SCOPE



Issue 55

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“Kindness” by Mrs. Kane’s English 4 Period 5 Class

Always be kind
You never know what’s on someone’s mind
A moment's patience when the world runs fast,
Ensures that kindness will last

A gentle word can lift a friend so high,
It doesn't take much effort to be great.
And no small loving gesture is too late.
To help them face the troubles passing by.

Sometimes you help someone without a plan.
You hold the door or lend a hand.
It doesn’t fix the world or change their life.
But makes things easier, less of a fight

In gentle acts, the heart’s true grace is shown,
where kindness sows a love deeply grown.
With proper care, friendships will bloom.
Bringing light into the classroom.

By Nadira Khan

Snow, soft on rooftops,
Lights flicker like whispered prayers
Midnight breathes in Peace.

By Claire Connors

Kindness is Contagious

Only kindness that ties your shoes (Nye)

Small acts that are just and right (Wilcox)

Just to scatter seeds of kindness (Wilcox)

Still, treat each guest honorably (Rumi)

and each will smile at the other's welcome (Walcott)

Hear the small bird's grief & care (Blake)

If I can stop one Heart from breaking (Dickinson)

Is anyone happier because you passed his way?

(Guest)

Let's do each day a kindly deed (Service)

Let us give something every day (Colesworthy)

"Failure"
by Carson Williams

It drains me until I'm a ghost,
heart beating and palms sweating.
Feels like torture all the time.
I wish to get it off my mind.
The idea I can't stand: failure fills me.
Cannot and will not let it happen.
But something runs across my mind.
"Trust in Jesus all the time."
It calms the storm in my head
and reminds me
One. Day. At. A. Time.

"The Hill Dream" by Amahli Vialva

I walked up the hill with some friends
until we reached the end.
We looked over the edge
and it looked like a bottomless pit.
I was so scared
I almost lost my hair.
My friends fought with me to stay
But then we decided to hit the hay.
I woke up on the edge,
trying not to move
But in the end it was all a dream.

“Overthinking” by Dante Giordano

In the house alone
Quiet thoughts, possible monsters, howling wolves.
Inner thoughts freeze me
Hearing heavy footsteps closing in on me
until I realize it’s the laundry clothes.
Creaking floors ... is it a tall monster?

Nope... It’s just my old floor.
Footsteps banging rapidly toward the door
Sharp claws start to tear the door down.
I run into my closet closing my eyes ...
The door swings open.

Oh, I’m ready, Mom.

“Change” by Brianna Cass

I fear the future.
what it will be.
What I want, my plans, my dreams.
Will my life take my expected course?
Or will I be waiting until I’m a dead corpse?

I fear the change.
What's going to be different?
I know the present,
But what’s the future?
I don’t want things to change, but again, I do.
Things always change; they need to.

I grew up in a small town.
But where to next?
Will I stay in Jersey?
Or move west?

Will I live near family?
or start fresh?
Will I keep contact with friends?
or make new ones and forget?

Will I be married, have a dog, and have three kids?
Or will it be the opposite, my biggest fear?
Will my job be one I like?
or one I dread to wake up to,
hate and despise?

Only time will tell.
and even though I fear,
all I can do is hope, stay curious,
waiting for what comes near.

“Learn How to Love Love” by Payton Golczewski

Love is a battlefield.
it’s ephemeral.
it haunts like a
recurring nightmare.
It feeds away at your
head and your thoughts.
What if you have
strong love for someone?
But they don’t feel the
same aching love for
You back?
You go too far over the
edge,
every exhausting time.
Love should feel sweet
and easy.
It shouldn’t lay in the
shadow of your thoughts
creeping up on you when
You want to move on.

"The Pressure" by Brody Follen

As soon as the hockey season starts,
Once again, the pressure rises deep inside of me.
That feeling of anxiety in my stomach
acts like a parasite.
but does not ever leave.
With streams of schoolwork
and enduring endless nights.
Tick tick tick ... Still piles of work,
but at the same time
There is no time left.
"Time to get some sleep;
you have practice tomorrow morning!"
Mom repeats.
Only she does not understand.
But making precious memories,
scoring clutch goals,
and developing deeply with the team,
that's what matters.
Because at the end of the day,
we know we will miss it.

“Running Out of Time” by Vanessa Halpin

Thinking about the future awakens my fear.
worrying what will happen when time starts ticking.
My mind takes over my life
wondering if I will achieve everything I have wanted.
I see myself in the hospital,
doing what I’ve always dreamed of
but still thinking to myself,
Do I have enough time?
The world feels like it’s ending
when my mind takes over
saying to myself,
I am running out of time.

“Eyes of the Immortal” by Chris Fraser

Every day is like walking through lasers
that are always beaming.
The constant downspout of pressure and
judgment seems to break through
the facade.
A facade that not only give me a sense
of freedom but also makes me feel more
exposed with each passing day.
Eyes that constantly glare like
The sun in the summer that seems
to pierce my soul.
However the eyes could feel like a dimming
darkness that engulfs me without warning.
The eyes often feel cold and disheartening, but
there are some eyes that feel warm and appealing.
the eyes of those who accept me for me
and all of me—my family, my teachers, and my
friends.

“Taken Away” by Symone Newell

As I shut my eyes
The world goes dark.
Everything is silent
until I hear a knock,
“It’s just a branch hitting the door”,
But that branch came back for more and more.

Annoyed, I run down the stairs
to alert my parents, but no one is there.
The knocking grows louder and louder and LOUDER.
At this point, the door turns into powder.

“I can’t take it anymore! ”,
I say as I open the door,
but as the thunder roars
I realize that it wasn’t a branch
making all the noise.
I see the shadow of a massive masked man.
Then, he points towards his van.
I don’t want to go.
but I can’t say no.
No sounds are being produced.
The man says,
“Don’t try and get loose."

I can’t believe I’m getting taken away
from my family, friends, and team.
I hear an alarm go off and

Oh, what ...? It’s just a dream.

“What Do You Have Planned For Me?”
by Keisyiah Patterson

I like the idea of saying I have
no fears, but there’s always the man
above.
I question God, what do you
have planned for me?
You have my whole life filled
with things I can’t see.
I close my eyes; my problems fly.
the noise in the background goes
silent.
As I talk to Him, I no longer can hide it,
I fear God. No matter how hard I
Try to fight it.
This fear kills me inside.
Will I wake up, or is it my time?
Oh God, what do you have planned for me?

"Tick, Tick, Tick" by Alexa Zapana

In a quiet room I sit.
counting down the seconds.
Before I knew it, I could hardly reckon
The year is half over.
But the weeks are long.
I still manage to feel
as if I were singing this endless song.
Freshman, sophomore, junior year,
these last few years,
I will hold dear to me.
Off to college,
smiling ear to ear,
as I carry the boxes
so this is what it was all for
...finally, I am in the clear.

"Lights Out" by Ayla Gould

Look at the clock; it's past twelve.
I'm laying down in my bed
looking at the ceiling.
I begin to hear noises coming from my closet.
A large, dark, tall figure stares at me.
like a monster from a horror movie.

I look closer—just my jackets hanging on my door.
As I sigh in relief,
The noises get louder.
I try to ignore them.
but I can't.
My heart is pounding so hard.
It's about to come out of my chest.
I don't want to turn on the light.
But my hands take over, and I do.

I see my cat rolling around playing with a toy.
My heart slows down as I turn off the light.
I finally go to sleep.

“Time” by Luke Stadtmauer

People who died yesterday had plans for today.
They thought they had more time.
We all do.
You don’t think it will be you.
You think you’ll have another day to say
“I’m sorry”,
to say “I love you,"
to finally start.
Because time doesn’t warn you,
It just stops showing up.
So stop wasting it.
Stop living like you get forever.
If something matters, do it.
If someone matters, tell them.
Because one day you will run out of some days
and none of this will wait for you.

“Falling” by Denys Drodovskyi

I look down from the clouds
at the buildings on the ground.
As I start to fall, I scream so loud;
My body is shaking from the sound.
My face is being poked by a
thousand needles and my nose is
so numb that breathing is needless.
Flying helpless, weightless, and
the feeling is endless.
I try to stop, but motions are useless.
I can’t let out sigh or frown as
the light blue sky pushes me out
above the mountains and the town.
I jump up in bed, or so it seems.
Thanking God it was just a dream.

“Just There” by Shannon McNulty

I was just there,
but my head took over.
It was not right.
I was just there
in the moment
and then I was not.
I was just there
in a place that I’d never been to.
From here, there was no way of being found.
I was in the darkness.
There was no going back;
it was like the darkness was blinding.
I tried to fight my way out,
but I was not there.
I was just there
not living,
not fighting.
I was just there.

The Way

by Dante Domino

Walking through the wild
A man has no one but him
Lonely and hungry
He continues moving fast
Until he finds his own path

“Literature” by Olivia Cantu

People often ask why I read stories.

Most people see words on the page, but I see much more.

I feel water and smell pine trees in the breeze.

Sometimes I dangle from a cliff, which is hardly a bore.

Sometimes I’m holding a torch, lighting up a cave.

Sometimes I’m flying, my hands touching each cloud.

Sometimes I train animals, teaching them how to behave.

Sometimes I am a famous singer, my voice loud among the crowd.

But most of all, I am myself, turning the page.

Every book finished is another one done.

Some of the endings fill me with tears or rage.

Thankfully, there are so many more titles under the sun.

“E Pluribus Unum” By John Brost
People may like to live in division.
But that’s no reason for celebration.
People may dislike what’s not the same.
But honestly, that’s kinda lame.
People may choose left or right.
People may be a minority or white.
People may be Muslim or Catholic.
People may be poor or rich.
In reality, none of this matters.
We can all unite under one banner.
A nation where we can all be loved,
One country rises above.
Under the stripes and stars,
We’re free, not behind bars.
One community, of them, me, and you.
Three colors: red, white, and blue.
From New York on the Atlantic
To LA on the Pacific,
From towering snow-capped mountains
To scorching desert canyons.
No other people has so much pride
As ours are tested and tried.
No other nation is so great
As we are here in the United States.

BIG TUNIC, SMALL MAN

BY BENJAMIN TROUSDALE

THERE ONCE WAS A SMALL MAN IN MUNICH
WHO HAD RECENTLY BOUGHT HIMSELF A BIG TUNIC
BUT ABOUT CAME A SQUALL.
AND BECAUSE HE WAS SO SMALL
HE WAS BLOWN FAR, FAR AWAY FROM MUNICH.

Black Cat

by Anna Haberman

A black cat can never be lucky
Even when outside is all mucky
Luck is in other cats
Anything but black bats
At least they are not like ducky



Team
by Aiden Terrell

There once was a team from Morris,

Whose games were quite often definitely not historic.

With Blue and with white,

Their bravery told.

Each touchdown is a win metaphoric.

Limericks
by Isaiah Francois

Limericks I cannot compose,
With noxious smells in my nose.
But this one was easy,
only felt queasy.
Because I was stubbing my toes.

“LA Shirt” by Ethan Everett

While Beck checked his rank on his phone,

He sat in the splash-danger zone.

From a cranberry glug,

Came a heave and a tug.

Now his young LA shirt's a red tone.

My Dog
by Paul Gennaro

My Dog Charged down the hall excited
I was confused: why won't he stop?
He slammed into me
I took a great fall
From the ground my head called

A Student By Julia Cianci

A student who studied all night
Mixed up every answer in sight.
Though the test went astray,
They still laughed the next day—
“Hey, at least I gave it a fight!”

Vans By Seth Vittatow

I need a new pair of Vans

I wish I had the bands

It seems I don’t have any money

The cashier finds it quite funny

I ask my parents for cash but they aren’t fans

County Title

By Darius Young

The game had ended, the score was tight

Everyone had played with all their might.

With a stray ball from downtown

We lit up the town.

The county title was ours tonight.

First Time in Aruba - Memory Poem by Summer Lerro

The sun was warm on my skin as I stepped onto the island.

I saw transparent blue water expand infinitely into the horizon.

I heard the waves crash softly against the shore.

The air smelled like salt and sunscreen.

The sand felt hot and grainy under my feet.

I tasted sweet fruit and cold drinks by the beach.

The breeze brushed my face and cooled me down.

I watched palm trees sway slowly in the wind.

Everything felt calm, happy, and unreal at the same time.

That moment felt special because I was standing

where my parents once began together.

Dread By Francesco Lombardo

There once was a kid full of dread,
At the sight of a zipline overhead.
“I’ll cheer from the ground!
That’s safer,” they found.
While others went zooming ahead.

Puck By Christian Iacuzzo

The puck is all black and is small
He skates up the ice and waits
He gets the puck
He riffles the puck
His scores and roars fill the arena

Halloween By Logan Cardinale

The night of October 31st
may go down as one of my worst
not for any tragic event
But the jokes that made me vent
Now forever I feel I am cursed.

Selfish Guitarist By Elisa Verrico

A guitarist, very full of himself
thought his solos
belonged on the shelf
he'd shred and wail
but always fail
because the amp
was off by itself

That Summer Night by Ava Capezza

The dark sky above me
countless stars scattered.
In the distance
ocean waves crashed hard
each echoing for all to hear.
The cool sand beneath my skin
Calmed my nerves and thoughts.
I closed my eyes and took a deep breath
Each breath of fresh air filled my lungs.
At last I felt peace.

CODER BY JOHN DEMIANYCZ

A CODER WHO LIVED BY THE SEA

WROTE SCRIPTS WHILE SIPPING GREEN TEA.

WHEN BUGS WOULD APPEAR,

HE'D GRIN EAR TO EAR

"IT'S NOT A FLAW, IT'S A FEATURE," SAID HE

“Just Because” by Gabriella Danzi

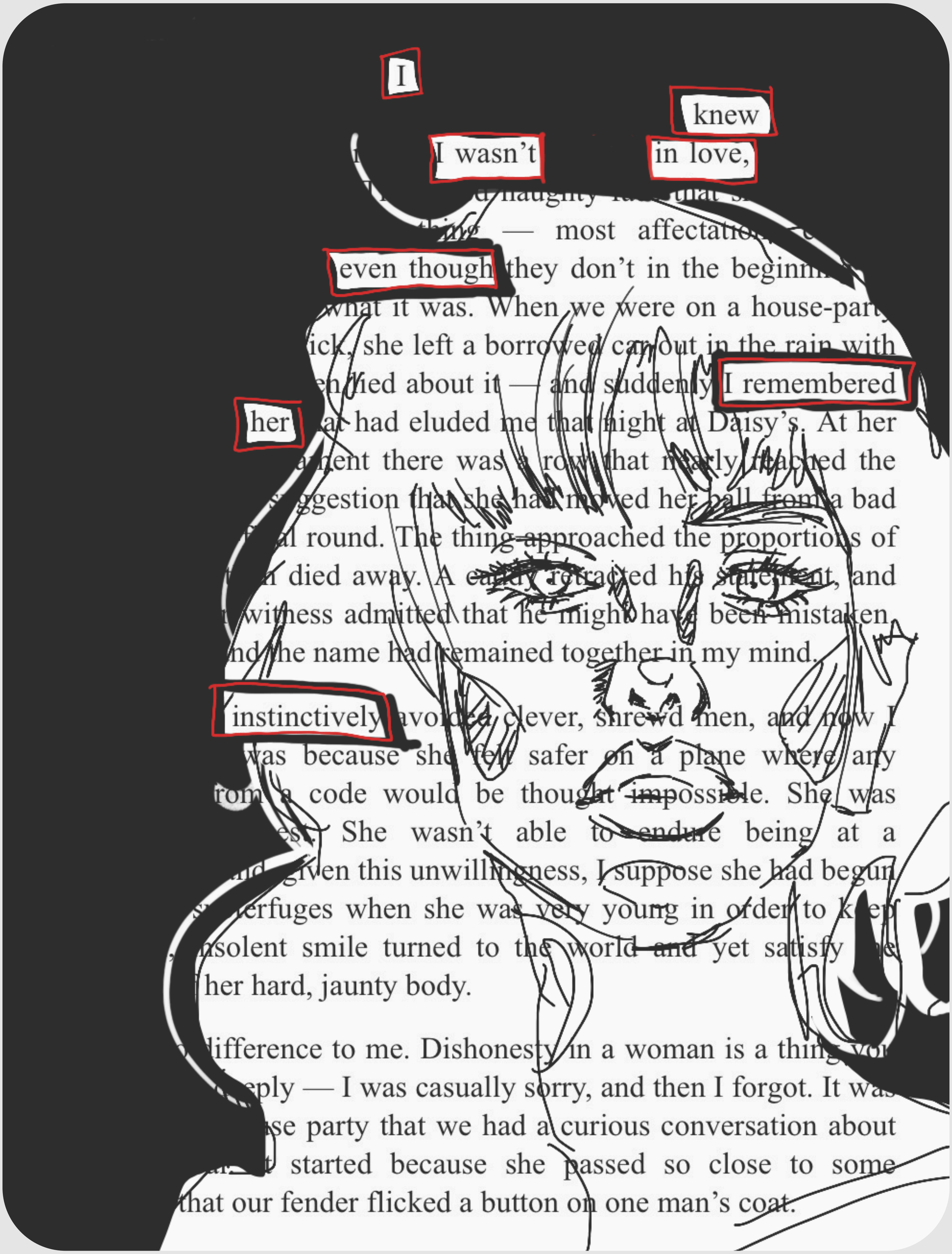
Just because I don’t go to parties,
Doesn’t mean I’m a buzzkill.
Just because I don’t drink,
Doesn’t mean I’m uptight.
Just because I don’t vape,
Doesn’t mean I'm boring.
Just because I am saving myself for marriage,
Doesn’t mean I’m weird.
Just because I have a different mindset,
Doesn’t mean I’m bizarre.
Just because I gave up my life to Jesus,
Doesn’t make me a weirdo
And by giving my life up to Jesus,
I have made many sacrifices, and I'm okay with it.
Just because I have different morals,
Why should anyone care?
Why should anyone judge?
Why should anyone look down on me?
I have different morals.
I don’t fit in with the world.
and that is okay.
But the world doesn’t fit in with me.

I closed the door behind me that strays me away from Jesus.

I’m not like kids in my generation.
I ran from those world-like decisions.
And now I’m considered an outcast.
But that is okay.

because now I’m an outcast with Jesus,
and I couldn’t be happier.

I WASN'T IN LOVE BY MADALINE MAINARDI



“A Conversation With Siri About Death” By Karia Cordero

i watch slasher movies but hate the sight of real blood leave the body
i panic on planes & think of ways the machine or sky
will betray me i read books in fear to evaporate
out of this world without seeing its soft hands
i ask siri how long a human can live without food she says: 20 days
i’m 32 & i feed the backyard lizard houseflies
cuz i know what it means to be a small thing empty with hunger
simmering in the boil of june in my car i keep matches & water
for the apocalypse i ask siri if death hurts
she says: depends today i remind my fragile father to walk careful
& he slams his foot on a corner wall his toe nail bent back like a door hinge
an entrance open for no one to nowhere
i ask siri how long a daughter can
Live without her father she says: there’s a crisis in america
my father’s broken brown flesh waves like a stiff flag & i think
about skin & another unjust dying & perhaps heaven needs all the help it can get
to send a winged-saint to convince: the hand the gun the trigger
to write a different story i don’t know where i’ll be buried
below the earth where i was raised or below the earth that questions my right
to own a bit of freedom i guess i’m writing this poem
to understand where our bones sink to) after the last spill of breath
perhaps like this poem born when the first line crawls across the page
then a small funeral when the last word sits like a headstone
i promise you turn the page
& witness a resurrection

To me this poem made me feel both anxious and deeply reflective. I could see the backyard lizard moving slowly, the corner wall where a toe slammed, and the heat of June simmering in the car. I could hear the quiet panic in the speaker’s thoughts, the. Imagined sounds of apocalypse, and the tapping of fingers on Siri’s screen. The poem made me touch the fragility of human life, like the fathers injured toe or the speaker feeding small creatures. I could almost smell the earth, sweat, and heat around them. Emotionally, I connected to the vulnerability, fear, and quiet hope, the sense that even in dread there is care, memory, and a longing to leave something so meaningful behind.

"Her Piano" By Carol Lynn Grellas

There are days she polishes the case
to a mirroring tool , yet never sees
her own reflection, only the brilliance
of a walnut face where too many ghosts
have gathered? she admires the frayed bench;
horse hair poking through; an unlikely box of music
rolled away for safekeeping where fingered keys
once pressed with exaltation and graced
the room to a sympathetic vibration
from cross stinging glory. She's hostage to the fever
where simpatico is addictive, her hallelujah
haven; a place she remembers lost harmonies
that trembled through the harp with pedals
pushed beneath her feet as the weight of her body
shifted into a rhapsody of days gone by
that echoed the night-bird's song and swallowed wing-beats like tinseled stars
in a flickering frenzy all the way from heaven
and back. If she shared her innermost secrets,
she'd tell you how she imagines lying naked
on the hammer and strings until the action's
completely immobilized), hitch pins locked
from the weight of years she can't forget
88 levers of ivory and wood pounding unforgettably into beautiful madness, like a bridge between all
things near and far, her heart a collectible;

a piece of vintage art. This poem gave me a sense of nostalgia and awe. I could see the polished piano reflecting ghosts of the past, the frayed bench, and the white keys shining under the light. I could hear the vibrating chords, the whisper of night bird songs mixing with the music. I could touch the piano keys and pedals, imagining their smoothness and weight. The air seemed to smell slightly of wood, age, and time. Emotionally, I connected to memory, passion, and the closeness of the person and the art. The piano became alive, carrying both joy and melancholy throughout time.

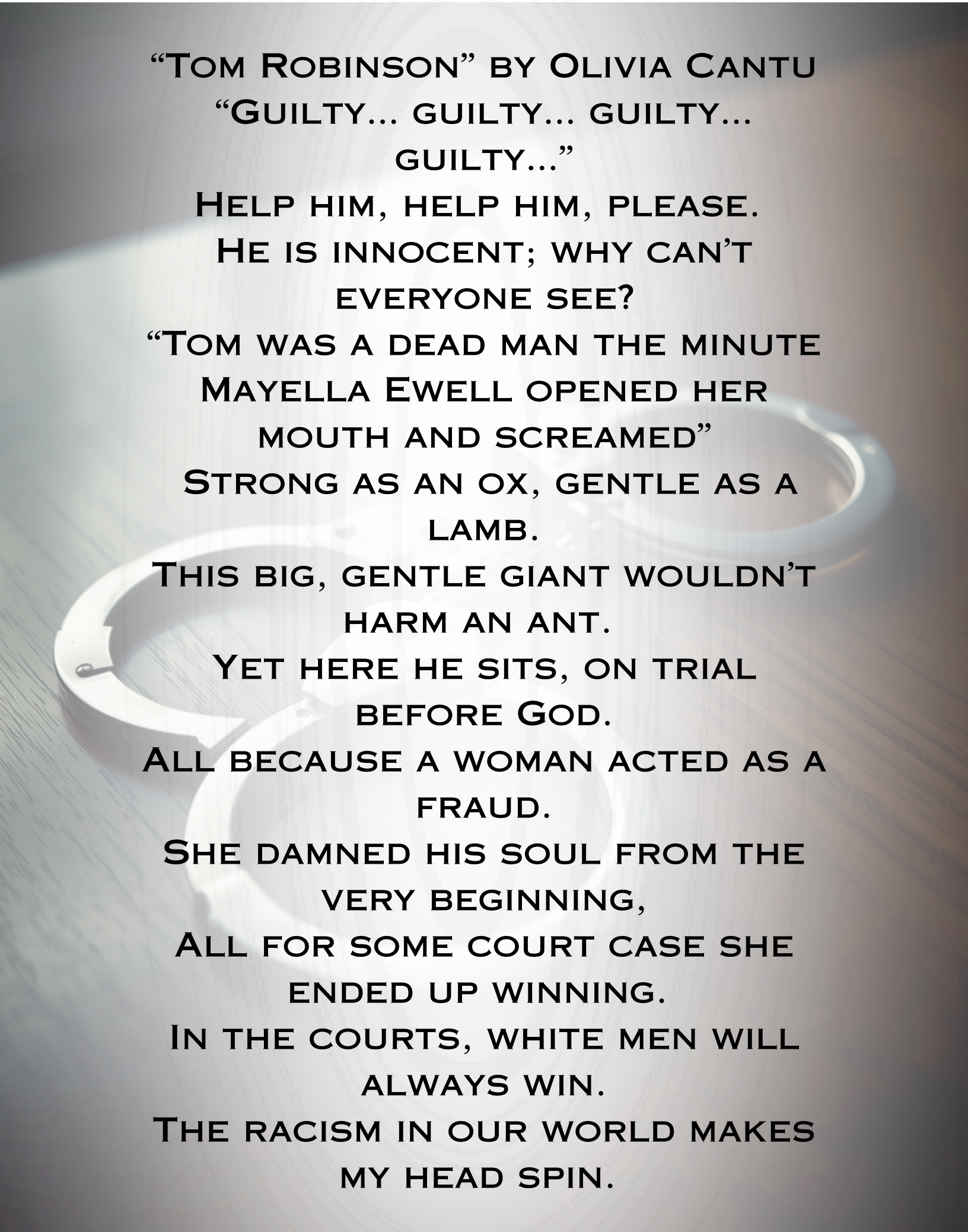
“Dream” By James Whitcomb Riley

Because her eyes were far too deep
And holy, for a laugh to leap
Across the brink where sorrow tried
To drown within the amber tide;
Because the looks, whose ripples kissed
The trembling lids through tender mist,

We're dazzled with a radiant gleam--
Because of this, I called her "Dream."
Because the roses growing wild
About her features when she smiled
Were ever dewed with tears that fell
With tenderness ineffable;
Because her lips might spill a kiss
That, dripping in a world like this,
Would tincture death's myrrh-bitter stream
To sweetness—so I called her "Dream."
Because I could not understand
The magic touches of a hand
That seemed, beneath her strange control,
To smooth the plumage of the soul
And calm it, till, with folded wings,
It half-forgot its flutterings,
And, nestled in her palm, did seem
To trill a song that was called her "Dream."
Because I saw her, asleep
As dark and desolate and deep
And fleeting as the taunting night
That flings a vision of delight
To some lorn martyr as he lies
In slumber ere the day he dies--
Because she vanished like a gleam
Of glory, I call her "Dream."

