

UNLEASHED

A Journal of Student Writing

Volume I, Summer 2020

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Unleashed: Volume 1

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Foreword

by Heather Garcia



Dear readers,

Marco Learning tried something new at Marco: we stretched beyond the world of AP® Exams. We dove head-first into the world of creative writing by offering our first Creative Writing Summer Camp - and it was a resounding success. The staff at Marco Learning aren't the reason it was such a success; it was the STUDENTS who made this event spectacular. I was fortunate to share the space with them as their instructor, but make no mistake, they are the ones who brought the magic. It was an immense privilege to interact with them, to read the product of their hard work and imagination, and to watch them grow as writers throughout the course.

I have been a teacher for 16 years and never, in my entire teaching career, have I had a single class with over 350 registered participants; never have I had a class bond so quickly; and never have I had a group of young people lift each other up in such a collective endeavor. The students in this Creative Writing course blew me away with their creativity, their talent, and their overarching kindness toward one another. This group of students formed a community faster than I have ever witnessed, and it gave me immense hope for our future.

I can't think of a better way to honor these kids and their hard work than to publish their writing in this beautiful literary magazine. These students are trailblazers, and in our inaugural edition of *Unleashed*, rest assured that you are going to be treated with some outstanding student writing.

Happy Reading,

Heather Garcia

The Future is Foggy

by Jessica Singh

The future is foggy,
That much is true.
O mysterious future,
How much do I really know about you?

What has been carved out is a path,
It will guide me on this voyage.
But an atmosphere of trouble may set in,
And nothing would be worth enjoying.

And when that path is narrow,
Smaller and farther than the eye can see,
I might find myself lost,
Without purpose to simply be.

And looks are deceiving when it comes to love,
That is an undeniable fact.
They come and leave without a trace,
My heart, after all this time, is still cracked.

At times I am faced with a wall,
So great, towering, tall.
It won't move, won't budge, no one's doing their job.
There is simply nothing else to do but sit here and sob.

I only own one flower,
A very beautiful rose.
However, it may appear that I have many,
In whatever way they may pose.

Though at the end of a long day,
Only that one rose remains,
And all of the others go back,
Playing long and strategic games.

In my detritus life,
I've been a witness to many things.
But be that as it may,
What else, dear future, do you have to bring?

The Request

by Sophia Dodson

It's a night like every other. I sit at the piano and play smooth jazz, or the occasionally suggested new pop hit. There's a small, thankfully calm crowd. The bartender is humming along to my playing as he serves a drink to a group of friends. As I finish the piece, the audience starts to applaud, so I feel the need to twirl around in my seat and bow. Our eyes meet and I notice how they don't look as if they've never heard a better pianist before, but as if they are thankful that my playing made them forget their problems. Someone in the crowd sticks out to me. A guy who looks happier than the rest. His energy and smile give me an uneasy feeling that I can't explain. His face is youthful; he could almost be a juvenile, but I have a feeling that he isn't. Before I begin to play the next song, someone approaches me. It's the guy.

"Excuse me sir," he says, "I don't mean to be a bother, but do you mind if I request a song?"

I get requests all the time, so this doesn't strike me as strange. I reply that he can.

"I would love it if you played that carnival music. You know, the one from the circus, the one that goes like this..."

He began to sing the tune of his desired song. I know what it is, so I agree to play it, though I find it very odd. As I play, I start to get absorbed into the song, like it is important to me. For what reason, I can't figure out. Suddenly, I feel the atmosphere start to change. A bright light running across my eyes causes me to look up, and I find that I am staring into a carnival. My eyes dart around in dismay. There are exciting rides, games, and food carts that seem to stretch for miles. I can hear children laughing, and for some reason it fills me with fear. Nothing seems right. Worst of all is that I am still playing the song. I don't want to stop. I want to keep playing forever. I turn to look at the man from the bar, who I realize is still there. He is the same man, but he is almost unrecognizable because he is in a mask of makeup, turning him into a clown. He smiles at me, looking happy as always and says,

"We've been wanting a piano player."

Essential

by Adanma Adebayo-Kay

In times of crisis,
We are told
to focus on what is **essential**.

Essential:

A word meaning absolutely necessary; indispensable.

Air, water, clothing, shelter, life.

The last time

I sat face-to-face with a friend was far too long ago, but that's a puny price to pay in proportion to what's possible:

What happens when you're knee-deep in virus vocabulary with no viable vindication,
When hours bleed into days, into weeks, into months, into forever?

It is **essential**

that we do not lose our minds.

That we do not lose sight of what is truly **essential**.

Of family,

friends,

hobbies,

homies,

blessings,

bliss,

gladness,

glee,

joy,

hope.

Of what makes the world go round.

Of our lives,

Of our loves, no matter how much loss coronavirus may cause.

If there is *anything* good to come out of this,

It will be the realization

That we all bleed the same blood.

We all breathe the same breath,

The entire world *hooked* on the same heartbeat.

From mortality to morbidity, incubation to isolation.

For the first time, we hold each other's lives in our hands.
For the first time, we hold each other's futures.
Life or death, Sickness or health, We all face the same fate.
We need to have faith.

In times of crisis,

We are told to focus on what is **essential**.

Essential.

A word meaning absolutely necessary; indispensable.

It is **essential** that we stay at home.

So we did.

Laughed

Cried

Ate

Sang

Played

Read

Wrote

Loved,

Lived the days away.

And born

were the artists.

The doctors.

The engineers,

The authors,

The lawyers,

The veterinarians,

The paleontologists,

The archeologists,

The botanists,

The actors,

The rappers,

The teachers,

The poets,

Born

was the future.

As they all learned

What was truly **essential**.

Mealtime

by Abigail Musherure

As I slip on gloves and remove the meal from the oven, I ponder how tonight might go
 One by one, coming left and right, family pops out of their hiding spaces
 The aroma acting like a magnet
 We gather around the sticky, marker stained, wooden table
 Laughter bubbling as well as the meal
 Life lessons being passed around with the salad
 Someone shouts, cries, spills
 We love, we learn, we talk talk talk
 But as the steam clears and I take off the gloves
 I gaze at the empty chairs
 Sit, pick up my fork and take a bite
 Solitude tastes bland

The Graveyard Garden

by Ruth Oyerokun

What we had
 Was a garden once
 The flowers were
 Fresh and bright and promising
 Then winter came
 And turned that garden
 Into a graveyard

As much as I tried
 To keep it all alive
 All I have left
 Are memories:
 The ground was so cold
 My toes curled back in retreat
 The flowers: brown, dry, and rotten
 Corpses of what they used to be
 The wind so harsh
 The fence couldn't keep its balance,
 Swaying to the beat
 Of a miserable song

I'd hoped for a resurrection
 And got a funeral instead
 As I mourn,
 Each passing tear
 Reminds me of my foolishness

It's midnight now,
 Time to dispose of the remains
 Under the moon's ethereal glow
 I strike a match
 And watch it all cremate

I took you for a friend
 You took me for granted,
 All we have now are the ashes

It Wasn't Me

by Samara Patel

I didn't do it. I didn't kill him. I'm innocent, I'm innocent, I'm innocent... The words swirled in my head, my mantra. It should be enough to get me through this. It has to be. I can't go to jail. Not that the stupid sheriff cared. If anything, Sheriff Jorkins looked delighted to have such an exciting case. His round, pig-like face scrunched up as he assessed me, escorting me inside with a gesture of what might be hospitality under different circumstances. Although I was glad to get out of the thunderstorm outside, the police station wasn't much better. I twirled slowly, taking in my surroundings, memorizing them. The room we walked into was small and dark, with shadows encasing the corners. A flickering lightbulb occasionally illuminated the stuffed moose head on the wall above the receptionist desk, from which the receptionist was missing. Peeling bits of paint gathered on the concrete floor in the hallway. All of this gave Longwood Police Station the impression of a shack made with bricks. One huff and puff, and I could blow it all down. *If only my problems could go away so easily.*

He led me to a room in the back, which had a short wooden table and not much else. The sheriff's large stomach bumped into it as he sat down with a groan. My eyes flicked over this action and filed the fact away. "Be calm, Arielle. We just want to ask you a few questions." My hands shook slightly, and I quickly sat on them. "Now, I just want to review some details for the record. Is that alright with you?" I nodded nervously, my tongue sticking in my throat. "Name: Arielle Orion. Age 17. Suspect in the murder of Ron Swindon, her friend and colleague. Suspected motive: revenge for the death of her sister Rya." My palms sweat. Words swam through my head like fish trapped in a bowl. The day flashed through my head. *There was a storm that day. A storm just like today...*

"Isn't the rain pretty, Ron?" Ree asked gleefully, twirling around in a puddle, the mud splashing her shoes. He barely glanced up at her from his park bench, saying nothing. She stopped and looked at him. "Ron? The rain?" He took a breath. "Yeah. Yeah, it's neat." She looked at him sideways, then sat down next to him on the bench. In the three years they had been dating, he had never once been so quiet. "Ron-

"Rya, we need to break up." He looked at her for the first time in what felt like years. "There's been someone else...someone else for a while now. And it's nothing about you, you have to know that. It's just- it's me. I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry." He studied her face for a response that her words weren't giving. Finding nothing, he sighed. And then he got up and walked away.

I know this because Ree told me in the kitchen that night, tears streaming down her face. A week after that, she took her own life. A month later, I took his, with a knife from his own kitchen. I hadn't meant to do it. We were arguing and I got mad and he admitted he had been cheating on her and he never cared about her and I took a knife and I killed him I killed him I killed him I-

"Ms. Orion? Are you still with me here?" My breath came out heavy. *In out in out in out in out.* I didn't kill him. But he deserved it. Besides, they have to believe me. I was a model student in class, the perfect worker, the perfect girlfriend, the perfect- oh hell. "Um sir, well, I-" My words dried up. Good. They haven't served me well before and won't help me now. I took a single breath in before I ran out the door. "Hey!" Sheriff Jorkins cried. He tried to run after me but quickly hit the ground like I knew he would. I turned the corner, then the next. This place was like a maze, and I was running out of time. *Peeled paint. Flickering bulb. Door-* I passed reception and snagged a keychain off the desk, hoping, praying it would be the right one. The other officers were starting to take notice of me, trying to run after me. I punched and kicked and slapped at anyone who dared to try me, a living death machine. *Too much, this is too much, I have to get out of here. I have to breathe, too much too much too much-* BOOM. I crashed through the door with energy I didn't know I had. Adrenaline was racing through my veins like those stupid cars that my sister loved so much. *My sister, she died, she's dead and he killed her! He killed her! No time, no time.* The sky was dark and ominous, save for a single beam of moonlight that hit the beat-up thing they called a cop car. Right now, it might as well have been a pumpkin carriage. I clambered inside, barely restraining my excitement. I shoved the keys into the slot. *Come on, come on, come on!*

Suddenly, it sputtered to life, coughing up fuel and dust as I slammed onto the gas. Barely holding back a yelp, I took off toward the only place I knew would be safe: home.

One Chopstick

by Abby Coons

Need to split the chopsticks and choose a side
 Do I feel more one race or the other?
 I am living the American dream
 I am not considered American
 Why? Why can I not be American?
 I was born here, raised here, I speak english
 Citizenship apparently matters
 I am a citizen; what's wrong with me
 My almond eyes? My straight dark hair? What's wrong?
 Tell me so I can fix it if I can
 American smile? White skin? What's wrong?
 I'm "Whitewashed" and "neglecting my culture"
 Birth certificate? What more do I need?
 My ancestors at war and now I live
 just two branches in my family tree
 But if I split the tree there is no me
 Need to split the chopsticks and choose a side
 Tell me: How do I use just one chopstick?
 One chopstick, without stabbing everything

Secret of the Mulberry Trench Coat

by Camille Duncan

"Your story is impeccable. You have stopped even the craziest of criminals from practically taking over the world! You have the entire country in your hands. Even Al Capone is terrified of you!"

There is an officer and a woman sitting in a well-lit room by a single lightbulb. The officer holds a thick file with an infinite amount of information on the disinterested woman in front of him. The woman adjusts her purple trench coat and retro black sunglasses, regardless of that the room is seventy-nine degrees.

"You have traveled the world and live in lavish suites," the cop says, flipping through her profile. "There are few humans who can live such luxurious lifestyles such as yours."

"Yeah, I like to keep myself on my toes," the mysterious woman replies. The cop continues, "You have arrested the famous crook, Frank Raymond from destroying the city! You somehow knew when the infamous Sasha was going to try to hijack a plane! The most powerful people in the criminal world are no match for your--"

The woman interrupted. "Look, can I go? I have a busy day today and--"
 "Wait," the cop blurts, "We would like to recruit you. This organization knows you and your part in the world. Please join us for the greater good!" The officer takes out a business card and slides it across the clean gray table.

"No need. I think I have made my choice," She quickly pulls out a pistol and shoots the officer and his body falls to the floor with a muted thump.

"Having this much information about me is dangerous. I will not let any vulnerabilities out there" she scowled. The woman grabbed the file and stuffed it in her coat as she fled the room.

Her Headphones

by Maya McCord

An aching strong boom rammed its way through her ears as she blocked out the overwhelming screams from the outside. The rhythm puts her in a trance that can only be broken by lifting them from the comfort of her ears. Maria knew they were at it again. Both of them in a tune that no one wants to hear. Her dad is as deep as the bass, while her mom is stuck in falsetto. Lifting the cushion slightly from her ear, she could hear the door slam for the sixth time that week. It hurt, but the music was here to comfort her.

