six times a year.

-ELA 9 Students

Muse
Aidan Butcher

“So how is a cinder block brain like yours able to drop so much wisdom, huh? Did you roll a nat 20 during character creation?” Inteval asked as he looked over at the construct, who happened to be sitting in a bean bag chair watching TV.

“I would not deem it wisdom, nor did I roll a ‘nat 20’ during character creation,” Zel responded, his voice deep and grainy.

“Well, you got it somewhere? Because I can’t go out to any ol’ construct and ask them what I should do about my problem. Are you telling me I have to write it out like a poem or something? I majored in history, not English.”

“Your college course of study is irrelevant to the discussion. I suggest writing poetry to come to terms with what problems you have. It seems to work for others,” the construct replied.

“You know what Zel—...Yeah, I’ve got nothing. Fine. I’ll give it a try,” and with that, Inteval got up from his place on the couch and went into his work office, where he sat down to begin writing.

It was two weeks ago.

Two weeks that, to me, were an eternity.

It was only my third day here in this town

When the unimaginable happened.

A demonic portal, much like from sci-fi

Opened up within a student's home!

Demons are nothing new to me, but this,

This portal was something entirely different.

The crimson glow shone out the window.

I was returning home from work,

Walking along a cobblestone path when

The crimson had enveloped the street.

The next day in class, I asked my students

About such a thing, and if it were normal,

As if a portal could ever be normal.

But I was shocked and within dismay

By their many answers.

“Mister Valwrak!” one of them exclaimed.

“It was only my grandparents!

They stopped by for a visit to check up
On the family!”

I was shocked. How such a thing could be normal
Within this normal town?
Perhaps there was more,
More than meets my eye that happened.

After countless drafts and hours of his Saturday wasted, Intevar went to push himself back from his desk, only to be stopped suddenly by a large and immovable object. He sat there, motionless, before slowly turning his head to the side, only to look up and be met by the gaze of his large stone friend, Zel.

“Wha—, Zel!? How long have you been there watching me!?” Intevar demanded.

“For approximately three hours. I was testing my ability to see if you wouldn’t notice me if I stood still enough. It worked, until you foiled my spell by bumping into me with your low-quality desk chair,” he replied.

“Dude, we have been over this! No magic in the apartment! Now where’s the spell book?”

Zel let out a deep, aggravated sigh as he reached into his shoulder bag and pulled out a spellbook. He stared down at the cover for a moment before handing it to Intevar.

“*Thank you,*” Intevar said as he took the book and walked over to the other side of the room and locked it within a safe, full of other miscellaneous magic items, such as a wraithbone, a jar of magical powder, wizard scroll copies, and other loose trinkets.

“Okay...Now get out of my office and go do something productive, Zel. I’ve got more writing to do—”

“But do you not want assistance? I have been watching you write for the last three hou—”

“No! I do not want help from a *stalker*. Go look that up in the dictionary if you don’t know what it means!” Intevar scooted his chair forward so he sat a comfortable distance away from the desk. He stared down at the page before him, and then glanced to the clock. He had been writing for hours.

“Eh, it’s Saturday...I still have tomorrow to finish what I have to get done.”

Last weekend, a ‘normal’ weekend,
I chose to spend my time grading papers
At a local restaurant that a few students
Had recommended to me.

I was enjoying a burger, cooked well-done,
When something out the corner of my eye
Grabbed my attention, like magnets to metal.
Standing at the lunch counter was an angel.

I had always heard of their existence,
Mostly from books, but I never expected,
I had truly never expected to see one.
Especially at a lunch counter.

As she stood at that counter,
Golden wings upon her back
I sat there in shock and awe.
It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Although I sat idle and said nothing,
Only taking in the marvelous sight,
I thought back to myself,
“How could such a thing be normal?”

As he finished writing, Intevar stood up from his desk and glanced around the room. No more Zel? He left? Good. It was about time he took a break for a while and went to enjoy his day. With that, Intevar shut off the lights and exited the office, leaving it shrouded in darkness.



