

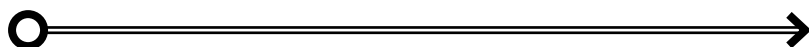
PEGASUS 2019



PEGASUS
Pittsford Sutherland High School
55 Sutherland Street
Pittsford, NY 14534



"Caught in the Act" - Kate Paku



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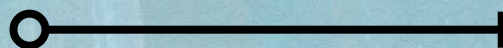
Front:

"Among the Reeds" - Elise McCamant

Back:

"Collage" - Elizabeth Husarek

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A Letter from the Editor



My freshman year, I wrote a poem called “yellow is NOT a happy color.” I wrote it when I thought that poems had to be about sad things and that I had to feel sad things to write good poems but that the feelings needed to be masked with metaphors. A circular train of thought.

In the next years, however, I wrote about cheeks tinted muted rose and smiling even with a cold nose. I sat in a room lit from the walls, and I told fables with my friends and my friends and my friends. I wrote happy poems and I read them out loud, and when I read them I laughed! All they meant is what they said!

Weeks (maybe years?) later I was at a spoken word show and a six-year-old boy asked a reader, “Why are all your poems sad?”

Nobody answered.

Can you?

The next month, the man brought a happy poem, even though he’d had a hard life, and read it and smiled. It wasn’t brimming with allegory and it wasn’t gut-wrenching. It was a happy poem and it was well-written and it made us smile with him. It was one of the best poems I have heard.

I hope that now the six-year-old will write happy poems. I hope I will too. I think I will write them about yellow.

Thank you PEGASUS for giving me four years of your life. Thank you to the English Office for spending time with me. Thank you for listening. Thank you for hearing.

○ ————— | Noor



Rain

Will Pierce

We know That rain,
The showers of gilded cloudburst
Falling between ourselves and the limoncello sun,
Melting into the deep indigo horizon.
We know the warmth of those heavy beads
Dropping upon us, encompassing us, embracing us.
Driving down the rolling paths,
Windows free, Dad's hand resting on Mom's
As she drives; we sing "The Book of Love" by Peter Gabriel together.
That rain was falling.
Falling with the thick, humid air,
It is familiar.
But that rain is rare now,
A fleeting wish only granted once every few weeks.
It is the minority, the unexpected.
For we also know the silver cleavers of torrent,
Falling with the velocity and vengeance of bullets
Shot at point-blank range.
It slices us open, mocking our soft flesh
That we like to believe is "thick skin".
It tears our insides to shreds,
Pushes unfamiliar terror out from our core.
This rain doesn't need to be forecast,
It rains wherever we go.
Whichever windowsill, flanked by dead sepia curtains,
With freezing drafts from the diffused grey-blue sky
Seeping in through our grasping fingertips
At the edge of the sill, praying for the knotted clouds to tell us
Why Mom is crying on the couch, why Nana is here, staying up "just in case",
If this was our fault...
This rain is falling there.
Whichever dark bedroom,





Sleep by Katherine Moon

Illuminated solely with the torpid, growing glow of a sleepless night
Slipping, slipping away to our angry and confused questions,
“Why was Dad so angry, Mom? Why did he slam the doors,
Why did he drive off? Is he coming back, Mom?”
This rain is falling there.
This rain is predatory, this rain is a disease, and yet
This rain is still so familiar to us.
So, we’ll get used to the rain that’s begun to surround us,
We’ll wait and wade through the harsh silver gloss of the rainfall.
We’ll stay up that night with Nana even if we’re in the other room,
For we know that the rain with warm, luminous tones will soon drop upon us once more...
We’ll wait for that golden rain in the morning.



An Encounter at the Art Museum

Emily Oh

"Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness but must explore if it be goodness."-Emerson

I remembered meeting him on a rainy day. I can recall the itchy pale blue sweater and distressed black jeans. I was in a rush to meet my best friend Cynthia--we were going to paint at a local art museum a couple of blocks away from my apartment. I poured a cup of black coffee, said goodbye to my ginger cat named Gertrude, and grabbed my old umbrella.

As I bounded down the steps, I saw that Cynthia radiated excitement, her glowing smile mirroring my own. We absentmindedly wandered to the Renaissance section while spilling the contents of the past week in an enthusiastic blur of words. As we went about the room, I recognized pieces from Michelangelo and Raphael that were so well-preserved, it was difficult not to notice their meticulous details. Up close, I could see each brushstroke of the paints. That is when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the piece I will spend my life trying to mimic, even though I know I will never come close to capturing the same beauty. The label marker next to the piece read "The School of Athens by Raphael." It resonated expression with vivid colors and sprawled people in angelic poses. I was instantly drawn closer. In fact, without these paintings, I never would have thought of conforming to a religion.

Cynthia and I began painting immediately, and after a few hours passed, I began to feel some acrylic paints dry into my skin and the creases from my hands created indents that reminded me of lightning. I sat down on the velvet sofa in the room and glanced at my work. Suddenly, a man with messy brown hair, glasses, and plain clothes sat next to me. I caught a scent that reminded me of gasoline and musky cheap cologne which made me think of my comforting grandfather. He began to compare my work to the painting hung against the wall.

"Your work is magnificent" he said in a strong voice.

I turned to his curious brown eyes and I felt heat rise to my cheeks. I smiled a little and looked at my painting.

"It's okay, I guess," I replied with a shrug.

"I'm Luke," he said with his hand out confidently.

"Marley," I said as I shook his hand. He had a firm grip and his hands were smooth. His brown eyes gazed at mine and I saw a glaze of happiness. I could see every detail of his face. His eyebrows were nicely groomed, facial structure was defined, and his smile lines added soft definition to his face. His calm warm presence reminded me of my brother, who was a hardworking business man. His appearance and body language made me imagine him drinking rich hot chocolate in a lonely diner, while working on a proposal late at night.

"You look really familiar. Do you come here often?" He said as he examined my face and body closely.

"No, not really," I answered "I'm here with a friend." I scanned the room looking for Cynthia, who probably stepped out to another gallery.

"Me too." He replied with a soft chuckle.

"What a coincidence," I said with a small laugh.

"I don't believe in coincidences."

"What do you believe in then?" I challenged as I looked at his eyes. When I met them, I saw a glimpse of humor.

"I believe in Newton, that every action has a reaction"

I lightly laughed and asked "So, you believe in fate then?"



"Not really," He answered. "I believe that God is deliberate to the extent that we will never understand Him."

"Why not?" I questioned as I looked at the paintings surrounding the room. For the longest time, I remember that my parents were very intrigued by religion and strictly followed Catholicism. Ever since I was born, religion was my 'safe haven.' I believed that God was the answer to everything, and everyone should believe in a religion.

He looked at me intensely and then looked at my

our limited interpretations."

"So, no religion has it right...?" I questioned.

"Or wrong, just different interpretations," he added.

"Which God do you believe in?"

"Which ever one you have a connection with," he said and we both began to laugh lightly. "Let's go find your friend."

After a while, we both found Cynthia in a gallery taking photos of contemporary sculptures. Each figure was different, abstract and unique. The gallery was larger than the Renaissance gallery and the lighting throughout the room was sporadic.

Luke turns to my direction and says "Well, I better get going, nice meeting you." He paused for a moment and looked into my eyes deeply.

"Yeah..." I replied with some sadness.

"I have a diner not far from here," he said as he was handing me his business card. "Come in sometime and we can talk."

I began to smile slowly, and Luke started to walk away from me. I stood there in shock as Cynthia was walking towards me. The sound of her boots echoed throughout the room and she began to smile.

"Who was that guy?" she questioned with a laugh.

I began to blush as I shoved his business card into my jeans. "He's some guy I met today."

"I don't remember the last time you talked to a guy," Cynthia replied as she began to raise her eyebrows with a smug look on her face.

"People change," I said with a shrug and turned away from her with a smile.



"The Modern Age" - Somayya Upal

painting. There were streaks of dark blue and swirling images and angelic people with straight faces. A few minutes of silence passed and the whole room was quiet enough to hear the buzzing of the yellow lights.

"Try explaining the color blue to a blind man," he said with a smirk.

I thought of the idea for a couple seconds. "It's impossible," I muttered under my breath.

