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# The Phoenix

is the art and literary magazine of  
Manhasset Secondary School  
200 Memorial Place  
Manhasset, NY 11030  
516-267-7600



Submissions—both art and writing—are accepted throughout the year from students in 7th-12th grades. Submissions can be uploaded to *The Phoenix's* Canvas page.

*The Phoenix* believes human voices matter, and as a result, does not accept submissions made fully or partially by AI.

A special thanks to Jana Taha for the doodles. *The Phoenix* appreciates your hard work and dedication.

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# Thank You to the Manhasset Staff

*The Phoenix* would like to thank the teachers and administrators who have supported our efforts and helped to foster the creative spirit of Manhasset Secondary School.

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# Editor's Note - Yansiyu (Remy) Huang

Matshona Dhilwayo once said, "It is a bird's imagination, not its wings, that determines how high it can fly." I think about that line every time I stare at a blank page. Perhaps imagination is what lifts the pen, not the hand that holds it. And maybe that's why I kept coming back to *The Phoenix*, year after year— why all of us attend *Phoenix*— not because we already had something polished to say, but because we wanted to see how high we could soar.

I'll assume that everyone knows the tragic story of Icarus falling from the sky. It implies the consequences that come with reckless ambition and warns against human hubris, suggesting that it is safer to stay on the ground. However, when I read "Rewriting Icarus" by Fiona, it caught me off guard. I just expected yet another retelling, but I was pleasantly surprised to find it offered a new take— that sometimes the goal isn't just to survive the flight, but to choose it in the first place. There's some merit to that, given Icarus laughed as he fell because he knew that falling meant he had once soared.

I've felt that kind of fall. I've also felt the laughter. For a long time, I've been too scared to jump, because I've always think, "what if I fall?" I know now, though, that the fall is as much a part of it as the flight is. Failure should never be feared. So I applaud every person who's been brave enough to share something they don't think is perfect, and that's the beautiful thing about *Phoenix*.

This year was far from perfect, in my opinion. Though we've had our ups and downs— with our first writers workshop of the year, the second one we eventually held, including this year's candy cane sale— this year turned out to be a great success. There is no better reason for it than our growth as a team. I want *Phoenix* to be a second home for those that attend, have attended, and will attend, just like it has been for me all these years. I want that the same warmth to empower other people to work their creative minds. It's okay not to have a final goal in mind, as long as you are still moving toward it. This applies to one's creative works and to life. The whole point is that it doesn't need to be perfect.

Of course, no bird flies alone. *The Phoenix* wouldn't be the same without the teachers who keep us in the air. Mr. Novak and Mrs. Pelfrey-Kennedy are the core of this publication. This is more than a magazine. The Phoenix is a family. As I close off my letter, I want to remind all future *Phoenix* members to never hesitate to leap forward. You might fall. But you could also laugh. For falling only happens when you have the guts to try.

Remy Huang  
Editor In Chief 2024-2025

# The Karie Sit Art and Writing Contest



Karie Sit was a beloved member of Manhasset High School and was part of the class of 2015. *The Phoenix* was her favorite club, where she enjoyed expressing herself through creative writing. Her compassion and creativity continues to inspire others. Karie's last piece was a touching requiem that was the basis for the 2016 edition of this magazine.

After her passing, the Karie Sit Award was created in order to encourage other writers and artists to see the same beauty in self-expression that she did. *The Phoenix* is incredibly grateful for the Sit Family's continued support for this contest, and will continue to honor her memory through promoting creativity in art and writing at Manhasset.

Every year, the staff of *The Phoenix* chooses a theme for the contest. One writer and one artist in the high school and middle school categories are selected as winners. This year's choice was "What Paradise Looks Like." We are honored to announce Alvina Zheng and Yue Gao as the winning high school and middle school artists, whose works are on the front and back covers, respectively, and Sofia Ogulluk as the winning high school writer. The winning middle school writer has asked to remain anonymous.

IN MEMORY OF



# KARIE SIT

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TEN YEARS MAY HAVE PASSED, BUT KARIE SIT REMAINS A GUIDING STAR IN THE HEART OF PHOENIX MAGAZINE AND ALL WHO KNEW HER. THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE PHOENIX.

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IN HONOR OF KARIE SIT, THIS YEAR WE HAVE DONATED **\$500** TO TEEN CANCER AMERICA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



# Karie Sit MS Writing Winner

## The Other Side

\*

### *part i*

Florian Kieljs was encircled now, trapped, being pushed further and further back towards the gaping, arched window. There was nowhere he could go now, yet he was strangely unafraid of Death now. He was no longer panicking as they locked eyes, he was no longer angry as they crossed paths, he was no longer sad as they approached each other. He felt devoid of emotion, save for a lingering sense of calmness and relief that a weight had been lifted off his chest.

The Nazis were getting closer and closer, their sadistic eyes gleaming with utmost satisfaction at having captured the figurehead of the uprising, their rifles raised as one, as if threatening Florian to run from the inevitable. But Florian was not looking at them; he was gaping at the figure pushing his way through the soldiers' ranks. It was a lean young man with dark blond hair and electric blue eyes, carrying the red-and-white flag that they had fought so proudly for together, resembling Florian so much that they might well have been biological brothers. It was the last person Florian thought he would see.

The officer looked flustered for a moment, then let out a scornful laugh. "How innocent must you be, Zaślak, to believe that I might let your little friend go? You are worth nothing to me!"

"As you wish," Olaf returned, his tone polite and even despite the circumstance, still holding on tightly to the flag. His gaze caught Florian's, and this time, he smiled sadly, walking over to stand beside his captain, and handing Florian the flag.

"Thank you, brother," he told Olaf quietly. Somewhere in the background, he heard a faint command to fire. "Long live the Republic!" he cried, allowing Olaf to echo the sentiment.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that his best friend had fallen; Olaf lay lifeless beside him, sprawled out on the floor. Yet Florian had no time to mourn; he felt himself tumbling backwards, out the window, then the world around him started to slip from his view, and images became muddled -- for a moment he was back in that terrible schoolyard in Berlin, then he was at the familiar café where the uprising had been born -- until they had disappeared altogether. Florian heard voices in the distance, singing the songs of the revolution that had filled his heart for so long, and they became louder and louder as the seconds ticked on, although he felt weirdly timeless. A shining city

came into view, too stunning to describe, becoming clearer and clearer as the voices rose. He finally saw all those who had departed from his life: His brave brother August...Olaf...who had fallen at the barricade before him...a beautiful woman he was sure had to be his mother...the boy that had stood up for him back in Berlin all those years ago...They were all here, brandishing the flag of Poland, a beautiful reminder that the fight for freedom would continue even beyond the barricade. Here, finally, was the world he had bled for, the world that he had died for, and it was beyond wonderful.

Florian passed through the breathtaking golden gates and entered into the great city, joining the eternal crusade of the saints of heaven, vowing to fight for freedom once more in this life that was to come.