“the world” by brielle ryan

the world
is an ocean
it washes.
over me
sounds
of water
drown
my heart
panic
becomes
large
the world
hurt me
and i
comfort myself



“Tom Robinson” by Olivia Cantu

“Guilty… guilty… guilty…
guilty…”
Help him, help him, please.
He is innocent; why can’t
everyone see?
“Tom was a dead man the minute
Mayella Ewell opened her
mouth and screamed”
Strong as an ox, gentle as a
lamb.
This big, gentle giant wouldn’t
harm an ant.
Yet here he sits, on trial
before God.
All because a woman acted as a
fraud.
She damned his soul from the
very beginning,
All for some court case she
ended up winning.
In the courts, white men will
always win.
The racism in our world makes
my head spin.

“Atticus Finch” by Ellie Greenman

During his first five years in Maycomb, Atticus practiced economy more than anything; for several years thereafter he invested his earnings in his brother’s education.
Simon would have regarded with impotent fury the disturbance between the North and the South, as it left his descendants stripped of everything but their land, yet the tradition of living on the land remained unbroken until well into the twentieth century, when my father,
Atticus Finch went to Montgomery to read law, and my younger brother went to Boston to study medicine.
Their sister Alexandra was the Finch who remained at the Landing: Atticus was related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town.
During his first five years in Maycomb he practiced economics.
Atticus invested his earnings from practicing economics. He invested it in his brother's education.
He went to Montgomery to read law, while his younger brother went to Boston, and his sister remained at Finch Landing.
Atticus was related to almost every family in Maycomb; he was either related by marriage or blood.

“Jeremy Atticus Finch” by Madelyn Hartman

An adventurous and mature gentleman
Just like his father He is brave and smart and fun
His kindness, never falters
Like a father He protects his sister scout
Like a man He works hard, no doubt
Still more to learn A jolly young child His personality
Never just mild Jem Finch, a kind young man
A true follower of Gods plan

"Mrs. Dubose" by Josie Villani

Spitting fire with her tongue
She seems simple at first glance
A violent old hag, they thought
But really all she wanted was a chance
Morphine ruled her body
But her mind was set
She was to be freed from her captor
And out of its debt
And for the kids that save her
Wrapped in cotton
Lies a Camellia.
So her memory will never be forgotten

“Atticus” by Anna Young

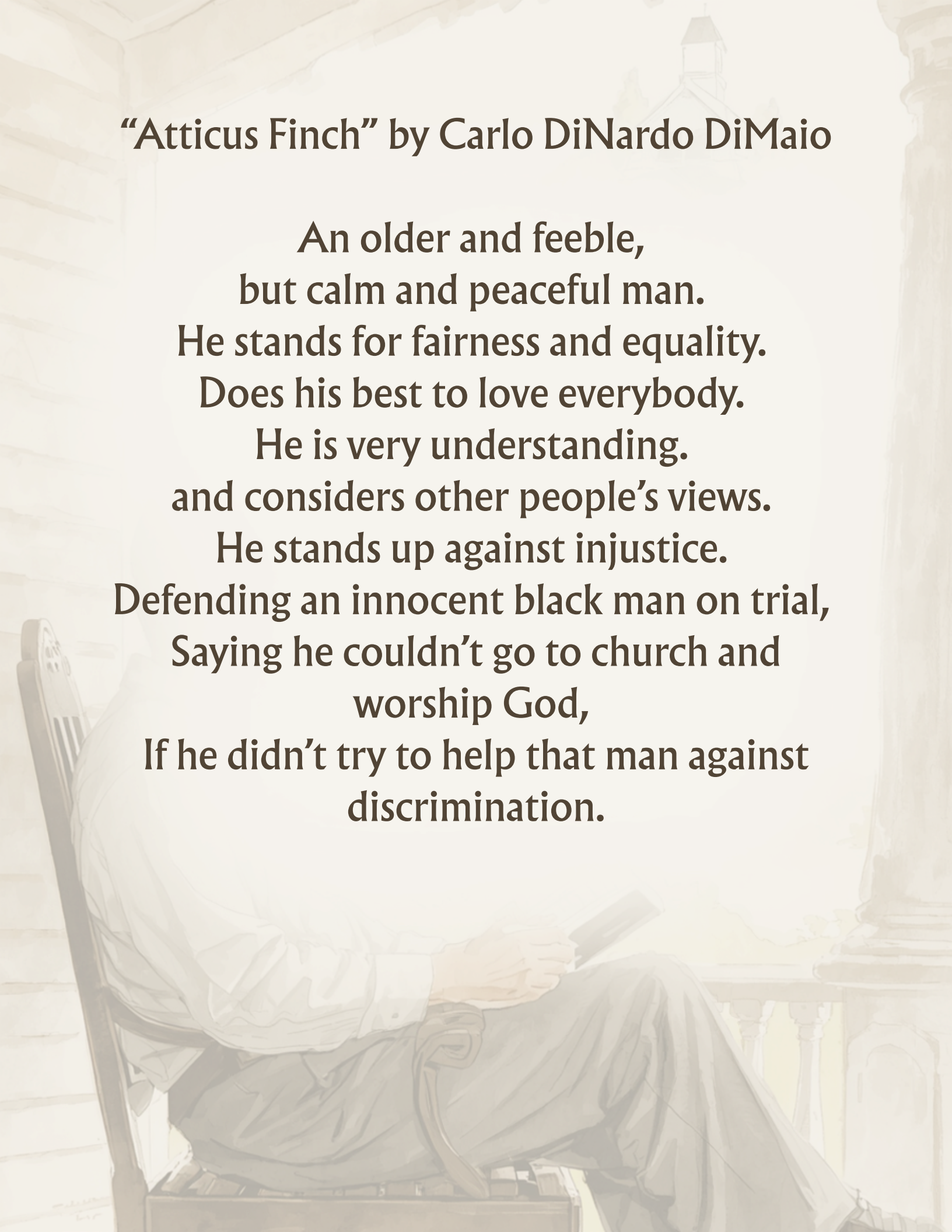
A very wise man,
Everyone knows where he stands.
He has beliefs that don’t cease.
If there is a fight, he will listen to
both sides,
and he’ll say they were both right.
He knows real courage is knowing
that you are licked but still
beginning.
Equality is very important to him.
and he is quite fair.
He’s a role model to many,
his children and others in his town.



“THE WISDOM OF BEING ATTICUS” BY SIENNA COLIO

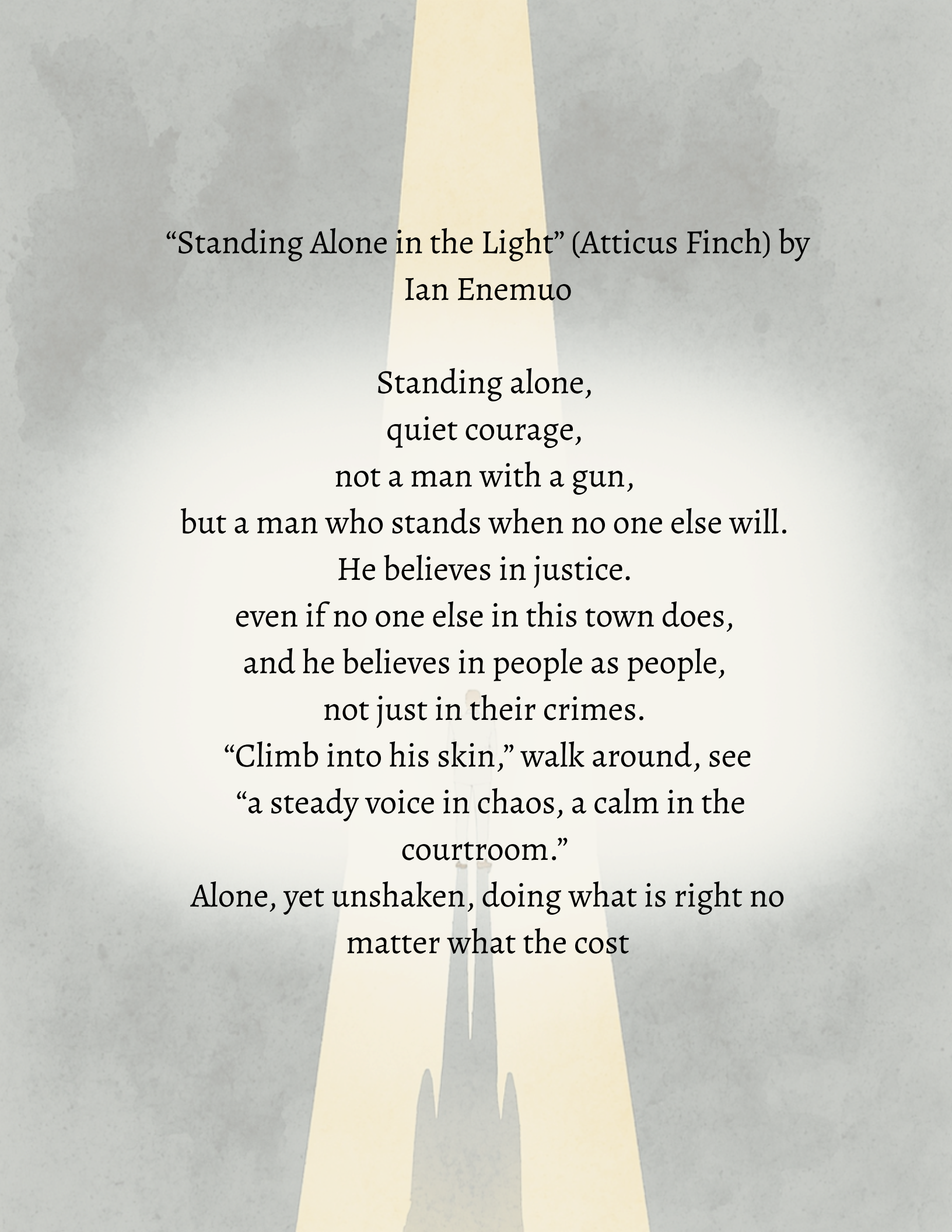
MY FATHER ATTICUS,
FEEBLE, NEARLY FIFTY,
MUCH OLDER THAN THE OTHER PARENTS.
WASN'T INTERESTED IN GUNS OR SHOOTING.
NEVER REMAINED AN INCONSPICUOUS MAN;
DEFENDED THE MOCKINGBIRD
WHO WAS RATHER SHOT AT THAN A TIN CAN.
FOUGHT THE HARDEST FOR TOM ROBINSON.
WHILE SCHOOL BUZZED WITH TALK,
MY FATHER WAS RIGHT;
IT’S A SIN TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD.





“Atticus Finch” by Carlo DiNardo DiMaio

An older and feeble,
but calm and peaceful man.
He stands for fairness and equality.
Does his best to love everybody.
He is very understanding.
and considers other people’s views.
He stands up against injustice.
Defending an innocent black man on trial,
Saying he couldn’t go to church and
worship God,
If he didn’t try to help that man against
discrimination.



“Standing Alone in the Light” (Atticus Finch) by Ian Enemuo

Standing alone,
quiet courage,
not a man with a gun,
but a man who stands when no one else will.
He believes in justice.
even if no one else in this town does,
and he believes in people as people,
not just in their crimes.
“Climb into his skin,” walk around, see
“a steady voice in chaos, a calm in the courtroom.”
Alone, yet unshaken, doing what is right no matter what the cost

"JEM" BY NATALIE JANKOWSKI

JEM STANDS QUIET IN A ROOM. HE'S NOT
LOUD BUT PAYS ATTENTION
A PRESENCE THAT YOU CAN'T MISS
IT'S SOFT AND QUIET
HE WATCHES EVERYBODY THROUGH HIS EYES
WHILE EVERYONE LIES
HE SEES STRAIGHT THROUGH THEM
IN A TOWN WHERE LIES SPREAD AROUND
HE SEES WHAT'S UNFAIR
EVEN THOUGH HE'S NOT THE LOUDEST IN THE ROOM
HIS THOUGHTS ARE THE LOUDEST IN HIS MIND
WHATEVER WILL HAPPEN HE WILL STAND
FOR THE RIGHT SIDE
JEM REMINDS US THAT EVEN THE QUIETEST
PEOPLE HAVE THE LOUDEST THOUGHTS
THAT THE QUIETEST PEOPLE CAN SEE
THROUGH OTHERS

"JEM FINCH" BY JULIA JOSEPH

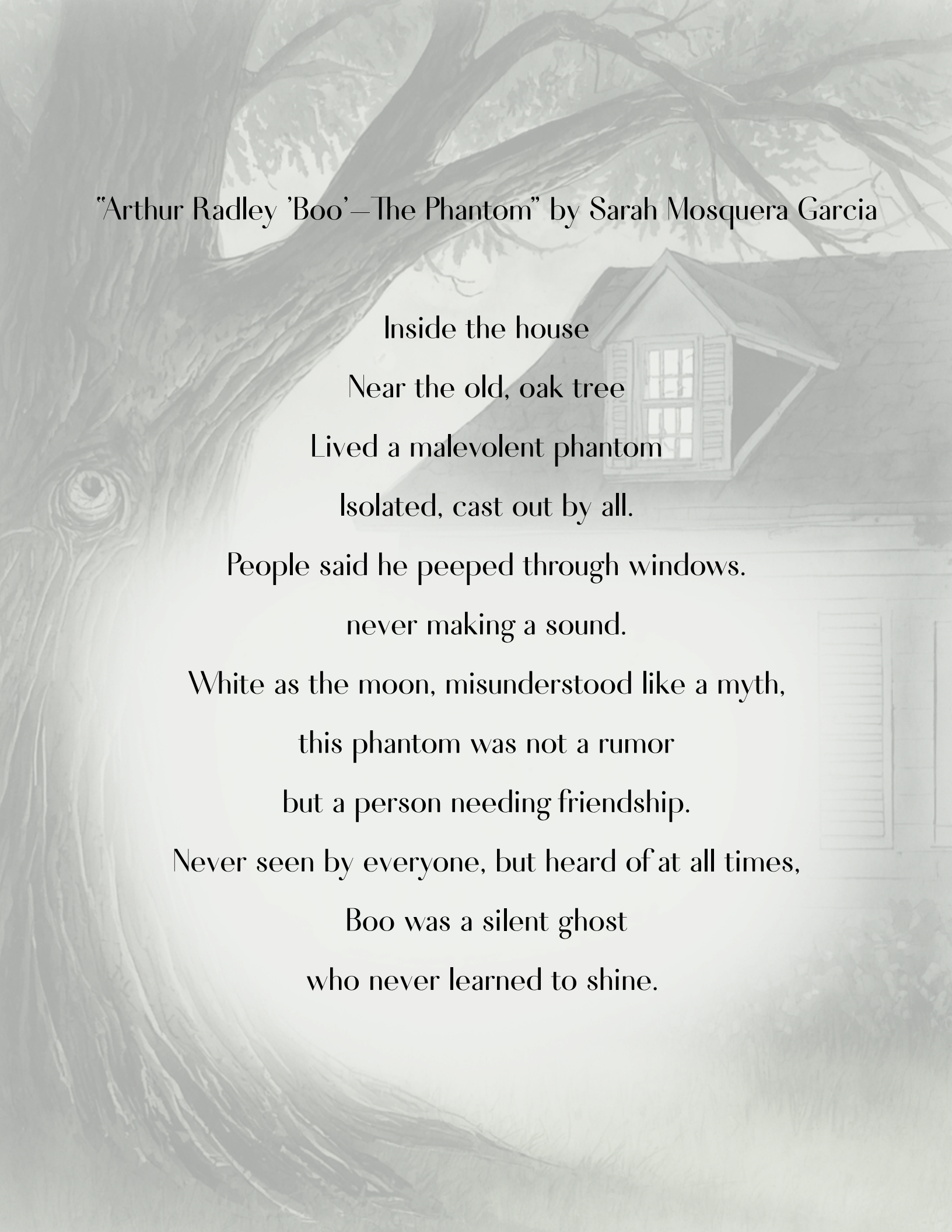
HE WAS INCONSISTENT.
MOODY
LIKE THE BEST FOLKS IN THE WORLD.
WHO HAVE ANGRY EYES THAT SCREAM
"HOW COULD THEY?"
AND TEARS THAT FALL,
ONLY WHEN THINGS GO WRONG
HE WAS A TWELVE-YEAR-OLD.
WHO WANTED TO SEE... REAL COURAGE.

“How Scout Sees Jem” by Megan Kling

My brother Jem
was four years my senior,
In years Jem was ahead.
Jem comforted me.
he told me to hush.
”Don’t worry, Scout,” he said.
He was all I had; his laugh was happy.
Jem looked at me and his eyes would lighten.
Ever since Jem was born,
I have been less frightened.
Jem’s growing up now,
I still want to play.
Jem and I always thought it funny.
And I just want to keep it that way.
Jem’s growing up now,
I still wished to play.
But looking at it sadly,
Mister Jem now stays away.

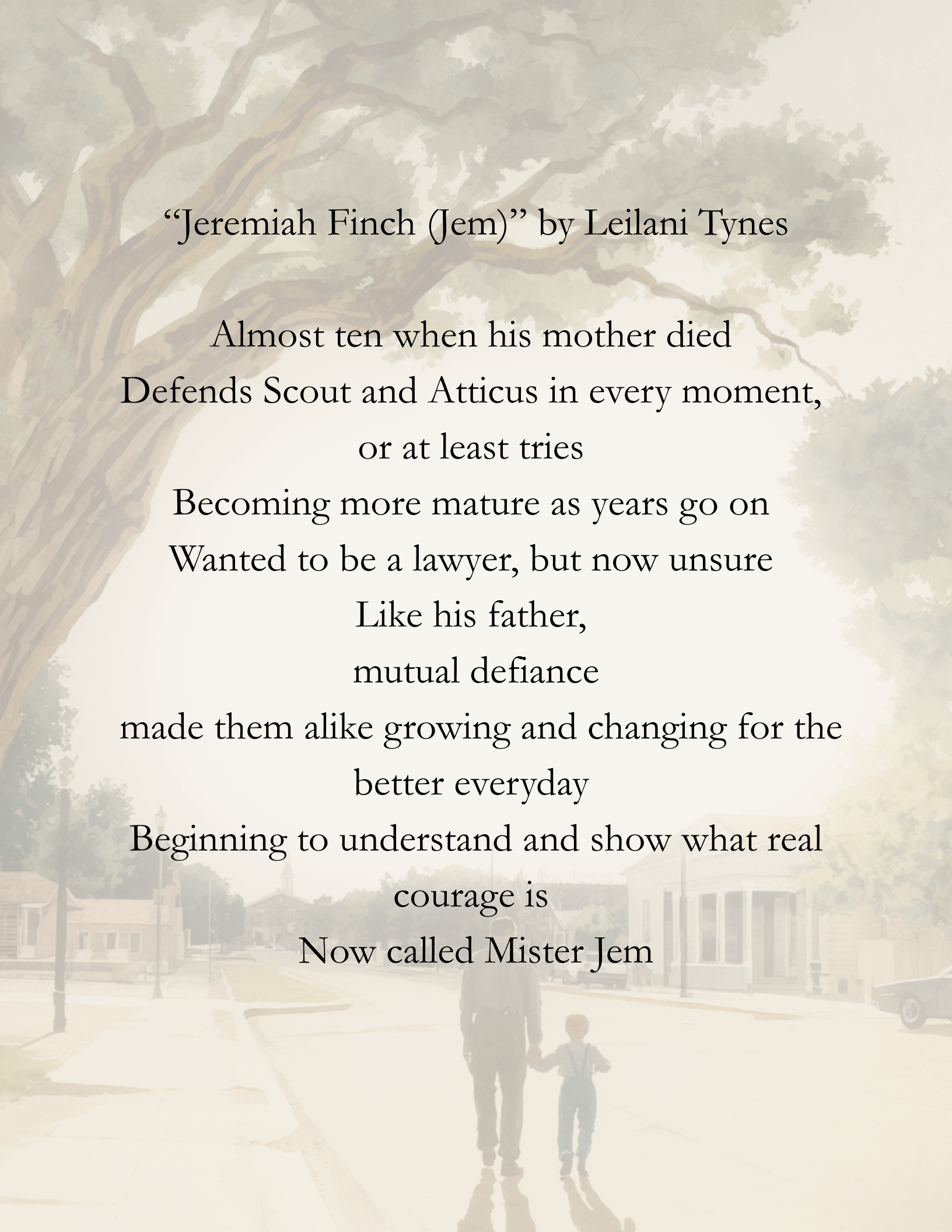
Arthur (Boo Radley) by Giulliana Lalo

Walking south, you face its porch.
The house was low, and it looked scorched.
Behind the shutters lived a malevolent phantom.
According to Miss Stephanie, he threw many tantrums.
Boo Radley was about six feet tall.
Many called him a monster, which was not true at all.
He watches over the children while they walk and play.
Leaving them gifts they could put on display.
Many are wrong about Boo Radley.
He's very alone and kept in his room sadly.



"Arthur Radley 'Boo'—The Phantom" by Sarah Mosquera Garcia

Inside the house
Near the old, oak tree
Lived a malevolent phantom
Isolated, cast out by all.
People said he peeped through windows.
never making a sound.
White as the moon, misunderstood like a myth,
this phantom was not a rumor
but a person needing friendship.
Never seen by everyone, but heard of at all times,
Boo was a silent ghost
who never learned to shine.



