

Full Circle

2019 Huron High School literary magazine, Ann Arbor, MI

Full Circle is a publication of Huron High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Writing pieces printed in this magazine are selected from submissions to the River Rat Writing Prize by the PACC Writing Club and the advisors of the River Rat Writing Prize. Original artwork images printed in this magazine are selected from student work created in the Huron High School art program. Authors and artists retain all rights to their own work.

The River Rat Writing Prize seeks to provide a creative outlet and authentic audiences for students. We believe that the student work produced at Huron High School deserves to be celebrated within our school community and with the community at large. Winners receive public acknowledgement and financial reward for their inspiring work. We encourage all students to enter the competition.

Go to:

www.riverratwritingprize.com

For more information about the prize, to see past winners' submissions, and to access a link to this literary magazine. Additional print copies are available for purchase through the link on the website.

PACC Writing Club

Members and Editors:

Catherine Bass

Claire Bott

Moka Johns

Davis Moyer

Anna Scott

River Rat Writing Prize Advisors:

Ms. Jennifer Colby

Mr. Chris Erickson

Thank yous:

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* 2019 River Rat Writing Prize winner

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The absence-
condensed infinity of everything that will be
every planet, every rock, every word
squeezed so tight they don't exist.

Nothing and nothing and-

Light!

Existence unravels like a snake in the night,
spinning upward, outward, down and about,
The Garden of Eden explodes-
a million stars, a million bits of gas and matter,
pulsing, webbing, clammy hands that grasp at every corner of nothing,
dawn, genesis, bang-
it starts.



I walked into CVS, following my sister on her search for gum and multivitamins. I had decided to go along for the fresh air, which beat my stuffy room. It was winter break 2017. January 4th of the New Year, and being a sophomore with what felt like all the time in the world, I was bored. Scrolling through Instagram, New Years resolution spam photos were plastered all up and down my screen. I remembered a girl's post saying her resolution was to journal every day of the New Year, so she would have something to look back on.

Wandering away from my sister's side, I found myself in the school supplies section (my enthusiasm for going back at the end of break was just *oozing* out of me). I looked left and right inspecting all of the hideous spiral red, white and black 5 star notebooks, my eyes kept rolling back and forth over them, knowing I had zero interest in picking one. So instead I looked in the opposite direction, where there was a small corner of disorganized stack of journals. Big pink ones marked \$10.99 and little brown and blue ones labeled "*Notebook*" or "*A Girl With a Latte and a Dream*" in curly gold lettering. I let out a dry laugh when saw that one.

"*C'mon!*" my sister shouted down the aisle waving. I looked and saw she was waiting at the checkout counter. I searched through the pile and saw a black and white striped journal. It was rather wide, lots of pages and best of all marked \$4.00 with a big red clearance sticker on it. I grabbed it from the bottom of the now crumbled pile, hustled my way to check out and put that baby right up on the desk. I gave my sister a big grin, she gave me her signature pissed side eye.

Writing in my new black and white striped journal became a tradition. It started out as a day to day update and later turned into a therapeutic release. My black and white striped journal became the keeper of all my secrets and thoughts. When my family and I would argue in frustration, I would cry my thoughts into my journal. When I was having arguments with friends, I would turn to my black and white striped journal. When I fell into a crumbling ball junior year I always had my black and white striped journal.

Looking back, now that I am a senior, year 2019, there are so many pages filled with color and smudged graphite. Pages filled with airplane travel updates, Doodles of multi colored swirls, clothing sketches of boots in neon highlighter, and glittery purple bell bottom jeans that flow 4 inches wide.

I don't write in my black and white journal much anymore. When I think back to the lovely journal, it's filled with evil and darkness. Here and there I add life updates; where I went on a date, something exciting I did that day, or a message underneath the *Incredibles 2* movie ticket that is taped in. I see this journal as a sign of growth. When I was surrounded with unhealthy people and relationships the pages would be covered top to bottom. Now looking at it, I am no longer reliant on its broad pages to be filled with therapeutic doodles of loopy shapes and flowers and messages written in swirly cursive lettering. I keep this journal to remind myself of the savior it was at the time for my mental health, and that as life keeps progressing and moving forward, I have something to look back on in this black and white striped journal: My strength.



His father was a lighthouse keeper. Old, gruff, he had a weather-beaten face with skin like tanned leather and a beard like the sprays of sea foam shooting off the rocks. He wore an old, beaten-up fishing hat that was his constant companion, that he wore through thick and thin, and had long been battered by the sun and rain.

His father always implored upon him the importance of the work they did, lighting the way for ships to keep them safe, and away from the deadly rocks that pierced the angry surface of the water. He knew his father was proud to be a lighthouse keeper, like his father before him, and his father's father before that, and on and on up a long line of proud lighthouse keepers. He should have been more proud of his heritage, if only it didn't mean that he spent his entire life living on a rock.

He had always known that he would one day take up the tradition of keeping the lighthouse, and that day had finally come. On the day of his thirteenth birthday, his father took him up to the long, winding staircase of the lighthouse tower. A feeling of anticipation and excitement took root as his whole life had been leading up to this moment. They got to the room at the top, in which was nested the light that would guide the passage of ships at night. The view through the glass-paned windows was spectacular. One could see the ocean stretching out toward all horizons, like a vast infinite plane of the deepest blue, deceptively calm. He knew that it could transform into into a frothing, whirling frenzy in the space of a heartbeat.

He had been up in the lighthouse room several times before, when his father had let him watch as he lit the lamp. Now, as he surveyed the familiar room, it seemed to have a different air to it than before. The lamp, the lenses, the reflectors, while before having been to him mysterious things known only to his father, now seemed to acknowledge him, ready to stand at his command, waiting at the edge of his fingertips.

His father showed him how to light the main lantern, trim the wick, and clean the soot off the lenses, giving him advice and adjusting his handiwork. When he did something well he would say "good job," or "that's the way." Having watched his father do it many times before, it was exhilarating to finally be able to do it with his own hands. After he practiced lighting the lamp and setting the mirrors several times, his father laid a hand on his shoulder and said to him, "I think you're getting the hang of this. What do you say we have you light it tonight?"

He felt a little bit of pride swell up in his chest as his father said those words. Maybe he could enjoy being a lighthouse keeper one day. He would continue the fine work that had been done by his fathers and by his father's fathers. He would make them all proud.

"Yes, I think that'd be wonderful," he said.

That evening the daylight faded much faster than usual, and the sky became thick with low, overhanging storm clouds, stewing in agitation. The wind picked up in kind, adding to the general feeling of unrest and chopping up the surface of the water into small waves like teeth flashing in anger. The temperature plummeted, but it was unsure whether part of it was due to the feeling of nervous anticipation on the skin.

“Looks like we’ve got a storm coming in,” his father said. “We better go light that lamp before it gets any darker.”

He nodded in agreement. Together they trudged up the stairs to the top of the lighthouse. The sounds of the storm resounded through the walls from outside. “You remember how to do it?” his father asked.

“I can do it,” he said, trying to be confident.

As they entered the dim room it was clear that the storm was picking up fast. Rain streaked the window panes like long, angry claw marks. The thunderclouds hung black and ominous from above and the sea roiled like a pot boiling over. The wind screamed a mournful song as it passed around the walls of the lighthouse. His father was casting a concerned eye on the weather as he went to open the glass cage that contained the lamp.

“What’s wrong?” he asked his father.

He kept looking out to sea. “Storm’s lookin’ pretty bad,” he said. “I better go check on the boat.”

In addition to keeping the lighthouse, they also fished on the side in the shoals and reefs that dotted the rocks around their small island, the reefs that made the waters treacherous for the bigger-hulled ships passing through. They had a small fishing boat, which they kept moored at a jetty that extended into the water, and with the storm coming in it would be banging against the side of the dock if the knots weren’t secure.

“Do you think you can handle this on your own?” his father asked, looking at him.

He saw the concern for his boat in his father’s eyes. “Don’t worry, dad, I’ve got this,” he said.

His father hesitated for a moment more, then hurried to the trapdoor in the floor and down the stairs. He saw the fishing hat disappear beneath the floorboards, then he turned back to the lantern that held the light. He saw that he would need more kerosene to light the wick. He went to refill more, but right as he took the tank in his hands, there was a resounding *CRASH* like a cannon going off next to his ear, that shook the ground and reverberated in his bones. Accompanying it was a flash like the light of a million suns, assaulting him from the windows on all sides. The lightning strike was so loud and so bright that it must have struck the tower. He stood there dumbly, shell-shocked, as the kerosene tank fell from his hands, and the first thing he saw once he recovered from his temporary blindness was it falling through the air, as if suspended in time. Then, an oddly beautiful black flower blossoming out across the floor as the tank relinquished its contents.

He stood there, once more stunned, incredulous at the magnitude of his misfortune. He imagined the gods were laughing at him right then from their lofty perch above the clouds, delighting in the small havoc they had created.

He would need more kerosene. The oilhouse was at the farthest end of the island from the lighthouse and their home, as was customary. Feeling frantic, he cast a nervous glance out the window, looking to see if his father had come back. What he saw drove fear through his heart and through every vein and blood vessel in his body. In the distance, maybe a few kilometers out, he saw the dim outline of a ship, blurred by the rain and rising and falling with the crest of the waves. And it was bearing straight toward the rocks.

Terror greased the cogs of his limbs, if not that of his brain, and he bolted across the lamp room and through the trapdoor, flying down the stairs. His feet moved so fast that if he tripped he would certainly tumble to an unpleasant demise. He threw open the wooden door to the lighthouse and the cacophony that had previously been echoed in the hollow chamber of the stairwell now became even more apparent to his ears. He stepped out into the storm, making a beeline for the oilhouse, the silhouette of which he could see across a hundred yards of open ground. As he ran the rain lashed at him like a thousand angry whips, tearing at his skin. The wind buffeted him like a shriveled-up leaf that clings to the dead branch of a tree. As he reached the oilhouse and grabbed a tank of kerosene, he could not resist but sneak a glance out to sea. The ocean roiled with the vengeance of an angry god, the waves rearing up their great heads only to come crashing down again in a show of uttermost power. The ship was closer now, and he could see it in more detail. It was one of the new steam-powered ocean liners, probably a cargo ship heading for a nearby port. Its red-painted hull and broad lines boasted ignorant defiance against the storm, confidently plowing toward its doom written in the jagged, unforgiving rocks lurking just under the surface.

He raced back up the tower steps, his heart pounding, the kerosene sloshing at his side. When finally made it to the top he crossed the room, forcing himself to ignore the red and black object on the edge of his vision outside the window, growing frighteningly in size. He wasted no time in throwing open the glass paned door of the lamp, coating the wick in kerosene and lighting it, the match fumbling in his hands. The light sputtered, then, without warning, blazed to a blinding brightness. Too late, he raised his arm to shield his eyes. Lights dancing in his vision, he set the lens in front of the lamp and arranged the mirrors to send a lance of blazing luminance streaking across the troubled sky. He even flashed the hood over the lamp several times to make it more noticeable, alerting to the danger. Now he could only pray that the ship captain saw the light and turned his ship away in time.

His prayers were answered. He saw the massive ocean liner, slowly and ponderously, like a great lumbering beast turning around, veer away from the light and clear of the rocks it foretold. He could only imagine what was going on the ship right now, frantic orders being shouted over the din of the gale.

He stood there for several moments, his heart pounding in his chest, ears ringing. He watched the ship recede into the distance, and after a short while he became aware that his father had returned. The brown fishing hat surfaced and along with it the grizzled face and scraggly beard. He had almost certainly seen the approaching ship and would probably be wondering why he had taken so long to do something so simple as light the lantern. He could see the question written in his face as he went up the last step. He wondered if he would be disappointed, if he would think him unfit to be a lighthouse keeper. He braced himself for a squall of angry admonitions, but all his father said was, "Well, that was a close one."

He hung his head. “I’m sorry. I should have lit the lamp sooner.”

But his father shook his head, the ends of his beard waggling. “No, it’s all right. You reacted quickly in a difficult situation. No one got hurt. That’s all that really matters in the end.”

He could tell from his face that maybe it wasn’t completely all right, that things could have easily been much worse, that he should have taken his responsibility more seriously. But he was just a boy, and he was still learning. Lighthouse keepers by nature lead a very solitary life, and ever since his mother had been taken by the sea many years ago, his father had been very lonely and he struggled with basic social skills. Just as he struggled to express his love for his son.

“Although, I will admit, you gave me quite a scare there,” he said.

He grinned and felt a warm glow surge inside, glad that they could laugh it off, and not let this incident get between them. They were all they had on this weather-beaten rock, and they would never lose that, though they be battered by wind and sea.



Mixed Media / Jaide Wilson

The first summer where *I* felt free

a lake that lacked in flashbacks and panic attacks

Where every night I watched the white curtain become two steps darker within their creases,

It reminded me of the clouds that donned the sky
Noctilucent, providing a view while I questioned my existence
at 3 in the morning
they're still here when the wind begins at daybreak
And I'm brought back
to the white lace cloth that floats before me
Draped against the window while the world comes alive

And every morning the luscious peach sunrise always paints my skin with no shame
The only essence that has appreciated the colors on my body
While the rest has
burned my heart, my skin, my soul,
until there was almost nothing left

I am the desecrated remains of
the merciless wildfire's
sacred dance
and when rebuilt from the leftovers,
it was never quite the same

Yet the lake seems to erase all the burns that decorate my body
With the blue waves lapping at my feet,
Pulling me in so they can envelop me in the affection
I was never given

And the scars that trace my veins?

swimming in the depths of
our lake makes it seem like
they'd never been carved so harshly
in the first place

And I have always preferred to
swim with the moonlight
dancing over my hands, enlightened by
our newfound tranquility
slipping through the grasp of my fingers

golden hour / Olivia Li

There is a part of me left behind
every hour
I have spent floating on the waves,

I have drowned so many times,
But yet

I am still here.