### *part ii*

Łukasz Krajewski felt his heart drop as he saw the commander he had looked up to falling out of the window above him lifelessly. Łukasz had always considered Florian to be immortal, to be some conqueror sent to rescue Poland, but now he saw how truly mortal his friend and hero had been. Blood stained Florian's usually spotless makeshift uniform and the white half of the Polish flag, tainting its purity. The flag was hung upside down, but Florian still held onto it with everything he had, as if it was his lifeline.

Łukasz could sense that someone was following him through the forest before he even turned around. Sure enough, as he risked a glance backwards, the towering figure of Florian's father - Inspector Kieljs, the coldhearted leader of the Gestapo in Warsaw - was behind him, rifle raised, preparing to shoot. Łukasz whirled around, prepared to meet his fate like Florian had. However, to his shock, Inspector Kieljs had stopped dead in his tracks, and he was gazing at the body of his departed son in stunned silence, transfixed with a mixture of shock, regret, and pain.

After an eternity, Inspector Kieljs turned to face him, but he seemed hesitant to avert his eyes away from Florian. Łukasz knew that he should run, that this was his only chance to live, but his feet were glued to the ground as well, and he felt powerless. Behind both of them, more Nazis were coming through the woods, no doubt here to assist Kieljs in ensuring Łukasz shared Florian's fate.

"Go," said a deep voice in thickly-accented Polish. It took Łukasz a moment to realize that Kieljs was speaking to him. "I'll hold them off." The Inspector turned around to face the soldiers charging through the trees, pulling the trigger on his rifle as he did so.

Bemused by this sudden show of emotion and the fact that the stonehearted Gestapo commandant had just shot at his own comrades, Łukasz ran in the opposite direction, and he did not fully comprehend what had happened until he

looked back to see the Vistula River run red with the blood of a man who had chosen redemption in the last second of his life.

### *part iii*

There was a slight *whoosh* as a gust of wind grazed the café's once-occupied tables, causing the sole candle that was still burning to flicker and die at last. With it the dreams of a new world disappeared, with it the last spark of the revolution faded for good, with it the anthems and the sacrifices of the Home Army were forgotten.

As the candle's light was extinguished at last, Łukasz felt a part of him die too, for the hopelessness he felt was too real, too tangible, and he could no longer refuse to believe it. He sat at the café for hours, silently bargaining with the universe; beside him, the empty chairs were creaking ghostily, even though he was alone. The only other thing he could hear was the pouring rain hitting the ground outside with a *tink*.

If he concentrated hard enough, he could even envision Florian standing by the table in the corner, passion flowing out of him as he spoke words of inspiration into the hearts and minds of the Polish people. He could hear the clink of a wine glass - that of the amusing, upbeat Piskor - and the quiet humming of Zaślak, Florian's contemplative, humble lieutenant. He could feel the warm fur of the popular bartender Struzik's cat against his leg, could sense the opening of the door to the secret cellar of the tavern where they all gathered day after day, could taste the delicious meals that were being prepared in the kitchen upstairs.

Łukasz waited and waited, but Florian did not stand up and address the brave freedom fighters.

Piskor did not toast the revolution.

Zaślak did not hum his sweet, strange song.

Struzik's cat did not come to the table to greet him.

The cellar door did not swing open to admit another revolutionary.

The chef did not come carrying heaping plates of freshly-prepared food.

The world did not change, for a long time.

### *part iv*

Łukasz allowed his apartment to be warmed by a combination of the bright sunlight outside and the candle he had lit, which looked as strong and unwavering as ever. The very sight of the white-and-red flag flying outside atop the colorful buildings was enough to make him smile, because he knew all too well the price of freedom.

It had been years since he had dared to allow himself to think of the terrible

\*events that had happened on the twenty-eighth of September, 1939. The seasons had shifted and shifted and he had forgotten to live, too occupied with being afraid to die. But now the memories came flooding in like the daylight, and he accepted them gladly as he gazed out at Warsaw, which was painted beautiful once again. Łukasz was surprised at how easily he remembered everything that had happened.

He watched the trains at Stawki Station go by, and remembered what had happened to Florian's younger brother, his best friend August, who had spent three of the seventeen short years he had lived as Auschwitz prisoner 24601. But today the trains would not take the *untermenschen* to their final destination, where the only way out was the chimney, as they claimed. Today the people of Poland went freely wherever they wished.

He stared at the Vistula, its water clear and blue again, and Łukasz remembered his final, bittersweet encounter with the Gestapo commandant he had been bent on despising so much. He was filled with regret that Florian would never know of his father's final act, but assured himself that they might perhaps cross paths again on the other side.

Łukasz was the last of the revolutionaries, the sole survivor out of the barricade boys that could keep the memories of the failed uprising alive. He dwelt on this thought as he returned to the café, and it brought him comfort as he sat down at the same old table in the corner. "Long live the Republic," he murmured. As Łukasz Krajewski closed his eyes for the last time, somewhere in the distance, he caught a glimpse of the great barricade of Piwna Street.

# Karie Sit HS Writing Winner

## Descendants of Hope

Sofia Ogulluk

*i. father*

The pink stones cry  
as I leave them behind.  
I've found an oasis  
of opportunity.

So, I feel no remorse,  
kiss goodbye my horse,  
as I step forward and  
embark on this journey.

Paradise ahead,  
green hand in hand.  
I want to taste  
what the wealthy know.

Paradise in air  
seeping in dark hair.  
For, generational suffering  
there will be no.

Beside me, my eldest  
brown eyes wide.  
I yearn to capture the moment;  
the essence of innocence

I touch my eyebags  
dark and incessant.  
I look at his face  
filled with hope and adolescence.

Destiny ahead,  
tears will be shed,

but my pain will paralyze  
once *he* reaches paradise,  
and all will be worthwhile, in the end.

*ii. son*

I keep my chin up, no shame  
will erode my rigid brain  
as hands of hatred  
turn my way.

No, I keep my eyes down,  
my children beholding my gaze.  
They are eating an apricot, squinting  
at the bittersweet taste.

I used to laugh at strange foreign ways  
with other children mid-day.  
Yet, now I stare at the papercuts  
adorning my hands.

I finally look up  
and am met with disgust.  
Evil eyes cannot protect  
the monumental shame.

Yet, in the other way  
my people remain;  
a constant reminder of  
why I must resist the pain.

Pen in my hand, I continue to write  
I'll never admit this to public eye,  
but late at night, I hear my father's voice

and dream of what paradise looks like.

*iii. child*

a gold framed portrait, grasped in my arms  
walking down a crimson colored crime scene  
i do my best to avoid the camera lenses  
a constant reminder of  
absence

the words you wrote  
harnessed as weapons  
unintentional, provocative  
all the same to them

mother only weeps  
as we walk down the street  
i keep my eyes down  
refusing to repeat your failures

you once told me  
of your wildest dreams  
in which you'd create  
a perfect reality

you, with your prose  
would silence the foes  
make peace with the world  
and bring the pink stones light

yet, now we pass  
the unmistakable darkness  
that forever haunts this street  
and i can't help but wonder  
is paradise only achieved in dreams?