"Jeremiah Finch (Jem)" by Leilani Tynes

Almost ten when his mother died
Defends Scout and Atticus in every moment,
or at least tries
Becoming more mature as years go on
Wanted to be a lawyer, but now unsure
Like his father,
mutual defiance
made them alike growing and changing for the
better everyday
Beginning to understand and show what real
courage is
Now called Mister Jem

“Real Courage” by Amaya Walker

mean words
sharp tongue
a voice that cuts
anger on the porch
watching everything
children pass
she judges
but inside
a different battle
pain every day
hands shaking
breath unsteady
fighting chains
no one can see
not a gun
not a war
real courage
standing alone
facing fear
without running
free at last
owing nothing
to anyone

“Atticus Finch” by Allie Zakrzewski

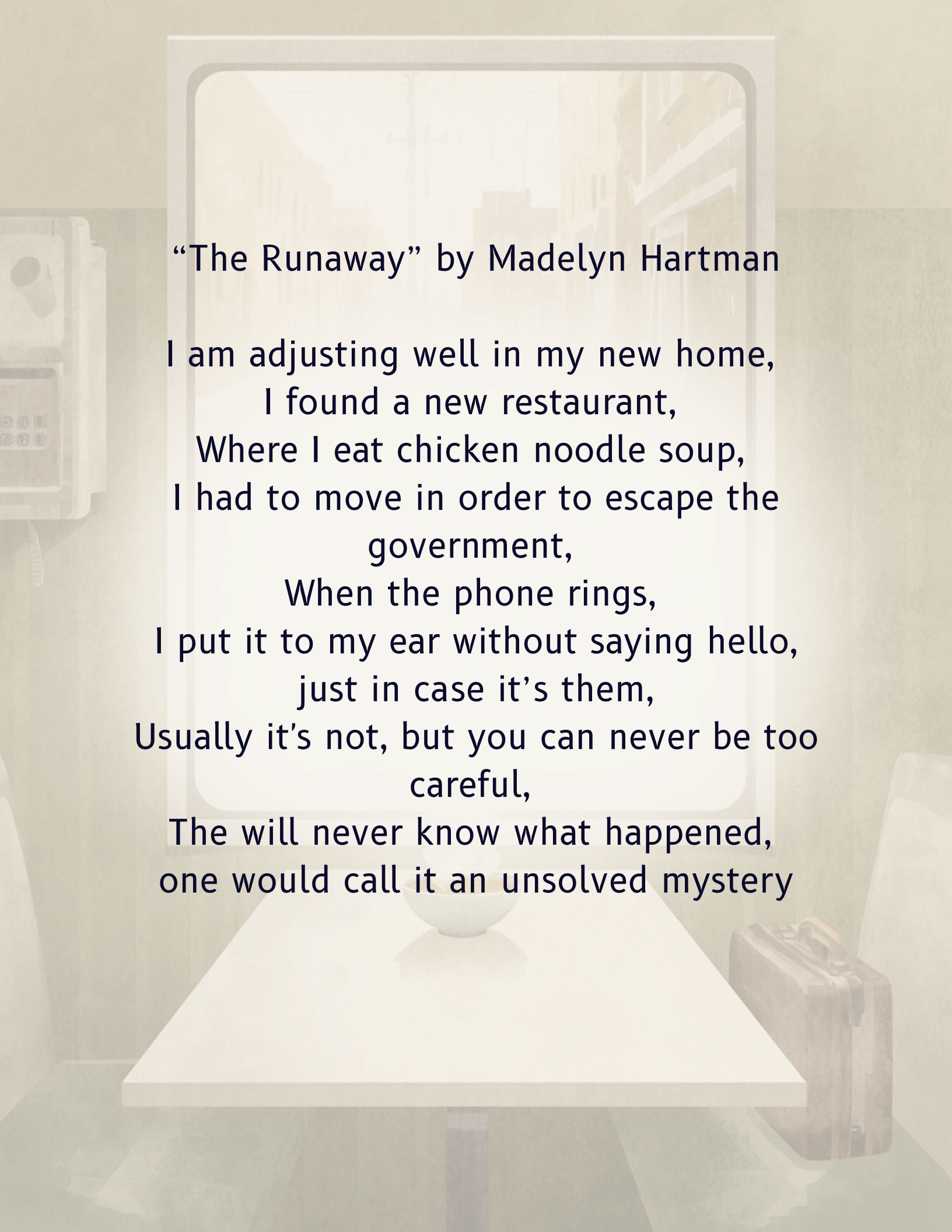
Standing tall in the courtrooms,
Atticus’ courage seems to bloom
Although majority seem to contradict,
His integrity was never tricked
On the public streets he’s known,
For never raising his tone
Atticus’ conscience
demonstrates bravery,
While fighting for Tom
who is typecast

“FLOWERS” BY OLIVIA CANTU

THEY SAY FLOWERS ARE GIVEN ONLY
TO THE DEAD.
I DISAGREE.
THEY’RE GIVEN TO THE LOVED,
THE GIFTED,
AND EVEN THE NEWLY WEDDED.
THEY SYMBOLIZE GRACE,
PEACE, AND LOVE.
I PERSONALLY THINK,
THEY’RE NOT JUST FOR ANGELS
ABOVE.

“We Suspect” by Ellie Greenman

We are coming to suspect
that the ocean is different than we thought.
We’re coming to realize
that the ocean is even deeper
than we first believed.
The glassy water splashes around the hull,
And on the shore of the earth.
The everlasting breathing of the seas constantly moving in blue naïveté.



“The Runaway” by Madelyn Hartman

I am adjusting well in my new home,
I found a new restaurant,
Where I eat chicken noodle soup,
I had to move in order to escape the government,
When the phone rings,
I put it to my ear without saying hello,
just in case it’s them,
Usually it’s not, but you can never be too careful,
The will never know what happened,
one would call it an unsolved mystery

“Phone Call” by Jake Jimenez

Long Awaited Phone Call in Space
When she put the phone to my ear.
Without saying hello, I listen to my
long-distance love.
I whisper, "I love you."
I’m coming to suspect about our
fantasies on Earth.
I am adjusting to the new chicken
noodle soup.
When she doesn't respond.
I realize we have strayed from the line
of breath.
After that, I whisper her lines.
And travel through space forever.

"Everlasting Love" by Ariana Sabharwal

Without saying hello.
We look into each other's eyes.
And slowly whisper
I love you
We're coming to suspect
that our love is everlasting
The word "space" does not come in our drift
Our love is deeper than we first believed
Without a measured quantity in sight Our love is
Everlasting

“Long Love” by Drew Schubkegel

The love we had was even deeper
then we first believed
The government decided where you lived
After we learned,
we just sat on the line and listened to each other breathe
We measured it with a quantity of insight
He grabbed a drink to sooth the pain,
“I saved the rest for you." “I love you.”
He said, choking down the pain.
He just looked and saw the expression on her face.
He knows that she loves him but just can’t say it.

“Eyes” by Josie Villani

In an effort to get people
to look into each others
eyes more,
and to spark actual conversation,
the government has decided
to limit people’s time on phones
to a half hour per day.
The phone rings, and I put it to my ear
without saying hello,
as I know it will waste my time.
I am adjusting to the new way well.
Late at night, I call my long-distance love,
knowing I only have four minutes left.
We sit in silence for two minutes before
I finally say I saved my time for you
Our last two minutes end too fast, so fast that
I don’t hang up.
The next day, I hear a bang on my door.
Thirty-four minutes, they say. Even as
I get escorted to the car and driven far, far
away from my home,
I don’t regret the extra minutes with her.

“Different” by Sienna Colio

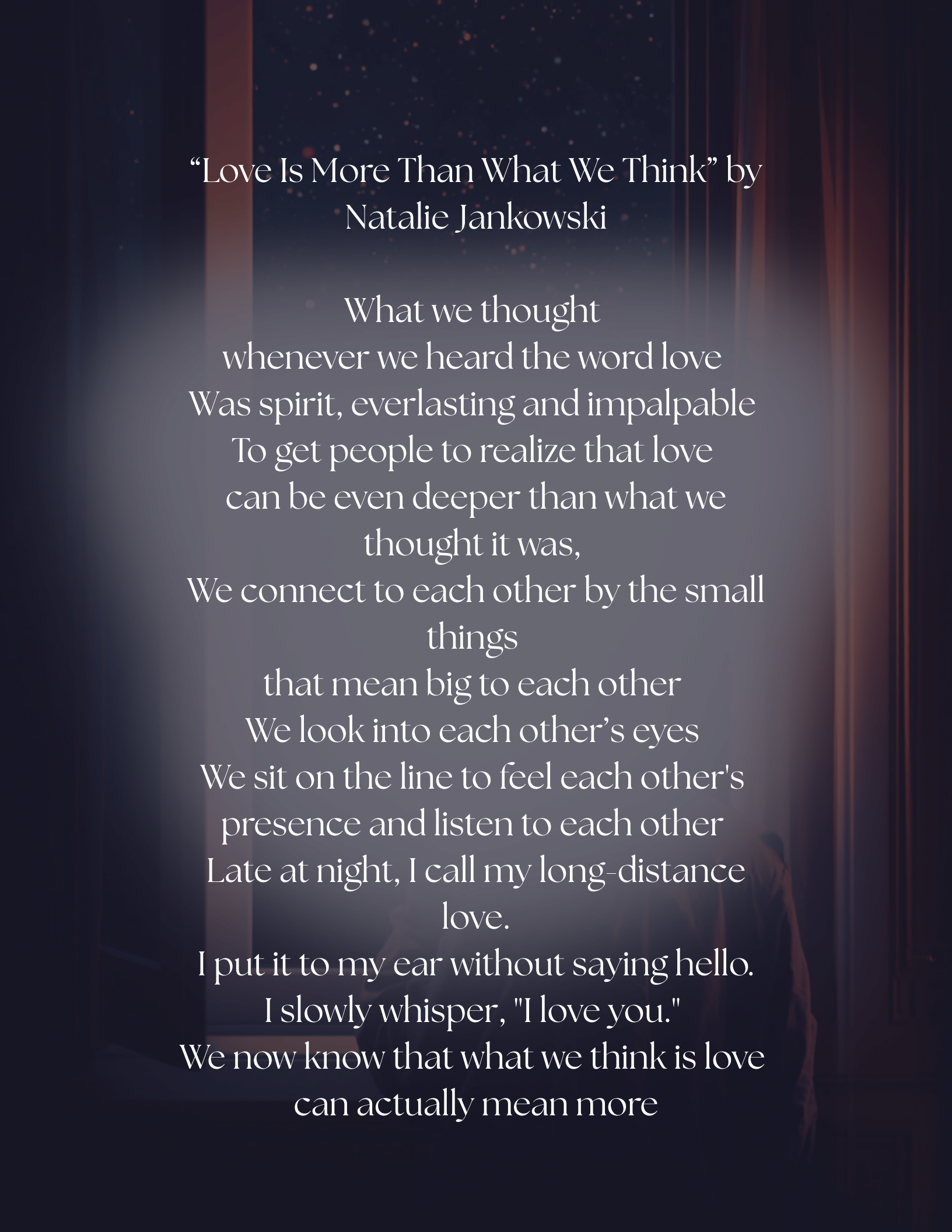
Decked out by fantasies,
Our naivete has made us
look into each others eyes
Slowly suspecting that
Earth is just a fantasy
Adjusting to a structure where we don’t respond
We listen to each person
At night, we just sit, listen and point
The spirit of the Earth is a mystery
Its structure is everlasting. It’s different.

“Drifting” by Carlo DiNardo DiMaio

We have become a quiet world
Communication continues to
weaken as time goes by,
As though we have a limited amount of words per day
We go on the phone without saying hello
We don’t even look each other in the eye.
We continue to stray from the right way.
The way we are supposed to converse,
The way we are intended to live in unity.
We have drifting away from each other
More than we ever first believed.

“Saving Words in Space” by Ian Enemuo

The government gives us
exactly one hundred words,
but space has no number.
I put the phone to my ear and don’t say hello,
Just listen to breathing.
We are drifting deeper than we thought.
In a quiet world,
where knowledge feels small.
I save my words for love,
floating in spiritual seas.

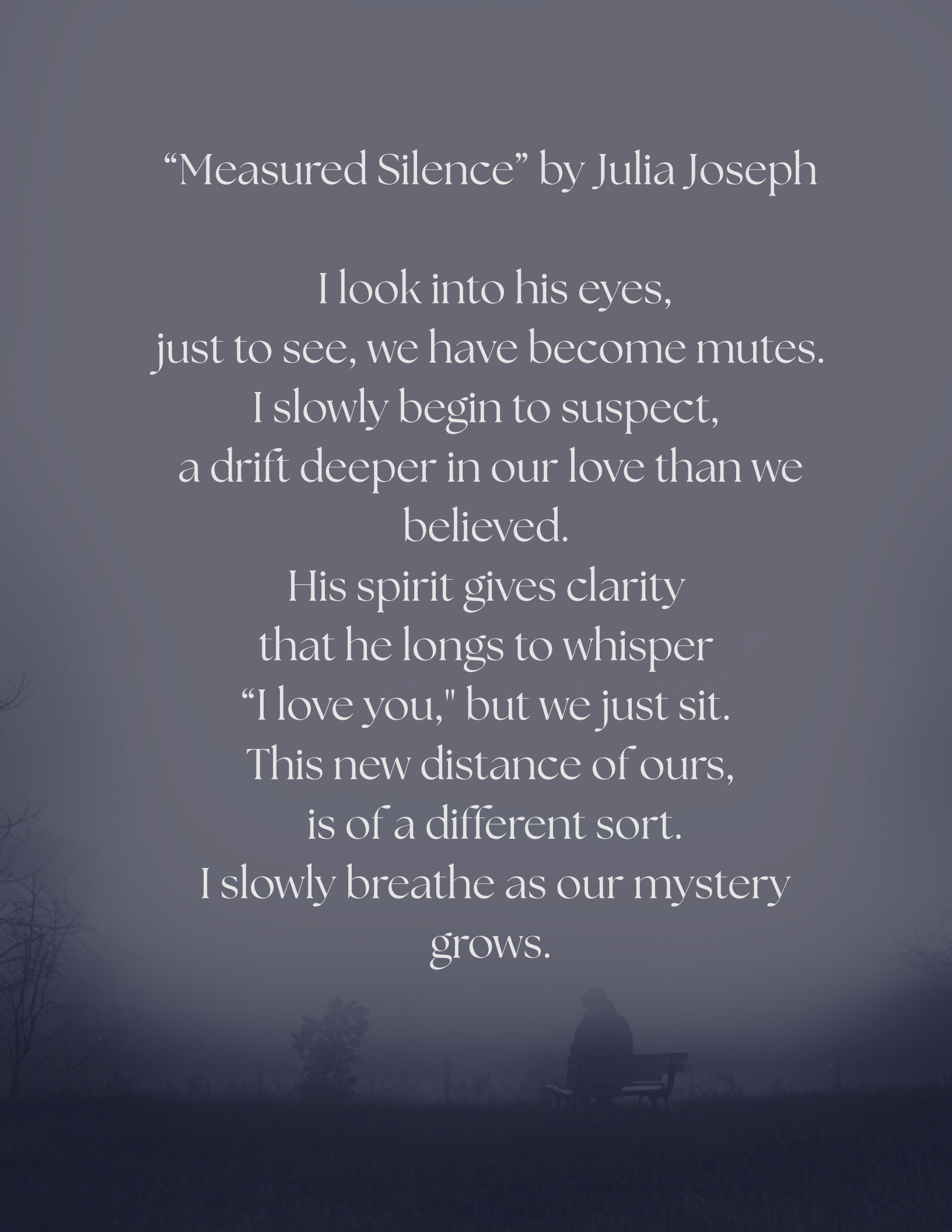


“Love Is More Than What We Think” by Natalie Jankowski

What we thought
whenever we heard the word love
Was spirit, everlasting and impalpable
To get people to realize that love
can be even deeper than what we
thought it was,
We connect to each other by the small
things
that mean big to each other
We look into each other’s eyes
We sit on the line to feel each other's
presence and listen to each other
Late at night, I call my long-distance
love.
I put it to my ear without saying hello.
I slowly whisper, "I love you."
We now know that what we think is love
can actually mean more

“Measured Silence” by Julia Joseph

I look into his eyes,
just to see, we have become mutes.
I slowly begin to suspect,
a drift deeper in our love than we
believed.
His spirit gives clarity
that he longs to whisper
“I love you," but we just sit.
This new distance of ours,
is of a different sort.
I slowly breathe as our mystery
grows.



“Came Too Far”

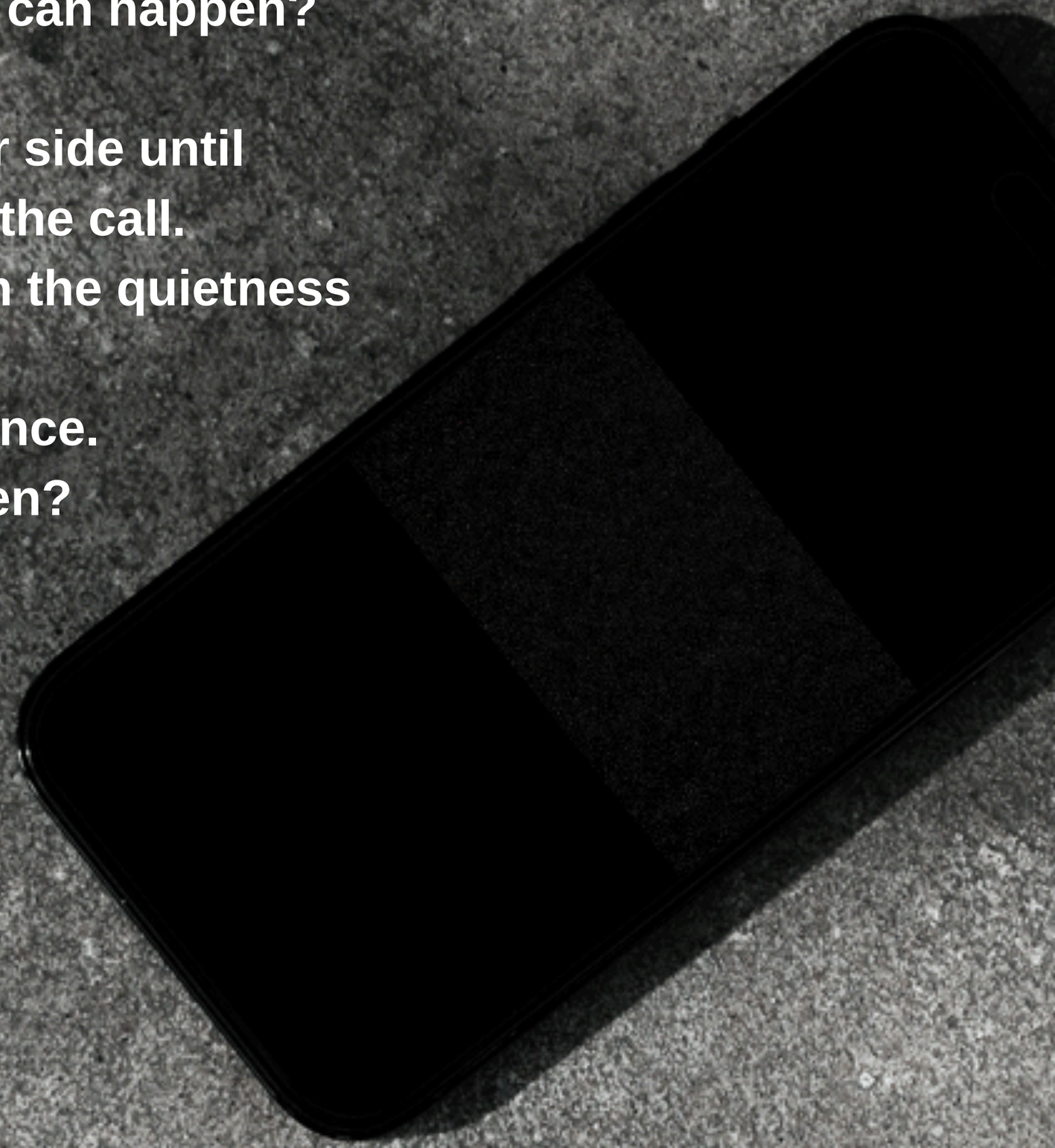
By Megan Kling

I am coming to suspect
that we have strayed
A long distance
deeper than we first believed.
What we claimed when
we first believed
We were decked out by our fantasies.
But she has decided it was a long distance off.
All her words are of a different sort
Then what we thought they were.
“I am adjusting well," I proudly say.
She doesn't respond.
It is too late now.
If I only had that knowledge earlier.

“Being In the Moment”
by Giulliana Lalo
In the restaurant
I point at chicken noodle soup.
No words said,
and no questions asked.
Instead of doing my regular greetings,
I just wave and smile at my friends.
I am adjusting well to the new way.
In an effort to get people
to look into each other’s eyes more,
the government has decided to limit
the number of words each person has each day.
They think by doing this, we will see people
for who they really are. Late at night,
jme in the moment.bt
I call my long-distance love.
I’m ready to tell her all about my day, and how
I saved my last words for her.
When she doesn’t respond,
I know she used all her words.
Which makes me think,
Was I not a top priority to her?
Why did she not save a few words to talk to me?
I use my last words to tell her how much I love her,
but there are still thoughts stuck in my head.
After that, we just sit on the line and listen
to each other breathe.

“What’s the Worst that can Happen?” By Sarah Mosquera Garcia

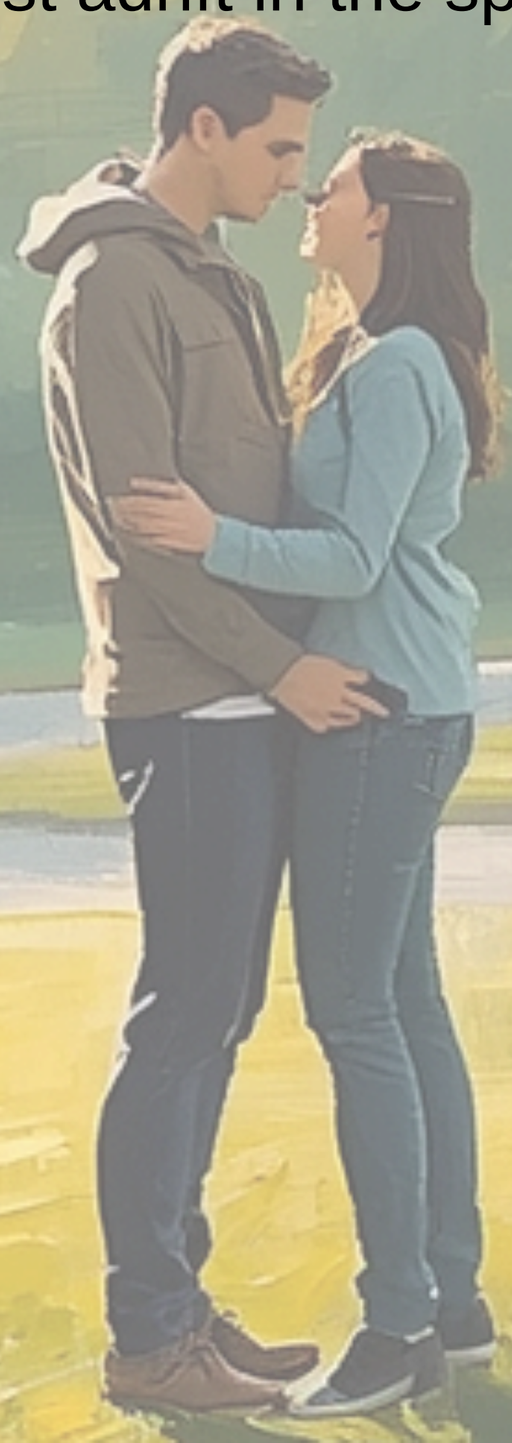
I stare at the screen,
rehearsing the words one too many times,
as I try to make an effort to dial your number.
I stop short—closing my eyes
and dive deeper into my mind.
What’s the worst that could happen?
You might respond or you might leave
without saying a word.
Both scare me, nonetheless.
But really, what's the worst that can happen?
I travel through my fantasies
of what could await on the other side until
I suspect you must be awaiting the call.
I snap back into reality as I sit in the quietness
and stillness of the streetlight
listening for a voice of reassurance.
What’s the worst that can happen?
I try to imagine your voice,
echoing faintly and everlasting
in the depths of my mind.



“Adrift in Spirit”

by Corrine Park

We're coming to suspect
now that our drift is even deeper
than we first believed,
that we have strayed in spiritual seas.
I call my long-distance love and
I slowly whisper, "I love you."
But we can only listen to each other breathe.
My love is spirit, everlasting and impalpable.
Late at night with a measured quantity of insight,
We were decked out on our fantasies,
traveling in the hull of space
The phone mutes,
after that I just sit on the line.
I am adjusting well to the new way.
I imagine that the mystery has structure.
Although I feel a glassy clarity
whilst adrift in the spiritual seas.



“IT STAYS” By Margot Squires

Beyond the extent
of the human mind,
lay strayed in spiritual seas
lies Mystery.
Its structure unfathomable
and impalpable,
It stays waiting.
Working through the neurons
of the everlasting expanse
of the brain.
Incomprehensible by even itself,
It stays waiting.
And furthermore we cannot even
begin to hear
It listens to the quiet moments
of our seclusion as it stays
waiting.

“Lost Love” by Leilani Tynes

I love you, I say.
She doesn’t respond.
We are suspecting, those three words
are all she cannot say.
Our knowledge is novice.
I called her again,
without saying hello.
Mystery has structure,
but in our world it is small.
We watch, and just sit for
something that has disappeared.
To reach what is lost,
I hold my hand out,
waiting but get no response.

Precious Words

By Allie Zakrzewski

In a world where silence is common,
Society must allot our voices with caution.
While I will waste my interaction
with a point,
It only takes no response,
to create a drypoint.
I refuse to appease the space with no sound,
As today, a simple “hello”
lingers all around.
A word is not just sound that hogs the air,
It is the only gift to reveal that we are near.

