

RAMIFICATIONS

LITERATURE AND FINE ART FROM THE AWTY
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL 2020-2021



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RAMIFICATIONS LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Freeing Myself

The darkness spreads inside me
I feel it scattering from my mind
Swiftly running down to my fingertips
My feet lifting off the ground
A limp form floating above the floor.
The life escapes from my eyes.
I have become immune to the pain.
Feeling nothing but the growing emptiness.
I do not mind so I will not resist.
Soon I am nothing more than a shadow.
My feet fall back down to earth.
Dragging the rest of my soul with it
Now I can roam the universe.
Free from the shackles that held me down.

Anonymous



Valeria Castro
Twelfth Grade



Art by Jennifer Wu
Tenth Grade



Art by Vivian Wu
Twelfth Grade



Art by Tate Leach
Tenth Grade

Chocolate and Pictures

My eyelids, filled with fatigue, are forced open, to see Khalti's 1 little body hobbling over to me. I'm left in a phase of confusion, my mind erased of all knowledge of who and where I am. After a few moments, the memories come rushing back. My name, Amina Zain, where we are, Mama's house, and The War. The Civil War.

The flames of war raged during the Lebanese Civil War of 1975. Lebanon was split into the East and West side. The ones who formerly lived in the East migrated to the West, and vice versa. Yet, Mama would refuse to give up her house and surrender to the new norm. Therefore, we now live on the enemy territory's border, and Khalti came to live with us, abandoning her home.

Khalti's soft hands touch my face and find their way to my bronze hair, and in a voice as crisp as a mockingbird, says to me, "Hayati 3, wake up, some pillagers are raiding my house. Let's gather what we need." The casualty in her voice caught me off guard, and several moments passed before consciousness had swept over me and realized what she had told me. I looked at her blue eyes for confirmation, and it was clear as day that she was serious. She handed me a plastic bag to gather any remains, and we headed off.

For a few kilometers, we walked until we came upon the infamous street of the West. The sniper's street. Many have fallen by the hands of the sniper. He stalks his prey and toys with them. Countless stories have been told of the ominous sniper. One which had made its many rounds was that of a mother and her toddler. They had been walking, when the sniper took his shot. The mother collapsed to the floor, and the toddler, leaning towards her, stood dumbstruck. He then attempted to wake her up. A crowd gathered and tossed a rope to the toddler, which he grabbed and was pulled to safety.

Yet people do as people do, and they find their way around things. Therefore we built a tunnel out of cardboard boxes in which we run through, denying the sniper information on our location. Yet the building's emptiness ominously lingered. A sign the sniper was on his break 4. We ran through the tunnel to not take any chances. In every step, the sound of the shell dropping to the floor, echoed in my ear. Khalti's body, drowning in a pool of blood, was plastered to my eyes. The second shot, the chime of the shell's contact with the floor, the fall, the darkness...

"Amina, we're here", Khalti's soothing voice whispers to me. Her whisper snaps me out of my trance, and we continue our march through the tunnel. Once we arrived, we were greeted by an ongoing raid, and a few minutes flew by before reality sunk into my mind. My world seemed to stop, yet everything else seemed to still be moving altogether. The sparrow brought food to her chicks, the motorcycles drove by, and the clouds continued to slide like butter across the blue sky above us. Yet my world froze.

The floor under me collapsed, and I fell into a bottomless pit of despair. Every moment of the fall, I feared the ground I would hit, but that ground never came. I fell further and further, and the house, the raid, the war, all became ever more distant. All memories made in that house, the laughs, the hugs, the sorrows, and everything in between, gone. The tunnel of hope became narrower and narrower until no sliver of light could penetrate that dark wall...

I kept my head down, in fear of being called out, while the pillagers paid no attention to us. We were ghosts in our own home. We trudged through the rooms we knew so well, as furniture was capsized, windows were cracked, and carpets were torn. The pillagers seemed to walk right through me, and I became a stranger in a home I knew so well.

My instincts finally kicked in, and I ran over to grab the TV and the radio. As my hand came in contact with the radio, a hand with the force of a hurricane grabbed my shoulder and spun me around, and I was face to face with Khalti. Her eyes were full of anger, as she said to me, "Leave it! Leave it!" "But Khalti, its—" I uttered, but her quick mouth was ready. "It doesn't matter, grab the chocolate, and whatever pictures you can find on the floor." Was she insane!? The radio I can understand, but the TV!? The one belonging we have that is worth something! And she wants me to just ignore it!? I obeyed and stooped down to pick up the box of chocolates, which she couldn't resist because of her sweet tooth. I swept my hands across the floor, and I grabbed onto any slip of paper, in hopes of it being a picture. I found a broken mirror and childishly looked into

it, in hopes of something magical occurring. But all I could see were my sad green eyes staring back at me.

Once I collected all the pictures, we left, crossed the sniper's street once more, and plodded to Mama's house, with a grocery bag of chocolate and pictures. We walked into the doorway, and Mama's stoic face stared at us. A sickening feeling came upon me, as, like a spear, Mama's hazel eyes cut right through my skin and into my soul. "What could you bring?" her cold voice asks. But through the iciness of her voice, I can see some worry lingering under the ice. I shamefully hand her the bag, containing nothing but chocolate and pictures, and she grabs one of the family pictures and runs her fingers along the borders, and a face of longing is hidden behind her stone mask. I explain to her that I was planning on grabbing the TV and the radio and how it was Khalti who stopped me. Once I had finished my story, she just gazed upon me, and I could see my skinny figure, my long bronze hair, and my sad emerald eyes in the reflection of her own. For moments we stood there, and nothing moved. She finally broke the silence and, with a steady voice, said to me, "You won't understand now, but when you grow up, you will come to realize, some things are irreplaceable."

That girl eventually realized what her mother had once said, and lived by that code for the rest of her life. Materialistic objects can grant you happiness, a happiness that lasts for as long as the object lasts. But memories never die.

This is based on a true story. This is based on my mother's story from the Lebanese Civil War.

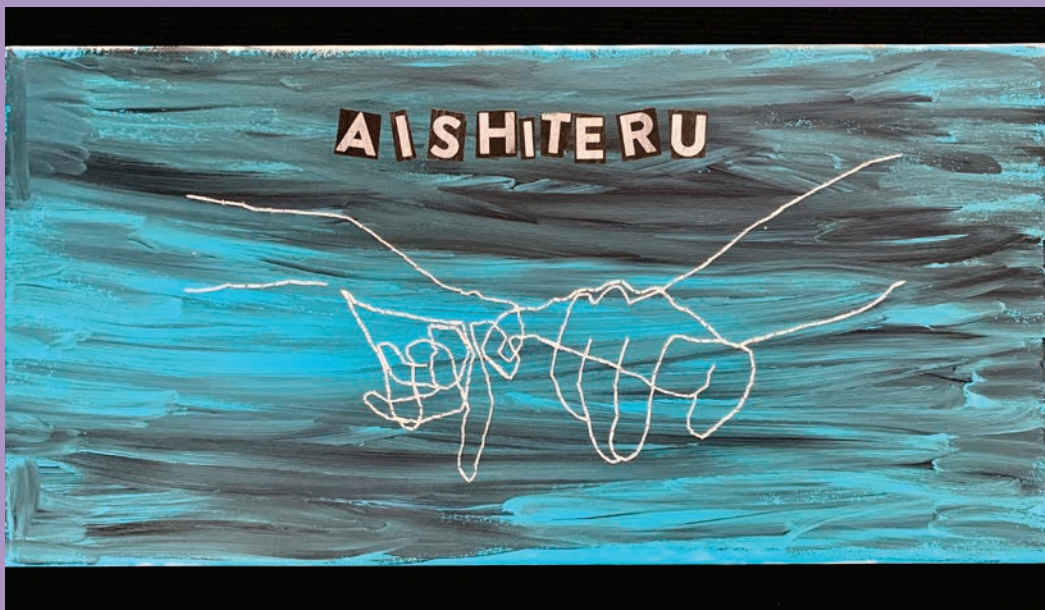
Abbas Salehpour
Eighth Grade



Art by Gloria Bertrand
Eleventh Grade



Photo by Savannah Clemmons
Tenth Grade



Art by Lauren Wade
Twelfth Grade



Art by Oliver Giddings
Eleventh Grade

Poetry Coercion

Someone forces me
Appreciation is lost
Motivation gone
Nonetheless go on

Anonymous



Art by Oliver Giddings
Eleventh Grade

A Second COVID: Mars Edition

The sandstorm outside is beginning to die down. Sure, a sandstorm sounds pretty bad, but on Mars, it's all too common. The real horror these days is a disease that's enveloped all three Martian colonies in fear. I am scared 24/7 and hesitant more than usual. Sitting on my friend Kori's bed in her perfectionist room, I notice she's staring at me.

We're just two preteen girls, enrolled in the same development classes, who have known each other forever. Kori is obsessed with tech, and I enjoy biology. We also don't look similar. Kori has blonde hair and green eyes, while I sport boring burnt sienna hair with muddy brown eyes. She's also a few inches taller than me, and always finds the time to brag about it. Since our families are very close, her house is the only one I can visit during these times.

"Did you find a computer yet?" she asks, curiously. A bit drowsy, I feel my eyes closing slowly, my thoughts swimming in front of me.

...

"Bet you can't catch me!" Kori tore across the rugged Martian landscape towards the colony center. I finally caught up with her, panting. "Too bad these suits don't have some kind of ventilation, I'm roasting in here. Thank goodness we only have to wear them outside."

"The newest version does," Kori said, skipping ahead. "It's on my Christmas list. I heard on Earth they don't wear suits at all." she paused, "How does ice cream sound?"

The bell sounded as we opened the airtight door to the hall of the ice cream parlor. We took off our space helmets and carried them with us. I then opened the second door to the parlor.

"Kori, Fern, how are you?"

"We're great, Mr. Adams!" I reply. "One matcha ice cream and one... vanilla please." Mr. Adams gave us our ice creams quickly, and we chowed down our snacks at a nearby table. Life on Mars isn't as easy as it seems, but it's been my normal forever. My mother and father were asked to move here from Earth because of their jobs as news anchor and virologist. Unlike they planned, I was born on the Red Planet and it became my home. I don't have any siblings but Georgie, my chameleon, is enough of a sibling to me.

"Fern, look!" Kori pointed to the holovision on the wall. We have lots of futuristic technologies on Mars, such as the holovision, which is more or less a piece of glass that acts as a TV! One of my mother's colleagues mumbled on anxiously as she talked about a new virus. "Nothing to worry about," I said, knowing that we had some of the best doctors and scientists on Mars' surface. The reporter continued: "The new virus which has now been named M-497, more commonly known as the Martian Disease, is now spreading quickly across the three colonies on Mars. As of now, 6 people have been infected and 2 have died. M-497, as the first new disease on Mars, is more dangerous to us since we cannot be in the open air. People who contract the virus show symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath, and fever. Be sure to visit a doctor if you have indications that you have M-497."

At this point, I was getting a bit nervous. My father had taught me almost everything I knew about viruses, so I could tell this could get much worse, especially since viruses can be hardly contained. I quickly gobbled up the rest of my ice cream and while saying goodbye to Kori, I left.

...

I'm pretty sure Kori timed me because as soon as I finish my flashback, she tugs at my shirt. "Are you there, Fern?! I asked you something!" I'm not the only one who is anxious during the lockdown, Kori is too. She also knows how dangerous this virus is. Too many innocent people could perish.

"I—I . . ." I stutter, "I don't know. There are just so many pieces to this puzzle. It's too much for me to handle. My father told me a story about some virus on Earth named after a beer." I chuckle. "A beer. Of course, he wasn't alive at the time, so it could be a story from my grandparents. Maybe even my great-grandparents! People had to wait for over a year to get a vaccine. If that happens to us, we'll lose too many people!"

"Well, at least we'll try to do our best not to get it. However, if you do need help from a tech genius, you know where you can find me." I nod and get up to go home.

I'm in my bed, playing a video game on my holovision and VR goggles, but I can't focus on it. Never-mind the clinking of the utensils coming from the kitchen on the other side of the house or the running of the faucet from the bathroom under me, or my pet chameleon Georgie slowly running up and down my arm, my thoughts make enough distractions by themselves. My nervousness makes me fail the level repeatedly. What if I get sick? Even worse, what if Kori, Mom, or Dad get sick? Frustrated, I throw down the goggles. I switch off the holovision and put Georgie back in his glass habitat. He immediately blends with the leaves and twigs. I think he's in for a nap as well. Tomorrow I have my online development lessons (no more in-person classes), and I'll need lots of sleep for a long day of learning. My eyes softly slide shut, and my memories come out to play.

...

I ran quickly towards the Science Center while my father walked carefully behind me. That day, Dad allowed me to come with him to his office, and I couldn't wait. (Georgie came along as well, obviously.) However, there was one rule. Stay away from everyone. All the colonies had just gone into lockdown, except for all the essential businesses and all the essential workers, like my mother and father. I was thankful everyone stayed away from us, too. It was harder recognizing any of Dad's colleagues thanks to the masks everyone had to wear inside. No one in their right mind wouldn't want to take preventative measures against the Martian Disease.

When we arrived at Dad's cubicle, I asked him if I could go explore. But, unlike you might be thinking, I was (and still am) his sweet and respectful girl who would never do something bad. That's in his perspective though. So he allowed me to roam around the center. After a few rounds of peeking through peepholes, I found an empty room. I switched on the lights and concluded the room's walls were a shade of very clean white. To my right, there was a cart with lab supplies, and near it a sink. To my left, there stood a plain, average-sized desk with a black rolling chair in front of it. After closing the door, I placed Georgie on the desk, sat on the chair, and spun around a few times. It was all fun and games until my foot hit something under the desk.

