

# The Agathist

Issue 19

Fall 2025



# The Agathist

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*ISSUE 19*

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## Advisor's Note

MR. DICKSON

Emily Dickinson wrote these lines in 1861, but they still hold true today: "There's a certain Slant of Light,/ Winter Afternoons--/ That oppresses, like the Heft/ Of Cathedral tunes." We've all seen this: the cold, heavy winter sun slanting in quickly, blindingly, but not warmly. It defies what we expect of the sun, yet it's still beautiful.

One could say that art can be like that too. Stories of pain can evoke feelings in us that are hard to describe. We can be tormented by beauty. Pretty songs make us cry.

There's a lot of that mixed-bag feeling in this edition of *The Agathist*. Yes, some of the poems are sad, some of the pictures melancholy, some of the prose show us heart-squeezing loneliness, and yet, they bring comfort to us. Maybe we're not as alone as we think we are. Even if we can't directly relate to the situations shown in these words and images, we've all felt the feelings expressed there, and isn't that what matters?

Math folks tell us that a line is the shortest distance between two points. Art is the shortest distance between people--a direct line from the artist to the audience.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank this semester's contributors and the magazine staff for helping shape this phenomenal edition. You all made beauty, and I am grateful.

Read, ponder, and be connected.

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## To the Performer

ARIEL MORRIS, 12

I must say,  
I admire your  
work and dedication.

The Bible you hold  
with no marks in the  
scriptures. The plastic  
cross you've plastered  
on your chest, and the  
prayers you clasp with  
fingers spread out  
with allergies of each  
other.

The white sapphires  
within your wedding ring  
who think they're diamonds  
that smile in a post  
with a caption you  
didn't write.

And your production  
has been doing this a  
long time. I'd be lying  
if I say you've don't have  
a good crew.

They've mastered  
the large house  
made of cardboard walls  
and painted you a  
happy family upon them.

Clean, porous,  
porcelain faces  
who've been acting since  
they were born.

To the performer,  
usually, I prefer  
a more obvious show  
but

I must say,  
I admire your  
work and dedication.



## Catching Bubbles

DESIRAE GIVENS, 12, WHITE CHARCOAL

## The Path

MADDIE GARLAND, 11

In fields of gold, where love took seed,  
A chilling frost, a silent creek.  
I walk with you yet feel so far.  
A distant echo, like a fading star.

Your laughter rings, a hollow chime,  
While shadows dance in corners of my mind.  
I yearn for warmth, a tender touch,  
But find a void, I long for much

Is this the path, the love we sought?  
Or just a dream, now come to naught?  
My heart aches, unspoken pleas,  
Lost in the maze of what could be.



## First Light of Summer

JOHN TEASLER, 9, WATERCOLOR

## What Do I see?

ANVI SETHI, 12

When I look in the mirror,  
I don't see the black hair that blankets my scalp.  
The brown pools of dirty water that create my eyes.  
I see my words.  
I see the compliments that I've given,  
the people I've laughed with and the advice I've shared.  
I look and see the conversations I've been a part of, the  
people I saw, the new outfits draped on each person passing me, and  
the smiles I've pasted on my lips.  
I don't look in the mirror to look at my looks  
I look in the mirror to see if my words were to create my skin would I  
still be beautiful?  
I look and I see me...

## For You

DERON GRACE HUGHES, 12

I built my world on the thin edge of your presence,  
a precarious, breathless perch.

Every sun rise was just a count of hours  
until your shadow fell across my floor.  
And everything I did, I did for you.

I hate you for the power I gave you.  
I burn with the shame of my devotion,  
a cheap, pathetic thing, laid bare like an open  
wound that only your hand pretends to soothe.  
I abandoned myself for you.

Why are you not enough? I scream at the ceiling,  
the words really meant for the ghost in the mirror.  
You're just a man, flawed and fleeting, but I treat  
you like the last patch of dry earth in a rising,  
endless flood.

I tore down my own boundaries for you. I was willing  
to change for you. I abandoned myself for you.  
For some reason I still miss you, but I have nothing  
left for you.

## Crumbling Names

LANE MILLER, 10

The door creaks open to my old  
kindergarten classroom,  
the halls looked smaller than I remembered.  
The chairs were lined up neatly,  
but they looked too small to sit in.

I showed her where I used to sit,  
near the window with the sun on the floor.  
We looked at the desks,

but we find only crumbling names on them.

# Too Young to be Old

ANONYMOUS

Your wings are caught in a cage,

I knew it, I watched you struggle

Don't dwell on your morality,

Because it's infinite,

Whether you're here or above,

Your name will be written in the stars,

When our clock runs out the universe is gone,

We'll look back on people like you,

Brave for humanity's sake

Faded, almost gone, but still on my soul,

Standing even against the test of time.



## My First Commission

KOFI HANDY, 9, MIXED MEDIA

# Alone

MALERIE BOYLE, 10

The rain hit the ground with soft splashes, the city streets slicked reflecting neon signs and taxi lights. Under her umbrella Lola felt the welcoming calm surrounding her. It wasn't just the quiet, it was a heavy silence that muffled the sound of her breathing and made the tick of her heart feel like a hammer to the ribs. People around her surrounded by family and friends felt like a galaxy away. She watched them walk and dance through life surrounded by laughter and rainbows while her life seemed to be a saturated grey.

Lola's life once a vast ocean now seemed dry to the touch. Her home, once a calming sanctuary, felt like a cage she couldn't escape. The secret diary she kept under the bed she knew personally. It felt like the only thing that would listen. Sometimes she wouldn't even write in it to be afraid someone else would find it, she would just talk to her past pages feeling like she was talking to her old self. She would talk about how the cashier wouldn't look at her or the bus ride home where her seat mate ignored her.

She never believed anyone who made a promise because so many were broken in the past. Lola wasn't always like this; her heart was as pure as gold shining bright for everyone to see. The change had been slow like the erosion of a small rock until there was nothing left. It started with her brother promising not to tell but when mother asked it was her name that came out of his mouth. Then it was her best friend in middle school who promised to always have her back but stuck a sword right through the middle. The final straw was her sister who promised to always be there for her, but in the end left her.