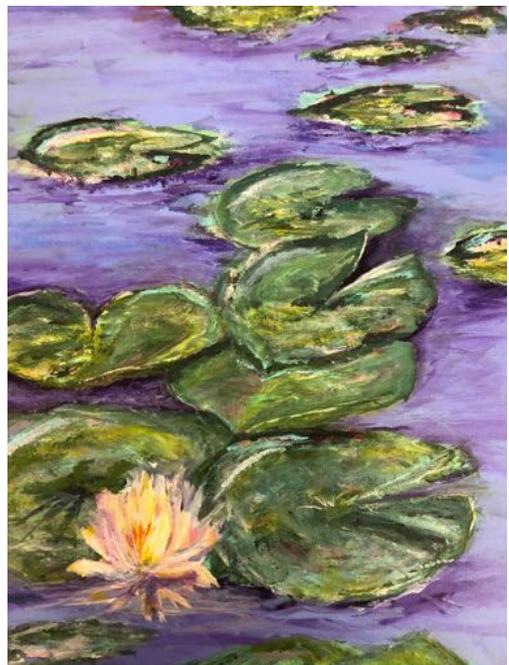
And soon,
There'll be no one left to watch the sequoias grow,
No hands to catch the moonlight
Or glance at the dying sun as our golden hour decides
to come to an end

No one to watch the last of the light gliding over my feet,
Giving way for the moon to worship my body
as the I swim one last time in
the depths of the lake

But I will always be here
My soul will lie near the lakeshore
My heart buried amongst the trees
And the painted sky will remind my sorrows
Of the way I set them free



Acrylic / Brock Engler



Acrylic / Lilly Schaldenbrand

I first noticed the shaking when I was putting on my watch. I picked up the black and gold clearance sale Casio watch I had managed to scratch on its very first wear and put it face-down on the table to help me put it on. The same shake which I had been cursed with, the same quiver in my hand which followed me through numerous auditions, tests, and risky texts to girls I would never come to date. I uneasily coax my wrist into position and clumsily attempt to secure the band to my wrist. My right hand is entirely sore and aching from practicing drums, knowing damn well I have been warned about my tendinitis. In this shape, I'd have better chances at winning a claw machine game blindfolded than I do in putting on this watch.

It is only with the help of my brother that I am able to put the watch on. I try and shake him off after he offers to iron my white button-up for me. I can't let him see me like this. I've upheld my facade of confidence before these events for too long, having performed in music concerts since the fifth grade. With today marking my first ever jazz gig, the guise veiling my lack of self-assurance is only so believable. My current physical and mental statuses are synonymous with those described in the opening lines of Eminem's "Lose Yourself." Sweaty palms? Check. Knees weak, arms are heavy? Check. Vomit on my sweater already? Not quite, but considering the rate at which my panic levels are rising, I wouldn't discount the possibility. Inside the car, the silence and tension compete to see which can break me first. The tension emerged victoriously.

"I heard they have good fries," I blurt. No response. My mother and sibling sit tacet, heads stooped over their phones, reading about this meditation routine, that new computer part being released soon. Whatever it is, it's definitely more appealing than anything which a family member has to say. Though our sedan feels packed, I feel more alone than I had felt preparing myself for the performance.

As we approach downtown Detroit, the amount of foot-traffic dramatically increases, and with it the number of jaywalkers. My father lets out a deep sigh after being stopped in the middle of the street by myriads of Lions fans on their way to the stadium to be disappointed once again.

"*Uthro*," my father finally says, "Get off here and take your cymbals with you." He commands, "Aayaam, go with him." I hastily unbuckle my seat belt and exit the car. I'm running from discomfort towards anxiety. How funny.

I throw open the trunk, wincing as soon as I do after remembering how much my father loves his car. I hear his distraught exclams from inside the car as I pick up my cymbals. *Thump*. I close the trunk and meander over to the sidewalk in hopes that I am able to hold my facade of confidence.

CLIFF BELL'S

The sign emanates with a welcoming glow. I'm a moth as I gaze up at the lamps, slowly approaching the venue. As I draw closer to my final destination, the sign begins staring at me menacingly. My head is filled with all of the possibilities of what could go wrong. The light is burning my eyes, and I decide that it is finally

time to go. I swat away the thoughts swarming my mind and drop my head, avoiding the sign's sinister gaze.

"Hurry up already," my brother complains. We push our way through the doors and into the restaurant. The aroma hits me like a truck. As the smells of fries, sauces, and beer all conglomerate, becoming more intense with each breath I draw, I take a look at my surroundings. The seating area of the restaurant is tightly arranged. I wonder how many people this venue would seat. By my math, it's too many people for me to feel comfortable. It'll be fine, I think to myself, not knowing that the entire restaurant would come to be packed as we began our performance.

I make my way up to a crummy, dimly lit upstairs lounge where I set my hardware down.

"This is probably where the drug deals go down," a familiar voice quips. Thank god, I think to myself as I turn around to see AJ's beaming smile. A killer baritone saxophone player, and an all-around jubilant character, AJ never fails to put a smile on my face.

"Let's get some chairs and stands set up," he suggests, "That way I can go get some of those truffle fries as soon as possible." Classic AJ.

The next hour passes in a blur and I find myself sitting on a foreign throne, in front of a foreign drum set, playing for a foreign crowd. However, one factor has remained constant. I look around and see the same faces in my ensemble which I have grown accustomed to being around.. I turn and face my director, and he returns the stare. He puts his arms up, an artist ready to paint his masterpiece.

He takes a deep breath, as he always does before counting us off. His voice pierces through the light conversation taking place in the audience, immediately silencing it.

"1. 2. 1, 2, uh, uh, UH!"



Color Pencil / Anna Beth Hish



Color Pencil / Isaiah Penniston-John

There was a tired old man sitting at his desk and he did not know how he had gotten there. He barely registered the thuds of feet on the floors above, its empty beat a drum echoing into his wide shoes- brown, leather, bought years before in a stint of caring about the impressions he gave that had worn like the soles, down to nothing. He deleted a few lines.

He tapped his foot, slouched over his keyboard so that the top of his tufted dandelion hair came level with the crookedly taped-up picture of an eight-year old boy whose rigid jaw and ridged nose already jutted out like he had roughly carved his initials there. He suddenly registered that the lunch break had started, and his stomach rumbled.

It was then that he heard it. Faint and off tune but he could still recognise its semblance to the familiar sequence. For a moment he stopped to consider whose birthday it could be, but since no one had mentioned it to him he assumed they didn't think he would care, and he was happy to oblige their picture of him. And as he sat the little librarian in his mind brought down the memory of his last birthday, of him shouldering up to the modest suburban structure he had payed half the mortgage on and watching the sandy- brown mop of hair follow his son's dash to the car.

The door flew open with a "Happy Birthday, Dad!"

The car mumbled under them, and the man saw his son's fist clasped over the opening of a canvas bag. "It is one now." His husky voice seemed softened by the words. "How's school?"

"School-ly. So, what are we doing today?"

"What do you want to do?"

"It's your birthday!"

"Fine, then we'll drive to a bar and I can blot out my memory with a beer-cheese coma. Crap, don't tell your mom I suggested that- she already wants to kill me." The man glanced over and saw the corner of his son's mouths turn out slightly.

The car eased to become parallel with the "Nancy's Pancake's" sign and the pressed lips drew wide. When they had drew to a stop, a sudden "um" kept the man to his seat.

His son stuck a hand in the mouth of the bag, and half pulled out a couple papers cut through with thin lines, with notes scrawled over in pencil. "I didn't really know what to get you, since if you really wanted something you would probably just buy it yourself. So I wrote you something. I'll play it for you later- I just wanted to be able to actually give you something now."

The man held out his hand for the paper, and his eyes turned glossy though his mind struggled to make out meaning from the foreign marks. They stepped out of the car, he wrapped his arm over his son's shoulders, and they walked lopsided into the restaurant, leaning into each other. That night they had climbed the three sets

of stairs to the apartment lugging a violin, and the whole floor had vibrated with the clunky at times, but raw and simple notes strung together, while the man sat nestled into his armchair, slowly tapping his foot as a small smile cracked his lips.

That day had been a glimmer in the dark loneliness he had come, through experience, to associate with his own birthdays. But the birthdays of his colleagues meant something beyond oatmeal or salads of tired lettuce he had bought on a whim in bulk with that jarred dressing that plopped out like something possessed. Something free which would make his mouth feel tacky with the store-bought frosting-

He would have to be tactical about it. He rose from his chair, following the last of the cheers to their source, and came to a room into which white light shone from a wide window, illuminating the faces of his colleagues. There was bobble-head Clara, who in her first few weeks at the office had followed him like a duckling, sure that his seniority would impart some wisdom. When he had asked her if she had a step-counter attached to her head and was trying to reach her daily goal, she had nodded once, stopped in the middle of her second stroke downwards with her mouth slightly open in confusion, and started going the other way with her eyes slowly tracking him in her skull. He skirted around her, further into the thick of beaming faces and laughter about something one of them saw on facebook or other flitting trivialities, churned out like their reports. He rolled his eyes, and in a blur knocked into a man crowned with a red paper hat crookedly held on his head with a string.

Code red- human contact. Crap-

And before the man could completely register him, he quickly ducked under the man's arm, juttied between two women chatting, and reached the other side of the conference space, with its buckling table on which sat containers upon containers of mini cakes billowing frosting and-

Wait, why were they all that sassy-lipstick shade with white ridges on top? Had someone really bought four packs of red velvet cupcakes? What had humanity come to, where food coloring was the only flavor expected? Then he saw the side of the container, on which the words "Fat Free" were emblazoned, his insides turned a scarlet to match the cupcakes and for a moment he doubted the long-term success of the human race. And then suddenly he started to laugh because all he could think of was his son, whose ideas always burst past the man, and how unlike his son was to all this mediocrity, and knew then that it would be fine. He was still chuckling to himself as a path split for him through the surprised crowd, and he went back to his desk to eat lunch.



"Name and date of birth?"

The bag with the drug says "HAZARD" in orange.

My name is Aviva Krimgold. I was born on March 18th, 1957...

-

February 23rd, 2018.

This place is formal, white, and sterile — a medical, slowly churning office. The HAZARD drug is *carboplatin (car-bo-pla-tin)*, bold, orange-bagged, very out of place. The two nurses, Name-and-Birth and Awkward-Smile, are at the computer, cross-checking with military precision: *name-and-birth, name-and-birth; aviva-krimgold, aviva-krimgold; carboplatin, carboplatin* — and hence the clear liquid flows down through a tube, down into the needle, and down into my mother's arm. Personalized poison, Mama calls it. I sneak another cracker into my mouth. The nausea is bound to redouble tomorrow.

March-18th, March-18th, I think, and suddenly the saltine cracker doesn't taste like anything. How many birthdays are left, anyway?

From her green hospital chair, my mama looks at me with laughing eyes.

-

In 2018, my papa ages seven decades in two months: he gets smaller, somehow, his hair turns whiter and his eyes sadder — but Mama turns into a child. When she calls to me her voice is loud and petulant and funny, and when she grins, her eyes fill up with mischief to the brim. It's for survival, you see. She's thinner than she's been for years.

One day, she ascends down the stairs in a dusty yellow-white gown, waving her arms, and twirls in front of me.

"Is that your wedding dress?"

My mama grins and twirls again.

-

March 18th, 2018.

Exactly two months ago, my mother was diagnosed with stage four NSC lung cancer, and the internet says she has about 0.5 to 1 birthdays left. If she's really lucky — if she's one to two in a hundred — she's got five. Today, she turned 61.

It started slow, in December, when 2017 was dying. Several months ago, it was a cough (they said *whooping*), and then it persisted (they said *pneumonia*). The word *cancer* drifts around one's head like a specter and like a thin tendril of smoke wafting from a burning tip. Wispy, terrifying, all over the news and in every wrinkle of old-lady gossip. It started with a joke, furrowed into suspicion — it turned into the future in three days. It's been the present for months.

My mother had smoked for forty years. She smoked vogue cigarettes. People will say *she had it coming*, and no, it's not surprising, but Mama never whines, never apologizes, never rues the past aloud.

She'd quit last December, when 2016 was dying. She must've had it by then already.

It turns mundanely unbelievable and unbelievably mundane so quickly, just the way milk goes sour. Cancer occurs over winter break, and I return to school reborn into cynicism, disbelief, and periodic bouts of tears. My Papa teaches students with a new-found vigour. Mama coughs, pales, throws up and up and up, cuts her hair. She shrinks down to a woman who seems new to me, so tiredly thin, feverish, nauseous, unless I look right into her eyes.

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In 2018, I finally understand why people believe in God.

Normal things don't matter anymore. My Papa's never angry anymore, and my parents never argue about dishes.

I'm angry all the time. In school, my grades slip and slide and become something I hadn't ever fathomed — but somehow, now, grades don't seem to be nearly as important as pots, pans, groceries. School is useless, *useless-useless!* What matters most is food, medicine; fever, bile, blood. Bodies. Fucking statistics. This man named Doctor Kalemkerian, whom I don't know very well.

Sometimes I think it's ridiculous — surely the eyes need only to be shut very tightly to be reopened, and then Mama will be there as before: a little fatter, a little browner, her hair a little longer — strong and unbendable, warm and undying.

Sometimes I think it's ridiculous: surely the eyes need only to be shut very, very tightly to be reopened; and then Mama will be there as before...

She smells different, so sometimes I bury my head in her closet, my nose in her sweaters, and shut my eyes so tight that yesteryear comes spinning.

Sometimes: fuck, you know what, nevermind, this isn't normal — this will never be normal. It *shouldn't* be. I want to wake up.

-

"Mama?" I say and push my head into her arms and onto her lap. Only my head fits nowadays. I'm too big nowadays. "Mama, have you cried?"

"No."

Her words blow across the top of my forehead. I close my eyes and I try to remember her voice forever and ever.

"Nope, I haven't cried."

"Why?"

Mama shifts and pulls back. "Because I don't want to break," she says. "If I let go, I'll never stop."

-

It's evening. In her bedroom, my mama lies asleep, her right hand bent behind her pillow like the arm of an infant, her other curled to her chin, her wrist laxly bent, fingers spread and pointing downward like a broom of roots.

My Papa is reading, and his voice is a slow and a rolling burble, as if were it the voice of a deep, deep forest stream of the clearest blue, with shafts of sunlight streaming to the very bottom.

I come into the room on tiptoe and sit down by my mother's white chair, which Papa is sitting in.

"*Uga*, go to sleep," he says, mid-sentence.

I won't go to sleep. I lean my head to his leg and he brushes his round, worn fingers through my hair and lays his heavy warm hand atop the crown of my head.

I remember being small — Papa used to read me fairytales. He'd always loved fairytales. He still loves fairytales. I liked only a few. *Karol Ayist* — The Stork-King — *Konok Garbunok* — The Little Humpbacked Horse. The Snow Queen. Sinbad's Voyages. Arabian Nights. Greek myths.

When I was in the womb, he read Pushkin to me: *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, 1820. When I was older, he read me whole novels. I remember, distinctly, Papa reading to me about Paganel, who thought he was studying Spanish but actually learned Portuguese in *Children of Captain Grant* by Jules Verne (whom I never liked), and about the cruel Lilliputs, who argued about boiled eggs and heels in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. When I was far older — thirteen, perhaps — my parents read me Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. First Papa read a little, and then Mama read a little, and then I would read even less. We'd sit at the kitchen table and drink tea and read into the latest hours of the evening. My mama would laugh (like a mischievous child) and unconstrainedly spoil all the best parts at all the wrong places.