In her mind, it kept the demons away. Their antagonising screech still keeps her up on some nights. It's the same thing every night. They stomp and screech as she hears them rattle passed her bedroom and into the kitchen. The squeak of the cabinet and the clinking of glasses echoed throughout the house. She thinks to put on her savior, but she's never heard the demons all the way through. Thirty minutes pass as she hears them, stomping and screeching up the stairs. Their sound intensified as they made their way down the dark hallway, coming to a stop in front of her room. The eerie sudden silence filled the house. She felt a chill run up her spine and a shortness of breath as she jumped from the covers and headed under the bed. There she craved for the soft cushions of her electronic savior; whether she had her mp3 player or not.

Before she could reach for them, she heard the clicking and cracking of the door opening. She pushed deeper under the bed as the quiet steps grew closer until she could see their shoes. They looked familiar. Almost identical to the pair her mom and dad wear. "The demons had to have possessed them," she thought. The same ones that screech and bumble i the night. The same ones that make her hide under the bed. The same ones that make her want to boom the bass of her headphones.

The monsters look out across her room, not once glancing at the bed to see if she was actually there. The shoes turn and stalk slowly out of the room. Maria lets go of the breath she was holding and crawls out. Rushing to the door to get a glimpse of the devils that peaked her nightmares, a small gasp rushed out of her mouth when she spotted the familiar shadows of her parents tripping into their room. The door slammed seconds later to confirm the demon's confinement in her parents' room.

Quietly closing the door, she pushed back into her soft bed sheets. Her head facing the cold blank ceiling, while her thoughts raced for millions of miles. Question after question popping up in the cerebrum of her brain. "Were those my real parents?" "They couldn't be, right?" "Why were they so clumsy?" "Why didn't they look for me?" She wondered. Her clammy right hand met her forehead before her thoughts overtook her. She needed closure, an escape, something to get her mind off of this mind boggling railroad track. Then she remembers the cushions, her salvation, the one that helped her escape time and time again from the screeching.

Swiftly reaching under the bed, she grabbed a hold of one side and pulled them up. "Beautiful" she whispered, admiring the delicate, but sharp stitching of the cushions along the inner speaker. Plugging them into the mp3 player, she gently places them on her ears and presses play. The sudden whine of the violin started as she leaned back onto the pillows. A tender piano key sprung from the background as a cello started to harmonize with the rest of the instruments in the piece. Her mind placed situations into her thoughts. The squeaking, the screeching, the stomping, bass, falsetto, everything was simultaneously fitting with the rhythm. Her tears begged to leak out, but she couldn't bear the thought of letting go. The inner speaker pulsed with the instrumental piece, while her face showed nothing, but a blank slate. It really hurts, but the music will comfort her, right?

The Tide

by Anonymous

An unknown spark permeates the tide
 Perhaps it is the power of
 A cobra waiting to attack:
 Fangs unsheathed, venom dripping,
 Vermillion tongue, and viridescent venom.
 Or a rock balanced precariously on the cliff's void
 Tipping toward destinations unknown

A horde of faces energized and alive
 United by one destiny:
 Pulled inexorably to this grounded bastion of relaxation and comfort.
 These people have become simple brushstrokes
 on the infinite canvas of life itself
 Their identities blur together in
 This mass of togetherness and homogeneity.

Above the sea of bodies, there waits a storm
 Biding its time to strike.
 The clouds are a mirror --
 They reflect the emotion of the crowd they cover.
 The sense of sameness envelops the water droplets above
 And the crowd below.

The storm and the people
 Both hustle and bustle
 Filled with spirit and
 Guided by their own unique and divine impetuses
 Enshrined in nature by the Creator above.
 But if only they paused and took a moment
 To appreciate each other.
 The water and the people
 Do not differ to an extraordinary degree
 Yet they never undertake the required time
 To observe each other
 And notice their similarities.

Indeed
 The pitter-patter of the raindrops on the brick walkways
 Is synonymous with the symphony of feet on the floor.
 And the storm's rumble of thunder
 Is not unlike the swarm's rumble of cacophonous, conversational voices.

At this moment
 The same energy is coursing through them both --
 That feeling like lightning preparing to strike.
 And the storm with all its water
 And stream of all the people
 Are both the tide:
 Ebbing, flowing,
 Unsure, and carefree.
 Never giving a moment's notice
 To what meanders beneath
 Or what hovers above.

If it Gets Too Cold

by Indya Taylor

our numb fingers intertwined in the thick morning air
 when I look into your eyes, I can't tell what's there
 how do I know that you won't let my poor fingers go,
 if it gets too cold?

the seasons go by like chapters, but you're hard to be read
 i watch your lips move, not hearing what you said
 trodding through the rough snow, I match your fast pace
 do you promise that the snow won't interfere with our fingers embrace,
 even if it gets too cold?

Night of Despair

by Alice Zhang

The quiet night was interrupted by painful screams of agony and torture. A young girl watched as the people beside her withered and collapsed of pain. The scent of blood was prominent in the cold night air.

“H-help..” a voice croaked.

The young girl looked down and saw a man covered in blood and dirt reaching for her. She smirked at his pitiful form and decided to put him out of his misery. She knelt down onto the dirty alleyway ground and reached for him.

“Thank-!! ARGGHh”

The man screamed in pain as he was slowly choked to death, his eyes bulged out in surprise as he saw what this tiny girl was doing to him. Her small stature made her an unlikely assassin, but it also gave her a deadly advantage. People didn’t expect a young twelve-year-old girl to already have a body count, nor did they expect her to be able to take down many trained mercenaries.

She pursed her lips as she knelt down examining the bodies of the deceased. She slowly made her way around the men checking their belongings for what her benefactor wanted. As she was making her way around the blood ridden alleyway, she noticed a movement from the corner of her eye.

SHINK!

The sound of her knife pierced through the night as she stabbed the boy. Blood splattered onto the walls as her knife stabbed into the boy’s arm. He fell down, back against the wall trembling of fear. Her cold dark eyes shone of murder and death. She carefully made her way to the boy looking back and forth the alleyway.

“WAIT!” cried the boy. She chuckled dryly hearing his pleas and stabbed his chest. Her eyes widened suddenly as she faced the now-dead boy. His ash-blond hair and his now dulling blue eyes were somehow oddly familiar. The scent of lemon and violets were now mixed into the bloodied air.

His expensive dark gray suit carefully handmade was now stained with dark viscous blood and had tears in the fabric from her knife. His ornate diamond cut sapphire ring glinted in the moonlight. She gasped clutching her own matching ring.

Her eyes widened as she slowly backed away in horror at the realization of what she had done. She desperately tried to stop the bleeding, but it was too late. There was nothing you could do to reverse death.

Bright lights suddenly shone down the dark alleyway as the shrill sounds of sirens pierced through the night. The clattering of horses notified her of the police. She knew she should run, but she couldn’t bring herself to move.

The police arrived and took in the scene. A dark alleyway with a prominent scent of blood. Corpses and dead bodies were strewn around the alley. The only thing left alive was a lone girl stained with blood.

She tremored and shook as she was led out the alleyway in cuffs. Her usual cold emotionless eyes were filled with tears as she wept at what she had just done.

She had just killed her childhood best friend and her fiance.

The Unfortunate Insignificant Value of Fantasy

by Mahir Rahman

Deep red bricks enclose bright lights
They shine out from a kitchen door
The smell of cooked rice and roasted chicken
Spreads profusely from the home

A tiny boy inside lies on his bed
One leg crossed over the other in the air
A small book opened in his hands
Large letters flicker across his brown eyes
He makes use of a new talent

A larger boy crosses to the outside
He holds the large books of magic
His imagination spreads throughout the garden
Wizards and witches fight each other
He adds trolls and goblins

A strong, tall man enters the gates of a new life
He grasps onto his old books of wondrous fantasy
Soon they are discarded for books of the oldest wisdom
The ideas of magic and love leave his delicate mind
And he takes upon the real world

Leaves on trees turn green to red to green again
Lives are lost, more are made
Discarded clothes, new shoes
Time passes by

A fragile, old man struggles to breathe in a cozy chair
He sits in the mansion of his dreams
He only thinks of material gain now
He believes that magic is the most foolish idea created

But as his days became numbered
A sudden evil spreads inside his body
He turns to the one remembrance of his past
The green book filled with wizards and witches
His additions of trolls and goblins
And tears drip from his eyes as he is reminded of the beauty and imagination
That stems from reading the fiction of the world

So, all I have to do is jump?

by Reem Numan

“So, all I have to do is jump?”

“Mhm, then, all your desires, your dreams, everything you’ve yearned for would come true in a blink of an eye.”

She glanced beyond the edge of the thin, wooden bridge. Beneath her, a swirl of cloudy mists jumbled like branches in a tree, almost calling out to her. She froze, startled at the menacing sight of possible death that awaited her. This guy had to be crazy, insane even. The only thing she’d accomplish jumping off a bridge is a quick, painless death.

Chills crawled across her body like sporadic ants. What if... this *is* what she wanted?

The girl leaned at the bridge’s wall, her arms lying atop the counter, staring into the endless abyss in front of her. Several flashbacks drifted to her. Memories of her mother’s screams echoed in her fragile mind, flinching from recalling her slapping her across the face. Her cheeks stung as the memory furnished.

Another memory flowed to her. She’d been crying from a lost doll. Her mother, so sick of hearing her whines, made her stand outside in the bitter cold for an entire night. Her lips turned blue, her stomach ached for food and sustenance. Her body chilled like an icicle in the north pole.

Lost in the tangled branches of her thoughts, she heard a voice echo to the left of her. “Mrs...? Um...?”

“Yes!” She jolted from her position. “I’m sorry sir, I just... got caught up in my own thoughts, that’s all.”

The man plastered a smile. “Ah, as do many who come across this bridge. It is your choice to believe me, of course. You’re free to carry on as you please. Or heed my words, and jump.”

The girl gazed at the vast canyon beneath her feet. Her spirit drained, like whispers of a thousand souls caressing her, telling her to jump. They rang like church bells, calling out with welcoming arms. She couldn’t. She’d never really jump?

Would she?

What if... jumping would accomplish her dreams? What would change? She pondered for a moment.

What’s the one thing I want more than anything else?

She froze.

Death.

It was **death**.

Death, to escape from this hellish life she had the misfortune to live. Death, to gain even an ounce of love or concern from the woman she called “Mama.” Death, to rid suffering and agony she’d been forced to endure, cowering in utter loneliness.

So, all I have to do is jump?

She peered over the edge again, the swirling clouds of mists so tempting, so enticing to her. She knew what she wanted. She knew what she desired more than anything.

And thus, she lifted one leg over the edge of the bridge, pulling herself up to sit on the fragile, thin counter. Her feet dangled like leaves waiting for autumn to snatch them from their branches. She let out a sigh, finally accepting her fate. She closed her eyes, reaching into her memory and replaying her life out like a tape. She drifted away into her memories like a baby falling into a deep slumber.

Yet she noticed something peculiar. Something strangely... consistent.

As a child, she was always so... happy. So cheerful and carefree, with every vein in her body bursting to explore the world, always seen with a pure smile ingrained on her face.

What... happened to me?

...Is this how it ends?

Is this the fate of the girl who once shined so bright?

How could I let her life end like this?

No.

She doesn't deserve this.

She doesn't deserve this fate.

I will not allow it.

No matter what selfish, crude desire I have to rot in this world.

I will live for her.

I will continue on,

Regaining the life I lost.

She gasped, opening her eyes to see her hips scooted too far on the railing. Instantly, she lost her sense of balance and slipped overedge. With sheer grit and determination, she swiftly lifted her right arm to grab herself on the floorboards. Her body dangled with so little strength to hold on. By mistake, she'd peered down, taking in the infinite nothingness that was her inevitable doom. Her breathing staggered. Her heartbeat raced like a bullet train as she felt sweat dripping from her face. Her blood ran cold. Her limbs jittered, gradually losing her grip on the bridge.

She cocked her head up and begged at the man. "Please, please help me get up! I've changed my mind, please sir!"

The man stared blankly at her.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she fearfully sobbed. "Sir, please, please, I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

Her petrified shrieks would've ushered help from almost any other soul. Yet the man stood still, watching the girl cry and cry.

She felt her pinky and ring finger slip off the bridge. Then the index.

Then the middle.

And she fell.

At terrifying speeds, she plummeted down into the deep canyon of mists. Her horror-stricken screeches echoed throughout the walls.

And suddenly, all went blank.

The girl felt the barren, scruffy wood touching her face and hands, her heartbeat and body trembling. Her vision still black, she opened her eyes, met with the sight of a floorboard. She instantly lifted herself up standing on her two feet.

She was still on the bridge.

With her sudden realization, she sighed with complete relief. Her limbs gently ceased shaking with her heart returning to a normal pace. She glanced around her surroundings, looking for the man.

Yet he was nowhere to be seen.

Puzzled, she walked off the bridge to land beyond. No one. She did the opposite on the other side. She squinted, getting a clear look at what was far away.

No one.

She sighed again. "Whatever the hell happened to me, that doesn't matter now," she whispered.

"I'm just glad I'm alive again."

Seashell Necklaces

by Aubrey Bocalan

Laughter mingled with sun,
and the sound of waves crash into me,

hurling me back to those ancient days
picking seashells from sugar-white sands.
When we got home,
we rinsed sand off our feet and out of our hair;
then we sat on the living room floor and
made seashell necklaces.
One by one we began,
to thread tiny beads and fragile shells
across the tangled fishing line of time.