Memory
Alexa Velasquez

As my pencil scratches the wide expanse of my page, my eyes dart back and forth between the picture and my paper. After working on this drawing for several weeks, I have realized little details in the girl's features that I never noticed before. The hint of sorrow that hangs in her mouth. The slight sag of her shoulders, as though carrying so much hardship on them has weakened her spirit. The tangible fear that radiates from her eyes.

Despite this palpable pain, I see hope.

There is a glimmer of optimism and curiosity that shines in her eyes. The softness of her expression conveys a sense of wonder and utter resilience. As I construct my artwork, I notice all these details. I notice the infinite complexity of this girl that I know nothing about. But although I know nothing, the impact this unknown girl has had on me is everything.

The piece of artwork that I am referring to is one I constructed through The Memory Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading kindness and intercultural understanding through art. Through The Memory Project, students are given pictures of different children around the world who have faced immense hardships, such as abuse, poverty, and neglect, and create portraits of them that are then sent back to these children. The Memory Project allows for these children, who have been forced to face extreme pain and sorrow, to know that their lives do indeed matter. That they are valuable and important and memorable. That they will not be forgotten. Creating a portrait for a girl from the former USSR through The Memory Project has dramatically influenced my outlook on life and the characteristics I possess, and has also impacted the girl that I drew the portrait of.

While I drew a portrait for a girl from the former USSR, I experienced an intense psychological change, as I questioned my own beliefs about humanity and our value. In life, we often feel so infinitesimally small and utterly unimportant. We think of the generations of people before us and the masses of people we are surrounded by, and our total insignificance compared to the expanses of the universe and galaxy. We are simply one human being in a tapestry of time and space that holds no value or meaning at all. We are all destined to die and be reduced to dust, and will be forgotten as we diminish into complete and absolute nothingness. Our existence is futile.

However, as I constructed this portrait, I realized the value of every life. As I examined the complexity of this single human, I understood the utter beauty of existence. This unknown girl may be one person woven in a tapestry of humanity, but the effect she has had on myself and those around her serves as a testament to the significance of her being. Every human is important because every life impacts the experiences, characteristics, and values of other people. Her life will continue to be meaningful long after she dies, because of the invaluable impact she has had on myself and those around her. This realization also helped me understand the value of my own life. Although I may be just one fiber woven in the tapestry of humanity, my existence is significant because of how I have impacted those around me and the memories that immortalize me. Through memories, our lives are everlasting. Even when our bodies become recycled into dust and generations pass, memories of ourselves are testaments to our being that withstand the test of time. Our lives are not meaningless when memories of ourselves are preserved. Through memories, we never truly die.

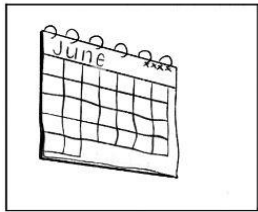
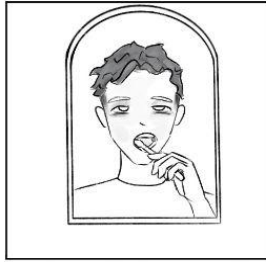
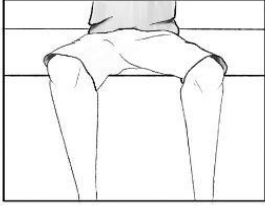
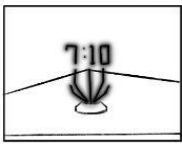
While working on this project, not only was I able to validate to myself that my own life does indeed have value and meaning, I was also able to validate the existence of the mystery girl I was drawing. I was able to give her the gift of immortality through memory. No matter the struggles she endures, she will always know that there is a girl in America who refuses to let her life feel meaningless. Who refuses to forget her. We are intertwined through the mystery of our existences. We know nothing about one another, but hold so much understanding for each other. Even though I do not know her name, this girl's being is preserved through my portrait of her, and through my promise to never forget her. We are bound and connected to one another through an invisible rope that transcends all boundaries separating each other.

Regardless of the physical boundaries that separate us, and the different cultures and experiences that we hold, we are united through our common sense of humanity. Humans are complex creatures, and behind all of our eyes, we hold stories of loss and pain. All humans have been ravaged by hardships and adversity that others know nothing about.