Now, Mama lies asleep in bed with cancer, and my Papa is reading her Nabokov's *King, Queen, Knave*. He lets me stay for a little while; and when I go to my bedroom next door, still, my Papa is reading, and his voice is slow and safe and home.

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In some ways, I had thought our lives immortal. I had fears, of course — everybody has fears, of hurt, of myself — but I mostly had fantasies and plans for the future. I had dreams about my elder sisters dying, sometimes, about my friends dying — but never my mother, my strong everlasting mother who smoked half a pack a day.

It's only when I take a knife to my forearm that my Mama stops smoking. 2017, sophomore year: winter, slush, and the grayest of fogs. The trick in school is to stay on top, afloat. I got it from the internet. It's embarrassing to say; my parents gave me everything. The world was my oyster.

But I'm trying to be honest. Skin is surprisingly hard to cut. First with nails, under the desk, at home, too much work and too much death and no way out. Then with my compass from ninth grade, with my sharpened pencil tip, the knives and tools from the ceramics drawer. There are sharp things everywhere if you look.

I used to like school, especially when I was little. People, stories; learning in the book, out the book. That sort of thing heals. Now all these books are framed with tests, trials, counting, scoring. This system is a desperate, angry place. Hearts break at sixteen.

If you care for grades, the pattern smothers you: *test tomorrow, next week, clubs, extras, exams, grade-dropping, yours is better, hers is better, I shouldn't compare, paper due, final, gone, goodbye, she died*. If you don't care for grades, you've failed, because the letters mean your worth. Humanity isn't all that strong; it

strains against the stress, slips down between the gears, gets lost. Everyone I know here is chipped and cracked. If I counted them all, they'd overflow my fingers. It took me a long time to learn the percentages weren't worth it.

High standards, stay afloat. In class the words turned to buzzing, sometimes, and I molded my forearm under the desk and scratched off everything I didn't like. It didn't hurt much, with time. I suppose that's why people go deeper. I am frightened of two things, but I really should be frightened of habits.

In the end, the truth came out — I was luckier than most; I never went deep, no ever-scars. There's a teacher I owe my life to. A call from school, a series of fraught arguments; I could always be depended on to cry, and Mama always to burst into shouting anger. I'm sorry — *I'm so sorry*, but at last even Mama's voice gives way, and the quiet turns desperate, until her hand settles on my back. (*What did I do wrong with you? Why?*)

-

One day Mama finds me huddled in a corner, crying myself a small private Nile of snot and tears.

"Show me!" she demands, and grabs a hold of my right arm, turning it over.

"Wrong arm," I mutter. She always takes the wrong arm.

My right underarm is white and smooth; the veins are blue and green — the good hand, my future hand.

Mama sighs — what a cruel child I must be to her. She takes my left then, gently, and I want to bury my head into her wide wide chest until I disappear or become a part of her or a four-year-old again. She smells so much like everything — like the whole universe in one single, smoke-tinged breath.

"What are you doing to the beautiful body that I gave you?" she asks. She doesn't sound angry anymore, just tired.

"Mama," I say. "*Mama.*" How can I explain that it's automatic now, angry, it helps, and I'm sorry, it's not about my arm or myself but because the winter is long and so wet and so —

"I can't," I hiccup. "I c-can't stop —"

"*You* can't stop?" My mother swoops down. "*You?*"

She pulls my shoulders back and makes me stand as straight as a fence-post. "You can do *a-ny-thing*. Anything. You hear me? You are young," she accentuates with a jabbing finger on my back, "you are strong, you have everything. You can do whatever you like."

Hot angry tears spring to my eyes. She doesn't *understand*. "No," I wail, "no, no I can't—"

"You can't quit?" Mama points her hot brown gaze into my eyes. "Hah. Fine. *I'll* quit."

And Mama quits smoking. One week, two weeks, a month.

“If I can quit after forty years,” she says, and proceeds to name first the impossible (presidency, or the moon), and then the possible. She goes, for one week, to a “hypnotherapist” who turns out to be a proponent of what she calls *tapping*. My mother sits at the dining table and taps the top of her head, under her nose, above her clavicle. It's supposed to be like acupuncture, I think. We all laugh at her — she looks ridiculous; but from that week she never smokes again.

Eventually, I quit cutting too — I drop an extra class in school, I start going to a therapist, I stop crying all the time.

In the aftermath, I make two great discoveries.

The first is March. Early, inevitable spring — the soft green tendrils curling in the muddy earth, the smell of warm rain, the sunbeam peeking through gray wooly clouds. I remember that there's something inside me that is burning and that wants to live forever and doesn't ever want to die. In my old seventh grade diary I find “*i want to live irrefutably*,” and then suddenly, slowly, I begin to believe in everything again. It's a shy, careful spring; but it's so lovely, nevertheless.

And hence of my discoveries, the first is March.

(The second is how nice everything smells when your mother doesn't smoke.)

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In two months (eight days before she turns sixty-one, on March 10th, 2018) my mother doesn't break, but she cries. She sits on the couch, and she cries, and cries, and cries.

I cry with her a little. I draw circles on her back; circles go on forever. I've seen her cry less than ten times in my life. She lights the room, my mother.

Here is my mama, like a child. It is good to cry sometimes. No one can fight and fight and fight all the time. She'll deny it later; she denies everything later.

“Shhhh, Mama, shhhh,” I whisper. “I love you — I love you more than anyone in the world.”

Mama inhales a sob, no words. I know what she means. She cries, for a little while; we sit, for a little while. But we always get up, afterwards.

-

PERKS OF CANCER:

#1 *everyone respects you! cancer is a highly respectable thing*

#2 *you can get away with anything, anything, anything (almost — so stop going to those boring dinner parties you don't like)*

#3 *so now you know who the good friends are*

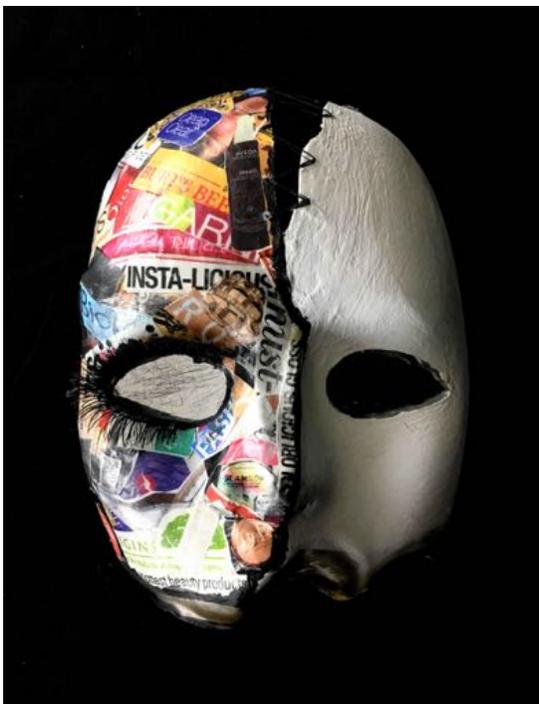
#4 *now you know what's important ! priorities !*

#5 *you might fit into your 40 yr old wedding dress*

#6 *(you might just be a little cancer miracle...)*

12:04 AM; March 19, 2018. In the next room over, my papa is putting my Mama to bed. He's reading Nabokov's *Kamera Obscura*, from the same collection — he's already finished *King, Queen, Knave*. Outside, the moon is bright and the sky goes on forever, clouds and stars and everything else I don't know. In my room there's a light by the bedside; I'm on the bed with a textbook in my lap.

Inside, there's my home. There are my curtains, my windows, my bookshelves. There is my father's voice, my mother's raspy, insistent breathing — perhaps there is even a little secret that we share. There is the safest sound, the safest sound in the world. The light on my bed stand is kind and yellow. Tomorrow, morning will come.



Mixed Media / Jessica Moran



Mixed Media / Karley Misek

The best thing about coffee shops isn't the coffee. It's sitting in the window seats, nursing a latte and watching the tide of humanity roil in and wash out, dragging or being dragged by, pulling or being pulled by love, hate, rage, boredom, fear, anxiety, or a major case of the just-don't-give-a-damns.

I've always been a people-watcher, and coffee shops are perfectly situated in the middle of a busy world. Here, on the other side of the glass, I watch movies play out, sometimes in time-lapse and sometimes in slow motion.

In the early morning, passersby move too slowly (pre-caffeine injection), too quickly (post), or are stuck in between (attempting to manage a briefcase, tablet, and to-go cup all with one hand).

In the streets, people armed with badges and security codes and the irritation that comes with too little sleep swipe into their buildings. Some fumble with keys and panic. Others stare glassily from between noise-cancelling headphones. Off the curb, a black Jeep Patriot takes too long to parallel park, and the quicksilver Honda close behind gets antsy. Quicksilver driver's hand dances with indecision over his steering wheel horn.

I'm not a part of this tangled, busy world. I'm only a window-seat observer. But I'm about to become one of those unaware they're being watched: a Work Person.

In twenty-four minutes, I'll be at my first employee orientation, in that huge beige concrete building across the street. Cook County Administrative Building, the plaque proclaims, in capital letters, down-to-business and sans-serif. There, I'll enlist in the workforce. I'll fill out tax and insurance forms. I'll get my own security ID badge.

Just last week, I was nervously awaiting the phone interview, hoping my voice wouldn't crack or break, or that my train of thought won't scatter like marbles fallen on the floor.

I'm not sure I feel ready.

An man wearing suspenders and a belt and a pocket handkerchief stops in front of the Administrative Building. He checks his phone, watch, and briefcase three times in quick succession, pacing left and right in front of the entrance.

At first, I think he is lost, swept up in the morning chaos. Then I realize he is here for orientation too.

I see you, fellow nervous Work Person.

I see you, and I will soon join you. On the other side of this suddenly thin glass, I too will become a Work Person, part of this muddled, harried crowd. I too will adopt that not-quite-hunched attitude, that forward-leaning posture that Work People seem to believe will save them two steps. I will no longer have the luxury to dawdle about on summer mornings in coffee shops. My latte will serve a different function—to keep me awake rather than leave me dreaming.

Work People have their eyes trained on the block ahead. As a whole, the mass looks ordinary and almost haphazard, but each Work Person knows his or her purpose.

Across the street, the man finally calms his nerves and bolts up the steps. No looking back.

I, too, take a deep breath before finishing my latte.

And then I leave the coffee shop towards the Administrative Building, careful not to step into oncoming traffic, careful not to interrupt those paths of love, hate, rage, boredom, fear, and anxiety, ready to step into my own purpose on the other side of the window.



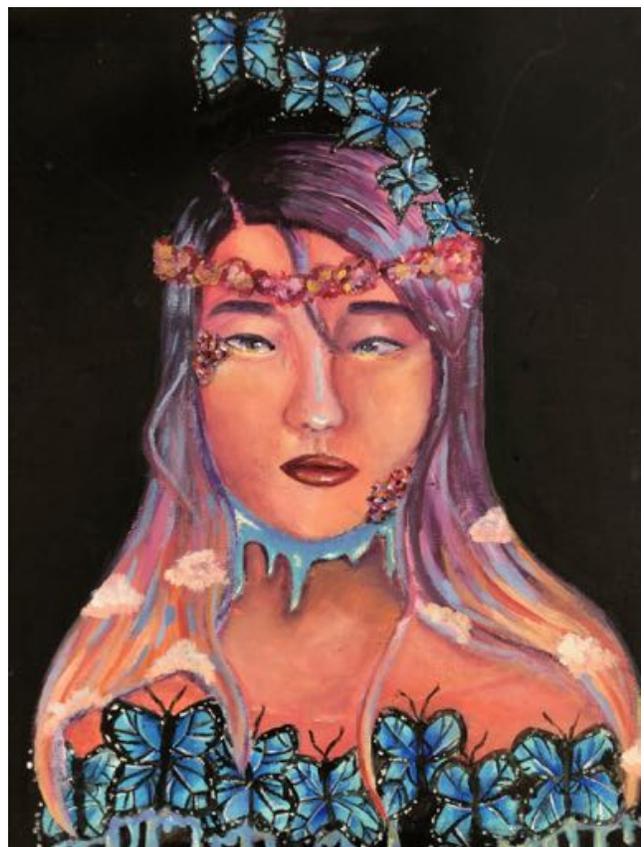
Watercolor / Dominique Nevaux

She stands in the garden, uphill,
Surrounded by chicken wire
Keeping her tomatoes and squash from flirting off,
Dancing into the paws of a hungry racoon.

Her voice, thick plum,
Drips into the roots, soil, where stalk cradles leaf
Red water nursing, singing,
Breaking and healing

Her fingers walk the prickly spine of a pepper
Picking off the beetles and bones of bugs gone wrong
She pops one into her mouth,
Bitter pill, swallows it whole

Vegetable woman, cloaked in sod-
You are the closest thing to my god.



Acrylic / Jasmine Xu

Growing up in the backwoods of Connecticut, my father's family had very little. They lived in a house of six people and one indoor bathroom. An indoor bathroom was a step up for his parents, who had outhouses and used pages from the Sears catalog for toilet paper when they grew up. The family's car was a junker. The car could not go in reverse and they could not afford to fix it. My father's mother exclusively bought her clothes in second-hand stores and rummage sales. His parents finished high school, but never went to college. They were hard-working Americans fighting for every penny. They even built their house with their very own hands. My father never had lots of clothes or toys, but his parents did everything they could to make his life a joy. Growing up, all my father really had was family. He would play with his siblings outside, go fishing and camping, and work on the house with his dad. The list goes on, but the fun of life started to dwindle.

When my father was only five, his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. As my father told me about his mother's illness, his eyes began to tear up, looking to the sky as if he saw her gazing down on him. He never knew she had cancer until she passed. His father refused to explain what his mother was suffering from. He and his siblings played a guessing game their whole childhood, wondering "Why can't mom get out of bed? Or, who are these doctors?" My father would lie at the end of her bed, crying and begging his mom to explain why she was sick, but she refused to answer. He would lie awake at night, trying to figure out what was going on.

The first eight years of her illness she continued to cook for the family, wash their clothes, and provide for the family the best she could. It wasn't until the last two years before her passing that she could not even rise from her bed. As a smile comes across my father's face, he says "She was a strong woman. When she would go to the dentist, she would never use any form anesthesia for dental work. She knew she would have to learn how to deal with pain so she could provide for her family." When she passed, his father became seriously depressed and started drinking. "He would have drunk his life away if he never remarried," my father said. Growing up poor was a struggle with two working parents but now with only one, their economic struggle became even worse.

When my father was an adult, he asked his dad why they never told them what was happening. "I asked my dad why he never told us. His response was, 'We wanted you all to live a normal life, not knowing your mom had cancer let you do that.'" In fact, my dad says, it did quite the opposite. It made it much harder to cope with her death. It took him more than ten years and a lot of therapy to deal with her death.