Time that was lost to garage sales and garbage bags.

The waves recede
and the memories wash away.

Here,
now,
I look down and
pick seashells from sugar-white sands.
Maybe, when I get home
and settle into that sleepiness you feel
after being warm for too long,
I will sit down on the living room floor and
make seashell necklaces.

The Ballad of Creation

by Kacie Kline

Above the angels sing
Their wings fluttering in the breeze
Halos shimmering as sweetly
As summer morning birdsong

Arrow: A Short Story

by Caitlin C.

These were the boys I was supposed to kill?

The tracker continues to beep erratically in my hand, confirming the location of my next two targets. My gaze shifts between it and the scene of utter joy that is unfolding a couple blocks away from the rooftop of my nearby apartment as I try to comprehend the situation. The younger child races upon his Lightning McQueen car, his brother pushing him towards an unseen finish line up ahead. The screams of pure delight were audible from my height, the little one calling out, "Faster! Faster!" as the older boy steers his brother through the obstacle course of toys set up around the dirt and grass area. They zip through each object with an abandon and recklessness that would make any real driver swerve in fear. The car tilts dangerously as the front left wheel skirts by a rake, just barely escaping the terrible fate of a flat tire that would put them out of the race, the youngest holding on with a single hand. He let loose another scream of pure delight at the dangerous risk, a fist pumped out in front of him, like a soldier leading his troops to battle. Even though it was a race. And there was no battle...

A slowly increasing group was gathering in clusters around the boys. Through the scope of my sniper I could make out the smiles on some of the observer's faces, wider than the Mississippi, and the scowls of disgust on others. One resident stood out on her balcony from the apartments just opposite of the one I stood on, curlers wrapped tightly in her hair and her make-up only half-applied, shaking her fist at the boys below for disturbing her morning routine with their "childish and rambunctious fancies." *No offense, ma'am, but you might want to lighten up if you plan on ever getting married in the future*, I thought.

I train my scope back on the boys and their onlookers, reminding myself not to get carried away as I had last time. Two bystanders in particular stood in front of the crowd, their eyes beaming with pride as they devour the spectacle. The mother and father of the boys, I assume. The mother was clutching a phone, holding it up to the scene and capturing the memory to be reflected on later.

Or to be forgotten with the rest of the seemingly important moments in life. The intent was clear in her eyes-- she believes, just like everyone else, that by recording it she will be able to enjoy the moment forever, reliving the beauty of the past with every replay. My experience was far different, however; I learned the hard way that recording a moment only made it less memorable than it had been at the time.

Focus on your mission, Benedict.

The boys are still zooming around the obstacle, gravel kicking up in the wake of their path, completely oblivious to the man watching them from the roof two blocks away. My head is spinning as they move, trying to understand. Why had the Administration sent me here? They were just two boys, the oldest hardly reaching eight. They can't possibly be the Class A threat that the Administration fears them to be.

With a grunt I pack up, getting ready to call out their cruel joke of a mission. So what if I'm still green? I've proven time and again that I can handle myself just as much as anyone else the Administration picks up. They will see, I am not going to be insulted by a joke mission they saw fit to hand me to get one more newbie out of their hair. I toss the tracker into my pack with a growl and stand up, turning to the roof entrance. My foot catches when I notice it from the corner of my vision, even from this distance. I sweep around, unable to believe it.

Both of the boys had disappeared. They were there two seconds ago, the older boy still helping his brother across that invisible finish line, towards a phantasmic victory. But the moment I turned my back, they disappeared, no longer racing across the dirt road.

My fingers fumble with the backpack zipper as I hastily pull out my binoculars, pointing them down at the gravel where the boys had been racing. I scan the crowd feverishly, searching for the boys or for a hint as to where they had gone. A minute goes by, my eyes picking through the jumble of people and pets and street and bustle, unable to spot them. A sigh of frustration escapes me, at my lack of conviction. I should have known better than to question the Administration, than to even think that a mission could have been a joke. If I had stuck to it and not allowed myself to get caught up in my hasty and misguided conclusions, I would know where they had gone. But, as usual, I screwed it up again.

Wait. Something isn't right, my mind warns me, urging me to inspect the crowd again. I put my eyes up to the binoculars again, focusing the lenses. No one seems to notice a thing. The people who had just been admiring the boys' child-like imagination are milling about now, scattering in all different directions they weren't heading in before. Even the woman on the balcony had moved on, a dazed expression on her face as she realizes that she is on her balcony and not at her vanity applying more make-up and perfecting her hair to just the right amount of bounce.

Just minutes ago these people had been watching the same thing, albeit with differing opinions on the situation. Now they were moving on with their days, as if nothing strange had happened at all. If I didn't know any better, I'd say they were acting as if the boys had never been there at all. My eyes strain, goggling at the area through the binoculars, my mind dumbfounded at how this could be. All of the toys and objects the boys had been using as obstacles are gone. Even the dirt tracks the tires had made were magically wiped away, the flattened grass standing straight up as if no one had trampled it in the first place.

Did no one else see this? Maybe this mission wasn't a joke after all. Something else was going on here.

"Look, Enok," a small but resounding voice says, sending a chill down my spine. "They sent another hitman to kill us."

I whirl around, finding myself face-to-face with the two young boys. How had they gotten here? It's at least a ten minute walk from the park to this building, and that isn't including the seven flights of stairs you had to walk up to get to the roof. They hadn't even been gone three minutes. I can't help but stand, appalled.

Now that they are closer, I realize I had been mistaken about their ages. The older must have been at least ten, maybe even eleven. He was leaning casually against the wall of the entrance to the roof, his dark skin popping against the dull light grey paint chipping away from the edges, faded from

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overexposure to the sun. His short, frizzy hair stuck out in places; combined with his startling and sharp stare, I could have mistaken him for a mad scientist stuck in a kid's body. He's wearing a perfectly ironed and pressed black shirt, completely different from the rumpled and dust-coated, striped lime green I had seen him in minutes ago. Sitting on the hard surface next to him, the younger brother is playing with a smaller version of the Lightning McQueen car he had just been racing on. In his other hand is a blue Dinoco car to match. He's dragging them both across the ground, the scraping of the tires echoing off of the taller surrounding buildings. I notice that he had made a sudden wardrobe change as well, exchanging the vibrant blue t-shirt with a pressed dark blue that matched his brother's. He's maybe seven, but even up close it's hard to guess because of the way he held himself. His actions clearly display the child he is, but his manner and posture hint that he is far less innocent than any other child you see playing with his brother in the park.

Enok didn't look up from the toys as he spoke. "What are we going to do this time?" It wasn't concern that he spoke with, but genuine curiosity. As if this whole situation is a game, and he finds the hitman standing with a sniper at his disposal amusing.

The older kid tilts his head, staring at me intensely. It was subtle, but there was a tint of curiosity to his scrutiny, a question behind his eyes. A different question from the one his brother asked, I can tell.

Instead of answering he nods in my direction, his eyes on the sniper slung over my back. "Your sniper was never loaded. You weren't going to shoot," he states.

How he knew that was a mystery to me. How did he even know that I had been up here, two blocks away, in the first place? I didn't know how to respond to that, so I didn't. Instead, I'm planning ways to find out more information without the kid noticing.

The kid pushes himself off of the wall, stepping closer. He crosses his arms in a threatening manner, shifting into a wide-but-prepared-for-danger stance. If it wasn't for the fact that he stood six inches shorter than me, I might have been intimidated by him. I'm wary, though, keeping a careful eye on every move they make. Clearly, they're dangerous enough to be on the Administration's list; I wasn't exactly planning on recklessly throwing myself to this kid and testing out their standards. I'm less concerned about Enok, however: he's too focused on his toys to do any harm.

"Who sent you?" the older kid deadpans. I still don't know his name.

We can't give you any names-- they seem to change every time. They're sneaky. We can only give you the tracker. Everything else is on you.

So they'd given this mission to people before me, I remembered thinking at the time. That either meant that no one had solved it, or it was a ritual joke. I might prefer it if it was a joke, I think now, teetering on the edge of a stand-off with these kids.

"I think you know who sent me," I reply cautiously, shifting the strap of my backpack on my shoulder nervously. The weight of the backpack is uneven, gravity dragging it backwards and down more than usual, and I realize that the top zipper was still open. I had forgotten to close it in my haste to locate the boys. Now they can see everything inside, if they just shift to the left slightly. Sloppy.

"Hm, you're right," he states, his eyes never leaving me as he walks around. "I guess they do have some distinctive patterns. They always send them with the same sniper. The same outdated tracker."

Now he's starting to creep me out. Distinctive patterns? Outdated tracker? What is that supposed to mean?

"Arrow?" Enok pipes up. He's stopped playing with his toys, wide and curious eyes watching us from his spot by the door.

I see it now, the small arrow tattooed on his left hand. Why did a ten- or eleven-year-old kid have a tattoo on his hand? What kind of mission did the Administration send me on?

"Alright, Enok," he says after a pause. "Let's go." Enok practically jumps up from his spot, bursting with the adrenaline from the imaginary race that is still coursing through his veins. The older kid-- Arrow?-- walks past the door to the roof entrance, heading to the other side. Enok eagerly trails behind, his cars magically turning into planes in his hands. He holds them high above his head, whispering soft *woosh* sounds as he pilots them on a journey somewhere unknown to everyone but him.

"Where are your parents?" I blurt before I can think better of it. Of all the questions in my head, that was probably the most irrelevant one I could have asked.

Arrow gives a small chuckle. "If you were the real Benedict, you would know."

My breath hitches and my foot takes a stunned step backwards, knocking against the ledge of the roof. My mind hardly seems to notice, entirely focused on Arrow instead. *What had he just said?*

"I-I am Benedict," I stutter.

He shakes his head, turning back to face me this time. "Go back to your Administration and tell them to try again." Fire blazes behind his eyes, barely contained as it seeps into his words.

Two kids. Two not normal kids who can somehow transport in mysterious ways and make people act like they had never been there in the first place. An arrow tattoo.

No, *the Arrow*. I stumble, almost falling as everything comes back to me. The memories flood inside my head, scenes rushing past faster than I can grasp them, but I know what they all are. I recognize every single one of them, recognize the pain and the sorrow and the heartache. The joy and laughter of a friend group tighter than family, the connections I had thought I would never experience.

The tender smile of Avery's face, Eamon's smooth words and not-so-smooth flirting. Levon, not as the small boy playing with cars and planes, but as the young man he had been before, the fierce yet silent leader of the group. The missions he had led, but more importantly, the missions he had walked alongside as a friend.

But then that meant...

"Eero?"

They came faster than I could catch them this time, flying by until a single memory emerged to the front of my mind. Everything else clears out as it begins to play before my eyes. My friend, my *best* friend, sprinting alongside me into the midst of fire and iron. Sparks flew everywhere, smoke clogging the air, the sun unable to penetrate it. Complete darkness overwhelmed the valley, but it hadn't been the darkest cloud present. We had run in blind, not knowing where they were or how to get to them without dying first. Eamon cried behind us, still pleading that we stay, that we would get ourselves killed, that it was too late to help.

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"It's never too late to help," I had shouted back, taking the handgun from Eero's outstretched hand. The image of Avery's resigned terror burned into my mind.

The picture was crisp in my mind, as if it was playing out in front of me in real time. We had plunged through the central cloud, entering the battlefield encased in the darkness of air and devastation. They were going at each other, striking lightning and energy for earth and metal, a battle between raging betrayal and desperate hope. We all knew it was a losing fight-- we had known from the dawn of its arrival-- but we had had no other choice. To fight for what was right, or to die trying.

We had all hoped the latter was not to be our fates.

Lacey screamed from the midst of the battle, had let loose another quake from the earth. I stumbled under the wave of earth as it had come crashing towards us, tumbling into a pit of debris and piling ash. I could practically taste the acrid ash from that day. Eero doubled back, shoving a hand out and pulling me up again.

We had almost been there. We had almost gotten to Darius, almost pulled him out from the midst of the chaos. We had almost saved Lacey, rescuing her from a fight she didn't have the heart to continue. Almost planted the final strike, just enough distraction to escape, to get to safety.

We had almost succeeded.

"They're not dead, Benedict," Eero whispers. The memory fades, reality pulling me back to the present.

He's standing in front of me now, one hand on my shoulder. He's so short he has to stand on his tip-toes to be able to reach, but he doesn't seem to mind. Enok-- no, Levon-- is just behind him, a small smile on his face.

"How?" I ask, unable to believe it. I had seen them die. We had suffered together, helpless to do anything but to be with them when they drifted away. The pain wells up, fresh in my mind. A single hot tear runs unwelcome down my cheek, sending another wave of anguish.

"It's about time you came back home to your buddies."

Levon slips his hand into mine, Eero's hand still resting comfortably on my shoulder. With a final breath, I'm whisked away.

I know now why they sent me.

And I'm going to be the first to succeed.

Where the Poppies Grow

by Sophie Deerberg

A dark, deep silence wraps around the oak
Night's black wing covers it like a cloak.
The starlight and moonshine beat down below
To light the place where the poppies grow.

Now their blood red petals fall to the ground,
Dipping and slipping without a sound
Curving and bleeding like crimson lips,
The poppy-field blooms in the quiet eclipse.

Now the seeds collect in piles in the grass
As dawn slips across the sky like a glass
Wilting, dying, drying up and crying,
The fresh breeze of morning kills off the last.