"Exactly," Luke said promptly. "That's the beautiful thing about it. God is person and universal simultaneously. To believe that one religion has it all figured out is believing an unlimited God would confine itself to one of

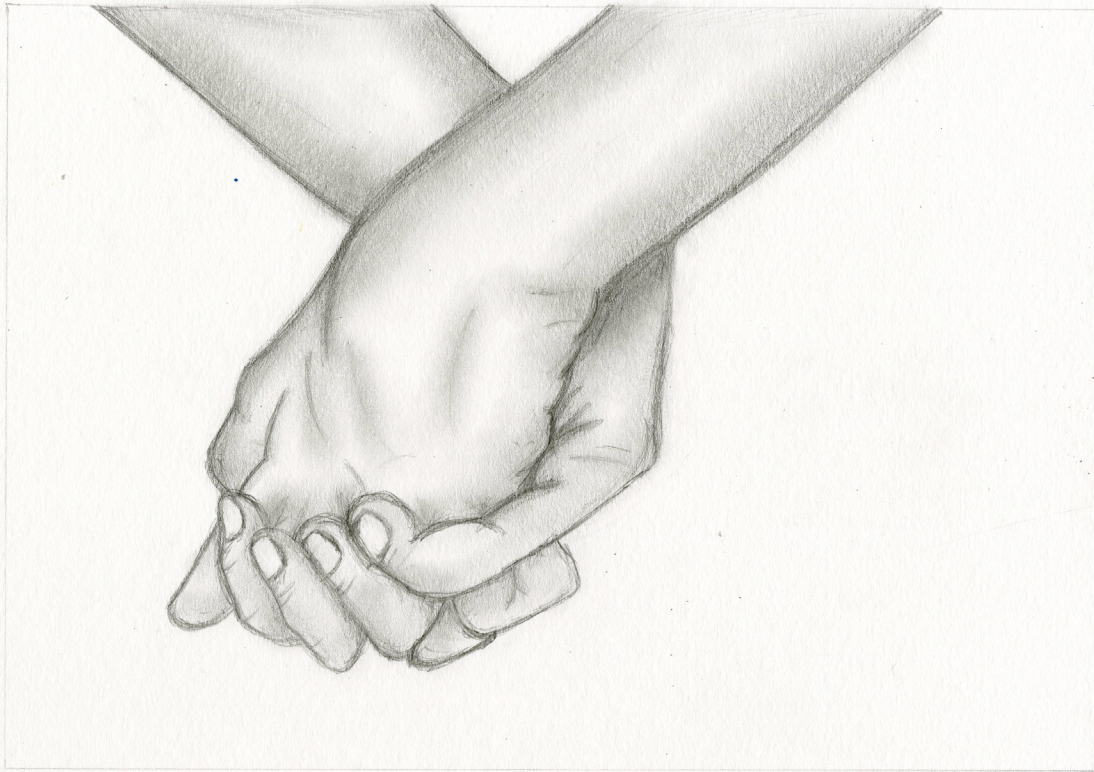


Escaping the New Age

Gabriella Cibella

She stands on the fire escape, overlooking the lights of the city. The fire escape rusting and chipping away, the same as the actual her. The sirens of the city are loud and red and pull her in with promises of pink fluffy nightgowns and boxes of chocolate from her future husband. Standing barefoot next to the rotten wood of the Christmas cactus planter, with Gerard the tabby juggling the pink flowers that drape over the side of the disintegrating planter. The flowers dance along his claws, almost being shredded but slipping away before he gets the chance. Happy and comfortable he is, spending his life juggling, like a clown satisfied being on the road surrounded by elephants and the ringleader. She is not. The long hair blowing in the winter wispy wind and her feet imprinted by the cold metal chaining of the fire escape. The New York City sirens call again, trying once more to pull her in with things that don't appeal: wedding rings and

champagne, when all she really wants is to smoke some weed and drink her scotch on the tetanus-ridden fire escape. Twirling scissors in her hand, up and down, weaving the handle in and out of her fingertips, the blades spinning and taunting her. Children and a happy life together, the sirens say. Gerard purrs up against her unshaven legs on his way to the rickety stairs of the fire escape, tail waving like the frigid wind is blowing, laying gracefully. Gust of wind blow the hair into her face, that's it. The scissors stop swirling and twirling; now they are chopping away. She throws the finger to the sirens, and they stop calling. They go on their way to torment another. Long chunks of wavy hazelnut hair float through the holes in the fire escape to the ground. Other parts stay balanced between the gaps in the rusty floor, where they will stay until they are whisked away by more bitter wind.



"Hands" - Sydney Cornell



All Hail the Chairman

Elise McCamant

When I returned home, I walked on trampled carnations,
Hailed as a hero greets his ghost.
The air kissed rose onto my cheeks,
Brushed death, sensuality, Mardi Gras down my spine.
The unnamed traveler walked towards me like jazz,
Like saxophone and syncopation and a swish of the hips all tied up in one.
Creak creak creak.
The air tasted like desperation.

The traveling man's world tastes like this:
Trodden-on halos, chapped lips, yellowing light bulbs,
Unlucky encounters, dead rats, New Orleans.
The traveler sells his soul to a man on the street for six grams of cocaine
And a chance to speak with the devil.
I can't figure out how to believe in anything but myself and my mortality
(I am haunted by the Capuchin Crypts).

I rode the train out of Alabama,
Then again in a week out of Athens.
Escape artist to the end: anonymity was key as I fled
Myself and him and the spaces in between
And where those two met, us and the good ol' times clutched
together and dissolved in a quilted patchwork of cloths.

The memories are chasing! chasing! me.
Boots heavy, steel toed,
Lavender paint cracking underfoot as they run across the stucco walls.
I sit on the porch in my rocking chair,
Plucking daddy long legs off the walls.
Creak creak creak.
I realize perhaps I cannot hide forever.
He is coming.
The summer ends.

The summer ends and now the traveler walks the curb,
Between the bricks and the grass,
Angling his foot so that his toes brush the clover
While his heel drags on concrete.
Good luck charms are hard to come by.
The creaking still follows me.



The Sea

Mallory Michalko

Low tide drew
in the ghosts.

Echoes of words

spoken and silenced had taken refuge between the jagged rocks, only to be muttered again in the deep, gurgling tone of the crashing waves in the sea. The moon bled into the horizon and the cutting salted breeze promised a storm blowing in off the coast. Bits of wood and sparkling broken glass, having been chewed up and spit out by the sea, littered the shoreline.

My legs dangled off the irregular boulder on which I sat and looked out into the twilight. They called this stretch of ocean Shipwreck Harbor, from the frequency of misfortune that resulted from the teeth of the sea tearing at the hull of the ship and bringing down whole crews of experienced seafarers. I toasted the ocean with a bottle of rum.

“For you, father,” I said aloud before tossing the bottle, sending it crashing into the rocks below. I was about to depart from my personal anniversary with the sea until my eyes picked out an object being tossed about by the waves.

It was a young man, clinging desperately to a little piece of wood to keep himself afloat. He wasn’t doing very well, as every now and again he would be pulled under by the tide and then clamor to find his broken piece of salvation.

“Move away from the rocks,” I warned, seeing

him edge nearer the sharp formations that stuck up out of the water.

The waves rebelled against my command, separating him from his board and throwing him against the jagged stone remains.

I climbed off my perch and waded in despite my skirts. His limp body was caught between two boulders, having nearly been impaled by the mast of a ship wedged in the nearby tidepool. I hooked my hands underneath his arms and dragged him to the shore. *Laborer’s girl* I thought to myself disdainfully as I hauled him much like an unwieldy bag of potatoes. He proceeded to cough up most of the sea water he had swallowed once I turned him on his side.

“All lost...all lost,” he muttered repeatedly, lost in his memories. I turned his face up to reality.

“Can you walk?” I asked politely as I could.

He looked at me, dazed. A deep gash ran down his leg, blood mixing with the sand and earth. I put his arm over my shoulder and stood him up.

“I’ll take you into town. We’ll get you some water, and maybe get that leg checked out too, ay?”

“Thank ye,” he mumbled semi-coherently.

A thank you from a sailor, a rare thing indeed, I thought as I trudged up the hill back to civilization.



PegaSeuss

Nicholas Kinney
Inspired by Theodor Geisel

There once was a horse who dreamt he had wings
“If I had wings, oh how high I would fly!
I’d rise up past the low things,
Straight on towards the sky!”
The horse wished and he wished, but they just would not grow!
He tried and he tried, but his chances were low.
He soon gave up hope, that poor little horse,

Then one day...

He slipped on some soap and woke up on a course!
A course of grass green where clubbing abounded;
There were so many balls, the horse was astounded!
“A-ha! I think I know where I am!” said the horse
“Alas, when I fell, I slid to a golf course!”
But then came a man, and the man was not happy.
He crossed his arms and his toes went tap-tappy.
“Who are you?” said the horse to the man on the course.
“The owner, of course!” said the man to the horse.
“Now get away from here, go far, far away,
This course is not one where horses can play.”
“How sad,” thought the horse, “oh, how terribly sad
If I could just fly away, boy I would be glad!”

He walked through the woods, looking up at the trees,



And stared at the branches rustling in the breeze.
“How I long to be flying, gliding and soaring,
‘stead of stuck down here, where everything’s boring.
I cannot stop; never give up, nor surrender,
I must stay strong to be an ascender!
I know in my heart—I can’t shake the feeling
I am destined to fly straight on past the ceiling!”

Then he got an idea; on went the lightbulb,
All he needed to fly was to see Doctor Zightbulb!
The horse galloped off with a new sense of glee,
“I have a plan! To the Doctor!” said he!



The trek was quite long, but the horse travelled on
Through the forest to the plains, from dusk until dawn.
As he ran swiftly across the green countryside,
He passed rivers and roads, both thin and wide.

But soon the weather turned harsh and cold;
The icy winds blew more than ever was told.
The horse ran on yet, and he kept good speed
Still, the frost bit, and he missed his warm Thneed.
He soon had to stop—he was all but frozen!
At last he relaxed at the Tavern of Kerflozen.