By High school Lola had built her walls brick by brick. It felt like she gained a 6th sense of deceit. It could be a small flicker in someone's eyes, a slight hesitation in their voice or the way their eyes never seemed to meet her gaze. When her classmate Bella asked if she wanted to go study at the library, Lola politely declined, certain that a hidden motive lay beneath her kind smile. She'd learned that kindness was often just a tool, a means to an end. Her fear of betrayal had made her an island off the coast of the world. The silence of her apartment became a fortress

made her an island off the coast of the world. The silence of her apartment became a fortress against the unpredictable lives of other people. She had her routines, her solitude, and the quiet knowledge that if she never let anyone in then no one could hurt her.

Back to reality she hits, with her headphones in, she moves through the sea of people. She passes the glittering lights and towering buildings of Times Square. Further downtown, she turns a corner, and the noise softens to a rumble, she's in Greenwich Village now trying to make the gloomy day brighter. The streets she walks are shady and cool, winding through different stories. She keeps moving on down the street as the neighborhoods bleed together creating a comforting warmth. Lola was looking for something special, she didn't know yet what it was, but she knew it was what she wanted. Sitting just on the corner of the street was the library. The old storefront was built of brick the color of aged clay, softened by decades of rain and sun. Light green Gin gum pattern on the overhang with a dusty blue door.

Lola ducked into the small, cluttered bookstore to escape the downpour. The scent of old paper and dust enveloped her, a comforting aroma. She drifted through the narrow aisles, her fingers trailing over the spines of forgotten tales. A book with a faded red cover caught her eye. It was a collection of stories about old myths and folklore from around the world. She pulled it from the shelf and opened it to a random page.

A story of a lost traveler who, after years of wandering, realized his true home wasn't a place, but a feeling of belonging, unfolded before her eyes. He had found it not by searching for a specific landmark or by a group of people, but by helping a lost stranger along the way. The story resonated with something deep inside her, a forgotten chord plucked back to life.

For the first time in a long time, Lola didn't feel alone. She was part of a vast, mythical story of wandering and finding. She bought the book and carried it out into the rain. The city didn't seem so distant anymore, and the rushing people no longer felt like strangers. They were all on their own journeys and she was just one of them. The rain was just rain, washing the world clean, and for the first time, she wasn't just walking in it—she was a part of it

## Where Did She Go?

MADDIE GARLAND, 11

In mirrored halls, I search in vain,  
For a familiar face, to ease the pain.  
A stranger stares, with hollow eyes,  
Lost in a labyrinth of tangled lies.

The path I knew has disappeared  
Replaced by shadows, doubts, and fear  
Each step I take leads further astray,  
From the person I once was yesterday.

But hope remains, a flickering spark  
To guide me through the endless dark.  
I'll gather fragments, piece by piece,  
And rediscover who I'm meant to be, finding inner peace.



## Fleeting Thoughts Floating By

ANDREW MARTIN, 10, DIGITAL ART

# As I Finish to the Wall

MAHLON DAY, 12

As I get up to the block,  
My heart beats loud against the clock.  
I say a prayer that time would stop,  
And ask again my time might drop.

The whistle loud as it can be,  
Makes me dive into the sea.  
I start to swim my final race,  
Trying to keep a steady pace.

I feel my speed, one final rush,  
The World fades out beneath the hush.  
All I hear are my own thoughts  
Remembering what I've been taught.

Then it hits, I've come to know,  
That this will be my final show.  
My mind it spins, how can it be?  
That this is the last race for me.

My vision starts to blur and swell,  
But not from strain, my body tells.  
Knowing that when I am done,  
This will be over, all the fun.  
Suddenly I am all alone,

I feel the pain in every bone.  
Not the one of physical hurt  
But of the love I can't desert.

I want to slow, but even so,  
I know the price that I would owe.  
It's up to me to finish the race.  
But when I do, my heart will ache.

The end is near, and I can't choose,  
For if I win, I still will lose.  
The cheers above, the world around,  
Can't fill the void where hope is drowned.

The Family I've made my own,  
Will be some friends who I've once known  
The fleeting years that seem so short,  
Remind me how I love this sport.

The end is close, the flags draw near,  
As I swim for my final year.  
One last breath. One last stroke.  
I mask the tears that I still choke.

The ghosts I knew now start to call,  
As I finish to the wall.

## Late Train to Marlowe

ANONYMOUS

The last train was nearly empty — just a handful of faces dulled by the hum of the carriage lights. Claire sat by the window, watching her reflection blur against the night outside.

She'd told herself it was ridiculous, coming all this way for someone she hadn't seen in seven years. But ridiculous had always been Simon's specialty.

When the train slowed into Marlowe, she almost didn't stand. What would she say? *I kept your letters? I never really stopped?* The words felt too thin for the space between them.

The platform was nearly dark. And then — there he was, the same easy slouch, hands in his coat pockets, pretending not to search the train doors.

She stepped out before she lost her nerve. He saw her. Smiled — a small, crooked thing that broke through the cold.

"You're late," he said.

"Seven years," she replied.

He laughed, breath clouding in the air. "Still counts."

The train pulled away behind her, and for the first time in a long while, Claire didn't look back.



## Untitled

KOFI HANDY, 9, PHOTOGRAPHY

# The Death of the Emotionally Unavailable

ANONYMOUS

My mom died when I was thirteen.

My parents have been divorced since I was a year old, so I've never understood love or the family dynamic the same way others have. I've lived with my dad and stepmom as far as my early childhood memories could retrace. Dad and Lindsay- Lindsay is my stepmom- have never been the perfect picture of a happy couple. My only memories from the old house were the broken kitchen tiles and the yelling coming from the next room over. My mom on the other hand, I saw her every weekend. But every weekend turned into every other weekend and every other weekend turned into once a month until it had been half a year since I had seen or heard from her.

The last time I spoke to my mom was November 22, 2021. I was avoiding talking to her because I had reached the point in my life where she started texting and calling me more but I was sick of being let down by her time and time again that I would shut her out. Everytime I'd see her text pop up on my phone, I would ignore it. Everytime my phone rang and I saw the name "Mama" I would scoff, answer, and treat it as short as I could without being a jerk. The last time I talked to her was a two minute phone call. A two minute phone call about going to my grandmother's house for New Years. I had so much hostility towards her, but could you really blame me? The woman that gave birthed to me had chosen another man and his kids over me, but I could have never expected that rage-fueled two minute phone call would be the last time I spoke to her.