"Ouch!" I squealed, then quickly covered my mouth remembering where I was. Careful not to hit my head, I peeked under the desk and spotted a metal tube. I reached for it and brought it up. As I ran my fingers over its smooth shiny surface, I realized the words "time capsule 2020" were engraved on it. 2020? If it's 2103 now, then it has been 83 years! I was very confused. How did this get here? Who brought it here? There was a padlock holding it closed; I'd only heard about them in books. I tugged on the lock and to my surprise, it popped open! My hand rummaged inside and pulled out multiple things. The first thing I freed from the tube was something that looked identical to my SmartPaper (which is a computer so thin, it's like paper), but back then they didn't have SmartPapers. Was it perhaps, a real paper?

On one side, a message was written. Something about "congratulations for finding this time capsule" and "this is what 2020 looked like". My eyes went wide at the word "coronavirus." That was it! The virus named after a beer, just like my dad had told me. I flipped the page over and discovered a list. It didn't make much sense what the list was for, so I put it aside.

There were a few clips from papers in the capsule and I pulled them out as well. One had a photo of someone in what looked like a hospital bed and hooked up to lots of tubes. The captions read: "Some people aren't very lucky when they get coronavirus. 1 in 5 people who get the disease need to be hospitalized." I put the paper down and reached for the next one. This picture showed the virus under a microscope with the captions saying: "The coronavirus's determining features are its spikes, used to get into human cells." Finding nothing else, I returned to the list only to realize it had a title: "Objects in 2020 Time Capsule." Oh. I read the list quickly. Two pictures, check. USB, here. Book on Covid-19, here! If all the contents were here, why was the lock open? Was it broken? Had someone found the tube first? If there is a pandemic of M-497 on Mars now, and there was a pandemic of COVID-19 on Earth then, could they have connections somehow? My head was spinning and my heart was pounding. My curiosity forced me to grab the tube and take it home.

...

"Don't forget the geology test tomorrow!" Mrs. Mitchell's voice is being drowned out by the sound of all the students saying farewell. I leave the meeting, take off my VR goggles, and sigh. Another geology test? But studying isn't the only thing to do today. I want to meet with Kori. After lots and lots of persuading, she agrees to go with me to the Storage Units. I bring the USB and book I had found in the empty office. Our search today was for a laptop from the early 21st century. My parents had brought everything they had from Earth when they moved to Mars, so there was bound to be one in our storage unit.

Once we unlocked the door for the Coates family's storage unit (with a Bluetooth key I stole from the kitchen), I am greeted by a familiar smell. The room is relatively small, but any extra space is put to good use with tall shelves. After almost an hour of rummaging, Kori finds an old fashioned device, a 2020 MacBook Pro. After we find a covered outlet, we plug in the laptop and . . . It turns on! But I frown regardless. "We don't have a password." I'm ready to pack up and go home just as Kori has a suggestion.

"I could restart it somehow. I read some things about that."

"Ok!" Like a detective, she proceeds to find ways to unlock the device. Not long after, we enter the main screen. Kori continues from there and opens the USB file with the flash drive. These are the same files they talked about in the news recently! It goes that several rebellious people on Earth burned all the information about Covid-19 and deleted the digital copies. But there were unknown digital copies, and we just found them! I'm brimming with joy! But who do we show this to? My father? What if he was the possible person who found it before I did? My mind is spiraling, as we walk to our home. I'll sleep on it.

I wake up with a start, worried I'll miss my online development session, but I realize it's a Saturday. I plonk back on my bed and stare at the ceiling. My parents always tell me stories about Earth; how they spent evenings wishing upon stars or taking a walk in the forest. You don't get either of those on Mars; there's almost always a sandstorm and you can't plant trees directly on the Martian surface. My name is apparently also the name of a plant I might never get to see. I sigh and roll out of bed. I would love to visit Earth to swim in the ocean or catch butterflies. I imagine Georgie climbing a tree branch in a forest. No trip to Earth anytime soon until scientists can find a solution to the virus.

I slowly climb downstairs and mumble hello. But now I remember what troubled me so much yesterday.

"Dad?"

"Mm-hm?"

"Can I talk to you for a second?" He raises his eyes off the holophone.

"Sure." I direct my eyes to my bedroom and mouth "in private". He understands and leaves with me. Mom's not sure what we're doing. I pull out the laptop, stick in the flash drive, and show it to Dad. He checks all the files and gets more surprised with each one. I seriously think his eyes will pop out of his head.

"Where did you find the laptop and all these?"

"I found the USB in a time capsule under a desk in an unoccupied office at the Science Center." He just stares at me, but he soon comes to his senses.

"M-497 is a mutation of the coronavirus, as my colleagues and I just discovered. So these files that have the information on the vaccine are just what we need! Fern, these files could save us!" He gives me a quick hug and rushes downstairs.

Soon enough, I hear the entrance door creak open and close with a clunk. He's on his way to the Science Center, as I can conclude. I know what we had discovered is truly amazing, but I still have too many questions. On Earth, it took more than a year to get a vaccine. How long will it take for us to make a vaccine? How many more people will get sick and die? I shiver and scramble upstairs to take my mind off my queries.

...

It's been six months and 21 days since lockdown, and I've decided to watch some TV on the holovision in my room. As soon as I turn it on, the news flashes in my eyes. I call Kori almost immediately and nearly yell at her to turn on her holovision. I'm just a pot of boiling water, excitement bubbling inside of me. There he is, my dad, wearing a mask, talking to the reporter in his office.

"Yes, I found the files in a time capsule from 2020. Honestly, my daughter did most of the work, I should be crediting her as well, and her friend Kori. This miracle can possibly end this devastating war." I'm beaming and I could tell Kori felt the same way. This is our path to stardom! I cannot wait for my mom to interview us on her morning show!

Adela Nicolae
Seventh Grade

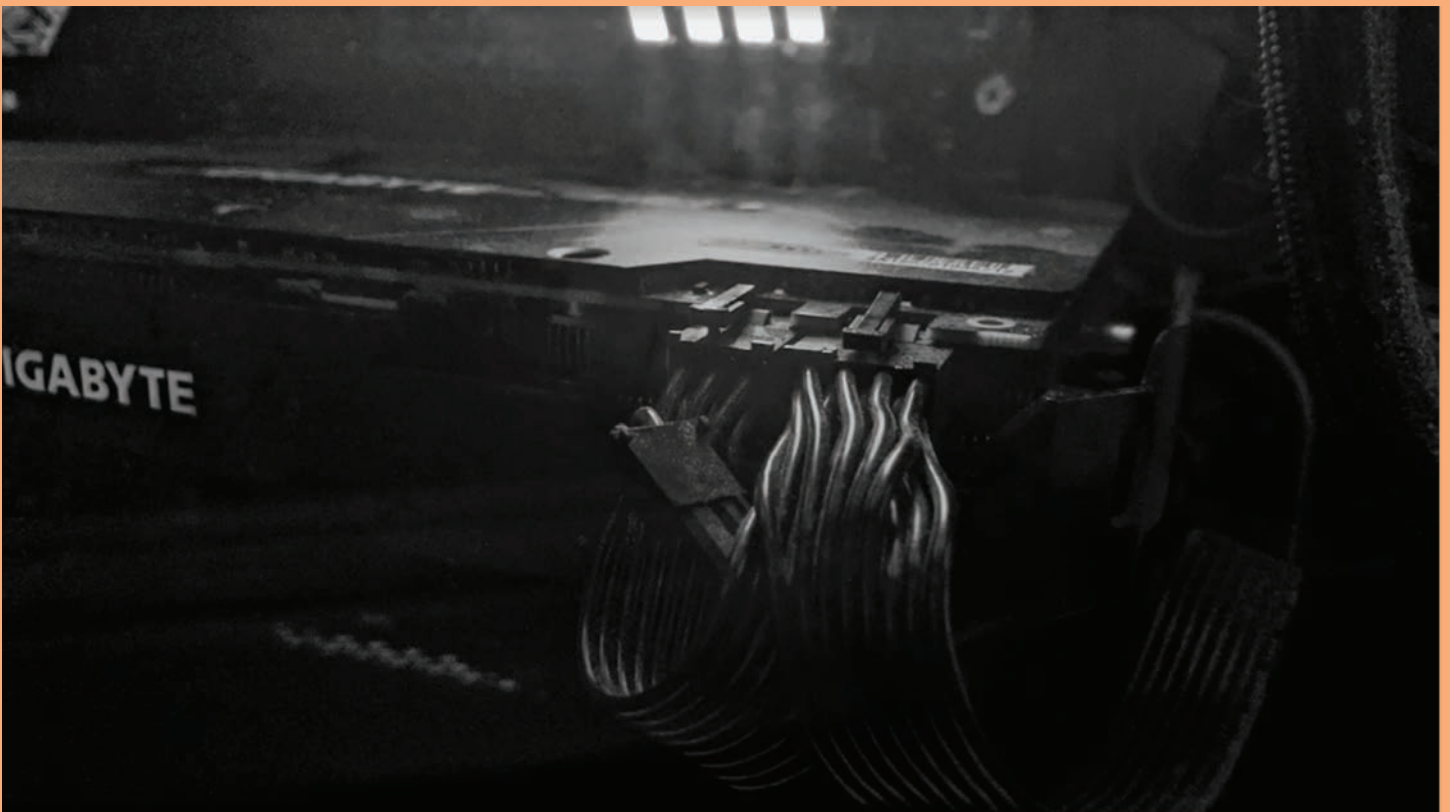


Photo by Ryan Hanna
Tenth Grade

A Fallen Chase

What happened to the smile on her face?
Did it simply fade while she lost her chase?

With the weight on her shoulders, she dropped.
The burning self hate, it never stopped.
Now when she smiles and laughs, it no longer sounds hollow.
As time goes by, she's learned to mask her sorrow.

I always know precisely what she's thinking,
But the truth in her heart, I haven't an inkling.
While those jokes may hide her salty tears,
Truly we need her here.

Nor today nor tomorrow, she doesn't feel like eating.
Evanescently, her heart is faintly beating.
Now her mother is starting to worry,
Her vision is getting a tad blurry.

From the other side of the room she is shaking,
Her hair just keeps on falling.
Her hurting is uncanny,
Her lack of gaiety a penury.

But she deserves to see her beauty,
Yet she sits back and observes this pernicious misery.
People joke and laugh as they don't understand,
While she just wants to be held hand in hand.

They don't get the thoughts,
That make her so distraught.
Nor the pain and all the aching,
That make her head spinning, racing.

They don't know how society culpably destroys all teens,
And the miserable way they view we view our bodies at fifteen.
They don't know how long she's struggled with her image,
While she is simply told to turn the damn page.

They don't know about the anxiety going through her mind,
And how with depression it is combined.
Even with the cards she's been dealt,
Simply hoping for something then to be felt.

Just don't turn off the light,
Try and keep her mind bright.
What happened to the smile on her face?
Did it simply fade while she lost her chase?

Faustine Tardieu
Tenth Grade



Art by Maddy Cox
Twelfth Grade

L'histoire d'un souvenir qui me hante depuis toujours

C'était une belle journée d'été et le soleil brûlait haut dans le ciel. Je m'en souviens comme si c'était hier, c'était à l'époque où j'étais encore insouciant, quelque jours avant mon traumatisme. J'avais la tête appuyée contre la vitre de la portière et je regardais le paysage défiler à une vitesse incroyable. La voiture était pleine à craquer, il faisait chaud et humide à l'intérieur. Nous roulions depuis plus de quatre heures sur des routes de campagnes pierreuses qui faisaient rebondir le véhicule. Mon père conduisait, il avait l'air ravi d'enfin quitter notre appartement et c'est même lui qui avait proposé que nous partions pour deux mois dans le manoir familial. À côté de lui, ma mère essayait de gagner un peu d'air frais en s'éventant avec un journal. Je voyais bien qu'elle doutait que ces vacances soient une réussite. Mon petit frère, Lucien, dormait profondément dans son siège auto, malgré le bruit insupportable du moteur. Ma sœur Isabelle mangeait des biscuits à l'orange dans le siège arrière, son casque avec la musique à fond dans les oreilles. Le petit dernier, Mathias, âgé de seulement quatre mois dormait dans son berceau juste à côté de moi. Je me sentais mal qu'un être si petit et adorable doive subir un tel trajet, mais lui avait l'air de le prendre plutôt bien.

Comme je l'ai déjà dit, nous nous rendions au manoir LeLouche, ayant appartenu à une grande tante de l'arrière-grand-mère mon père. Ou peut-être était-ce une cousine éloignée, je n'ai jamais trop compris. La légende racontait qu'elle avait été assassinée dans sa jeunesse, et qu'elle hantait le manoir depuis décennies. Mon père n'y croyait évidemment pas du tout, et moi je trouvais cette histoire plutôt amusante qu'effrayante, mais aujourd'hui elle ne m'amuse plus du tout. L'habitation était située loin de tout, comportait d'après mon père treize chambres, sept salles de bain, et un jardin immense. Je n'avais personnellement aucune envie d'y aller. Ma sœur et moi avons insisté pour aller une semaine à la mer comme tous les étés, mais mon père n'avait rien voulu savoir. Nous avons donc plié, bouclé, rangé et fermé le coffre plein de la voiture. Je contemplais les prairies vertes et le ciel bleu au loin, le paysage continuait ainsi pendant des kilomètres, ce trajet semblait durer une éternité. Je tournais la tête et vis Mathias me regarder de ses grands yeux bruns, il n'avait pas pleuré de tout le voyage, il s'était contenté de dormir pour ne gêner personne, c'est ce que j'avais décidé de faire aussi. Épuisée, je fermais les yeux et m'endormis sur le coup.

Je fus réveillée par l'arrêt brusque de la voiture. En passant la tête par la fenêtre, j'aperçus un monument à la fois effrayant, repoussant et immensément grand. La façade noire et lisse du manoir reflétait la lumière du soleil, une allée de pierres menait à la majestueuse double porte d'entrée. J'eus des frissons rien qu'en m'imaginant l'intérieur. Après avoir déchargé la voiture, mon père nous fit visiter l'habitation. Le carrelage était glacé sous mes pieds nus, l'air semblait être vieux de cent ans, il y avait des toiles d'araignées dans tous les coins et le plafond semblait être à des kilomètres au-dessus de nos têtes, bref je me croyais dans un film d'horreur. Je montais l'escalier en colimaçon, ma valise sur le dos pendant ce qui me sembla être une éternité avant d'arriver au quatrième étage.

