

2020 Huron High
School Literary
Magazine
COVID-19 Edition

Full Circle

Photo by Maya Kogulan

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. Authors 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:

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* Julie Heng asked that her piece not be published

Colorado is filled with big blue skies, skies so wide and deep you could almost touch them, drown in them, and little trees, and pale dust, and mountains that you can never escape, no matter how far you go.

Those skies, those mountains, the little trees and the dust, they were my home, the home before the one on the bumpy dirt road with the pretty sunsets, before the one by the Atlantic sun and the granite boulders, and before the home up the winding drive, with trees that took three whole people to span them. My blue sky home was long ago, like an old friend I've fallen out of touch with.

My classmates say they've lived in the same neighborhoods their whole lives. That they've known their friends for almost a decade. That their parents have roots in this city, and their grandparents have roots in this city.

Where are my roots? Do I take them with me when I move again, and plant them back in sandy soil, rich soil, wet soil? Do I leave behind part of my roots wherever I go? Are my roots where I was first, under those blue skies?

I think I take my roots with me, plant them down any place I go, and maybe I'll take them back up again, on a day when I want to live more, see more. But maybe I left a little piece of me everywhere I've gone, a little piece in exchange for everything I found along the way. Little roots, little marks on the soil. Was I here? I was here.

starlight

people
are made of
stars,
you know

and in some you can see it
the light
from long ago
that lingers in their souls

reaching across
vast darkness
to bring another
warmth.

wonder

isn't it

a little

magical

this big

beautiful

world

we live in

in our tiny

corner of

this big

beautiful

universe

supernova

stars are like phoenixes
when they die
they don't go quietly

they flare
 brilliant
and bright
for the last time
then scatter their own ashes
in a sunburst of color and light

and from what remains
they are reborn.

venus

how ironic
(or perhaps prophetic)
that the wandering star
the romans named after venus
their goddess of love and beauty
turned out to be the planet
where thick clouds rain acid
onto a blistering, barren world

when a world that believes women
should be worshipped only for beauty
and valued only for love
is just as toxic

on jupiter and change

what do they mean when they say “make a difference”
as if i could go my entire life without changing anything

when the new horizons spacecraft flew past jupiter
catching ahold of its gravity like a rope to fling it towards the stars
it slowed the planet’s orbit by a fraction of a second
and days on jupiter will always be that much shorter

people will always tell stories
and whether they tell mine or not
i will leave my marks here on the earth

not like messages scrawled in sharpie on the wall
I was here
announcing their presence to uncaring strangers

i will be one of many voices in the crowd
and i am happy i will never have to stand there alone

i will leave my handprints on the hearts of friends and strangers
smiles and i love yous and messages scrawled on pins and stickers
i am content to be the girl with the feminist t-shirt that you see in the hall
i am happy to be the friend who always tries her best to say the right thing, even
when she's not sure what it is

i will play as large or as small a role as the world has picked out just for me

maybe i will not start a movement
but together we will end it
we will be the ones they write about in history books
not i, but we

because my story is just a part of our story and her story and their story and history

and maybe there will be people who tell me i cannot move mountains

but i will laugh and say, i can move whole planets

i will be like new horizons

moving so quickly that my mere presence causes worlds to shift

and as far as legacies go

i think i could do worse than that

writing to aliens

writing is the act of shouting into the void. of sending out your signals into the darkness of space on the sliver of a chance that someone will hear them. that someone will respond. writing is wondering if you're alone in the vastness of the universe. trying to find someone out there like you. who speaks in the same frequencies. and sends messages too. listening for a heart that beats in time with yours. to find out if the stars aligned. and the miracle that created you happened again. and maybe you're crazy to keep searching. but maybe someday you'll find them. even if they can't respond. maybe they will hear you. maybe your words will reach across the space between the stars and find another home. maybe they will outlive you. maybe you can create something eternal. find something new. maybe insanity is repeating the same thing. again and again. and expecting something different. but maybe that's just faith. only time will tell.