Kerflozen was kind, a venerable host,
A generous old lady who claimed she's a ghost!
Curled up near the fire, the horse took a long nap,
And dreamt that great wings made him fly with one flap.
The horse had a deep sleep and he had a great dream,
And once he awoke, he had coffee with cream.
Ready and rejuvenated, he set off once more,
With his good luck charm, which he bought at the store!
His head and his heart were brimming with pride,
And he rode away with new strength in his hide.

The weather had cleared—the sun was now out!
The air was warm, there was no need to pout.
With no clouds in the sky, he knew it was go time,
So the horse trotted and ran and was there in no time.
As he zoomed into the office of the acclaimed doctor,

Dr. Zightbulb jumped up—the horse had shocked her!
She said, “I didn’t expect any patients today!”
“This can’t wait” said the horse without a second’s delay.
“I would like to grow wings, and I need a prescription”
“A wing pill, you say...does this match your description?”
Then the Doctor procured quite a hefty red lump,
The pill was so large, the horse’s heart gave a thump
“I’m not great with pills,” he said, “how ‘bout a potion?”
“I’m afraid I’m all out, but here’s a thin lotion”
The Doctor then handed him a wing lotion bottle,
The horse thanked her kindly and trotted off at full throttle.
He ran all the way home, for there he could relax
And before applying the lotion, he read the Drug Facts.
“Apply to skin gently and rub until smoothed”
And so, the horse did, and he felt almost soothed.
The horse took a nap so the ointment could set,
And he bet when he awoke he would have his wings yet!
Why, he slept for so long, almost twelve hours
But when he woke up, the air smelt of flowers.
He ran to the mirror, and basked in the glory
He had wings!! Oh such wings!! What an end to his story.
The horse ran outside and took off with a bound,
And flew in the air to see what was around.
And for once in his life, the horse did not fuss
For finally, the horse was
A Pegasus.

~The End~





Ageism (animation)

by Marquise Bennett

Use the QR Code or URL to view on YouTube:



www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpc8pruOzKk

The Storm is Coming

Catherine Xie

"Thump! Thump, thump!!" A knock on the monastery door halted the meal. It was a great feast with bread, onions, cheese, and fresh fish for a visiting friend. Everyone was surprised by the knock since it was quite late at night. Robert Stone, the former monk, glanced at the monk sitting right next to him. John sighed, placed down his loaf of bread, and rose. A blast of cold night wind blew into the room as he opened the door.

"Decrees from the church! Decrees from the church!" A person wrapped from head to toe in cloth repeated many times. However, the speech was muffled, so to Robert it sounded like, "Defreeze from ze hurch! Defreeze from ze hurch!" The guest fumbled in his bag and took out a scroll of parchment. All the monks were curiously watching this guest struggle angrily to unwrap his scarf. Finally, with his cheeks pink, the guest unraveled the scroll and started to make his announcement.

"I, Francis Tolbert, am here to bring an order from the church," he began. "This monastery from this day forth is required to pay a yearly tariff to help with important projects!" Tolbert squinted his eyes and looked at everyone sitting at the table, as if challenging someone to defy him. The monks were whispering among themselves and casting angry glances at Tolbert.

John slowly approached Tolbert, "I'm sorry, Sir," he said, "but where would we get the money to pay the tariff? Our monastery doesn't make any profits." The monks around the table and Robert nodded their heads and waited intently for Tolbert's response.

Tolbert didn't hesitate. "Hruump! What is with you monks!" he exclaimed, "How you get the money is not my problem. You will have to pay the tariff! If you don't get the money, then you'll see what will happen." Tolbert gathered his things and exited the monastery. The monks quickly closed the door.

Robert was steaming in his seat. "These Church officials!" he complained, "What do they know about the hard days people already face? There isn't enough money to go around."

Robert turned to the monk that opened the door, "John, what are you going to do?"

John sighed, "There's nothing I can do. No matter what, our brothers will manage." Benedict, a monk at the table, muttered under his breath "why can't these church officials just leave us alone?!" He had nodded, his fist still curled up on the table.

Robert's face was remained heated; he couldn't hold in his anger. He looked at his friends. "Brothers, you can't let them use you for their own gain. We must fight back. I remember in our days here together, you taught me to be true to myself. I can't just let my brothers suffer; I must act!"

John grabbed Robert by the arm and looked him right in the eye. "Don't do something rash! We'll be fine, it isn't worth your trouble. You wouldn't want to get stuck in a mess with the power of the church. Think about what might happen to Margaret and William if something happens to you."



Robert gently moved John's hand off his arm. He had thought of his wife and son, but knew he had to do something. "I'll think about it," he said, but his heart was still racing with anger. "I must return home now, it's late. I'll come visit you all soon." Robert bid farewell and walked down the steps of the monastery and looked back at the place. He stood outside for a while, watching the shadows of his friends frantically scurrying around, and he felt the anger building up in his chest. When he saw the redness of the sky and the sun almost completely gone, he quickly hurried home.



Robert opened the door to his cottage. It was tidy as usual. The table was bare, and the bowls were all stacked neatly in the cupboard. A person could wipe their finger on any object in the room, and not a speck of dust would be on their hands. Margaret, his wife, was at the spinning wheel. She glanced up at Robert, then resumed her task. Robert slammed off his leather shoes and went to sit by the fire.

"I've made you a new overcoat." Margaret said as she looked up from her work. She could sense something tense in her husband. She stood up and went to the table, casting a wary look at Robert.

"What kept you so long?" she asked. Robert shrugged and looked down. He didn't want his wife to worry and he was too upset to talk. Margaret sighed, "William already went to bed. He keeps asking why you come home so late."

Robert's heart tensed. He had an uneasy feeling

in his stomach. He did miss seeing his son but work at the University sapped his time. He didn't want his family to worry about him. Besides, they had other things to worry about, like the fact that the shelf was bare, and they still had no money for food. "I'm kind of tired," he replied, "I'll go to bed early." Robert could feel his wife's eyes watching him as he entered the bedroom. He decided to figure it out later as he climbed into bed.



"Aaahh," Robert yawned and rubbed his eyes.

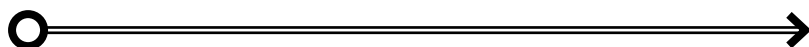
Margaret was still asleep, as was the sun. Slowly and softly, he moved the blanket and got off the bed. He dressed himself in his usual attire: a sleeveless overcoat over a heavy pleated tunic, leather shoes, and a belt. He didn't notice that Margaret had one eye open and was carefully watching him.

The road was muddy with leaves and little earth-worms crawling over the dirt. The ground smelled fresh like it always did after a storm. Robert stepped over the puddles skillfully and went down a familiar path to one of his friend's house. "Luther!" Robert shouted across the road as he saw a familiar face. Luther looked up from his vegetable garden and broke into a smile.

"My dear friend, what brings you here on a lovely morning?" Luther asked. He grabbed a cloth from a large rock beside him and wiped off his hands.

Robert walked closer and sighed, "I must tell you of something I witnessed yesterday. It is a great matter that involves our brothers, and I need your counsel."

Luther's smile faded and he gestured for Robert to



sit down on a log. "I was visiting the monastery..." Robert started.

"Oh!" Luther's eyes widened. "How are Benedict and John? I remember the laughs we had at the monastery back then. I do want to visit, but I'm too busy at Wittenberg. These students never seem to pay attention." Luther looked at Robert's anxious face. "I'm so sorry for interrupting. Do continue," Luther gestured.

Robert clasped Luther's hand. "I'm afraid things aren't going well." Robert's brow furrowed. "A church official named Francis Tolbert has imposed a tax on the monastery. I'm going to report him."

Luther remained silent, then he gestured for Robert to go inside and talk. There were some things that were best said quietly. News traveled fast these days, especially with the invention of the printing press. Almost everyone these days had a copy of The Bible.

It was quite a while before Robert thanked Luther and set on his way, feeling reassured and a lot more confident after consulting Luther. Before he left, he made Luther promise not to tell Margaret what he would do so she wouldn't worry.



At Wittenberg, the hallway was elaborately decorated with colorful cloths hanging from the walls. New paintings were hung, and the windows were wide open. Light streamed through the windows making the university look heavenly. Robert looked up and around at the columns and arches. He had never seen the school this beautiful since he started working there. It had always

been plain and dull. The windows were kept shut all year long to avoid leaves from drifting in and small animals from entering.

A slight whisper of a footstep echoed through the hall. Robert darted behind a column and waited. He felt like an intruder. His knees were wobbling, and his hands were sweating. Luther had told him the Pope was visiting Wittenberg and he couldn't believe his luck. The Pope had to be here. Slowly, with his heart pounding, he moved a little and looked. He quickly took a step back, hoping no one had seen him, then cautiously tilted his head. The Pope was heading in the direction of the library with someone trailing behind. "This is my chance", he thought. He brushed himself off and quickly made his way to the library. Pope Leo X and a church official were having a conversation right outside the library. They were whispering, and the Pope seemed upset.

"Your holiness..." Robert said softly as he bent to a slight bow. The Pope and church official turned to look at Robert.