# If Only It Wasn't A Wish

Julia Weston



# Dreamer

Emma Chu

The girl wished for a break.  
Every morning, she was interrupted by the  
BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.  
Still asleep, she lifted herself out of bed  
Splashed her face with water and soap  
And dragged herself to school  
Feet trudging against the sidewalk  
42 minutes  
Sitting through each class  
Every day she was assigned  
To the vigorous task  
Of writing essays  
With the words that never seem to fit  
Of recalling dates  
That she could never memorize  
Of calculating equations  
Where numbers would fly past her head  
After  
She was expected  
To go home and labor  
Every afternoon,  
Doing homework  
Till the sun went down  
Every night, she dreamt  
Sandy beaches,  
Calm waves,  
Golden sunsets stretching across the horizon.  
A feeling of acceptance and serene  
A place that she could take a deep breath  
And let go  
When she was finally able to kick up her feet and rest...  
Paradise.

# Cherries

Lili Tobar



*Linger*  
Caley Chen

*Linger*

like wisteria—  
poisonous and lined with white picket fences

soft around the edges  
a breath, a half step forward

the wind curls  
around  
me

and from the dew that clings to the branches  
weeping early in the morning  
soft, reluctant

like sinew  
tethering muscle to bone

yearning—

# Chaos Within Serenity

Jocelyn Liu



# Diamonds

Mia Chen

People don't love diamonds, They like what diamonds can do for them  
The power, status, the proof they can own an object so beautiful, so sharp, so  
flawless

No one cares what it went through, how it was cut, how it was meticulously  
polished

It's all hidden under the guise of perfection

It becomes proof of it's worth but worth is a lie

It's something the world fabricates by stealing what's yours

The world doesn't applaud dedication and time spent

But rather exploits it, devoured it, as if it was theirs all along

And even then, the beauty isn't cherished

It's consumed, admired from a distance

Bided because of its beauty, possesses because they can

A diamond does not belong to themselves

It belongs to anyone who demands for its presence, its beauty, its gleam

But still, a diamond doesn't stop shining

Still in the pitched darkness, it reflects even the tiniest sliver of light

It craves for every fleeting moment of attention, affection that it knows is never  
real

Not because it wants to, but rather because it's all that they've ever known

It doesn't matter through what means, or how their goal is achieved

No matter how tired, how cracked, how dull it becomes

It's polished, it's shiny, it's gleaming, as if it's instinctual

They say they praise a diamonds beauty

But really, they're praising its silence, its resilience, the power it gives them to  
judge

They never ask how long, how hard, nor how painful the process was

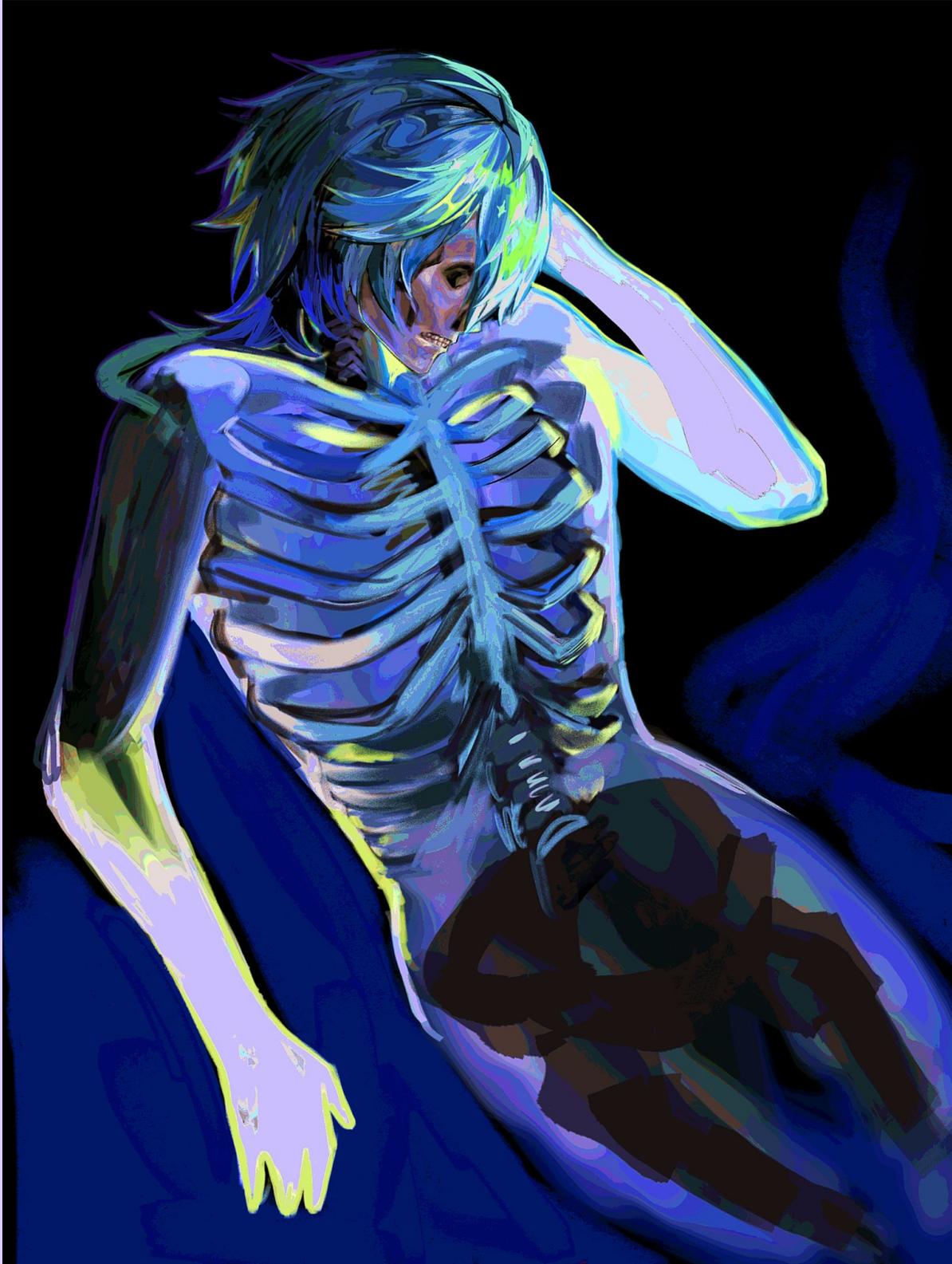
To be a diamond, is to be forged in pain

Under immense pressure, giving up all that you have

Just so you can shine brighter than the rest

# Insight Into Human Nature

Remy Huang



# blocked by your administrator

Ethan Duong

Anywhere there is knowledge  
Know that it is all artificial.  
Anywhere creativity is emphasized  
Artificial is all that it knows.

A constellation of creativity from a single prompt.  
Their wonders  
more wonderful than others?  
Why would we extinguish our stars?  
Academic Integrity, they say.  
Our input unweighted.  
And their new agenda, if I may?  
Human voices matter... computer don't...