My last moments spent with my grandmother in her time of health were spent laying in bed eating strawberry frosting from a Pillsbury container. She'd sit on her high windowsill looking across her city, and alternate between bringing a cigarette and a spoonful of icing to her lips as I watched in silence, never tiring of admiration for her beauty.

She had been diagnosed with breast cancer on a date far before my knowledge, and my youth caused explanations to minimize to "she's sick." When it got to the point of needing consistent aid, my grandmother moved in with my aunt, an hour away from Ypsilanti, which made visitations lack. Time for an adult my seem as if it flies, and memory tied with knowledge makes being caught off guard a rarity. As a child of nine, I remember seeing my grandmothers wide bright smile and cursing my own, wishing it was as full and as contagious as hers. I remember watching her adjust her silky, patterned headwraps, never noticing that there was nothing underneath, or that whenever we saw each other, we would stay in and never leave. I remember hoping that I too would grow to possess the spell that would make me look not as my age suggested.

Every few weekends, my family would go to visit her, and I had not yet realized that our time spent with strawberry stomachaches and the present had been enough time to change things. As we walked in, I greeted my cousins and after leaving the bathroom, heard a sound resembling the blaring noises of a gunting pig. Startled, I turned the corner and reached a half-opened door. I peeked in and saw the back of a body covered in a blanket, rising and falling with each snort of slumber. The light from the window reflected off of the figure's patchy, depilated head, which did not

come off as a very attractive sight. Confused, I walked back out into the kitchen and sat with my family. "Let's go say hi to granny," my aunt suggested, and I happily complied. I asked where she was, and my aunt raised a finger in the direction of which I had just came.

It didn't resonate until a few moments had passed that the bald, tired, ominous finger I had just laid eyes upon had eaten my grandmother, and that they wanted me to converse with it. In realization I turned back around and shook my head, sitting back down. "C'mon, she's awake and she wants to see you, she can hear you from here, come say hi," my eldest cousin said. "I am not." I responded and sank further into my seat. My aunt took my hand and began to try and lead me into the room. Digging my heels into the carpet, I felt fear and confusion run down my face in heavy wet streaks and ran to the living room where dread wasn't as large and it was there I heard a smiling voice. "It's okay, i'm just too beautiful for her to lay eyes on," it gently spoke.

As my grandmother's health and body continued to deteriorate, looking at her became less of a physical struggle, and more of an emotional one. She still had her beautiful full smile, and big, brown eyes, but watching her felt similarly to the emotions endured at the end of a deeply engaging, despondent piece of literature, without the relief that comes with remembrance that whatever had happened was fictitious. It takes the feeling of split-second sorrow knowing the literary journey has reached its end, and turns it into a mosquito that deems the phrase 'out of sight out of mind', meaningless and counteracts it in every way possible while managing to prolong the experience. Due to it, I began to miss my grandmother before having been given reason to.

My last moments spent with her in her time of sickness were spent lying in a hospital bed giving her a pedicure. I gingerly brushed on a coat of deep red, the color of a strawberry after being left too ripe for too long, having been rid of any nutrients or desire, no longer fit to be among the flavors of a Pillsbury container. I laid on the unfamiliar mattress, on top of the stiff white sheets surrounded by cold, silver poles that stood wrapped and suffocated by wires that led to my grandmother and gazed at her. Her eyes were shut and every once in awhile I would tap and blow a warm breath onto the center of her nails to check whether or not they had finished drying. Each time I looked up I saw a light smile on her face and took it as a reminder that she was still there with me. That we were still there together, but that was the last night we spent with solely each other, as one.

My last moment spent with my grandmother lasted for two minutes. She laid in her now eternal bed as I stood over her watching intently for her chest to rise, waiting for her to smile at me one last time, but neither came. My back faced a crowd of people, a line of beings waiting to pay their respects to a woman who was mine. I wondered if the person who put clothes on her limp back, and put color on top of her still eyelids was standing behind me. I wondered if whoever painted her finger nails the color they were left the toes how they ought to have been. I thought about the movie *My Girl* and wondered if her body too was left in a strangers cold, ominous basement during preparation as I walked back to a pew, saying everything but farewell.