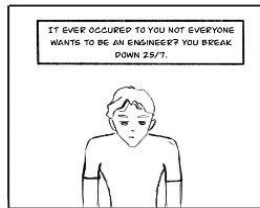
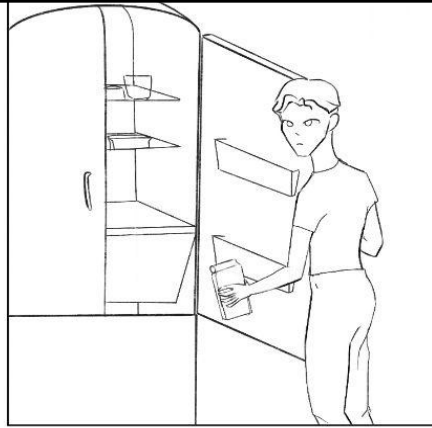
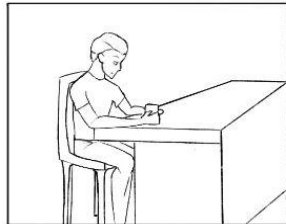
Through drawing this portrait, I gained immense empathy and compassion for others and the silent struggles they endure that no one else knows about.

While humans may be mere mortals, memories of our existence and the bonds we foster with one another are eternal.

Orbit Realm

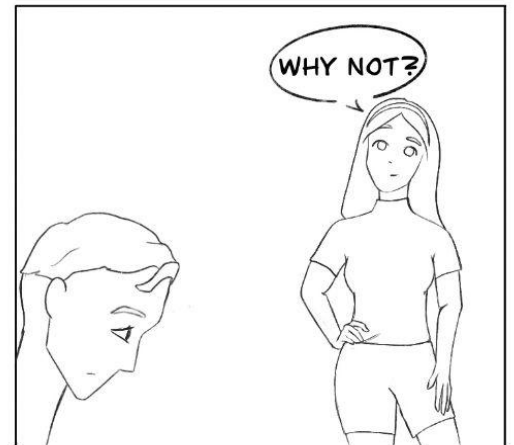
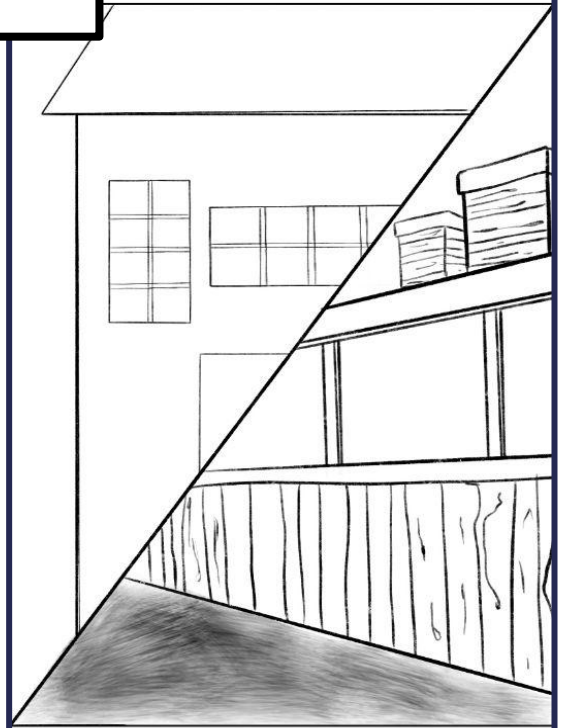


ORBIT OF RIVIR



I DID IT YESTERDAY.

FINE.



TO BE CONTINUED...

The Amazing Mr. Raven
Gino Manea

“Mr. Raven, when will you fly?”

The little girl looked up at Mr. Raven with grown-up eyes, a somberful blue washed along her iris.

Why does she look at me like that?, thought Mr. Raven to himself. Mr. Raven was never much of an overachiever; he didn't really consider himself to be an achiever at all. Such ideas did not reach him. *I do not let them reach me, I suppose.* Mr. Raven looked down at his watch with an anxious expression rooted onto his face.