To deal with this at such a young age taught my father self-reliance and perseverance. My father explains that the strength his mother had taught him to work hard, savor the moment and never give up. My father's definition of the American Dream is to overcome hardship and to rise above your circumstances. He never gave up in school, working 20 hours a week and two summer jobs to pay for college. After many years

of schooling, he ended up with a full ride to Northwestern's Ph.D. program and to Harvard Business School for a postdoctoral fellowship. Today he is a professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

Although this is a sad story with a cliché ending, my father explains, "I had all the fun a kid needed. I never went hungry. I had clothes on my back. My mother and father taught me life long lessons. My father taught me to be independent and to not worry what other people think. My mother taught me to be strong no matter what. They made me who I am today, and I wouldn't take back any part of it." Life is life, and you must roll with the punches. He came from the poorest parts of America, his mother died when he was 15, and his father struggled with alcohol, but he came out on top. My father was able to rise above his circumstances and overcome emotional and economic hardships.

My father found the American Dream, crafting it from the lessons of life. He is my inspiration.



Color Pencil / Ellie Makar-Limanov

“Who are we?”

Bright lights line every inch of the hotel marquee, glare through the wide windows of the bus as it slows and comes to a stop. Invading the previously dark cabin, the light highlights the features of my fellow classmates, distorted by yawns and stifled stretches. The intense contrast shocks them from their torpor after the tedious travel; they reluctantly shift from nests of jackets and backpacks. The blue-velvet bus seat does little to ward against artificial air conditioning; truly, mankind has mastered the elements to torture himself.

“Hotel work!”

I'm dressed up: white collared blouse, covered in the blooming blush of ice cream stains from a rest stop ice cream encounter gone sour; black slacks, crisp from sweat, sitting and rosin; pointed heeled boots, the same ones worn for years before and years after, changes covered by coats of black varnish, greying wrinkles where the leather creases; In short, it's orchestra formal for the show, *Hamilton*. Not the best attire for a road trip, but sacrifices are to be made to appear presentable.

“What do we want?”

A parade of protesters marches in circles along the pavement: Banging drums, blowing whistles and horns, brandishing noise makers. There's even someone waving a Mexican flag and another wielding one of Mary. A particularly patriotic man prances in a US flag cape and shiny stars-and-stripes paper top hat like the day-after-sale on the fifth of July. Large paper signs swing about, a splash of revolutionary red on which reads “Chicago Workers on Strike” with painted red wooden handles, and a slot for a piece paper denoting location could be swapped out. How often does this specific event happen for them to need to keep these handy? Even more signs are wrapped up in twine; leaned against a plastic fold out table. I grimaces as I realize the implications, for in fine print, as if anyone would approach close enough to read it, says that they are “not encouraging workers stop working”. Of course not. That's what layoffs are for.

“Contract!”

The brashest students begin to join the chant. Caught in indecision, eyes flicker over to the boys, idly wondering if those outside could hear the mockery of their mission. Others discuss the implications, wondering about the context as they peer at the display of defiance. “I heard about this when I was looking up the hotel. They hire temporary workers during the busy season, you see,” an assured student asserts amid the curious murmuring of the class, “However, they can fire them whenever, so the workers don't have health insurance or a permanent job.”

hire temporary workers during the busy season, you see,” an assured student asserts amid the curious murmuring of the class, “However, they can fire them whenever, so the workers don’t have health insurance or a permanent job.”

“When do we want it?”

From my high perch inside the bus I judged. There’s a long haired girl, standing at the edge of the ring, probably being made by her mom to do it. She looks bored, half heartedly swishing the sign around. Does she even understand what is going on? There’s a sassy girl checking her phone with long fingernails while sashaying in the line. After some swiping, shaking of hair, and a stuffing away of a phone, she is pumping her placard like the rest. Why is she here, with all of her accessories?

“Now!”

The bus door hisses open and the cacophony intensifies. Legs cramp and students shuffle forward with the promise of space. We walk past, giving the protesters a wide berth. They simply glance at us, with our fancy suitcases and backpacks that burden us; and professional outfits that choke us. We leave our belongings in huge piles, which are carried off by bellhop (the ones who are working avoid the eyes of those who are not).

Their voices fade as we walk away, yet the clash of instruments haunts us for some time more.

The theater is just down the street of the hotel. This is part of the reason it was chosen. The class flocks towards the glowing gold goal emblazoned on the theater. The streets are filled with a sea of cars, and people are fluid, taking the path of least resistance through the crowd. Scattered lights shine on cement, which takes on a shiny, almost wet appearance like unshed tears.

It’s late September, and my cloudy breath rivals that of the smoker watching the mob of students monopolize the sidewalk. The air is sharper here, a burning tang that passes through my throat. Eyes watering, I resist the urge to cover my mouth; it’s considered rather rude to do so. Instead I settle for shallow breaths that barely pass my throat and stifle a cough.

The class joins a growing line of people, mostly ladies who wear bright coats and brighter jewelry, tittering their excitement about the play. They flit around, some finding friends, some cutting the line. The bustle attracts others from the city.

There's a guy sitting on the ground, petting kittens who lap hungrily from cans of brown sludge, a slight purring sound earning coos from the girls. (He's probably just using them to garner sympathy. What happens to the kittens when they grow up?) There's a guy who just says help me, help me, please help me, over and over and over again with the exact same cadence and cheerful tone as he stands in his alleyway waving a change can. As I walk closer to the sign of Hamilton, I feel my 190 dollar ticket grasped in my hand, as I twitched under their judgement. They know. They know I could help, but I don't.

Some people donated. A friend, another, peers I didn't really know. You learn a lot about a person when you see them in a new location. Here you go: coins, 20 dollars, a water bottle. (What are they spending it on anyhow?)

Rough sequins catch my calloused fingertip, a result of playing an instrument. The scaly pink fabric of my change purse rasps at my hand. I don't remember grabbing it. It's a rather childish purse, sparkly with hope and all to noticeable. It's light in the way a hundred dollar bill might feel in comparison to a penny.

The streets glint with unknown fears.

I put it back.

See don't see. Do not look at me. Do not judge me. I am not ready to be judged. An endless cycle of denial that does nothing to help anyone. I volunteer at Food Gatherers; therefore I cannot be a totally irredeemable person, right?

The harsh light of the theater's miniature marquee marks me, casting everything else in shadows as my eyes adjust. There exists only this theater, and the confusion of the world is relegated once more to the back of my mind.

I wish I could say I donated. That I gave pizza, an encouraging, closed lipped smile, a few cents. Smile less, do more. I simply looked away, a neutral, accusing, vacant smile plastered to my face. After all, that's who I am.

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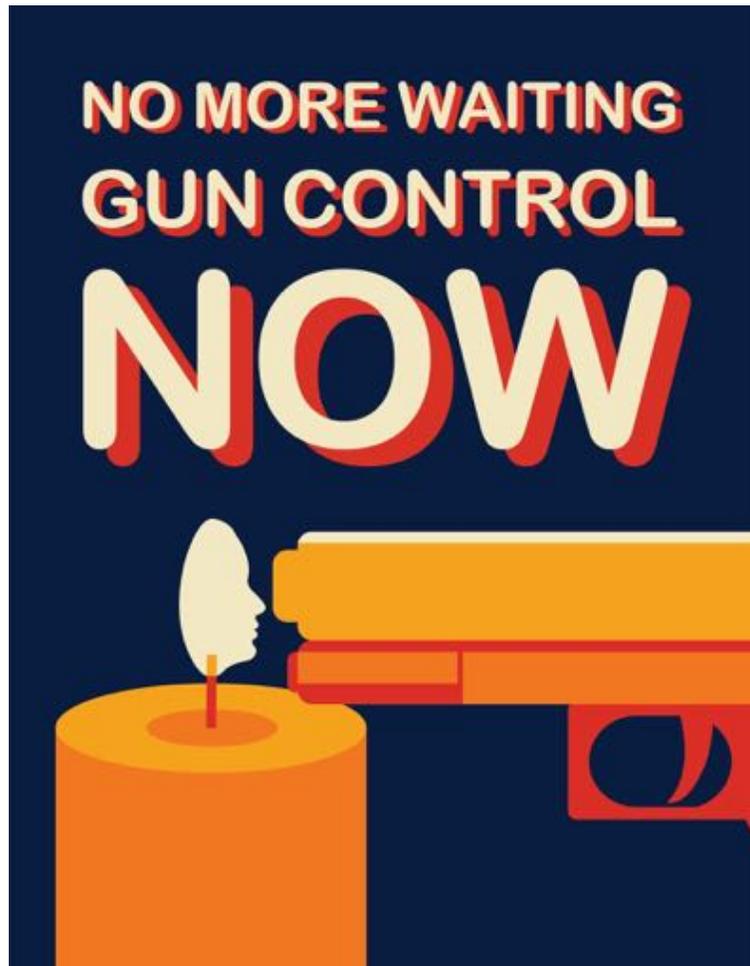
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I used to have this dream where I'd be walking around my hometown by myself, just people watching. I never interacted with people, they passed me by as if I was invisible. But they must've felt my presence unconsciously, because they never ran into me, just walked around of me like a hole in the sidewalk. It felt so real, as much of my life has been spent being ignored. The lights of the city lit up the sky, familiar franchises lining the streets, big historical buildings and art structures on every block. I could literally smell the treats in the bakery on the corner. I woke up with feelings of disappointment every time, the scent of hand sanitizer throughout the dry air bringing me back to my harsh reality.

A couple weeks ago, I met Jackson. He was tall and muscular but lanky in demeanor. He had light eyes and brown curly hair. Just my type. We were walking around the city park. He was talking to me about his school work and how hard his classes were and how much he hated his soccer coach. I found myself getting lost in his eyes, as corny as it sounds. He had this speck of gold in his right iris; completely mesmerizing. He told me he liked me, and that he admired my attentiveness. The premises of the budding romance between us was strictly physical for me. He bored me to death but I could stare at him all day. I call that eye-candy. It was just a dream after all.

When Jackson returned in my next dream, I was surprised, to say the least. He remembered me. He talked to me about his week. It had only been a day for me, an entire week for him. I wondered how I was coming up with this stuff. The brain is such a weird organ. This time we went to a rooftop coffee shop. I don't know how or why we ended up there. Heights aren't really my thing. It was such a happy dream. It felt so real. I don't even like coffee.

I had a few more dreams with Jackson as the star. He kind of grew on me. Every dream we went on random dates that I could only dream of, literally. Waking up after a dream where I was on a date with Jackson, stargazing on a perfectly clear summer night, eating pizza, was like waking up at 5:49 AM when your alarm goes off at 6:00 AM. It became routine for me to go to sleep and wake up with him on my mind. Which is just strange because he's a person I made up in my head.

But then, he disappeared. I went back to my invisible wandering dreams. I was lonely again. These dreams had an intense melancholic atmosphere, although they were the same as before. Soon Jackson became nothing more than a distant thought, although I missed him at first, it was just a dream.

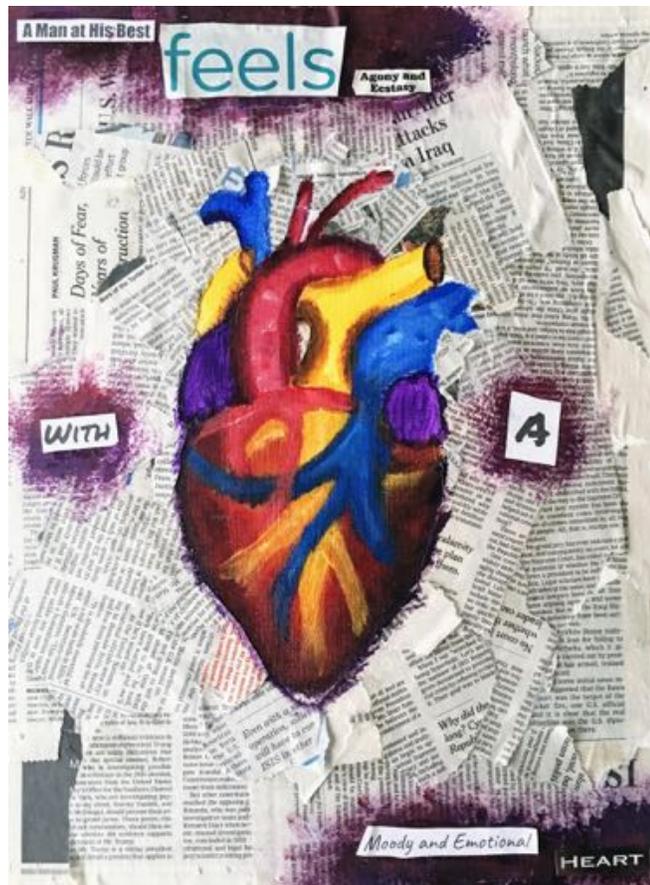
The first time they took me to group I cried uncontrollably. I was reliving all of my pain as I was forced to get up out of my bed. The cold touch of the nurse's hands helping me up sent chills down my spine. She didn't mean to make me feel that way. She didn't know. His hands were always so cold. Out of fear I stiffened, only reminding me of my bruises. They said the sessions were essential to my healing, I thought it was a load of shit.

As my nurse and I made the journey to the third floor, I thought about the nap I would have later. When I was seeing Jackson, I used my free time to sleep. Most of the other kids would go to the common area and be on their phones, some would use the art supplies they had and draw depressing shit. I used to just stare out the window at the cars going by and count the red ones. My mom had a red car before he gave her a new one. It was blue. I hated the color blue.

I walked into the room they had group in, and half of the kids looked at me, and then away in unison. It gave me the same feeling that my lonely dreams give me. I felt small and unimportant. The nurse sat with me in the circle and asked if I wanted her to stay for a little bit. I told her I'd be okay. The nurse was one of the only people that made me feel like I mattered, and I didn't even know her name. Says a lot about me as a person.

The doctor that was running our session went around the circle and had everyone introduce themselves. I absentmindedly stared out the window across the room. It was raining. I was watching the leaves dance under the touch of the raindrops when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and the doctor was staring at me, everyone else looking at their feet, picking their nails, their minds elsewhere. This one kid was bent over with his head in his hands, his elbows resting on his knees. He never looked up. The doctor told me to introduce myself. I told him I'm Analise Turner. Half of the kids slowly turned their attention away from their feet and looked at me with wide eyes. I guess they must've heard. There was a slight pause by the doctor, everyone was murmuring and whispering. Except for the guy with his head down.

I don't know what happened for the next fifteen minutes, I went back to watching the leaves dance. The doctor asked everyone questions to get everyone to speak and share. No one was too excited to share their favorite color or what their hobby was. I refrained from participating but I listened. The doctor tried to get the boy to talk. He was the only one participating less than me. He kept moving on and coming back to try and get him to engage. I don't know what he asked him to finally get a response, but then I heard him speak. The rain stopped. The leaves stood still. I froze. I turned my gaze away from the window and then our eyes met. I was blinded by the speck of gold in his right eye. He smiled, and I knew. And for the first time in a long time, I smiled, too.