My immediate family is not the type to dwell on the past for long, and often that causes healthy grievances to be cut short, but every once in a while someone will bring her up. I recently attended a funeral for a cousin I did not know, who was a

relative from my grandmother's side. Her whole family was there and as we left, I walked alone through a tight line of vehicles, looking for my own and saying goodbye to everyone. As I passed a red car, the window began to roll down and three heads became visible. The women within reminded me who they were --her sisters--, and went on to tell me how much I looked like my grandmother. After the exchange as I continued to walk on, more of her relatives stopped me to tell me how I reminded them of her.

When I finally reached the car I sat back and let out a smile that became a laugh that was a manifestation of how ecstatic and proud and beautiful I felt to have been seen as she had been, and to know that although she was not with me, she traveled through me, and that realization is a delicacy as delectable as strawberry icing itself.

“Because this is the greatest country in the world.” - Adrian Iraola*

There was one thing Jade knew deep in her mind: she was very, very sick. She felt it in the morning when she looked in the mirror. She felt it when she walked through the halls at school. She felt it when she called her family back at home. It wasn't a deathly, fearful sort of sick like the thousands of infected, many from her hometown--it was a sick that clung to her the way an overplayed song clings to your mind. Once she discovered it, it was inescapable.

At first, Jade ignored it. She'd heard of the virus from the news, and dismissed it as another overdramatized “hot topic” that journalists wrote in order to keep people on their toes. The media, she had learned, was dominated by people looking to spread an agenda and gain profit while wearing a mask of the search for truth. That month, she had read of multiple events that suggested things like World War 3, the disintegration of countries, and Armageddon, but the sun still shone and the earth still spun.

She only took it seriously when her family began to panic. Their city was sealed off, quarantining the few sick patients with millions of healthy individuals (who wouldn't be healthy for long). Significantly more people were afflicted by paranoia than illness. The entire country was a prison with uncountable layers, not unlike the matryoshka dolls of their northern neighbor. They were first confined in their country, then in their city, then their house, and in the end, people refused to leave their room out of irrational fear of their roommates. Jade began to feel faint despite her lack of interaction with the city. She was sick to her stomach with distress and melancholy. She scanned every article and wept until her room could no longer contain her tears.

She became stifled.

So she went to school, a cloud over her head and a cape of lethargy draped over her body. This was when she realized the severity of her illness. With every passing accusatory stare, her head grew lower. She saw her friends pointedly use hand sanitizer whenever she came by with her black hair and dark eyes. When her mouth felt dry, she swallowed hard to prevent herself from coughing. Once, in the back of the dusty library, she sneezed. From then on, she avoided dust like it was a deadly virus.

That week on, Jade waged a war on multiple fronts. From the east, she was attacked with countless horror stories of deaths, with each story seeming to crawl closer to her own parents, at first inching forwards, and now, approaching in a terrifying sprint. From the west, slanderous whispers with thinly veiled threats bombarded her. She had a one-man army and could trust no one--including herself. Every night, she poisoned herself with terror in her own dreams. Her mind had turned its back on her. Who would be there for her now?

It's said that once you hit rock bottom, there's nowhere to go but up, but in the middle of the Pacific ocean, it seems that you can fall forever. Locked borders provide that there are no overhead planes to save you. If you attempt to claw your way back up, you will be met with failure and suffocation.

When Jade screamed for help, all she got was saltwater. And in this way, she drowned.

*Adrian Iraola is a father of a student attending Saline High School. This was his response to someone asking him "Why did you stay in Mexico?" after he had explained how his son was bullied for being Mexican.