Today he was taking the subway to his new office job, watching the passengers climb in and out of the carriage, their eyes passing over him as they went. Mr. Raven looked longingly across the compartment, his gaze resting where the poster of a soldier reaching his hand out toward the audience was posted. *Six years since the war started*, Mr. Raven thought. One year since he served his first five-year draft for the war. It would be another year until Mr. Raven would go back and serve another five years. He was in a two-year relief plan given to the soldiers who make it through their first draft—a temporary fix. *Anything will suffice if it's not in that hellhole.* It was a common sentiment shared by the other soldiers who had come back with him.

After clocking into work, Mr. Raven went to his boss to receive directions on what to work on for the day. This usually consisted of correcting, writing, or printing miscellaneous documents. Most of them ended up coming to him, and few were rarely fully read. They were just formalities.

After sitting down at his cubicle, he began his work assigned to him for the day. This usually took him about five to six hours—on a good day.

“Great day today, huh Mr. Raven?” Crowed a young man from across the office.

Mr. Crow made sure it never was.

“I suppose it is a fine day indeed, Mr. Crow,” Mr. Raven cawed in response.

In Mr. Raven's eyes, Mr. Crow wasn't necessarily a bad person, but he was particularly bothersome. He was a very happy person, infecting those around him with his spirit, but there was just something about the way he carried himself—it irked Mr. Raven.

“So Mr. Raven,” Mr. Crow preened, “guess what happened to me yesterday?”

Mr. Raven forced a smile. “I can't imagine. Please, enlighten me.”

“I've been offered a new position at the main branch of the company!” He cheered. “I gotta say, I was pretty surprised by it. I won't say I didn't want it, I mean, I believe myself to be a hard worker, but it caught me off guard. I suppose now I'm gonna be your senior, huh?”

“I'm happy for you,” Mr. Raven replied, “don't doubt yourself. Understand, you are a hard worker.”

“I was wondering if you wanted to go out and get dinner later. There's something else important I want to tell you, but it'd be better kept between us.”

How peculiar, thought Mr. Raven. “Alright, as long as we go somewhere halfway decent.”

“Then it's a deal.” Mr. Crow flashed a smile and turned to walk away, then stopped as if he forgot something. “I'll take some work off of your hands,” he said.

With more wind in his step, that gleeful Mr. Crow walked away. *Caught me off guard*, Mr. Raven cooed internally. He'd never seen him get so serious about a topic before. And it was with that unsettling thought that Mr. Raven arrived at his desk, turned on his computer and looked at his screen. He watched as his workload slowly dwindled down. When Mr. Raven's papers were done, the men left the office for dinner. They ate at a restaurant near the middle of town, not too far from work or transit. The city was a big one, bustling with activity. This was especially true the closer one got to the city's center, where the town hall and most other government buildings were all packed. There were news reporters, getting ready to talk about whatever news was new in the city. There were recruiters from the military, handing out informational fliers on being drafted. There were vendors selling food, people off to work, government officials, hobos... One could set off a bomb and still feel drowned out by the loudness of those that lived in the city's heart.

"So, what I wanted to talk about before," Mr. Crow began. "I didn't get an invitation to the main branch of the company—or at least not our company."

"Oh...then where else?" Mr. Raven asked.

"Superd. You know, the ones who sell the food to families?" said Mr. Crow.

Superd had been on the rise recently due to the war. They sold rations to soldiers and food to families who couldn't afford it. *They have lots of public support*, thought Mr. Raven. He thought no less of Mr. Crow.

"That's...a great offer," Mr. Raven replied. "I'd be sad to see you go, but I think it would be sadder if you didn't take them up on that deal."

"Well here's the thing—they also offered to let me bring someone else with me. We would both get a job there." Mr. Crow was beaming with anticipation.

Mr. Raven hesitated for a moment. "So who were you thinking? You got to be careful who you ask, a lot of these people will do anything to ride your coattails. I'd say I'm pretty familiar with people like that so—"

"Mr. Raven," Mr. Crow interjected, "I was going to bring you with me."