On January 7, 2022, I woke up to both of my dad and my stepmom standing in the living room, almost as if they had been waiting for me to wake up all morning. My first thought was I'm in trouble again my life is over. With an unexpecting smile on my face, I made eye contact with my dad: "Hey, come sit down. We need to talk to you." My heart was banging on chest as if was trying to break through my ribs, and thousands of thoughts racing to reach my mouth as I sat down face

to face with those freakishly blue eyes that I've never been able to read. In that moment, I felt the most pure feeling of terror vibrate through my body.

"Mom passed away."

Oh my God my grandmother passed away. I felt like I had been hit with a comically large hammer of sadness. Through salty, ugly tears I managed to mumble "No dad that's not right. I was just with her last week and she was fine." I watched every shade of red on his face fall straight into his lap. As if he had seen a ghost and said, "Not *my* mom, *your* mom." I froze and I could've sworn i felt my heart freeze with me. Every ounce of sadness turned into shock. My mom had just died and the only thing I felt was shock. For the rest of that day, I locked myself in my room and didn't speak to anyone because all of a sudden, I- the loudest person in every room- felt like my vocal cords had frozen over.

The entire day of the funeral was suffocating and the drive to her funeral was silent. When I walked through the doors of the home, everyone looked at me the same way the pitiful table dogs look at their owners for scraps. I didn't want their pity, I wanted to see my mom. When I walked up to her casket, my lungs stopped working and all my feelings turned into dust. Jackie was now just another dead body that ends up wasting away until people forget about her. Sometimes I think that karma can be sort of comedic.

On Mother's Day the next year I felt like it was finally time to pay my respects; after all, Jackie was my mom. When I got there, I changed her flowers and sat down. I was silent for a while, but then I started talking. I was telling her about my life and all the stuff she had missed. In that moment, I was overwhelmed with peace and comfort. Visiting her on mother's day, which just so happened to be my birthday too, was my closure.

## Color

KOFI HANDY, 9, PAINT MARKER AND PEN



## Blue Woman

KOFI HANDY, 9, PAINT MARKER AND PEN

## To Who I Once Knew

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ARIEL MORRIS, 12

Hop along.  
We both know you can never  
Make up your mind  
To stay  
And this Lilypad was too small  
For you anyway  
So, bounce



## Thinker Frog

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BRYCE TUCKER, 12, PHOTOGRAPHY

# Taking My Life into My Own Hands

MAJOR CLEM, 10

Music changed my life. Through all adversity, every time that I've been unsure of what to do, or who I'd be, I've always had music. And more than just being there for me, it has taught me lessons that I will never forget, lessons that have helped me become the person I am today, and that continue to pave the road for who I'll be.

On Sunday, May 25th, I went to a concert at the Sunflower Oven, the now defunct bakery in Jackson. The Oven had long been a place of comfort and community to people all throughout the Jackson, and this night was no different. Four bands played that night to a group of people singing callouts and dancing on the sticky floors, dodging around the exposed power outlet sticking out of the ground.

After the three opening bands had come and went, leaving the crowd in awe and with at least two ruptured eardrums, there was one left to play. The group up last was a simple hardcore band from Elizabeth New Jersey named Bayway. To me (and most other people in that room) they seemed like your average band of tough guys, covered in tattoos wearing basketball jerseys and Jordans. Though this was my initial impression of them, I found out that night that Bayway had so much more than I thought they did.

This was far from my first experience going to shows and listening to this sort of music. My dad had exposed me to hardcore from the time I was little, through the sounds of Fugazi and Minor Threat rattling from the car speakers as we drove around. Though I didn't take to it at the time, the thrill of listening to my dad's old favorites had leached onto my mind and would never let go.

When I got older, I would have my time with all kinds of rock and metal alike, but I always felt as if I was impersonating. I explored, finding out what I liked and didn't like, sometimes being a little pretentious about it, but enjoying the process of finding new things. I would pick up guitar in the seventh grade, to the dismay of my family members and neighbors alike, and spent all day trying to play my favorite Metallica songs without exploding the speakers on my amp.

When I wasn't listening to terrible music or starting arguments with others online about bands whose members would never hear of me, I was spending my days at the guitar store up the street. Here is where I had my spark for hardcore.

One day after a lesson while talking to my friend working, he told me about a band in town playing a show at a bar downtown. I had been to concerts once or twice before, but never with bands like this. I thought about it and decided to go, somehow swaying my mom to drive me late on a Thursday night.

Walking into the building, I was presented with about 200 strange looking people that I had never seen before. I looked for my friend, only to find out he couldn't make it that night. I took a seat on a tattered green couch, sinking into its discomfort and pulling the shattered cellphone out of my pocket.

"I like your shirt."

"What? Oh my shirt, thank you! This is my first time coming here" I said.

"Me too!" She said. She said her name was Layne. At that show we shared conversations about music we liked, the bands that were playing, our schools. I found it amazing that I was shown kindness in a place that I had never been before. Despite me being a stranger, I was shown kindness and treated like the best of friends. And so I decided to go to the next show, and the one after that, and all the way through today every show that comes into town.

As I went to more shows, I started to listen to more and more hardcore. Every show that came to town was a new band to listen to. My closet became a never ending void of band shirts, and my desk became a pile of cd's and cassettes. I watched compilations, read articles, and listened to more albums.

The deeper I got into the scene, the more friends I made. Every time I came to a show I felt surrounded by people who all knew my name and who I was, and they accepted me for it. I felt like I was at a second home, and I could turn all the emotions previously sitting into something

positive, something with passion and love.

After a few more shows, I started to hear talk of a subculture within the greater hardcore scene. I investigated this scene of people rebelling not through angst or violence, but through staying drug-free and living their best lives. They called it "straight edge." I thought it was silly at first, why would anyone need to make an identity about not doing drugs? Is that not the bare minimum? Though I thought it was silly, I thought about it more and more as time went on. I began to realize what Straight Edge truly meant, it wasn't just a bunch of people being drug free and that was that, it was people living their life to the fullest, not letting themselves be dragged down by the hands of drug abuse, a story all too familiar to rock stars of the past. Straight Edge was people advocating for what they stood for, making real change, and inspiring the youth to live drug free. This is what began to speak to me.