Midnight

My mind has always belonged to midnight
Her quietness a cell of my own making
Her calm opposing the unrest that I've long carried
Her stillness becoming part of me before my eyes
She keeps my cell unlocked
Taunting me with the freedom of sleep
Something I've never truly known
The bags under my eyes permanent impressions
Her calling card for all to see
They call her an illness
As if she is something curable
As if I am curable
But I'm sick of the stick of the honey and aloe
Remedies that have stripped me of hope
But not of her
These meds they said would make her go away
But she only comes back stronger
Her vessel my broken mind
A vessel that no longer runs on its own
A ship once tidy,
Now rusted and cold
Its outer beauty hiding the horrors within
the darkness which always seems to beckon me back
Surrounding me like a damp cloud
Her hands wrapped around me like a doll
Controlling my movement
Constricting my tongue
She keeps my mind occupied and my mouth silent

Yūgen

Words are the most powerful weapon with which we can use to change the world.
Or so someone once said.
I think.
But don't you think their damning.
A spoken Melody dangerous in the hands of the wrong one.
Capable of destroying the strongest person.
And capable of rebuilding them in an image that they themselves did not design.
Did not approve of.
An ocean too dangerous to cross without the right boat
and no one seems to have the right boat.
I'm looking for a wordsmith
someone who can string together these individual words
and turn them into something beautiful
into something harder on the lips
but easier on the ears.

2002

I hate the way you say my name, filled with history
the vibrations echoing from your voice
like the sound of children on a playground,
our playground in your backyard
a place we claimed sacred,
your bedroom, a home away from home
the bar in your basement, where we had our first drinks.
the taste of tequila burning our throats as we attempted to take shots.
the flash of the lights from the tv where music played.
the party aesthetic was everything
and nothing
because when the music stopped
and the bottle emptied
all we had was each other,
and we never did manage
to fill the silence
to fill the empty
to fill the bottle
the top shelf was always just out of reach

Mirror

I've never been one to look in the mirror for too long
I hate the way my reflection stares back at me
eyes full of the life I've somehow forgotten
bright with colors that always seem to elude me
mind only in a state of anxiety when it's time to pick dinner
heart only beating fast when riding a roller coaster
smile wider than the cheshire cat
the girl in the mirror is one I no longer recognize
the memory of her fading more and more with every passing day
she is forgotten by no one but me
because on days when I go out
I reach into the mirror, grab her face
and replace mine with hers

Alexithymia

The act of breathing is simple

In and out

in_ and out_

from the moment we're born - we breathe

without instruction

without being taught

it's a primal instinct

having an anxiety attack is like turning your brain off, and on at the same time

your mind races with thoughts of everything and nothing

and for those moments, however long it lasts, you forget how to breathe

like you haven't been doing it since the day you were born

and you can feel your chest pound

and your lungs burn as your brain thirsts for the oxygen that you can no longer supply

that it will not ask for

that it will not command

and the world closes around you

the darkness settling like the night sky

you will try to grasp around you to find something, anything to hold on to

to find anything to save you

something to make the oxygen course through your body again, into your brain

and in a couple of seconds, or minutes, your mind will reboot

still the house of a virus that no software can remove

but functional nonetheless

Imperfect

The mirror grinned back at me
it's smooth surface reflecting a sadness no one can see
the ridges across my skin an unruly juxtaposition
A body riddled with imperfections that weren't mine to make
mind full of dreams that i had never desired
captive in my own skin
controlled by a voice i can't seem to recognize
a body i can't seem to love
every action an echoed cry for help
it's silence deafening
my hand a hammer moving on its own accord
the broken pieces my shattered identity
each shard a slice into the reality I have created
for you
cuts piercing the thin veil that seemed to hold the world
but never strong enough to support me, or us
but in the end all that matters of the veil is it's color
white, the unwavering love for self that I once possessed
or black, a color manifestation of the hatred I have self imposed

Begin again

And on the first day of 11th grade, I heard your voice in the wind
Reminding me of the things I had promised
Anchoring me to who I once was
Holding me down, holding me... back
your touch pin pricks on my spine
Two weeks later I could only hear your voice if I whispered first, as if I
Had somehow taken your permission to speak
After three weeks I only heard you in my sleep
A nightmare misinterpreted dream
Saw your face only in the reflection of my own
A month later your voice was a distant memory,
one I so desperately wanted to lose,
in order to hear my own

You know what they say: “Two can keep a secret if one of them is dead.” I always thought that was bullshit, but the world has a way of proving me wrong.