What a dolt, Mr. Raven thought to himself on the subway back home. It was nighttime and the subway was empty, save a soldier standing dead on the wall and a television screen hooked up to the roof of the train. The soldier was defamed, graffiti strewn over his corpse. The TV broadcasted several different news streams. The channels were all the same—old news and new news, but news no less. Just news. One story was about the recent efforts to win the war, another an explosion at the capital. The last was of a man who died in the bombing and another who felt dead inside.

This was why Mr. Raven hated news—there was always something bad to replace the good. Mr. Raven turned away from the TV to the decrepit soldier, his body hanging from the wall. On his face was a painted red bird, its eyes crossed out in black. Mr. Raven looked at the bird for the rest of the ride home. He felt indignation for the bird with its eyes sewn shut, dead to the world and dead to him. That bird chose that life for itself—the bird chose to die. Mr. Raven couldn't accept that.

It was fall, and the earth was in turmoil for the birds that had succumbed to the season of war.

Why must I fly?

Look at them fly...

The raw smell of gunpowder was intense, as if just lighting a match in the air could cause an explosion. Mr. Raven reared his head at the smell and turned toward the source of the cynical voice that was marveling at the artillery shells—they sailed through the air into the desolate middle ground. It was his commanding officer, Lieutenant Pigeon. “Lieutenant, what are you doing?” asked Mr. Raven.

“Just eyeing up the machinery one last time.”

“One last time, sir?”

“Haven’t you heard?” The Lieutenant eyed him. “Anyone who isn’t involved with the artillery bombardment is being sent up to the front line. God, I’m gonna miss these iron heaps. Certainly still excited, though, to see what mayhem they’ll cause out front! Just wish I could’ve had the chance to man one of these bad boys.”

Mr. Raven didn’t understand Lieutenant Pigeon’s infatuation with the artillery units, or with war in general. While Mr. Raven liked to think about the machinery mechanics, the Lieutenant had made it quite clear that he was more interested in the destruction rather than the construct. *In all fairness*, Mr. Raven thought, *It’s definitely much safer closer to the artillery than it is to the front line*. Mr. Raven related this to Lieutenant Pigeon.

“Yeah well, nevermind all that now,” he grumbled, “we’ll be lucky if we can even see this grass again.” Lieutenant Pigeon kicked the ground with a grunt.

Four years had passed since he was drafted for his second round of service. Out of these four years, plus his previous five, he’d only seen the front line once. There was a motto that the drafted soldiers liked to use. **Once to the front line was enough to never come back**. If you defied this adage, it became a reality, coming back home.

“Can’t believe the amount of deserters we had this year, damn traitors.” Lieutenant Pigeon sighed.

Mr. Raven felt little fear for war. He was a fine soldier who followed orders—no more no less. In the front line, there was no one to follow. In the wake of death, all soldiers ran blindly—backwards or forwards didn’t make a difference. The land of the front line was decimated by bombs and brimstone, leaving both sides locked in an entrenching battle of cowardice. In the pits—the entire world against them with no way out—the soldiers were forced to think for themselves: the fear of every fine soldier.

An explosion shattered the Earth—scattering debris into the air, mixing with hot shrapnel and the evil smell of lead.

“Lieutenant, what do we do?!” Mr. Raven screamed from the opposite wall.

“We’re pinned down.” Lieutenant Pigeon yelled. “We have no instructions from the higher ups. We’ll get mowed down if we try to retreat. Might as well start marching to our dea—”

Before the Lieutenant finished, one man began to weep while another yelled at the top of his lungs.

“Hey man, what are you doing?” Mr. Raven shouted. He wasn’t really expecting a response given the soldier’s mental state.

The soldier suddenly jumped up from his spot, running towards the gunfire. His dead body landed back onto the floor of the pit, in between the crying soldier and Mr. Raven.

Why did he do that?, thought Mr. Raven

Why am I here? What am I doing?

“Why...?” Mr. Raven asked.

I don’t want to die.