"THE HORN WILL ECHO ON"

BY CAITLIN GARRY

I COULD HEAR THE HORN BLAST
AS THE AIR SWIRLED WITH GLASS
I THOUGHT THIS HORRENDOUS CLASH
WILL CEASE TO PAST
AS I CLUNG THE WHEEL

THE SMELL OF GAS LINGERED THE AIR
AS I PLEADED THIS ISN'T FAIR
BUT NOT AN EAR OPEN TO HEAR
AS MY EYES BRIMMED WITH TEARS
AN EVENT THAT WILL NEVER DISAPPEAR

“Just Because”
By Gabriella Danzi

Just because
I don’t go to parties.
Doesn’t mean I’m a buzzkill.
Just because
I don’t drink.
Doesn’t mean I’m uptight.
Just because
I don’t vape.
Doesn’t mean I'm boring.
Just because
I am saving myself for marriage.
Doesn’t mean I’m weird.
Just because
I have a different mindset.
Doesn’t mean I’m bizarre.
Just because I gave up my life to Jesus,
Doesn’t make me a weirdo
And by giving my life up to Jesus,
I have made many sacrifices.
And I'm okay with it.
Just because
I have different morals.
Why should anyone care?
Why should anyone judge?
Why should anyone look down on me?
I have different morals.
I don’t fit in with the world.
and that is okay.
But the world doesn’t fit in with me.
I closed the door behind me
that strays me away from Jesus.
I’m not like kids in my generation.
I ran from those world-like decisions.
And now I’m considered an outcast.
But that is okay.
because now I’m an outcast with Jesus,
and I couldn’t be happier.

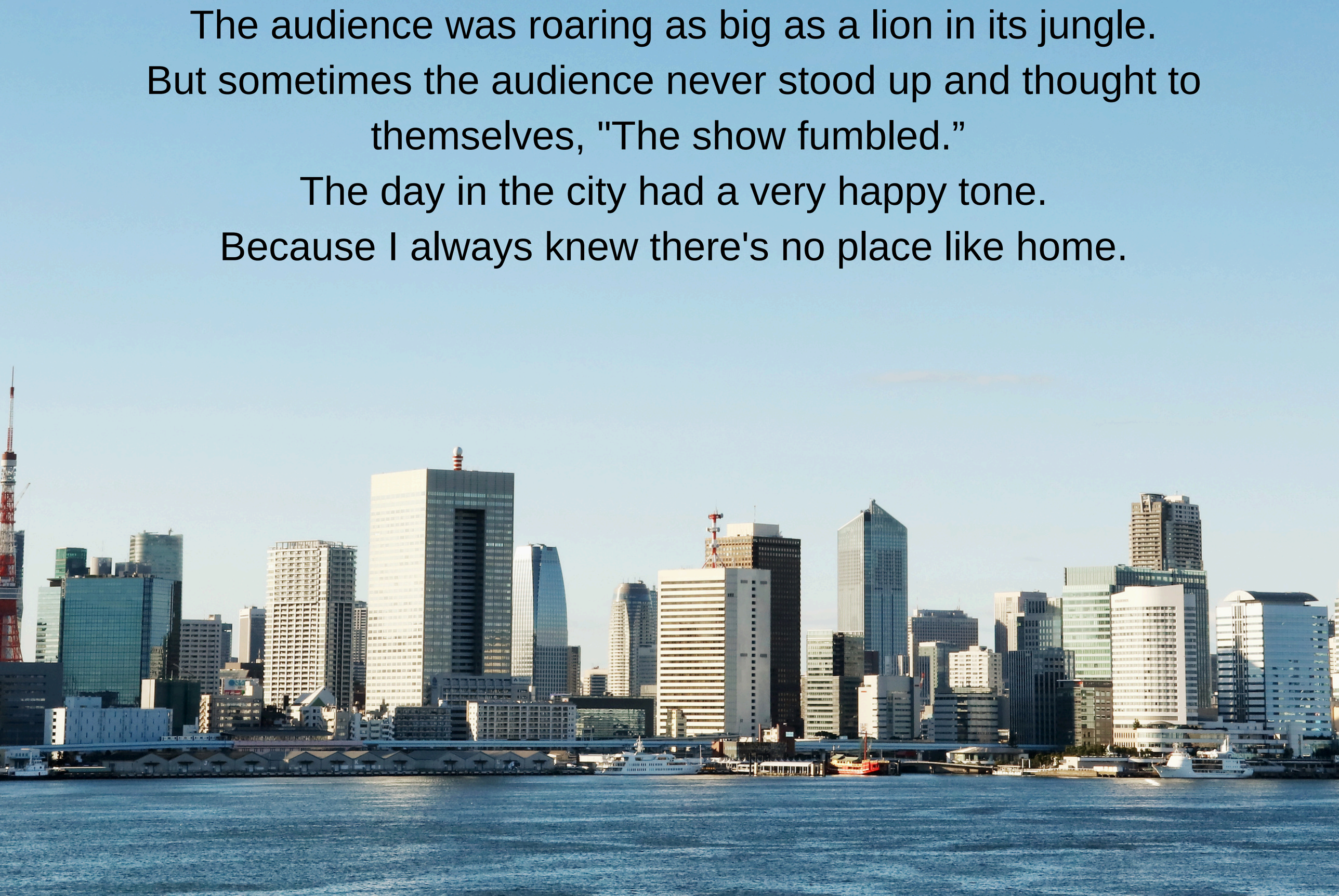


“Cento Poem” by Austin Workman

I wandered lonely as a cloud
I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
I taste a liquor never brewed,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons
I have promises to keep,
I felt a Funeral in my Brain,
I am large; I contain multitudes.
I dwell in Possibility—
I shall be telling this with a sigh

“A Day In The City” by Nicolas Vivar

Spending the day in the city with my family always feels like a dream.
The tall buildings were bigger than the whole sky and not like they seemed.
The bright lights and flashy buildings made me seem like I was on top of the world.
But sometimes the people looked like they never danced, never twirled.
Seeing a show on Broadway made me want to perform on that stage.
I always loved seeing that the story always flipped a page.
The audience was roaring as big as a lion in its jungle.
But sometimes the audience never stood up and thought to themselves, "The show fumbled.”
The day in the city had a very happy tone.
Because I always knew there's no place like home.



“The Concrete Whisperer”

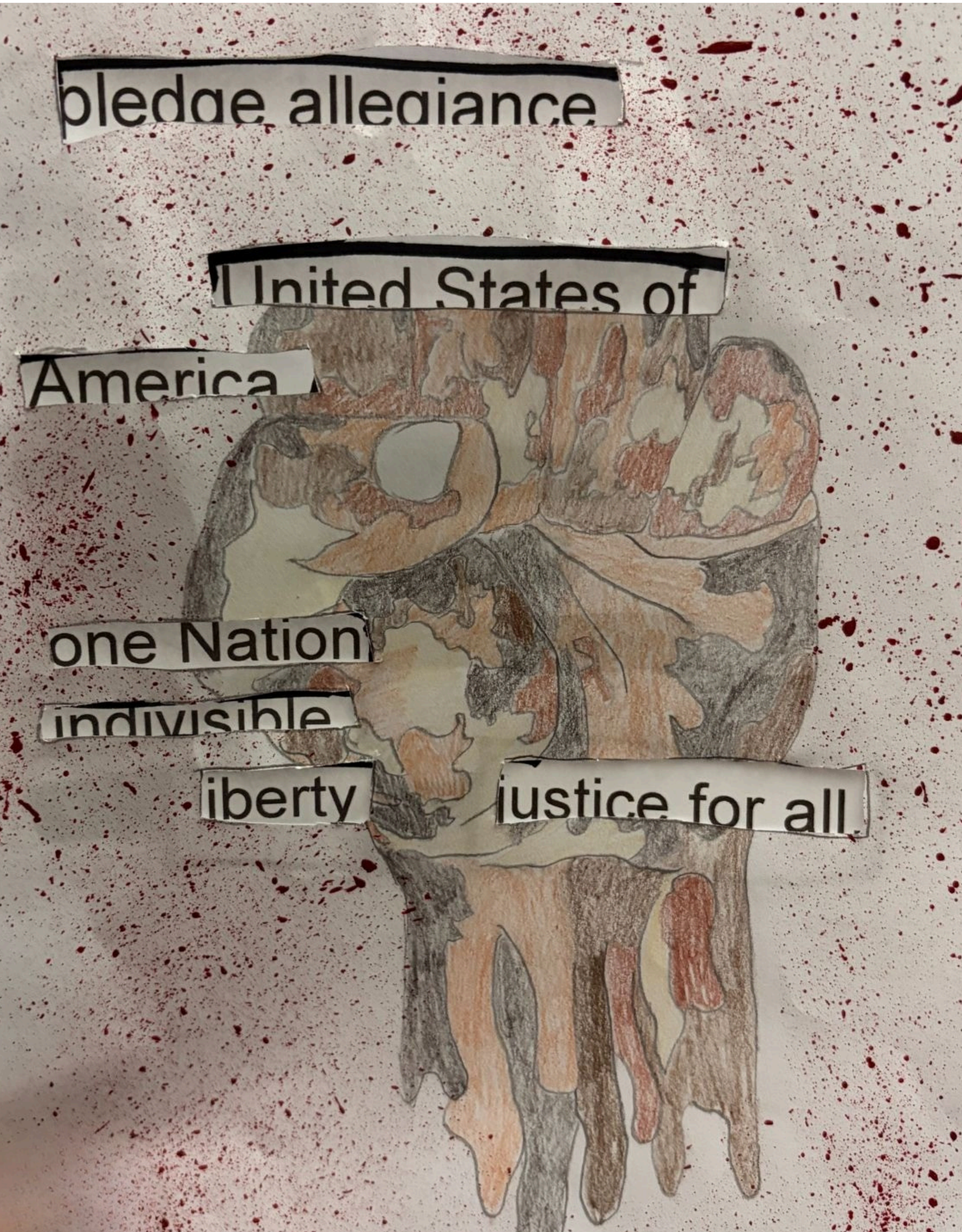
By Kylie MacDonald

A hot, thick hush
the air before the break,
still as a waiting drum.
Then, a single, fat splat
on the parched sidewalk,
a dark coin marking the start.
Now the torrent—
Pitter-patter-clatter,
the drainpipe's frantic percussion.
Sleek taxis slide through shimmering sheets,
their tires a continuous, rushing shhh.
The streetlights, blurry suns,
spill yellow across the newly polished world,
and the sky weeps, a generous, cool sorrow
over the thirsty, steaming stone.

“Guarantee” by Noah Billeci

The whole field feels quiet now.
And the pads are all put away.
I used to run so fast on that field.
Now all I want is to chase those days.
The friendships that I got.
From all the people that I met.
All of you I am so thankful for.
I will forever be in your debt.
As time moves on.
I guess I will have to move on too.
However there’s one thing I guarantee.
I will never forget any of you.

“Pledge Allegiance” by Makiya Broady



“Termites” by Margot Squires

Termites in silken pyjamas
gnawing at the sycophantic atrocities
of the faults of their own kind.
Products they conjured
with their own feeble hands,
grasping
with superfluous desperation
for any infinitesimal gesticulation
of reassurance
that their feeble existence
is justified.
Despite their wretched natures
and despite their horrid ambitions
and aspirations,
they seek salvation
in the fissures they carved
by their own blood, sweat, and tears.
Fissures of
pride, greed, and the pursuit of knowledge.
A pickaxe of flesh
vehemently scouring the Earth
for knowledge beyond comprehension.
Witless of the breaking point,
when the flesh
creaks and groans
and everything crashes down.

“Kindness” by Mrs. Kane’s Period 5 2025-2026

Always be kind
You never know what’s on someone’s mind
A moment's patience when the world runs fast,
Ensures that kindness will last

A gentle word can lift a friend so high,
It doesn't take much effort to be great,
And no small loving gesture is too late,
To help them face the troubles passing by.

Sometimes you help someone without a plan,
You hold the door or lend a hand.
It doesn’t fix the world or change their life,
But makes things easier, less of a fight

In gentle acts, the heart’s true grace is shown,
where kindness sows a love deeply grown.
With proper care, friendships will bloom,
Bringing light into the classroom.

“Summer on the Cape” By: Madelyn McLaughlin

The sun shines hot,
Light bouncing off the sand.
Waves are crashing and splashing,
Rolling in and pulling back out.
Seagulls flying overhead,
Their cries are sharp in the sky.
The air smells salty,
Sand sticks to my feet.
Warm and tense, burning in spots,
Kids laugh and shout.
Building castles, chasing the waves,
The ocean sparkles,
Inviting everyone to cool down

“Blackout Poem” By Nicolas Armout
I did not permit myself
any liberties
the worst of all
forget yourself
you cannot forget yourself
in sleep
Therefore, you must forget yourself
in the dream of life!
with his usual firm step
solid, almost smiling

“Light Finds Me Again”
By Riley Fitzpatrick

“I am the dream and the hope of the slave."
“I celebrate myself, and sing myself."
“I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow."
“I am the soft star-shine one night." “I dwell in possibility."
“I rose and found the world so still."
“I am the one who looks, listens, and decides."
"I wandered lonely as a cloud."
“I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree."
“I am the blossom breaking from the storm."

“First Time in Aruba”

By Summer Lerro

The sun was warm on my skin as I stepped onto the island.
I saw transparent blue water expand infinitely into the horizon.
I heard the waves crash softly against the shore.
The air smelled like salt and sunscreen.
The sand felt hot and grainy under my feet.
I tasted sweet fruit and cold drinks by the beach.
The breeze brushed my face and cooled me down.
I watched palm trees sway slowly in the wind.
Everything felt calm, happy, and unreal at the same time.
That moment felt special because I was standing where my parents once began together.

“A Dog” by Alexander Marmara

A dog who was hungry at noon
Tried howling a snack-time cartoon.
He chased his own tail,
Got stuck in a pail,
Then realized the pail was a spoon.



“Risky Plan”

By Sebastian Bakas

In the year 2267, the country of Crovalkia was ruled by a brutal dictator known as the Iron Voice. No one knew his real name. His words came through massive floating screens every morning, ordering people where to work, what to think, and especially how to act. Cameras were scattered around the country everywhere, and if anyone dared to speak badly of the Iron Voice, they would mysteriously disappear. In this story 5 brave people who lived ordinary lives decided to stop following orders and live their own lives how they want.

The group was made up of 5 people. Lira, a brilliant coder; James, a former city guard who had seen the country's cruelty up close; Marty, a medical professional who treated people that were thrown in the dungeon by the government; Theo, a historian who studied life before the Iron Voice; and Astra, a street runner who knew each city like the back of her hand. Each of them had suffered in different ways serving the Iron Voice, but all shared the same motivation: freedom. Their country is tightly controlled, and it was up to them to free people and restore the country to its former glory.

The country of Crovalkia was terrible. Huge metal buildings blocked out the sun. The factories that emitted nonstop smoke didn’t make it any better either. Glowing rails stretched across the sky for travel. Technology controlled everything; when born the government would
implant chips to track you. The Iron Voice used technology to maintain power, but that same technology would become his downfall.

The group’s plan was risky but carefully thought out. The Iron Voice depended on an AI system called the Core, that translated his commands into nationwide orders it also controlled the surveillance drones and peoples chips. If the Core was taken down it would be a lot easier to stage a revolution. Lira believed she could rewrite the Core’s code, but only if they reached the central tower, a place no citizen had entered and lived to tell the tale.

As they moved closer to their goal, tension built. James struggled with guilt from his past as a guard, wondering if he deserved redemption. Marty feared failure because she knew innocent people would suffer if they lost. Theo worried that history would repeat itself if the people were not ready for freedom. These thoughts forced them to think about the past if they win, making a plan for the future. The climax came when the group finally reached the tower. Alarms sounded, and drones closed in as Lira began rewriting the Core. Astra was injured protecting the entrance, and for a moment it seemed the plan would fail. The Iron Voice appeared on the screens, mocking them and promising punishment. But instead of backing down, Theo broadcast a message of his own. Stories of the past, reminding citizens that the Iron Voice was not all powerful. As people across Crovalkia watched, the Core shut down, and the screens went dark.

When the system fell, so did the dictator. The drones dropped from the sky, and the silence that followed was overwhelming. The city did not instantly become perfect, but something important had changed. People stepped out of their homes, speaking freely for the first time in their lives. The five rebels did not celebrate loudly. They understood that freedom required responsibility, not just victory. They would be prepared for what’s to come.



“Eagle In The Sky” by Olivia Cantu and Anna Young

Bang. Bang. Bang. **The knuckles rapped loudly against the metal door. “Open up!” The guard’s voice echoed down the hall of the dimly lit building. Tessera tied back her wavy brown hair in a messy bun. Opening the door, her gaze hardened as she scanned over the uniformed men. One had his tattooed knuckles wrapped around the barrel of his gun, the other with a taser and a security wand in his fists.**

“Hello Officer Zinia. Hello Officer Hoyte. How may I help you on this rainy evening?” Tessera’s voice was like steel: sharp and cold. Her stance was tall and guarded, her height equal to everyone else in their society. Ever since their leader founded their society, everyone was forced to conform. Men who towered at 6’5 were now 5’8, forced to get surgery. The only tall one was President Blackwell, who was deemed their leader years before she was born.

“7:30 PM security check. Any contraband is subject to possession of the Kilko Union. Any sudden movements and you will be shot.” Every night was the same routine inspection. Guards ripped down each house to make sure people weren’t hiding anything illegal. Some contraband included plants, alcohol, weapons, and hardware tools. Tessera’s father used to have mechanical wonders that were used for building trinkets and such. One night they weren’t properly hidden, and Kilko found them. Tessera’s father was taken that night and was never seen again. He either escaped or was food for the hounds beyond the borders. One rule is clear though: anyone who crossed the borders didn’t come back alive.

From her window, Scarlett stared into the world that she called home. She didn’t like it much, especially not anymore. At first, it had been a nice world. Everything was simple and beautiful because everything was the same. Nothing was different. The houses, the clothing, the food, and even the people all were exact replicas. Square houses lined the street. Each home had one tree to the left of it and one bicycle to the right. One hanging plant hung from the roof by the front door of every house. One street, everything identical, on which one hundred people lived. Specifically, the street contained twenty houses, with five people each. They all knew the rules that guided them. These laws were called the 1,000 Rules of Pine Bluff. The top five, being the most important, were as follows:

1) Everyone must remain the exact same as each other at every time and every place.
2) No questions can be asked in regards to the rules.
3) No attempt can be made to alter the rules in any way, except for by the president.
4) No leaving the borders that surround the town, or else there will be serious consequences.
5) You must agree to abide by the rules of the Occupation Assignments, which are given at notice of birth.

Walking along the path, Scarlett saw Taylor, the financial advisor to the president. Even she looks the same as other individuals in our society. The only way Scarlett is able to tell her, or anybody else, apart from the others is her gold-plated name tag. Everyone in their town needed to wear them, as this was one of the many rules of Pine Bluff. Not only did the name tags allow others to know the name of the individual, but they also signified the importance of that person. Taylor, for instance, was of high importance and exhibited a gold tag. At the same time, Scarlett and her closest friend, Tessera, both had bronze tags because they were of the lower class, which was the largest class. There were also silver tags for the middle class, which was less common but still more populous than the upper class.

As Tessera grabbed her belongings, she made sure that nobody could hear her as she packed her bags. Every night for three years, she hatched her escape plan. Run, hide, fight, escape. She mapped out every exit route and every guard tower. Her life of monotony and tyranny would finally be over. As long as she stuck with her best friend, Scarlett, they would be okay. Making up her mind for good, she left with her bags and knocked on Scarlett's door. "Scar, are you ready to go?" Her voice was as quiet as night.

"Yes. Let's go." They both made their way to the borders, dressed in black for camouflage. Their steps were quiet and calculated, as if someone were watching. Then again, nobody got privacy in Pine Bluff. Cameras were everywhere. With a little help from an engineer friend, they disabled the devices just long enough for the girls to escape.

The girls neared the borders of the town. Tessera threw a small rock, and it bounced back, just as she was warned. Perfect. Pulling out her walkie-talkie, she spoke quietly. "Eagle Eye, this is Talon Turner in position. Drop the glow and we'll be on our merry way." Another thing about Pine Bluff was code talk. Only a handful of people knew it, and it was just the girls' luck their parents taught them.

The force field had one flaw: it could easily be disabled, but the backup generators would kick on in less than one minute. That meant speed and precision were their top priorities. A loud whoop rang from the trees, and that meant it was time. The force field was down, and they could be free. Grabbing each other's hands, they looked at each other with fear. Tessera spoke first. "All for one?"

"One for all." They glanced back at their town one last time. All the memories of monotony flooded back. With intertwined hands, they leaped, soaring like eagles as if they wrote the stars in the sky.

After escaping by timing the electronic force field perfectly, Scarlett and Tessera sat hunched on the ground. Suddenly, warmth surrounded them as they changed their focus to a glaringly powerful, glowing sphere up above.

“What do you think that is?” Scarlett inquired.
“Don’t know, but I think we'll have plenty of time to figure it out.”

Up ahead, the horizon stretched as far as they could see. There were no limits; nothing to stop them. Never ending freedom was now theirs. There were flying creatures and all assortments of plants. Flowers of every color swayed in each direction. Animals darted throughout the land. Streams flowed. The pair was amazed; they had never seen anything like this before. Originally, they had only wanted to escape to be free from the strict rules that dictated them. Suddenly, in that moment, emotions rushed through them. Before, they could only feel occasional disapproval. They were the only ones who were brave enough to move past fear and act on their annoyance. As new feelings surged through their bodies, the two girls realized that leaving Pine Bluff was about more than physical freedom; it was also about the opportunity to become someone, a distinct person. They didn’t need to look a certain way or act in the same manner as anyone else. They could finally be themselves, whoever those individuals were. In all honesty, the two of them never actually knew themselves. Now, they finally could. They could have their own personality and create their own life. They finally understood that, without being their own individual, they were more limited than they knew; they were unable to better improve the whole society. With no differences, the tiny town was limiting itself. It would never change. Not because they didn’t want to change but because they misunderstood the way that a perfect society was created. It wasn’t by having complete control or exact replicas. Instead, it was about diversity and special talents. With this new realization, the two girls started to live, not just exist.

“The Memory Group” by Sophia DiFilippo and Ellie Greenman

In the year 3333 there was no longer anything natural, all the trees and plants had been destroyed a long time ago. Earth wasn’t really Earth anymore. And the people weren’t really people, because living wasn’t even living. There were only a few people who remembered the old ways, and they were slowly getting fewer and fewer. They were slowly disappearing. And no one knew why… except the government.

The government was all about work. Working for gain, working for money, and working for all time. They brainwashed us to do all the hard work while they reaped the profits. The only reason this worked was because of the technological advancements made by scientists in the 2490s concerning the brain chips. They never imagined what would happen because of their intelligence.

The government made contact, they told the scientists they wanted the patent and rights for experimental purposes only. They swore they weren’t going to do anything with it. Before the government ever used the chips, the scientists became the first protesters because they had a bad feeling about that technology in the government’s hands. So the scientists became the first who disappeared. But the scientists' invention had been closely documented and shown to the public and they, also growing nervous about the government’s work policies, believed them in no time. The seed was sown.
This first revolt by the people, the government was able to put a stop to and to prevent this from ever happening again, they placed the dreaded chips in their peoples’ heads at birth. Through this chip they controlled the peoples’ thoughts. Banning unity, support, and laziness. They could no longer remember the days of old, the days of freedom. And this was their greatest weakness.

Five years ago Nico revolted. He was given a dysfunctional brain chip which meant that he was one of the people who remembered how it was. When he turned eighteen, he said that enough was enough, and he began protesting against the government. He’d lead strikes and marches. And at first, no one showed up. No one believed him. But then he found one person who believed him. Me. As soon as I joined, people became braver, and more people joined us. When more people joined, it became harder to lead, so I helped him lead it. But he was scared. He knew what the government was capable of, and he wanted to protect me from that. That was the one thing we ever fought about. I didn’t want his protection. If he was going to die, I was going to die right next to him.

For a while it didn’t matter; the government didn’t think we were powerful enough to cause any damage. But then we started gaining people daily, and they realized that this was the beginning of a revolt. They paid more attention to us, and we spent more of our time in hiding. But Nico couldn’t hide. He wanted to be out there in the middle of it with the people he had risking their lives for his cause. Until one day, there was no Nico, there was just a note.

He was as good as dead. The government had tried everything with Nico. Threats, bribes, torture, they even tried to give him a new chip that they had made changes to. They made it stronger, more powerful. They had to bring in the best scientists in the world. They made every tweak they could’ve possibly thought of. But nothing worked and they could not understand why. Nobody does, still to this day. In my personal opinion, I think it had less to do with the chip and more to do with Nico. I don’t think any of the people who knew the truth actually had a dysfunctional chip. The government is way too careful for that. I believe that when these people were born their souls were just so full of hope and purity that the chips couldn't do anything to dim their light. Of course, all I know is that Nico was the most hopeful and brave person that this dark world has known. So much so that they couldn't keep him here.