In all my years, I had never felt such a love. It’s always the quiet ones, you know? Gentle and shy as she may have seemed, something about her was bright. She was fire. Beautiful. Ethereal. Dangerous. Get too close and you’ll get burned. I wanted nothing more than to know everything about her, everything she was. I wanted her to know everything about me. I wanted to spend my lifetime with her, and she spend hers with me, as much as I knew she could never. Love makes fools of us each.

I was out that night, sitting at a table in the diner on Fifth Avenue. I told myself, maybe it’s just the night what pushes us to fear, paranoid of that which may lurk in the shadows, but I was damn certain I felt eyes on me. I didn’t know who it was, but when I came in I only counted four folks in the place, myself included. And I knew there was someone watching my every move. Taking a slow drag of my nasty cigarette, I glanced over at the counter. Nobody there but good ol’ Doreen, uninspired to be scrubbing at the linoleum, her aquamarine garage-door eyeshadow highlighting the blue tinged bags that rimmed her sad eyes. She drew that old soapy rag in circles around the same four inches of the countertop, and I shook my head a bit. It wasn’t her. Turning back around, I blew the cloud of smoke out of my nose.

I picked up my white mug, taking a long sip of my coffee, smooth midnight black like the sky outside, city lights outshining the stars. Straining to seem casual, I looked back over my shoulder, just a bit. First, I saw old Kutcher. Can’t miss him.

Some nights he was here, nursing a cup of dinner roast, no cream, no sugar, and drinking in the comfort of the old diner, of Doreen's kind smile and scratchy voice. Other nights, he was sitting on the sidewalk down the block, asking for enough change to buy himself the coffee. He was a good guy, a World War II vet, recently returned and left behind to fall into misfortune after his service, but he still believed in humanity, even if his faith in president Truman was a bit shaken. He sighed contentedly into his mug, enjoying the moment, wrapped in its warmth. It wasn't him either.

Finally, my eyes landed on the fourth patron in the diner, the last possible option, my apprehensive nature aside. It was a beautiful young woman, sitting at the farthest table from my own, sipping absentmindedly on a warm cup of tea. She was wrapped in a silk raincoat, bouncing her leg and keeping her gloves clutched tightly in one hand, looking as if she was ready to leave at any moment. The robin's egg blue of the jacket sat rather nicely, I thought, next to the creamy copper color of the waves that tumbled down her head, past her shoulders, like licks of flame kissing her collar. Her eyes were a pale, complementary grey, like smoke, striking, even as far away as she was. Her lips reminded me of a sweet, ripe cherry, glossy and red. As soon as my eyes grazed her, she turned her head, cheeks flushing. Like a ringer in my head, confirmation of my suspicions. She was watching me; and yet, I didn't find myself discomfited by this notion. I could have sworn I recognized her, had seen her before, and yet I couldn't believe that, for it was impossible to see someone so stunning and not spend the rest of your days in yearning, eating at you, like something has been ignited in your very being, burning down the timber frames of your mortal soul.

Carefully, I returned to my cigarette, my coffee, curious of what she may do. I sat for a bit, wondering if she would speak to me, waiting patiently, excitedly. The clock ticked onwards incessantly, and I found myself growing tired. Had I no longer piqued her interest? After quite some time, I found myself uncertain that she even remained in the building. Defeated, I grabbed my coat, leaving a healthy tip for dear old Doreen and heading for the door. The moment I pivoted away from the counter and crossed the room to exit, my eyes caught her, still watching me, searing my heart, as I walked out. So she hadn't lost interest. Something in me was screaming *turn back, turn back now!! Sit down with her!!* But I couldn't. I just couldn't. I knew that she would see right through me, through whatever facade my lying face spat out and into my honest soul, see what I couldn't let her know. It was too risky. I took a deep drink of her radiant beauty as I departed, certain it would be the last time I saw this strange and wonderful creature, and let the door hit me on the way out.