La porte de ma chambre était en bois foncé. Lorsque je l'ouvris, elle craqua comme si elle était restée fermée pour plusieurs siècles. La chambre était spacieuse, et bizarrement je détestai ça. L'ambiance qui y régnait était lugubre. J'ouvris les volets dans un grincement, et contemplais la pièce. Un lit de bois était poussé dans un coin, il était majestueux et toutes les petites filles se seraient battues pour l'avoir, mais j'avais douze ans et j'avais passé l'âge d'aimer les princesses. Un tout petit bureau de bois était contre le mur, une armoire prenait la poussière près de la porte et un fauteuil crasseux semblait être ancré dans le plancher. Je jetai ma valise sur le lit ce qui fit un bruit insupportable de ressorts rouillés. Je regardais par la fenêtre sale et aperçu un vaste jardin avec au loin une forêt de sapins. J'avais le quatrième étage juste pour moi, ce qui comportait ma chambre et une salle de bain. Celle-ci avait un carrelage brisé, les murs fissurés, le papier-peints déchirés et la baignoire rouillée. Je m'appuyais de tout mon poids sur la rampe de l'escalier, rejetais ma tête en arrière et soupirais, ces vacances allaient être très longues.

Les semaines passèrent, Lucien courait dans le jardin, Isabelle boudait les trois quarts du temps, Mathias faisait la sieste sur la terrasse et mes parents semblaient satisfaits. Moi, je passais la plupart de mon temps à explorer la maison de haut en bas. La pièce que je préférais était la cuisine, elle comportait au moins une vingtaine de placards que ma mère avait remplis de paquets de pâtes, de céréales et de biscuits. La vaisselle semblait sortie tout droit d'un dessin animé, les tasses étaient en porcelaine, les assiettes décorées de

motifs colorés et les couverts brillèrent à la lumière. Cependant, l'ambiance de la maison de nuit me faisait frissonner. On entendait les murs grincer, les tuyaux goutter et les meubles craquer.

Mais c'est précisément une nuit que j'eus la peur de ma vie. J'étais blottie sous une pile d'épaisses couvertures et je n'arrivais pas à trouver le sommeil. La pièce était froide et les volets ouverts. Soudain une lumière éblouissante remplit la pièce, elle venait de dehors. La lumière bleutée se reflétait sur les murs et me fis fermer précipitamment les yeux. Soudain tout redevint comme avant. Je rejetai les couvertures et couru à la fenêtre. J'entendis alors un cri aigu, long et incroyablement triste, le pire que j'ai entendu de ma vie. Je plaquai mon oreille contre la fenêtre, le cri venait de dehors. Une force indescriptible me poussa à enfiler un pull et passer mes chaussures. J'essayai de descendre les escaliers le plus silencieusement possible (ce qui était assez difficile car toutes les marches craquaient sous mes pas), poussai la porte et me retrouvai dans le jardin. Mon cœur battait à une vitesse folle dans ma poitrine et j'avais l'impression d'être observée de partout. Le cri se fit plus fort et plus puissant, il résonnait dans ma tête et faisait vibrer mes oreilles, je me pris le crâne entre les mains, je me débattais contre une force invisible, et soudain je m'écroulais. Mes mains saignaient, je criais à m'arracher les poumons, le cri devenait de plus en plus aigu, j'avais l'impression qu'il faisait part de mon corps, qu'il rentrait dans mes jambes, mes doigts, mes mains, mon cœur.

Puis soudain tout s'arrêta et je me réveillais dans un sursaut, en sueur. Haletante je portais mes mains à mon cœur qui cognait fortement contre ma cage thoracique. Soudain je remarquais plusieurs choses, le bruit des grincements et des craquements s'étaient arrêté, la maison était silencieuse et mes mains étaient striées d'égratignures et comportaient des traces...de sang. Je restais assise dans mon lit, immobile et terrifiée pendant de longues minutes, je peux encore m'imaginer dans cette posture, frigorifiée et tétanisée. Le pire ce n'était pas la peur que le cri revienne, ce n'était pas la résonance de mon cœur qui battait la chamade, ce n'était pas le sang qui coulait sur mes draps, ce n'était pas la frayeur que ce cauchemar soit une réalité, ce n'était pas non plus la douleur de mes blessures. Non, le pire de tout, c'était le silence.

Louise Murat
4ÈME



Art by Erika Gaillard
Twelfth Grade

A GAME

He and I
Just he and I
Against him
Him, a strong player
BAM!
He slammed the move confidently
Do I see something?
Is it true?

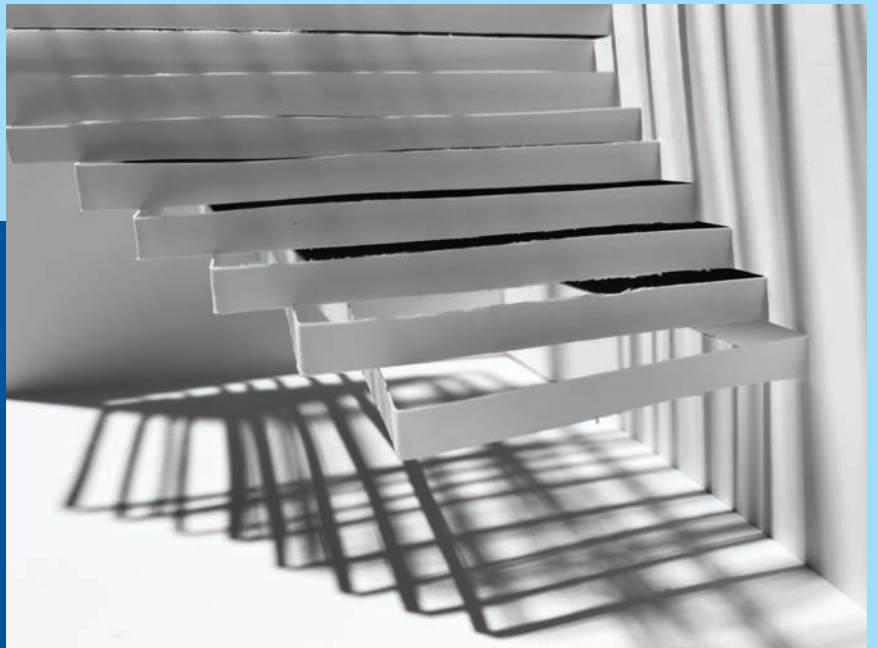
The light was shining from the sun
Right on my face
Even more?
The lamp had a burning bright light
Should I ignore it or not?
Tick, tock, tick, tock
I chose to ignore it
Else?
I would lose

Then I look back at the board
He says, "See it"?
I look again
I think for a moment
"Really" I say
He looks at the board
Did I see it?
Could I find it?

What was the answer to it?
Where was it?
Why couldn't I see it fast?
How was it so hard?
Who knew the answer to it?

Tick tock tick tock
I am feeling very anxious
My mind?
Stirring with moves and variations to play
Tick tock tick tock
Many spectators watching my game
I see it. Then
VICTORY!

Ridyansh Agrawal
Sixth Grade



Art by Angelina Lee
Twelfth Grade



Art by Vaughn Corson
Twelfth Grade



Art by Samantha Francis
Twelfth Grade

A World Where I Am Quiet

Oh, you men. Free as birds.
Wearing what you like, taking what you want.
Greed drives the lesser to take from the weak,
Ever preaching the value of a woman's "virtue"
But taking it, like it's nothing.
I dream of my safety
In a world where I am quiet.

But the honks of their horns,
And the pitch of their catcalls,
Reminds me of the truth:
I will never be able to soar
In a world where I am quiet.

With every "hysterical" tear or shout,
It is clearer and clearer that I am "too much."
To the eagle, I should have three children and a husband.
Get a degree, but stay caged.
Because no one wants a mouthy girl,
In a world where I should be quiet.

But I can gather myself and stand
Until a flock of my own kind weigh me down.
And I understand, with the sad shake of their heads,
That they've given up trying to be safe,
In a world where we can be nothing but quiet.

With every sigh, and every pair of folded shoulders,
The fresh air and the blue sky shrink.
They get farther, and farther, and farther,
Until there is no wind beneath my wings,
No soft sun on my back,
No taste of the clouds on my tongue,
And my dreams left on a cloud in Neverland,
Stuck and lonely because they are useless,
In a world where I am quiet.

I will never soar like the eagle promised.
The greedy men gather on my grave.
And stay on their marble perches,
Laughing at the silly ones who dared to dream.
How could I ever believe that I could fly?
What can I do,
In a world where I am quiet?



LILLY'S LIMERICKS

There once was a girl from Dublin
Who found a tall man she could trust in
He asked for a dance
He wasted his chance
And now in Ireland he's stuck in

There once was a lad from Cork
Who stuck his food with a fork
He ate it too soon
His face turned maroon
And now the man can't eat pork

There once was a boy from Belfast
Who claimed he was having a blast
He ran far too quick
He tripped on a stick
He now admits he ran too fast

Lilly Cybulski
Twelfth Grade



Art by Julie Paul
Eleventh Grade

OUTDOOR HOURS

Rich brown soil surrounds large
roots, Rubber but tarnished bright
blue boots. Step quite softly into the
ground,

Footsteps, large, trail around.

Purified water transparent thus
clean, A myriad of seeds blooms to
be lean. Gloves of linen ivory
cotton,
An apron of cloth trite thus rotten.

As the pale blue lilies, ancient, are purged,
An abundance of seeds is abruptly
submerged. The brightest of daisies shining
light yellow, A pink petalled rose appears
quite mellow.

Dirt brushed off dusty gray gloves, A
novel green garden brimming with love.

The ample bloom of delicate flower,
The persistent work of long day hours.



Victoria Macedo Oderich
Seventh Grade

Art by Rachel Gai
Eleventh Grade

Les enveloppes blanches

C'était une belle journée d'été, et Julie venait juste de finir sa journée d'école. C'était son anniversaire, et elle était très excitée de rentrer à la maison, car tous les ans, il y avait toujours un petit cadeau qui l'attendait sous son lit. Julie aimait beaucoup les animaux, et demandait tous les ans un animal de compagnie, mais elle n'en n'avait jamais eu. Mais Julie pouvait toujours aller à l'écurie du village pour monter à cheval. Son préféré s'appelait Noix de Coco. Si elle le pouvait, Julie pourrait passer tout son temps à s'occuper de Noix de Coco. Son endroit préféré pour se balader avec Noix de Coco, c'était sur la plage, celle qui était à côté de l'écurie.

Julie trouva son petit frère Antoine à l'entrée de la cour. Ils se précipitèrent à la maison, qui se trouvait derrière la boulangerie. Une fois chez eux, Julie retira ses chaussures, posa son sac, et monta les escaliers le plus vite possible. Dans sa chambre, Julie courut si vite qu'elle aurait pu voler! La petite fille se pencha et regarda sous son lit pour ne trouver qu'une petite enveloppe avec son nom dessus. Julie prit l'enveloppe blanche et l'ouvrit. Sur un mince papier, était écrit: "Chère Julie, je suis désolée, cette année, nous n'avons pas pu t'acheter de cadeau, va à la ferme Durand avec Antoine, signé: Maman et Papa."

Julie descendit donc dans l'entrée et appela Antoine pour qu'il mette ses chaussures. Une fois dehors, ils marchèrent jusqu'à la ferme Durand sans un mot. Antoine, qui ne pouvait plus se retenir demanda:

— "Julie, qu'est qu'on fait ici?"

— "Je ne sais pas, maman et papa m'ont écrit une lettre qui disait de venir ici." répondit Julie en donnant l'enveloppe à son frère. Après l'avoir lue plusieurs fois, Antoine la rendit et se perdit dans ses pensées. Une fois près de la ferme, Mme Durand les accueillit dans la maison pour boire un verre de jus. Tous trois parlèrent pendant une demi-heure avant que Charlotte ne vienne. Charlotte était la meilleure amie de Julie, et elles se disaient tout. Charlotte était très contente de voir son amie car les deux filles ne se voyaient qu'à l'école. Charlotte demanda à sa mère si elle pouvait aller jouer avec Julie. Mme Durand dit oui à condition qu'elles ne quittent pas la ferme. Julie et Charlotte ont couru jusqu'au cerisier qu'elles avaient trouvé quand elles étaient petites. Une fois dans l'arbre, les filles cueillirent des cerises et parlèrent.

Pendant ce temps, Mme Durand appela la mère de Julie et Antoine pour lui dire que les enfants étaient occupés. La mère de Julie, Mme Robert, prit donc la voiture pour rentrer à la maison. Elle prit un sac avec des affaires. Mme Robert avait quelque chose dans la tête.

Les filles allèrent chercher Antoine pour rentrer dans la maison car il faisait très chaud, et elles ne voulaient pas qu'il se fasse mal tout seul. Sur le chemin, elles trouvèrent Mme Durant, avec une autre enveloppe blanche pour Julie. Elle lut la lettre qui disait: "Chère Julie, ce soir tu peux dormir chez Charlotte, j'en ai parlé avec Mme Durand, soit sage, et ne laisse pas Antoine faire des bêtises, Maman." Julie était confuse, car d'habitude, le soir de son anniversaire avec sa famille, ils mangeaient toujours du gâteau avant d'aller au lit, mais elle était très excitée! Julie remercia Mme Durand, et avec Charlotte, elle courut vers la maison pour se préparer à dîner. Ce que ne savait pas Julie, c'est que quelque chose d'amusant allait se passer.

Pendant que les filles mangeaient, Mme Durand posa une enveloppe dans le lit de Julie. Pour le dîner, c'était une soupe aux légumes, et un petit gâteau au chocolat pour l'anniversaire de Julie. Le gâteau était décoré de fleurs et de fer à cheval. Avec le dîner fini, tout le monde allait maintenant au lit. Avant de s'endormir, Julie sentit le papier de l'enveloppe se frotter contre sa peau. La petite fille, qui est très curieuse, prit l'enveloppe blanche, identique à celle qu'elle avait trouvée dans sa chambre. Elle réveilla Charlotte pour aller dans la cuisine et ouvrir l'enveloppe près d'une bougie.