Now the poppyseeds grow in the field
Waiting and rooting, refusing to yield,
And when the glow of the pale moon falls down low
The poppyseeds begin, again, to grow.

The Light at My Disposal

by Mei Gordon Washington

I plod around the perimeter of the darkened subway car, feeling my leg skim along the line of vacant plastic seats and noticing the faint, wavering red warning lights reflecting onto the metal frame of our enclosure. In vain I attempt to ignore the incessant pounding noises produced by the erratic creature with whom I have been imprisoned. Her eyes- as I can only imagine from the sounds of her relentless shufflings- are wild, manic with inscrutable fear and inexplicable panic.

Yet another round of frantic thumping resonates from the darkness of the car's opposite extremity. The windows rattle against their worn frames and with each successive thump-rattle, thump-rattle, thump-rattle, my impatience boils more intensely in my throat. Almost before I can register that it has, profuse expression of my anger and pent up exasperation spew from my mouth in a series of scathing tongue lashes. My racing lips expel spit as I bark, "Stop it! Get a hold of yourself!" The hairs on the nape of my neck prickle in irritation and my voice seethes with injurious intent, "Hysteria has never been known to remedy a power outage before, and you don't exactly seem to me like the type to set a precedent. There is nobody around to hear your screeching, and even if that weren't the case, I can guarantee you that there is nobody available who cares! Give up already, your exertion is futile."

Immediately alarmed by my own brutality, I frantically try to reel my hurtful words back into the gaping red cave of their conception, but as expected, they are withdrawn to no avail. I am overcome with gratitude that there is not enough ambient light for me to discern the expression- surely one that is wounded and contorted with mortification- on my company's face. But then again, I can't normally trust my own appraisal of others, regardless of the amount of light at my disposal.

I hear and can vaguely witness the pitiful figure standing across from me, smearing dry her face, which is now taut from weeping, with the expansive sleeve of her thickly knit sweater, a sweater adorned with exaggerated bows that bring the balloon-like sleeves to a taper around her thin wrists. I recognize the egregious design from the day in that waiting room when someone else's much larger arm had allowed the tie's scratchy tendrils to pour over into my seat and agitate my vulnerable elbow. The sound of my present adversary's shifting to regain composure snaps me from my recollections. Beginning feebly, her speech quivers with emotion, her tone oscillating as she fights to suppress the tears that threaten to flow again, "How could you be so callous towards someone during a time like this?"

After a moment of only the sound of her tremulous breath disturbing the void of still air suspended between us, she continues more steadily, her intonation now flushed with indignation and offense, "What you call a meager 'power outage', I call a 'we're stranded in a blackened subway car without any water, any food, any means of communication- or compassionate company, apparently- and with no sense of where we are or how to escape'."

Even after the last traces of her words dissipate, I find myself mute. My cheeks grow hot under her interrogative glare, one that I am in no position currently to witness modelled on her face, but a look that I have emblazoned for eternity in my memories and consciousness from a lifetime of familiarity. Her expectation for a rebuttal is so potent that it needs no exchange of easily fumbled words or of frequently misinterpreted facial expressions to convey.

"I don't know what to do." I admit lamely, "The truth of the matter is, I am incapable of feeling the acute emotions that you are so overcome by during this moment of, what I do recognize as, most grievous circumstances." I can tell that my response is not found satisfactory by her, absent as it is of the reconciliation that she had haughtily sought. Diverting my gaze from her blurry shadowy figure, I am drawn to my shoelaces, just barely illuminated by the warning signal's red glow, satisfied to find that their tails remain as neat as I had arranged them this morning.

my attention deficit

by Juliana Smith-Etienne

the bell rings.
 i sit down.
 rolling a pencil between the pads of my fingers, i cross my ankles.
 rolling.
 rolling fields.
 rolling fields of interwoven images in my head-
 galaxies of budding ideas, battling for dominion over one another
 the pencil rolling from my fingertips onto my empty notebook page
 completely devoid of content
 i meander through the thoughts in the rolling fields in my head, plucking petals off the ones that
 catch my attention.
 sometimes they're vibrant, beautiful orchids. the morning dew glitters as it traces the
 indentations;
 connotations in their stems.
 other times, the flowers are moody- doleful, even. and yet somehow, i find myself pinching at the
 stalks of the fronds, clawing at the leaves
 of the melancholy trees of my psyche.
 the trees sway silently
 beyond the murky window.
 they observe my quiet figure in the back of the classroom.
 they lean towards me. i fidget with the corner of my paper.
 i sink.
 just as gently and gracefully as a rusty anchor,
 i collide with the inundated sand.
 i feel the sensation of the grains tumbling into my ears. they skid into the crevices of my face,
 caress my skin with gentle grazes
 i can faintly hear muffled voices from above,
 but they are not nearly enough to tug me to the surface.
 my limbs cradled by the pillowy ocean floor,
 i lie waiting for a tether into clarity that will never come.
 the water etches its smooth hands into and around my lungs.
 it gives a reassuring squeeze.
 the bell rings.
 i remain.

Ganesh

by Stefanie Brijmohan

1. What do I want to be, what am I yearning for?
2. I am so young, so determined, but don't have the consistency to push me forward
3. Ganesh, I look up to you
4. My parents put it in my head that you will lead me to success
5. Saving lives is my passion, my dream, I yearn for
6. Push me to my limits, tell me more that I can do
7. Ganesh, I look up to you
8. God of blessings, good luck is rooted in your soul
9. Like an elephant you are full of wisdom, you remove my obstacles
10. Make me work for it, test me, push me to my break
11. To see how hard I will work to achieve it, make me understand the value of life
12. In my bedroom, alone, for hours, I think "what change" will I make
13. I look up to you to show me what I must take to become great
14. Mind full of wonders and confusions, show me my true traits and path of ambition
15. I know what it must take, I know it will be worth it
16. Yet I am so afraid to see the pain and the hardships that will guide me that way
17. Ganesh, show me the way

Captured by Paint

by Diana Rivera

Incandescence enters the window shining upon the grime of bygone flower sheets.
The aroma of old newspaper and ginger is enclosed in this time capsule.
Lord's day was always the pinnacle for a styled suit and fresh sweets;
calcium needing bones dress in clear morning clothes, they complement the wrinkles.

White button-up shirt, cream-colored set, star-studded dress shoes; he's going to impress.
Milky locks combed back with the same oil that has been around for centuries;
cologne so potent that it makes his ripe skin smooth without excess.
The glassy creak of the wooden floor and the tap of the cane bring back memories.

Debris is covering his ancient face from the golden creature; wind hit cold like those days.
Down historic streets to the café, the sky is her second form outside the cage...
Lass with flaxen hair, indigo eyes, and a pale dress is portrayed by rays;
the scent of sugar and freshness travels by each small store and gets better with age.

Doll sitting on a country porch with a sundress and a plate of biscuits on her side.
Bell rings as a crystal bubble gives way to the warmth of a mother's kitchen.
Laughter crosses both lines; boy and girl running with a smile so wide...
Bin filled with goodness by equal works of artistry, topped with a tragic vermilion ribbon.

Stained beam walking, sound of water and steps surround the second stop of love.
Cold stream under the orange tree that had a swing made of barn string;
tingles of citrus and a splashing dance when feet touch with a shove.
Queen of the fruit bearing flowers, that alluring moment was captured by a blank king.

Elegance of time in every drop of aqua from a woman that holds a pot like a child.
People cheer as he holds one of the gifts kindly, a mare is worth flowers.
Third stop to get to his lovely stagnant beauty smells of the wild;
owned by the soul that knows the truth and the weight of the order that never falters.

Camellias, baby's breath, and bouvardias wait for him at a wooden table with red bows.
Cheeks flutter a blush when he remembers the play along ceremony with these;
fifty decades ago, love was under a tree, toys watched as they said their vows.
Young lips pecked with friendly disgust; crumbs on their hands were shattered into pieces.

Keeper of adoration watches from afar as the old man left leaves under a brown pot.
Similar mind's eye gaze at the washed figure consumed by undying loyalty;
in love with a tied-down angel that its wings have been left to rot.
Man of chained legs walks with two gifts in his hands; both represent eternal slavery.

The music of knowledge is heard by silence; he always arrives at the perfect tick.
Mansion of stories which intuited hearts dreamed of by each coin in a jar.
Stomachs on fall floors passed pages to get something of a peak;
ivory steps have made little clouds puff out, but that means that his love isn't far.

Marble floors and things that were created by godly entities are put to shame next to her.
The crisp cold preserves the waste while he with smiling riches and time.
Woman with a glass shield has always been kind to let him in there.
Young intuition says he visits a dove on the same day; in his mind he sees one more sublime.

Slowly inwards, the memories and affection crash with so much force that tears fall.
Last day of fall when the deer were hunted, they sat under the tree of fate.
History holders on the grass and backs to the world; a shot was a call.
Cries were canceled out like a painter who's slashing the last drops of paint on a slate...

Long wooden bench and golden frame; sat down with heaviness while he shook.
Heaven's morning fell down in crystals as lost eyes looked for a response.
Sobbing his soul; to him loveliness has never been so nuke.
Wet earth was walked upon as strong men held her; he was too young to serve.

Cloudy vision had the courage to look up, coins they gathered were used for one;
man that saw the halls with passion now has slowly died of old bonds.
The first second he saw her bosom his desires were erased, gone.
Girl as gorgeous as the sky laid down in a field of ground kissing orange blossoms...

An old man's faithfulness was stolen by an innocent kiss; his story is worth salt.
In front of her he always says the same thing: "If you could age with me..."
Human of an armoured marrow tied by a velvet sting with no fault;
flowers, cookies, and fervor for a painted woman that's secret lover will never be free.

The Whispering Woods

by Aiyannah Batton

Curious blue eyes shifted over to the dark, enchanted forest. Various sounds seemed to erupt from the wooden terrors that were often talked about.

Despite being reminded to stay out of the woods after the sun sets, the woman found herself growing more and more enraptured by the darkened forest. She would wonder about the anomalies that lurked within the murky green waters and the evergreen trees.

As time crept by, the woman found herself stepping towards the forests. With each step taken, the sound of her smaller feet hitting the ground would sound off, her wavy black locks would bounce with the force as well. The sounds of creaking timber would alarm her every so often, but still, she continued to journey towards the forest. The sounds of screaming oak seemed to continue, her body getting closer to the forest. The woman could practically feel the blank stares of the forest follow her every movement.

Her heartbeat was seeming to increase with each step she took. She knew she shouldn't be enticed by the calls of the forest, but here she was.

The closer she stepped, she would have to take a second to gulp down the ball of nerves that erupted from the pits of her stomach and threatened to escape from her chapped lips.

Soon, the darkness had seemed to call out to her, whispering out her name.

"Maragret." The forest would call.

The callings started off soft, resembling an angel who you would hope loomed over your bed while you slept the night away, praying your night terrors wouldn't get a grip on your foot. But as she got closer to the woodland, the whispering had turned to be more aggressive, much louder than before. The volume continued to increase until she was being yelled at.

"Maragret!"

Of course this startled the young woman, those blue eyes now wide, filled with alarm and dismay. Those deep blue pools snapped from the boring, grey walls to the woman who sat in front of her. She wore glasses which were trimmed with a fine silver. Her eyes radiated with disappointment which easily stirred within her dark brown orbs. She had fair skin, a pointed nose, a slim mouth, and a beauty mark that was on the left side of her chin. To put it simply, this woman was beautiful which intimidated poor Maragret in the beginning.

"Obviously you are not interested in the offers I am presenting you, so I think it would be best if I presented you with one the both of us know that is best for you." With that, the woman's eyes casted back onto the pile of papers she had in front of her. Her hand raised. The black pen that she was holding was now pointing towards the perfectly ordinary door that was certain to lead Maragret to her greatest enemy, her own mind.

Thunder

by Snow Rose

It's a sound of nature
 Ever so beautiful
 It can bring tears to one
 But a smile to another.
 The sound of it rattles your bones
 The result of light slashing through the sky
 Both reaction and product are very beautiful
 Like nothing else in the world
 Earth's beauty comes not from man-made items
 But from the nature Mother produces.

Silent Observer

by Marie Kinderman

Abandoned

outcast

alone

ringing ears

limbs
numb
and

exposed

drops of fresh
salty
tears **that**
melt
like December's first snow

trapped in a
deep
Hollowness

in **this** **large**

Expanse

A choking heart
A silent moan

Nostalgic for
days without

deep
deep
regret

restless fright
looms
a swaying lamp

searching for
an *INVISIBLE* place
to hide

These feelings
are sadly
familiar

as

footsteps disappear out the door

a muffled recreation
of

silent

snow

it remains
unmended
escalated

my spirit *CHANTS* but
flusters
and

fails

...

Silence is what
haunts
and lulls the innocent
to sleep

gaunt and overslept
scheming
and dragging

behind

no emotions
left to feel

an unclenched fist
Dry tears

Stillness stirs
the unkempt
tangle of rattling

Bones

c-----scshattering teeth

and
everything
disappears down
into the bottomless well

.
. .
. .