"Why have you come to disturb the Pope?" the church official demanded.

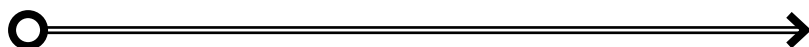
"I...I have someone to report," Robert stuttered.

"Speak up," the Pope said. He adjusted his robe, not taking his eye off Robert.

"Yes, your holiness," Robert replied. "I'm here to report a church official named Tolbert. He imposed a tariff on a monastery of my friends just yesterday. He knew very well that they don't have the money."

"Oh?" the Pope asked. "He did such a thing?"

"Yes," Robert stood affirmatively, feeling that the



Pope understood his words.

"Well, have you thought about who sent him to do this?" the Pope questioned.

"Well...no, your holiness. I suspect he just wanted to pocket the money himself," Robert replied.

The Pope paced around, then stopped. He lifted an eye and glanced at Robert. "Let me tell you, young man," Pope Leo X began, "It was me who sent him to impose the tariff."

Robert lifted his eyes and glanced at the Pope, then flickered them back down. The Pope continued, "I wouldn't want you to cause some riot, now, would I? So, I'm going to have to ask you to stay with me. Don't worry, it's just until you change your mind about what you said."

Robert panicked. "Your holiness? Why would you do this?"

"We need funds for St. Peter's. This basilica must be perfect. You peasants don't know anything! Someone like me would never live like a peasant." Pope Leo X replied. "I wouldn't want my reputation ruined." Turning to the church official, the Pope continued. "You! Take our guest to one of the classrooms and make sure he doesn't sneak away."

"Yes, your holiness." The church official nodded and grabbed Robert's arm. Robert resisted and tried to pull away, but the man's grip was too strong. Slowly, they trudged to a tiny classroom at the end of the hall. He pushed Robert in with a sneer. Robert swayed and crumbled to the ground.

is this real or am I dreaming how could I a respectable teacher be stuck at my own university maybe

if I pinch myself I will wake up and find it's all a dream no no no Margaret doesn't know I'm here and William will be so scared they're bound to notice when I don't come home why did I have to be so stupid and come here I'm such an awful father.



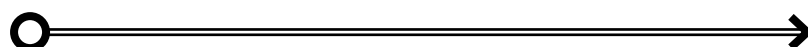
"Luther!" There was pounding on the door of Martin Luther's home. Luther, who was in the middle of adding potatoes to his stew, quickly came to his door and opened it. Margaret and William stood outside, each with a look of absolute panic. Behind them was another of Robert's friends, Francis Louver. He was still dressed in his shoemaking clothes and seemed antsy.

"Come in, come in." Luther waved a hand, worried that they were all so tense. Margaret took a seat at the fireplace. She was on the verge of tears.

"I can't find my husband!" Margaret wailed. "I went to his classroom to look for him, but they said he never came. And he was acting so weird this morning." Margaret fell on her knees and wept, "Oh please, tell me you saw him."

Luther gently lifted Margaret up and placed her back on her seat. "I'm sure he's fine. He probably has some business to do and it's taking him a bit long." Luther's own pulse sped up as he said it, and he couldn't bear to look Margaret in the eye. But he had made a promise and wasn't going to break it.

Margaret studied Luther. She had known her husband's friend long enough to tell when something wasn't adding up. She looked Luther in the eyes while her



own eyes narrowed. "There's something you're not telling me..." Luther fretted his hands and looked to Louver for help, but Louver was intently watching the spectacle. Margaret, although a small woman, seemed fierce when she was mad. Even men like Luther would cower under her.

"Tell me!" Margaret demanded. Her face was mixed with frustration and fear, like she would crumble if Luther denied her an answer.

Luther shook his head. "It's for your own good that I'm not telling you."

Margaret let out a wail of frustration and continued crying. Luther had his own head on the table, still deciding if he was doing the right thing. Then, little William went up to Luther and tugged on his overcoat.

"Just tell us," William said. "My mother will be more anxious if she doesn't know where father is. If she at least knows where he is, she can feel better. Please tell us!"

Luther glanced at the little child of only 8 years old. He sighed and relayed the story to them. "He came over this morning...So, he might still be there talking with the Pope."

"No one will harm him, will they?" Margaret asked.

Luther shook his head. "I don't know, but he should be alright. See if he comes back peacefully tonight, and I pray he does. If he doesn't, then we'll think of something."

It was near supper time, so one by one they shuffled out of the house. Luther stopped Louver as he was walking out.

"How's Louise?" Luther asked. He knew that Lou-

ver's wife was terribly ill.

Louver just shook his head. Luther added a sympathetic, "Well, thanks for coming." His relationship with Louver had always been weird. He still couldn't grasp what kind of person this guy was. He was closer to Robert than him. Luther watched each one of them disappear into the night and sighed a sigh of relief.

It was a long night of waiting for Margaret and William. The moment they got home, William went straight to bed. Margaret paced around the room, even cleaning, to get her mind off her husband. She grabbed one of her husband's overcoats and was clinging to it. Every 10 minutes, she would walk to the window, hoping to see Robert, and every time she would be disappointed. Margaret watched the sun set and the moon rise as she waited for her husband. Finally, she gave up. She sat by the fireplace and worked at the spinning wheel, eventually falling asleep.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" It was early morning and Luther didn't know what was happening outside. He got out of bed, got dressed, and quickly went to the door, checking through the window to see who was causing the ruckus. Margaret was standing outside, her cheeks all pink. He quickly unlocked the door to let her in.

Margaret was breathing heavily after running all the way there. "He... didn't... come home last... night." Luther put an arm around Margaret and led her inside.



She continued, "I already let Louver take William to his friend, Peter's house, so he wouldn't have to worry. What do we do now?"

Luther sighed, "I shall go to see the Pope and find where Robert is. I hope nothing happened."

"Let me come with you," Margaret pleaded. "I must find my husband. I must see him!"

"No. It isn't safe and I can't allow you to be harmed. Robert made me promise that." Luther made up his mind. He quickly got dressed and gave Margaret some porridge to eat, before setting on his way as fast as he could to the University.



Luther had come as he always did for work, but instead of heading to his classroom, he headed to the great hall, where Pope Leo X was having tea. There was a big crowd of students there, showing their respects to the Pope. Luther waited until the last student left before he approached the Pope.

"Your holiness," Luther said, bowing in supplication. The Pope nodded and gestured for him to continue.

"I had a friend that visited you yesterday by the name of Robert Stone. He came to talk to you about a monastery tariff. Have you seen him?" Luther asked. Pope Leo X frowned and crossed his eyebrows. He started at Luther for a while before responding. Luther was panicking inside. "What is the Pope thinking about? I didn't make a mistake, did I?"

"Yes, I did." The Pope finally replied.

"Do you know where he is now? His wife and children were quite worried when he didn't return home last night." Luther had an uneasy feeling about the Pope. But at least he was honest, Luther thought.

"I do know where he is, but he can't leave just yet. He has a wrong idea in his mind and he'll be able to return home when he changes it." The Pope glared at Luther and gripped the handle of wooden chair tightly until his knuckles turned white.

"His idea isn't wrong, your holiness. He told me of his thoughts and I agree." Luther was sweating but he couldn't give up. "I demand that he be allowed to return, or I'll tell everyone I know what you are doing."

The Pope's face was red. "How dare you talk this way to me!" He slammed his fist on the desk and shouted for someone. Tolbert quickly appeared from around the corner. The Pope leaned in and whispered something to Tolbert. Luther was watching them intently. "What in the world could they be talking about?" Tolbert nodded, eyed Luther again, and left. Pope Leo breathed heavily as he calmed down. Suddenly, he smiled at Luther.

"I've told my assistant to let your friend go," Pope Leo said as he set down his cup of tea.

"Thank you, your holiness," He said it little sincerity. Luther gave a slight bow and turned to leave.

"Wait!" the Pope said. "Why are you leaving so soon? Come join me for some tea, we have time."

Luther hesitated, "I wouldn't want to bother you."

"Oh, it's no bother at all! Come sit." The Pope pointed to a seat next to his.



Luther reluctantly sat down. He didn't want to stay longer, and he didn't like this Pope. But the Pope had just let Robert go. "What if he changes his mind when I leave?" Luther thought. Luther gave a weak smile and asked, "How do you like Wittenberg?"



After a small conversation about the university and new reforms, Luther was tired. It was past noon before Luther left the University. After sitting a while with the Pope, he had gone to teach his class and see to other duties. After work, he set on his way to Robert's house, hoping to see his friend returned to his family. Approaching the house, he heard voices inside.

"I didn't know he never made it there," Margaret's voice rang.

"Well, you should've checked!" Robert shouted angrily.

Luther knocked on the door hoping to end the argument inside. Robert swung open the door. A half smile appeared on his face when he saw Luther.

"What is the matter?" Luther asked, "I spoke to the Pope and he promised to release you. I thought you just got home."

Robert sighed sadly, "We can't find William. Louver was supposed to take William to Peter's house. Peter's mom came to ask why William never came to their house. We tried to find Louver, but he wasn't home."