The air was stale. It was raining, and the city was muted, almost deafeningly so. Late night, early morning, it all blends together into a certain kind of quiet, something most people here never get the chance to see. Who, other than myself, I suppose, would be out on such a miserable evening is something I could never understand. I opened my umbrella, began to walk home. No taxis were on the streets to flag down, it was the dead hours of the day. It didn't matter, I liked the walk. I whistled while I went, relishing how the sound echoed off of empty sidewalk tiles, harmonized with the erratic percussion of the rain. I listened closely as I walked, the rhythm of my feet pounding the concrete below me. Something seemed wrong. Abruptly, suddenly, I stopped, spun around.

Two more beats of footsteps rang out after I ceased. I thought I had heard a second pair of feet. There she stood, about ten feet away, just at the edge of the soft ring of light cast by the street light towering over us both. Her beautiful soft orange hair was plastered to her head, glowing golden and red like an ember in the lamplight, and behind the startled panic in her eyes was a spark.

“What’s your name, doll?” I asked, skipping over the obvious questions like ‘why are you following me.’

Her voice seemed caught in her throat, but eventually she spoke. The sound was sweeter than honey and warmer than the hearth. I savored every word. We talked for some time, stood there in the rain, soaked to the bone, in the halo of light cast by the tall iron lamp that hung over our heads. She said had seen me at the diner every night for months, longing to speak to me. This fateful evening, when I noticed her, finally, but said nothing, she could take it no more. She had followed me out with the intent of conversation, she said, then instead walked behind me with no certainty of what to say. Finally, she told me I was handsome, that I was beautiful. We walked home together that night. That blessed, god damned night.

Three years passed. We shared the secret. We lived happily, but something in it was unfulfilling. Not her, never her, the spark still in her ash-grey eyes, the creamy copper still in her hair, and the sweet, tart cherries of her lips red as ever. She was perfect, she was beautiful, she was bright. I committed all that I could to her and she to me, but underneath it all, there was something that could never stay the way it was. A slight dissatisfaction that nagged at her sincere morals. As long as she knew, as long as she was with me, my secret could never belong to just us two.

She fell ill not long before our fourth anniversary, four years since that eve spent in the old diner on fifth. The hospital room was white, sterile, unearthly and cold. So were the nurses, the quacks, all of 'em. It was no place for her, warm and lovely. I stayed with her often, the only way I could tolerate the place being that she was there, warming me up in the unfeeling chill of the ward. Disease gripped her, dulled the copper licks of flames that fell from her hair, turned her cherry sweet lips into cracked pink chalk. Still, she was perfect, and that spark, like a candle burning or the flick of a lighter, never left those soft grey eyes.

One night, close to the end of her stay, we danced, to celebrate four years. She was so weak, IVs keeping her tethered to this miserable place, but I held her up, her arms round my neck, her thin legs standing on my feet. Her hands were chilly, and it scared me, my girl like fire going cold, but when she pressed her lips to mine, when she rested her cheek on my shoulder, I felt the warmth I prayed for. She was still in there, she was still fighting, she was still mine. I moved slow, afraid I would break her apart if I went any faster. I remember the sound of the radio, crackling like burning logs, Frankie Lymon's "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?" ringing out, asking the same question I had been asking myself for some time. She laughed, a sound so bright and beautiful, and it was the last time I ever heard it. It was the happiest I had seen her from the moment she was admitted, and it made me happy, and it made me sad. I loved her so much. I still do.

She died in November. It was the coldest winter I had ever known. At her funeral, they painted her lips a deep berry pink color, all wrong, and I knew she was gone. Truly gone. The fire had gone out, and I would never see those creamy copper flames or those ripe cherry lips or the bright little spark behind those kind soot

colored eyes. I wanted to tell her parents, I felt I owed it to her at the very least. My secret. Our secret. She had wanted them to know. I never found them, the number and address in the phone book no longer theirs. I searched for a long time, too. But as she went out, it's almost as if they disappeared with her. I never could tell them I loved her, their daughter, that I lived as her wife and she lived as mine. So my secret stayed secret, the truth of my love never bared to the world as I used to fear so deeply that it may be. And that secret staying secret, well, it saddened the broken little bits of my heart. But you know what they say: "Two can keep a secret if one of them is dead."