The beating
Flesh
Has nothing left to give

Escalating sobs
bring

disgust
worry
unforgiveness

The limp being i see is everything but
who I know
I love

The day passes in a blur

Unorganized
Thoughts
A growing

Heaviness

In

my throat

A boulder
Growing as it
picks
up
speed

My eyes well
with bittersweet
puddles
Because my life
remains
broken

broken

b r o

k

e

n

I run through t

h

e

m

blind

whilst

everything rains down
around me

and muddles
the chaos
in my brain

Weeks often
end
and begin
with a

T

□

R n, BROKEN

heart

Trying to cover up

what lingers and settles
because what is done

CANNOT
be
UNDONE

Hate cannot
BE ERASED

The plates were set

for a little celebration

The guest is
gone

silence
thick as smog
running
through

Sand

a screaming
shrieking

painful

v o i c e

AAAAAAAAAAAA

AAAAAAAAAAHH

HHHHHHH

MY VOICE
MY TEARS
MY LIFELESS
SELF
LIMP
LIKE A RAGDOLL

■ ■ ■

I am
drowning

in sadness

moaning
in pain

and singing
a tune
long
forgotten

my life will never
be the same

I have lived through
Pain
Trauma
Unforgettable
Intense
Sadness

I may be damaged
but what has damaged
me
has
made me

STRONGER

* * *

Struggles are
universal

They are real
and **consuming**

I have struggles of my own.

Don't think you can't be
vulnerable
and show you are
STRUGGLING

The Taste of Life

by Nurefsan Zeynep Kurt

One day, John, a smart, hardworking student who became a teacher, wanted to visit his sincere lecturer from his university years. He hasn't seen him for nearly several decades. However, he still had contact with his lovely, dearest teacher through warm-hearted letters and special-days postcards. This was a big day for John. He was going to see his teacher Mr. Jack.

When John arrived to where Jack stayed, he anxiously but at the same time enthusiastically rang the doorbell, he could jump to the moon with that happiness! Mr. Jack opened his front door carefully. When he saw John, he got a big smile on his face. They hugged and asked each other how life was going. "Wow", thought John, "I really missed him." Mr. Jack invited his precious student inside the house. He made coffee for John and himself. They sat on the couch with the warm coffee cups on their hands, both of them got a sip of the coffee at the same time. Mr. Jack said "Coffee is good in these cold, winter days" and continued "but what is most important is drinking a cup of coffee with the loved ones. That's when they have a taste." John chuckled and agreed to what his teacher said. Teachers are teachers forever, they teach in every opportunity they can.

Superman

by Rena Cohen

I will never be enough
So don't try to convince me that
I am superman

They say,

"I can move mountains"
But that's impossible because
Those mountains moved on their own

And it's a known fact that

Our world,
Entrenched in
Greediness and lies,
Superficials and "I"s
Engulf
Serenity and happiness
Truth and kindness

So forever believe
I am worthless
And never say that
I'm more than the surface.

(now read from bottom-up)

Silence is Telling

by Mollie Grinberg

A young woman shuffles into my office; her gaze is fixed upon the floor. I wait for her to meet my gaze, but she never looks up. Her face is hidden by a mass of long brown hair which is nicely kept. The silence is deafening- if I want this to go anywhere I have to address her first.

"Miss?" I inquire sharply. Her head darts up slightly, her eyes now visible. I can see her grey pupils vibrating. Her shoulders become tense. Why is she so nervous? She was the one who wanted this job in the first place. I can't keep waiting. I have very important business to attend to. I usually never conduct interviews, since I am a busy CEO, but this is the one time I decided to scout out the vagrants looking to gain wealth and status through employment in my company. This interview is not off to a particularly great start.

"Miss, are you here for the job offer?"

She nods so slightly I almost miss it. This is going nowhere. This company is the most valued in the world! People would kill for this opportunity, and here is this timid girl, completely wasting it. Very few receive the opportunity to work here, nonetheless interview with me. How can I converse with someone who won't speak? More importantly, how am I meant to offer a position to someone this cowardly?

"Listen. If you want this job, you have to use your VOICE. Move your lips. If I don't hear a word out of you in the next thirty seconds, this interview is finished."

She grabs a piece of paper and a pen off my desk and begins to write. This is becoming quite irritating. Under what circumstances did this girl even get past the selection stage? She can barely hold her own. Her silence and mannerisms are already very telling of her qualifications. This interview is finished.

"I have important business to attend to. My time cannot be wasted. Remove yourself from my office. Now. Your lack of speech proves to me that you're unfit for this position. Don't come back here again."

She suddenly picks her head up and looks at me. Her long brown hair flies behind her, allowing me to see her face. Tears well up in her eyes, her hands tremble as she holds the pen and paper, and, to my surprise, her face is full of beautiful, sophisticated features. She drops the pen and paper back onto my desk and scurries out of the room, gently closing the door behind her. This failure is of her own doing, so why is she so distressed? I should be fuming because of how much of my time she just wasted! Who knows what might've been crashing and burning behind the scenes while I was doing this nonsense?

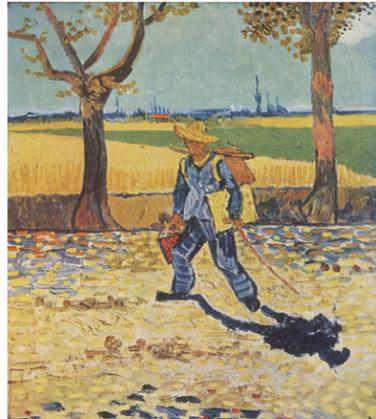
Before I leave my office, I glance at the paper on my desk- the one she placed there before exiting. There's something written on it. I decide to pick it up to take a closer look at it; what pitiful excuse did this girl leave for me? In shaky handwriting, only six words are written, "I am mute. Please forgive me."

The paper fell out of my hand and slowly fluttered towards the floor.

Loosely based on “The Painter on His Way to Work” by Van Gogh

by Vanesa Cardenas G.

Solemn solitude
 plagues myself.
 I -myself-
 plague the earth I walk on.
 Smooth cobblestone trips me up
 and the sweat which forms above
 my brow threatens to drip
 from my scalp, through my hair, to my eyes, into my mouth,
 down my chin and onto my shirt.
 [The scalp under my hat
 that does not provide shade to me,
 the hair that started to thin
 when I left my mother and father,
 the eyes that no longer shine
 as bright as they did when I cried salty tears
 (like the sweat)
 after I made my way to a better life.
 The mouth that learned to
 shut up,
 be quiet,
 and speak broken English
 only when spoken to.
 The chin that crinkles harshly with contempt and failed rebellion,
 for life is often unfair to those who seek to better their own,
 and the shirt that is too, too small,
 aged through walks in the sweltering sun like these.]
 Legs that used to kick ragged and worn down
 soccer balls fiercely now creak with age and fatigue on my walk to work.
 I wouldn't wish this upon my worst enemy.
 Such is life.
 But a smile blooms from my silent, silent mouth
 as I remember my family at home
 [mis estrellas, mi alma, and mis chamacos]
 and now,
 I'm content to walk my tired feet
 and glide on smooth cobblestone.



Invisible

by Frieda Sutton

Have you ever wanted to be invisible
 Unseen and unheard,
 Many think it would be great fun
 Messing around with no consequence.
 Did you ever think beyond that?
 Imagine you're going out
 You're dressed and ready;
 You turn to ask how you look,
 Why does it matter they say
 No one can see you anyways;
 Unseen, unheard, invisible.

But there's no way that could happen
 You can't just suddenly disappear,
 Yet when you're standing in a crowded room
 And no one comes to say hi
 Or even give you a smile.
 It's like you're standing there invisible
 You may actually be there,
 But no one cares
 To them you are invisible
 Unseen and unheard.

They don't care who you are
 Or who you strive to be,
 To them you're invisible
 And that's all they need
 To pick on a prey that no one can see
 To rip and tear them apart;
 With no care in the world.
 They don't care if you get hurt
 They'll cut you and push you down,
 Because no one can see a pool
 Of invisible blood.
 Unseen, unheard, invisible.

Maybe it's best I stay this way
 Invisible to all
 And silent in a crowd.
 Besides who would
 Listen to a voice
 That can not be found.
 Invisible, I will always be
 Invisible that is me
 In-vis-i-ble

John's Revenge

by Sophia Zhu

"Are you seriously telling me you haven't been near an oven in twelve years? Why did you apply to work at my bakery, then?" John spat out angrily. The interviews for the job had only gone downhill as the day went on.

"I applied to get some experience in the kitchen. My therapist said it would be good for me to override my trauma!" Hansel cried out.

"Trauma?" the interviewer asked bemusedly, cocking his head to the side in confusion. "What happened?"

"My sister pushed a witch into an oven to save my life when we were kids! The witch was about to eat me, and it was all very traumatic," Hansel said, nodding sagely. "That's why I haven't been able to get near an oven ever since."

John looked stunned, but his face quickly morphed into anger. "A witch?" John scoffed. "That's just about the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard!"

Hansel gritted his teeth. He loved to tell the pity story about the witch who had planned to eat him as a child. Of course, it hadn't actually traumatized him. He only said so to garner sympathy from others. "It's true," he insisted.

John was silent for a moment. "Come here, Hansel." He stood up, sliding the creaky wooden chair slowly with an ominous creak.

Hansel stood up with him, looking apprehensively at John. "Where are you taking me?"

John didn't respond; he merely gestured impatiently for Hansel to follow him into a large room with a massive oven.

"What are you doing, Mr. Graves?"

"This," snarled John. He spun around, grabbing Hansel by the lapel of his coat. John yanked open the door of the oven and shoved Hansel in, quickly slamming the door and locking it.

Hansel pounded desperately on the oven doors. "Let me out!" His shout was muffled from inside the oven.

"Why would I?" John raised an eyebrow. "After all, you even admitted that you killed my mother."

John Graves set the temperature to 500 degrees and twisted the dial to bake for three hours.

Reality

by Anonymous

Don't tell me to get my head out of the clouds
When dreams are the seed to reality
Don't ever let others put you down
That's the proper mentality

Pythagoras wasn't born a genius
As a baby he couldn't count to ten
If he could become a famous mathematician
You can also do anything then

There will always be obstacles
To stop you from achieving your goals
But don't let them get in your way
Make sure that they pay their tolls

At the end of any dark time
There will always be a light
You are never all alone
Even when things aren't bright

Phoenix

by Ella Zare

Ash wrings her hands, breathing deeply as she peeks around the heavy velvet curtains. Her hands roam the fabric, thick with wealth. She pushes back loose strands of auburn hair to get a better view. The girl at center stage is taller than Ash is, with richer skin and dark brown hair to match it. The girl bows her head to the judges and takes one deep breath before raising her hands. In an instant, fire sprouts from her palms, surrounding her in a tornado of reds and oranges, and even a few wisps of blue. The flames reflect on the metal of the swords on the table beside the judges. Ash ducks her head away as someone tugs at the hem of her dress.

"Careful, Azarine," says a scrawny boy behind her, wearing a smirk. Ash snatches her dress out of his hands. She hates that name; she hates it even more coming off his lips.

Ash crosses her arms, huffing as she spins back to face the stage. The girl had extinguished the flame and was bowing to the judges, met by applause. There's no doubt the Academy would admit her.

"Azarine Ash," calls one of the judges. Ash takes a last deep breath and places her steps carefully one in front of the other until she is in the center of the stage. "State your age and position."

"Fourteen, sir. I try for the army," she says, forcing a confidence into her words that opposes the knot in her stomach. All three judges raise their eyes to examine the dirty, skinny girl in a rag of a dress. A weak teenage girl can't fight soldiers of the Griper army. Surely, they think this a joke. Everyone else does.

"Proceed," the head judge says finally, reluctantly.

Ash tries to ignore the laughing boys behind the curtain. She bows her head and holds out her hand. One of the blades on the table beside the judges flies toward her, landing with a smack on her palm. She adjusts her grip and closes her eyes. A flame springs up on the steel, dancing along the edge. She slashes it through the air, eyeing the two approaching figures at her sides. Her feet move of their own accord, slipping around the figures like a shadow, just out of reach. The first soldier falls in a matter of seconds, tripping over his own feet to avoid the flaming sword. The heat brushes her shoulder, but Ash doesn't feel a thing. For once, the sweat is welcome. For once, her hands do not shake.

The second soldier approaches fast, more calculating than the first. He wears the proud insignia of the Griper army; two crossing torches topped by red flames that Ash hopes one day to bear.

Her breaths come in quick spurts as her sword collides with his in a spray of sparks. The clash of metal against metal reverberates around the hall. Expertly, she drags her sword upward and throws the tip of his blade away from her face. She thrusts the blade at him, but he deflects it easily, launching into another attack an instant later. Ash knows these moves; she's practiced them a thousand times. But all of a sudden it's as if something snaps in her mind and everything becomes heightened. The burning muscles keeping the soldier's sword from leaking blood that she cannot spare, the heat swirling around her hands, the judges scribbling notes on their forms. And the snickering coming from behind the curtain. One sick reminder after another of how she doesn't belong in this world. Ash's eyes widen as the soldier presses her down and the flame on her blade flickers out. The sword rips from her sweaty hands and clatters against the polished floor. The soldier holds out the tip of his blade to her throat until the judges call him off. The boys' laughter fills the hall.

"Thank you for that... entertaining show," says one of the judges. "I'm afraid we are in need of more experienced soldiers at this time."

"Please!" Ash pleads. She knows she looks pitiful on her knees and sweating on the ground. Her dress is too tight, her braid too loose, her cloak made of a fabric too cheap. That's her. Always too something.

"Please! I've practiced my whole life. My family--they need this support."

"Then I assume we'll be seeing you again next month." The judge looks back down at his paper, the broken girl on the stage already forgotten. "Destan Iriel!" The scrawny boy saunters out, chest puffed out as he smirks down at her. His unwrinkled red and gold cloak drags gracefully behind him.