Luther looked exasperated, "Oh no! Why have such problems befallen us? Why!"

Margaret silently wept, "It's all my fault. I should never have let Louver take William. I should've done it myself."

"Louver's a good man," Robert said. "There has to be an explanation!"

"Well, then what are we going to do?" Luther asked.

"We have to find Louver first. He will know what's going on. But how do we find him?" Margaret asked.

"Where is Louver usually?" Luther asked Robert.

"He's usually at home," Robert replied.

"Anyplace else?" Luther asked.

Robert thought for a moment, "Where could he be?" Margaret and Luther were watching Robert, hoping that he could think of something.

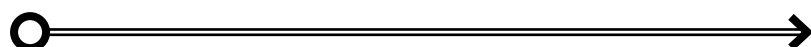
Robert's eyes lit up. "Oh, I know! Louver usually goes to the meadow across the University when he's got something troubling his mind. I think he might be there!"

"We must hurry!" Margaret gathered her coat and ushered them out. It only took a few minutes to reach the meadow.

"There!" Margaret pointed. Someone sat on the bench facing the pond. She was panting so Robert and Luther went ahead. As they got closer, they saw it was Louver on the bench. Louver turned around, saw them, and quickly he got up to leave.

"Stop!" Robert yelled. "We just want to talk."

Louver hesitated and turned back around walking towards his friends. He had his head down and couldn't



bear to look at them.

"Louver, we just want to ask some questions. Please, tell us what happened. Where is William?" Luther whispered gently.

Lines of tears were on Louver's face when he lifted his head. He got down on his knees. "This is all my fault... I'm sorry...I'm sorry." His voice faded off at the end and went into a fit of crying.

"Just tell us what happened! I must see my son! Please, please..." Margaret fell to her knees too and leaned towards Louver. Grabbing his arm, she shook it: "Please."

Louver nodded his head, "I was on my way to Peter's house when this church official approached me. He said that he needed to watch William for someone. Of course, I said no, but then he offered me a bag of coins. Well, Louise isn't well, and we need money for medicine, so I accepted the money. I'm sorry. I knew it was wrong." Louver sobbed into his hand.

Robert shook his head and Margaret cried, "my poor boy! Where did they take him? Was he scared?!"

"Hey!" Someone shouted from behind. Luther, Margaret, Robert, and Louver all turned around. The person beckoned them over with a wave. As the four of them walked closer, Robert thought that the man looked familiar.

"That's the person who asked for William!" Louver frantically told them. "Come on! We have go talk to him!"

"We have to get William!" Margaret cried.

As they approached the man, Robert saw that it was Tolbert! Tolbert reached behind him and brought out William.

"William!" Margaret cried as she embraced her son. Luther and Robert eyed Tolbert suspiciously.

"Why are you here? Why do you have William?" Robert questioned.

Tolbert sighed, "I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused you. I didn't know the Pope was this kind of person. I was there when he imprisoned you and I heard what he said." Robert's eyes widened as he remembered his conversation with the Pope.

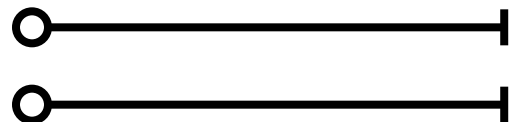
Tolbert continued. "All this time I thought I was doing good by helping the church. When he asked me to kidnap your son, I knew it wasn't right. However, I knew that the Pope would find someone else to do it if I didn't. So, I did take William, but to a place where he could stay safely. I tried to find you or your wife so I could return him to you. I followed your friend here and when I saw all of you, I went to get William and return him. I am truly sorry."

Margaret got up and gave Tolbert a hug.

"Well, what do we do now?" Louver asked.

Robert gave a sly smile. "We have some citizens to inform!"

Far to the west, dark clouds were forming.



The Way You Swing

Meena Potter

this must be hell
i say conversationally
and i, the sinner

imagination is a poor substitute,
i remind her
bells ring, falling from her mouth
and she smiles
and suddenly i am teeming
with want

this must be hell
i say loudly, holding the door for her
they walk through, his on hers
this must be hell, because you don't
know what you do!
i repeat, louder unafraid
i have made myself invisible today
the person you make me become!
bells ring through me

this must be hell
but that's nothing new

do you even know him? i ask
well, it's been two years, she answers
do you even know him? i ask
she blinks.

this must be a playground, i comment
joyous bells and she sits. we're on
swings
she swings only forward.

how does she do it?
i try and fail i always fail
i don't like the way you swing
do you think i'm greedy? i ask
her eyebrows crease
and she bares her teeth
how?
and her Question drips like syrup, or
perhaps blood-
i give her the only reply:
for swinging both ways.
something clicks in her brain. She
stands and walks away.

can you see my hidden worlds?
she does not seem to notice, but
i have not made myself invisible
has she?
do you know how the toilet knows
my mouth
and the secrets that from it pour?
the bells have gone silent
do you know of the earthquakes
that shake my body
of the lakes that empty down?
she is talking now
but not to me

this must be hell
and i, the sinner
this must be hell
and you, my sin,



Jar of Clouds

Somayya Upal

Grass stains painted across our knees, my sister and I lay in our front lawn with our small arms held up. We giggled as we pretended to support Nut, the Egyptian goddess of the sky, on our outreached palms. Beside us was a tattered mythology book, stamped by my elementary school's library; each page depicts Nut majestically arching over the Earth, holding the heavy cosmos we see above us.

And thus my love affair with the sky began.

I grew up trying to selfishly capture the sky for myself. I'd try to recreate the water cycle in a mason jar on my bedside, peering through the glass for any sign of clouds. From a young age I realized that the sky is a beautiful constant in our forever fluctuating lives.

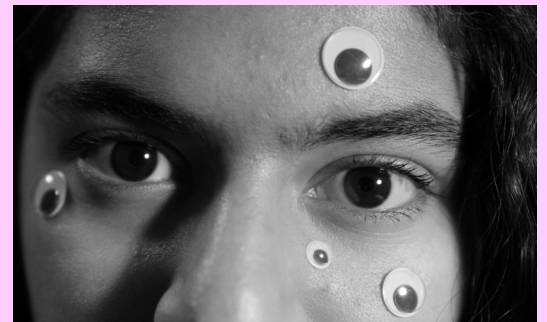
I'm in high school now, an infamous time for its stress and chaos. Falling on my bed after a long day, sometimes it feels like nothing went right, like nothing is worth it. My eyes barely focus on the textured ceiling in my bedroom. My fingers trace the soft seams in my clothes. I know many of my friends, my peers, and my classmates have ended up here (maybe whoever is reading this too). In those moments, where I feel weak and pessimistic, I roll over and gaze out my window. No matter what hour or what day it is, the sky is there: a reminder that there is good in this world.

Bright blue with fulsome clouds performing pirouettes for us. Or maybe pinks and reds that melt together like pigments. A pale blue with icy clouds like the lace that lines the dresses we'd wear as babies. Or the night sky adorned with sequins to form constellations that have left generations in awe. Even a gray sky, seemingly blank and plain, offers a stage for our minds to daydream on.

My fingers reach out just like they did when I was little, trying to touch the infinite color. This time I reach up not to support the goddess Nut, but to ask for her support.

I know that tomorrow the sky will be there.

And I will make sure I am here to see it.



You were friends with me for seven years.
You were friends with me
Not the other way around.
Nine months older and
Better at math,
Better at writing,
Better at persuading people that your stupid ideas were
right.

I sat with you,
Counted to infinity.
We marked where we left off and when we got to ten
thousand
Someone came for us
Because the class was distracted.
In the other room we made our own
Connect the dots.
I was later told that
“Important skills were being assessed”.
Maybe it was a waste of time
(We could make pictures of numbers
Inside our own heads.)

We went to the room
Writing two-week assignments in less than two days.
You watched a whole season of my least favorite show
Before October ended
I complained
So we did presentations.
Mine was on orcas—you were particularly opposed
To calling them killer whales.
The book you used was called *Evolving Planet*;
You gave it to me soon after.

Six years later I would spend two weeks
Hacking around an actual fossil
Of a fish from that book.

Fourth grade in New York is state history
Writing myths about fish.
A retelling of Icarus in which
Fish lost his wings
But found new life underwater.
Yours, a tale of extinction in which
Six species survived—
The sons of my Fish.
(We thought we were clever,
Tying our stories together)

On top of the pile,
Your grade.
(I shouldn't have told you.)
(I'm sorry.)
I tried to tell you it was someone else's grade.
You didn't buy it for a second.
All I remember is you screaming at me and
You didn't stop.

When your family took a trip to Texas,
You missed two weeks
Of everyone whispering of mental hospitals.
The school intervened
And you never heard of it.
I was familiar with the phrase
“Anger management issues”
Having been on the receiving end of yours
For two months.



It was the first time I'd heard the word
Anxiety.

The next year we talked
To the bus driver a lot.
Lauri or Lori or Laurie was her name
She hated Louise Slaughter and
Overused the word *love*.

Our bus was chronically early.
We waited every morning
To get into the school
With a seventh grader named Luke
Bullying you, the way you saw it—
Who was the real aggressor?
Connor talked to me a lot.
I don't remember about what.