# Finding the Right Job

Nina Machabelli



# The Flowers There Once Were

## Leila Altamura

I feel like a ghost,  
Always catching something that was never there  
To say, no matter if there were crowds I'd still feel invisible  
To say I live in your shadow,  
My light always dimmed.  
To hold myself late at night.  
Instead of walking, I float.  
Instead of baskin in the sun..  
The moonlight takes me in as her own.  
As if my tears are just as important as the rain's.  
Mother nature's tears lets the flowers bloom,  
Mine do...  
Nothing.



# Stream Under Sunlight

Angelina Yan



# Equilibrium

## Vikram Gauld

One day snowflakes began to fall in Tunisia.

Soon there were soft, white, flurries landing in the Lut Desert of Iran.

And then in Death Valley.

In a matter of hours, the globe was enveloped in a thin layer of clean, inviting snow.

As the flakes cascaded down, children caught them in their mouths, feeling the sudden juxtaposition of freezing and melting on their tongues.

Each snowflake satiated even the hungriest.

Homeless people and stray animals rejoiced in the sensation of instant contentment.

This magical snow had quelled thirst, hunger and want around the world.

People were covered head to toe in a shimmering blanket that was frozen, yet somehow warming.

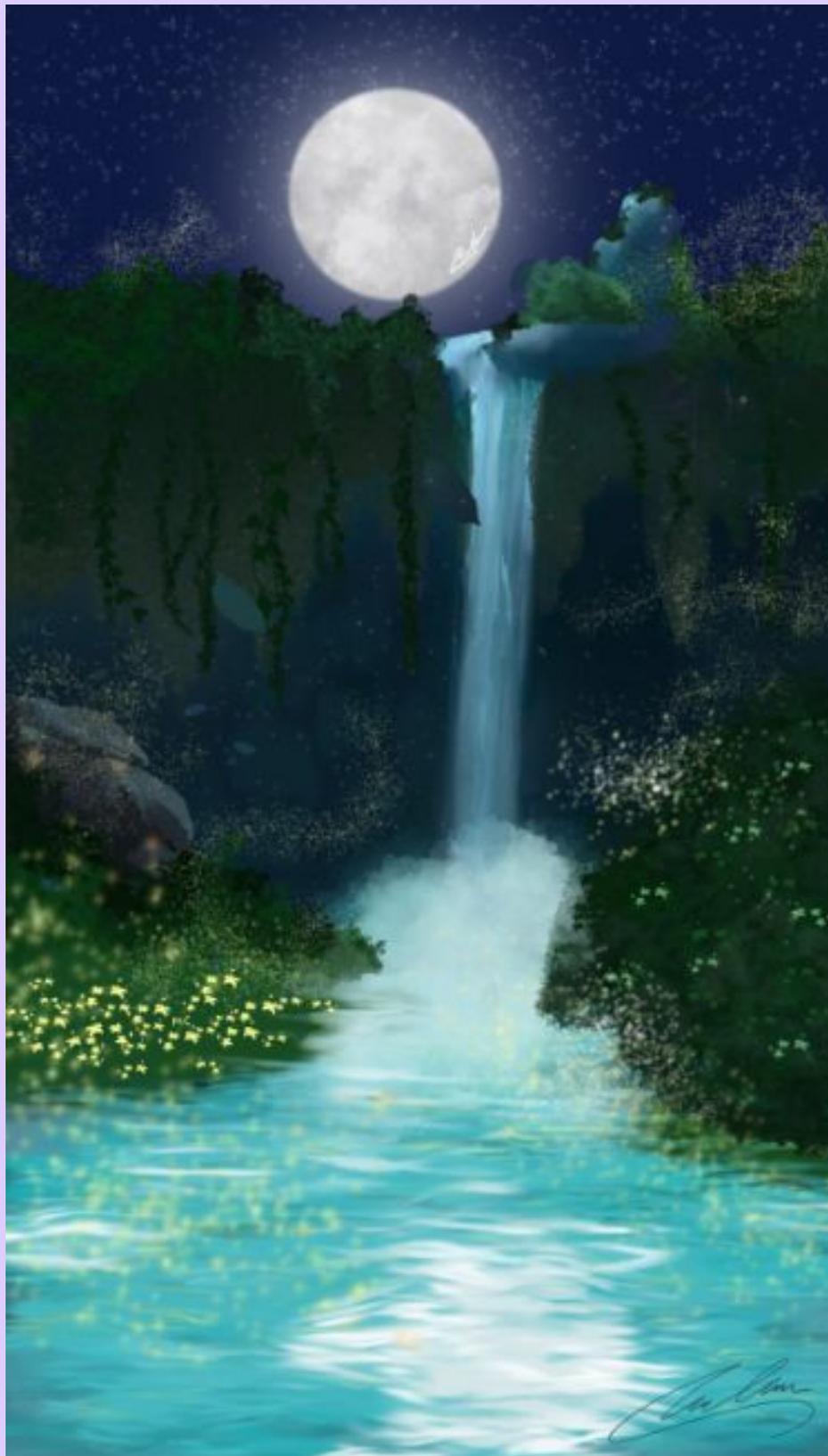
They walked the streets, no longer judged by their appearance or their clothing, for they all now wore the same.

They began rejoicing,

playing without worry in a world equalized by shared joy.

# Moonlight Sonata

Mia Chen



# Warned When The Moonlight Shined In

Lily Knapp

*Look out for the Ides of March, because something is happening tonight.*

The once-blue sky has turned pitch black. Midnight is as dark as pitch, with a full moon glowing like a candle. Shadowy black figures appear on the wall in my bedroom while I'm asleep. I hear a strange howl and I wake up.

I notice the figures on my wall and tremble at the sight I see. What could they be? They look crooked and scraggly like old scarecrows in a backyard view. Is this a nightmare about to come true?

*Don't be fooled, I remind myself. It's either insomnia or just something random from the house appearing, just play it cool.*

But then the howling gets louder and the figures get closer. I pull myself to hide under the blanket. What is happening? I can't even imagine. Soon, moonlight unusually enters the room, filling it with light as I'm slightly full of fear, and a strange shadowy figure appears. It whispered softly, "Dear sweet someone, I can see that you are dreaming. This is your fated curse. Since you have so many words, thoughts, ideas, and plans in your head, you always have a sense of feeling like you're too much to handle. Even when you're in social situations or with any group of people, you can't help but sometimes stop yourself from expression; the fear of being socially draining, or considered annoying to others keeps silencing you and making your ideas seem inferior to other people or worse. You have been in a self-destruction loop for a while and since no one will come to help you or pick up on any signs, you will keep struggling until it's all over. Be aware of tomorrow, March 6, because Mercury is going into retrograde. You may experience miscommunications, arguments, delays, sensitivity to criticism, technical glitches, minor accidents, revisiting old traumas, anxiety, struggling to complete tasks on time, and lack of mental clarity. This phase will be highly transformative and you will let go of the past. Self-reflect, declutter, focus on your intuition, stay organized, don't begin new projects, don't travel, and don't be impulsive. If you don't follow my advice then you will be unfortunate and face your feared fate. Good night, my someone, good night, my love. I am the moon's entity and you have been warned in the nicest way possible." Then, the figure fades. I think I have been warned by the moonlight and it almost didn't even feel

like a dream. Before I know it, the moon's phase is entering waxing gibbous and I have to be aware of misfortune during the next several weeks. This is unusual because I rarely have dreams like this or really even pay attention to horoscopic events. Is this warning really true? I start to suddenly remember several arguments I had with my friends from the beginning of the year. Even if it sounds like a myth, I still try to believe it or else I'd guess I have truly no purpose in life.