That brings us back to the show at Sunflower Oven. Three bands had come and went and it was now time for Bayway to take a shot at impressing these Southerners. As they turned their amps up and the singer's mic was flipped on, everyone in that room instantly knew this band was special. Their blend of hip hop, metal, and hardcore was infectious, sparking complete chaos within the audience as they erupted into a barrage of spin kicks and punches.

Midway through Bayway's assault of groove and power, the singer, Jay, stopped the music and called the audience forward towards the non-existent stage (we crammed the bands into the kitchen area to play).

"I want everyone in here to know that I've been nineteen months sober today," said Jay. The crowd exploded into applause, as was the standard reaction for the kind souls I had come to know and love. "I want to let anyone out there struggling with addiction know that you got this. I believe in you, and you got all these people around you that believe in you. What you have here is beautiful, and you should appreciate that." He then joked about how he was known for "getting people in the feels," and we all laughed with him.

After their set was finished and they had finished packing up, I walked up to Jay who was standing, cheerfully giving advice to a friend of mine who was in an opening band. After they were finished, I approached him and asked if he could sign the cassette I had bought. He agreed with a smile.

"I really liked that speech you gave in the middle there," I said, shaking with excitement as he handed back the cassette.

"I'm glad man, I'm glad that kids like you got a place like this to express yourself, and I hope you take that speech to heart," Jay said.

I told him about how I was doing a lot of research into Straight Edge and was considering claiming it for myself.

"That's a big commitment," he said, "but just know that anytime you think about getting messed up, it's not worth it, it never is. I believe in you kid, be good."

Jay didn't know me a single bit. He didn't know what Straight Edge was beginning to mean to me, or even who I was before I found out. He didn't know that he was influencing me to make this commitment not only to myself, but also to my family, my friends, and in the future my children. He didn't know that his words to a stranger would cause them to realize that they needed to claim Straight Edge and focus on becoming the best person they could possibly be, for myself, and for everyone around me.

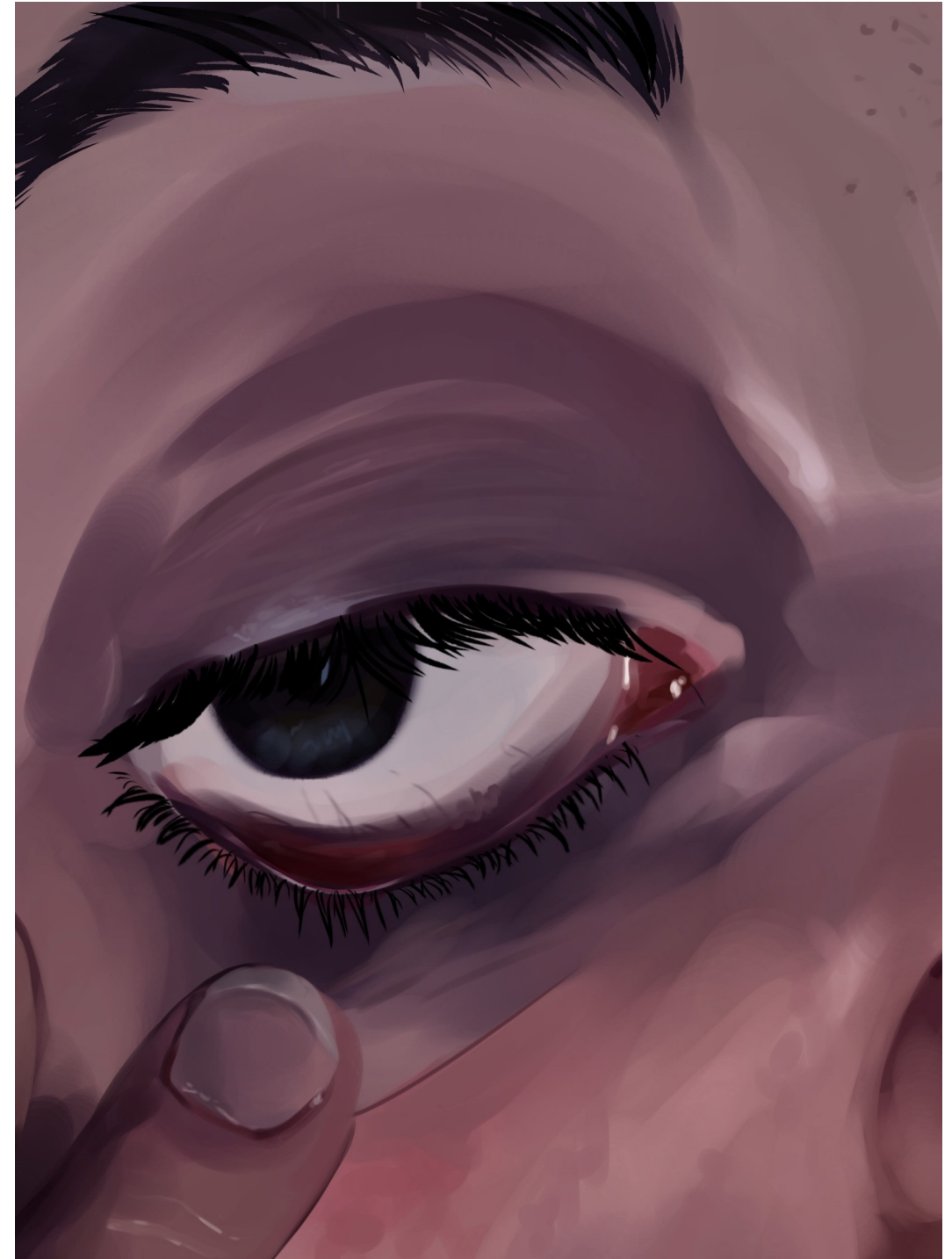
Now many months later, I still hold strong in my commitment to Straight Edge and in my commitment to my beliefs and dreams. Jay's words still pop up in the back of my mind, reminding me of what's important, and the service I was doing to myself. So, through today I thank hardcore, and I thank Straight Edge for teaching me the most valuable lesson I think I could tell anyone. Life is beautiful and I do not want to be numbed.