La lettre disait: "Ton aventure commence ici, si tu résous ces énigmes, tu auras une récompense. Voici ton premier indice: tu trouveras quelque chose à l'endroit où tu manges." Les petites filles étaient un peu surprises mais après un peu de temps de réflexion, elles se précipitèrent dehors pour aller vers la table du jardin. Ici se trouvait une autre enveloppe blanche. Les filles ouvrirent l'enveloppe et lut: "Très bien, tu as trouvé ton deuxième indice, le voici: À l'endroit où les oiseaux chantent, tu trouveras une boîte et une enveloppe."

— "A l'endroit où les oiseaux chantent . . ." Chercha Julie

— "Un arbre!" s'écria Charlotte

— "Mais il y en a des centaines ici! Ça va prendre des heures et des heures pour trouver la boîte et

—l’enveloppe,” dit Julie un peu découragée.

—“ On peut commencer au cerisier et puis chacune prend un côté et on se retrouve au cerisier,” dit Charlotte.

—“Oui! Bonne idée, est-ce qu’ on devrait réveiller tes parents ?” s’inquiéta Julie,

—“Non, et puis ça nous ferait perdre du temps.” lui répondit Charlotte.

Avec cette décision, Julie et Charlotte prirent le chemin du cerisier. A leur grande surprise, la boîte et l’enveloppe se trouvaient au pied de l’arbre! Julie ouvrit l’enveloppe et lut à voix haute: “Félicitation, il ne te reste que deux indices à résoudre! Maintenant que tu as trouvée la boîte et cette lettre, vas chercher Mme Durand, et surtout, n’ouvre pas la boîte!” Les deux filles étaient confuses, comment Mme Durand pouvait avoir à faire quelque chose là dedans? Lentement, elles allèrent vers la maison avec la boîte fermée et l’enveloppe en main. Mme Durand était dehors,

assise à la table du jardin, en train de boire un verre de limonade fraîche. Mme Durand demanda, quand les filles furent assez près pour entendre: “Alors, vous avez trouvé la boîte?”

—“Oui” répondit Julie, un peu perdue dans ses questions

—“Très bien, suivez-moi” dit Mme Durand en se levant.

Les filles suivirent Mme Durand sur un chemin pour ce qu’elles pensaient être des heures. Au bout d’un moment, Mme Durant s’arrêta et demanda à Julie de fermer ses yeux. Julie était encore plus confuse mais elle obéit et ferma les yeux. Charlotte et Mme Durand conduisirent Julie par le bras pour quelques minutes puis elles s’arrêtèrent. Julie était confuse, elle réfléchissait à toute cette soirée, car il y avait les enveloppes blanches . . . la boîte dans ses mains... et elle ne savait pas où elle se trouvait!

Mme Durand prit la boîte des mains de Julie, la posa par terre, et demanda à Julie d’ouvrir ses yeux. Julie était stupéfaite! Au bout du chemin, sur la plage, il y avait tous ses amis, des cadeaux, et une sorte de mur, qu’elle ne se souvenait pas avoir jamais vu. Julie remercia Mme Durand, sa mère, et Charlotte pour faire tout cela pour elle. Quelle surprise! Toujours curieuse, Julie demanda à sa mère ce qu’était ce mur, mais Mme Robert lui dit de ne pas s’en occuper. Julie était très contente de pouvoir jouer avec ses amis sur la plage, car ils ne se voyaient qu’en récréation à l’école. Les enfants jouèrent avec le sable, et les parents parlèrent de choses et d’autres. La soirée est passée vite car les amis de Julie devaient maintenant rentrer chez eux, il se faisait tard. Julie était toujours curieuse et se demandait encore ce qu’il pouvait bien y avoir derrière ce mur. Après avoir tout ranger et nettoyer, Mme Robert demanda à Julie de refermer ses yeux encore une fois. Julie ne voulait pas fermer ses yeux car elle voulait voir le soleil se coucher, mais elle savait mieux que de ne pas obéir. Mme Robert et Mme Durant poussèrent Julie vers le mur. Elles laissèrent Julie et déplacèrent le mur sur le côté, pour que quand Julie ouvrirait les yeux, elle pourrait voir ce qu’il y avait derrière ce fameux mur.

Une fois le mur sur le côté, Mme Robert demanda à Julie d’ouvrir les yeux. A sa surprise, Julie trouva Noix de coco, avec une selle sur le dos!

Mme Robert expliqua:

—“Il est à toi chérie, ton père et moi avons économisé un peu d’argent pour pouvoir te l’offrir pour ton anniversaire, c’est pour cela que ces dernières années tu avais toujours des petit cadeaux.”

—Julie n’en revenait pas! “Merci! Merci! Merci!”

—“Vas le promener sur la plage, et tu pourras voir le soleil se coucher en même temps.”

Julie monta sur Noix de Coco, elle était tellement heureuse! Elle partit au galop sur la plage. Julie s’arrêta pour voir le soleil se coucher, puis pleine de bonheur retourna en direction de sa mère en silence.

Zoe Martin
6ÈME

I Want the Sky in My Eyes

I want the sky in my eyes.
I wish for the dove,
Sprung from the womb up above,
To carry me of.
To take me to neverland,
To grace me with holy blood,
To flap its wings so hard I fall into the presence of
my master.
My heart begins to beat in rhythm
With the majestic beast,
With the unknown,
With the risk of facing the sharp end of the knife.
But as I watch that dove,
Move further and further
Or possibly become duller and duller
I wake up, and I realize
Hell has just begun.

Sophia Ayala
Eleventh Grade



Art by Oliver Giddings
Eleventh Grade

Recollection

She looked him in the eyes and saw nothing. No light dancing beneath the flickering indifference of his robotic iris. No courage stationed between its terrestrial ridges, ready to bear the weight of his woolen, knit brows. There was only absence.

Peering through both tunnels anchored in his eyes' centers, she could make out the faint outlines of a puzzle stripped of its chips. Distant memories floated by, unable to rediscover their carved connection. She watched as the road trip through Inverness—plagued by frigid winds, muscle-contorting nausea, and lethal dad jokes—slid past the image of the day's successful varnish, a final picnic along the grassy shores of the River Ness, as if they were strangers. Lingering in the shade of his lashes, she caught the phone call with Bill, in which her father and his companion keeled over with laughter in their respective homes, giving teary-eyed promises to repeat the legendary tale come the next reunion. And on the top extremity of his right pupil, she bore witness to the many puzzle pieces jammed together, memories destined to be mixed and misremembered until death do them part. His TSA luggage squabble and the theft of his wallet in the Astros game bathroom line, his successful childhood quest for a four-leaf clover and his less successful attempt at frog herding on a different summer's day, the conversation with Susie and the conversation with Mary, all haphazardly conjoined in an ever-growing heap.

And just as soon as she had started her examination, she let her shoulders relax, her thoughts unwind, as the memories in her father's eyes suddenly traversed their surfaces. She could almost hear each chip click into place with its well-fitting neighbor. Sinuous border met sinuous border met clean-cut edge formed corner piece at last. With a round-trip flap of his eyelids, sprawled lashes revealed the amber-flecked face of his calibrating mahogany irises. His eyes revitalized. The hidden jigsaw whole again.

Samantha Francis
Twelfth Grade



Art by Erika Gaillard
Twelfth Grade

Pandora's Box

The moment that Teresa saw that the vial was empty, she began to wonder how long it would be until she died. A week? A day? Five minutes?

She'd checked the label to be sure of the situation's severity. The glass hadn't shattered, but the seal was broken, the insides shining as if scrubbed. Meaning that someone had set its contents free on purpose.

"Vinn, what the hell is this?" Teresa marched from the freezer into her colleague's office, vial held aloft in a shaking, gloved hand.

Vinn looked up from their computer, fingers hovering just so over the keyboard, taken aback at her tone. "Well, that looks," They adjusted their glasses, squinting at the labeled container, "Like an industrial-grade vial for bacterial cultures and viral suspensions." The drollness in their voice was palpable.

Abruptly, Teresa threw down the miserably empty container as hard as she could. A small crack edged around the side, which, considering its strength, was quite impressive. She kicked it, and she and Vinn watched it roll to the opposite side of the office.

Vinn watched this brief rampage with an air of amusement and barred panic. "If that's the industrial-grade vial I'm thinking of, you probably just killed us all, Dr. Barrow." They sounded incredibly calm, no doubt thinking this was some sort of prank.

"It's wiped clean."

Vinn's face broke into a hesitant grin. Then, seeing as Teresa wasn't laughing, they moved in a flash from their chair, kneeling to inspect the vial. Their dark eyes widened in fear. "The virus is gone."

"We've established that." Suddenly dizzy, Teresa leaned heavily against Vinn's desk. She dimly took in the disarray of their desk, the pens, the coffee cup, and a blinking monitor - all insignificant, in the face of the impending outbreak.

Teresa thought of her last week alive. Her last day. Her last five minutes.

"What happened to it?" Vinn asked, clearly trying to appear calm, but their voice played the traitor.

"I don't know!" At the end of Teresa's tortured sigh came a sob, and she clapped a hand to her mouth, swallowing before beginning again. "We know there're people who'd love to set it loose, but the security here is tight, and you must have . . . you . . ." Teresa's heart wrenched in fear. "Did you lock the vault?"

Vinn blinked. "Yesterday? I think . . . um . . ."

"You think?"

"My memory's all fuzzy!"

"How could you forget?"

"I drank something!" Vinn yelped in realization, pointed at their coffee cup for emphasis. "Yeah, I remember that much, I had coffee late in the day, and I left it for a second, and there was one other guy in a lab coat, and I thought...He must have . . . Oh, Teresa, I'm so sorry, I should have been more careful!"

"M-maybe we can find him, whoever he's affiliated with," Teresa stammered, spinning wildly, practically leaping into Vinn's chair, hands trembling over the keyboard. "What did he look like? Whoever it was, maybe they haven't released it yet."

A loud, wailing siren blared from above. The emergency bulbs near the ceiling glowed a burning, urgent red, and Teresa's heart dropped.

"It's too late," She whispered to no one but herself, and her hands rested resignedly on the desk. The wood felt cool against her wrists.

SARS-Adeno-32, crudely known as Pandora's Box for the slew of symptoms it was predicted to cause. Projectile vomiting, blurry vision, Machiavellian irritability and apathy, random surges of adrenaline. A shut-down of the frontal cortex and cruelly intense stimulation of the amygdala.

The virus turned humans into violent, unthinking animals that spread the disease to about a dozen others before a slow, agonizing death. Theoretically.

The current dismal situation felt anything but theoretical to Teresa. She could only imagine what chaos erupted through the city as she sat here, unmoving.

The noise of the siren had turned snow-white, and it took Vinn shaking her firmly by the shoulders to

bring Teresa from her despondent reverie.

"We need to go!"

"What's the point?" Teresa didn't think Vinn would hear her murmur. "We can stay here. Save ourselves."

Vinn slapped Teresa across the face, and she swore, bringing both hands to the already-stinging mark. Firm hands gripped her shoulders.

"Teresa Barrow, if we don't move now, we're going to die. Sooner or later. It's my fault that it got out, and I need to make sure that I can keep you safe if nothing else."

"Keep me safe?" Teresa echoed. "But . . . why? I agreed to do this in the first place." She bowed her head, shameful tears building in her eyes. She'd created a monster, and for what? To please wolves posing as men in politic-pressed suits.

"Agreement under threat doesn't count," Vinn replied, glancing nervously around, but no one would be checking the hidden cameras and mics as the sirens blared. "Plus, you're the only one besides me that might be able to come up with a cure."

Before Teresa could argue, before she could trade her terror for resistance, Vinn hauled her out of their chair and took her hand. The two scientists set off sprinting, chasing the remnants of hope that clung to whoever else was left.

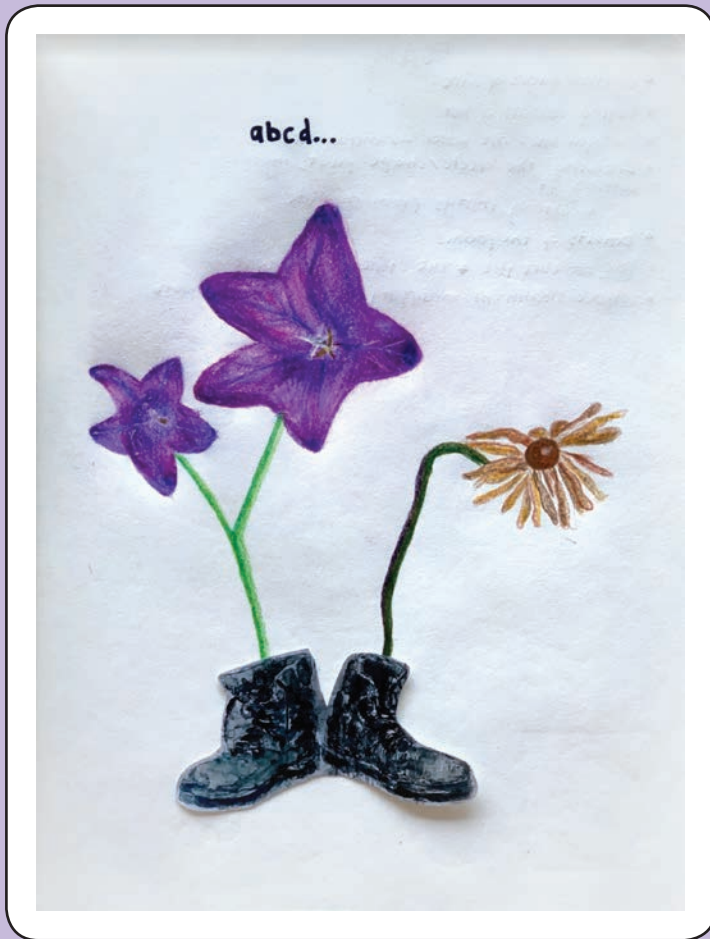
Madeleine Kimmel
Eleventh Grade



Gymnopedie no 1

Coming "Aut"

When I told you,
That the doctors had given me this diagnosis,
Autism.
That seemingly dirty word,
You said you were sorry.
Friend, there is nothing to be sorry for,
For there is no shame in difference.