# It's You, My Love

Mia Chen

The way she walks, the way she talks,  
how each step holds the weight of something unknown,  
something only the heavens know.

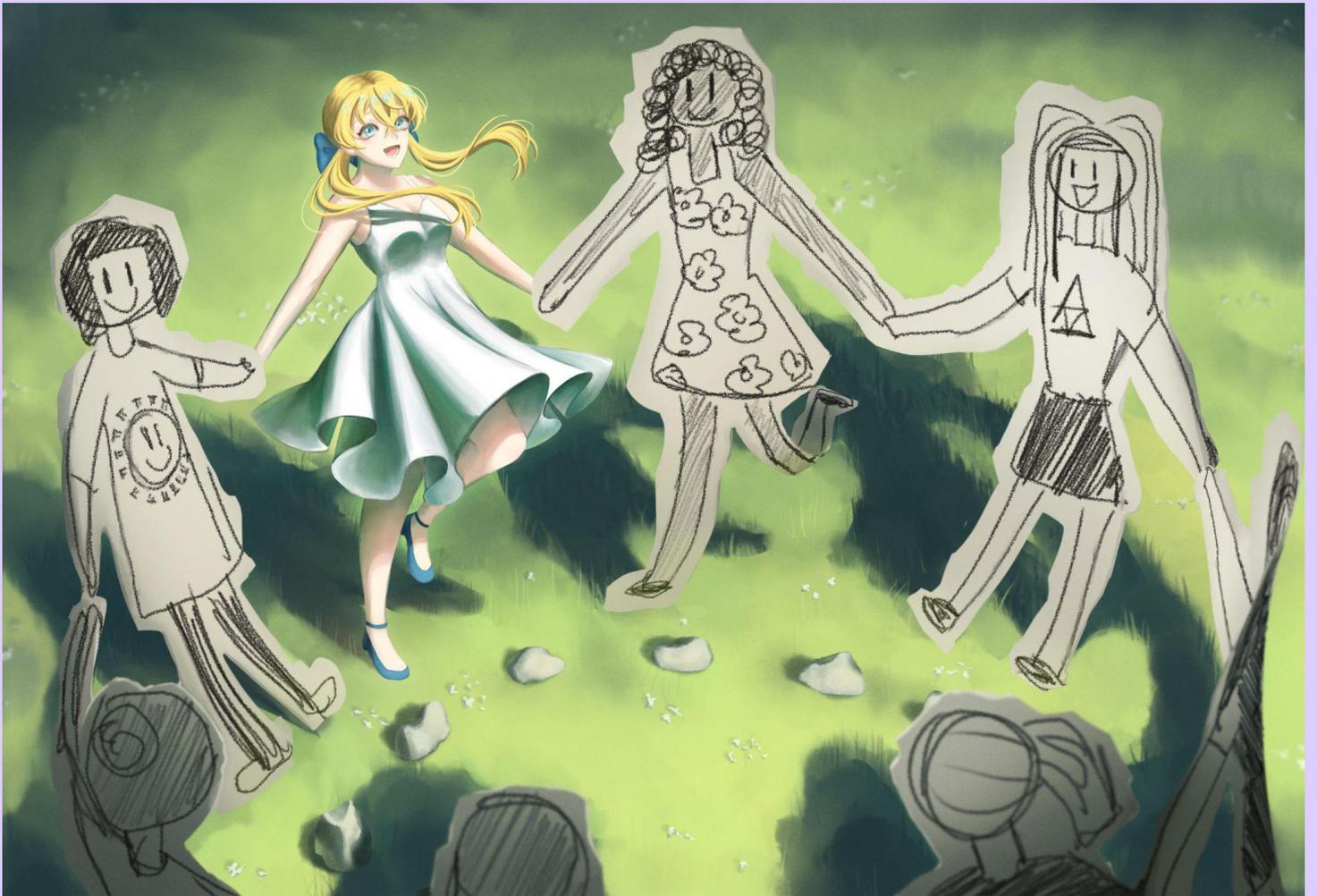
Her brown eyes were golden once.  
But the stars grew jealous and stole their color,  
leaving them void, filled with an enchanting darkness.  
The Sun felt remorseful, so every time his light grazed her,  
he would return its shine.  
Just once more, her eyes will shimmer like gold.  
Each gaze etching through me,  
a reminder to the universe of what it had once lost.

Her brown hair was light once.  
But the night grew envious and stole its warmth,  
leaving it a deep, rich, ebony.  
Yet when the Sun greets her again,  
it spins a gold halo that radiates her beauty.

But one day, you took that light,  
the one that tore through the earth  
The one that made me see everything  
You replaced it with something else  
You showed me the beauty in the darkness of space  
the beauty of the night sky, the vastness of the void  
Something far beyond what human boundaries can perceive  
And before I realized it, I had gone blind.  
Not from the darkness, but because of you,  
I can see better now than I ever had  
I have fallen for the very thing I once thought others were foolish for believing.  
It's You, My Love.  
You are my paradise.

# Paper Reality

Angelina Yan



# Anemoia

## Jeffrey Lin

A world rests inside my mind  
A world that I will never know  
A world where light has all the time, but no time at all  
A world that blooms and withers in bunches of ephemeral color

I dangle my legs the pellucid water, and peer into fantasia

Streaks of light refract across my vision  
Streaks become beams, beams blossom into flowers  
that wilt and fade under dancing waves  
diffusing somber petrichor

Foam forms on the aureate sands  
of time catching golden fractals  
that melt into the ombre surf  
embraced by ocean brine

I'm asked if men could fly into this world  
On wings made of hope and prayers  
But those that learn the way to cross  
Will never be able to go

I stand on the opposite shore,  
trapped in anemoia.  
Watching the wingèd fall from grace  
As streaks of shooting stars



# To: My Someone

Leila Altamura

To be inlove with you,  
To let the petals fall,  
Let myself be able to fall into your arms without being frightened  
Engage in puppy love without feeling like I'll get bitten.  
You've got me smitten.  
To be inlove with you,  
As if I have to hide in the shadows.  
Never take off my mask,  
You'll say I'm full of sunshine,  
You must not know me then.  
To go outside and watch the sunset.  
Watch as the moon comes.  
To be in love with you,  
Now my inner child is like a kitten, hopelessly devoted.  
Hoping you'll promise to be there for better...  
or worse.