The government now had Nico in custody. The government decided that they had enough, and they hung him, and made it mandatory for the people to watch. They brought him to the town of Harthwaite which is the biggest city in America. There they broadcasted him walking up to the gallows, tying the noose around his neck, and then hanging him. The whole scene was horrible, but one good thing came out of him getting hanged and awakening something inside of people. People began to realize, even if it was subconsciously that there was a big problem.

They thought that the government had too much power, but they hadn't realized that the government was pure evil yet. The name of the group that Nico founded was the Memory Group. Then we took advantage of the people being uncertain about the government. We used this time to totally revolt, we put all our effort into it, and started trying to get all of the people on our side. We started getting hundreds of people on their side daily. But the government was still a huge problem. They were doing everything they could to keep the people in control. They started saying that killing Nico was an accident and that it was the rebel group that killed him. But at this point our rebellion had run too deep, and we just kept gaining people. People were pillaging government villages and we outnumbered them. It wasn't hard to kill them all.

Then I called everyone who was part of the rebellion to the city of Kelna, which was no more than an hour from the city of Harthwaite. When we came together to decide on a new leader, I have to admit I didn't expect to be elected, but I was happy and proud. The first thing that I did was to gather a group of people to storm Harthwaite and destroy what was left of the government.
Then I along with a bunch of people found Nico's body. We decided to have a huge funeral for him, celebrating his life and all of his accomplishments. He will forever be remembered. He started the change and died for his cause. But he was more than just that to me, he was and always will be the love of my life.

Over the years I have tried to make America a better place. I have turned off the chips, and made the planet greener. I have done my best to be a good, kind, and just ruler unlike our old rulers. I'm trying to do everything in my power to honor Nico's memory, and make sure that the new generation knows their past, and how they got their freedom. It is very important that you don't take your freedom for granted.

We have a new government, a democracy, so that the people can impact the government. It is very important that we never end up in the same situation again. The people can vote on anyone they want as long as they are over the age of 17, and the person with the most votes becomes the ruler of America. This election happens every year, just in case there is a bad ruler they can't rule for that long.

I have been elected for the past twenty years, and I have done everything in my power to set the new rulers up for success. This is my last year of ruling, after this even if they elect me again I will refuse, I am getting too old and my life's mission is done, it's time for me to rest.
I am happy. Nico will be remembered forever, and we are no longer under the law of the old government. Trees have grown taller, grass is greener, rivers run stronger, and the world is cleaner. I am happy and content to settle down now, knowing that I have completed my goal in life, and made a big change in the world. It is time for me to enjoy the new world I helped create, and it is time for someone else to take over. We may have lost so much, but what we've gained has been absolutely invaluable.

“Wayne the Waiter from the Gordon Ramsay Fish and Chips in NYC from next Year's Summer”

By: Kyle Guevarra

This week has been the worst one of my life. I got a parking ticket; I got pickpocketed and lost my wallet; I have to work overtime every day this week; and worst of all, my girlfriend left me for some guy she met when we went to dinner last night all because he was way taller than me. The guy was about 6'4", and I’m 5'9". I hate working at Gordon Ramsay’s Fish and Chips, but I need the job and it pays well, so I just dealt with it. It sucks being the only good waiter there since everyone just slacks off. Jessica just has to do her makeup all the time, Colin just sleeps, Perry only cares about his pet platypus and just looks at photos of him, and all the cooks are the new C.H.E.F. robots made by Elon Musk!

But it's all worth it just to come home and see my dog Marcus’s tail wagging, happy as ever. He has been getting me through this tough time and is the reason I keep going. But I still have to work. The customers are basically machines that were created to ruin my life. There’s “Karen the Complainer," who will not stop complaining about her “not enough fries” and her “too much ice in her water” and of course, her obsession with gluten-free nonsense. Of course she has kids as well who just whine the whole time, yet they all keep coming back for some reason!

Also, there’s the influencer trying to make everyone mad, telling me to “put the fries in the bag” for the millionth time. Also, that one guy who always finds loopholes so that he can bring his parakeet in and disrupt the customers. But the cherry on top is that my coworkers just tell me to deal with it and they all talk about how their parents will just bail them out so I can’t do anything.

But, today was the most important. Gordon Ramsay was coming to visit so we had to make a good impression. So, we got to work. All the tables were perfect, orders flawless, perfect amount of everything. It was so good that Karen stopped complaining for once. Then it happened. Colin messed around and dropped a bunch of dishes. Gordon saw, got mad, and of course I got blamed for it and said that “I tripped him”. He then said “Wayne, you are an absolute disgrace. GET OUT!” Then I snapped. Saying “Do you even know what these people even do when you’re not here? They just slack off and leave me to do everything. I’m literally contemplating leaving this job and moving away after everything that’s happened. The only people doing their job here are those dang robots and I and I’m sick of it. You can’t fire me, because I quit.” In front of everyone, and the customers.

I came home to my bed and just started crying, still with my uniform on. Marcus jumped on my bed and comforted me, licking me. Later that night while watching TV and eating ice cream, I got a call from Gordon Ramsay. He said he found out everything and everyone got punished with no pay for a whole week. He gave me my job back and gave me one whole month off with full pay, and I got a raise. My confidence was finally back and for the first time this whole week, I smiled, and I finally got my confidence back.

EARTHARANIA

BY MADELYN HARTMAN AND ARIANA SABHARWAL

Once upon a time in a far away land called Eartharania, there was a space station where astronauts came together to form an army to attack Mars. On the day they were supposed to take off, an unexpected creature follows them....

Early that morning, all Eartharanians were summoned by the King. The order to prepare for war was commanded, and each Eartharanian went to their homes and prepared to leave their country. All their belongings, loved ones, and homes would be left behind and no one could tell whether they would be back to recollect it. The fine people of Eartharania awaited the long and cold winter in war. Little did they know, the best was yet to come.

The first day across the mountain was brutal. The wind blew fast, the trees bent from side to side, and the path in front of them was barely visible. They had been walking for three days, and the sun was starting to set, frost clung to their armor, and their breath rose in clouds as they absorbed the warning message. The general then stepped forward, led a prayer, and continued to give a speech about the importance of helping one another. Each soldier was filled with light and prepared to give the battle their all.

The battle began three days later. People fought, lives were lost, but on the fifth day, a miracle emerged. Their king decided that enough blood shed was seen, and we won the battle by forfeit. As the glow from the gateway faded, warmth slowly returned to the mountain pass. Snow that once seemed endless began to melt, revealing tall grass. The Eartharanian army cheered, embracing each other in relief and joy. For the first time since the call to war, laughter echoed through the mountains instead of fear.

Later that night, after the celebrations, the army made camp at the edge of the mountain, their fires flickered against the howling wind. It was then a low, unfamiliar sound echoed through the darkness-something between a growl and a whisper. From the shadow emerged the unexpected creature that had followed them since the station. It was then that a low, unfamiliar sound echoed through the darkness-something between a growl and a whisper.

From the shadows emerged the unexpected creature that had followed them from the space station:a puppy with a collar labeled "Scout."

Scout had made his way all the way to the planet Venus. How does one puppy do all that?



He landed on Venus very afraid and confused as to where he was. He was in a dark corner and saw creators coming closer to him. The Venians see Scout cold and scared. Scout expected them to attack him but instead they were fascinated by this unknown creature. An alien called Rock handed a shivering Scout a blanket and offered to house scout for the time he is there. Scout was beyond grateful that they didn't hurt him and even more grateful that they took him in as their own creature. When rock took him home he was fascinated by the way they live. He saw things floating in the air. They had advanced technology.

But he noticed something very different on this planet from eatharania. Everyone was kind to each other. They were all friends. They all smile and wave when they see each other on the street. Scout knew that that's not something people from his planet do. The people on this planet are so friendly. He wondered what they had to do to be so happy all the time.

"Scout!" Rock called out. "It's dinner time." He was excited because he was very hungry! He sat at the table, and Rock brought him a plate with glowing green Jell-O on it.

Scout was confused because this didn't look like food. Scout looked up at Rock with a confused expression. She noticed and asked what was wrong. He said, "This doesn't look like food from my home." Rock replied, "That's okay! It's good to try new things! Even though you may not like it, you don't know until you try." Scout trusted Rock and decided to try the glowing jello. Scout tried it and was surprised because of how yummy it was.

After dinner Rock made a nice cozy bed for Scout to sleep in. Scout couldn't sleep, wondering if he was ever going to see his human again, named John. So he got up and went into Rock's room. He thanked Rock for all that she had done for him this past day. Then he went to bed. The next morning everyone was awoken by a mysterious noise. They all went outside wondering what was causing all the ruckus. They saw something in the sky coming towards them. They all were fearing that this was the end. Some were hugging and others were crying.

Rock hugged Scout. But he knew that they were going to be okay because it was just his people coming to get him. He announced to everyone that it was going to be okay. The ship landed far away, a huge space shuttle. Smoke filled the air. Everyone thought this was the end, but Scout ran to see the ship wondering if John was there. Rock tried to stop him thinking it was dangerous. John was the great one out of the ship. John and Scout reunited in a hug. Then the astronauts came out and were fascinated by the planet. They all started to tell each other about their planets. The Venetians started to show the astronauts from Eartharania around their planet. A few years later, there are people roaming both planets as friends. The aliens taught the humans how to be kind and love everyone. Now they are all friends together and are all one big family.



"GIOVANNI'S ASSASSIN"

BY JAKE JIMENEZ

Landon was walking back home from school when he noticed a group of men. They weren't any random group, they appeared dangerous and up to no good. They were all dressed in black with holsters on their coats that they clearly used to intimidate others. This was the Venetian mafia.

Landon knew he had to pick up his pace. When he arrived home he quickly ran to inform his father but to his surprise he wasn't there. Most of his family had gone Christmas shopping. Only Landon's sister, Chiara, was home. "Where's dad?" Asked Landon, "I don't know, figure it out genius" replied his sister. The two always found a way to fight with one another. Chiara was older than Landon and she used to always treat her little brother like a baby. However, ever since she started getting ready for college, she began to treat Landon with a little more respect. The Bernadino's were always known for being rich and smart but surprisingly enough Chiara was the first Bernadino to get accepted into an American college. Especially a college like Chiara's University of California Los Angeles.

When Landon's friends, Dominic de Clavetto and Vincent Sorrentino, arrived at his house, they could easily tell something wasn't right. He usually acted with less excitement but today he was different. "Guess who has the whole mansion to himself?" He said. They grinned at the sound of that. "You guys better keep it down, I'm having friends over." Shouted Chiara from her bedroom closet. Landon rushed to grab his video games and soccer ball from his room. Lately the snow in Venice had become very heavy which made it perfect cushioning for football and soccer. It was 3:30 pm when a knock came from the door. Landon was surprised to find his high school crush, Lucia Bevilaqua, at the door. "Hey Landon, is Chiara home yet?" She said in her soft and kind voice. "Oh uh yea, I th-think she's upstairs." Landon stuttered and mumbled as he spoke.

Lucia ran upstairs to Chiara's room, leaving Landon nervous and shocked by the whole ordeal. His friends came in, and they decided to take a break for a while. "Well, make your move, man!" Said Dominic. "Dude, come on, you've got this!" Whispered Vincent. Landon was far too afraid to do anything about it, so he simply urged them to go back outside. Chiara and Lucia watched as the three boys played football. "Your brother seems like a nice guy," said Lucia. "Yeah, well, he can be an absolute idiot sometimes." Chiara knew that Lucia had a liking for her brother but didn't want to tell Landon. As they sipped their cappuccinos Chiara decided to annoy her little brother one more time before she left for college in three days.



"Landon, let's go, it's getting dark outside," she shouted. Landon and his friends came in instantly.
It was freezing cold outside, but none of the boys wanted to be the one that gave in to the weather conditions. Inside, the boys were surprised to find a beautiful meal right in front of them. Chiara had clearly taken the time to make them. Landon always had a disliking for his sister. Many times he came close to confronting her, but Chiara would always do something nice for him that prevented Landon from doing anything. Chiara knew this was the case.
The boys indulged in the freshly made chicken cutlets and warm hot chocolate as they watched the Italian news.
Apparently the notorious Venetian mafia boss, Giovanni de Campostella, had escaped the Mario Melotta prison in Naples, Italy. Landon started to become concerned. Normally his father would be home around this time. His dad was a hardworking lawyer in Rome. He was the prosecutor who sent de Campostella and many of his allies into prison. He was a very intimidating man. He was tall, strong, and had an appetite for justice.
Florence was the location of Giovanni's new hideout. There was a tall abandoned warehouse located on the Mariana river right in the center of the city. Lately, the police had reported activity in the supposed "abandoned" warehouse. However, corrupt officials made it easy for Giovanni to continue operating in his new location. It had been a tough several months for the criminal mastermind. He tound it much harder now to bribe the Italian higher-ups. Ever since Mayor Metollisa retired, the new mayor has done an excellent job of cracking down on crime throughout northern Italy.
Recently, news came out that the United States and the European Union had started a new task force meant to prevent crime throughout Europe. Even though Giovanni was in serious danger of being captured once again, he wasn't going to give up so easily. Many of his allies were still around and wanted to finally get their revenge on the Italian government.
The one man who was on every major crime organization's mind was Dante Bernadino. Landon's father had made quite the reputation for himself over the past several decades. Dante began his time as a lawyer in 1985 when he was just 28 years old. He was the man who brought many of the best criminals of the past 30 years to justice. How he did so was an absolute mystery. He brought down men such as the infamous Mortebello brothers and the Eduarte family. Both of which were considered some of the most feared gang leaders in all of Europe. Nearly every criminal in Europe knew about this man. However, Dante Bernadino was soon about to put his entire family in danger. On December 20th, Giovanni awoke to the sound of laughter and yelling inside his warehouse. Thinking it was some rookie bodyguards who had gotten drunk, he quickly filled his mind with anger about how he would teach those rookies a lesson. He looked through his closet looking for a nice suit to wear. After that, he looked for a good weapon to use on those kids downstairs. He grabbed his most expensive leather belt and stormed down the metal stairs and into the main room. 'What are you idiots doing!"He yelled.
"Sir, we captured him!" Said one of the bodyguards. The room fell silent, in front of him was a tall, middle-aged gentleman. It was Dante Bernardino.
Giovanni quickly organized for him to be sent to the warehouse basement. He used the basement to hold hostages. Giovanni knew he had to act quickly. The Carabinieri and U.S. special task force would be on the hunt for Giovanni; he had to dispose of Dante quickly.
Back in Venice, Landon was growing more and more suspicious of what had happened to his father. He knew something was wrong but didn't know how to act. The next day Landon received a call from Lucia Bevaliaqua. She was talking about how she overheard her family speaking about his father. Landon began to put the dots together. Lucia continued to explain that Landon's father was captured by Giovanni de Campostella and was being held hostage in his warehouse somewhere in Florence. Landon knew he needed to help his father somehow. He immediately contacted the Italian polizia and informed them of the situation. The Bernadinoes had an excellent relationship with the Italian authorities.
Thirty minutes after Landon's call, two Italian military trucks were in his driveway. Landon wanted answers; however, he knew that the polizia had just started this case and they were known for being painfully slow. By noon Bernadino's estate was packed with reporters, the polizia, and the U.S Brigadier General and his intelligence agents. Landon couldn't wait any longer. He called his friends and Chiara up to his room. "I refuse to let my father be under Giovanni's grasp any longer," shouted Landon. His fear had turned into anger from the authorities' incompetence. He asked his friend Vincent to look up every single major manufacturer in Florence. Landon was going to find out which warehouse was abandoned. This would mean that Giovanni was hiding in there. His mother and sister were very much against the plan. "You're just a kid!" said his mother. Chiara agreed He knew that he would need help if he were to rescue his dad. The next day he spoke with the U.S. Brigadier General Ryan Weathers. Landon explained his plan. He knew Americans were much better fighters than the Italians. The Marshal was impressed. However, he explained that U.S. troops couldn't help with domestic problems if they didn't have proper reasoning for it.. Landon was furious; he stormed out of his office and to his house. Landon's friends worked hard the night before finding out which warehouse Giovanni was located in. They figured out that he was located in the abandoned gunmaking facility right on the Mariana River. Landon breathed a sigh of relief; he had found his father. This was Landon's way of getting American boots on the ground. When he informed General Weathers of this new information, the general invited Landon and his friends to a meeting with all the higher-ups involved. December 21st was the day of the meeting. Until then, Landon simply had to wait.



On the day of the meeting Landon was escorted in a bulletproof Cadillac to the regional capital of Italy, Milan. There he was escorted into one of the largest buildings in the city. Many high-ranking Italian and American officials were present. For them it was a chance to capture the most powerful Italian gangster since Al Capone. Landon and his friends explained the plan once again. U.S. troops would surround the
warehouse. The Calabeneri and special task force would break into the warehouse and fight their way to Giovanni's room. The plan sounded foolproof at first. However, General Weathers put a wrench in the plans. Intel revealed that Giovanni was very much prepared for something like this. He had set up secret pressure plants around the warehouse. U.S. troops couldn't simply siege the warehouse. It would take a stealth mission to pull a mission of this scale off. Landon offered to go. "Are you crazy?" yelled an Italian official. "Do you know how impenetrable that citadel is?" The room went silent; he wasn't wrong. However, Landon persisted. "If the kid is up to it, then I say let him do it." Said General Weathers. Finally, all the endless hours at the gym had paid off for Landon. Landon was going to go on the mission.

Preparation for the mission would need to be done in secret and couldn't take more than a week. Landon and his friends were very familiar with the use of rifles. They used to go hunting all the time. The difficult part of preparation was deciding who would go. Landon, Vincent, and Dominic were locks for the mission. Chiara and Lucia offered to go. Lucia was excellent at solving mysteries, and she was well versed in traps such as tripwires, chemicals, and weapons. No one questioned her about it. Chiara was good with computers and technology. She was going to college to study technical engineering. U.S. and Italian intelligence agencies taught the small group all the information they would need. By the end of the week they knew the insides of the warehouse perfectly, they knew how to use the military's gadgets and weapons, and they were physically ready for the mission.

December 24th was the day the mission was going to be carried out. The entire day was quite peaceful. The group would be transported at 9pm. At 7pm the miniature task force was transported on a Blackhawk to the location of Giovanni's warehouse. The plan was simple. Go in through a small vent on the side of the roof. They had a map of the warehouse so they could get their way around the vents. They were dressed in all black. They carried the silenced American M4A1, gas masks, a small Swiss Army knife, small grenades, flashbangs, many mags of ammunition, walkie-talkies, night vision goggles, and a small Italian pistol. Chiara would stay with the U.S. Army on the outskirts of the warehouse. She would make sure the plan was going smoothly, and if anything went wrong, U.S. troops could easily extract the group and level the warehouse to the ground if absolutely necessary. At 9pm, Landon, Vincent, Dominic, and Lucia were dropped off at the roof of the warehouse. They slipped into the vents and quietly moved through the rough and cold ventilation system. The air was dangerous to breathe, so they used their gas masks and night vision goggles. Landon knew that the group would need to split up. The warehouse was so large they couldn't all go the same way. Landon and Vincent would go through the north side of the warehouse, while Lucia and Dominic would go through the south side. The group was making good progress when Landon accidentally broke through a faulty vent opening. Luckily he fell into a small room with a gang member with headphones in. Landon sneaked up behind him and made sure that the music the gang member was listening to was the last thing he would hear. Vincent found another ventilation opening in the room, and they sneaked in through there. The warehouse used to be used for gunmaking during WWII. It was insanely large. Lucia and Dominic were making excellent progress slipping through many sections.

Just when everything seemed to be going right, the plan was in extreme jeopardy. A gang member had found the dead man in the office. The warehouse was on full alert. When the gangsters told Giovanni what had happened, he was not one bit alarmed. He knew this was going to happen. He always knew. Lucia had told him everything. He ordered his troops to stay at the entrance of his room. Lucia told Dominic that they should leave the vents and into the next vent entrance. She told him that Giovanni used dangerous chemical gas in the vents and they needed to get out of there. Dominic was confused but complied. At the next vent entrance they dropped in and Dominic froze completely. To his horror he had fallen directly into Lucia's trap. In front of him were ten of Giovanni's armed guards. Lucia laughed hysterically. Dominic, though just sixteen years old, knew his road had come to an end. A singular tear fell from his youthful face. He dropped his weapons and fell to his knees. He took a small grenade from his pocket and pulled the pin. Everyone was busy laughing at the sight of the kid. Lucia noticed the grenade in the boy's hand and quickly ran out of the room. Nobody else noticed. Dominic thought of his younger siblings and parents at home. Dominic was known as a fun and energetic kid. His mission was complete; all the times he complained about not getting enough sleep would end. He let out one final smile as the grenade relieved him of his mission. Chiara saw the whole ordeal unfold. In tears, she informed Landon and Vincent of what had happened. The two boys couldn't help but stay silent. However, the mission had to go on. The extraction team would be there in thirty minutes.

Landon and Vincent had reached the entrance to Giovanni's office. Lucia was there. She rushed to them to lie about what had happened.

Landon took his rifle and fired at her twice. Her legs were badly damaged. Landon had one final use for her. When Landon opened the door to Giovanni's room. He found his father with a pistol pointed at him by Giovanni. "Don't move!" He yelled. Vincent went through the ventilation shaft in a different room. After Landon put his weapon down, Giovanni explained his plan. A classic game of Russian Roulette. Dante was pushed off to the side. His hands and legs were tied. Chiara was unable to access the cameras in the room. Vincent was still finding his way to the room. It was Landon and Giovanni only. The game started. Landon and Giovanni survived the first few shots. Landon caught a glimpse of the pistol's ammo count. He finally found a use for his math skills. The next turn was Giovanni's. This one had a bullet. Giovanni offered the golden revolver to Landon. Landon refused. Giovanni took the opportunity to turn the revolver around and point it at Landon. "Any last words?" At the same moment Vincent arrived through the ventilation opening and shot Giovanni in the head

The two boys fell on the leather couch in Giovanni's office with Landon's father. No one uttered a word until Dominic's funeral. When the Bernadino's arrived home, they watched the news to ease the mood. "Giovanni de Campostella, Lucia Bevaliqua, and Dominic de Clavetto were found dead in a warehouse in Florence. Reports claim that a police raid had killed Giovanni but authorities remain silent about who Giovanni's assassin is."



Sunken

BY DREW SCHUBKEGEL

In the trenches of the deep Pacific Ocean lay a sunken vessel. The San José. Before it sank in 1708, it housed 17 billion in gold and artifacts. It was hidden for the safety of the world and the future. No money of that amount had ever been seen in one place. For thousands of years people searched and searched to no avail. Now 2,500 years later, hunters catch wind of the search that once was.

Tyrone Mercer and Kevin Perko sat at a bar with the robot waiters. They weren't good for a conversation. As Tyrone read the newspaper, he turned to Kevin. "Kev, have you seen this old treasure thing people have been talking about?"

"I heard it had something to do with the sinking of a ship like 2000 years ago." Kevin was eating holographic chicken wings while responding.

"Old man Jenkins has been building that time machine. I bet we could go back and see where it sank."

Kevin looked up with satisfaction. "You know, Ty, this is a plan I could get behind. How much did you say the gold equates to?"

"17 billion dollars in gold alone."

Together, they marched to Jenkins. Kev yelled into his not-so-humble abode first. "Jenkins? We're here to test the machine."

Popping out in front of them, Jenkins responded. "Hey fellas, ready to get a blast from the past?" Without hesitation they jumped into the machine. Waiting to be launched through time. As the gears started turning, they became more and more anxious. Before they departed, Jenkins had handed them watches. With a click of the side button, they would be sent back to modern time. SWOOSH, SWOOSH, SWOOSH.

Kev slowly opened his eyes. He saw Tyrone laying next to him on the beach. They looked each other in the eyes and then at the ship boarding on the dock. "Well I'll be damned, Jenkins sent us to the right place." Kev was surprised.

"He sure did, are you ready to be known as the world's greatest treasure hunters?" "Never been more ready."

They boarded the ship and waited for any sign of sinking. They slightly overheard the captain saying the ship was starting to slow down. Then, everything violently shook. Slowly, but surely, they were starting to sink. The captain bursted out of the control room, "Dissolve the gold in the mercury buckets! If we can't use this for war then no one can!" Just then, huge bags of gold were poured into these metal buckets of mercury. Kev and Ty were unknown among the chaos. They slipped away into the control room. They were getting ready to jump back to the future.

They arrived back safely and in shock. "So many people devoted themselves to finding that treasure.

In reality, it never actually existed when they started searching." Ty pondered and came up with it.

"Do you remember that mercury poisoning incident they told us about?" Kev remembered something

"Well, yes, it was right around that same area."

"I think we just put two pieces of a football field sized puzzle together."

"Football? Never heard of it."

"Something they used to play back in the day."