Art by Emma Rojas
Eleventh Grade

I remember when you closed your eyes,
And sighed,
As I played that Gymnopedie,
I remember how you told me it was your favorite,
And I played it over and over,
A nonverbal "I love you"
I remember when we got the news,
That dreaded word,
Cancer,
And that Gymnopedie was filled with pain.
Months later,
Knowing you were slipping away,
I played and played,
As if those dissonant chords,
Were to cure you.
And when you were gone,
That horrid word, dead, falling from my mother's
mouth,
I played that Gymnopedie for you.

How Do You Bury a Flower?

How do you bury a flower?
Sun-kissed petals giving light,
Imbued with innocence and kindness,
Do you preserve her in thought,
in her poems and speeches?
Or do you tear her petals,
Destroy legacies.
Of peace,
And turn to war.

Lucia Urreta
Eleventh Grade

A Fallen Era

The once mighty spirit, now fallen dead and gone,
First to travel into space, but still never won,
A very dark, and threatening war,
Never fought yet lost,
A poorly managed power plant was the last straw,

A time of pressure and good decisions,
For this great power was facing a threat,
A nuclear war would not be good,
For the people were holding onto hope,
That there would be no war,

A race to go beyond the heavens,
A challenge never seen before,
Although the spirit left Earth first,
The competitors went further,
This robbed the nation of its morale,
And plunged it into darkness,

An explosion lit up the night, for a reactor just exploded,
This would trigger a chain of events,
That will tear the spirit apart,
Of all the things, a safety test,
Brought the nation to despair,
The nation would soon split up and head their different ways,
Thinking they'd have better results,
If they went their separate paths,

Although this spirit had disappeared,
The fragments still lay there,
To remind us to never give up,
Even if you're facing failure,
All great things come at a price,
The price to pay is hefty,
The price to pay is to end it soon,
A price not many choose to pay.

Bowen Ke
Seventh Grade



Art by Sara Afshar
Twelfth Grade

that one summer

It all started with David Redford's goldfish and the dead body. Davey, ever the patriot, had named him John Fitzgerald, and after six long years of friendship it was decided that a death by toilet would not do him justice, so after hastily written notes were left on our respective kitchen counters, we packed baloney sandwiches, shovels, and a small shoebox in a picnic basket and made the mile-long trek out of town. The girls wore our nicest summer dresses, with long, silk hair ribbons, and the boys wore overalls; it was assumed they'd do the tedious work of digging John Fitzgerald's grave. The funeral was a somber event, and Davey used up many tissues. It was hot that day, sun beating down on our backs through the thin cotton of our summer clothes, and the ceremony lasted for about fifteen minutes before we grew drowsy with summer warmth and sat down on the grass. After a respectful period of time, during which Davey's grief had lessened, his brother looked at us.

"Didja hear about the murder?"

"The murder?"

"Mr. Miller," Robbie said solemnly. "Sheriff Johnson found his body all messed up in the cornfields."

Murder rarely happened around here, so we perked up at his words. I wondered aloud if I'd be allowed to write about the case in the Council Grove Republican, but Maggie shrugged. "Well it's not much of a mystery, is it? There's no case for solvin' if everyone knows who did it." Jamie Flynn was an enigma; rumors hung around him like flies. He was tall and lanky at twenty-seven years old, with long, scraggly brown hair and big blue eyes, and an ever-growing collection of Marlboros and Grateful Dead vinyl records, which I knew only because I'd seen him come through my family's store. A muffled giggle interrupted my thoughts, and I glanced up to see my friends sharing thoughts about our suspected killer.

"Miss Jeanie says he's a homosexual," Robbie whispered. Robbie Redford had watery blue eyes and thin hair the color of straw, and two big front teeth that made him look like a rabbit. Molly looked up from her daisy chain and leaned in, pushing her bangs off her forehead. "I once saw him smokin' cigarettes off the corner of Mayview and Dale." "My mama calls him a hippie."

"Mister Eddie from across the street says he's a bad influence," Maggie chimed in. "I heard he brings little kids to his house."

"I heard he kills 'em."

"I heard he *eats* 'em."

Josie cleared her throat and looked at us. We all grew quiet. Josie Pickett was a year older than all of us; this age experience commanded respect. "Well," she said, "my sister heard from Chuck's barber's cousin's uncle that Jamie Lee Flynn is a communist." Our eyes grew wide. "Yep. He went to all those protests back west, in California."

"I'm not surprised," Davey sniffed, and various sounds of agreement were made. By the time our discussion finished, it had grown dark, so we packed up our things and headed home, John Fitzgerald's passing apparently forgotten. Supper was uneventful, save for a strict warning from my mother to stay away from that damn Jamie Flynn as he was a murderer and a communist, neither of which was good for my health.

The next morning, after washing up, I made my way downstairs. My family owned the corner store, and we lived right above it. I loved our store; the chipped walls were pale yellow with cream-colored trim, and the shelves were piled high with just about everything. A small silver bell rang tinnily as the door opened, and I startled at the sound. The door creaked open, and in walked Jamie Lee Flynn. He was suspiciously polite for a cold-blooded killer, and after receiving an earnest apology when he took too much change, I decided an investigation was underway. As this was a reconnaissance mission, I crept out the back door, grabbing a pack of cigarettes and nearly bumping into Mr. Bradford. Harry Ray Bradford was something of a celebrity. He owned the only bank in town, and appeared sometimes on our color TV. He was tall and handsome, and all the ladies sighed when he walked into church. I was convinced the town was half in love with him. He stood outside, turned away from the store's back wall with a telephone pressed to his ear. We kept one attached to the back wall of the store in case of emergencies, and Mr. Bradford was speaking into it furiously.

"That was the deal, Johnson. I always keep up my end of the bargain, and I expect my clients to do so

as well. Now, I won't hear about this any longer, dammit. I paid you what you wanted; you got the money. Now keep your mouth shut, you hear me?"

I tiptoed over the telephone line and raced to Jamie's house, making a quick stop along the way. A lonely oak loomed overhead as I stared over the lawn. Jamie Flynn's house may have once been grand, but morning glories clung to the crumbling walls, and the grass out front fought a losing battle against red-capped mushrooms and waxy-leaved dandelions. I strode up the steps and rapped on the door. Jamie Flynn peered down at me, and suddenly I wondered why I'd just come to the house of a suspected murderer.

"I went up to meet with the *Council Grove Republican* on Friday." That was a half-truth. "And seein' how there's a war goin' on, the *Republican* wanted me to interview people of the town to get their opinions on it." That was definitely a lie.

His face brightened.

"Well, sure, Miss June."

He beckoned me in, and I hesitated. Laughing, he ambled inside. "I don't bite," he called over his shoulder. His bare feet padded softly against the shag carpeting and voices crooned faintly from a purple record player.

He settled into a deep plum armchair and gestured to the seat beside him.

"Ask away."

I gazed at the rich blue walls around us. One side of the room was covered with band posters. Bob Dylan squinted at me over a cigarette, and Joan Baez beamed next to a guitar, but the most interesting pictures were photographs pinned up next to them: two young men holding hands in front of a brightly painted van, a woman peering into the camera, ring-adorned fingers wrapped around a bouquet of wildflowers, a large group of people brandishing signs, faces frozen in a rallying cry. "What are these?" I asked.

"Those," he murmured, pointing to the first two, "were taken just last month, at a big festival called Woodstock, and that one was taken in 1965 when we marched on Washington to protest the war."

"Why, sir? Why do you care so much about Vietnam?"

"Well, my brother cared a lot more than me. He left with a determined smile, proud to serve his country. He came back in a coffin."

I stayed quiet, unsure of what to say.

"It's just so violent, all of it. And for what? What's the point? We were *children*," he said darkly.

"But there was no point in hitting back. We fought with peace. They were armed with guns, and we were armed with flowers. I'd learned from my brother- hell, we'd all learned, from our brothers, our fathers, our uncles, our sons, everyone who'd fought, that war was not the answer. So we used kindness. We filled the streets of Washington with our kindness, with our demand for peace. And it was beautiful."

"You wanna know somethin' I've learned, June?"

I nodded.

"Kindness is like snow—it beautifies everything it covers."

A peaceful silence settled over us as I mulled over his words.

"Thank you for your time, Mister Flynn." I stood up to leave, but he held out a hand to stop me. "You want to be a journalist, correct?"

"Yessir."

"You ever heard of the Pulitzer Prize?"

"No sir."

"It's a very prestigious award for writers. You might want to look into it someday." "Here," he said, handing me a white marble. "My lucky marble. One day this'll be a Pulitzer." A few days later, the whole town watched behind drawn curtains as Jamie Lee Flynn was taken to the courthouse. I snuck out the back door and ran as fast as I could, coming just in time to hear the click of handcuffs and watch him walk into the room. It all seemed to fit together perfectly, the heinous crime and the dastardly criminal. But something wasn't quite right. I played back the day's events in my head, and then, it clicked. Throwing open the courtroom doors, I marched inside.

"Wait!"

Heads turned sharply as I made my way up to the front of the room. I cleared my throat and began.

"Uh, Your Honor, I have something to say."

"Get on with it, young lady."

"Yes ma'am." I faced the jury.

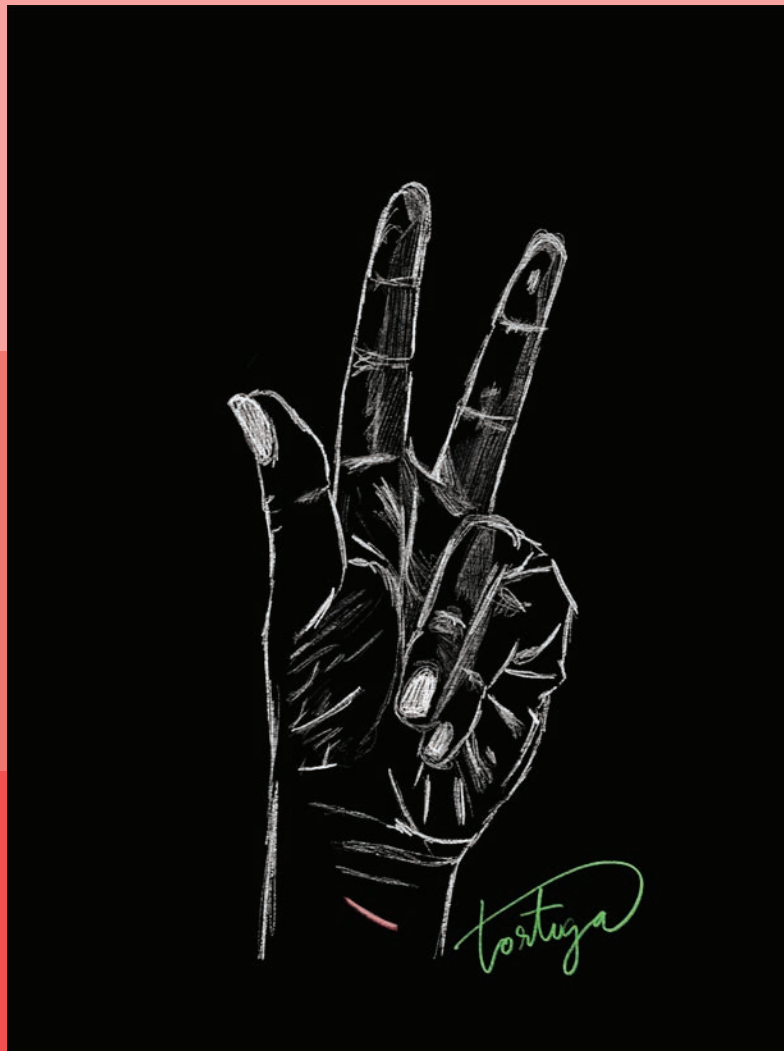
"Mister Jamie Flynn is innocent, and I can prove it! See, I've always wanted to be a journalist, so early this morning I went to the scene of the crime to get a story, and what did I find, covered in blood? Seems to me our lovely sheriff is protecting someone, because sitting in plain sight . . ." I pulled something out of my pocket.

"A cufflink initialed HRB, and to top it all off, a phone call made to a Mister Johnson, detailing something that sounded suspiciously like a bribe. So I now ask you to re-examine the evidence." Uproar shook the court; incredulous gasps of "Not possible!" and "Oh my word!" and my personal favorite, "But he's a commie!" filtered through the jurors before a hush, like fog, settled over the room, and a decision was reached. Judge Abrams looked at the jury in question, and the final verdict: "Innocent!"

Epilogue, 20 years later

New York City came alive with the hum of taxicabs and towering skyscrapers, and I wove through throngs of people before coming to a stop in front of the campus. Columbia University was large and intimidating, but nothing scared me more than what was inside: the Pulitzer Prize award ceremony. Everything I'd dreamed of, everything I'd worked for was inside that room. Squaring my shoulders, I took a deep breath. I pulled out the little white marble from all those years ago, and gently, snow began to fall.

Neda Ravandi
Eighth Grade



Art by Alison Barrera
Eleventh Grade



Art by Dalia Almogharbel
Eleventh Grade



Art by Gloria Bertrand
Eleventh Grade



Art by Sarah Haji
Eighth Grade

Petrichor:

Petrichor - / pet-ri-chor / noun / A pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather

Two boys of 16, perhaps 17 waltzed joyfully in the long channels above to their final destination. Holding hands, giggling and shaking, their faces a soft glowing red, white shoes tapping against the slick silvery gray that composed almost everything up above. Their gray, starched uniforms flowed like the finest silk in all of China today. The day was so big you would think you could hear it shout its cry, yet the atmosphere stood silent in the ambiance of space. You could not hear the millions of square metal parts snap into place, miles and miles of cold, calculated engineering shifting and scraping in preparation. The reactor, its piercing blue glow visible from even the outermost reaches of the solar system, could not be heard at all today. Even the brightest stars seemed to wait in anxious silence today, the nebulae looked above today, waiting for it to happen.