# Peach Celsius

Mia Chen



# Drifting

William Pereira

In October, a chill tickled the unamused waves of the East River  
From the southwest, blossoming embers jaunted across the sky.  
Torpids professionals retreated from their glowing daytime residences,  
As I watched, with her head on my shoulder, on the far left of the bench.  
Her legs rocked deliberately in the changing winds, and she drifted;  
Lady Liberty wished her rest, beaming, illuminated, to us from her noble seat.

In December, our coats knelt, battered under the snapping air,  
emerging from the English Channel due East.  
Young men and women sprang into the dirty water towards the sun's grave,  
Only they, unafraid; the few of us alive.  
Her eyelashes fluttered, wisps of hair performed a smoldering dance.  
The sea greeted her, and sent her back into her dreaming mind.

In April, we rested on the corner of a roof in Shibuya,  
A great edifice which seared the night.  
The lost and the lonely roamed the streets in bare clothing,  
Now beyond their searching, but with a wish to be found.  
Thunder startled the metropolis, but she, like stained glass,  
Let the laden raindrops collect slowly on her cheeks.

In June, the fresh morning in Marrakech was shared,  
With ravens, vendors, children with sunken eyes and empty cardboard.  
The world had lost its vivid interest in the fragrant spices which,  
All night had waited beside where we lay,  
On the bench underneath the verdurous date trees  
For her soft nose to tremble at the dissonant scent.

In September, by noon we had reached the edge of the world,  
Patagonia lay firmly, assured, beneath our worn feet,  
And settled her kin with a stagnant, poised midday.

Eons of labor and scorn molded her, now a home for the bears and the bees.  
Still to my left, she began to stir, her eyelids revealing an apprehensive calm.  
She wore my jacket, nature's icy breath would not disturb her slumber.

November, "I'm sorry, I must have fallen asleep"  
"Don't worry, the air hangs heavy here, rest your eyes"  
"We are home, it is as I never slept...  
What did I miss?"  
"Paradise"

The sun bid us farewell from the window,  
The night air stopped at the pane, sighed, and departed.  
With their word, I too drifted away.



# Silhouette

Esther Youn



# quiet rapture

## Wickey Yo

when He came to collect his dues  
there was nothing I wanted to do  
i passed over his keep  
and did not weep

then i reached the pearly whites  
something i yearned for each night  
worldly tales proved themselves true  
i lived in a world of bedazzled blue

sapphire skies and tender warmth  
intense exultation burst forth  
finally this is what i earned  
somewhere free from spurn

time was no more  
so were the aches and sores  
unadulterated joy warped into placid serenity  
for an eternity

one day i looked above  
and saw a lack thereof  
a cerulean crib  
what

it had escaped my thoughts  
something i previously sought  
this farce must not drag lest  
it extinguished my billowing zest

i had not known it was far too late

the dullness did not abate  
it was not the will of a celestial loon  
it was the product of my assumes

with each dawning day  
gone were my joyous rays  
a gloom overtook my spirit  
soon i hit my limit

but what could i do  
nothing i soon presumed  
because what are euphoric glows  
without terribly solemn woes

i only wish to capture that quiet rapture  
rapture i was bestowed a lifetime ago

# Hungry Woman

Blair Bi



# Back Of My Hand

Sofia Ogulluk

No one seems to question  
The way clouds move when the sky spins  
No, they never seem to notice  
Dead leaves dropping in the wind

Yet, I remain  
My face pressed against cold glass  
My hot breath sticks on it  
But, in the end, it doesn't last

No, no one understands  
And that's perfectly okay  
No, I don't understand  
But, what else is there to say?

I dry my eyes with words on a screen  
Searching for the feeling of being seen  
And I always end up in the middle of crowds  
People-watching until the sun has gone down

And this sensation I can't seem to name  
Buried in the crevices of my brain  
I don't know when it all began  
But somehow I know it like the back of my hand

# Memories and Mementos

Brianna Hayes



# A Glimpse Into the Soul

## Julia Chainani

A shimmer of light  
A flicker of bright  
The water dances in a liquid stance  
They crash and fall, into the stone  
Wondering if they'll rise again  
They will, only differently: striped with the lessons of their past  
A reflection, a glimpse against the Moon  
The man who is stranded there, wishing to be down in Neptune  
The ripple of the liquid longing to understand  
That they are where many may find a helping hand  
But the few who skew  
They will stay true  
To their hearts  
To their souls  
To their minds  
To their homes  
Their paradise is like the waves  
The end of the fall will cause the drag back  
But the start is only a new beginning to become a better hand

# Butterfly Girl

Katherine Russell



# Cheese

## Blair Bi

My seasoned boat creaks beneath the weight of time.

Hands sing of salt. I grasp the dainty sprig

And search for myself upon the indigo tides,

My visage is featureless.

an absence gods alone possess.

The sting of salt withers, my sea-worn flesh—

Once jagged and raw, now a pristine webbing.

The blue captures me, echos

his shivers

The seas hums become

a drone,

As sand sifts through

His fingers,

And the mortal figure

stretches into

the hollow expanse of

godhood

without decay, without

Salt.

-----  
But a new Infatuation starts with a nymph's beauty.

She bathes within the milk-soft waters

Unspoiled and pure as it cradles her sweetness

A goddess looms from above,

draws her highest hand

To spread her sickly drops of envy,

Melt her tender flesh into corruption  
And so nature takes its course,  
the salt sizzles and eats away at  
Her souring skin  
Takes her captive until she bleeds black  
Her sweetness drained into the abyss,  
leaving the briney aftertaste  
She gapes at her warped reflection  
Purity conquered by an unrecognizable monster

Cold eyes, spindly legs, with an appetite for destruction  
What was once milk, curdles into bitterness.

She is left as the world's stinging wound  
Let her relieve her bitter ache  
Because passion is the salt of life;  
Sharp enough to savor.  
Strong enough to sour.