A boy walked along a woodland path. He was perhaps fourteen or fifteen at most, but the war had changed him, and he felt much older than his years. This was a member of the Youth Corps, and he was patrolling the woods for any signs of escapees from the detention camp just a few miles from his town. There had been revolts and riots there a few days before. Civilians were still on high alert. They had heard that some fifty dangerous prisoners had escaped. These were violent criminals, convicted murderers, the officers had told them. They would kill you as soon as look at you. Always be wary; always be circumspect. Never trust them.

As the boy turned around a bend in the path, a patch of color caught his eye. He turned toward it. It was nothing more than a patch of brown and black, nearly engulfed by the white of the snow. He knew that it was probably nothing, but he ran toward it.

Lying next to tree, a little ways from the path, was a young girl, or rather the body of a girl. Her fingers were blue and black and red with cold. Her face was turned toward the ground. Gingerly, he turned her body towards him. She showed no signs of waking. He felt for her pulse. Nothing. His fingers searched her wrist. There was a pulse there, a faint flicker, nothing more. She was alive, but barely. She wouldn't be much longer.

He knelt down and propped the girl up with one hand. Her bones were nearly sticking out of her skin. She looked about twelve or thirteen, but she couldn't have weighed more than eighty pounds. Just then, her eyes flickered open. They were dark brown, darker than her hair. They looked afraid, alone, helpless. She was helpless. And she wouldn't last much longer.

He could hear someone coming. It would be his friend, another patrol. He lowered the girl back onto the ground and sat back. If anyone caught him acting kindly to an escapee, he'd be in big trouble. But he couldn't simply leave her there. It wasn't right. That didn't matter.

His friend crashed through the trees. Quickly, the first boy stabbed his fingers at the girl's wrist, as if he had been checking her pulse. His friend stared at her, wide-eyed.

"Is that a runaway?"

"Yes."

"Is it alive?" He hesitated.

"I don't think so. Oh! Yes. Just barely."

"Back up."

"What?"

"Back away from it." The second boy reached over his shoulder and pulled out a gun.

You're going to kill her? The first boy thought. He didn't say anything though. That would have been suicide. He let the girl's hand fall to the ground. Frozen fingers clutched weakly at his, then fell away, not strong enough to support their own weight. He backed away.

His friend pointed the gun at the girl and aimed.

“You’re sure we’re supposed to kill them?”

“They’re dangerous. Captain said so.”

“She doesn’t look too dangerous to me.”

“Won’t lose anything. Better safe than sorry.” The other boy fell silent.

The boy with the gun aimed at the girl again. Then fired. The girl’s body jerked. Blood spouted from her forehead. The sound echoed through the trees, then vanished, quickly muffled.

Another shot. A small, ragged hole appeared in the girl’s thin, patched coat. A dark stain spread across her chest. Neither boy said a word.

The second boy, the one who had fired the two shots, turned away and grunted.

“Didn’t think it would bleed so much.”

The first boy said nothing.

“Guess we’d better go before animals start smelling the blood.”

The first boy nodded.

The second boy turned and crashed through the trees, heading back to their patrol route. The first boy hesitated, then followed.

As he passed by the girl’s body, he stopped and looked down. The flow of blood had slowed. Her eyes were closed. Blood was starting to freeze on her face and in her hair, reminding him of tears. Her expression was difficult to make out. Or maybe he just didn’t want to see her expression, of loneliness and betrayal. Her arms were flung out by her sides, fingers clutching at nothing. He turned and walked away. As he passed a tree, something small and dark caught his eye. A backpack. Her backpack.

He glanced toward the direction his friend had gone. There was no movement, no sign that the other boy had missed him. Swiftly, he knelt and opened the pack. A book fell out. Then a cheap fountain pen. An ink bottle. Then an empty skin for water. Last came a small packet. Clearly, it had once contained food.

He picked up the book and shoved it into a pocket of his uniform, feeling lucky that it didn’t show. Abandoning the rest of the things on the ground, he turned and ran.

He caught up to the other boy only as they were nearing the town. His friend turned and greeted him, eyes bright from the cold and the exercise. They walked back into the town together, chatting about nothing. They reported to their officers, then headed home. The second boy ate his dinner, asked for seconds and dessert, then went off to find another friend. The first boy ate half his dinner, then went quickly to his bedroom and shoved a chair under the door handle. He sat on the bed, pulled the girl’s book from his pocket, and opened it. It was a diary, ragged and torn at the edges. He turned to the first page. The heading at the top showed that the entry had been written on the night of November 10, five years earlier. One night after the tragic act of violence that had started the war.

Some of the ink was smudged. Much of it was difficult to decipher. He began to read.

Nobody heard me
It wouldn't have mattered anyway
Just stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time
Out camping
By myself
Out exploring the woods
Traveling due south of my tent
Just to explore
be one with nature
the birds, the trees
the animals
the momma grizzly and her two cubs staring me down on the trail ahead of me
Everything I've always imagined
Searching for that indescribable beauty found only in nature
What was that part about a bear?
Oh right
She killed me
And no, it wasn't in the comical, figurative sense of the word
She killed me
it wasn't even her fault, the way her momma bear claws tore through my chest,
over my head,
and through my butt.
Which I would've found funny if I'd lived to tell someone about it
But no
I only watched as her two cubs sniffed the bloody mess of my body as my spirit drifted away
and flew above the trees,
And looking back down on the world I knew that this,

This

was the beauty I was searching for the whole time.



Acrylic / Kayleigh Manchester

mills202 has signed on

mills202: Sorry its been a while since i was online ive been on va ca 😊 ✈️



4t4r1: 1t's g00d t0 s33 4t 143st 0n3 0f us c4n g3t 0ut t0 3njoy 11f3.

mills202: still havent been able to get out lately 😞 you need a vacation

4t4r1: W0rk h4s m3 sw4mpt but th4ts just h0w my 11f3 1s.

WolfnSheep has signed on

WolfnSheep: If you're unhappy with your job why not just quit? After all it should be easy for someone of your great intellect , to find a job.

4t4r1: Unl1k3 y0u 1 d0n't just quilt b3c4us3 s0m3th1ng 1s h4rd.

Mills202: Hi wolf what have you been up to while i was gone

WolfnSheep: I've not been doing much as of late. However something very interesting happened to me last Tuesday.

4t4r1: N0t th1s 4g41n.

Mills202: What happened the suspense is killing me

WolfnSheep: Last week I met a ghost.

mills202: Spooky 😱😱😱

4t4r1: M1lls y0u d0nt 4ctu4lly b3l13v3 1n gh0st d0 y0u?

mills202: Idk maybe i havent met one yet but that doesnt mean they arent real

WolfnSheep: Well this ghost is very real and quite scary.

mills202: So how did you meet this ghost of yours

WolfnSheep: I met them online.

mills202: What lol are you trolling me

4t4r1: H3 1s.

WolfnSheep: I'm not joking. This is a ghost who is trapped on the internet.

mills202: How do you know it wasnt just someone pretending to be a ghost and trolling you

WolfnSheep: Because I met this ghost in person.

4t4r1: Y0ur c0mpl34tly full 0f 1t.

WolfnSheep: If you still don't believe me, then let me prove this ghost is real.

4t4r1: 4nd h0w 4r3 y0u g01ng t0 d0 th4t?

WolfnSheep: By summoning the ghost to this chat room.

mills202: Whaaattt!!!! You can do that

WolfnSheep: Yes that is why I said I could.

Mills202: So are you going to summon it

WolfnSheep: Just watch me.

Ryan has signed on

mills202: Aaaahhhhhh its a ghost 🤪🤪🤪

Ryan: Explain.

4t4r1: W0lf s4ld h3 was g0lng t0 summ0n 4 gh0st r1ght b3f0r3 y0u slgn3d 0n.

Ryan: K.

mills202: So ryan is not the ghost

WolfnSheep: No but he did interrupt my summoning.

4t4r1: H0w c0nv3n13nt.

mills202: Hurry up and summon the ghost already

WolfnSheep: 3mit33rfhcum00t3v4hu0ys1htgn1d43r3r4u0yf1

mills202: N

4t4r1: W

mills202: H

mills202: K

4t4r1: Y

4t4r1: 0

4t4r1: U

4t4r1: G

4t4r1: 4

4t4r1: V

4t4r1: 3

4t4r1: U

4t4r1: S

4t4r1: 4

4t4r1: V

4t4r1: 1

4t4r1: R

4t4r1 has signed off

mills202: A

WolfnSheep: You have to swap delete and enter if you want to be able to talk normally.

mills202: Some ghost any old virus could screw up our typing and cause 4t4r1 to get dropped

WolfnSheep: That's how it starts.

Rayn: Brb.

mills202: Wait ryan dont leave me

Ryan has signed off

mills202: Wolf what happens next?

WolfnSheep: The ghost signs on.

mills202: It can do that

Σ∅-f~B''π has signed on

mills202: Aaaaaahhhhhhhh waht do we do now

WolfnSheep: Don't be the first one to talk after it signs on.

mills202: But I was the first oen to talk

Σ∅-f~B''π: μ^→β™™ ¥∅''® f^®β†≥

mills202: What did it say whats going to happen to me

WolfnSheep: It's going to appear before you and steal your soul.

mills202: You still have your soul how did you stop it

WolfnSheep: The computer is its power source, so I just unplugged my pc.

mills202: Im on a phone

Σ∅-f~B''π: ^†æβ †^μ' †∅ ∂^^ μ^→β

WolfnSheep: Quick smash your phone it's the only way.

mills202 has signed off

Σ∅-f~B''π: H4 h4 h4 h4. Sh3 4ctu4lly b4ught 1t. St1ll g3tt1ng h3r t0 sm4sh h3r ph0n3 w4s g0ing 4 b1t f4r. D0n't y0u th1nk?

WolfnSheep: I didn't think she actually do it.

Σ∅-f~B''π: 1 f33l b4d sh3 br0k3 h3r ph0n3, w3 sh0uld pr0b4bly buy h3r 4 n3w 0n3.

WolfnSheep: Yeah we should.

Ryan has signed on

Ryan: What happened?

WolfnSheep: Not much.



i. an 8-hour flight is perfect for self-reflection.

drooping eyelids,
chapped lips,
reflections doubled,
breathe in,
out,
weak.
i must wait,

in transit,
a transition
between two oceans
between two worlds
i've lived on the edge of,

never fully encompassed
unintegrated,
unjustified,
half and half
and skin of coffee.

who are you,
okhti?
why do you stand in the middle,
bnti?
what do you hide under this veil,
habibti?

and my parents,
in transit,
a transition after ashes,
a transition to middle age,
both a thousand miles away,
more than oceans apart,
a cracked surface,
a mitigated relationship,

and my transition to adulthood,
painful and erect,
in clouded days
across strange cities,
foreign countries,
days passing by,
painfully erected
with an urgency,
a dependence,
like oxycontin,
like sullen purpose,
like bitter love,
when i am predisposed
to imaginings of a body
and its soul
to fill the gaping void,

in transit,
the transition,
love,
loss,
loving harder,
losing faster,
and crying out into the night,
nightly whispers,
a bitter call to nostalgic longings,
a mistranslation,
a miscalculation,
misprojected,
and intercepted,

in transit,
i am not the woman
i dreamed of in girlhood,
in transition,
i am mutely and merely
the lost wonderess
forgetting if home still exists,
or ever existed,

i am still the one who chases the dead,
the last and only,
alone,
and lonely,
the transit,
the transition,
unimpeded,
uncontradicted,
uncorrected,
in its correctness,

but then when
can i claim
transition
from this transit?

ii. it's probably just a passing feeling.

deep down,
let me tell you
how i feel.

a sheltering smoke,
a smothering shadow,

whisked away
like winds in
a cemented childhood.

along lines of lineage,
lithe and lingering.

failing and falling
like the fits
doused in despair.

iii. strange, fleeting thoughts still come to me.

i met a woman
who was a victim
of modern-day slavery,

and she called me darling,
and hugged me,
as if i were the victim.

when i got home
there were two drops
of blood
in my panties
even though
i had just finished my period.

and the next day,
i walked around the hospital,
from room to room,
and as i paced in the corridor,
i saw an old woman
who was my relative.

she opened her mouth
as if trying to speak,
but nothing came out
of the exhaustion,
just an empty moan,

and i was terrified.

iv. i always wind up fighting for nothing.

tonight,
another fear
of falling,
of returning to the
shadowed being.

an argument,
i've begun,
fists clenched,
mouth closed,
let me wallow alone.

i am smothered
by the sweetness
of misunderstood love,
anger and tragedy,
an overwhelming grief.

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there were two drops
of blood
in my panties
even though
i had just finished my period.