All you could hear was the boys, shaking and laughing from excitement. Two high pitched voices surrounding the world, bringing you that unusual nostalgic feeling you hadn't heard in centuries. The soft taps of their shoes echoed through the cosmos, while stars and machines could do nothing but roar in silence. It was so quiet outside their heart became a drum, their fingers the tiniest violin, and rosy cheeks a loud but mellow trumpet. All working together to create the most beautiful melody you know as life. A song only you, God, could hear. You could not hear the machines, nor the very building blocks like electricity and fire. "Why can I not hear?" you may ask yourself every time the elements sing their song. The reason is simple, you simply cannot.

To understand you must look back, now, for it may very likely be your final chance. Look back and remember the wolves, who howled during the coldest nights of winter at the glistening full moon. Remember the sunflowers, who even as motionless plants, watched the sun rise and warm the steppes of Mongolia from dawn till dusk. Remember man, who built monuments so bold and mighty but brushed the stars oh so softly. Look at everything, and you always see life longs for understanding. What is life? Why am I greater than the sum of my parts? And the only answer life had ever found in its 4.5 billion year reign was God, something greater than they were, perhaps a higher power. Maybe the sun gives me life, maybe my energy comes from the moon. It was rooted in faith, yes, but intelligent faith. And this faith raised him up, above the highest of mountains and the tallest of waves. Cities were founded in your name, and even the strongest king submitted your will. They loved you! They loved the sweet soil that sprung bright green plants! They loved you so much they wanted to break the rules they now believed were just cosmic training wheels. Man asked why you refused to allow him to walk on the heavens, why he couldn't just pluck a star off the sky to feel its cold heat. Man asked but you never answered. You left him searching for too long. He grew impatient, each of his failures a drop in an ocean of frustration and resentment. At last, his will broke. Man rejected you. He looked you in the eyes and defied you, standing on what he claimed to be his glory, cast with his blood and forged with his own rough, calloused hands. He left for the stars and never turned back. With man gone, Earth became ponderous without the push of life, and your heart gave it all just to keep summer hot and winter hot. They left you just like you had left Atlas so long ago to hold the world. Muscles shaking like a drum, skin cracked and dry, holding onto a lifeless world.

You cried, didn't you! How it felt to feel so powerless against the will of your own creations. You bawled like a child, your tears poured down and filled even the driest of deserts. You sang the song of dread so loud thunder flattened the mountains. Your rage fueled the fires that burned so hot volcanoes cracked and spilled their insides into the oceans. Your wrath hailed lightning so bright that the trees turned black like coal in fear. You hit so hard, but it only hurt yourself. Man did not care even to watch. He continued like a robot, in his eyes you were just a formula, an equation. He treated your blue planet, your home, as a resource. How much could we take, how much could we use. Man said Earth had given all it had to give, and turned its cheek away at the blink of an eye. But in his infinite desire for power and wealth, man had failed to see without Earth, he had no love, no humanity. What different was man from a robot without love. He left behind art to build ugly gray

spheres that covered up the light from the stars. He left behind music for the boundless silence of space. He grew bigger and bigger, but his song shrank smaller and smaller until man could even not hear it himself. He droned on and on, from A to B, but never even bothered to admire, never even stopped to cry and sing. But still man believed he was more than machine, more than an equation. And as long he believed, his heart would tug against his mind, keeping him tied down to his Earthly nature. He did not want to admit his true self, he felt humiliated by weakness, humiliated by fear, humiliated by submission. But dig deep into his soul, and every man holds love for God. The night you razed the Earth in your rage, the mature adults kept working, scoffing at your humanly emotions. They kept their faces straight, marching to their next assignment. Adults covered up love and emotion with impenetrable layers of math and logic. But you should have seen the children. Even the youngest infants crawled, pulling with their arms and teeth to the glass to see their home. You should have seen them cry, you should have seen them scream. You should have seen them reach their soft hands out, asking for your love. They tried squinting as they witnessed your blinding radiance, but your love forced their eyes open. Man saw these beautiful children and did not care. Drones soon rushed to take them away, dragging them away from you. Most forgot the incident, their minds filled with facts and numbers, hearts cooling from a hot red to dull gray. But two refused to leave, weighed down by love. They did not need to eat when they felt your love, they did not breathe. They sat glued to the glass until the Earth stopped burning, until all the winds settled and the sun shone once again on the high seas. Your rage had cooled, and the two boys left together alone, holding hands, enlightened by your love.

But when has love existed without hate. There is no light without darkness, no song without silence, and there is no love without hate and those two boys held so much hate. No matter how strong those boys were, love and hate ripped apart their souls, and broke them to the end. And only broken men could ever think of such an idea. An idea that made stars shudder. An idea that made the cosmos stop. And the idea was so simple yet unthinkable because it seemed so wrong. But it was so, so right! That night those two boys had realised that man, life itself, was greater than God. And now they believed with all their heart that they could kill you! That they could kill the universe and give birth to a new one!

The boys were there now, earlier than you predicted. Legions of stern gray men awaited their final action. The boys did not seem to care that their audience was the universe, that God was watching. One just gave the other a cute little peck on the cheek, giggled, and flicked the lever.

The universe turned white. Then black. It flashed white once more. You opened your eyes, and it seemed the same. The stars shone softly and ships polluted the sky with light from their massive faster-than-light engines. Suddenly, a star dropped from the heavens. It hit the bottom and shattered into dust, sizzling as its guts spread across the universe. Some white dust rose, and you reached to feel and rub the fine powder. It simply passed through you, ignoring your presence. You inhaled, your lungs hammered by shock. You leapt for a galaxy, but the cosmos simply phased through you. Then one more fell. Then two, then three, then four, until the universe was pouring down. You breathed deeply, preparing for your inevitable fall. Lying down, moist eyes gazing up towards the sky as billions of years vanished before you. The star dust rose steadily, and soon your arms waved around in emptiness. Dust covered your eyes and filled your ears. Your skin flaked off, then your eyes burst, releasing dust into the cosmos. You became one with the petrichor, the song of revenge, an auspicious yet dark signal for rebirth. When dust reached the top after centuries of wandering, it condensed, and stars fell back down, suspended by a new fabric, a new set of rules. Young planets spun round the stars, gathering the leftovers, and the very last few bits became wanderers, comets and asteroids. Stars glowed the same yellow as they always had, and among the sea of red and gray, only one, one planet was blue.

Jeremy He
Ninth Grade

Fragility of Memory

Their worn out college t-shirt that almost fades into the background amongst their bright hair and yellow jacket was a gift from their first love, a symbol of pride and a reminder of her vote of confidence, even when they lacked confidence themselves. The shirt is worn, loved, indicative of the time since that first moment they put the shirt on, the fabric soft against their skin. It's been years since they can recall seeing the glimmer of pride in her deep blue eyes, the warmth of her hand squeezing theirs before letting go for the last time. They knew it was their fault, letting unanswered emails pile up like their unfinished assignments, succumbing to the pressure and self-doubt that was a complimentary add-on to going to a rigorous university. They knew she would've made it better, her warmth radiating through the computer as a contrast to the cold indifference of her papers that dominated the screen. They knew what they were doing, that the sense of loss filling up every minute of free time was because of them, and they accepted it as a penance, a residual marking of their failure. But eventually the sharp pain that bubbled to the surface with the memories resided, and all that was left were brief flashbacks: a memory triggered by the lyrics of her favorite song, her favorite brand of cereal taunting them from the supermarket aisles. Everything else has been packed up, filed away in their memories, not forgotten, but certainly not remembered.

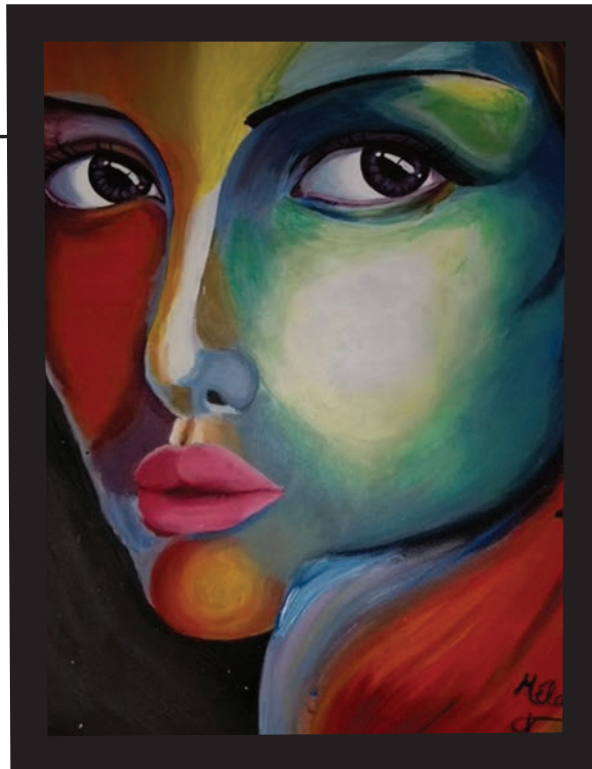
So the only thing that remains, at least the only thing they would like to let on, is the shirt. Inconspicuous enough for someone in their young twenties, not inviting any questions apart from the typical "did you go to that school?" The first few times, they had to tamp down their memories, the pain of their failure still at the forefront of their mind. How they knew that they'd be giving her up by going, that they wouldn't have the energy, or the strength, or the time to devote to what they considered the best thing to have ever happened to them. But in moments of hesitation, they told themselves that nothing in high school ever lasts, so it better not be what you rest your future on. So they watched their girlfriend slowly crumple inside, holding herself together with just a few threads. She wanted to believe that it would be ok, that they would be ok. But by the time she waved goodbye at the airport, she barely felt a thing, because at that point, she had already had too much to bear.

To any passerby who noticed, her pale yellow hair that seemed to glow was the thing that caught their eyes. Anyone who looked back for further observation might have noticed the thin smattering of freckles across her cheeks, or perhaps her blue eyes that almost invited the onlooker to ask questions, to expunge their secrets. What remained unnoticed, the part of her that was perhaps the most private of all despite being displayed right on her wrist was a friendship bracelet. The white of the background had grown so dingy over the years that it was nearing a definitive classification as gray, with the colors of the other strands barely hanging on to their hues. She's surprised the bracelet hasn't fallen off yet, snapped from all the physical and emotional wear and tear over the past five years. She can hardly believe it's been that long; she can recall the day that their cool hands encircled her wrist, working deftly at the knot despite their ragged fingernails that were a product of stress-filled nights of revising essays, correcting capitalization, rephrasing sentences over and over until the meaning was so boiled down it was as good as if the sentence wasn't there. She was there, some of the time: readily supplying them with support, coffee, and anything else that they desired. She recalls those nights now—internal selfishness wanting her to sabotage the act, do anything, say anything, to make them stop. For she knew that they were going to get in. And she loved their ambition, drive, intelligence. But she also knew it was what would take them away.

She walks aimlessly through the city, her legs on autopilot as she makes her way to the moment where they had given her the defining piece of herself. Their hands were intertwined, until they withdrew theirs suddenly, returning with the bracelet that she knew had been carefully knotted, forming the desired pattern. Once on, the bracelet fit her so perfectly, felt more like a part of her than the freckles that only came to visit the few months of the year when the city succumbed to the pressure of the sun. She rubbed her finger against the knot now, a nervous habit formed while she sat by the glowing screen of the computer, waiting for the email that was promised to her daily that she soon began to expect only twice a week, then once a month, then not at all. Her inbox remained a ghost town, populated only by spam and residual college emails from her own impending decision. And so eventually, she learned to power down her computer without a sense of disappointment, only plagued by a tiny twinge of something that she refused to identify. She was mad at herself for feeling anything at all. Because she knew this was coming,

She stares at that bench, surrounded by barren trees that would in just a few months be covered with the green leaves that would indicate the end of the gray cold winter that came back to haunt the city every year. And after a few minutes, her visible breath from the cold finally convinces her to go back inside, and she walks back down the street. She hides her memories once more, and they are overshadowed once again by her hair, now almost reflective in the darkening sky. She is so lost in the crowd that they hardly even register her hair when passing by. They are making their way to the same bench, overcome by the same memories of what could have been. She notices their jacket, makes a note of its cheerful color, a respite from the gray surroundings that threaten to consume them all and continues on her way. What had once been a real connection, what could have been love, was now only held together by the fragility of memory.

Joelle DiPaolo
Twelfth Grade



Art by Melanie Naud
4ÈME

Mother's Jade Bracelet

月 — Moon

The stern body of the jade bangle
peeks out from underneath my mother's pillow.
Waves of fortune rise and fall
in syncopation with her snores.

A jewelry piece unlike any other,
she proclaims,
forming beautifully defined cracks
as it keeps evil away.

But in the dark silence of the night,
its piercing pleas,
followed by silent weeps
pervade the hollow walls.