# Paradise Paddling

Lily Knapp



# Field of Light

Yue Gao



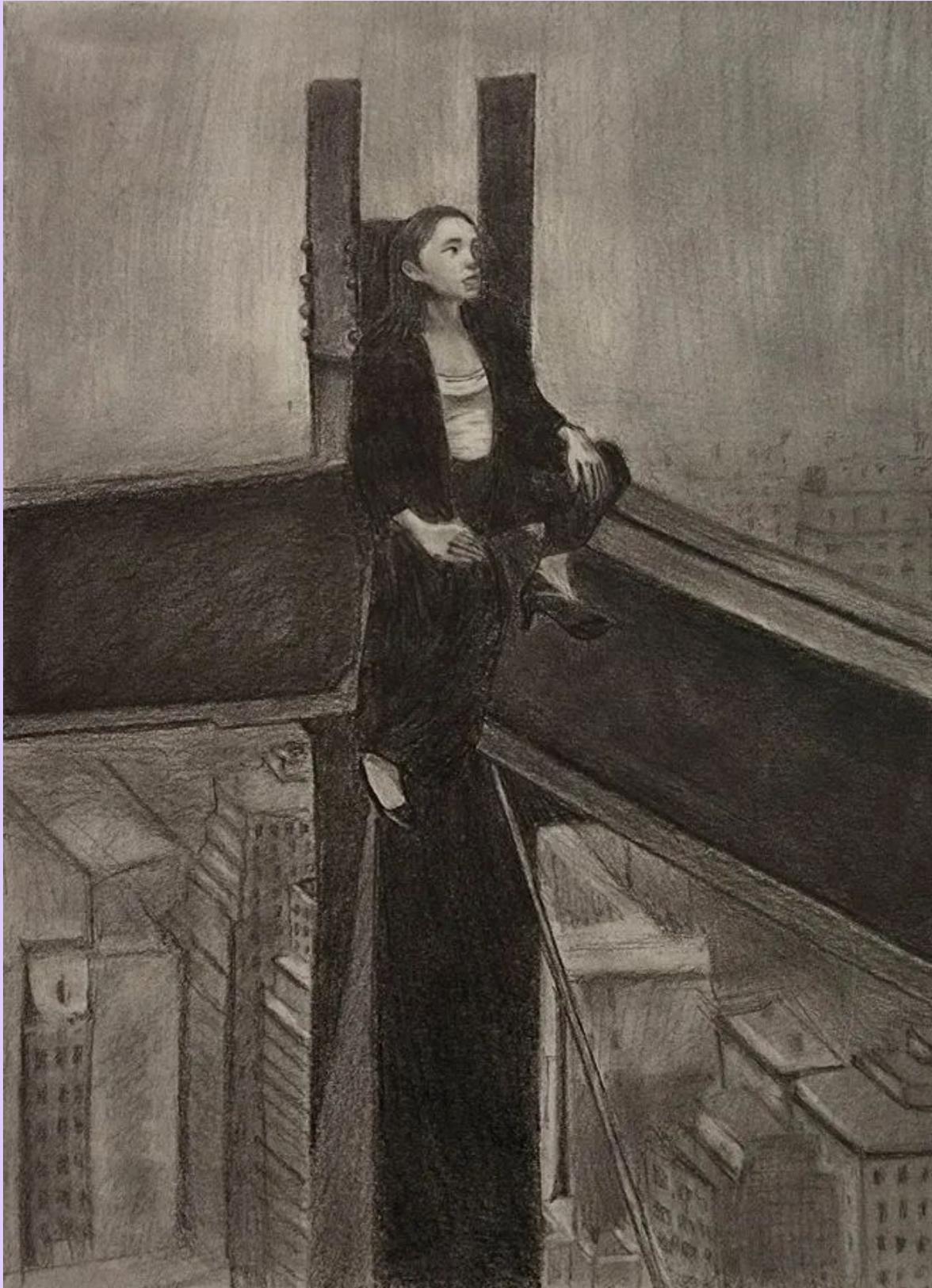
# An Imperfect Harmony

## Chase Im

A plane of infinity, the cosmos rest  
A single brushstroke against a canvas of nothing  
Forever altering the properties of existence and color  
How can such a small action ultimately define your world?  
Another stroke, another sprout.  
As seasons pass, new strokes are added to the canvas  
The old, winding oak despite warped, stands proud  
The rough bark beneath my fingertips portraying a life of fulfillment and joy  
Another stroke, another breath.  
A fantasy of vibrance emerges from its temporary dormancy  
Spreading its wings, taking the leap  
Fluttering towards the golden sun  
Another stroke, another shimmer.  
The stars smile down upon me, burning to help illuminate my path  
The longer they burn, the dimmer they become, until they too, must rest,  
An explosion of light symbolizing the end of a long journey.  
Another stroke, another supernova.  
The stars burst in a shower of flame, the light still guiding my path  
How can I tell them it's a wasted effort?  
How will I ever live up to unattainable hopes and dreams that were chosen for me?  
I sit along the beaten path, feet imprinted into the rich soil.  
The footprints of those before me, those who succeeded.  
I stare up at the endless cosmos, what was once a blank canvas  
Turns into a sparkling, unorganized splendor of dreams and infinite possibilities.  
In this imperfect harmony, I find my perfect place, the path ends here.  
This is where I belong.

# Building Myself Up To The Top

Nina Machabelli



# “Am I Beautiful?”

## Yansiyu (Remy) Huang

I was born with a script in my hand. They told me, “This is who you are, who you will be.” Not a question— a **command**. I didn’t understand it. I didn’t understand why I was expected to grow into dresses like second skin. “Well, that’s just how it is,” they’d say. This must be someone else’s dream, then. There is a costume tailored for me. Its edges are rigid. Undeniably beautiful, it doesn’t quite fit when I try it on. My soul never seemed to understand the directions. It stretched against that seam that was made without asking me, this is not how things were meant to be. I blamed myself for being unable to love what I was given. I suppose it was when I cut my hair that I realized how satisfying the feeling of liberation was. “It’s a shame,” “You were so beautiful,” they’d say. But why can’t I be both at once? Can’t I be *‘beautiful me’*? But this isn’t a performance. It’s me. Unapologetically me. Still I know, I will die your daughter. You’ll remember me for the person in the script, not the man I am. Maybe I’ll wake up one day and this will just be a bad dream. You’ll take me into your arms, just like you always should’ve. The script has been cast aside, forgotten in the memory of a summer afternoon. The show has been cancelled. Still, I know I will die your daughter. “Don’t be ridiculous,” they’d say. My body is torn open through ignorance. Look at me — not through me. They wanted a puppet, not a child. Even when the strings are starting to loosen, even when I won’t stop cutting, tugging, snapping at them but instead threading myself further into your living nightmare, your definition of beauty lives in the photos I want to burn. You will cry for *her* never knowing you never knew *me*. I know. I don’t need your approval. I don’t need your pity. I don’t want your pride. But my hollow insides churn at your idea of “beautiful,” and my skin must burn away before I accept that. The lights are dark. The theatre is infested with cobwebs. The seats are empty. I’d look like a fool if I kept acting on this stage. It’s okay not to love me. You are not the first person who found it difficult. Somewhere inside me there is a forgiving person who forgave you for being the first ones to turn me away despite being all I’ve ever known. But I know how to love myself. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, after all, isn’t it? It’s me. With my arms forever extended, I present you with something you will never take, All that I am, all that I was and will be—  
*unapologetically, me.*

# The Distance Between

Nate Seibert

The bright, red sun shone through the little window slit, eight-feet high. The room was crowded with bunk beds nailed to the ground, pointed north against the adjacent wall. The little boy woke up early, careful not to wake anyone, creeping to the window. He faced the wall, extending his right arm as high as he could, and jumped.

Every day, he felt a smidge closer. He couldn't yet see much out the window, only the sky—but he could imagine. He a bustling market, with a little courtyard in the center. Two football posts would sit at either side, where the schoolchildren played. If only they could see him, maybe they'd remind Father he was here. He hurried back to his top bunk as he heard Master's keys dangling outside.