Ash gets to her feet and marches off the stage. The girl who created the fire tornado is off to the side, whispering with a girl wearing another of the red and gold cloaks. Ash glares at them, at their cloaks too, clenching her fists to keep them from shaking. From rejection or rage, she doesn't know. But she does know that she doesn't have time to wait for the next month's trials. There is never time to wait when there is a war to fight. No, she can't wait for them to see her worth. She'll just have to show them.

An Interview Gone Wrong

by Rebecca Goldstein

I'm jolted awake by Coldplay's crooning blasting from my phone.
6:30 already?

My alarm always goes off at the same time every day without fail, 6:30 sharp, yet somehow I am always surprised by this daily phenomenon. I take a few moments to brace myself for the day to come before dragging myself out of bed to turn off the incessant racket of Coldplay. I notice an email notification from Elderberry Inc. and shudder.

I don't want to face today

I stumble into the offensively tiny bathroom. I quickly brush my teeth and shave off yesterday's 5 o'clock shadow, making sure all of my stubble goes down the drain; if I don't, my neat-freak of a roommate won't be happy. Sharing my shoebox apartment with Max has led me to have a new take on the old maxim, happy roommate, happy life.

With a last splash of cold water to my face, I force my thoughts back to my morning routine. My feet carry me back to my bedroom and my mind wanders while I shrug on an old hoodie and sweats. I slip on a pair of mismatched socks and make my way to my favorite room in the apartment: the minuscule kitchen.

Both Max and I are coffee addicts, and despite how often we get on each other's nerves, coffee always brings us back together. I am one of the few people Max trusts to make him the perfect cup of joe, and I take that sacred honor as seriously as I take my own coffee experience. I busy myself with the coffee machine and get out the fancy caramel cream Max likes in his coffee. It isn't until I notice how tightly I'm holding the cream carton that I can bring myself to acknowledge the pain and embarrassment of yesterday. I mentally kick myself for what can only be described as what my eight-year-old nephew would call an "epic fail."

I startle out of my self-deprecation when a hand is placed on my shoulder.

"You seem stressed," Max jokes, but I can tell from his tone that there is genuine concern there. Once his words hit me, I know there is no use denying it. "Hey" he continues, "I'm sure whatever happened isn't as bad as you think." I crumble a little at his words, finally letting go of some of the tension that has been with me since the first few chords of "Viva La Vida". He takes the cream from my hand and sets down next to the coffee maker. I release a breath and turn to lean against the counter. Max and I wait in a comfortable silence while the coffee brews.

Max takes out two mugs, one covered in a Starry Night replication and the other with a bad coffee pun on it, his and my favorite mugs respectively. He fills my bad pun mug and hands it to me before beginning his intricate ritual of creating his caramel coffee monstrosity. I close my eyes to take a revitalizing sip of my own coffee.

"Do you want to talk about it? I figured your job interview didn't go as planned when you retreated to your room as soon as you got home taking a box of Cheez-Its and a bottle of dollar store whiskey as company."

Max's attempted humor causes me to smile for the first time since my dreadful interview. I pull out one of our barely-held-together dining chairs and gesture for him to join me. I don't know what to say or how to say it, so I settle on a long sigh followed by a simple, "I messed it up," my voice dripping in defeat.

Max reaches out to once again place a reassuring hand on my shoulder. I usually wouldn't appreciate Max's touchy-feeliness, but today, I readily accept it and even lean into the comforting touch.

"What happened?" Max asks tentatively, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to, of course," he adds hastily.

I take another sigh and try to communicate to him the magnitude of yesterday's failure in as few painless words as possible in an attempt to avoid adding insult to injury. "I was so nervous I honestly don't remember much of what the interviewer and I talked about, but I have the image of her malcontent expression as she opened the door for me to leave burned into my brain."

"Well, if you don't remember it, it might not be that terrible," Max attempts to lift my spirits, "And there are thousands of jobs out there. Any employer would be lucky to have you on their team." Max stands up to collect our empty mugs and places them gently in the sink to be dealt with later.

"Thanks," I mumble.

"No problem, I'll wash them later," he responds without pause, but I know he knows I wasn't only thanking him for taking my mug. "So, what do you want to do today? It's Saturday, and neither of us have anywhere we need to be, unless you have some other friends demanding your presence that I don't know about?" Max says to lighten the mood.

I smirk slightly, "Nope, there's no demanding pack of friends to see today."

"Good. That means you have no excuse for not bingeing the Star Wars movies with me. But only the good ones! The original trilogy!" Max's voice dies out as he marches into his room to dig out his well-loved *Star Wars* DVDs.

While I'm alone, I check my phone for the first time today since I turned off my alarm. I prepare myself before opening my email. The email from Elderberry taunts me from my inbox. I know what it will say: "Thanks for your interest, but we won't be requiring your services at this time", as many of the emails I get these days do. I know that's what it will say, but the optimist buried deep down makes me open it anyway instead of sending it to the great beyond of my trash folder. My eyes scan the text and I let out a yelp and nearly drop my phone.

Max runs out of his room and asks, "Are you ok?"

I slowly look up from my phone and settle my gaze on him. I must look crazy as I struggle to keep my grin from taking over my face and demand he read the email to prove I'm not hallucinating. He carefully takes the phone from my hands, and I observe his face as he scans. After a beat, his head jolts up to look at me and exclaims, "No way! They want you to come back for a second round of interviews! That's amazing!" He puts my phone down on the table and gives me high-five and then a hug. "Now we get to watch *Star Wars* in celebration, which is, in my humble opinion, the best way to watch."

"Nothing can ruin my mood, not even your creepy obsession with Han Solo. Go ahead, turn it on," I say as I quickly type out a friendly yet formal response to the email stating my gratitude and letting the interviewer know I can meet with her at her earliest convenience.

"I'm going to make popcorn for breakfast! We're having a real celebration!" Max declares with a smile on his face. I smile back in approval, and settle in on the couch as the opening credits scroll down the screen.

Bad Poetry

by Alyssa Simone

I really wish I could do something more than write bad poetry.
 I envy those who can grip pens-
 Ideas spilling out of them onto snowy white pages-
 Filling them with inky words,
 Although they always seem to be the right words,
 But me-
 I can never describe the thoughts that live in my mind
 In simple strings of letters one would find in a dictionary.
 I run my fingers against the book,
 Hoping it will save me.
 But if I could write lines with power-
 And trust me, I've tried-
 What would it mean coming from a teenage girl
 Who only pollutes the world?
 Whenever the emotions that hide within the deepest chambers of my heart
 Become too strong to choke back down,
 I just keep writing and writing so I won't have to feel,
 Until there's nothing left to say,
 And this is why when it's two in the morning,
 Instead of getting the sleep that I so desperately need,
 I'm sitting on my rooftop and filling every notebook I own with
 The words that don't know how to keep themselves locked up.
 The longing to fill nothingness with everything overtakes me,
 And pretty soon,
 I'm scribbling words into the margins of math notes with a dull-tipped pencil
 I found on the floor,
 Not even knowing how I'm putting them together, but at the same time,
 Refusing to stop.
 I don't really know what I'm trying to say,
 But then again, I need to say something,
 And if the only way I can do that is through writing bad poetry,
 Then I will not stop until every little voice screaming within my veins
 Knows that what they have to say makes the universe
 Shine a little bit brighter every night.

Possession Story

by Reece Calvin

"Come on, we have been over this. You need to stop hoarding trash." A tear runs down her face but she quickly wipes it away so her husband does not see. She wants to scream but nothing is coming out. It feels like her heart was just ripped out of her chest. "It was just a cheap tarnished ring" he says. She knows he means well but it only causes the pain to cut deeper.

She never wore the ring out, she usually hid it away in her nightstand but every once in a while she takes it out when she is suffering through hardship. Last week she was passed over again for the promotion she knew she all but secured and while she told herself not to get her hopes up again, it still cut her like a knife. She had the ring out to remind her of her mother, as this was the first ring she bought for her growing up. After her mother passed, she never told anyone where the ring was from. To her it was a secret way to connect with her mother. She would sit on her bed after a stressful day and twirl the ring around her finger as she would talk with her mother.

"I can get you a new one if you'd like." She can not hide it anymore, she starts to sob uncontrollably yelling for her husband to leave. She does not know what to do. Even though her mother passed four and a half years ago, it was not until now that she truly felt gone.

Where I'm From

by Myah Crowell

I'm from the memories of family reunions,
 the places I have been,
 from the trace of my Carolina roots
 to my Bostonian footprints.
 I'm from the happy moments
 spent with friends and family,
 days full of laughter
 summer vacations,
 days full of sun,
 reunion days dedicated to fun,
 days full of barbeque and
 homemade lemonade.
 That's where I'm from.
 I'm from the happy times turning pages of the best books,
 to times watching great movies with the ones I love,
 that's where I'm from.
 No matter where I am,
 I'm for being happy among anybody,
 that's where I feel safest.
 That's where I'm from.

Never to be Seen Again

by Jacqueline Gutierrez

I gracefully walked to my bed, quietly shutting the door, staying silent so I heard if someone was following me. I sunk into my cloud-like bed, mentally torturing myself for what I was about to do. I carefully removed my mother's locket that I displayed on my neck, feeling all of the flower patterns that adorned the outside of the pendant. Quickly opening the clasp kept the object that I treasured more than my life, a family portrait. A portrait that exhibited my life before those hell-spawned monsters killed the royal family, *my family*. The same ones that I was now living with, the monsters had taken me in as a pretty face to keep around *their palace*. I recited my promise of taking vengeance, thankfully they didn't know who I was, being just town folk to them. All those years being cooped up in the palace, protecting me from the dark, treacherous, and twisted outside world finally paying off. I gently ran my fingers on the portrait, when a ferocious river of hot tears ran down my icy cold cheeks. I swiftly slammed the locket closed before I could have any second thoughts. Knowing that if those monsters even caught a glimpse of the contents of the locket, I would be dead in a heartbeat. I carefully placed the locket back on my neck, and steadily walked to the balcony taking in the salty, fresh air, remembering when my life was still my own. I looked at how the moon was beautifully reflecting on the dark ocean lighting up the midnight sky, before climbing out the balcony like I've done thousands of times before. The monsters had ironically given me my own room, saying that someone as pretty as me deserved a room of a princess. Once I had made it to the beach, I contemplated whether I should really do this and it was driving me insane. My hands trembled as I removed the locket, not daring to see the portrait again, feeling as if I was being impaled in the heart with a sharp dagger repeatedly. I brought the locket to my cold chapped lips to kiss it goodbye. The moment was short-lived, I briskly flung it into the vast ocean, never to be seen again. A single tear rolled down my face, as I tried to stay composed. I felt a presence approaching me, when the monster wrapped his callous hands around my waist. I quickly patted my tears away.
 "What are you doing outside? I thought you had gone to sleep, sweetheart," a deep voice spoke. I plastered a fake smile when I turned to face him. I gritted my teeth as I spoke, "I had trouble sleeping so I came to the beach and skipped stones," trying my hardest so the lump in my throat wouldn't make my voice sound strange.
 "If you wanted to clear your mind, I would have gladly helped you," he smirked
 "Let's go back to your room and help you with your problem." He spoke disgustingly smoothly. Taking one long deep breath, looking at the ocean one more time, I repeated my vengeance like a mantra in my noggin. I gracefully followed the monster back to *their palace*.

Strawberry Blonde

by Sally Young

Strawberry blonde is
sunsets on the beach,
freckled smiles, sun-kissed cheeks,
and bright pink lips.
It's warm wind that combats the blazing sun.
Waves crash, hearts are alive,
and loud music blares inside cars.

Strawberry blonde is
blankets on the grass,
the bustle of spring trees and bees,
and an endless sky full of clouds.
It's picnics in open fields
with daisies and braided hair.

Strawberry blonde is
the crunch of leaves on autumn trails,
Red, orange, and brown against green grass,
and pumpkins sitting stationary on porches.
It's hayrides and and excitement
mixed with raging adrenaline.

Strawberry blonde is
cherry red noses,
having to squint against the glowing snow,
and abandoned playgrounds in the cold.
It's puffy coats over fancy dresses,
shivering before walking inside.

Strawberry blonde is
hope for a better tomorrow.
It's driving ambition and fierce determination
under a mask of sugar-coated blushing.

Strawberry blonde is
forever.
It's an unending loop of seasons, but it never compromises its warmth.
I am strawberry blonde,
and strawberry blonde is eternal.

Crazy

by Ashton Brophy

As I sit in the cold, hard, metal chair, waiting in silence for the director of this cruel institution to speak, two things become abundantly clear. Number one: I'm not insane. Crazy, possibly. Insane, no. Number two: That fact is precisely why I must fail this interview.

"Andrea?" I glance up, startled at the raspy voice. "I'm Will Higuer, the director for this institution. May I ask you a few questions?"

"No. You may not." Surprisingly, my voice comes out even, clear and cold. I see the delight etched on his face as he studies me. I'm a challenge. He hasn't seen the likes of me in a long time. He thinks he knows me.

He's wrong.

"Come now, Andrea. I'm here to help." Slowly, he laughs. A high, cruel noise, devoid of any joy.

You can tell quite a bit about a person from their laugh.

"Yeah, somehow I doubt that." I stare at my hands, pick at my bloody cuticles. Anything to keep from looking at this man who wishes to take away my youthful freedom.

"I didn't want to do this, Andrea. You've left me no choice."

"There's always a choice."

"This is reality, Andrea." In the distance, somebody screams. An unstoppable chill crawls its way down my spine.