## **An Old Life**

---

CASS EVERETT, 9

I sit in my chair as I think of what I once had  
When my life wasn't this bad  
I traveled the world with the wind blowing through my hair  
Now I sit at the window and stare  
I sit down and retrace  
When I saw my future husbands face  
We got married and he said I was a great wife  
Now where is he in this new life  
I've counted all the lights and all the tiles  
"Dang I've been here a while"  
In an old life I had many kids who had kids  
They probably don't even know where their grandmother is  
This nursing home feels like a jail  
I remember the days I set sail  
I remember visiting all my friends  
Now that journey ends  
I remember the euphoria of love  
That is now something I've never heard of  
I remember in my youth  
I always told the truth  
Now I sit and lie  
Saying "I don't miss the sky"  
My old life is gone  
This life is my new one  
I will never become adapted  
But at least my old life happened



## **Untitled**

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ORIANA NINNESS 9, DIGITAL ART

# The Muse

ANONYMOUS

I want to be the muse  
Paint me, sculpt me  
Show your love for me in written form

I want to be the muse  
Draw me, write me  
Paint me how you picture me

I want to be your muse  
Love me, fantasize me  
I want to be your winning piece

I want to be your muse  
I want you to see me  
Frame me in your mind  
Paint the small imperfections  
And sculpt my soul

I want to be yours  
Your poem, your painting  
Your favorite art piece

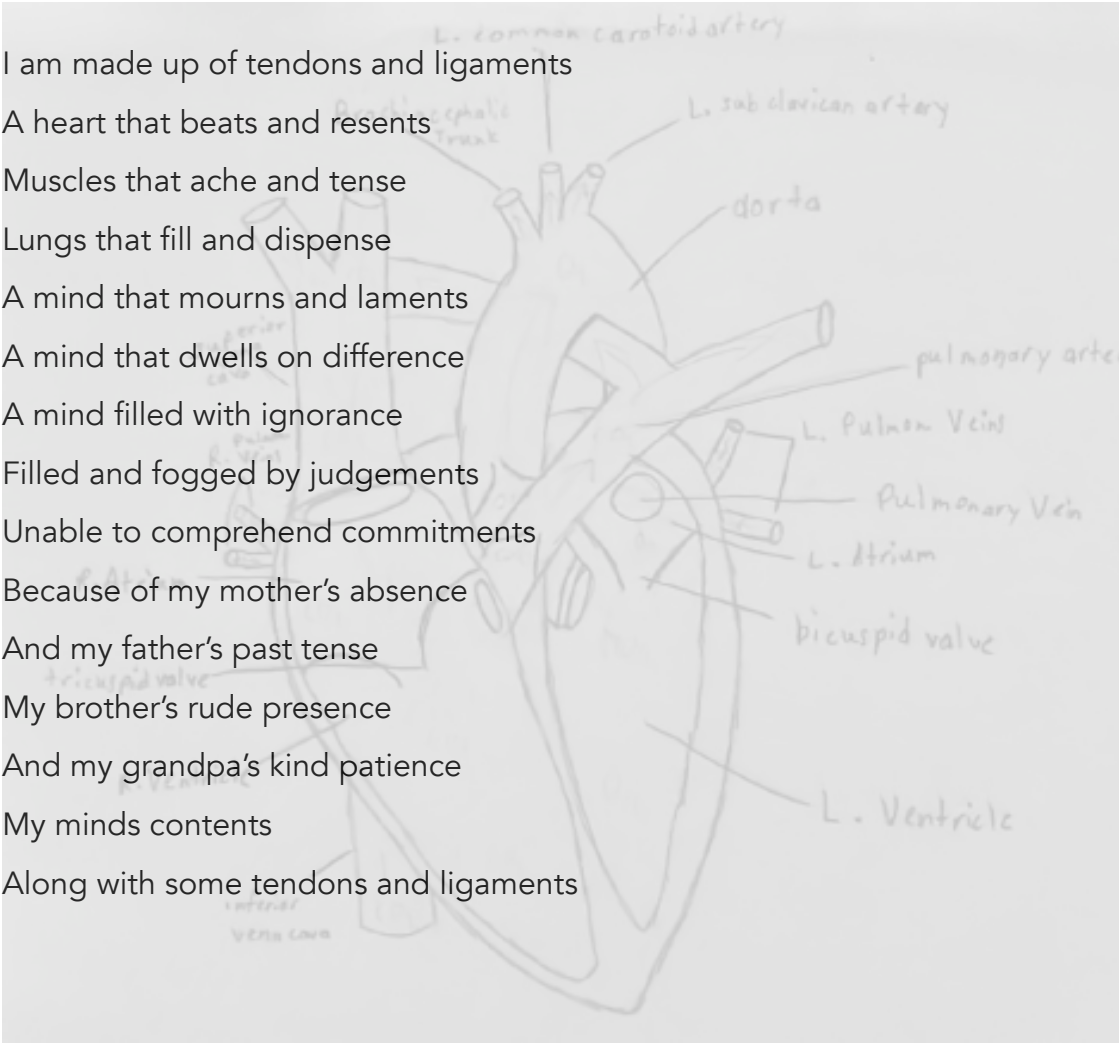


# Untitled

JOSIE MCCORD 10, PENCIL

# Anatomy

ANONYMOUS



I am made up of tendons and ligaments  
A heart that beats and resents  
Muscles that ache and tense  
Lungs that fill and dispense  
A mind that mourns and laments  
A mind that dwells on difference  
A mind filled with ignorance  
Filled and fogged by judgements  
Unable to comprehend commitments  
Because of my mother's absence  
And my father's past tense  
My brother's rude presence  
And my grandpa's kind patience  
My minds contents  
Along with some tendons and ligaments

## Heart

MEREDITH BELL, 11, PENCIL

# There are People Who Live in My Brain,

ANONYMOUS

They sit at the kitchen table every night,  
Theres a lady who sits at the head of the table,  
She's always late and sometimes doesn't show up,  
But when she's there she must sit at the head of the table,  
When she's there she holds my hand,  
When she's there the doors are closed and the room is warm,  
When she's there you know she's important,  
But when she's not there,  
The windows are open and the cold rain hits my face,  
Her absence is felt,  
I feel abandoned sitting in this wooden chair,  
At this dinner table with no food,  
I want to listen to you talk.