The children formed a line for the bathroom, the smallest first. The little boy washed the dry blood off the back of his hand, which had seeped through his cracked skin. He splashed water over his head, pushing his bushy hair down, and then washed it with some hand soap. Ayman banged twice at the door, and the little boy stepped out.

They slugged down the short corridor, led by Master, and into the mess. The eldest children unfolded both white utility tables laid against the wall, pushing the two together, before laying out all eight plastic chairs. The other kids stood staring, half asleep.

Master set down a knife and two rolls of soggy bread for the children to ration among themselves. Ayman cut and distributed the loaves, tossing an extra slice to the little boy. Ayman did not eat—he'd grown enough, he said. They took their seats, all sharing chairs with their bunkmates.

The children discussed quietly what they'd dreamt the night before. Everyone at the table listened intently as the little boy spoke of his old family hut, atop a great, sandy hill, overlooking the village. He saw a grove of palms behind the market, bushels of dates sprouting about. Father carried the little boy on his back so they could reach the sweetest dates, highest up. He'd be carrying Father around when he got home, laughed the little boy.

Young Lamia kept quiet, as she thought of her mother, her lustrous black hair and dark skin. Whenever she got off work, Mother would take Lamia to the bank of the river, where there sat a small beach crowded with tall grass and big rocks. They sifted for dinner, through the stones and plastic, sharing a pair of gloves, until they found mussels wider than their palm. By sunset, their yellow beach bucket was always full.

Mother cooked the mussels, as Lamia listened to the radioq—an American station, not understanding a word—on the bed. The March breeze carried a light gust of wind through

the apartment, the balcony curtains flying inwards. The building suddenly shook. Lamia watched through the balcony, wide-eyed, as the sky turned a blood red. Across the river, pillars of fire shot to heaven. The apartment shook again, and Lamia hid beneath her bed as Mother yelled frantically. The apartment shook. It shook, and it shook, and mother screamed, and Lamia stayed hidden beneath her bed, praying. She heard a loud crash and the screaming stopped.

No, she did not speak. As Lamia slept the night before, she saw Mother wearing a pretty white wedding dress and headscarf, standing at the shore, watching the sunset. Lamia ran to her, pushing against a strong gust of wind carrying motes of dust and sand. She shouted, and Mother turned to face her, opening her arms in embrace. As Lamia grew closer, she noticed a flame rising from the ocean. The fire rose, engulfing Mother's gown, her hair, and all she was.

The children filed upstairs into the workroom through a slim stairwell, taking their sections. The little boy took a bottle of glue and a plate filled with shiny sequins from a table at the center. He filled his arms to the brim with polyester striped children's shirts, before settling down in an empty space on the floor. He applied glue meticulously over a floral pattern in the middle, grabbing a handful of sequins and pressing them into the fabric. The little boy finished quickly, then draped the shirt over a nearby rack to dry. He took another shirt and repeated the process.

Master had already taken his seat in the corner, with the window open as he read the newspaper. Every once in a while, Master shouted at the passersby in the street below to quiet themselves. When he wasn't looking, the little boy would poke his head over the nearby table to get a glance of the big pictures on the back of the paper, with old white men, tall buildings and planes. The little boy could not read any of the words at the top.

Ayman sat at a stool, manually sewing sequins and beads into wedding dresses over a bench. His hands were rough, his calluses built up, marred by scratch and scar. He towered over all of the other children, and Master too. The little boy could not understand why Ayman never tried to reach the window, or at least catch a peep through it, like he did—why did God waste height on Ayman?

Lamia worked next to the little boy, but at a pace noticeably slower. Hidden from Master's view by the workbench, sitting on the floor, she snatched a cheap, not yet decorated wedding dress off the table. The little boy stopped in place, and watched. She took a needle off the floor, and ran it through the dress, cutting it in half through the waistline. A girl sewing nearby gasped loudly in shock.

Master dropped his newspaper, marched over, and swiftly took hold of Lamia's arm, shoving her hard against the table. Lamia then bit his wrist, sinking her teeth in deep. Master shouted a curse, taking her by the neck into the stairwell, and slammed the door behind him, all as the children looked on.

They kept their eyes at the door, Ayman muttering a muzzy prayer, as they heard Lamia screaming, for help, for God, for Mother. She pushed the workroom door back open, falling onto the hot, concrete floor. Ayman jumped up, fists clenched, his stool falling to the ground. But he did not move any closer to the door. Master pulled Lamia by the legs, up the stairs to his quarter, her head bobbing up and down on every step, her screams growing fainter and fainter. From the top of the staircase, he barked at Ayman to keep the children in control, before barring his apartment door shut.

Ayman stayed frozen, standing, for a minute, studying the apartment door. He walked to the window, still open, and peered his head out. The children hesitantly gathered around at his urging, taking turns looking out. The little boy saw a slim, dusty alleyway, packed with traffic, and an apartment block across the street crowded with signs and graffiti. The little boy looked down at the downstairs neighbor's awning, only a few meters away, and the street not far below, with motorcycles and beaten-up cars parked. He imagined himself jumping down, then onto a car, and surviving just fine, but he figured someone would've tried that by now if it were a good idea.

Sitting on a balcony across the street, he saw another boy not much smaller than him playing with a truck toy by himself, and the boy's mother, setting out towels to dry. The little boy shouted, trying to get his attention over the traffic, but one of the others pulled him back and told him to shut up.

Ayman called on the children to get back to work, lest Master see them like this. But the little boy could not work. He sat there, fidgeting with a needle, wondering what was going on upstairs. By the day's end, Lamia would be back, with only mild scarring and a story to tell, Ayman reassured him.

Master came down the stairs some time later, without Lamia, and took his usual spot in the corner. By nightfall, the children were exhausted, and Master rounded them up, patting each child down to make sure they hadn't stolen anything. He walked them down the stairs for bedtime—no dinner tonight, he said. Not until they learned to show some more gratitude. The little boy climbed onto his bunk and Master locked the bedroom door tight.

The room was quiet, without Lamia's snoring, broken only by an occasional bout of thunder. The storm brewed fiercely outside, carrying an intense stream of wind through the window. The little boy shivered. He raised his head, careful to avoid hitting the ceiling, and took a look through the window, studying the sky. The moon was bright tonight.

He closed his eyes. When he got out, he told God, he'd befriend that boy across the street. He would play football in the alleyway with his schoolmates, yelling and having fun, and they would ignore Master as he grouched from his apartment. The little boy would learn to read and he would read every sign and newspaper in the city. He would hitch a ride to the countryside, and surprise his two little brothers. They wouldn't be happy to see him, the boy chuckled—they'd be forced to share beds again.

Oh, how he missed his family, his comfy bed, his mother's food. He hoped they hadn't forgotten him. He knew his father wasn't tall, but he prayed his grandfather was—and then maybe tomorrow, he thought, he'd reach the window's ledge.



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