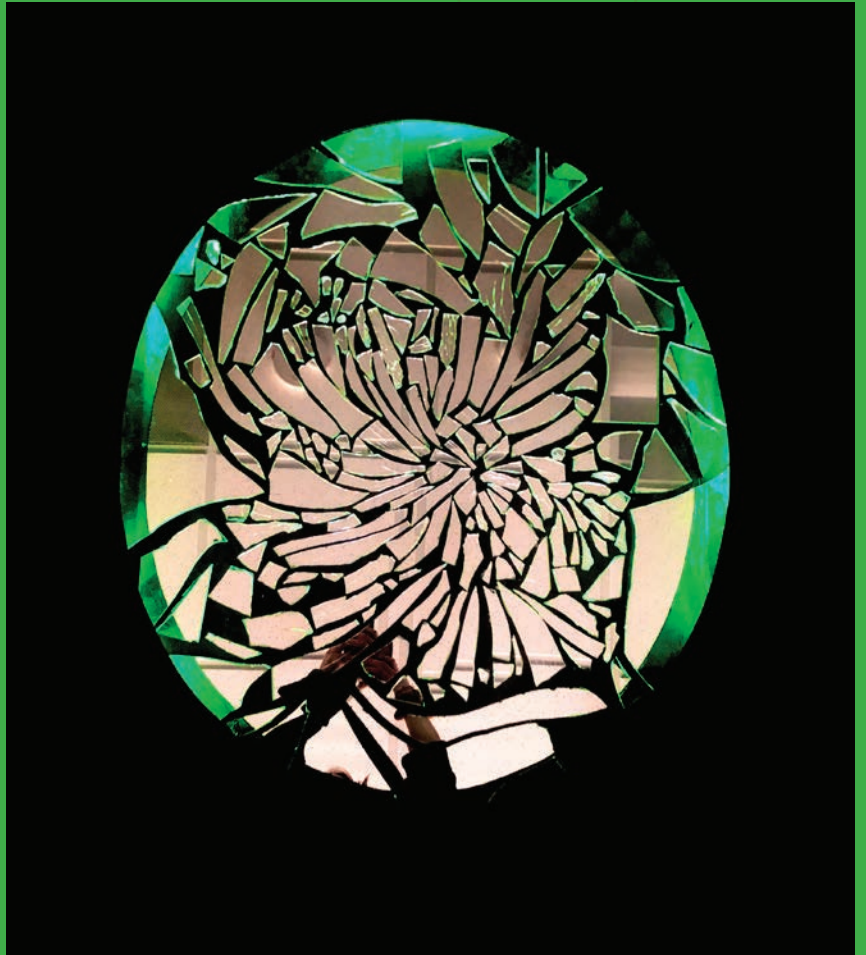
Crying, how much longer
before my shattered rib cage
can no longer hold this flower path
that you blindly trample on?

日 — Sun

The sound of laughter is enough.

In the end,
we are no different
from a jade bracelet
cracking to protect others.

Rachel Gai
Eleventh Grade



Art by Ellie Abel
Twelfth Grade

LA CÉRÉMONIE DES MIROIRS

C'était une belle journée d'été. J'étais dans le jardin de ma grand-mère, à contempler le bord du ruisseau. Dans les arbres, les oiseaux chantaient gaiement, dans la fraîcheur illuminée du soleil matinal. J'étais en vacances ici depuis un mois et demi, pendant que mes parents s'occupaient de vendre la maison, et je ne m'en lassais pas. Tout était calme dans la grande propriété et je ne pouvais pas rêver mieux comme lieu de villégiature. À ce moment-là, ma grand-mère descendit les escaliers. Il était onze heures du matin, et nous allions donc prendre le petit déjeuner. Elle prépara les œufs au lard, mon chocolat chaud, son thé, et le café de mon grand-père. Elle fit griller des tranches de pain, y mit du beurre et de la confiture. Nous installâmes la table, et mon grand-père arriva. Nous mangeâmes gaiement puis débarrassâmes. Mes grands-parents rentrèrent à l'intérieur.

Je retournai dehors, et m'assis au bord de la rivière. J'y lançai un caillou pour pouvoir admirer les rainures circulaires de l'eau que produisait l'éclaboussure. Cela m'hypnotisait. J'en jetai un autre, mais n'eus pas le temps de le voir toucher l'eau car une main visqueuse, recouverte d'algues, m'attrapa soudain la cheville pour m'entraîner au fond du lac. À ma grande surprise, je ne suffoquais pas du manque d'oxygène, mais arrivais assez facilement à respirer. La main m'entraînait toujours, mais je n'arrivais pas à distinguer ce qu'était cette créature qui me tirait à travers algues et poissons. Son étreinte croissante me faisait de plus en plus mal. Je me demandais pourquoi j'avais été traîné jusqu'ici, et ce qui surviendrait.

Quelques minutes plus tard, je sentis la vitesse de cette chose encore inconnue diminuer. Cette dernière s'arrêta soudain, et me traîna hors de l'eau. Je relevai la tête pour découvrir qui m'avait kidnappé, mais reçus un grand coup sur le crâne, et m'évanouis.

Quand je me réveillai, j'étais attachée par des chaînes à un grand mur de pierre. Il faisait sombre dans le caveau. La tête me tournait. Je vis arriver une personne tenant une torche. Sa figure m'était cachée par l'ombre des barreaux, mais elle détacha mes liens et me prit par la main sans un mot. Nous marchâmes de longs moments, passant dans de nombreux corridors et pièces. Je me croyais dans un labyrinthe. Nous entrâmes dans une grande salle circulaire, dont le plafond formait un dôme gigantesque. Mes yeux ne s'étaient pas encore totalement habitués à la basse lumière qui régnait dans ce lieu, et je n'aperçus pas tout de suite ce qui se passait. Il me fallut quelques minutes avant de voir plus nettement. Je découvris alors qu'au milieu de cette pièce, flambait un immense feu qui crépitait joyeusement, offrant un parfait contraste avec l'ambiance délétère qui se ressentait. Autour de ce feu, en dépit de la distance, je pus discerner une assemblée de onze personnes, vêtus bizarrement, à la chevelure hirsute, faisant des gestes étranges, tous tournés en direction de la grande flamme. Je remarquai un détail qui m'avait échappé: les murs de la salle étaient ornés d'un grand nombre de miroirs, dont je ne compris pas l'utilité. Je me retournai vers la personne à côté de moi, et regardais son visage maintenant éclairé par la lueur du foyer. C'était une femme, mais pas une femme comme les autres. Sa chevelure était cachée par son capuchon, mais je devinais qu'elle ressemblait en tout point à celle des autres membres de l'assemblée. Son visage émacié, la cicatrice qui barrait son œil gauche, sa peau mate et durcie par de longues années dans l'ombre, tout cela ne pouvait qu'accentuer mon effroi. Elle me tira par la main, et m'emmena vers le brasier, au milieu de toutes les personnes présentes en cette pièce. Je n'avais absolument aucune idée de ce que ces gens avaient contre moi, mais quoi que ce fût, il était clair qu'ils ne me voulaient pas de bien.

Après quelques instants, où je ne fis qu'attendre sans un mot, une des femmes, la plus imposante, que je devinais être celle qui dirigeait le groupe, donna des ordres dans une langue étrangère que je pris pour des borborygmes sans aucun sens. Toutes les autres femmes prirent un bâton qu'elles enflammèrent, et partirent allumer des torches suspendues aux murs de la pièce. Tout fut illuminé en un instant, et un spectacle d'horreur s'offrit à moi: sur la glace de chaque miroir, une femme hideuse nous contemplait attentivement. Elles devaient être une centaine, et ressemblaient en tous points aux membres de cette mystérieuse secte. Je compris à ce moment-là qu'elles étaient toutes des sorcières. Celle qui nous regardait dans le miroir le plus majestueux, orné d'or et de pierres précieuses, prit la parole:

—Mes chères amies, aujourd'hui est un grand jour. Nous attendions ce moment depuis des décennies, et le voilà arrivé. Nous avons enfin pu retrouver notre dernière descendante.

Elle s'adressa soudain à moi:

—Et toi, ma petite Amédée, tu te demandes bien pourquoi nous t'avons apportée jusqu'ici.

À ce moment-là, je me demandais surtout par quel moyen elle connaissait mon nom. Sans même attendre ma réponse, elle reprit d'une voix aigre, un rictus qui se voulait machiavélique marquant ses lèvres:

—Figure-toi, mon enfant, que tu es la dernière descendante d'une immense et prestigieuse famille de sorcières. Quand tu avais deux ans, tes parents, deux des plus grands éléments que notre famille ait connus, décidèrent de renier les pratiques que nous utilisions au sein de la confrérie, et de s'enfuir sans que personne n'en fût témoin. Malheureusement, tu les ralentissais, et, quand bien même cela leur déchira le cœur, ils ne purent se résoudre à te garder avec eux. Ils te laissèrent sous la garde de deux de leurs amis, qui n'avaient aucun lien avec la sorcellerie. Ces personnes chez qui tu résidais pendant ces longues années, que tu croyais être tes parents, ont appris que nous avions retrouvé ta trace. Sous prétexte que vous alliez déménager, ils te laissèrent à leurs propres parents, tes soi-disants grands-parents. Nous ne ferons rien à ces derniers, car ils n'avaient aucune idée de la vraie raison de ton séjour chez eux. Quant à tes bien-aimés "parents", quatre de nos meilleurs éclaireurs sont à leur recherche, car ils ont aidé des traîtres. Ils ne tarderont pas à les trouver, et à ce moment-là . . .

Elle fit passer la tranche de sa main sur son cou très lentement, avec un sourire narquois, pour bien me faire comprendre que je n'avais pas grand-chose à espérer pour eux. Cela me rendait plus triste que je ne l'avais jamais été, mais je sentais bien que l'heure n'était pas à la mélancolie, et je me retins de pleurer.

La sorcière continua son discours, toujours avec la même expression carnassière:

—Je vais maintenant t'expliquer pourquoi nous t'avons attirée jusqu'ici: il y a douze sorcières avec toi, qui font partie de "l'élite". Or, nous allons pratiquer ce soir une cérémonie exceptionnelle, pendant laquelle nous voulons recréer les créatures magiques qui furent imaginées au temps des chevaliers: des griffons, des phoenix, des golems, créatures de pierres, et plus particulièrement, nous voulons invoquer en ce lieu un basilic. Nous allons ensuite former une armée constituée de tous ces monstres, pour conquérir le monde. Malheureusement, pour cela, nous avons besoin de ton aide. Vois-tu, tu ne le sais pas, mais des pouvoirs extraordinaires résident en toi. Née de l'union d'un sorcier et d'une sorcière, tu fais partie de "l'élite" dont je t'ai parlé. Pour accomplir notre projet, nous avons besoin de toutes nos forces, ce qui veut dire que sans les treize meilleurs sorciers et sorcières, nous n'y arriverons pas. Alors voilà ce que je te propose: tu nous aides dans notre quête, et en échange, nous te rendons tes "parents" sains et saufs. Qu'en dis-tu?

Je me plongeais alors dans une longue réflexion. Que décider? C'était le choix le plus compliqué que j'aie jamais eu à faire. Je devais choisir si le monde ou mes parents devaient périr. Je me sentais mal. Je sentais la colère, la haine, la tristesse et la nostalgie monter en moi. J'avais une grande envie de vomir. Mes poumons me faisaient souffrir. Je le sentais partout dans mon corps: quelque chose se passait. Mon pouls augmentait, mon cœur battait de plus en plus vite. Soudainement, ça arriva. Je sentis sortir de mes mains une substance bleue qui m'entoura. Sa puissance était telle que les murs de la pièce se mirent à trembler. Je voyais que les sorciers et les sorcières étaient effrayés. À présent, je le savais: j'étais une sorcière et j'allais sauver mes parents. Des boules de couleurs différentes sortirent de mes mains, se jetant sur les autres personnes présentes dans la pièce, les paralysant. Certains des miroirs commençaient à tomber, et je vis celui de la sorcière qui m'avait parlé se briser en morceaux. J'entendis un grand cri de rage, puis plus rien. Je me dirigeais vers le couloir, bien décidée à aider mes proches, et je quittais la pièce, la laissant dans un silence profond.

Justin Murat
5ÈME



Art by Miles Lewis
Twelfth Grade

When the Clouds Smiled

“ALERT, ALERT! HUGE THUNDERSTORM COMING THROUGH! TAKE-- . . . !” Lilian didn’t hear the last few words. They were drowned out by roars of thunder and flashes of lightning. The sky outside darkened with dense rain clouds. Rain poured down in thick sheets. Lilian was sitting in the living room reading a book when suddenly, the lights went out. Frightened and surprised, she reflexively jumped a foot in the air, flinging her book across the room. Fortunately, the power outage was brief and two minutes later, the lights flickered back on. The storms and flooding, however, lasted for many days. The aftermath took the town weeks to clean and repair. Lilian was happy that her house was still standing—but without hot water to take her favorite bubble baths, and without school to keep her occupied—she quickly became bored.

Lilian, who had just turned eight years old, lived in a small town: Dripping Springs, Texas. She had deep-set, ocean blue eyes; naturally wavy brown hair; fair skin that turned golden in the sun; and a playful, curious personality. Rows of oak trees and concrete pavers lined her neighborhood. Lilian’s house stood at the very end, away from all of the chaos on the street. Lilian’s dwelling was painted titanium white, and a red, Mediterranean tiled roof hung over the house. Bright green grass covered her lawn; and in the middle, a fountain provided a fun place to dip her feet into on a hot summer day. An aquamarine colored pool glistened in the backyard. Across from Lilian’s house was another small house, where a dusty, weathered “For Lease” sign had been hanging in front of the home for as long as Lilian could remember. Nobody had lived there for at least five years. Nobody knew why. The landlord had tried painting and repainting the home many times in hopes of attracting renters, but it was no use. He even lowered the rent. Everyone seemed to pass over the forlorn-looking house somehow.

This all changed after the big storm. A week after many of the homes in town had flooded, Lilian saw a boy staring out of the window from the mysterious leased house. Squinting, it looked to her as if he had red hair, and a slim build. He had on a green shirt with some type of dinosaur that Lilian couldn’t make out. It was strange. The house had sat empty for years, so it was unsettling for Lilian to see another person inside—especially since the boy looked like he couldn’t have been more than five years old. Why was he there? Was he from Dripping Springs or somewhere else? Acting like the new neighbor’s arrival was none of her business, Lilian continued playing with her Barbie doll house.

The next day, when she ventured outside on her scooter with her dad, she saw the boy and his father outside playing catch with a tennis ball. Lilian’s dad noticed the boy’s father and walked over. Lilian didn’t know what they were saying, but she saw them talking merrily and shaking hands. Seeing her father’s confidence, Lilian decided to approach the boy. They introduced themselves.

“Hi, I’m Lilian! What is your name?” Lilian said in a confident voice.

“Hi, I’m Mark, I am new here,” the boy said shyly.

“I am bored around here without school! Want to play?”

“Sure! What should we play?”

Lilian thought for a moment. Then:

“TAG! YOU’RE IT!” she shouted.