I'm stuck in a tower. There's a little window for me to see the outside, but I'm oppressed by my flaws and my fears and my self-hatred. The pain I feel is ceaseless, originating from my fingers because of my writer's block, travelling through my arms like little red blood cells, arriving at my chest, at the heart. When it gets there, it gets difficult to move, and my heart beats agonizingly slow, teasing me into losing all hope.

I walk towards the opening in the wall, staring out into the dusk sky, littered with white specks like someone took a paintbrush and let the drops fall onto the purple page. Below the skyline is the salty ocean created from my tears, and I'm back to add some more. My eyes get red and sore, and it feels like I'm just a sponge being squeezed of its liquids, just being used for personal gain. Knowing I'm pathetic, and stupid, and that I can't accomplish anything fuels my agony more, and the cries keep coming out, never stopping 'til I am finally dry.

I look back towards my chamber, with it reflecting my interests as if it was a mirror, with scrapped, unfinished stories, plushies laying on the floor everywhere, varying in different species and colour, and the mirrors. So many mirrors, all masking the walls so I can't see them anymore. The glassy surfaces are always clean, when I spill something on them, the substance just fades away, like it was never there to begin with.

This room, this castle, is cursed by someone, a demon, trying to break my mind. It's haunted by my nightmares of being isolated and exposed to judgemental peers, so I'm stuck here, unable to leave because there's no exit. No doorway out. Just me in my little room, in the middle of a great sea, surrounded by darkness.

One day, I tried to break the mirrors in anger, but it was no use. The shards cut into my skin, blood droplets splattering all over the floor, and voices booming, telling me to stop because I'm weak. I listened to them. The glass pieces on the ground flew into the air, reforming the original shape like a puzzle being completed. I would look at the mirrored walls, seeing all my insecurities, forced to see, because there's nothing else to look at. Seeing my ugly face, and my puffy eyes, and pink-stained hands would make me remember how disgusting I am. I don't want people to see my appearance, so I should be happy here, being secluded on my own. The voices would reassure me this often.

Some days, I would look out to the ocean, wondering if anyone else was out there. Only grey clouds and a dull sun awaited me, and the waters as well, but it's monochrome too. No life, not a single soul out there to greet me. Reminding myself of this would make me turn around and ignore the outside, and I would read a book. They make me think that I have friends, because most of the novels are written in first person. Seeing the crazy adventures, the diverse personalities, all these colours blooming fills me with a fleeting happiness.

Today I woke up from my bed, stepping onto the cold floor. I saw my reflection in the mirror, I look terrible, as always, I thought. I swear I see someone standing behind my other self in the glass sometimes. I originally thought it was great that I was here, with no one to stare at me, no human contact whatsoever, but it gets lonely. Vines would start to sprout from my heart and pierce through my chest, with thorns poking me with every step I take. I'm a weed that needs to be exterminated from society, so I'm doing them all a favour by staying here, right? On the outside I seem normal, but the inside of me has spools of multi-coloured yarn, all tangled and

twisted up so they can't be unravelled again.

I glanced at the mirrors, at all the twisted versions of me. Focusing on one of the crystal surfaces, I saw myself with missing eyes, with some black substance leaking out of the sockets and dripping down my face, and even though it wasn't me, I could feel the liquid caress my face.

Wait...

I craned my neck to look at a different mirror. This reflection had a gigantic hole in its face, and insects crawling out of the chest cavity.

That isn't me...

I stared downward, touching my stomach, my face. This realization hit me hard, the force making time stop, the waves that were once crashing against the castle's walls now resting peacefully.

Maybe it isn't other people locking me up here, it was me the whole time...

All the mirrors suddenly shattered, clinking noises hitting the floor. A blinding light came from wall in front of me, and a door materialized. I grasped the cold, metal handle.

내 이름은 지호.

I am Jiho.

난 최고가 아니야...

I may not be perfect...

Turning it, and what awaited me, at last, was the outside.

사람들은 여전히 날 사랑해.

But I am still loved.