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fists clenched,
mouth closed,
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by the sweetness
of misunderstood love,
anger and tragedy,
an overwhelming grief.

fate,
nothing else,
agony in brotherhood,
in solitude and solemn silence,
a devouring storm.

doses,
overdoses,
a break from the living,
whispered dreams,
apocalypse and chaos.

weakness,
fatigue,
drifting in the wind
with a hunger for dishunger,
obsolete resolve.

morning,
another fear,
aching, gasping,
avoidance and taking
nothing for my troubles.

apologies,
in light,
and daylight's surrender,
another tear and cry
out for help!

let the cycle go on.

v. the truth is, i lost more by leaving.

the quiet eclipses in the night,
shallow and swallowed,
i awoke to a dream
of a foreigner's bad luck.
i sat across from him,
another story of speechlessness,
he interrupted it,
intercepted,
i want to lie down,

to relive the time
when life was
buried in messages.

vi. aye, there's the rub

i wish
my body
could be broken
up into
millions of pieces. lit
up and
thrown to the stars,

i come to him
every night,
dusted in smoky forgetfulness,
and he cannot find me
what he wanted. in me
is a towering grief,
an encompassing sorrow,
an endless storm,
there is no eye(s). on me,

i want to be so thin
that he can step on me,
and every bone
would shatter,
fracture,
represent each moment
of my heart breaking.
and it breaks,
the entire world falls apart,
alarmed, alerted, deserted.

i want to leave if only,
in silence and solitude,
to live the rest of my days
like a recluse. the loneliness,
a reflection only known to me.

vii. there's always meds, you know.

on the stairwell,
sometime before noon,
a cascade
and tripping up
the ladder.

at some point
life's value,
holding only anguish,
results in a nihilism,
devoid and desolate,
destitute,

i am alone.

and i let myself in,
interior
and within,
the portrait of anguish,
another take of societal woes !

what grief could you bear:
obsolete guilt,
attempted recovery,
disrecovering,

in denial,
i don't want to admit it,

inhibited,
repressed,
a motive for abandonment,
motivation for being no longer,

abundant and absolute,
the mind's ultimatum,
the heart's utilitarianism,
logic pervades in no aspect
if loving aches.

and ache it does !

buried in the night,
where this grief does live,
finding bodies where no bodies lie,
imagining desire where no desire resides !

o god ! let it pour like anguish,
the heart feels nothing
except the lack
of feeling filled,
of holding hope,
of trusting tongues !

let me rest,
for once,
find myself,

because those who see me know
that anguish
should make no home:

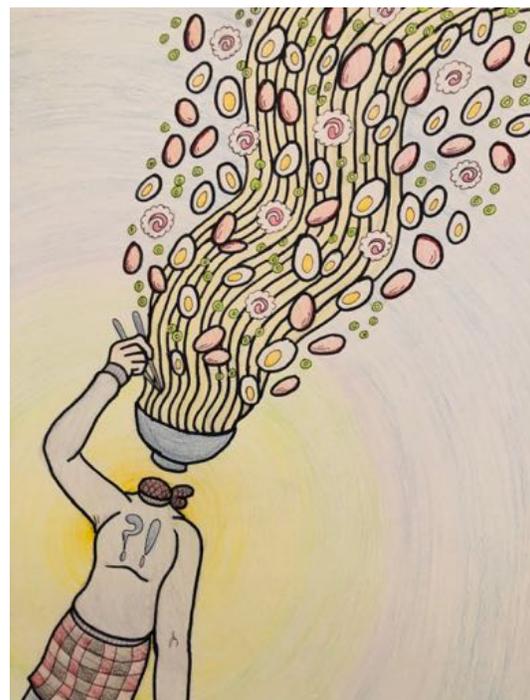
i am better than that,

i overcome nothing:
nothing is over me.

i have nothing to be depressed about.



Acrylic / Jasmine Xu



Colored Pencil / Katelyn Payne

Ever since I was little, I'd wanted to make a difference, to do something that, years from now, would matter. There was only one profession I could think of that would satisfy this - to be a writer - and so I set out to become the best. At first, I had great success, but childhood faded and, with it, the fertile imagination necessary for successful stories. My writing acumen was gone, and I'd have given anything to get it back. Yet instead, I found myself staring at the computer screen day after day, fingers hovering above keys with only a vague idea of what to write: *Something meaningful, something deep, something questioning the very foundation of society. Maybe something profoundly tragic. Everyone loves a good tragedy.*

One day, after having gazed at a blank page for a straight three hours, I decided to seek imagination where I'd often found it before. There was a park a few blocks from my house, with woods behind it, and in these woods I'd found a small, three-foot-wide clearing. I settled down there, needing ideas or at least a break. My head pressed against the bark of one tree, shins pressed against another, I stared up at the sky and watched the clouds pass above me as my eyelids drooped.

I woke up a few hours later, after my phone's criticizing *bzzzz*. Blearily, I pulled it out of my sweater pocket, its screen lit up with 'incoming call - anonymous' imprinted firmly within it. "Hello?" I muttered, my voice blurred with the last vestiges of sleep. "Who is this?"

"Sid Glamecian, writing consultant," replied a voice thick with charm.

"How did you get this number?" I asked, my voice slowed with suspicion as I looked around, spurred by some instinct to look around although I knew I would find no-one there. I pressed hang-up.

"Can I send you a card?" he continued.

"I'm sorry, but I need to leave now." I was mashing the 'hang up' button now, dull taps echoing. The tip of my pointer finger was flattened and pink, and I switched to my pinky finger, thumb, ring, middle.

"I'll send you a card."

I tried fiddling with the volume buttons, then turned off the ringer. My phone's screen was adamant there was no sound coming out - the ringer icon declared it to be silent, and the volume icon had a massive slash through its midst. Even the home button had stopped working.

"Let's set up a meeting time at my office,"

I shook the phone, smacked it with my hand - nothing. I was plotting my letter to the phone company as it began to shake on its own, jittering back and forth. Its temperature increased rapidly, the phone's surface seeming almost to glow. It almost burnt my hand, and I dropped it with a start. It landed, screen-up, in the grass.

"The address is 375 Loone Street; it's a block down from the Makalilisang bookstore," came the voice from the grass.

“I don’t want your address, and I’m not interested in setting up a meeting. I don’t know how you got my information, but ... take me off your call list and hang up now. Frankly, I...” my voice trailed off as the phone started spinning rapidly. Sid’s voice became garbled as he continued on, apparently ignoring me - I began to wonder if there might be some kind of one-way connection problem.

“I look forward to meeting with you in person, so we can discuss all of the different paths we can take your writing in.”

“There will be no meeting in person!” The phone’s speed was such that the edges were becoming blurred, the phone’s path melding into one vague circle that glowed reddish-orange around the edges. The inner portion of the phone-circle was now a smoky grey with orangish sparks flying about in it. I stared at it, filled with a sort of fascinated doom; it almost seemed to be growing. Little sparks flew off the outer rim, releasing tiny puffs of smoke. A single blade of grass caught fire, and I stomped it out with my shoe.

The circle where the phone had been was definitely growing now, over a meter wide and spewing out sparks. Smoke started billowing out - not small puffs anymore, but thick clouds that slunk along the ground in puffs and drifts. I covered my mouth with a hand as I backed away, attempting to suppress the gag that was seeking to come out. The moment felt surreal, and I found my thoughts were centered only on the vein of ‘Where is my phone?’ rather than what I had a vague feeling were the more appropriate worries, such as ‘Will I be killed by the otherworldly void formed by my phone?’ It was almost as though I was watching the situation from afar; I could almost picture myself, staring at a spinning circle formed by what used be my phone. This wasn’t possible - I was keenly aware of that - and yet, somehow, it was still real, still *happening*. It felt like a dream.

A hand began to emerge from the void, flicked dramatically upward, followed by the rest of its body. A man, his other hand stuck in the rectangular left pocket of a dark brownish trench-coat, with a ribbed black turtleneck and black corduroys and black patent-leather looking shoes. Black-brown hair was slicked upward and back beneath a brown fedora, tiny wire glasses perched precariously on his nose, and a brown scarf wrapped around his neck and then thrown back over one shoulder. He stepped gracefully forward, out of the spinning void which rapidly shrunk until it was down to the original spinning-phone-sized circle, which eventually ceased its spinning. In one move, the man bowed down, swooping up my phone and holding it out to me as he pulled his left hand out of the pocket, revealing a cream-colored card. I snatched back the phone, ignoring the card.

“I’m Mr. Glamecian from the phone,” he explained, in a voice of saccharine sweetness that promised beautiful lies.

“What are you doing here? How ... how is this possible?” I backed away as I tried to turn my phone on, feeling that there must be someone I should call. There was no signal.

“I enjoy exploring the ... hypothetical,” he explained with a smile as he flicked the hand holding the card, which dissolved into smoke and reintegrated in my hand. In gilded script on thick paper, it read:

Sid Glamecian

Writing Consultant

375 Loone Lane

(Or Wherever Imagination Strikes)

“Writing is, after all, the art of the hypothetical,” he explained as I stared at the card. “Anything is possible in stories, so long as you can dream it. That’s why you love writing, isn’t it?”

“Is this a dream, then?” I asked, almost to myself. I pinched myself, then, in the way you’re supposed to in dreams. Indeed, as my fingers closed against a flap of skin, there was nothing - no pain, no redness, no feeling. It must have been a dream, I realized, as Sid smiled.

“Sometimes, the world - or your mind - sends you what you need to get out of a rut,” was his only answer.

“And how am I supposed to do that?” I asked. He smiled coolly, his eyes slimming as he snapped. The trees blurred around us, colors swirling and morphing as though the world was melting, swirls of paint blend round in a kaleidoscopic fashion before finally settling into a peaceful meadow with a small blur in the distance that I somehow instinctively knew was a village. A match appeared in his hand, and he passed it towards me. I took it, the grain of the flimsy wood pressed up against my fingertips.

“This match will help you to write your story. Imagine all of what you would want your perfect story to be, flick the match, and release your imagination into the real world.”

Meaningful, inspiring, with deep meaning, something that sticks with you... I flicked the match and it lit suddenly.

The flame seemed almost alive, engaged in a deadly dance with itself; stretching and twisting.

“Throw it,” he whispered. “Let your troubles - all those parts of you burning you up from the inside - let them be extinguished and even the last vestiges of your ‘rut’ be cast far, far away from you.” Cautiously, I took the stick from him, its wood grain pressing against my fingers. I could hear the slight crackling of it, feel the heat upon my fingers, see tiny bursts of light swirling and spinning in a hypnotic dance.

“Throw it,” he murmured; “Throw it, and let your imagination free.”

I could feel my fingers readying to throw it, and could feel the heat of the flame nearing me, yet still - "I don't want to start a fire," I told him, trying to reassure myself of the same fact. I tried to shake out the flame, yet I lacked conviction and the flame only wavered a little, a little laughing motion that only made it spark up for a second.

"This is your dream," he reminded me, "So there won't be any fires unless *you* wish them. So, throw it!" His voice sharpened suddenly, words pointed as daggers. "If you don't, you'll never be successful. This flame? This flame will reignite your creative spirit. Imagine - pure artistic freedom. You'll be happy, fulfilled, *famous*. But you're weak, afraid. This match? It's almost out! Just think about it: throw it far enough and it'll be long out before it even touches the ground." - he sighed - "Sometimes, you just need to let go. This match" - he pointed at it - "This match will solve everything. All you need to do" - his voice suddenly softened again, an clear turnaround to a smoothness dripping with honey - "Is let it. If you don't, you'll only burn yourself. It's never going to go out on it's own, because, deep down inside, you don't wish it to."

"I will not start a fire."

"Yes; you'll just throw a match. Look, it's almost to your fingers."

"It doesn't matter."

"It doesn't; it's just a dream. Besides, you wanted a tragedy, right? This is a tragedy."

My stomach roiled. "Still-"

"Throw it!" He practically screamed it, and the flame sparked suddenly, growing a foot tall and bright as the sun. Its tendrils leapt at me, and, startled, I tossed it away from me with a quick flick, hoping to extinguish it as I did so.

A thin tendril of smoke rose from the blackened, twisted tip of the match, its rounded end crumpled, sunken, breathing out thin strands of blackened air. I felt myself relax, until there was a sudden 'pop.' Flames reignited, suddenly, without warning and beyond all logic; I could hear them from here as a single piece of grass lit fire and was quickly followed by another, another, another; strands of fire racing towards the glow of the town in the distance.

"How do I make it go out?" I cried.

He smirked. "Why would you want to?"

This is a dream, I reminded myself, *Only a dream*.

"Is it, though?" Sid asked. "When that fire reaches the village, will their screams be any less real? Less potent? Who are we to decide what's real and what's a dream? Perhaps this is the only time you've ever been truly awake."

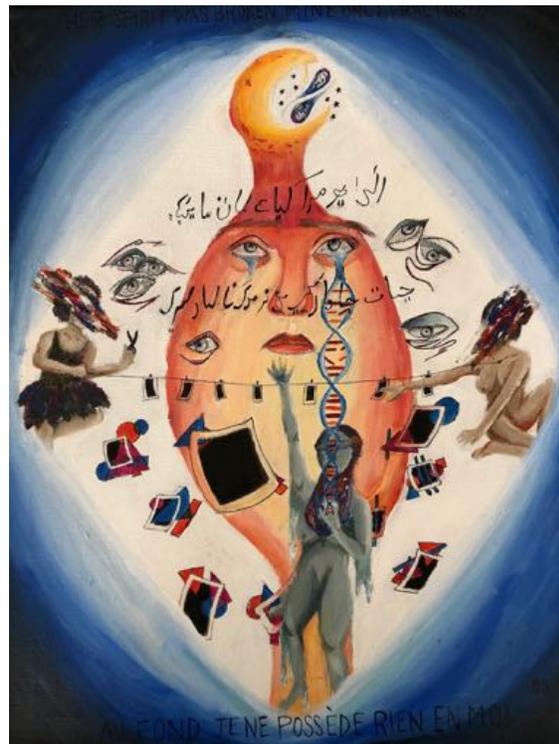
“What is wrong with you? Why would you do this?” I cried. A house caught fire, visible from where we stood, like a demented torch beckoning out. Its fellows would not be long behind it, I knew. My breath was short, the back of my throat seemingly determined to block my air intake. I felt as though I was falling. This was my fault, and it suddenly hit me, as I felt the heat of the flames blown towards us on the now smoke-smelling meadow breeze, that this was not, and never had been a dream. “Why did I do this?” I whispered.

He shrugged. “Simple.” His voice was barely audible over the flickering flames. “Everyone loves a tragedy. We write the world with our desires, and the sweetest are those we’ll never confess to without help.” He vanished, and the world seemed to swirl around with him, the air darkening and smoke swirling closer and closer until it completely encircled me. At last, the sun’s light was completely blocked out. I shut my eyes to block it out. The moment I opened them, I was back in the clearing, the smell of smoke strong and my phone gripped tightly in my hand, vibrating gently and hot to the touch. A slight breeze blew threw, carrying with it the scent of fresh flowers.

I left the clearing then, and returned home, to stare once again at a blank piece of paper. Yet, this time, the words flowed freely. My reality had changed, was now so different that a part of my mind I’d never been able to express before was now unlocked. Sid Glamecian had, in a way, taught me to write again; but what he’d done, what I’d done, was something I was never able to forgive. Success - and writing - is a funny thing. Tragedy inspires, corrupts, destroys. Imagination is, after all, nothing but magic and lies.



Mixed Media / Isaiah Penniston-John



Acrylic / Eman Akhtar

As my hospital bed was being swiftly rolled into the operating room, I looked up at the swarm of medical professionals surrounding me. While they called out orders, darting eyes peeked at me over masked faces with furrowed looks of sympathy, but I didn't need their pity. There was not a single worry in my mind. Normally, under these circumstances, I would have burst a blood vessel from stress. However, on this day, I had a completely different mindset. I felt oddly relaxed and confident. This could have been because I was drugged out on an oral sedative, with a breathing mask recently placed over my mouth and nose forcing gasses to slowly seep into my body in preparation for general anesthetic, although I prefer to think that I was poised because of some special advice I received just brief days before.