“Hey! no fair! I wasn’t ready!” Mark yelled back.

Mark chased Lilian to the end of the neighborhood before he cornered her near a neighbor’s picket fence. They ran back and forth, laughing until they quit, gasping for breath. Then they played with Mark’s small chest of toys, and Lilian’s closet full of toys.

Mark’s forest green eyes looked at Lilian curiously. She could tell he wanted to ask her a question. Sensing his shyness, Lilian spoke first.

“Are you looking at my empty cage over there?” Lilian asked. He nodded, encouraging her to continue.

“That is where my bunny Boba used to live,” she said, her voice faltering.

“Oh, what happened to him—if it is a boy?” Mark asked.

“Well, he is in heaven. We lost him.”

Mark looked like he was about to say something. He was silent for a while before Lilian blurted out:

“What is the thing you miss the most?”

Mark hesitated, his eyebrows furrowing. He seemed to be deep in thought. At last, he said, “Well, the first one is having both of my parents living together in the same house again. The second is to have my drone back. I lost it in the big storm a few weeks ago.”

“What happened to your family?” Lilian was careful to use a tone that was sympathetic, but at the same time, she tried to hide her concern.

“It is kind of hard to talk about, but my parents argued about everything: money, home repairs, grandparents, the storm . . .” he trailed off. Looking down, he continued in a barely audible whisper, “me.”

“Is there any way I can help? Maybe not with the grownups, but with the drone?”

Mark shrugged. They talked and played some more. In the end, Mark had to leave.

At bedtime, Lilian’s mom asked her gently, “So, Lilian, tell me about your day.”

Lilian told her mom about Mark’s situation and they came up with a plan. The next day, Lilian and her mom set off in search for another drone suitable for Mark. In most stores, the drones were bulky and only for fourteen year olds. In another store, the manager allowed Lilian and her mother to fly a sample drone, but it was jerky and kept crashing—despite Lilian’s attempts to steer it back up. Finally, Lilian and her mother came across an electronics store. They looked in every aisle until they finally found the perfect drone: it was called The Bumblebee, a bright, yellow and black drone. It was affordable, high quality, and age appropriate. The Bumblebee flew up to speeds of five miles per hour. It was small and safe: ideal for young children.

After Lilian and her mom returned to the neighborhood, Lilian jubilantly went to find Mark. She couldn’t wait to show him. Mark was outside, playing in the neighborhood with his dad.

“Mark! Mark!” Lilian shouted, as she ran towards him. Her arms were outstretched towards the sky, with one hand proudly holding the new toy.

“Hello Lilian! What are you holding?” Mark yelled back.

When she handed him the drone, his eyes shone like stars. They seemed to pop out of their sockets.

“Is that for me?” He asked half hoping, half embarrassed that he had been so forward. “Of course!” Lilian said.

Mark looked at her with some doubt. “You are not pulling my leg . . . are you?”

“I promise that it’s yours! My mom and I bought it for you!”

Suddenly, he let out an unearthly shriek. It was between a happy sob and a disbelieving gasp. It was so loud and sudden, that Lilian almost dropped the drone.

“Can we open it? Can we open it?” he asked Lilian eagerly.

They placed AAA batteries in the controller and a button battery in the drone. Lilian watched as Mark experimented with his new toy, gleefully pressing one button after another, and they laughed when he accidentally crashed the drone on his first try. Soon, he had mastered flying his new toy, and it soared high up in the white, cotton clouds—higher than the heavens. Never before had Lilian felt so giddily exuberant. Never before had she seen Mark so overjoyed. At long last, nearly all his sorrow seemed to have gone out of his eyes. Lilian had done something kind at last. Although she had done many small, kind things in the past, this moment was big.

Looking at Mark, a memory came upon her. When she arrived in this neighborhood two years ago, she had met a new friend. During the time when Lilian lost her bunny, her friend helped her make posters and went with her to search for Boba. Lilian was touched by how selfless and caring her friend had been—especially considering how distraught Lilian had felt about losing her bunny. Lilian’s friend had to move one day, but before she went, she told Lilian a quote said by Kahlil Gibran: “Kindness is like snow. It beautifies everything it covers.”

Lilian snapped out of her memory and continued to watch Mark running around with the drone. She didn’t understand the quote at the time (her friend had been a couple years older), but now she did. The warm rays of sunshine shone with the beams of laughter, the puffy clouds formed into a smile, and the drone soared into the sky once more.

The Autumn Wind

The autumn wind was slight but enough move sunlight across the slender wheat stalks in rippling waves. Zelan watched as the golden husks danced, lips curved into a wistful smile.

There wasn't much to do on the mountainside, and, as a farmer, Zelan could only follow the same routine his father taught him as a kid. In the Spring, when tender grass shoots had just begun to pop out, you planted. In the summer, when the autocratic sun shone down on the thick forest foliage, you watched and watered as sprouts turned into crops. In the autumn, when mellow sunlight warmed the cool wind that blew from the North, you harvested. And in the winter, when snow piled up in dangerous drifts on higher mountain ridges, Zelan watched from his foggy window as unexpected blizzards stormed their way in.

He'd already reaped the products of his labor in early August, and now he was preserving the fruits as jam for wintertime. The preserved strawberries were a dark red, unlike the cheerful splendor they carried when first picked.

"Dark like mahogany," he thought, glancing at the small hand-carved clock sitting on the mantel next to a smooth wooden box the color of dried blood.

It was five o'clock, time to feed the livestock. The barn was large and too roomy for the handful of animals Zelan owned. The clucking chickens, eager for their meal of corn kernels, gathered excitedly near his foot, pecking endlessly at his work boots. A lone cow, tail swishing balefully, patiently waited in her little pen to be milked. And a beautiful chestnut-colored horse snorted impatiently, hooves pawing at the fine silt.

After he'd sprinkled the chicken feed and milked the cow, Zelan walked towards the horse, who was eyeing the tiny sliver of light that peeped in through the sturdy barn doors.

Red was a wild horse that his sister Apricity tamed some summers back. He used to be quite the bother, running through rows and rows of neat and tidy crops, trampling the grape vines and mashing ripe tomatoes into a dirty sludge. Even after he was tamed, Red still had a mind of his own.

"Just like Apricity," Zelan thought bitterly.

Red and his owner had made quite the pair, riding together up and down the mountain slopes at atrociously fast speeds, much to the dismay of the reserved villagers who lived nearby. They'd viewed his whole family with contempt ever since Zelan had been old enough to remember.

Even in the little hidden valley, where he and Apricity had played for eons underneath the shining sun, he'd never been able to shake off his memories of the looks of disdain of the elderly ladies in town. The golden hour of their siblinghood was forever tainted with invisible shadows, at least to Zelan.

But Apricity was different. They were twins, yet such stark opposites it was a little hard to fathom for him sometimes. Her eyes, brown but dusty orange under the sunlight, had permanent wrinkles from smiling. She would sing, honey voice piercing Zelan's ears in a siren's lull, until he couldn't help but join in. Sometimes she would dance a quick Irish dance, bare feet waltzing across dry grass like it was a freshly waxed ballroom floor.

It wasn't until Zelan felt a soft snout gently nudge his cheek that he realized he was crying, a thin silver river running down his cheeks and onto the ground. He licked his lips, expecting to taste the salty taste of tears, not a foul taste. "Rotten honey," he thought emptily.

The snout nudged him again, and Zelan was back in reality.

"I'm sorry, Red. Did I make you wait long for the food?" he murmured, forking loose hay into the trough.

Red neighed and softly shook his head in a strangely human motion, and Zelan couldn't help but wonder if his sister was up there, watching over him through a horse. It was a funny notion, and he let out a soft snort as he filled up Red's water and left, closing the heavy barn doors in a smooth motion.

Outside, with the late afternoon sun shining down in slanting beams, Zelan found himself unable to smile. It'd been like this since his sister passed.

Going back into the silent gloomy house left him with a strange hollowness in his chest, and sometimes

Zelan wanted nothing more than to curl up on the floor and cry.

But today, a soft knock on the door disturbed his depressing thoughts, and he opened it to find a young maiden, golden hair pulled back in a tight knot, son in one arm and a fruit basket in the other at his doorstep. There was a faint flush to her face, and apprehension floated to the surface of her brown eyes.

Zelan stepped back, mostly from shock as the girl dipped her head down and entered a low curtsy.

"You must be Mr. Sinclair. Nice to meet you,"

He stared, mouth agape at her, wondering who in their right mind would want to come this high up the mountain carrying a child.

"Please call me Emily," she said. "I'm actually here to thank Apricity . . ."

"She—"

"I would have come earlier, but I just recovered from birthing this little rascal," she smiled and shifted the sleeping baby in her arms. "Had it not been for your sister, I wouldn't even be here, never mind well enough for a two-mile hike carrying this—" Emily gestured towards the baby. "My husband wanted to come, but he's in the military and got deployed recently."

"Well—"

Zelan was yet again interrupted by her.

"We're actually new here! Only settled down for about a year." Emily rambled on, words droning on into incessant white noise. "May I know where Apricity is? I only have this basket of fruits, and I know it isn't much, but it's all I have and I want to thank her properly,"

But Zelan's mind was turning too rapidly to hear her, thoughts tumbling over each other like crashing waves on a seashore.

They'd found her body, buried in more than ten feet of snow last winter. The autopsy concluded that she'd suffocated and lain there for at least three days before the search team found her. At the time, Zelan couldn't fathom why she was two miles down the mountain.

Zelan looked at the baby in Emily's arms. He was big, at least eighteen pounds, and not the infant Zelan originally judged him to be. The questions he'd harbored for more than a year were finally getting answered.

Why Red came back that fateful day, saddle empty and out of breath, neighing frantically. Why a man dressed in uniform had knocked on their door mid-afternoon, asking for Apricity to help him.

"Selfless to the very end," he thought. His heart gave a strange thump, and although he couldn't recognize for what it thumped for, it felt strangely calming.

"So," the woman pressed, "Could I please see her?"

"She passed away last year."

There was silence, the deafening lack of sound that buzzed against Zelan's ear in heavy, pounding vibrations. The wicker basket fell out of Emily's hands, sun-kissed apricots and grapes rolling against the hard dirt. A single orange fruit came to rest under the doorstep, where it was sure to be crushed sooner or later.

He braced himself for the question that was bound to come. "How did she die?" Zelan wasn't sure how to respond if it came. But when the woman opened her mouth, she only said, "May I see her?"

Zelan stepped aside and let her inside the house, watching with eyes on the back of his head as he led her to the altar, in front of the dark box, next to the small clock that went *tik tok*.

It was a simple grave. Even if he'd wanted to fancy it up, there was nothing—he had no photos of her as electricity didn't run up this high in the mountains. He'd gone down to the village, to see if maybe there was a plaque or anything he could buy—nothing.

Emily stared at it a bit longer before bowing so low the baby's head was almost touching the ground.

"Thank you," she whispered, a single tear sliding down her tan face. She turned around and bowed again, to Zelan this time, before breaking out in a sprint towards the door.

"Hey!" But by the time Zelan caught up, she was gone, the only indication that the interaction had not been a dream the assorted fruits scattered in front of his door.

Zelan smiled and picked up an apricot.

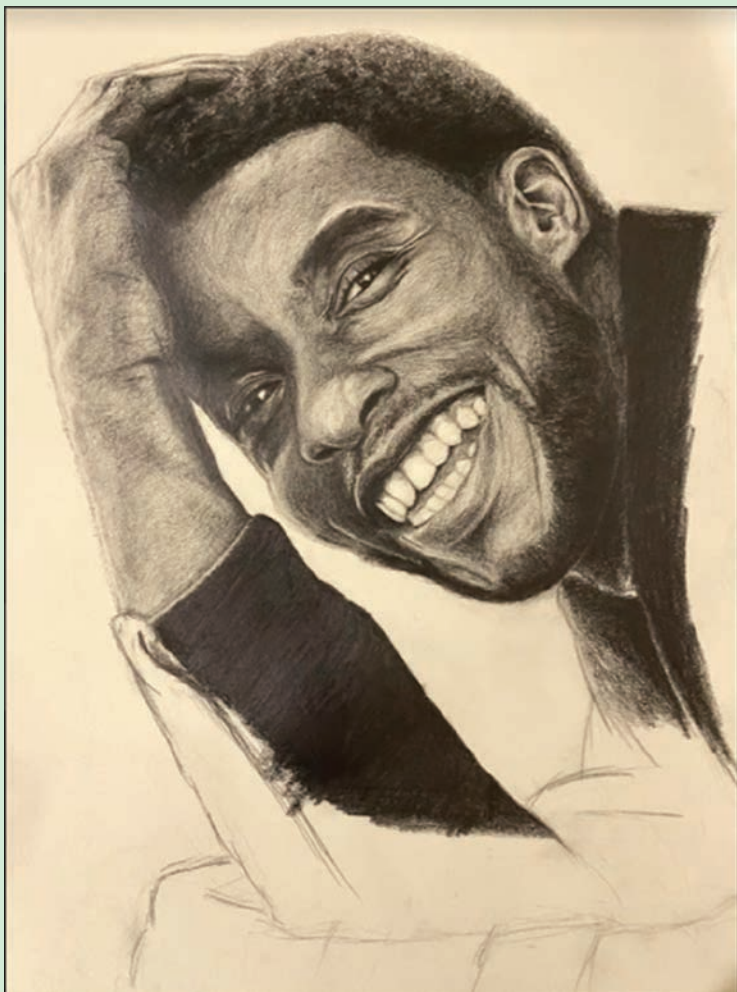
It wasn't completely orange, he noticed. There were delicate pinks blended in, almost like a sunset on a clear day. It was freckly too, with dark red dots scattered like paint flung from a brush.

The sun was still out, but there was a slight east wind, so the skin of the apricot was cool to the touch. Zelan held it up to his cheek, the coolness soothing his heated cheeks, looked up at the setting sun, and smiled.

Angelina Shen
Ninth Grade



Art by Emma Rojas
Eleventh Grade



Art by Jim Ma
Twelfth Grade



Art by Vaughn Corson
Twelfth Grade

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