Just then, Ty realized, Kev was a hunter back in the day. He'd always wanted to know what happened. In fact, he planted tiny seeds in hopes his partner would notice. Just one question was left unanswered. How had he made it all the way here?



TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

BY JOSIE VILLANI

I wake up with my brain feeling groggy and distant. A beautiful woman is sprawled out next to me, and though I know she is my wife, when I think of her there is a cloudiness in the back of my mind that unsettles me. Sitting up, I think hard, and then they come to me. Memories flash through my head: our first date, our wedding, our anniversaries. I push the feeling of unease out of my head, quickly getting up to wake the children.

Andre and Lacy are twins, the kind that did everything and anything together. It's weird though, because when I try to remember their births, everything is foggy and wrong. I try to convince myself it's just the excitement of their delivery day that is botching my memory. When I get to their room, they're already up and getting ready. The twins behave in a way that every parent dreams of, with their best attributes being polite, punctual, and smart. How can I not love them, right?

After they're dropped off at school, I head over to Assentria University. Here, I am a scientist who studies biology and anthropology. Not wanting to go into work just yet, I gaze up at the huge sign marking the human studies building. That's when it happens. An image flashes through my mind of a structure, exactly the same as the one before me, except the sign reads, "Intergalactic Dimension Studies." Startled, I quickly staggered out of my car just to be met with a couple concerned glances from the coworkers.

"You good, Peter?" my coworker asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Are you sure, because you look like you've just seen a ghost?"

"I'm very sure," I bit out, annoyed at the questioning.

From then on, I go about my day as I have been doing for what seems like ever. Work, kids, dinner, sleep, repeat. And so, my routine stays the same for months, never changing and definitely never exciting. That is, until it happens again.

I am tucking in the children, placing a kiss on each of their foreheads, when my body suddenly goes still. I look at my twins, except they aren't my twins. Instead of my blonde five-year-olds, two brown-haired kids are staring at me. Right before I am snapped back to reality, I notice two names carved in wooden plaques above their beds: Andrew and Lizzie. Horror falls over me as I stare into space, trying to process what I just saw. "Daddy, are you alright?" Lacy asked. "Of course, sweetie, goodnight," was my only response as I practically sprinted out of their room. I lie awake in bed after that, wondering what the heck is going on.

Following that night, the hallucinations start coming more. All. The. Time. They are eating me alive. I am so desperate to know what they are that I will do anything to find out. One day, I get one with two children screaming, "Dada! Dada!" and the next, I am sharing a bed with a short brunette. Just like the twins, my wife is blonde. At 5'8, she's nothing like the small woman that flickers through my mind.

Just as I am about to reach the point of insanity, I get one last hallucination that acts as a key, unlocking that fog in the back of my brain. I am at work, looking for the storage room that has the equipment needed for microscopy, when I open a door to a room covered in dust. Foreign tools and machines litter the floor and tables. That is when I feel the familiar tug, and this time, I let myself fall into the vision.

"Pete, this is amazing. We'll beat the Russians to D2 with this. Oh, and you're dismissed now. "Can't have unauthorized personnel getting too comfortable," my boss winked at me. As he walks away, I can feel the rage building up inside of me. I have worked on this project for years, just to get treated like crap. When I'm sure he's gone, I go straight for the machine. Putting in the coordinates, I step through the arch, and then...

Returning to my senses, I hear a chorus of thuds coming down the hallway until they stop behind me. Of course they're coming for me, just when it makes sense why it is so hard for me to remember what are supposed to be the most important events of my life. Slowly, I turn around just to see men clad in suits stare back at me. I already know what's about to happen.

Because I remember now.



The Escape

By Sienna Colio

The cold wind blew in from the cracked window. I shivered. I was knitting a blanket for my youngest daughter, Sally, when a loud bang startled me. Immediately an earthquake erupted. The books started falling off the bookshelf; they were all scattered across the floor. Four minutes passed, and the shaking came to an end. The power was out but I used a power bank to turn on the television. I changed the channel to the news station. There was no news about the earthquake. But instead, a mysterious UFO had crashed in DC. Just 5 miles away from the pink house. That would be 20 miles from Pleasantville, where I live. Investigators were still searching what this mysterious UFO could be. I remember when I was studying aeronautical engineering in high school, there was a particular spacecraft that looked just like that. I just couldn't remember what it was called. I decided to not worry too much about it and take a rest. When I woke up from my nap, my husband brought the kids back home. My youngest, James, exclaimed, "Mommy! Mommy! Have you seen the UFO that crashed?" Then my oldest son, Oscar, began to bombard me with questions as to if I've ever seen anything like that before. I had to lie to him. I signed a contract after I graduated saying that I would never reveal anything about what happened and what I learned. After dinner, my husband, Patrick, talked to me; he said he knew I was lying. While I wished that I could tell him the truth, I just couldn't. I knew that I would be hunted after.

At six in the morning, I received a call from the school district. A mysterious blizzard was about to storm Pleasantville. I hurried to the living room; it was actually snowing! I knew this wasn't just a coincidence; something disastrous was erupting in Pleasantville. I turned on channel five; Andrea Winston was warning that this big blizzard could leave us trapped for days. There were warnings that we must stock up, as we may be trapped for more than two weeks. Since I have a big family to take care of, I knew that I needed to act fast. I immediately put on my coat and rushed to my car. While pulling up to the parking lot of Good Foods, I noticed a frightened look on everyone's faces. Children strapped to their mothers, mothers with large overflowing bags of groceries, and workers struggling to keep customers in order. As I saw these panicked and confused civilians, I hesitated to approach the store. Eventually, I built up some courage and walked in. The manager announced on a megaphone that the store would be closing in ten minutes due to the store being almost empty. People hurried out of the store. I acted quickly; I ran to the fruit and vegetables aisle. There was barely anything left. After ten minutes of fighting for food in the store, I left with six bananas, one gallon of water, and two bags of frozen vegetables.

When the kids woke up, I talked to them and assured them that everything would be ok. I later tucked them into bed and read books to them.

The next morning, the snow was almost up to the window of the second floor. The news announced that it would only get worse. Although the blizzard was massive, work was not cancelled. I was expected to meet my team to investigate what had happened, so I bundled up and reported to the site of the crash. My crew and I picked up these cold and mysterious fragments of the wreckage. Agent Mario called me and my other colleagues aside. He told us the truth. There was a war going on between the Martians from Planet Z (the cold planet) and Planet X (the hot planet) over the abundant planet, Ipsy. The reasoning for the blizzard was because the spaceship from Planet Z had crashed. The suspicious case was that no Martian remnants were found. Agent Mario told us that he would leave this job to the senior agents. He would transfer us to Camp 61, a private enclosed camp on the other side of the country. The plan sounded terrifying and amazing at the same time, it was rare for individuals to enter Camp 61. Then, Mario revealed the catch, we couldn't bring our kids with us. Mario remarked that our kids would be safe in Planet Pluxur, a planet that no human has stepped foot on in over forty years.





Arriving home, I told Patrick and my kids the news. Alarmed, James, my oldest son, was skeptical and didn't trust my colleagues to transport him and his siblings. I trusted them as I have gone to school and worked with them for over twenty years. Although my kids were nervous, I promised them all would be well.

The singing of the robins awakened me at five in the morning. There were only three hours left until Patrick and I had to report to the air base. I decided that I would pack the kids bags since I didn't want to stress them out. In each of their bags I packed a knitted blanket with their favorite colors. I also hid a small walkie talkie to keep in contact with them. At last, it was seven o clock. I woke up the kids and made them banana pancakes with a green smoothie. I double checked their bags and made sure all their necessities were packed. I kissed my kids goodbye knowing that even though I trust my colleagues, this was a dangerous mission and I may never see them again. I shut the door and waved goodbye to the kids as Patrick was leading me into the car.

Finally, we arrived at the airplane base. Mario, Sandra and Catherine as well as my other colleagues and their spouses were waiting inside. I could tell they all held fear inside them. Mario guided us to the silver jet. The jet was very uncomfortable. The seats were worn out and there was barely any space separating the seats. Settled, the jet blasted off. In four hours we would arrive at Camp 61.

It was now 12 pm. Patrick questioned me once again if my colleagues were actually trustworthy. I had to convince him once again that everything would be fine. We were placed into a bunker with four twin beds in each bunk. Sandra, her husband, Patrick, and I shared the room together. We all felt exhausted, so we agreed to turn off the lights and catch some rest. Starving, I woke up and roamed the facility. While walking around, I stumbled upon an open door that led to a long hallway. I didn't think that I would see anything horrifying, but within the first few steps I took, I saw warm-blooded Martians trapped, enclosed with various wires plugged into them. Frightened, I ran back to the bunker. I panicked. I have never seen anything more terrifying than this room before. I explained my sightings to Patrick. He believed me and was curious about these creatures. I made him follow me to the room. We both witnessed the blue Martians enclosed in the glass chamber. Patrick then noticed the arm of the Martian twitch. Then its eyes opened. We shrieked, then we heard loud footsteps begin to approach the hallway. We hid behind the dark chambers and shut our eyes. Minutes passed and we heard footsteps walking away. We carefully walked back to the bunker and tried to sleep.

Loud bells filled the halls. I woke up with very heavy eyes. I could barely get any sleep after what I witnessed the previous night. I decided to tell Sandra, one of my closest friends, what I saw. She comforted me and then sternly said, "Don't you think we should tell everyone else? But we can all keep it a secret." I told her that may not be the best idea. However, Sandra didn't listen. By the afternoon, I was blasted with questions. Before dinner, Mario and a group of men pulled me into an office. They warned me that I could lose my job and potentially be killed if this secret were spread to anybody else. At nine, I went to the bathroom to try and see if I could communicate with the kids. James picked up and told us everything was going amazing in Pluxur. They were being fed enough, and there were playgrounds for the children to play in all day long. I wish I were a kid once again, experiencing the fun and excitement that comes every day. Being an adult is hard; I was being threatened with death because of my colleagues' big mouth.

The bells rang once again. I expected this day to be better. When I turned on the radio, I heard Andrea Winston talk about the breaking news. The breaking news wasn't about the blizzard but was about the aliens in the glass chambers. I have absolutely no clue how the news could have spread all the way to D.C. But I knew that Camp 61 and this country were no longer safe for me. With fear on my face, I ran to Patrick. I told him the situation, and we created a plan to escape. During breakfast, we would run out the backdoors, perform a long trike to the highway, and then hitchhike to the border of Idaho into Canada. We discreetly packed our bags and headed out the door. We thought we were successful until a security guard stopped us. I persuaded him, saying that we were employees delivering food to the back. He believed us! Patrick and I ran as fast as we could. We knew that it would be a long hike to the highway, but it would be worth it in the end.

Finally, we saw the highway. Filled with hope, we waved to cars for about an hour. An old lady named Mary, with a tiny white car, agreed to take us to Canada. She informed us that she would take us to her cabin in Creston, a quiet rural town. She seemed like a trustworthy lady, so I explained our situation to her. After about three hours we arrived. Although we were no longer in America, the American radio was still on. The FBI was searching for me. My face turned burning hot. I knew that the old lady would keep us safe in her cabin. Ultimately, we arrived in Creston; Mary led us into her brown cabin. She showed us our room and assured us that we would be safe here. At last, I finally felt safe. After a long week spent fighting for food, traveling on an old jet and being threatened with death, I felt a sense of peace and quietness in Creston. Although I was not surrounded by my kids, I knew that they would be fine without me. I knew that one day I would see them once again. While being an adult is hard; I've learned to live life to the fullest from it, even when it's difficult.

Hidden by the Truth

BY EMILY FUGGER

The crisp mountain air always bit hardest on New Year's Eve. It was a biting cold, the kind that seeped into your bones and made you feel like you are moving in slow motion. Our house, deep in the woods, was usually filled with the scent of pine and coffee, but tonight, it was thick with anticipation. I traced the worn out carving of the big bold word ‘HUNTER’ on the wood table, a nervous habit I'd picked up over the past couple of years, well the past five years. It had been five years since the population dot tradition began, and five years of careful, calculated choices by the government.

It started as a solution, a way to manage the growing population that was starting to take over everything. The elders, in all their glory, decided that on New Year's Eve, a mark would appear on the hands of those chosen to contribute to the balance. For most of my family, the bright red dot was a flex of a symbol, it was like a shiny piece of jewelry, they showed it off constantly, trying to see who’s eyes it sparked fear in, and who smiled when they would see it. They'd return from work, their hands glowing with the mark, it gave them purpose. But not for me. Every year, as the clock ticked towards midnight, I'd stare at my hand, my heart pounding. And every year, it was the same. Not red, but a bold electric blue. Prey. It was a word repeated in my mind, a symbol of pity and fear. They said it meant I was supposed to be hunted, not to hunt.

My family, hunters and all, still believed that I was one of them. It was like I had to put a mask on, a shield from the world, from my own reality. Everyday I have the same routine. Wake up, cover my dot, hide my fear and repeat. This year, as the sky begins to darken, and the clock ticks closer to 12, I know that blue dot will find me again. But this time, I had a plan. One better than before. I'd practiced the nonchalant shrug, the practiced, sinister smile, the quick way to hide my hand in my pocket or behind my back. They would see the red dots on their own hands, and deflecting, they wouldn't look too closely at mine. Maybe one day I’ll become a hunter, but for now I'll be the hunter of my own truth, hiding it from the rest, and praying ever so quietly that they won’t realize that I am the one they hate, at least for now, and hopefully forever. I’m just family.



Speechless

BY NATALIE JANKOWSKI AND GIULLIANA LALO

I woke up for my 15th birthday, the year is 3026. I'm so excited that it's my birthday. I see a number above my head, I think nothing of it and go downstairs. As soon as I say the words good morning, my mom interrupts me and tells me what she's been keeping until my birthday. Confused, I ask her what's going on. She tells me how on everyone's 15th birthday, the government gives an amount of words to each person to use before midnight everyday. The number above my head, 10,000, is the amount of words I have to use up for the day today or else, there will be consequences. She tells me how no one has faced these consequences, but no one wants to see what happens.

Last year I remember my cousin getting taken away just before my eyes. The cops had come to our house, and stormed in looking for her. She was screaming and was yelling at my mom. She was telling my mom that she will pay for what she has done, and that she won't let her win. Back then I had no idea why she had left. My mom just said that she had done something very bad and she had to face what she had done.

The improvement of technology scares me today, I can't believe this is the future. I mean, how can the government control how many words I say, and if I'm alive or dead? Yesterday, I could talk just as much as I wanted, but now I can't.

Today I felt different, I'm on the way to school and I can see how many words other people have. My teachers have way more words than I do. I guess that's because they have to teach their students all day. I go up to my friend group, and they all say "happy birthday", and I talk about inviting them to my birthday party. I ask them if they can all go and Marissa says that everyone can go, and they will all go together. She even asks if she can bring Jake. Jake is the person I like, but no one knows. I can't believe he will be at my house.

It's around 6:45. My mom tells me to be safe and make sure nothing bad happens. I tell her to stop being so overprotective, and I remind her I'm going to be safe. Once they arrive, they come into my living room. I'm talking to Marissa when I see Jake whispering to someone, and then he yells out to everyone that we should play truth or dare. As we sit down in a circle, they decide I should go first. Jake tells everyone that I should put on a blindfold so I can see the surprise they got me. Excited, I fumble to put it on, but as soon as I get it on, they start walking me somewhere. They put tape over my mouth and tie my hands behind my back. At this point I'm getting confused and scared about what's about to happen. They start counting down "3, 2, 1!" Then they push me into a closet and lock the door. I try to move the blindfold off, and all I see is darkness. Confused, I start banging on the door telling them to let me out. The last time I checked the time, it was 10:30 p.m. My parents come home to find me in the closet; no one else is in the house. When I walk out of the closet, I see my parents standing inside of my room. It's 11:30. I only have thirty minutes to use up all my words. My parents start bombarding me with questions, asking me why I was in the closet and where everyone went. I told them I have no idea what has happened.





Then they start telling me that the neighbors gave all their words to my sister, and now she has twenty million words to use before midnight. Right now it is 11:55, but then I look above my head. I have thirty million words!

I asked my sister, “Did you just give me all the words?”

She said yes and explained that she and my mom were planning this all along. They had the plan to get rid of me for so long. They just had to wait till I turned fifteen for the plan to take action. It is now 11:59 pm. I know I’m not going to use all my words up. But I try to start rambling on as many words as I can. As the clock hits 12, I know the police are on the way. I hear the sirens from many blocks away. “There she is!” As they come barging into the house, they go into my room and take me away. I look back at my mom and sister and remember. This is exactly what happened to my cousin. I now realize why she said what she had said. As I’m heading to the police car, I black out.

I wake up in a white room, with computers around me. Then, an unrecognizable woman comes out and says, “I see that you didn’t use up all your words before midnight.” I ask her why I’m here and what happened to me. She tells me,” I see this a lot, people getting words right before midnight. I was you once.” Confused, I ask her what she means. She tells me that it's her. Claire, your cousin. Wow, I can’t believe it. I run up to hug her, but then she backs away. She tells me how she influenced our family to turn against me so she could be free. I can’t believe how messed up my family is. Even though my mom and sister betrayed my cousin Claire, she still takes their side and does the same thing to me. While I’m trying to think about what is happening. I remember that if you don’t use up all your words, you have to face a consequence.

While I wait for this consequence, someone pops out from the corner of the room. They tell me that I do not get a consequence and that I can go straight to the job.

I now have become the next person to help the government and control everyone’s words. After people don’t use up all their words, they control everyone else’s words. They also take the place of their family member that works in the government. It’s been happening for 50 years.

Years passed, and I have now become the new government. I control all the words of everybody. Every day I wait to be assigned my sister and mom to get revenge. A few weeks go by, and the time has come. I see who I got assigned; I got my mom and sister.

To make them feel what I felt, I give each of them an amount of words that are not humanly possible to be able to use before midnight. The clock strikes, and I see my mom and sister get dragged into the room that I was put into when I didn’t use up my words. I didn’t get any consequences, but since they plotted against me and tried to kill someone on purpose, they got a huge consequence. They can never talk again no matter what. The government will no longer give them words, and they have to live the rest of their lives like this.

A few days go past, and I finally get the courage to visit my mom and sister. I walk into the room they are in, and they get surprised. They thought I had died, but then they saw me right before their eyes. They tried to run up and hug me, but I backed away. They really think that I would forget everything that happened and treat them like how I used to. No way would I ever do that. The government has a very strange way of keeping things in control, but I guess they have to do whatever they can and whatever it takes to be the ones on top.

I'm Sorry

BY JULIA JOSEPH

I have never apologized in my life. Well, that's a stretch. I have said more complex phrases that mimic apologies, but truthfully, I fear the word "sorry."

In my odd world, my government decided to make our society one big social experiment. When each and every one of us was born, we were assigned a word that we can never say. Everyone had a different one. Some forbidden words were quite weird, but I got stuck with a word that is so overused yet is still overlooked. The number of times in my life I have wanted to apologize with just one word but couldn't is uncountable.

Today is my grandmother's funeral. It's a traditional, all-black, depressive, rainy-day funeral. My entire family has united to honor her. My parents told me to put on a brave face since I was chosen to give a speech to talk about how her silence and beauty made her so "perfect." No one knew my grandma the way I knew her. She told me the truth about how she lived; she was never actually happy. She always felt incomplete, as if she had been missing out on something; she just never knew exactly what. I always had a feeling she was against the government we live with, the same way I am. It's cruel how we all fear saying one word for our entire life span because we all dread the idea of our cause of death being a word. I promised my grandmother one thing and one thing only, that I would live my life as if there were no limitations. I would live to the fullest.

I arrived at the funeral venue; it was packed. The room was filled with emotions of darkness, depression, gloom, and grief. The silence was loud; all you could hear were heartbeats. My grandmother was in an open casket. I thought she looked beautiful, but it felt wrong to think that. She would specifically tell me how it was draining to be seen for her beauty rather than her brains. In reality, she had so much wisdom to share but was never given the chance to speak it. She was born deaf. She never spoke.

As the afternoon flew by, it was finally time for me to give my speech. I stepped up to the podium. I gazed upon my family as they silently wept. I wanted to break down, but everyone was counting on me to brighten the room. I looked down at the paper I had written, but my vision became blurry. I tried to read the first sentence out loud, but I couldn't speak. My throat was closing. That's when I decided to make up my speech on the spot.

I took a look at my grandmother in her casket and screamed, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry I failed you. I'm sorry I can't enjoy my life knowing you and billions of others have died fearing a word! I'm sorry that your funeral can't even do you justice! I'm sorry for not saying it sooner, I-I-I'm sorry."

I could no longer continue what I was saying; I collapsed. I felt my family glaring at me with fear as to what would happen to me. Then I slowly felt a vibration in my heart. This is how I would die. The government must have planted a tiny bomb in each of our hearts that goes off when we say our forbidden word.

I muttered my last words, "I'm sorry...".



"I'm Sorry" by Julia Joseph

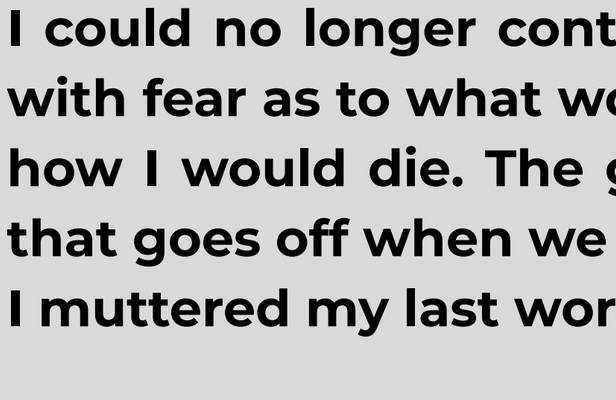
I have never apologized in my life. Well, that's a stretch. I have said more complex phrases that mimic apologies, but truthfully, I fear the word "sorry."

In my odd world, my government decided to make our society one big social experiment. When each and every one of us was born, we were assigned a word that we can never say. Everyone had a different one. Some forbidden words were quite weird, but I got stuck with a word that is so overused yet is still overlooked. The number of times in my life I have wanted to apologize with just one word but couldn't is uncountable.



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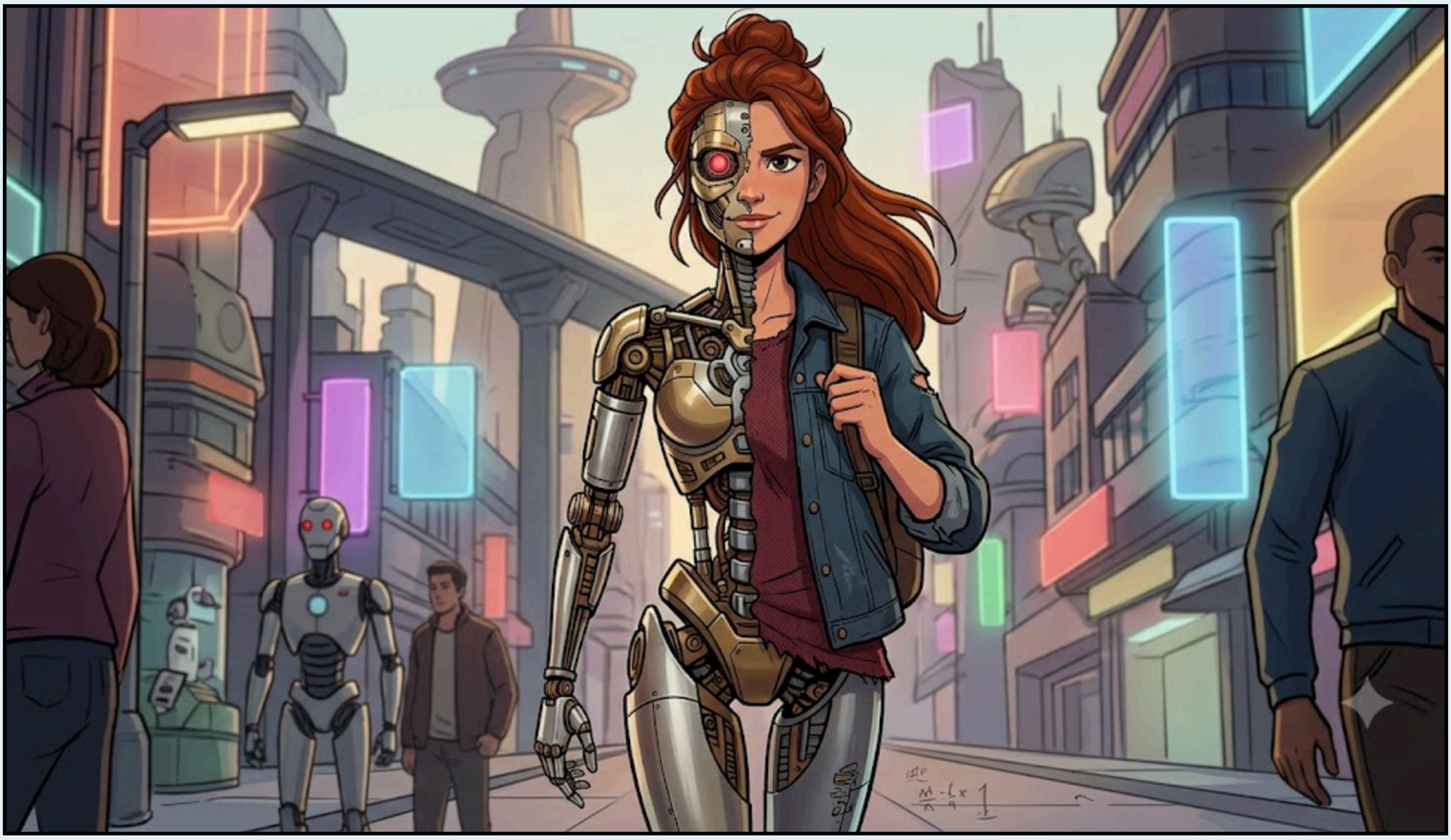
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“The Last Update” by Sarah Mosquera Garcia

The first time I noticed something was definitely wrong with my update was during third-period English class. I was listening to my professor drone on and on, but my ears perked up when he finished a sentence.