Mr. Raven drew this conclusion on his own; he considered this to be one of the few thoughts he had ever genuinely crafted.

I want to be special.

“We need someone to take charge here!” yelled Lieutenant pigeon. “We’re being shredded mercilessly of our own accord. We need someone to rally behind, men.”

Mr. Raven grabbed his gun and stood up with a snap, decision made. “I’m going to run across the middle ground.”

“...What?” Lieutenant Pigeon replied weakly. “W-why would you do that? I know I said we need a leader right now but...” the Lieutenant paused for a moment. “Do you think you can make the gap? Do you think you can overcome that, soldier?”

Mr. Raven looked up without a word. He was filled with fear, and it certainly showed on his face. But he knew the Lieutenant for three years and he was sure the Lieutenant knew him just as well.

Mr. Raven climbed out, his feet sinking into the trench that the world cradled him in. “No one wants my success. I don’t even expect it of myself, but I don’t care anymore.”

Mr. Raven wrestled away from the grip of the earth and broke into a jog—the desolate No Man’s Land.

“I didn’t care that I was a failure, because it was me who viewed myself as such. But I never wanted to be a failure—I just wanted to be special.”

Bombs shook the ground around him. The soldiers who were hiding in fear behind Mr. Raven began to watch him in awe of his pursuit. They chanted: “RUN MR. RAVEN, RUN!”

“I believed I was content with who I was and what I did for a living, but I was living in the shadow of what I couldn’t accomplish.”

As bullets whizzed past Mr. Raven’s head, he broke out into a sprint, his legs shaking from the world trying to stop his approach.

“I believed that I wasn’t special—that I couldn’t succeed even if I tried. I believed that if I tried, I wouldn’t get a second chance when I failed. I believed that I would *fail*.”

Mr. Raven's feet sped up, arms swinging up and down at his side as he ran. They raised higher and higher each time they swung.

"I wanted to be special. I believed that I, especially, would fail at this, but I never considered why. I knew why—I only pursued this to escape my failure. My failure with myself. Does being special feel that good? Is what I sought really "being special", or was my idea too superficial? I'm not so sure it matters anymore...but I'll never give up fighting—it matters to me."

I still want to be special.

Mr. Raven's feet kicked off the ground, his arms flapping around him as the wind lifted him up and guided him through the air. The soldiers behind Mr. Raven cheered and shouted, screaming at the top of their lungs in awe of Mr. Raven. Some even began to climb out of the pits, running after Mr. Raven, while others fell before they even had a chance. But they were all smiling.

Mr. Raven, you're flying.

"I am? I AM! I'M FINALLY FLYING! I DID IT! I did it!"

Mr. Raven, you're free.

"...You know what?"

Yes, Mr. Raven?

"Being special feels really nice."

When the Moment is Over

I. Night

...
The silence of night.
Not a single person.
Not a single sound.
Not a single star.
The nothing feels comforting.
The nothing feels safe.
Yet this moment
of peaceful nothing
is temporary.
So my heart aches
When the nothing becomes
suffocating,
When the emotions creep in,
When the moment is over.

II. Moon

Whoosh, whoosh
Of cold winds whipping through me
like my sorrow and anger.
The moon shines on in the cool night.
And despite all of the emotions
heavily weighing on me,
When the moon meets my gaze,
I feel connection
and peace.
There is moonlight
shining at the end of the tunnel.
Yet this moment
of peace and connection
is temporary.
But my heart feels a bit lighter
When I avert my gaze,
When I open the door,
When the moment is over.

III. Wind

Whoosh, whoosh

Of cool winds whipping through me
as if I'm a tree, strongly rooted in the ground,
yet somehow still standing.

The strong winds travel
straight through my bones

And carry all the
anger

fear

and

sorrow

away

like leaves blowing in the wind.

It is a quiet comfort,

In the way that it hugs you gently

and says

I'm here,

you're going to be okay.

Yet this moment

of comfort and connection

is temporary.

But my heart feels peaceful

When the winds die down,

When I close my eyes,

When the moment is over.

-Jordan Olsen