## Music was My First True Love

MAHLON DAY, 12

Music  
was my  
first true  
Love,  
The  
Beat  
I feel  
inside.  
It lifts  
me up  
when  
I am  
low

And shows me places I  
can go. I'm Grateful for each  
Single note and chords that set  
me free, for songs that speak  
The words I can't and each  
New harmony. It whispers  
Like a river's song, like waves  
That once crashed down.  
In every chord a world was  
Born, where lonely hearts  
Are found. It lingers in the air at  
Night and makes my  
heart resound.

## There are People Who Live in My Brain,

ANONYMOUS

They sit at the kitchen table every night,  
They talk about what it was like to love me,  
One of them never talks,  
Unless the air is the perfect kind of cold,  
Unless the music is turned up loud enough,  
Unless someone brings up our favorite band,  
Unless there is cotton candy ice cream,  
Unless someone mentions my freckles,  
When he talks everyone sits and listens,  
They all sit quietly after he's done talking,  
Wanting to keep him in the front of the mind,  
Wanting to hear his stories forever,  
Wanting them to not just be stories,  
Sometimes I listen to you talk.

## There are People Who Live in My Brain,

ANONYMOUS

They sit at the kitchen table every night,  
They talk about what it was like to love me,  
My favorite one to listen to is the one in the rocking chair,  
He talks as if I am the sunshine,  
His voice old and calm,  
The squeak of his chair, familiar?  
He tells them about how I am going to conquer the world,  
He tells them about my dimples and the lovey i can't sleep without,  
He talks about me like I'm still the untouched girl he knew,  
Sometimes i listen to him talk and pretend its true,  
Sometimes I listen to you talk.



## On the Go

MARY ROBERTSON, 12, ACRYLIC

# I Wish, What If

ASH HARPER, 10

I wish I could read people's minds, but what if I hear something I didn't want to know, and I can't stop hearing people's thoughts. I wish I was immortal, but what if I lose everyone I care about and I'm all alone forever. I wish I could perform miracles, but what if I get exploited for that or labeled as a threat for being unexplainable.

I wish the world was perfect, but that can never exist because a perfect world has no conflict but that would also mean no free will, you can't voice your own opinion if it differs from someone else's, you must be the same, you can't be your true self. I wish I understood, but what if understanding is worse.

I wish I could be normal, but what if that makes me weird to other people. I wish I was a billionaire, but what if people judge me for it and think things about me that aren't true. I wish I knew everything, but what if I become annoying for correcting everyone all the time, or I can't feel the feeling of wondering something and coming up with the most ridiculous ideas that make me laugh.

You see, for every "I wish" there's a "What if". Everything has consequences, whether we get it or someone else does. For every right there's a wrong, you can't have light without the dark. Most people make wishes without thinking how it will affect you, or people around you, or even a random stranger in the long run. No wish or what if is ever perfect and we know that, but we choose to ignore the dark side because what we wish for is what we want and being greedy is human and that's fine but accepting the consequences for your actions is also human.

Sure, we might not want to be human a lot, sometimes we want to be unicorns, or dragons, or even trolls sometimes just because it's funny, but that won't make the problems go away, it will only make the problems change and evolve. You see, any wish you make, whether it's with good intentions or not, has affects you either don't think of or ignore, so you need to think it through, think of both the good and bad things. The next time you have a wish bone, see a shooting star, throw a coin in a wishing well, or anything else, think about the wish your about to make and think about the negative effect it could have on you or the people around you first.



## Even the Stars Pass

BAILEY DENSON, 9, DIGITAL ART

# The Raven

ISABELLA JONES & PARKER HILL

Lacie awoke in a cold sweat, staring around the dark room. The air was stagnant, and she seemed panicked. Her dreams were becoming vivid, first it was crashing, now she kept seeing animals. At first, she saw a dog, a German Shepard, it would approach her as a friend but as soon as she reached out for it, it attacked. Now it was a raven.

Lacie reached for the lamp beside her, it making a faint clicking noise, before turning on after a prolonged moment. The bedroom was empty besides the warm glow from the lamp and the bed she was laying in. She looked over to the window across the room and a bird landed. The raven from her dream, she gasped, throwing the blanket off of herself, before running over to the windowsill. Most would have assumed it would fly away, but it didn't. It stared right at Lacie, its eyes beady and black. It looked as if it was trying to tell her something.

The raven briskly flew off due to a sound coming from the living room, which was weird as it wasn't startled by her running straight at it, but she ignored it. It was just a bird after all, the main door to her humble abode was there. It was knocking, Lacie turned her head quickly, trying to figure out whether the sound was a false alarm or not. It wasn't. Because it kept knocking, and knocking, and knocking. Lacie travelled from the windowsill, across her bedroom, and to the door. A slow creak emerged from said door as she opened it, she cautiously looked out to see someone looking through. It was Hannah, her best friend.

She laughed, holding her head in her hands for a moment, her imagination had gotten to her. Hannah was harmless. She walked across her living room, admiring her newly acquired sofa, which was a sage green felt with pink throw pillows, before opening the door for her uninvited guest.

"Hi Hannah." Lacie remarked, looking around, it was still dark. "What's going on?"

Hannah looked pale, her face was in shock. She was silently

gathering her words, glancing around quickly. It had been as if she saw a ghost.

It took a moment before she finally spoke, "I did something." Her mouth was dry, her words were crisp, and they stayed in the air before falling to reality.

Lacie glanced at Hannah, realizing it was serious. "Come in," she remarked, almost frightened by the situation, having no idea what was going on. They both walked into her house, and to the dining table. It was made of walnut; her father had given it to her when she moved out.

"Tell me exactly what you did." Lacie said, her voice was stern and cold, she was serious when it came to wrong-doings, and this one seemed serious.