They say ignorance is bliss, and just mere weeks prior, I was living a blissful life. It was the first day of tryouts for basketball my freshman year of high school. I was stretching out on a tapestry of zig zags, wooden planks woven together that create the gym floor. The buzz of incandescent lights rang throughout the gym. Having played basketball nearly year-round since I was six years old, it was my first time back on the court in few months since I had spent my fall in the pool playing water polo. As I looked around, a wave of nervousness washed over me. I began to question myself, asking, *What if I suck now?* Even worse, I thought, *What if I don't even make the team?* However, I was yanked out of my self-doubt by the loud screech of the coach's whistle. He separated us into groups, exclaiming, "Line up along the sideline!" I was put in the advanced group and selected to try out with JV because I had been coming to practices with the team for the past couple of years, and the coaches knew my skill level. When the tryout began, all the worry I had melted away as I slowly got back into my rhythm. My shots were going in, and I quickly felt at ease. As our workout ended, I was confident in my abilities for the first time in a while. For the rest of the week, Tuesday through Thursday, we had more tryouts. That Friday, I was excited to discover I made the roster, and I couldn't wait to get back on the court.

The moment I heard the clanging of the seventh hour bell on the first day of practice, I swiftly strolled to the gym, excitement filling me with every step. I couldn't wait to play the sport I love so much with people that shared my passion. Once practice began, everything was going well. The ball was coming off my fingers just right and energy coursed through my veins. Unfortunately, about an hour into practice, I felt something shift inside of my knee and experienced an intense dagger-like pain slicing my femur and tibia apart exploded out of my knee. My leg gave out from underneath me, causing me to crumple to the ground mid-stride of a sprint. I yelled out in pain as I fell to the ground. Concerned, the coaches stopped practice and came over to check on me. "I'm fine," I told them, as I slowly got up and hobbled to the sideline to rest. After about ten minutes of trying to stretch and loosen up my knee without success, I hopped back into practice even though the pain was still relentless.

As I limped into my home that night, my parents noticed my odd gait, and my mom asked, “What’s wrong, Ben?” I responded explaining that I hurt my knee at practice. My father told me to ice and elevate it. He was not too worried, because I had dealt with a knee injury in the past. When I was younger, I had been diagnosed with Osgood-Schlatter disease, which is a common cause of knee pain in adolescents, so the pain I was having was familiar to me. The next day, I experienced the same intense pain again, and then again every single day after that, with the pain level increasing exponentially. With the condition worsening, I started to wear a brace for support. My parents introduced ice, anti-inflammatories, compression, and elevation into the treatment, but nothing helped. When my mother saw me struggling to run during a practice, she decided that we needed to see a doctor. Within a few days, I found myself in a University of Michigan Orthopedic Surgery exam room. While the plain x-ray the doctor took of my knee showed no clear evidence of an injury, the swelling surrounding my knee, description of my pain, and prior history were concerning. Suspecting a deeper problem, the doctor ordered an MRI to examine the soft tissue in my knee.

Two days later, following what I did not know at the time would be the final basketball game of my freshman year of high school, I sat in Radiology at Mott Children’s Hospital at 10 p.m. with my mother, waiting nervously for the nurse to call my name. I was still excited from the game, having been the top scorer, with four three-pointers hitting their mark in succession. My mind raced through the possible outcomes, as I pondered, *What if I tore my ACL?* Even worse, I questioned, *Oh, God! What if I never get to play sports again?* My mother picked up on my stress. She tried to assure me and calmly said, “Everything is going to be all right.” I gratefully accepted her optimism, but I was still worried. After a few minutes that felt like an eternity, my name was finally called. A nurse gave me scrubs to change into and led me to the MRI room. Walking in, I noticed the menacing size of the machine. I was instructed to lay down inside the large tube.

“Do not move.” the nurse stated. Nervously, I complied with her command, and she started the machine, which emitted a loud buzzing sound. Over the next thirty minutes, the drone of the machine slowly put me to sleep, allowing me to briefly escape my worries. When I awoke, I groggily changed back into my clothes and met my mother. The nurse came out and confirmed our appointment with the surgeon to receive the MRI results, and all my worries came flooding back into my mind.

Within a few days, I was back at the orthopedic surgeon’s office with my parents anxiously awaiting my results. “Click, whoosh.” The exam room door opened, and the doctor and her entourage walked in. The first thing I noticed was that the doctor had a sympathetic look on her face, “Oh, crap!” I whispered to myself, realizing I would be receiving bad news. She had been busy and distracted in our first appointment. I didn’t like this new attentive, sad look she was projecting; however, I still held a sliver of hope. Basketball is one of my favorite things

in the world. *Nothing can change that*, I told myself, as the doctor greeted us and shook my hand. Swiftly, the doctor got right to the results. Nervously, I looked to my parents, noting they had their eyelids glued open and were focused on me.

As the doctor opened her mouth, her words came out in slow motion, as she explained, “The results are not good. You have osteochondral dissecans of your medial femoral condyle.” Immediately, my heart dropped. She explained that I had an extremely large lesion, which is like a crater in my knee, and they considered the lesion to be “unstable” given a large piece of cartilage had actually sheared off my knee and was floating loose. She then dropped the biggest bombshell, telling me, “You won’t be able to participate in any high impact sports for a year.” Her words felt like a truck slamming into my chest. All the air escaped from my body, and I began to cry. The realization that I would be on crutches, unable to run or jump, and lose my ability to play basketball was devastating. My parents jumped to comfort me, and assured me that everything was going to be okay. Even the resident, PA, and surgeon were teary, wiping their eyes and offering kind words of comfort. We were all quite the sad group huddled together in the small exam room. After I had a few minutes to collect myself, the doctor explained the proposed surgical plan. She stated that surgery was urgent due to the large size of my lesion, and that if I didn’t have the operation the injury would lead to severe, debilitating arthritis by my twenties.

I returned home in an extremely depressed state. My parents tried to comfort me by explaining that it was good that the lesion was discovered before it was too late, but I didn’t care. The only thing I could think about was losing basketball. To me, basketball was a paradise, a way to escape from everyday life. The realization that it was gone for a year was crushing. Fear engulfed me. *What if I lose my spot?* I asked myself. Even worse, I heard the whispers in my head asking, *What if I can’t return at all?* As the news of my injury got out, I began to receive calls from loved ones. I appreciated their kind words and support, but nothing they said helped fix my mindset. I was still very concerned about my surgery and life following it. One afternoon, my grandmother called to check in. For the first time, I openly explained my worries about the future. After listening to me carefully, she offered this advice, “Ben, life is sort of like walking on the moon. It’s never going to be perfect or smooth, but instead filled with craters that you might fall into. The real test is to see if when you fall into the craters, how you handle yourself. Are you going to give up and lay there or are you going to get up, climb out of the hole you are in, and move on? The choice is yours, Ben.” While reflecting upon her advice, I realized she was right. My injury was one of my craters in life. In order to progress and climb out of it, I had to stop worrying about basketball and focus on getting better in the present. My worries dissipated, as I focused on preparing for surgery. When the day of surgery finally came, and I was being rolled into the operating room, there wasn’t a worry in my mind. Thankfully, by embracing my grandmother’s advice, I decided to get up, crawl out of my crater, and walk on the moon.



I picked at my tights nervously as I stood in front of her, feeling so small and yet as if I, a mere 8th grade exchange student, held the weight of the world on my shoulders. Sadako Sasaki was a baby in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped on her city in 1945, eventually dying as a young girl from leukemia caused by the radiation. As the tale goes, once diagnosed with the illness, Sadako set her mind to folding a thousand origami cranes in order to be granted a wish. Upon accomplishing the task, she wished for a world without nuclear weaponry. She now stands immortalized at the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima, the wire crane she holds symbolizing her cries for nonviolence atop the memorial for the child victims of the bombing.

Standing before her statue that seemed to embrace the world with open arms, I couldn't move, pinned to the spot by a weight in my chest. Sadako was the same age when she died as I was in that moment. We had both lived wildly different lives in those 12 years and it would have been easy to detach myself from her completely, but through that bond of age, I felt the need to empathize. I tried to place myself in Sadako's shoes and was overcome with emotion: sadness, fear, and most prevalent, guilt.

I grappled with guilt as an American, feeling as if I played a role in the bombing that occurred 56 years before I was even born. Shame burned within me and I felt a sudden urge to leave: the monument, the city, the country. The exchange program was a means to bolster relations between the two nations but I was overcome by a sickening need to isolate myself.

I couldn't fathom the hatred she must have felt for the United States and realized such feelings must be shared across the nation. Yet, in my time there, I never felt anything but welcome, greeted with warm embraces and bows of respect by host family, schoolmates, and countless others. While time is said to heal all wounds, I struggled to believe it could mend something in a few decades as egregious as the bombings. Wading in remorse before Sadako, it struck me that all the Japanese people I met had made the conscious choice to forgive, and if they could make such a choice, then I, out of respect, could make a change for the better too.

Looking up, I awaited confirmation from the young girl. My eyes drifted up to the crane in her arms as I tried to let go of my guilt. I had solely focused on the separation between us that I forgot the commonality we share: a desire for peace. Thus I chose to connect and to love, to bring together instead of divide. When I finally pried my feet from before Sadako, I hoped she would be proud of my decision to change. Feelings of shame and the urge to run away only set me back, so I focused on our shared goal of unity ahead.

I joined the other exchange students standing before multitudes of cranes, the origami grouped by the thousands. We carefully unbagged our own, folded and strung together over the summer by the fourteen of us. Taking a string in my own hands, the cranes felt surprisingly heavy. I hefted them up and onto the hook, letting

the weight of the origami in my hands and the guilt in my chest go, choosing to replace them with love, understanding, and dedication to the following decree that sits inscribed in black marble beneath where Sadako forever stands: "This is our cry, this is our prayer: peace in the world."

Now as I choose to live a life of empathy I look back upon that moment, recalling the consequences of those that chose otherwise.



Colored Pencil / Brian Chanthathirath

The push and pull of life's daily stream of control can be overwhelming at first
The sun rises a bright peach skin yet never fails to set a kaleidoscope of burnt petals
Oceans flood into fields of waves that give and take yet retract into coarse swaths of sand
Trees bloom in deep blue skies yet shrivel in a dry November wind
We open two eyes into life yet close each into death

For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction
We do not have as much free will as we think we have
We work for freedom yet are constricted in practice
Desire happiness yet face ultimate destruction
Blossom for a moment in existence's continuum yet shrivel in a blur of dust and stone
Push our feet into earth yet pull away with each step
We are not as permanent as we think we are

This world is an ancient garden bursting with new life at each corner yet we treat it as a product
Reach into the ground and take handfuls of earth
Plant and sow and
Plant and sow and
Take and take and take
These actions do not cancel each other out
In 100 years our bones will decay but the trees we plant will carry on
Flesh cannot surpass nature
Yet we live like humans are an infinite option
A controlled variable in each experimental day
This earth disregards your entitlement
This ocean does not rise for you
This sun does not burn for you
These trees do not tower for you

We tally up each worldly miracle into another profit margin
Strip forests of their trees
Fill oceans with oil and plastic
Pollute the air with exhaust
Take what the earth bore out of love
And formulate a game of life

But life is not some competition of consumerism
Life is a deep breath in the dark of uncertainty
Life is a paint stroke in the possibility of fate
Life is a scale to judge our mistakes
For everything you do nature will have an equal and opposite reaction
Existence is not a promise but a chance
Newton's third law—
The most poetic truth of physics
We live in a repetition of action-reaction
Balance is a given and we cannot change that equilibrium

This earth is not yours to own
So while you are here
Take care of the gift you are given.



Digital Mixed Media / John Rackmil

Alice Stowe clung to her husband's arm, panting.

"Darling? Are you alright?" Richard Stowe inquired.

She waved a hand. "I'll... I'll be fine shortly, dear."

"Whatever is the matter?" As he spoke, Richard led his wife off the dance floor.

She smiled ruefully. "Oh, it is just my corset. I'm afraid you cinched it rather tightly for the Independence Ball and the strenuous dancing, dear."

Richard clasped her hand. "Darling, I'm so sorry you feel it is an inconvenience, but please, understand that I only wish for you to look beautiful."

Her smile wavered slightly. "I... thank you, dear. That is very... thoughtful. As is this lovely gown, though I must admit these skirts are rather heavy."

"It is the finest and most fashionable design. Only the best for you, my Alice."

Alice averted her gaze. She slowly withdrew her hand. "I think I will go watch the fireworks now, dear."

He frowned slightly. "So soon? Couldn't you stay awhile longer? My gentleman friends wish to see you on the dance floor in all your finery."

"I believe some fresh air would do me good," she explained, fanning her face with her hand.

"Well... I suppose I will allow it for you, darling." Richard pecked her on the cheek and walked away. Alice watched his retreating back for a moment, then left the ballroom.

The streets were crowded with townsfolk, and the air was stiflingly thick with body heat. Everyone's heads were tipped back, their necks craned up at the clear night sky. The blue flames of the gaslights hissed softly, and fabric rustled as people shuffled around on the cobblestones.

Alice weaved through the crowd, murmuring apologies as she walked. *There are far too many people*, she thought. *I will never see the fireworks properly from here.*

Her eyes flitted over the streets for a moment, then landed on the bridge crossing the river that ran through town. *Ah, that will be perfect!* she decided. *No one else is there, and it is further away from the crowds.*

Alice brushed past several people before emerging from the crowd. Smiling, she calmly walked towards the bridge.

Suddenly, there was a fizzling sound and a *woosh*. She turned around.

Alice watched as a rocket lazily arced into the air. It seemed to wobble to a halt just over a row of houses. Then, the firework exploded with an ear-shattering roar. Silver sparks pelted the roofs of several homes, and the wooden shingles smoked. Red and orange tendrils of flame snaked into the air, crackling.

People screamed. As houses caught fire, they staggered away and pushed at each other. Everyone broke into a run, surging down the street.

It is a stampede, Alice realized. And they're coming straight for me.

She whirled around and ran. Her shoes slipped off, and her bare feet slapped against the cobblestones. The screaming of the crowd grew closer.

Alice fixed her sights on the bridge. *I have to make it. I must make it across!* She sprinted faster.

Her lungs strained against the corset, crying for air. Alice began to feel light-headed.

No! I mustn't stop!

The fabric chafed her skin. Sweat beaded her forehead, and her face paled.

I must... make it...

She gasped. Her lips turned blue.

Nearly... there...

Her feet landed on the bridge's rough wooden boards. Abruptly, Alice bent over and wheezed. She coughed and greedily sucked in mouthfuls of air. Dizzily, she heard footsteps pounding behind her.

What's... that? she wondered dazedly.

Screams pierced the fog of exhaustion in her mind. Alice looked over her shoulder. For a moment, she simply watched as the stampede barreled towards her still-unmoving form.

Then the fog lifted, and her eyes widened. She turned to run.

Suddenly, they were everywhere. They stepped on her with pointed heels, elbowed her in the ribs and shrieked in her ears. Alice barely struggled upright before someone slammed into her from behind. She tumbled into another person, and they blindly shoved her away. Alice fell backwards, over the railing, and towards the murky river below.