Slowly, I make my way to my feet.

Slowly, I walk to the locked window.

Slowly, I strip off my sweater, revealing the tank top underneath.

Slowly, I wrap my sweater around my right hand, pulling it into a tight fist.

Slowly, though everything in me wants to move quickly.

While Will drones on about what a wonderful institution he runs, about how happy I would be here, I study my surroundings. We are several hundred feet up. A fall from here could kill a person.

Unless you knew how to fall.

Unless you knew how to land.

Unless you had friends waiting with a mattress for you to land on down below.

Unless you were a little bit crazy.

Unless you were someone like me.

"It's been nice talking to you, Will. A real pleasure."

With that I turn, punch the glass with my sweater-protected hand, watch it shattered exactly as my father said it would, swing my legs up to where I am standing on the window sill, turn to face Will, stretch my arms out, lean back, and fall.

Will's face, mouth agape, eyebrows raised, is priceless.

As I fall, I watch flames devour the place I'm falling from.

And I laugh, a joyful, belly laugh, with a hint of crazy.

You can tell quite a bit about a person from their laugh.

An Open Letter to Betrayal

by Amal Bumbia

All I can ask, is why? Why destroy the steel bond of trust between two innocents? Why murder the seeds of love and decimate human connections? Why shatter the fragile purity of memories, crush the shards underfoot with gleeful malice? What are you? Pain? Suffering? Hate? Perhaps purgatory. For who else can shake the very foundation of human nature? Who else can manipulate and motivate while simultaneously decapitating joy? Who else can serve both poison and cure with a single hand? Who else can embody the shell of an angel and soul of a devil, bring promise and malicious hope after wounding a heart beyond repair?

You were spawned from the moment Satan defied God. The unfortunate result of Pandora opening her box of maladies. The reason Ra was banished and Osiris reduced to be nothing but a mere shadow. You contaminate minds. The pain you impose is a thousand cuts slowly bleeding out the souls of those who cared the most. You are the bane of the rest of humanity.

You feel nothing, care about nothing but your ceaseless hunger as you feed off the suffering of others. You are a parasite, leeching all that's good from the world and leaving behind a barren landscape void of life. You create an abyss of chaos, the turmoil shoving your victims down a dark path they never fathomed they would find themselves upon...

So is it not fitting that the very people you ensnare in your grasp... resist? Are we not entitled to exact revenge on you, the one who wronged each and every one of us, the children of the Earth upon whom you have enacted various degrees of injustice?

Maybe it is us who should strive to be better, to forgive your sins and forget. But we both know that is not possible. The only way for humanity to cope with the ever-festering torment you engender is giving you a feel for what it is like. And don't you deserve it? To feel a mere fraction of the pain you have caused? To be betrayed yourself by those you believe to control?

You made Hell on Earth. Now we won't hesitate to bring it back to you. I wonder, how will it feel to have the blade buried to the hilt in your back for a change? What I can tell you with certainty though, is this: I will relish every second you agonize. And you, Betrayal, you're running out of places to hide. We are coming for you.

Pens

by Nadine Lanila

A stroke of a pen can go a long way

Leading me anywhere, though I longed to stay

My dreams are placed in endless amounts of pens' colors

Hoping that someday it'll lead people to wonder "Where did these writings filled with color come from?"

I'm a creative mind from the Bay

Where beautiful colors come from hands of diverse shades

Memories

by Shivani Patel

A glass dome, waiting to bestow upon blissfully eager eyes
The gold that rains atop capped peaks
The gold that settles into every crevice of every rooftop
Reminding me of the magic witnessed

The royal base gently permeates the encapsulating walls
Crafting the very essence of premature innocence
It plays the tune of a heavenly call
A call back to the beginnings

Those good ole' days were filled with cheerful cries
As I wondered whether to get off or stay on the ride
Yet the thrill and the joy overwhelmed the thought of tumbling
A risk too good to surpass

Aren't we all in our amusement parks?
With our own joys
Our own fears
Our own rides

As deviant as it is
We are more than often connected to our roots
To our beginnings, before we knew the world
Even before we knew our own names

Albeit tough to recognize
Life is inherently intertwined

The Brain on the Desk

by Kana Badenoch

Tiny green particles mixed with a chunky, brain-like substance splat onto the manager's shiny desk. The substance begins seeping into the papers, making the skin of the manager's hand sticky. I instantly bring my hand up to cover my mouth, desperately wanting a shield to separate myself from the manager.

"Um, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to vomit. I didn't know I was that nervous... I think I just ate too much ramen this morning," I spit out the words as fast as I can, to somehow salvage the situation. The manager in front of me slowly peels his hands off the desk with his eyes scrunched in disgust. He unclasps his name tag that reads Ken Tanaka. The orange logo of the convenience store on it is splattered with a piece of ramen noodle.

"What kind of ramen did you have?" he asks, sounding like he needs to clear his voice. I look at the manager with puzzlement, wondering if I heard him correctly. I begin to remember the steam coming out of the ramen bowl, topped to perfection with char siu barbecued pork and green onions, calling my name earlier this morning.

"Oh, I had about two portions of..."

"Unbelievable," the manager abruptly cuts me off. "You came here for a job interview to become a cashier with absolutely no experience, and after you vomit all over me, you really want to talk about the type of ramen you ate?" he asks.

I feel sweat bubbling on the back of my neck and I silently beg the leather of the chair to swallow me away. Just as I open my mouth to apologize again, the manager throws his head back and begins laughing in a high tone.

"You're the kind of girl we need in this convenience store, a person who loves food."

"You've got the job, Ms. Ramen," he says, clasping his hands together. The rusty smell of ramen vomit completely forgotten, as he shakes my hand.

Meditations of the Son

by Aileen Xie

He knew it was of no threat to do what he was to do at this hour, as the people of Rome were asleep, domesticated to the governing hand of his own. To commit such blasphemy when the mob was awake was to invite persecution, but both within his luck and his misfortune, there was no one to concern themselves with the activities of Commodus. The gods were in his favor that night. As he walked along the great stone walls to the palace's lowermost chamber, the lines of torches that gave the walls an oversaturated glow reminded Commodus of the same torches his father's soldiers gripped as they rode into battle, coupling with the inflamed arrows they released to provoke the beginning of each victorious crusade. Such resemblances mocked Commodus, reminding him of his inability to become the formidable fighter his father once was. He recalled the first time he saw the way his father honored the army general, an embrace full of a love that Commodus himself could not grasp, could not recognize. Hastily he spat into one of the torches – a venom laced with spite, only for the fire to engulf his spittle like the stake does to its victim.

Resting upon a pedestal lay his father's manuscript, a record that one could hardly call a journal as it was the owner's choice of weaponry, a mode of transportation that carried both realizations and warnings. He had called it Meditations when Commodus was under his rare instruction. To the young emperor, the word meditations was laughable - what kind of a ruler was to meditate, to show weakness and revoke aggression when Rome could only rise alongside a sovereign leader? But what roused his anger most was the page it was left on - his father's four virtues: wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. And what did Commodus have but those four virtues? No, indeed - but, he once foolishly thought, he had other virtues. Ambition. Devotion. Passion. But such suggestions were met with constant reject from the former emperor, a direct disapproval of the son he tried to accept.

And that was when he spotted the sculpture that captured the looming stare of the stoic ruler – Marcus Aurelius. It had the same face of a negligent father, eyes hollow and lips a straight line, a simple expression Commodus was all too familiar with; a listlessness that reeked of disappointment for his mistake of a son.

With a swift retrieval Commodus drew his sword, an action that he desperately trained to perfect in hopes of pleasing the former emperor – but no matter, as father was no longer alive to see it. As he slashed his blade across the serene face carved meticulously from marble, cries of rage and convoluted sorrow intermingling with the hacks of iron hitting stone, one could watch this scene and see a weakly ambivalent ruler murdering a harmless monk. A snake killing a rabbit.

When the deed was done Commodus looked dead center into the ragged eyes of a once unscathed face, the eyes of a man he tried so hard to please, and he began to weep, clutching in his trembling hands the morbidly damaged memory of a virtuous man and a distant father.

At the very moment his first cold tear came in contact with the stone, a drop of poison on delicate skin, the marble statue collapsed and crumbled. Commodus watched in disbelief as the dust flew, wafting away into the harrow of night, becoming stars that punctured the sky, candles of the evening's vigil. Marcus Aurelius was one with the gods. And the son longed to be up there too.

Hope is There

by Shayanne Spell

Darkness looms over us
It brings chaos through confusion and fear
As another hopeless day passes in our world.

Then slowly, as the days pass by
There is a light of hope that raises like the sun at dawn
In the people of this world
And it pushes out the confusion and fear
And brings hope for the future and love for all.

Crowded

by Ronald Pascua

A rush. Rush, *rush, rush* - the definition of a crowd.
A split-second blur, even when you just waltz by.

Two or three?

NO. About hundreds that escalates to thousands that escalates to millions.

Dense enough that gray clouds above would envy.

What You Meant That Day

by Nakylah Gray

He sat there, staring at the words dancing across the thank you card he received on his sixteenth birthday. His chest heaved while he gasped for air, his head replaying the events of that day six years ago. Images of the day he watched his girlfriend die continue to bounce around his consciousness as his lungs beg for air.

The young man's mother watched him through the slightly opened door, peering in and watching her son grip the card in his pale fist. Any other mother would have quickly ended her baby's suffering, but this mother watches her son's skin turn pale.

He stood and opened the window, holding the card out to give it the same fate as its author. The boy stared at it, remembering the words he yelled to her, begging for her to come down so they could talk. She did come down but was not in any position to talk. He dug his nails into the card wondering when she had decided she would follow through with the many threats she would send and why she would smile at him.

Why would she smile at him before walking onto that non-existent platform? He recalled the way her fragile body turned upside down as she fell head-first onto the pavement in front of her apartment complex. The boy pushed his head out the window along with the card, his mouth breathing as much as he could. Just when the color returned to his face, he made the rookie mistake of looking down at the pavement from his own apartment window. He pushed himself out of the window, card in his clammy hands and body shaking violently. For a split second he saw her body there on the pavement, blood rushing from out of the crack of her head. The boy screamed in agony, holding his hands to his ears and shutting his eyes tight, tortured by the young girl's death.

His mother covered her mouth as tears rolled down her cheek, visibly fighting against herself to take the card and burn it. The more she saw him hurt the more she wanted to keep him near, she couldn't see that keeping him near is what was causing this. For six years she made sure to distract him from his pain, they never talked about it. He never talked about how her death may have affected his life and she never talked about how that girl was not worth the grief. His mother hadn't even talked with him before indirectly forcing the girl out of his life. This boy was her only child and she didn't know the best way to protect him from the manipulative people of the world when they were so prominent in her life. The mother sat next to the door, visibly hurting from the fact that she may have caused all of this.

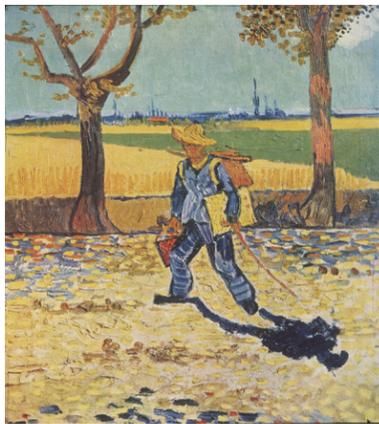
The boy had stopped screaming and stared at the ceiling while he lay on his back, his breathing slowed and his gaze looked distant but tears still flowed, pooling in his ears. He reminded himself of the toxic moments they would spend together when her manipulation was more obvious and the good times that were few in number but served a great purpose. As a teen he would do this many times, weighing the good and bad of their relationship when he was thinking of breaking up, the good times were too good for him to let go so he stayed. Remembering the happy moments he shared made him tear up, those parts of her he didn't want to slip by were gone forever now. He held the card close to his heart, out of all the things he has of hers, somehow a reminder of her death is what made him miss her so much.

After a few minutes of reminiscing, he would close the window and sit on his barren bed. He read through the card again, then closed his eyes and started speaking a message he was hoping would reach her, knowing he was finally alone. "I don't think I will ever understand why you were like that but if I had to guess I'd think it was because you never showed true love, I know your parents were too busy hating each other to love you so that's why I tried. I tried so hard and many times I wanted to give up, when I saw you smile before you jumped I thought I had failed." He stops to wipe away any tears before continuing. "But now I know, you smiled because I had succeeded. You smiled because it was hard for you to do what I was doing, and I never held that against you. You jumped because you felt you didn't deserve someone like me." He lets the tears be as they flow out of his closed eyes freely like a faucet he couldn't turn off. "You don't have to worry about me, thanks to you I learned that I was wrong. I enabled you to treat me like you did, I was too young and naive to understand that I wasn't helping. But now I know how to handle someone like you, so thank you for teaching me how to love. You're welcome for trying to teach you how to be loved." By the time he was done, the young man was crying profusely. The cries were different from before, he wasn't shaking and his eyes were filled with sadness but he smiled. The card sat on top of a box marked with a moving company's logo as he cried into the palms of his hands.

Poem Inspired by Painting

by Mason Chadwick

The scenes of the world
are mute and dull in his eyes,
Not by color, but emotion.
He can observe the beauty of nature
and even recreate it on canvas,
But it does not reach his soul,
Which has been stripped clean of heart
by the trials of his own existence.
He walks alone with none but his own shadow,
Surrounded by color
but untouched by creation.