"I- I was with Francis, Francis Evermore, you know him. Right?" She was silent for a moment, as if waiting for a response, but went on when Lacie didn't reply. "We were at my apartment, and I made him some Tuna casserole," she smiled a for a moment, "his favorite." Then her smile disappeared, replaced with the earlier frightened expression. "I put it into the oven and walked away for a moment to use the restroom. I came back and Francis was dead! On the ground! He had burns everywhere and the tuna casserole was exploded in the oven!" She became hysterical, sobbing and laughing at the same time, it all happened so quickly, the emotions poured out of her like rain during a storm.

"How did you not hear him? That must've made some noise, Hannah." Lacie seemed confused as to how Hannah could miss a casserole exploding in the oven and in the process killing someone. She also had trouble believing a casserole killed someone, burn scars? Yes. Death? Not usually. She kept her calm demeanor, trying not to worsen Hannah's emotions.

"I don't know! It was completely silent Lacie! Like a horror film." She shuddered, "I don't know how any of it happened." She began to weep.

"Did you call the police?" Lacie tilted her head.

There was silence, the silence was prolonging, sending a chill up both their spines. Hannah didn't have to reply. Lacie knew what happened,

and she was going to figure out how this happened. Her friend possibly killed someone and blamed an oven explosion for it.

"Call them. Now, were heading to your apartment." Lacie stared at Hannah, who got up from the table and onto the landline, calling the police. After the police were informed of the situation, the two headed past the sage couch with pink pillows, and out the door.

Once they arrived at the apartment building, they immediately felt uneasy. It was as if someone was watching them. Every few minutes they would look behind them, but nobody was there except a lone crow that seemed to be following them. When they finally called the elevator, they took it to the sixth floor. The elevator clicked open, and the two stepped into the eerie hallway, it was silent. Lacie strode down the hallway; Hannah trailed after like a lost puppy.

Hannah then stepped in front of Lacie, unlocking her apartment door, the keys jingled, and it rang throughout the hallway. Lacie pushed the door open, it slowly slid until a sliver of light escaped from the room, it was otherwise dark. The air felt musty as Lacie and Hannah entered the apartment and flipped the main switch, light now filling the room rather than the lamp giving it a soft glow. The kitchen was cleaned, the entire apartment was, except for Hannah's slippers at the bathroom door across the room, showing that she had been there.

"Hannah, where's Francis?" Lacie turned to meet her gaze, now more concerned than ever before.

Her face went pale, "He was right there!" She ran around the room frantically pointing at things, "and the oven- the oven's glass was broken! My casserole was on the floor." She was manic, hysteric even as she described the bloody scene, and its small details.

"Hannah. No one could've cleaned this up, are you sure it wasn't a dream...?" Lacie placed a hand on Hannah, and she screamed, startled by her frigid touch.

The police cars could be heard from down below, and suddenly there was aggressive knocking behind them.

"Police! Open up!"

The two girls froze; there was no crime scene. The only crime committed tonight was calling the police without a real emergency. There was profuse knocking, before there was slamming at the door, it eventually broke in, and four officers barged through. They all stood there, looking to see a completely clean apartment with Lacie and Hannah standing there looking terrified.

"Did we get the wrong apartment...?" One of the officers asked, now mortified by the situation. Lacie thought he looked familiar, blinking as she saw him, before focusing on the new speaker in the room.

"No, this is the correct address." Another said to the worrisome guy, now looking to the two, "Why did you call us about a brutal murder, when there is nothing here?"

Hannah immediately began spitting out lies before the officer, her demeanor completely changing from before, "What? We didn't call anyone! It must be those pesky girls on the floor above us, they always try to get me in trouble! I am so sorry officers, this will never happen again, I will inform their mothers of their wrong doings." She bowed her head many times, Lacie stared at Hannah in disbelief. How can a girl who could barely even speak two minutes before, now lie in front of the police? Lacie looked out the window as Hannah continued to make up lies, a raven stood before her. It stared into the apartment window, before it began pecking. Everything around Lacie went silent, all she could hear was the pecking of the bird getting louder and louder, it was a pattern. The raven was pecking in morse code, Lacie couldn't understand. How can a bird understand morse code? Probably just a coincidence. Dit-dit-dah-dit. She shakes her head; she must be going crazy. The room is now filled with chaos and noise once more; she turns her head to see Hannah and the officers still talking. How long had it been? Her eyes travel from the group to a clock on the wall, it had been less than a minute. No wonder they were still talking. Once she registers their words, she realizes the interaction was over.

"Thank you for your time, Miss, please tell the girls upstairs that if they call the police again, they will get into more serious trouble." One of the four officers nods his head to Hannah, "and were sorry for your door,

send the police station the bill and we will pay to get it fixed." He now turned away from the two, bringing the other three officers out trailing along behind him as they travel down the hallway and into the elevator. "Hannah, what was that...?" Lacie looked over, now astonished by her acting skills. Were they always this good and she just never noticed? How is she able to lie so easily? Why would she know how to? Has she lied like this before? Questions continued to enter Lacie's mind as she tried to make sense of the situation.

"It's nothing, Lacie. I think you should go home." Hannah said this in a sinister tone, her expression darkened as she spoke. She was clearly not going to answer any questions, and Lacie decided she was going to figure it out herself. There was a long silent pause as the two stared at each other. The situation was just getting worse and worse.

"I'm going home, but Hannah, so help me if you do anything like this again, I'm not going to stand there and watch. I will tell the police. We might be best friends, but I won't lie to the police for you!" Lacie shouted at Hannah, her voice getting louder as she continued, her eyebrows furrowing as she explained her frustration.

"You won't have to lie." Hannah responded, the girl she was earlier was completely gone. Overtaken by some sort of monster within herself. Lacie knew she had mood swings, but it never got to this level, nor seriousness. It was infuriating to know that she could do something so horrible and lie herself out of it so easily. Lacie didn't even know if she could trust her best friend ever again, what else had she lied about?

Lacie opened her mouth to speak, before shutting it quickly, nothing she said would make the situation any better, and after this she knew not to bother Hannah. She spun on her heels, swiftly striding out the door and down the hallway. The elevator clicked open, a noise she was greeted with, and quite enjoyed. As it meant she was leaving this horrid place. She took a step into the elevator, pressing a button, now waiting for it to move. Why had Hannah lied about such a horrible thing happening? Francis was a great guy, Hannah and he were like best friends, which is unlikely among families. Why would Hannah imagine killing her cousin...? Maybe Lacie was just imagining it. Hannah was her best friend. They had known each other for years, she would know if Hannah was a sociopath, right?