All I remember is him hugging me
Holding my hand.

If I ask about you
People remember that you ran out of the room
Every week
And that one time you thought a printer was magical.
They forget how you
Fell and disappeared
From my life.

You once told me that
We are nothing more than the
Sum of our memories.
A quote from a book about magic
For an enigma like you
And what shall I love if not the enigma?



The Girl and the Tree

Lluvia Ayala-Pound

Oh how beautiful,
The Cherry Blossom tree?
With its pale pink leaves and wonderful scent
“How captivating, our beloved tree”, they say
Oblivious to the figure before them.

There she sways,
Wind swirling through her hair,
On the Cherry Blossom tree
With the pink,
Now stained red,
Falling to the ground.

They walk by, ignoring the sight of her
Refusing her existence.
And when they did,
The wind exploring her luscious locks slashed
the net of safety violently,
Causing them to plummet face first.

Reality hung onto the wind,
As she did to the tree.

More red falls,
Almost as slow as their realization of what they
allowed
And what they could’ve prevented.
She had to silence them somehow,
She had to get them out of her head.
So she climbed away from her fears and leaped
into the darkness.

There,
It surrounded her like a blanket.
But as more red fell,
The silence became deafening
The gravity defying curls had no more bounce
Her brown eyes tore the soul of those looking
on.

No more life.

Gave into the eternal higher power,
Isn’t that what you wanted?
She did the dirty work for you,
Why don’t you be grateful and look at the
magnificence bestowed upon your eyes?

The queen was limp,
Although her foreign beauty still so apparent.

You conquered the Amazon Warrior.
Made her sick and she started to die
Failing to realize that she planted the seed,
watched it grow and protected it.

‘It’ being your precious Cherry Blossom tree.



Overcoming Gravity

Alissa Frame

The white fluorescent lights shine like an artificial sun.

But they still rise and set each morning and night.

The squeaking of wheelchairs fills the stale air.

My nose tickles with the overwhelming aroma of Purell.

I touch her frail hand and feel the years of sun,

the delicate smoothness amid wrinkles.

The room is warm with stillness, empty stares that I see.

Tiger runs in and covers her with kisses,

right there at the Highlands.

Well, dogs aren't really allowed in the center.

No matter, we'll bring Bodhi next.

Because there's something about them,

they make those fluorescent lights a little more like the sun.

Silence and one-way conversations filled in by a dull drawl
coming from the tube.

"They've discovered Jesus' bones after years of search..."

and with a flip of a channel,

"Now, patter the eggplant coins in the breadcrumb mixture..."

We sit in the rehab center and have cherry cough drop breath.

She says we can shoot the breeze,

but the breeze only blows in one direction here.

The rainbow-colored pills of fear and confusion and skeptical

relief

shake around in plastic cups.

Everyone is as active as turtles.

We float through the air and abandon all constraints,
eating cherry pops the size of balloons.

Li twirls through the air, taking her by the hand.

I tell her we'll be in the garden tomorrow,
popping juicy tomatoes in our mouths.

Pretend footsteps embedded in the grass.

I'll backtrack through them towards the future,
and you can come with me.

Nous marcherons à la lune, vivant au milieu de la gravité.

Teeth will talk and lips will yell up to us.

As we sit with our legs hanging over the moon,
Lights rising and setting above us.



"Everyone Has a Story" - Sarah Woodams



The Worry Tree

Meena Potter

"I want you to think of a field. Waves of nameless grass, weeds, tiny flowers glimmering with morning dew. It's an atmosphere of vague familiarity that wraps around you as your world manifests according to your design. There is a forest somewhere, a mile behind you, and the moon is gazing fondly down upon you, nestled in her bed of clouds. Simple, peaceful, quiet.

"Now imagine a tree.

"Any type of tree you want. It could tower above you, stretching across the sky, dappled with mixed starlight and moonlight. It could be the size of your hand, the long rippling grass making it nearly impossible to see. A weeping willow, a giant oak, peeling bark, blue leaves, pink fruit. Imagine you look closely at the fruit. Imagine the fruits are shaped like stars.

"Now I want you to imagine something that's hurting you – a cruel comment, a stressful situation, an overwhelming thought – and give that something to a fruit. Watch as it lights up, holding your burden for you. Take as much time and as many star shaped-fruit as you need. Don't worry, they'll be there when you return."

I always worry that I'm going to fall asleep when I visit Dr. Janette. Her voice feels like a heavy layer of snow on a house, and I sometimes get muffled by it. It doesn't help that my chair shoves the smell of pine needles and cinnamon up my nose, that pungent smell of old furniture in unfamiliar offices. Nevertheless, I obligingly close my eyes, trying to remember the tree I've made up in the past.

It's white, the fluorescent teal sap pulsing just behind translucent bark. The pale green leaves are wisps of clouds,

or maybe cotton candy. Specks of golden fruit pepper the branches, emitting a brilliant glow as they bob in the breeze of the evening wind.

I don't like to count how much fruit I light up.

I don't think my great-grandmother did either.



Nobody says why my great-grandmother left.

My mom was the first one to actually talk about it. She said that Nana had packed her bags, leaving her room empty, and took a little vacation, but she never said where that vacation was to. Whenever I ask her about it, Mom bursts into tears and demands why I don't have faith in Nana. Sometimes she'll cry without me even saying anything, and when I ask her why, she shakes her head and says she's fine. It's not nice to keep secrets from people.

I don't think Mom's fruits are lit up. I think she believes she doesn't have them.

My older brother says we shouldn't cry about Nana. He says it's her fault for abandoning us. He tells me that I shouldn't look at pictures of her or wish for her back because she doesn't deserve that. He says she betrayed us. When we first learned that she had left, he punched a hole into the kitchen wall. I know he was angry, but now the wall is broken and that's never a good thing. We're very fond of walls, my family.

I'm pretty sure my brother's tree doesn't even have any fruit. Maybe the only things there are the splattered remains of glowing star-shaped fruit that were hurtled to the barren



field ground.

My younger sister has a rock that she keeps under her

pillow. Sometimes I'll come into her room and I'll catch her whispering to it. She says it's a wish stone, and if she wishes on it 1,000 times, Nana will come back. I tried telling



her that's not how it works, but she never listens to me. No second grader listens to what people say anyway.

I think my sister's tree is shriveled and dried up because she doesn't water it. I think she just hopes for rain.

My grandfather doesn't talk much. Nana was his mom, and as soon as he heard the news, he locked himself in his room and still doesn't come out save eating and going to the bathroom. I don't think we've had a proper conversation in months. If you approach his door, you can hear the TV playing the same cartoon, over and over. Grandpa must have it memorized by now. I wonder why he doesn't watch anything else.

Grandpa's tree will get no water, not because he's not watering it, but because he's moved his to an icy tundra. The water will just freeze if it gets close.

"How about your dad?" Dr. Janette asks. I wonder what her tree looks like. Maybe it's a pine tree, and a layer of snow frosting the leaves that do nothing to shield you from the glow of her fruit. I'll bet her branches are strong and broad to counter the weight. She's got a lot of people giving her worries- enough for twenty trees.

"My dad?" I ask, pulled out of my thoughts.

"A couple weeks ago during our last session, you said he really liked the idea of the Worry Trees and wanted to try it. What do you think his tree looks like?"

My dad's tree glows, I'll bet. When you stand by it, you can see one large branch with pictures of Nana nestled among the leaves so he doesn't forget what she looks like. If you climb up to the branch, you can hear the whispers of stories about Nana when she was young, stories she's told Dad countless times. There's a tape recorder tucked gently away in a hole in the branch playing a song she wrote. At the base of the tree trunk, there's a notepad with drawings of trees and fruit and little notes in his scattered handwriting, reminding himself

how to make the tree. That's how he knows what to say when I start crying and can't seem to stop, when my world spins and calming down is something that's as elusive as an unlit fruit on his tree. That's why when he wipes my tears away, he tells me to take a deep breath.

And then he tells me to imagine a field.

I love my family with all my heart, and that includes Nana. And I know everyone misses her just as much as I do. I know I may not have as much fruit as my dad, and that he may not have as much fruit as Nana, but I know that we all have some, and I know that it can hurt. I know that we all treat our trees differently.

Sometimes I cry about Nana too. Sometimes I feel like my tree has too much fruit, that the branches will break with a sickening crack from the trunk and topple down upon me. When that happens and Dr. Janette isn't there, my dad asks me what I think Nana's tree looks like.

Her field is full of fairies, of hidden creeks, of floating water lilies. Her tree is laden with fruit to the point where the branches dip and billow, bending close to the ground.

But the branches don't break.

A lot of people that are Nana's age have trees full of fruit, but they don't like to admit it. I think that's a very human thing to do. I think it's very human to dislike the fact that you need to have a tree every now and then. Nana really liked her tree, though. I think that's human too.

Sometimes people don't care for their trees. Sometimes people forget how to.

I think it's important to remember.

I think that's what Nana did.