The Mango That Picked Me

by Aparupa Brahma

"You don't pick mangoes, mangoes pick you," my mother said to me
And there I was, trying so hard, just to disagree
But, one day, I decided to test this tale with glee
I snuck out to our garden field
While mom sipped her morning tea
I trotted over to our massive, great, big mango tree
And I reached for the nearest mango, shouting cries and pleas
But, no matter how hard I tried to reach, this mango wouldn't come to me
Instead, it hopped to the next branch
As if to say, "Hee, hee, hee, hee,"
I jumped, hopped, leaped and sprang
The mango just moved up the branches where it swung and hanged
I sat and wept, my heart beating with a pang
Until something hit my head with a great, big bang
Sniffling, I raised my head up to see
And there it was, the mango beside the tree
I picked it up, all smiles and beams
For the tale still stood, this mango picked me

An Editorial from Anna Lynne DeMarco

by Richard Hubert

My fellow New Yorkers,

This Tuesday is the Democratic primary in NYC and I hope that you, my fellow New Yorkers elect me back to the New York Senate! Now I have discussed all my policies and experience in debates, forums, etc. However, in this letter, I would like to take a moment to tell you why you should truly elect me back to the New York State Senate. Now two weeks before I decided to write this letter, I was taking a ride on the New York City Subway. (Why?! Why else would a Politician running for re-election in NYC take the Subway? Publicity, of course!) So it was the last one of these press things I would have to do as the clock was ticking towards election day and amidst a packed subway of angry New Yorkers, who do I find but this young homeless woman and her two young children. Now if you've been following my campaign you know my biggest policy is affordable housing and job creation to get our homeless off the street, so I went over to talk to the girl. She told me her name and she ironically had the same last name as me then I asked her about her life. (Now usually I don't care to listen to these boring speeches because I am only there for the publicity.) So (however) today I listened and I am so glad I did because her father was my husband Joaquin DeMarco. Years ago after my husband's first wife died, it was either put her in a foster home or have her live with my husband and I. Now as someone who could never physically have children, I completely felt that foster care was the only place to put her as it was so depressing that Joaquin's late ex-wife was able to have a child with him while I struggled for years to get pregnant. So we picked foster care knowing what a great institution it is for our kids, it would be so much better for her than living with me who was a broken down depressed woman at this point. (We were selfish and wrote her off). And seeing now what the foster care system had done to her, I realized that I have to take charge of this state and restore the childhood of our children so that the future of these New York children can be brighter than ever. So this Tuesday, make sure you think of that when you hit the polls.

Sincerely,

Anna Lynne DeMarco, Democratic Candidate for New York Senate

24 Years Later

My Fellow Americans,

Election Year has come and gone again, now I know it has been years since I ran for Office after the huge upset I had in my re-election for New York Senate. But today, I would like to tell you all what I have done in the aftermath of that election, what I've learned about myself, and how I changed my life. Now that last letter I sent you all before the election I typed verbatim above, the only difference is that now in parenthesis I have written in everything that I felt in my head while writing that letter, that now looking back cost me the election. So I felt to patch things up with my home state, the Wednesday after the election I returned to the subway and my husband's daughter was still sitting there with her young children. I approached her once again. As she asked how her father was, I responded stating, "well" which provoked a conversation between the two of us. She asked if she could see him and since folks were staring I obliged. So I took her and her children back to our home. The evening started shakily but then went okay so they stayed for dinner, dinner went well so they stayed the night. The nights turned to days, days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months, and months turned to eight years in which they lived with us as we supported her through college and her children through grade school. This re-instilled such a beautiful relationship between my husband Joaquin and his daughter Cheryl as well as his grandchildren who now call me "Nana Anna"! This newfound family dynamic that Cheryl never had struck something deep within her in her days at Fordham University which inspired her to study Government and Political Science and go into a life of politics so she could fight for families all across this country! Which she has done throughout her whole political career starting as the three-term elected Governor of New York. This is just one of the reasons why I am so thrilled that this country has elected President Cheryl DeMarco for her second term of office and why I am so thrilled that when she asked me four years ago to be her Vice President, I obliged to her...again, and I am so damn glad I did, especially the first time.

Sincerely,

Vice President Anna Lynne DeMarco

제목없는 문서

by Olivia Molcakova

Mt. Olympus, 31 589 BC

Mooooom. I am scaaaaaareeeeeed. Mooooom. Heeelp. Everything is shaking. Is this an earthquake? I am faaaaalling. I don't want to leeeeeeave you.

Wow, so shiny. My eyes slowly move around the room as I try to assess the new environment. The omnipresent gold is reflecting the rays of sun striking at this extravagant building. I slowly take a step. Then another one. I need to get used to my new body. It is huge. I raise one hand and my eyes are hit by yet another ray being reflected from something golden. A golden shield attached to my arm. It is plain and has a circular shape. I lift the glance off my arm and touch what is in front of me. It is a pillar made out of marble. It has a nice cooling effect in this hall embedded in the gold that reflects the sun and causes the air to heat above bearable temperatures. The pillar has regular lines carved into it. On the top, there are chiseled statues. I look around to check if it is the same on the opposite side of the hall when I spot a big man with long, curly hair matching the color of gold. He seems familiar. He has a dauntless facial expression yet he is obviously scared, judging by how he is clinging to a golden tube blasting electrical discharges all around it.

"What are you staring at?" the man asks.

"You" I mumble.

"You know me, you literally came out of my head so don't stare at me like you don't know me," he avers.

Head? What? I freeze for a minute, not sure what to make out of the jumble of thoughts in my head.

"What... what is this place?" I ask.

"You came out of my head, you literally are my thoughts so stop pretending like you know nothing. Obviously, this is Mt. Olympus and the Earth, my kingdom," he answers.

My thoughts start clicking together. He must be Zeus, the ruler of the Earth. So that means he must be my father and what I thought was an earthquake

was in fact him, giving birth to me through his head.

"Now move and help me prepare for a fight." Zeus continues. "Cronos is going to come soon and I am certain he will throw me into the Tartarus! He's angry that his siblings ended up in there! He wants me to bring them out! But they'll help him destroy me if I do so!" he almost screams at me.

The name Cronos reminds me of stories my mother told me throughout the long years spent in the darkness and the solution to the problem suddenly seems obvious. At the mention of siblings my eyes fill with water. I can definitely relate to Cronos, I miss mine a lot as well. Yet I remember that mother always spoke of Cronos as a very dangerous being and Zeus appears to be so wretched I can't help myself but aid him.

"You said he wants to do it because he misses his siblings. Duh, why don't you just help him go there instead? I'm sure if you ask Tartarus he will gladly trick him to appear like it is a welcoming place. After all, doesn't he hate Gaia as much as you do? Having a common enemy always helps. If his ego is as big as yours, I guarantee he'll jump in there willingly." I suggest.

"But then I will only have humans to reign upon!" he despairs.

"Come on, think a bit." I respond. "Ain't it better to have one race that worships you unconditionally than many who will only cause problems? You'll be able to enjoy the smoked meat without having to care about anything else!" I try to reason.

"What are you waiting for? Go arrange it!" Zeus ordains me.

"Me? You know Tartarus, I am sure you will be better off if you personally talk to him." I object.

"Oh ok. Wow, you are quite smart... for a woman." he remarks as he is rushing to meet Tartarus.

As Zeus leaves, I walk to a crib made out of white marble, similarly ornate as the columns supporting the roof inside of which a smoked carrot suddenly shows up. Then another one. Then some olives appear. And small rolls of vellum with messages inscribed by an indigo colour obtained from walnuts. I open one that says "For Athena, the wisest being in the universe. For saving the Earth." I laugh. I still did not fully embrace what is going on. When I advised Zeus, all I used was basic logic. How come nobody else figured it out?

제목없는 문서

Rome, 24 BC

As per usual, I am sitting in front of a colonnade screen of my temple, observing aisels winding down the hill where a grandiose basilica stands. Through clerestory windows I can see what is going on inside.

Today, they are naming planets. The emperor Augustus has already decided to consacre one to my dad Jupiter. As I contemplate who will the remaining ones be named after, a random thought crosses my mind. How come Jupiter was never afraid of his brothers overthrowing him but he was so scared his children could do so that he ate my mother? And then me and my siblings were born and he even seems to like us? Weird.

Anyway, I would love to have a planet for myself. I am doing so much work! Without my combat strategies, these Romans would never acquire such a big territory!

There is a quick flash and I twitch. All of a sudden, a huge man dressed in full armor is standing above me.

“You would love to have a planet, wouldn’t you?” Mars smirks.

“I deserve it, I was the one who helped them discover these planets. I am the one who perpetually whispers to them new pieces of knowledge.” I proclaim, doing my best to act confidently.

“Heh, if it was so important to them, they would dedicate at least one to you. But look, the red one will go to me. It resembles blood so much, I love it! The orange one will go to Venus and the purple one to Mercury.” Mars taunts.

“How do you know? They haven’t decided yet!” I cry out.

“Maybe you are not as smart as everybody thinks if you have not figured out who will they devote the planets to. Look, here is the official document.” Mars says with a triumphant grin on his scarred face, showing me a piece of rolled papyrus with names inscribed on it.

I put on a wide smile, I am not going to give him the pleasure of seeing my disappointment.

When he leaves, I lose it. Ah, ingrates! They were the first one who listened to my advice and started using concrete instead of that kitsch gold and impractical marble. They also skillfully improved sewage, drainage and heating. But by giving planets to Mars and Venus end even such an egoist as my father Jupiter, they clearly showed that aggression and sex is where their priorities are at. Should I abandon them when all they do is use me to improve their lives or should I remain and hope one day they will acknowledge my help?

Paris, 1778 AD

I wake up, hearing my name in the distance.
It’s been ages since I heard it for the last time.

I look around. The use of fine light material for architectural purposes is back. How grateful I am that the usage of gold did not return hand in hand with it. However, looking at rococo houses standing side by side with the buildings similar to those of Ancient Greece, I regret claiming gold was kitsch. The beauty of the simple white constructions with engraved patterns truly stands out next to those fastly botched buildings where all that matters is that they are colorful.

I listen to people voicing my name.

“I think, therefore I am” proclaims Rene Descartes.

“No man’s knowledge can go beyond his experience.” John Locke argues.

“I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it.” Voltaire speaks in order to ensure no piece of what I tell them goes to the vain.

“New opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common,” proclaims Locke in a fear that humanity does not want to listen to what I reveal to them and argues for the freedom of expression despite being aware that “All men are liable to error; and most men are, in many points, by passion or interest, under temptation to it.”

“I don’t know what I may seem to the world, but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.” Isaac Newton beautifully voices the truth, well aware of how little he knows.

All people are demanding wisdom. They are not satisfied with the society they are living in. They have long ago figured out why thunder and lightning occur and that heavens are not ruled by a big fat boy as I happily judge based on the absence of Zeus or Jupiter or however you want to call my dad, the majestic god of storm. People finally seem to start thinking of themselves as well. Some, sadly, acquire a conviction that they are the chosen ones and I only speak to them. I see that after all the ego of my father left some mark. Nevertheless, I whisper to them. I talk to them. I scream at them. After a millennium, people are finally listening again. But why if I tell them the same things, each of them interprets it differently?

제목없는 문서

Bratislava, 2020 AD

I am more alive than ever. I am greater than ever. I hear my name more often than ever. I haven't seen anybody listening to the full matter of what I have to say though.

The world of people became diverse. I am inside of colorful buildings made out of stone that serve as schools where students before exams call upon me to ask for information. I am behind the gloomy walls of clinics where IQ is measured. I am in seriously looking institutions where seriously looking people pretend they are more than anybody else because they have the privilege of studying me, the mind. I am behind the metal jars of prisons where convicts ask themselves when did their plan they found so smart go wrong. I am within the glass offices where people hope for cleverness so they can make a lot of money. I am in the cozy rooms of what people call homes where broken beings cry out wondering when have they lost their minds. With the increasing diversity, people have dissected me into small pieces - smartness, wisdom, IQ, wit, consciousness, intellect, knowledge, cleverness, mind... And if they don't achieve something, they claim they have lost a piece of me. Because it would be too hard to admit they made a mistake, messed something up or did not listen to me. No, they rather claim I was not given to them. Or blame me for not helping them. Too cowardly to assume responsibilities, they prefer to worship those few who actually listen to me. They are missing out on so much because of this dumbness. But I am hopeful. Maybe one day they will stop asking and start actually listening.

Thank you to our contributors!

Writers

Adanma Adebayo-Kay
Kana Badenoch
Aiyannah Batton
Aubrey Bocalan
Aparupa Brahma
Stefanie Brijmohan
Ashton Brophy
Amal Bumbia
Caitlin C.
Reece Calvin
Vanessa Cardenas G.
Mason Chadwick
Rena Cohen
Abby Coons
Myah Crowell
Sophie Deerberg
Sophia Dodson
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Mei Gordon Washington
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Marie Kinderman
Kacie Kline
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Reem Numan
Ruth Oyerokun
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Shivani Patel
Mahir Rahman
Diana Rivera
Snow Rose
Alyssa Simone
Jessica Singh
Juliana Smith-Etienne
Shyanne Spell
Frieda Sutton
Indya Taylor
Aileen Xie
Sally Young
Ella Zare
Alice Zhang
Sophia Zhu

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Mary Beth Garrick

Managing Editor

Heather Garcia

Content Editor

Joanna Newton

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Craig Patches

Designer

Sofia von der Schulenburg

UNLEASHED

Volume I