But then again, she didn't actually know much about her. Hannah was a quiet girl and didn't show much of her personality and mostly just listened to Lacie talk. There was a definite possibility that Hannah had a side Lacie hadn't seen before.

By the time Lacie made it home, she felt like a different person. Thinking of one of her best friends as a murderer, a psychopath, a sociopath- whatever other synonyms for crazy there were! As she unlocked her door, she smelled a foul odor. Something like rotting meat mixed with smoke.

She rushed through the door, only there was nothing wrong. She sighed in relief and dropped her keys by the door then entered her living room, but it was there where she saw it.

There, sitting in an upright position, as if he was watching the television, was the body of Francis Evermore.

Lacie couldn't do anything but scream. She fell backwards and onto the ground. She felt the wall behind her and tried to reach up for the phone that hung there, but she couldn't reach it from where she was huddled. Lacie began sobbing. She had a dead body on her couch- her brand new, pretty couch- wait, not the time to think about that, Lacie! She sat there huddled for a few moments, just staring. Then, as if snapped out of a trance, she stood up and dialed 911. The entire time, she kept her eyes on the body. This time, it wouldn't disappear. After a few minutes, there was a knock at her door. Lacie kept an eye on the body as she answered. It wasn't the police, like she had expected. It was a man, his shadow lurking outside her empty porch. "Hello, Lacie," the man said, "My name is Matteo Flintlock. I just moved in next door, and I heard a commotion, is everything alright?" He seemed genuinely concerned, a perfect, steady person to keep her on the right track.

Lacie stood and gaped for a second, then tried her best to smile. "Oh, um..." Lacie contemplated whether to tell him about the body or not, then quickly decided he seemed trustworthy. "Okay, Matteo, if I'm being honest here, I have a dead body on my couch and I have no idea how it got there. I called the police a few minutes ago but I feel unsafe and weirdly I trust you?" She didn't know why she so easily trusted him; it was just his vibe one would say. It's not like he looked harmless, he was

tall, and his resting face was terrifying, but he was familiar looking, as if she had seen him before. She brushed it off, he just had one of those faces.

Despite having just heard that his neighbor had a dead body on her couch, Matteo just nodded like he understood. Lacie motioned for him to go inside, and he entered silently. The lights on the porch were slowly covered as she closed the shutters, just in case, before turning to meet Matteo's gaze.

For a second, they both stood awkwardly in the foyer, staring at each other. Then, a bird cawed outside, and they finally moved to the living room. Suddenly, the body fell over, making a harsh splat! Noise as the body riddled with rigor crashed on the coffee table.

Lacie practically jumped into Matteo's arms when she heard the noise, then sheepishly rushed out of his arms and felt a chill run down her spine. She realized he was cold to the touch, and his skin was far more like rubber than Cells. In an instant, she no longer felt safe with him in her house.

But it was too late, he was here, looking at the body with her. Lacie excused herself for a moment, mumbling something about needing to make a call, but when Matteo followed her into the kitchen, she panicked. She turned on him and tried to politely tell him to wait in the living room, but before she could say a thing, she felt a sharp pain in her chest. She looked down, her vision suddenly blurred and saw the knife.

"It was you?" she asked, as if she didn't already know, blood rushed out of her mouth as she tried to speak again, choking up on it. It was him. She tried to breathe, but every shaky, small inhale was met with the sharp metallic taste of blood. She held where she was stabbed, as if touching it would make it disappear just as everything else had. The knife was freezing to the touch, or maybe that was just her. Slowly dying.

Matteo Flintlock had committed the murder of Francis Evermore, and now he had murdered Lacie Darwin as well, but nobody was there to catch him. Nobody was there to punish him for his crimes. No one would ever know how this happened. Matteo knew this, so did Lacie. Matteo turned from the brutal scene, walking towards the door. He

reached his hand out the doorknob and looked up, the raven landed on the porch. He paused, before opening the door, the all too familiar creak sounded as he closed the door back, stepping onto the old, rusty porch that Lacie had never gotten to fix up. The raven stood before him, he stared at its beady eyes, as if they were trying to communicate. Silence. Little did Lacie know that when he walked into her home, it wasn't the first time she had seen him. What about that officer asking if they had made it to the wrong apartment? The one that cleaned up the crime scene waiting for the two to arrive? He was always there, he knew Lacie Darwin, he knew Hannah Birmingham. Everything he did was for the time he was an outcast. When the two girls bullied him for just existing, being someone who wasn't in sports, someone who never made the grades he wanted. He never wanted this; it was just something that had to have been done. If he didn't do it, how would they know how much they hurt him...?

# The Pressure of Breathing

JAMES LING, 11

## The Weight of Winter

Is life really life without death?  
Death is the end of our life  
As our lives end with one last frosted breath.  
Death will feel all our strife.

If life falters in its course,  
And death fulfills its waiting role,  
We shall weep in sorrow's song,  
Our souls lost amid the snow and hearts pay the toll.

Life made me smile.  
Why did the gods declare us to die?  
Maybe our ancestors were too juvenile.  
All they did was defy.

The gods made us to die young  
Before we were truly alive  
And that weeping song being sung  
And for our short lives, we failed to thrive

## The Silence Between

A storm of frost and ash  
Where sorrowful echoes crash.  
The gods gave no reply  
While we still try to live before we die.

## A Breath of Spring

Though when you see cracks throughout death's embrace  
Life shall be there, showing their face.  
The cold force death brings  
Can only be prevented by what life sings.

Showers and springs of flowers and trees  
Death forcing us to get on our knees.  
Life speaks, and we listen  
Death yells to make us blind to all that's given.

Fire and Freedom, Death and Life  
Flowers and stalagmites.  
Death shows us life can be torn,  
While life shows us to appreciate the thorns.

Life cracks, while death breaks.  
A little time is all it takes.  
But once the vase is crushed,  
Nothing can bring back the life  
we rushed.

## Overgrowth of Chrysanthemums

CORI EVANS, 10, DIGITAL ART