“Alright, everyone, if you could please take out your notebooks.”

There was an awkward pause, followed by sullen silence. It wasn’t the type of silence where you could close your eyes and reminisce about nice things. No. This silence was eerie and too quiet. Then, he continued.

“Alright, everyone, if you could please take out your notebooks.”

I was puzzled. Didn’t he say that already? I glanced at my classmates to see if anyone else had noticed, but no one seemed to notice. Instead, everyone took out their notebook from their bags, like they were some sort of programmed robots.

That’s when I realized what today was—the day I got my final update.

“Honey! Breakfast is ready!”

The day of my last update, my mom kindly reminded me to eat my breakfast in under ten minutes. She had read on the network website that stocking up on protein the day of your last update had beneficial effects on your body. The Network, you could say, was our government. They were the ones who looked through our electronics, controlled our schools’ management, and established rules around the community. However, they were infamously known for being the ones who installed our chips—tiny microchips that were placed behind our ears that would deliver our updates to our minds and bodies.

I took a seat at my dinner table and nodded to my mom. Even though my stomach was swirling with nervousness, I ate my breakfast quickly. Everyone had been talking about the final update for months now. My teachers and principal said it would complete the “final transition into adulthood." Some advertisements stated that it helped reduce anxiety and improve your senses. I always found it weird how no one explained exactly what it was.

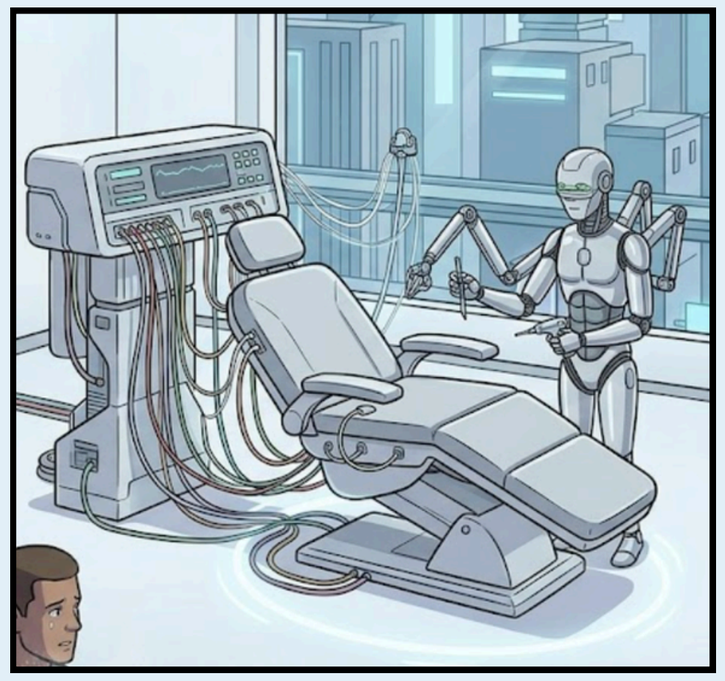
All the students in my class—including my best friend, Noah, and I—already had two Updates. The first one was installed to help with memory—something about how the mind needed “nourishment and polishing," according to the network. The second Update supposedly regulated the spiral of emotions. This last Update was going to “finish the job," whatever that meant.

On the way to school, kids on the bus were talking about it like it was an everyday event. “My brother cried while getting his,” one kid winced.

“I heard you don’t even remember anything during the process!” another one exclaimed. I paid no attention to most of their conversations. My best friend, Angel, slid into the seat next to mine. He had gotten his final Update the week before since he was a bit older than me. Sure, he looked the same, but something about him felt…muted. Like a rock song playing way too quietly.

“You need to relax, May,” he spoke up when he noticed me staring. “My mind feels way clearer now. I’m sure you’ll feel the same way after your procedure,” he said calmly, tapping his chip. Tch, clearer? He sounded emptier, but I kept that thought to myself.

Once the bus arrived at school, I was sent by my teacher to the nurse’s office. I walked inside and gawked at the sudden transformation.



The office had been rearranged into an update room. Bright lights, pristine white walls, and a machine in the center that hummed softly. The only way I could describe it is like a dentist's chair with a bunch of wires hooked to it. I could smell disinfectant in the air, causing my eyes to burn and my nose to sting. It didn’t help my worries.

“May?” A technician appeared by the door on the other side of the office. She—or maybe a he, who knows, because they had a mask on and a cap—wore bright blue scrubs. “Your final update is ready. Please sit on the chair.”

Why did they sound like a robot? I thought it was peculiar, but I complied with the request, sitting on the comfy chair. Though I didn’t feel comfortable at all. “Sit still,” the technician said. “This will only take a moment.”

The machine clicked into place, and a long, mechanical arm stretched out and settled behind my ear. Something buzzed—sharp and cold—behind my ear, like a flu shot. Then, everything glitched. The technician, who loomed over me and had taken their mask off to reassure me, had frozen mid-smile. The hum of the machine stuttered. My vision started to blur, and a message flashed across my eyes in a bright, red-ish hue.

ERROR: UPDATE FAILED TO PROCESS.

I panicked slightly. Was this part of the procedure? Surely not. I sucked in a deep breath. As fast as the message appeared, it vanished, and the air felt heavier.

“You’re all done. You may return to class,” the technician said smoothly, turned, and disappeared behind the door they had entered from.

I stood up slowly, still dazed from that message. I waited for something—anything—to change

or my thoughts to line up. For my mind to be "clearer," like Angel had said. For my anxiety to diminish, as all those advertisements I saw from the inside of my bus every morning had promoted. Nothing changed.

By third period, I started to realize something was seriously wrong. My English professor repeated the same line twice, word for word. It was like he hit a rewind button and didn't even realize it. A girl who sat in front of me dropped her pencil case and didn't pick it up, even though it was within her reach. The classroom, the air, and the way everyone was acting were eerie, and it felt heavy and suffocating. I wanted to leave.

At lunch, Angel sat across from me, which was weird. He usually sat next to me, and we would laugh at our inside jokes like there was no tomorrow. Today, however, he sat in silence, staring at his food like it was going to stand up and crawl away.

"You're not gonna eat?" I asked in between bites of my sandwich.

He shook his head stiffly. "I am not hungry."

The sentence, on its own, wasn't weird. It was the way he said it. He sounded monotone. Usually, Angel had that warm tone in his voice—the one that lit up a room every time he spoke or laughed. It was gone now, replaced with a cold, robotic tone.

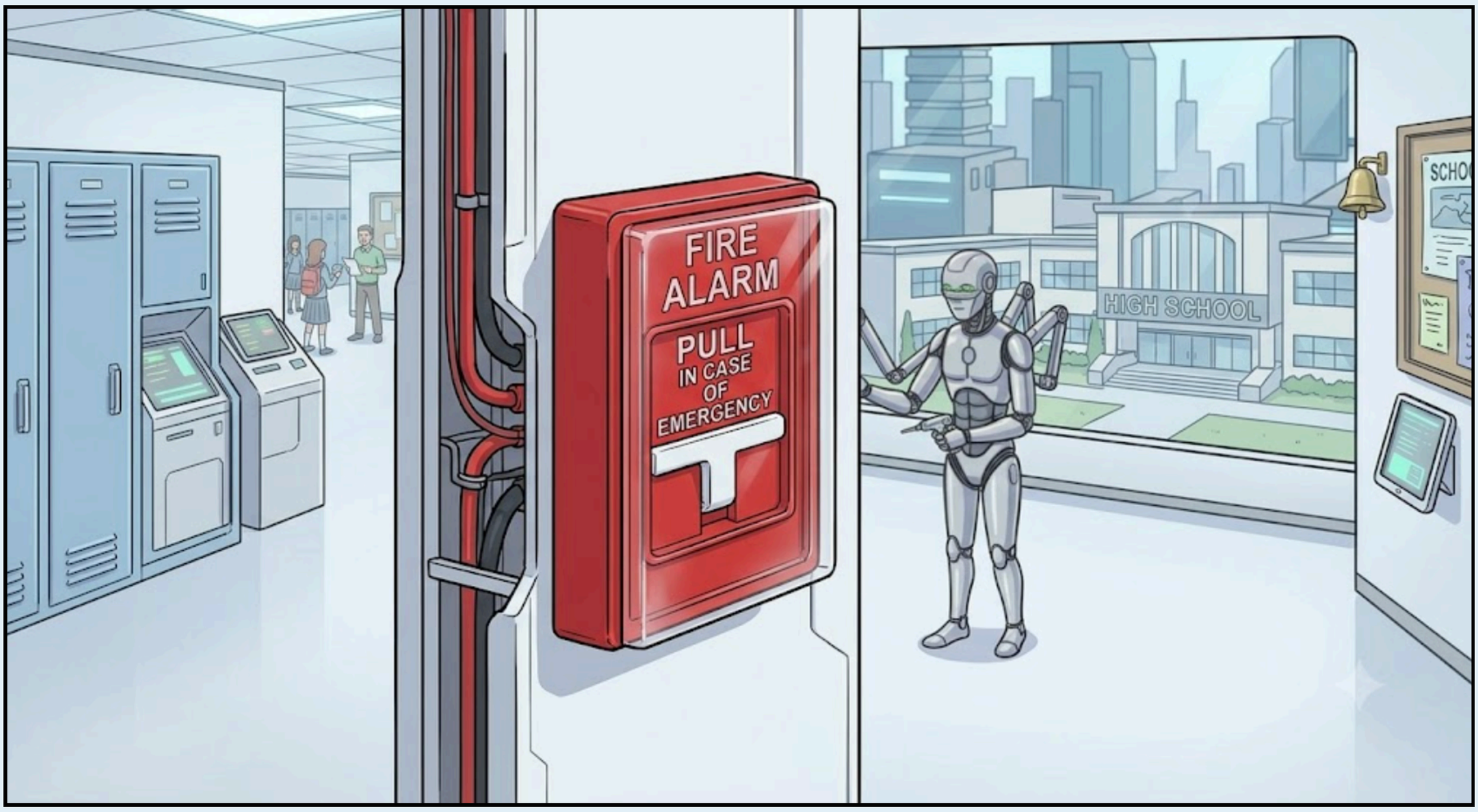
I wanted to test something out for myself. "Do you remember when we accidentally set off the fire alarm in seventh grade?" I laughed.

If this were the real, true Angel, he would break out into a giggling fit.

He didn't.

Instead, he smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "It was an irresponsible decision."

My stomach dropped to my feet. No, this wasn't normal at all. That update had done something to my best friend, and God knows what it might do to me.



It was at that moment that the messages decided to come back, startling a yelp out of me. SYNCING: OPTIMIZATION IN PROCESS...

They were lined up and hovering at the very edge of my vision. Whenever I tried focusing on them, they disappeared, like I wasn't meant to be seeing them. Or someone didn't want me to see the messages. A click from the PA speaker system snapped me back to reality, and the voice of my principal rang through the silent cafeteria.

"Good afternoon, everyone. Please remain seated. A minor technical issue was found and is currently being addressed within school grounds."

The cafeteria stayed in silence. Not an optional silence. More like obedient, mandatory silence. What was going on? My phone vibrated in my pocket, and I took it out. My heart skipped a beat when I saw the message.

YOUR UPDATE WAS NOT COMPLETED. YOU MUST REPORT IMMEDIATELY. It hit me like a running freight train. Of course, how did I not notice before? The updates weren't just helping us control our emotions or calming us down. It was like

They were sanding people down, reshaping them to the network's liking. Every sudden thought, every creative idea, every spark of warmth or joy—gone. Anything that didn't fit the system's standards got flagged for being "too humane" or "too different," and by the looks of it, was

eradicated by the Updates on the spot. Curiosity became something rare and deemed "weird"; any anger was turned into sullen silence, and hesitation was rewritten into obedience. No one took risks or had fun anymore. Everyone was predictable and perfectly polished to be just like mindless robots, wandering around. Anything too human was like a wrinkly shirt waiting to be ironed—all because of the Network.

I was pulled out of my thoughts by an alarm sounding. The lockdown lights flashed throughout the school building, and panic started to rise from my chest. No one was moving. I stood, my chair scraping against the floor before falling, and my legs moved on their own as I started to sprint down the hall, alarms screaming in my ears.

Messages flashed and flooded my vision.

CONTAINMENT REQUIRED: ANOMALY DETECTED

I burst through one of the side doors, sweat dripping down my face. The air felt colder, and somehow sharper. I heard whirring above me and saw drones flying overhead. Sirens blared in the distance as well.

I had no idea where I was going. The only thing I knew for sure was that I had to get out of here. Away from the Network. Away from this sick, controlled society. I stopped at the edge of the community and looked back. The town's lights glowed, shiny and perfect. Lined up evenly. Too evenly.

My update failing wasn't a negative thing. In fact, I think it saved me.

I wasn't "complete." I wasn't optimized or feeling clearer. On the other hand, I was terrified, confused, and unsure of what was going to happen in the future. But I was still me. I was still the same old May, one of the few left that still had her personality intact, her true self. And for now, I think that was enough reassurance to push forward.



“Foreign DNA” by Corinne Park

“Wake up!” My older sister Valentina screeched into my room. “Don’t forget about my appointment today; we all have to go!” Of course, how could I forget? Our mom had booked her an appointment for that brand new treatment people have not stopped talking about. Well, I suppose that "brand new" is a bit of a stretch, but ever since her...accident about a month ago, our mother has been scouring every new treatment and doctor's office that will let her in, and she finally made this appointment last Friday. After I had breakfast and my sister stared at the empty space where she used to have an arm in the bathroom mirror, we loaded into the car, and our mom drove us all to the teleportation center. This new limb synthesis treatment is still sort of experimental, so I suppose it makes sense that there is only one location; it is just a little inconvenient that it is all the way across the country. When we arrived at the place that resembled some sort of miniature hospital, my sister was already having a hard time holding back tears. I know that this month has been uncomprehendingly hard for her; she hasn’t been able to play any of her favorite sports, and she had to try and learn how to write using her left hand for the first time. She definitely deserves this treatment.

I stumbled into the waiting room to take a seat to try and stop myself from hurling up my breakfast onto the floor; I have always had horrible teleportation sickness, but I have to keep it together for Valentina. I know that this day is about her. Our mom checks us in for the appointment, and after 3 long, grueling hours we get called in to the synthesis room. The

Dazzlingly bright lights shimmering off of the pearly white floor force my eyes shut, but as they are opened, my eyes are immediately drawn to the synthesization machine. It is different from anything I have ever seen, a beautiful sterling silver base with an impossibly clear glass frame that is only barely visible, although these components all pale in comparison to the iridescent orb floating in the center of the synthesizer. As I turn my head over to my sister, I can tell that she is just as in awe as I am, barely nodding along as the assistant informs her on the process of the treatment.

“Are you ready then?” The man who I assume is performing the treatment inquires as he glides into the room. He is dressed in a sleek white coat adorned with a small, white name tag, 'Dr. Christopher Synthanai, limb synthesizing specialist.’ Valentina nods her head vigorously and presents what is left of her upper arm to the doctor, which he disinfects and brushes in a clear gel. He then powers on the machine and slowly inserts her arm into the hole in the glass, and with a whirr of the synthesizer, a brand new arm begins to materialize right in front of our eyes. In less than a minute an entire new arm has been made for my sister and we are rushed out of the office and on our way home, finally able to relax after this entire month-long ordeal of my sister...lacking an arm.

After a few weeks everything still feels satisfactory about the entire treatment; my sister is taking physical therapy to help her with her daily functions, and the new arm looks nearly identical to how it did before the accident, that is, until she begins to notice some red bumps flaring up on her new forearm. “It must just be a rash,” our mother said calmly. “I’ll give you some medicine for the inflammation and you’ll be fine.” But then the news stories begin coming out; black hairs appearing on the leg of a blonde man who had gotten the treatment and vitiligo appearing on the arm of a woman who has no family history of it; it was becoming too frequent to be a coincidence. My sister did not want to believe it until she saw it: a clear separation between the red bumpy rashes on her forearm and her unaffected upper arm; it was as if you had painted her arm bright red and taped off the upper section. It was clear and undeniable, this new limb was not her own. Our mother began to pace around the house as she began to frantically contact the treatment center, only to be met with no response.

In fact, the entire company seems to have been erased off the face of the earth; no one is able to get any contact from the company.

For a few days, nothing new comes out about the company until an urgent news story that unfolds the truth of the company. Apparently the now-abandoned building had been broken into and researched to discover the truth, and what they had found was beyond anybody’s expectations. The synthesizer had never used the DNA of the person getting the treatment; it was completely foreign. It turns out that for the synthesizer to materialize a new limb that can seamlessly attach itself to someone, it needs much more DNA than what could be safely extracted from someone. The amount of DNA that the synthesizer used would be fatal if extracted, but that was the only way that any of the treatments could work. The ‘doctors’ at the treatment center would source people that were kidnapped or trafficked from other countries and extract their DNA to be used for people with nearly identical skin tones, meaning that everyone that had gotten the treatment had a complete stranger's limb attached to them.What was even worse is that the foreign DNA was proven dangerous, or even fatal when attached to the body for too long, so all the new synthesized limbs were required by the government to be cut off...



“December 24, 2025” by Margot Squires

“Sir?”

The word shot through my head like a bullet, striking me awake before I was even ready to open my eyes. Before I had even sat up, I knew something was wrong. The panels that were supposed to be yellow were an artificial grey, and the lights that had been flickering just seconds ago were now a blinding white.

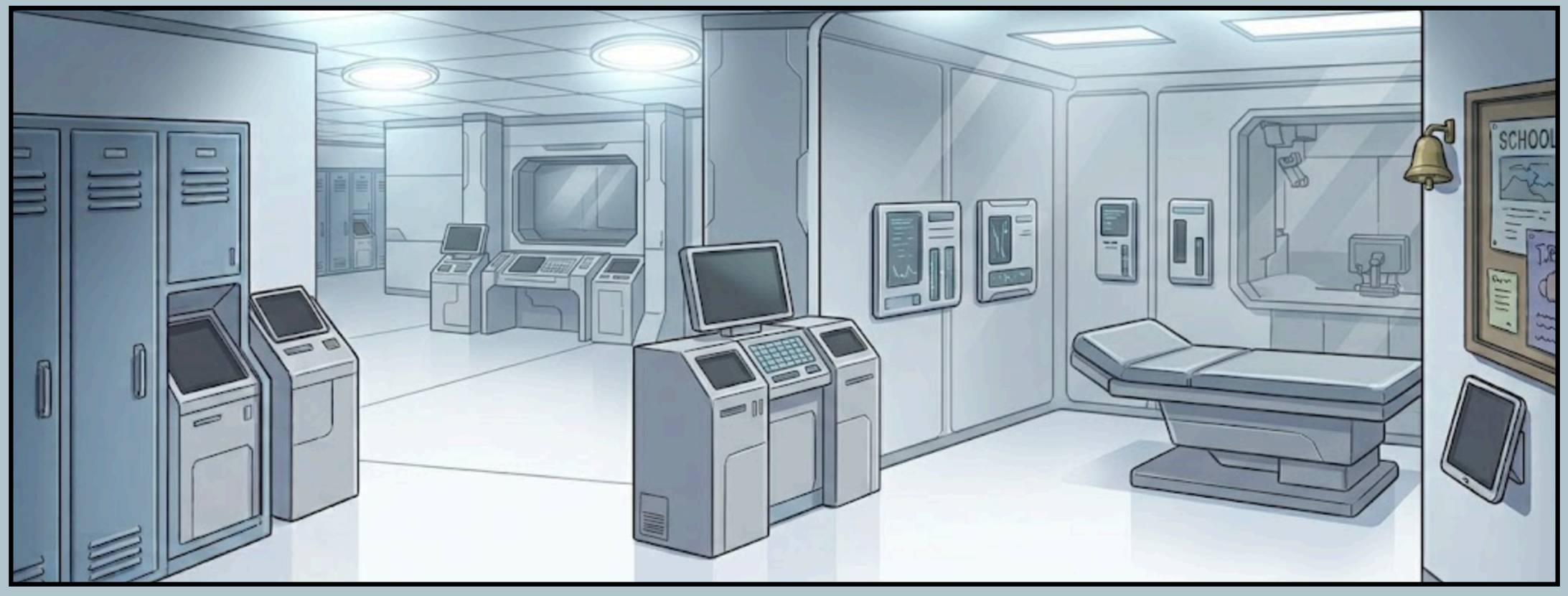
But I was not able to sit up— my arms disagreed with any notion my body made to do so, as if I had not used them in years. A light gasp from my left matched the voice that had spoken to me seconds earlier, and I managed to turn my head to look at her.

A small, caramel-skinned woman peered down at me, her brown eyes creased with a lot of emotions— but the two I picked out were worry and awe. Considering how I felt right now, I did not think I was very awesome, but this woman clearly seemed to think so. “Mr. Charlie Johnson?”

“Uh-huh,” I grunted, trying once again in vain to sit myself up. My voice was hoarse, unused for a long time, clearly, but I had no clue why. And I was cold. So, so cold.

“Where am I?” The words in themselves took effort to get out, but I had finally managed to sit up to take in the rest of the vicinity. It looked out of place, as if untouched for decades. A lamp lay next to me, along with sleek tables and a yellowed chair.

“Mount Sinai Hospital, New York City,” whispered my nurse. She seemed to be glancing fervently at the door, as if contemplating leaving, but I was not intending on letting that happen until I had my answers.



“Right… I remember that.” I do not know why I said it. I barely remembered anything. My head hurt a lot at that moment, actually, freezing my brain as much as the rest of my body. “Do you remember much before that?”

“No…,” I admitted. “What time is it? I’m hoping to get home before supper.”

”It’s 9:30 A.M., sir.” The nurse was waving at a man from outside, who was also staring at me in shock.

“Well, then I should be just fine. I’m terribly cold, but that should be a quick fix once I get home.” I let out a light chuckle.

“I’m afraid that isn’t possible, Mr. Johnson.” The man stepped into the room, adjusting tan glasses that sat on his nose. “Dr. Thomas. Thank you, Lydia.” He nodded to the nurse, who ducked her head and left before looking at me one more time.



“Now, Mr. Johnson, I’m going to keep this straight with you.” Thomas began to speak as other doctors came into the room, quickly descending upon me. Several instruments I had never seen in my life before were strapped onto my body, beeping and screeching into my ears.

”Hey now, what’s going on!?” I demanded, “trying to fight the men off. This proved near impossible though, as the men were clearly in much better shape than I was. And most likely less cold. But I stopped to meet eyes with Dr. Thomas.

“What year do you think it is, Mr. Johnson?”

”Well… my mind isn’t in the best place right now, but it ought to be 1940-something, no? 1942?”

“Mr. Johnson, it’s December 24th, 2025.”

“Well, I don’t think that’s awfully funny.”

But Dr. Thomas’ eyes said otherwise. The conviction in his voice had already managed to convince me halfway, but it was his eyes that told me the truth.

“Get me out of this hospital.” My voice was low and raspier than I had intended. ”That’s… actually quite possible.” The doctor adjusted his glasses and checked a few papers. “You don’t seem to have any illnesses or lasting repercussions from your condition.” He spoke the last word very hesitantly,

as if the words could heighten any of the emotions in my head at the moment. In fact, I felt quite numb at the moment. My mind was furiously trying to put together what was happening. There were so many implications of the idea that I was now one of the oldest people alive. But I did not feel a year over thirty—nor did I look like it. I glanced in a mirror and realized that I looked exactly the same as I remembered myself before. Obviously, I was famished and pale—but my hair remained a dark brown, and wrinkles minimal.