Unnecessary Air

Noor Lima Boudakian

We're sitting again
On this pile of thin-lipped smiles
Pushing around unnecessary air
That both of us might rather be
Giving to someone else

Yesterday I stood on top of a mountain
Wearing my boxing gloves and blood
Heaving the thin air
Trying to force my hands out of their fists

Tomorrow I'll sit on my bed with its purple blankets
Looking at the watercolored sunflowers,
Thinking of my road to loving yellow
My legs crossed, looking back at how yours dangled
Thinking of supermarket raspberries
Picked up on my way home
To you

Before you stopped breaking up petty arguments
Between my sister and me
And before I began refusing to smile

I'll still vote for you in 2036
To remember how important a handshake is
Maybe this time more formal than when we quickly shook hands
For the first time while my dad idled in the car a block away



Songbirds

Thomas Pinkham

Tomorrow was bound to be the best day of any in a young woman's life. To many, it was a day of joy. To a certain lady, it was an opportunity. Alice had spent years surrounded by stone walls, hardly ever leaving the city except in an adorned carriage. It was a comfortable life, but a dull one, days of weaving and study punctuated by meaningless holidays and feasts. Tomorrow she would no longer be left abandoned in a castle to sew and sing and learn greetings in different languages she would rarely use. Tomorrow she was meant to meet her fiancé. Her father had told her that Prince Douglas was a stunning man, dressed in the finest clothes money could buy. His kingdom was supposedly vast and full of beautiful forests and pristine lakes. Of course, such a man was very wealthy, and her father went on and on about the riches that the Prince had won, how he was rich enough to afford beautiful gifts in exchange for her hand. Alice was not as excited as her father. She remembered the story her mother told her, about her marriage; that was the first time Alice understood the feeling that always showed in her mother's eyes.

It was a tired, longing look, subtly covered up by practiced smiles and weary charm. Joy was scarce and fleeting for her, even her own children were distant. Yet Father said she should be joyous, that mar-

riage was a wonderful thing, so Alice smiled, if only to make him happy. Besides, Douglas was a young man, surely, he was more handsome, more interesting, more romantic than her old, grey father. When they met, it would be the most wonderful moment of her life. They would be married under an archway of flowers, dancing to the piano notes of the songbirds. He would whisk her away to a beautiful castle, with a royal garden and a view of the meadows. They would live together as king and queen, spending time together at all the most wonderful parts of the kingdom. But of course, such thoughts are childish fantasies.

An alarm blew loudly, shattering Alice's day-dreams as the castle erupted into action. Soldiers suddenly sprung up, armed with crossbows and spears, shouting and looking to the sky. A winged form descended from the skies like an angel falling from heaven, swooping over the castle walls. With a stroke of its tail it flung two men from their tower, effortlessly passing the stronghold's defenses. As the creature flew upwards Alice could see it clearly. She ran from her window in panic as a dragon circled the tower and charged directly at her. The rush of wind blew her into the wall as the monster burst through the wide window and slammed into the floor. Alice cleared the dust from her face and stood up quickly, turning to the door. Before she could reach it, the dragon heaved itself up in front of her, shaking shattered glass off itself.

It was a very strange dragon, very little like



the ones Alice had heard of in legends and fairytales. Rather than a rough and brutal looking creature it was lean, with a layer of thick grey feathers, with some tawny patches. It had short pointed ears where horns should have been, and it was surprisingly small; a grown man would be about as tall as its shoulders. Still, it was large enough that it could kill her easily, and it quickly had her backed into a corner. Its pained grimace showed a long mouth filled with sharp, curved teeth as it slunk forward like a wolf, bright blue eyes focused in on its target. The creature stalled, then pounced, and Alice screamed, yet there was no stabbing pain or crunch as it grabbed her between its jaws, almost gently despite her panic. It turned around and leaped out of the tower, spreading its wings and taking off, leaving the safety of the ground far below. As she soared, Alice felt herself getting dizzy, closing her eyes as the tower vanished from sight.

She awoke laying on a soft blanket that had been torn and stitched several times over the years. Several trees surrounded her, standing tall and silently above her. The princess listened closely, and she started to hear the leaves and the birds, as something stood up from the ground nearby.

“Ah, good, you’re finally awake.”

Alice whirled to see the dragon standing there, looking her over, seemingly concerned. She backed away and screamed;

“You speak? You understand me? Please--”

“Easy, girl. I’m not going to harm you. Sit down.”

Fearfully, she sat back on the old fabric, keeping her eyes on the creature. It relaxed and laid down.

“To answer your question, yes, I speak. A few languages. And I’ve sworn twice in each of them that I would not cause any harm to you.”

“May I ask why? I would have thought--”

“That I wanted to eat you or hold you for ransom. Of course. You know, not all my kind are greedy savages.”

Sensing hostility, she quickly apologized.

“No, of course you aren’t. I’m sorry, I’m very confused.”

“Then let me explain. Your name is Alice, yes?”

“It is.”

“Well then, call me Mica”

He extended his paw towards her, and she shrunk away. He gave a look that seemed almost like a pout.

“Don’t you people shake hands with someone when you meet them?”

Fearfully, Alice reached out her hand. Mica



had rough skin under the thin feathers on his palms, but his grip was practiced and respectful. His toothy grin still left a twinge of panic in Alice's mind.

"Alright, so you probably have several questions for me. Firstly, the reason I am not going to just kill you is because somebody has asked that I bring you alive."

"Who asked for me, and why?"

"A close friend of mine, a human. She went to a lot of trouble for this, so I'd like if you were polite to her."

A vague answer, frustratingly useless. Alice asked again, firmer this time.

"Who is she, and what does she want from me?"

"She will introduce herself soon. And I was not making a request, so watch your tone."

His glare immediately silenced her next comment. She resolved to simply wait for this person to appear. Several minutes passed as the two sat and stared at each other. Eventually Alice picked up the sound of somebody walking along a worn path. Mica perked his ears again as a young woman emerged from the brush. She was wearing a tunic with the sleeves torn off, showing the muscles of her tanned arms. She carried a short bow across her back, a sword strapped to her waist, and she held a large bag full of clanking

objects. Strangest of all, her expression upon seeing the princess was nonthreatening, and happy. She certainly didn't look like a grimy bandit or a deadly enchantress. She was just normal. Actually, she was fairly good looking. Mica turned to greet the girl.

"As promised, Princess Alice of Cannica."

"Quick work, well done. And for you;" The girl unloaded the contents of the bag. "Twenty-four silver plates, two colored glass lanterns, and a furred cloak and sapphire necklace."

The dragon looked over the shining trinkets, and felt the expensive cloak, giving an approving rumble. The girl scratched him softly behind his ears, then looked over to Alice and stood silent for a second. Mica nudged her closer.

"So, it's nice to meet you Alice." The girl began and held out her hand. "I'm Simza. Sorry about the rough ride here."

Alice shook her hand and replied.

"That's very kind of you, but why exactly am I here?"

"I saw you at that festival a few months ago and I wanted to meet you. Get to know about you a little. So here we are." She smiled. "I know a really nice place nearby, if you just want to sit and talk for a little while."

No demands, no threats, and no sign of any



affiliation with an enemy lord. Simza's voice was conversational, and a little bit nervous, even though she could easily rob or kill the princess. As she spoke, she even discarded her bow and quiver. Alice still felt a little uneasy, but she decided to go along with the strange girl's request.

"That would be nice. Where is this place?"

"Come right this way."

Simza took another path through the woods, pushing bushes and low branches out of the way for Alice. The princess held on to her dress to make sure nothing else tore it. Mica followed them, keeping his head low. As the three walked, Simza tried to start a conversation.

"So, what do you normally do? Can you make laws, or jail people, or can only the king do that?"

"I have no influence in my father's affairs."

"Well, if you have that much time, what do you like to spend it on?"

"I don't usually do that much. If I'm not busy with lessons."

The rogue girl looked back, as if asking for elaboration, but the princess remained silent. She spoke again, in a language Alice couldn't understand.

"She doesn't trust me, what do I do?"

Behind her, Mica perked his ears and replied

quietly.

"Try singing about your feelings. I hear that does wonders."

"What do I say though?"

"Make it up, you'll do fine."

Alice couldn't understand what they were saying, but they seemed to be in an argument. Simza gave the animal the sort of glare her father had when he was angry.

"You're better at this than I am, and you aren't even human! I can't just sing a magic song and make her fall in love. I don't know how to convince her I'm someone I'm not?"

"Don't do it the way I do. Let her get interested in you naturally. Just talk to her like a normal person, she'll open up when she feels safe."

Both went silent for a second, as they came out into an open plain. Alice saw that the land was mostly empty, with only a single abandoned manor and overgrown farmhouses obscuring the blanket of tall grass that covered the slowly rolling hills. The only sign anyone had been there in years was a campsite with a set of cooking pots and an ornate wooden table, split in two parts and held together by tree sap and a set of old nails. Alice looked around, finding the silence odd, but relaxing at the same time. Behind her, Simza stood watching.



"You're right. We probably have something in common, maybe I'm overthinking this. She seems nicer than I thought she would be."

Mica stepped to her side and leaned down to look in her eyes.