She struck the water with a splash. "Help! Somebody help!" she screamed. Alice flailed about, kicking her legs as she struggled for the shore. But water seeped into the layered skirts of her gown, dragging her down.

Her screams turned into gurgling cries as her head sank below the surface. Water rushed into her mouth, nose and lungs. She tried to choke out a cough, only to swallow more water. The full, suffocating weight of the river bore down on Alice.

Bubbles forced their way out of her mouth. Her lungs squeezed and strained for air. Spots dotted her vision. Finally, Alice's body went limp. Her vision faded to black, and she saw nothing more.

At least, so it seemed.

On August fourth, Richard Stowe took an evening stroll. He appraisingly studied the half-constructed houses. *The carpenters have been working at an exceptional rate!* he thought. *Soon, everyone will return to their homes, and we can all put this ghastly business behind us.*

He almost skipped down the street, whistling an airy tune.

“Richard...”

He paused mid-step. Glancing around, he shrugged and continued walking.

“Richard, dear...”

The whisper brushed past his ear. “Hello?” he called.

Behind him, something squelched. He turned around. Several feet away, he could see two damp footprints on the cobblestones.

That’s odd, he thought. How did two footprints land in the middle of the road with no sign of other markings?

Then, before his very eyes, another footprint soaked into the pavement.

Richard stared blankly. *It’s as if they just appeared there*, he realized.

More footprints appeared. Richard stumbled back, eyes wide. Now there was a trail slowly snaking down the street... and leading to him.

Richard turned and ran. The footprints splashed onto the road behind him, coming faster and faster.

There’s nowhere to go... except for the bridge!

He broke into a sprint, the bridge bobbing closer in his field of vision. Suddenly, his tie tightened around his throat. He let out a strangled gasp.

The footsteps splattered closer.

Richard’s hands flew up to his neck. His fingers scrabbled at his tie, clawing frantically. It only grew tighter.

A breeze stirred behind him.

Richard stumbled onto the bridge. Spittle frothed around his mouth. He doubled over, gasping. The tie finally slackened around his throat, and he sucked in mouthfuls of air.

A hand gently touched his shoulder. He looked up.

Wet hair hung loosely around her shoulders, dripping steadily on the cobblestones. Muck and algae coated the skirt of her once-vibrant gown. Blue lips parted as she heaved a rattling cough.

“Hello, husband.”

Richard stared unblinkingly for several seconds. “Alice?” he breathed.

“Don’t tell me you don’t recognize your darling wife, Richard!” Her glassy eyes hardened. “Especially when you so painstakingly chose her wardrobe.”

A tremor ran through his body. “But you’re dead. You’re dead! Why are you here?!”

Alice threw back her head and let out a gurgling laugh. Suddenly, she grabbed the lapels of Richard’s suit.

“Why, Richard! What wife would I be if I didn’t repay the favor?”

“W-what favor? Damn it, woman, what—?!”

He fell silent as she lifted him in the air by his lapels.

“You wanted to dress me up, my dear.” Her blue lips split in a smile. “Let me do the same for you.”

When dawn broke the next morning, a constable making his morning rounds discovered Richard Stowe floating face-down in the river. His arms and legs were tightly bound by several spools worth of pink ribbon. A single strand was tied in a neat bow around his neck.

The constable hurriedly blew on his whistle. Several of his colleagues, also making their rounds, sprinted over. Word spread quickly through the little town. A crowd gathered at the bridge, murmuring amongst themselves as the police lifted the body from the water.

“Alright, ladies and gentlemen,” the first constable called out. “This is a crime scene, so we kindly ask that everyone—”

“My God!”

A man standing at the front of the crowd stumbled back, his eyes wide behind wire-rimmed spectacles.

The constable steadied the man. “Yes, it is quite the shocking sight, Mr. Riggs. That is why we ask for—”

Mr. Riggs stared at the body of Richard Stowe as it was heaved over the railing. “You don’t understand, Constable,” he replied in a querulous voice. “I recognize those ribbons!”

“Sir?”

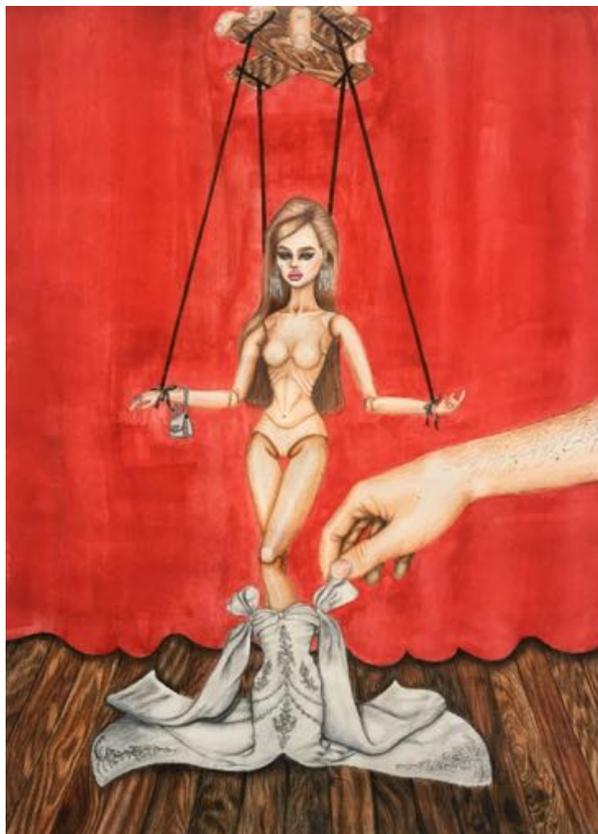
“They are from my shop! I would recognize them anywhere... and I suspect Mr. Stowe would as well.”

“Whatever do you mean, sir?”

“Those ribbons cinched a particular item...” His voice faltered.

“Sir? Please continue.”

Mr. Riggs took a deep breath. “They cinched the corset he purchased for his late wife.”



Senator Pat McCarran proclaimed in 1952 that any bill eliminating special restrictions on immigration would be met by the “kiss of death” (Chin and Villazor 48). Congressman Emanuel Celler even said that he “knew that a really liberal immigration bill, particularly the discarding of the national origins theory, had no more chance of being enacted this session than could a bit of butter remain intact on a hot stove” (Celler 101). In an era where 84% of American immigrants were of European descent, diversity was heavily frowned upon (Chishti). Racially based immigration quotas originally established in 1921 were, in fact, still in effect. Yet on October 3, 1965 at the foot of the emblematic Statue of Liberty, President Lyndon B. Johnson scrawled his name upon an immigration bill that effectively nullified the 41 year old national origins quota system (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”). The lawmaker who had proposed and tirelessly fought for this bill was none other than Representative Emanuel Celler of New York.

As the grandson of German Jewish immigrants, Emanuel “Manny” Celler was an unfailingly strong advocate for refugees and immigrants alike. When he entered college in 1906, his parents tragically passed away, and Celler “worked [his] way through law school selling wine to Italian immigrants, who later became [his] first law clients” (Celler 95). Even at this young age, he defended his foreign born customers from being deported over minor infractions (“Emanuel Celler”). Elected to the House of Representatives from New York in 1922, Celler witnessed various limitations on the number of immigrants allowed into the country. During the Johnson Immigration Act debates of 1924, Celler protested that “thanks to the ill-considered and improvident Johnson bill; race is set against race, class against class” (Celler 82). He constantly challenged those who insisted on “keeping America for Americans” (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”).

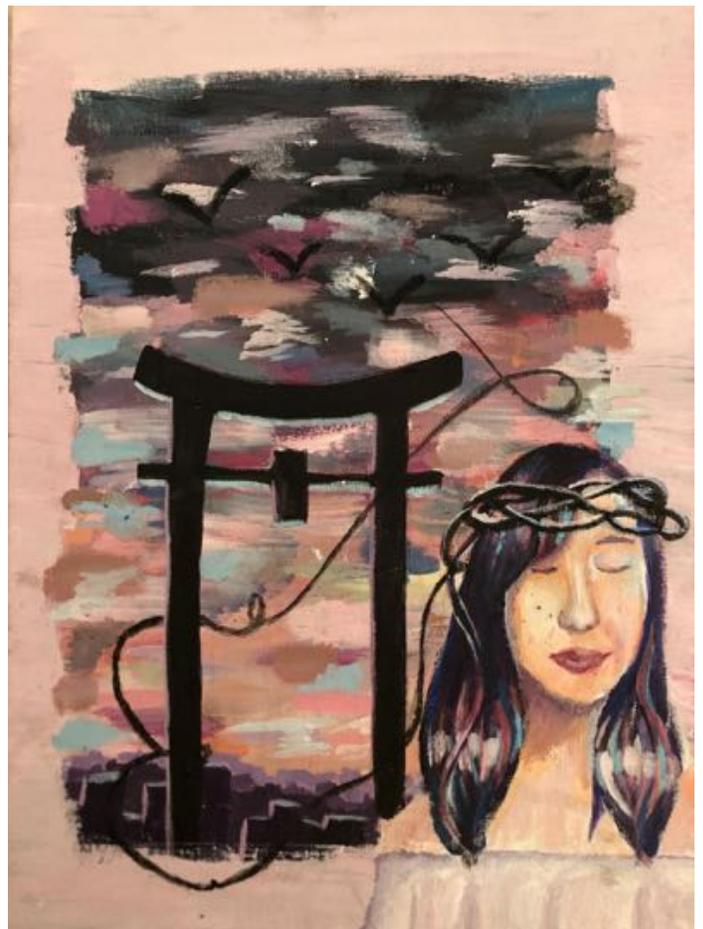
Xenophobia was quite a prevalent feeling in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, public sentiment was not much different than it had been in the 1920s. A 1965 Harris poll surveying the most and least preferred immigrant nationalities confirmed that “Canada, England/Scotland and Scandinavia topped the list of most preferred” while Russians, Asians, and Middle Easterners were “immigrant groups whom Americans would like to see the least” (“Huddled Masses: Public Opinion and the 1965 US Immigration Act”). Coupled with “the explosive rate of the growth of the world's population” (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”), the general sentiment regarding immigration was not a positive one, to say the least. Furthermore, McCarthyism had only recently waned. Celler noted that he had to “face the accusation of a sneaking sympathy for the Communists” (Celler 176). Being labeled a Communist or accused of any association with what was believed to be the Communist agenda was still one of the greatest threats a politician could encounter.

In the midst of these concerns, Celler rose up to propose the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, nicknamed the Hart-Celler Act. Immediately, Congressmen expressed their worries over “desperate people

ignoring borders and clamoring for visas” (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”). In response, he proclaimed that “we are not talking about increased immigration; we are talking about equality of opportunity for all peoples to reach this promised land” (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”). Celler was no stranger to backlash over his views. Following the proposal of an earlier immigration bill that did not alter the “basic restrictionist approach” (Celler 101) of previous limitations, Celler denounced the hypocritical nature of many Congressmen in 1952, claiming “we publicly pronounce the equality of all peoples, discarding all racialistic theories; on the other hand, in our immigration laws, we embrace in practice these very theories we abhor and verbally condemn” (Celler 103). He ultimately alienated himself to the point where he “made no friends with this report. It pleased neither those opposed to the bill nor those in favor of it” (Celler 109). Thirteen years later, there was, as he expected, a similar reaction to his proposal.

Under the provisions of Celler’s bill, a constant per-country ceiling was drafted to eliminate the disproportionate quota system by which only “one-sixth of one percent of each nationality’s population in the United States as of the 1920 census” (“Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965”) was allowed to immigrate to America. Preference was given to immediate relatives of citizens and those with employable skills. In order to “reassure the conservative people that what we were doing was not going to blow everything up like a bomb” (Chin and Villazor 48), Celler suggested that “there would not be ‘comparatively’ many Asian or African immigrants; that is, that there would be no huge influxes” (Chin and Villazor 47). As a man who had “struggled with immigration for a generation” (Chin and Villazor 48), Celler was hell-bent upon enacting legislation “not considered through lenses of prejudice and fear” (Celler 108), regardless of any criticism or condemnation.

On September 30, 1965 after months of debating, revising, and persuading, Celler triumphantly witnessed the House of Representatives vote 320-70 in favor of his legislation (“Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965”). In hindsight, historian Roger Daniels asserted that if “the Congress fully understood [the 1965 Act’s] consequences, it almost certainly would not have passed” (Chin and Villazor 15). The Hart-Celler Act became a historic turning point in the ethnic origins of American immigrants. By 1980, an astounding 87% of immigrants were coming from non-European nations, compared to a mere 16% only twenty years prior (“The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act”). Celler succeeded in his lifelong ambition as a politician to remove racially discriminatory factors from America’s immigration policy. Welcoming all of “the huddled masses yearning to breathe free” (“The New Colossus”), Celler advanced equality of opportunity as well as cultural and ethnic diversity, a virtue worth honoring.



It was the soft blue season,
grass and forest thick with the lull of late summer.
I remember how we lumbered through the birches,
my brother and I tumbling around her, rolling over bluebells and buttercups,
only children, cubs, little paws descending from big claws.
We licked blackberries from their thorny knobs,
our needle teeth stained purple.
We climbed on her at night, wrestled over the slope of her back,
She told us stories
tucked us in snug with sweet cherry words,
cradled us under the stars.

I felt it my my sleep before I smelled smoke.
Primal, panic, past generations and instinct stinging my stomach,
eroding, shredding, screaming.
We ran.
It slithered at our heels, consuming bluebells and buttercups,
burning the skin from our noses, stirring the shrill cry of ravens as they sank into the sky.

We burst into the arms of the great lake,
paddling through the icy black waves, that heartless rhythm I still feel,
rattling over crest and trough,
mountain and valley.
My brother's head bobbed and shuttered,
inky black eyes clung to the sky, horizon, mom.
Just keep going
I heard her scream through broken lips,
Just keep your eyes on me.

The sky faded grey, then smoky red,
then soft orange, dawn.
She drifted further in front,
slipping into the smack of the next wave.

My brother cried out, feeble, raspy.
As the dusky yellow line of land crept into sight
I felt my head, lungs, cease to fight.

I sank
drifted down like a feather, a rock,
sucking in water. I dissolved,
legs splayed out, immobile.

I slept on that sandy floor for days.
Quilted water rocked my fur
twisted, turned, strange seaweed.
Laid there for hours, years,
grave hibernation.

Eventually, I heard it-
her voice on the tongue of the Great Spirit,
My children, you are brave and clever
I promise I will wait forever.
He knelt down, cupped my skull in his hands,
lifted me up, fine air, light,
brushed me with sediment,
tossed windswept grasses, fur.

I saw her smile
across the water, resting atop the highest dune.
Her children, two islands,
four eyes, full set.
She smiled the way a mother smiles,
I closed my sandy eyes,
and we finally
slept.