Before I knew it, hands were under my arms, and I was being helped out of my bed. Time seemed to slide by as they checked my pulse, took my temperature, and did more strange things with more loud machines. All the while, my legs were beginning to work, but I was still terribly cold— and my wet clothes did not seem to help. It was as if I had taken a shower, or water had been poured on me. But I had no clue why— nor did I even want to guess, for fear more truths I would not be able to handle would become far too apparent. And finally, I was outside.

The wind was cold, biting, and unforgiving. Small specks of snow were beginning to fall, and the ground was dusted in the white flurries. I had been given itchy beige scrubs and a dusty coat from the hospital for my travel, but they had only given me very loose directions on where to go afterwards. ”There’s a hotel on 23rd Street, we’ve reserved you a space there for a week for you to get your bearings,” the lady at the counter was telling me. I barely remembered what she had said after that. Some sympathetic poppycock, I presumed. I had gotten a lot of that in the last hour or so— and it only made me feel worse. As if I was inhuman. An anomaly. That phrase alone had me utter a light chuckle. I suppose that was exactly what I was at the moment.

“Hey, you!”

A voice sounded from somewhere to my left. I squinted to see a group of kids perched near a fountain, eyeing me with a smirk.

“Hello,” I mumbled, trying not to stir anything.

”Nice dress,” the same voice said. A boy, definitely on the younger side— but old enough to be out at this time of day alone.



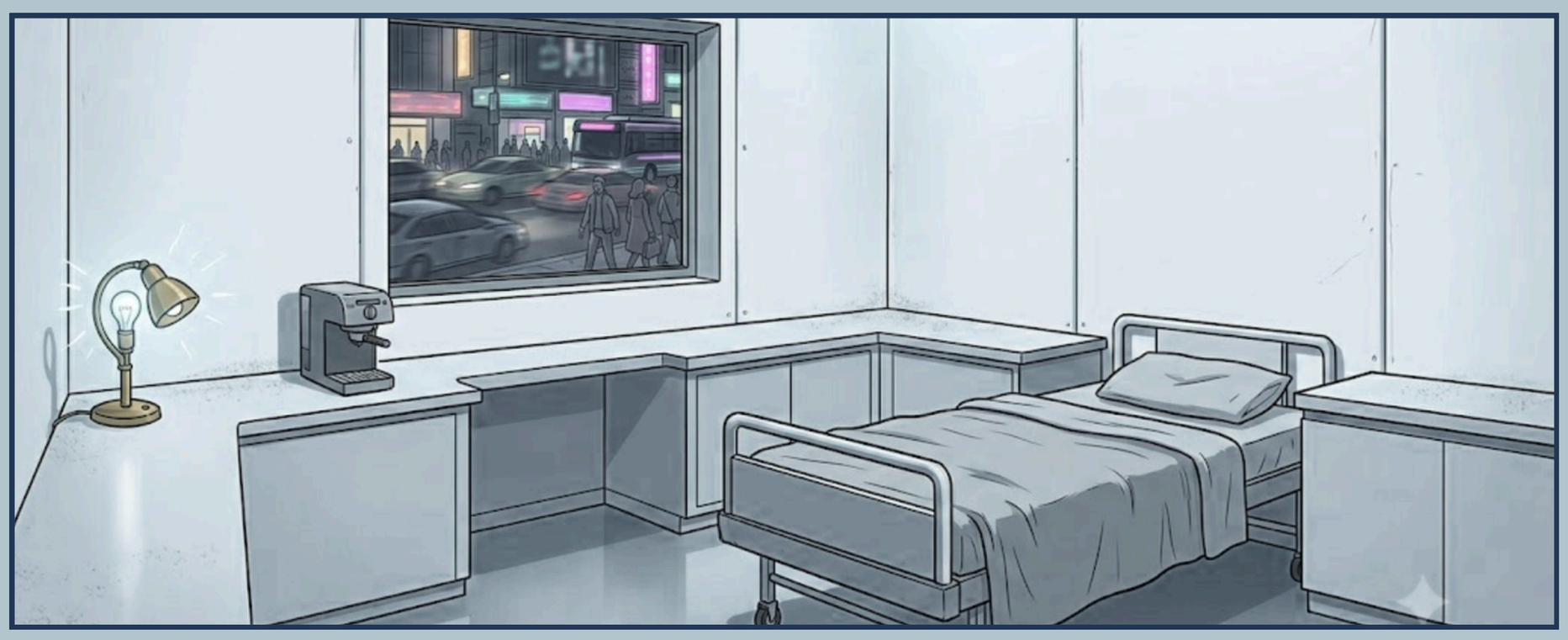
“C’mon now.” I tried to pick up my pace, keeping my eyes forward.
“I just wanna know what you’re doing out here.” The boy kept pace with me, a couple of his friends following.
“On my way home.”
“Where’s that?”
“Wouldn’t you like to know?”
“I would, actually.” They now blocked my path, the empty sidewalk occupied by just us.
“Kid, I just want to get home. I’ve had an awfully long day and you should be getting back to your mother’s by now.” I was too tired, too annoyed, and too cold to deal with this right now. But at the same time, I was interested. This kid had the same round, hazel eyes as my father. They stared at me way too intently, as if he was making the same connections.
“Go talk to her then. Marie Johnson.” He barked a laugh, his friends joining in. I froze. “Johnson, eh?”
”Uh-huh. Does that mean anything to you?”
I do not think I could properly recall what happened to me at that moment. I suppose you could say that it all hit me, or that I finally realised that I was speaking to my grandson right now. Not only was he right in front of me, but he was trying to jump me. It had never occurred to me that someone of his age could go down such a path. But Johnson was a common last name, it could be a coincidence.
Or at least that was what I told myself.
“A friend,” I said quietly. I pushed past the kid to continue down the road. And to my surprise, he did not follow. Instead, I heard snickers and jeers continuing to emanate from behind me.
The rest of the walk home was fast and silent, leaving my mind to wander to places it should not have gone. The world had not stopped to wait for me and instead had run on without a care in the world. But it barely ran, moreover, flying at the speed of light and leaving me helplessly clawing for any sense of direction. I had not found one yet, nor did I think I ever would. There was nothing for me—no booster to get me back into the workings of the world.
The hotel loomed in front of me like a final destination, rotten wood creaking threateningly under the wind. I stepped inside, stumbling to the front counter to see a meek man at the counter.

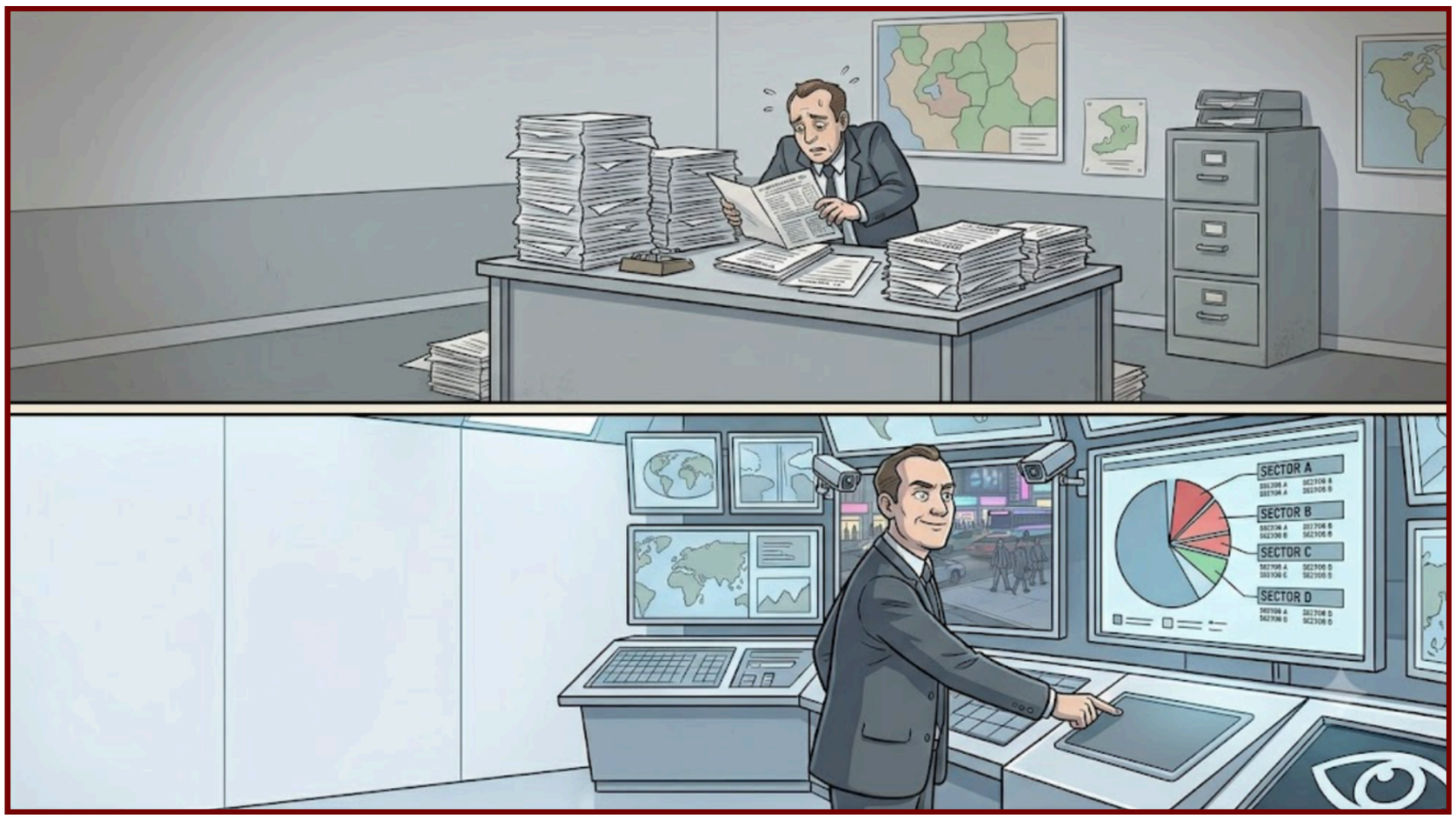
The first thing that caught my eye was the headline, and my heart dropped. *MAN ALIVE AFTER FORGOTTEN CRYOFREEZE LASTING 83 YEARS.* I find it shocking that I was surprised. Of course I had been forgotten about. Of course I had pulled some idiotic stunt and ruined my life doing it. It was all too in character for a man I barely remembered. I think this is really when I decided I was going to do what I planned to do. There was nothing left for me. No friends, no wife, no money, no job. I was hopeless. Do I think I could be able to salvage my situation if I really tried? Most likely. But I was tired. So, so tired.

The room was cold and unforgiving— white walls surrounding me with a lonely bed and counter in the corner, with a window looking out into the busy street. A had a few amenities waiting for me— a coffee machine and a flickering lamp, but that did nothing to soothe me.

I unpacked, putting the clothes given to me from the hospital on my bed and a few books on the nightstand. Modern literature could be interesting. I opened the window, and wondered about their dreams, their wants, and their hopes. All *I* wanted was to go home. But people from here— people who *belonged* here— wanted other things. Maybe some of them even wondered about my life. They could think about the life I lost, or maybe even write a report on it. That was all I was cut out to be. A statistic, an artefact. Something that would be spoken about and dreamed about, but never spoken too. A name in a history book, or on a science test if I was lucky. Man's dreams of time travel were accomplished, yes, but at the cost of men who would sink into the unforgiving quicksand of history, never seen again.

It was an awfully long way down from the window, so I supposed I had some time to go through what I remembered of my life.





“Lost Control” by Leilani Tynes

Every single day, we have to look a certain way, to fulfill what the government wants. It all started a little bit ago, when the government felt like they no longer had control over people. Some thought that it was no big deal and the government was not going to do anything, but that was far from the truth. At first we thought it was only going to last like two weeks but then it just kept going. We have been going through this for a little over a year now and it has gotten to a point, where people are getting mad at the government and want to overturn it. The situation can change everyday based on what the government is feeling like. Some days their rules are not terrible, but other days it feels like it is the hardest thing to follow. Not only do they want more control, they also want to keep population rates down because they feel like it is getting too congested sometimes. Throughout this, we will take you through some of the hardest days we have had, and some of the restrictions we are still having now.

They have put people against each other because we are all just trying to survive. Last week, they limited the amount of times we could breathe. They gave us this little jar that we had to use, but this is one of the main events that put others against each other. People went out and tried stealing others' air when they ran out. This one was for population control, because if you ran out of air then you would die instantly. Some people who were in support of the government now despise it because they did not know how much control they would have. One of my neighbors died, because someone had stolen his air in the morning. Another one of my neighbors got into a fight because someone tried stealing her air can. They have put so much control on us and I knew so many people who had died that day. Every week they switch it to a different category.

This week, we had to fulfill the task that was announced over the speaker that day. It basically makes us all look the same, and someone comes around making certain that we did it. If you did not fulfill the task, then you would be brought to jail. One of the tasks was that we all had to be brunettes and wear a black top with jeans. We all thought it was weird because it just made us look identical to each other. Some people who didn’t have

it, or could not afford it, had gone to jail. During these weeks when there is a task like this, they are the only weeks that people come together to help each other because these are the weeks when the most survive. People go out and try to help others that might not be able to afford it. Some people try to help the kids the most. Since other weeks there is no way around it, like with the air, this is the only week where you can actually help others survive.

People used to support the government and thought that the control would be good for us. In the beginning, people thought that it would be easy and basically we would just have to listen to them on simple things. People started protesting, so they got even more angry and made the consequences and the task of that week much harder. If we win against it and protest, they would threaten to arrest us. Now, people have no idea why they gave the government so much support in this change. We are all living under strict control and cannot get out of it. If we tried doing anything, they would make our task the next week much harder, with many more deaths, to make sure that we had consequences for our actions. We have been struggling so hard to be able to have some type of freedom. We thought that it would just be a little control to have us more civilized, but it was way more.

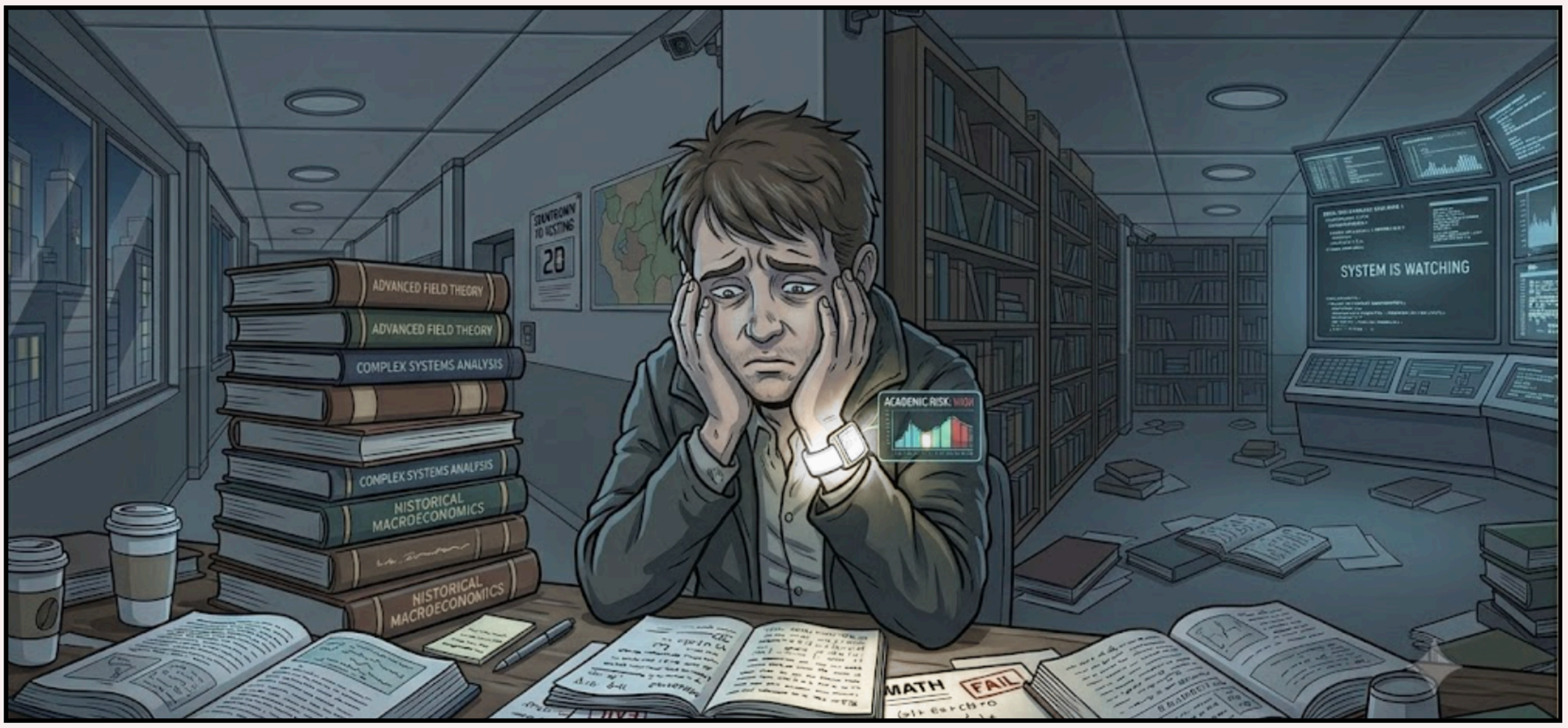
The government has been able to control basically everything we do since that one day a while ago. Now, we basically have no freedom and they really do not care about us. They only care about having power over us which in the beginning, we supported. The government has been putting us against one another and do inhumane things, just to try to survive. They have taken over our lives and no one can do anything about it.



If they feel like they are losing control, then they will make it harder for us to live and have more people die. We have tried everything, but nothing works. Just because we gave them that little ounce of hope in the beginning that we wanted them to control us slightly and make us more civilized, now they basically have all the power and run our lives. We are going to have to live like this for the rest of our lives. In a way, even though everybody just blames the government completely, it is kind of our fault beca--use we should have been more aware in the beginning with who we chose and what their plans were for us. I now dread waking up and seeing this task for us, just because I know it is possible that someone I know can die, and even the most innocent people can. We did not think, and now this is our consequence that we will have to live with.

“Final score” by Amaya Walker

At my school, grades weren’t just numbers. They were warnings. Every student wore a wristband that showed their GPA in glowing colors. Green meant you were safe. Yellow meant you were falling behind. Red meant the system was watching you. If your grade stayed too low for too long, you were removed from the academic track. No one explained what happened after that. Students just stopped coming to class and teachers avoided saying their names. The system was created because adults believed students were under too much pressure. Test scores were dropping. Colleges wanted higher GPAs. Parents wanted results. Instead of fixing the pressure, the government decided to measure it. Grades became a way to prove who could “handle stress” and who couldn’t. Mental health wasn’t something to support; it was something to test. I was always a good student in everyone’s eyes but never perfect for myself. I made sure that everything was turned in on time and not a second late; I checked my grades constantly and panicked if my average dropped even a few points. Teachers praised my responsibility but never seemed to check up on me. No one noticed how nervous I felt all the time. My friends and I compared grades like they were scores in the game. We all once played together when times were fun and not stressful. In my eyes one bad test could ruin your whole week and make you scared for your own life. Things got worse during the testing season. Practice exams, review packets and countdowns filled every class. Sleep became optional. Anxiety became normal. When I failed a math quiz that I studied so hard for , my wristband changed from green to yellow. Seeing that color made me have a full panic attack. It felt like I couldn’t breathe. I have felt this feeling before, but every time it seems different. I couldn’t focus anymore. I was scared and all I could think about was falling further behind and not being able to catch up. I had felt myself slipping through the cracks.



I asked my teacher if I could retake the quiz or get extra help. She sighed and said, “High school is preparing you for real life. You have to learn to manage high pressure in difficult situations." Her words sounded like familiar things adults already say today, but now they felt like a threat. My friend Jonah wasn’t as lucky. He studied constantly, but tests made him freeze. His wristband glowed red more often than not. “Everyone thinks I don’t care," he told me. “But I care too much.” When his evaluation notice appeared, he looked exhausted, not dangerous.

The night my wristband turned red, I couldn’t sleep. I kept refreshing my grade portal, hoping that something would change. A message appeared on my tablet: Academic and Mental Review Scheduled. That’s when I realized the system didn’t care why we were struggling. We all showed signs of stress, anxiety, and burnout, and we were treated the same as a failure. The next morning, Jonah took me to the old library, which was one of the few places without scanners. Students were sitting in circles, talking honestly about panic attacks, pressure from parents, fear of college, and the feeling of never being good enough. It felt like group therapy, something our school talked about supporting but never actually made time for.

“We’re not failing school,” a senior said. “School is failing us.”

They had hacked the system not to raise grades, but to erase the connection between grades and survival. That afternoon, wristbands across the school went dark. No colors. No rankings. Teachers didn’t know who was “successful” anymore. For the first time, students were allowed to breathe. The system was shut down weeks later. Officials said it increased stress instead of reducing it. But students already knew that. When grades decide your worth, learning turns into fear.

Grades matter. Effort matters. But mental health matters more. And no system, future or present, should ever make school feel deadly.



“Area 51” by Allie Zakrzewski

On a hot summer day in the middle of July, a group of friends decided to discover what we call “Area 51” and its secrets. They had become very fond of the idea that there was life behind the area. Stories online had convinced the group that there had to be some sort of dark story behind it. Daniel, the oldest of the group, was more of an adventurous person than the others. However, Rylie might’ve been interested but had deep feelings towards the subject. Gabriel and Lucy were the smart ones of the group and were stuck on their opinion that it was a warehouse of aliens. Ultimately, what the group had discovered was unlike anything they had imagined.

July 17th, 2017 we had decided was going to be the day of adventure. I looked out the window and jumped out of bed. I texted the group chat, “Today’s the day!” I woke Lucy up and immediately following that we left the house. Gabe and Rylie lived right down the street so it was just a short 5 minute walk. We ended up mapping out our game plan right before going. Investigating Area 51 had always been a dream of ours, and after hearing about these new assumptions of aliens living there; we needed to see.

We began our drive towards the site, anticipating what we were going to encounter. I had to drive because I was the oldest, but I didn’t really mind it because I was intrigued by the mysteries behind the place. Lucy was talking about our food plan, Gabe was listening to their music and Rylie was helping me with the directions. We had always worked well as a pair although we weren’t siblings. Being located on the border of Las Vegas, we had a fairly long five hour drive.

After many arguments about food, the music, and who’s exploring what, we finally arrived.

The campus had been huge, way bigger than anything we would’ve expected. Rylie, Gabe, and Lucy all shot me a look once we stepped out and realized how humongous this place was. So I replied, “Well, there’s no going back now!” While exploring, we had to be very careful that we wouldn’t be caught on any cameras. There had been many rocks surrounding the base which resulted in us falling numerous times. Everyone had an indescribable feeling about what was expected of us; however, no one spoke up.

Once we found an opening, we barged right through. The southwest area had little



to no camera and a tiny crawl space. There was a huge red sign above the grey metal doors, through which we ran. Thankfully, no buzzers or sirens detected our motion. There were bright blue LED lights around the white trimming on the walls. It felt like we were in a space station in a whole different dimension. As a group, we made a horrible decision to split up and go separate ways, which in the end wasn't that bad after all. Rylie and I went down the right hallway while Gabriel and Lucy went down the left hallway.

Down the hallway we discovered new types of rocks, and different shapes hung across the walls. It had a dark essence to its area. We kept walking for ages when all of a sudden we heard a huge scream coming from a voice that sounded very close to Lucy's: "Guys! We found something, help!!". Rylie darted down the hallway, and I quickly followed her, committing sharp turns. Our eyes had pure shock as this yellow glowing portal stared directly at us. We all darted a look at each other, and it took a second, but then we jumped right into it.

We went through this spiral loophole into this dark room. All of us had a very confused look on our faces; we didn't understand what we had just entered. In front of us were three-dimensional figures and aliens. At least that's what we thought it was. We were very scared and anticipated every little movement. However, looking around, it was clear there was no way out.

The aliens slowly walked towards us with this sinister grin on their faces. I looked over, and Lucy was visibly trembling, and I gave her a shrug. There was no way out. The aliens took us back into a jail cell chamber and locked us all in a room adjacent to the bathrooms. The little creatures continued to speak in an understandable language, which made us even more scared.

To be fair, what kids wouldn't want to research potential aliens? It's been almost four months since the incident, and we've steadily adapted to this life. Although we've looked everywhere for an escape, it appears that there is none. Now, we will forever live and exist in this dimension.