"You've got charm, you've just got to stop worrying and remember the practice. Confidence is the best thing you can have here. But just in case, signal me if your little problem comes up. I won't go too far."

Breathing in deeply, Simza stepped forward to talk to the young princess.

"I'm sorry about the table, but this was too sudden to go through the effort of getting wood for a new one. I don't know much about crafts, but I did the best I could."

Alice looked around the camp, observing the multiple different objects scattered around. She wondered exactly why this girl was living out here, practically alone. Behind her, Simza kept talking.

"I really hope this isn't too uncomfortable for you. Most of the things around here are falling apart."

"No, it's just fine." Alice raised her eyebrow and asked; "How long have you been living here, with that dragon?"

Simza's face lightened a little bit, and she paused in thought.

"We met a little more than two years ago, but we've only been around here for, say, six months, maybe eight. We've mostly been going west so far."

"Why have you been moving? Where did you come from?"

"I used to live in a little town, nowhere special. I'm not sure exactly where we're going. Mica says he promised my father he would find me and bring us together, but he isn't sure where to find him. We didn't plan to stay here this long, but then I saw you, and then I felt like I had to meet you."

"But why?"

"Because, I saw you up with your family and thought you looked nice. Honestly, you looked pretty."

Pretty. She was pretty. That was just a compliment, but something about the girl's voice was strange. There was meaning in it, more importance than just empty praise. There was a hint of hopefulness in her eyes for just a moment, before the silence drowned it out. Simza stepped away.

"Was that weird? I'm sorry, it's a stupid reason to take you all the way out here by yourself. I just thought it would be nice, talking to another girl after a while, getting to know her. I'm sorry."

"It's alright, really. I haven't talked to many people my age either. This is all very strange to me."

That wasn't entirely true, but talking to her



brothers was different. This girl knew nothing about her, yet she was so insistent to learn. Despite the circumstances, Alice was starting to feel comfortable. She sat down on another thin sheet laid across the flattened grass.

“What is it like, living out in the wild? I don’t imagine it would be simple.”

Simza looked back over her shoulder and paused.

“Well, ... it gets cold sometimes. Mostly in the winter, obviously.” She gave a little nervous chuckle. “That’s why we found some old blankets and fixed them. Whenever we come near a village, I look around for anything we can use. Mica usually hunts for his own food, so I just take something to last me for a while.” She sat down on a cloth next to the kindling, looking at Alice for a moment. “You’ve probably had much better food though. I found an old recipe book around here, with a lot of different meals in it. I don’t have many of the things to make them though.”

“I’ve had quite a few nice meals, yes. My father has a lot of cooks working for him. They are very good, they must have at least a dozen different ways to prepare everything they make.”

“I can imagine. Life in a castle must be great. You would always have someone to do everything for you.”

Alice came over and sat next to her.

“It is nice, but sometimes that’s the problem. I have nothing to do. It’s like being a bird singing in a cage. It seems nice, but soon it all becomes like a routine, and nothing has any appeal anymore. I’ve been hoping that maybe I could get my chance to actually do something new for once.”

“Well, what do you think of this?”

Alice looked out over the open plains, at the long, curving horizon that carried on for miles before being broken by the trees. Now that she was out here, the world looked like it was sprawling over everything in sight, fading into the sky and continuing towards some invisible edge. The landscape was a moving painting that subtly shifted with the wind that turned the grass into waves. Faintly in the distance, a bird was singing its lovesick song in a strange little language. All of it was somehow foreign, as if the shades of green had never been so vivid before. Without the dead, grey stone of the castle and the thatched roof homes, every color seemed a little brighter. In just the right spot of sunlight, it even looked like Simza’s hair gave off a glow like polished gold. Maybe that was just the confusion from the flight, but Alice was smiling, just a little. Just sitting there with the sun making her face warm, the world seemed to stop for a moment. She realized she had been silent for a long time.

“I think I like this. It’s beautiful out here”



"You're..." Simza paused. "You're nice company. I like this too."

Around then, Mica returned from wherever he had been, carrying a large buck in his teeth. He set it down behind the girls and stood next to them.

"You two look comfortable. I hope you haven't been waiting too long."

Simza looked at him, smirking. "I was sort of hoping you'd run away."

"Well, you know how I can't stand being away from you." The dragon's grin dripped with sarcasm. "Unless you've already eaten while I was away, you should start the fire before this starts to rot."

"Yeah, give me a second." Simza lifted herself up and stretched her arms. She took some of the kindling she had stacked and arranged it in the firepit. Mica pulled the deer out of sight, baring his claws to carve the carcass. Within a few minutes, they had everything ready. Simza clapped her hands together as the fire sprung up and crackled. She turned and came back to talk with Alice.

"We usually don't do anything this fancy, but I think we're doing a good job. We would have gotten a professional to cook for us, but everybody ran away when Mica came by a town to ask." Alice found herself giggling at that. Simza smirked, "Maybe I should check on him, make sure he doesn't fall asleep and

burn the deer. Have you ever had deer before?"

"No, I don't think so. I don't really remember."

"It tastes great if you cook it right. There are thousands out here, I've gotten a lot of practice with them."

"I imagine you have more free time than I do. I wouldn't be surprised if you've learned how to do magic."

"Not very well. I tried turning something into a toad and I blinded myself."

Both girls laughed at that. Simza thought for a moment and stood up. She snuck over to the remains of an old shack and picked up an old board. Leaning down to Alice, she whispered;

"A little while ago I learned a little secret about Mica. If you throw something right over his head like this;"

She swung the board and sent it high in the air, over where Mica was laying down. In almost a second, his ears perked, and he jumped up to grab the board in his teeth. After he landed, he tasted his catch and recognized the trick. Simza was almost in tears.

"It just looks so funny, I'm sorry!" She reached out as if to hug him. "I had to show her."

Mica smiled back at her and leaned in to let her touch his chin. Then he opened his mouth and dropped



a wet chunk of wood into her hands. He started to laugh as she recoiled. Alice felt a bit bad for laughing too. She handed Simza the sheet to dry herself.

“It looks like you jumped almost as much as he did.”

Simza put her hand to her forehead dramatically.

“And now you’ve betrayed me too! Who wants to laugh at me next? The king himself?”

She waited for a moment, then started to giggle herself. Mica turned back around to check the deer while Simza and Alice went back to talking. Even as they ate, the two were locked in conversation, about the day Alice’s brother learned to ride horseback, and the time Simza let go of the wrong part of the bow and hit herself. They spent so long talking that Mica had finished the deer before they did. Simza showed Alice where to scratch the soft spot behind Mica’s ears, getting him to purr. Near the end of the day, the two of them lay down again, listening to a flock of birds resting on the plains.

“You’re going through a lot of work for this.” Alice smiled. “Thank you.”

“Mica did the hardest parts, really. I’m glad you enjoy it, though. It feels like this is all worth the effort.”

“I hope so. It’s a nice change, instead of living

up in a tower, waiting for a prince to come and bring me somewhere better. I was told the dragon was the worse alternative, but this is much nicer than I was expecting.”

Simza shifted over so she could look Alice in the eyes.

“Life is surprising like that. I grew up expecting that I would either join a convent or marry some poor farmer and spend the rest of my life working either way. Then, just by chance, everything changed. I’m glad that it did. Now I’ve got freedom, I have a friend, and a father, somewhere, looking for me.”

Alice started to grow melancholy.

“I’ve had a father and a mother all my life. Brothers, maids, cooks, teachers. None of that ever changed. All anyone ever gave me to look forward to was marriage. Even that still seems surreal. I think of my mother, and I start to have doubts.”

“What do you think about that--the prince, the marriage? Do you still want that?”

“I’ve wanted it for years. That was everything my life was building towards. A husband--a king--and children of my own. Even if it never worked for my mother, I can’t give up on that chance to be loved by somebody. I want the chance to feel love for someone, and to have them feel the same way.”

Simza seemed to pause for a moment, as she



moved closer.

"I'm going to take my chance at that right now. I've had that feeling-that love-for a while now. I know that I might not get another chance to find it, so I wanted to try, at least. I want to say that, even with the short time we've known each other, I felt that way about you."

Alice tried to find her response, and she found nothing.

"I know that isn't normal," Simza continued, "And most of my life I've been told to be ashamed of that, but I had to take that chance. I know you might not want that, and I understand that. I just wanted to spend a little time with you, to tell you that."

Alice stopped herself for a minute to breathe. She knew nothing about this sort of feeling. She had grown up expecting a prince, and here she was, doubting herself again. But they had enjoyed their time together, they had grown so close in just a few hours.

"I don't know what to say. I enjoyed my time with you, truly, but I can't..." She hesitated. "I can't say what that was. I wish I could say, but I don't know how I felt."

"If you want to go back home, I understand."

Over the horizon, a flock of birds scattered.

"I feel like I should go back. I'm sorry. You're a wonderful girl but I don't know if I can feel that way

about you."

"Alright. If you don't hate me for it, that's the least I can ask. Mica can bring you back before the sun sets."

"I won't have to." Mica stood nearby, looking at the horizon. "There are two men on horseback out there. I think they sent them to look for you."

Alice looked between the two of them. They had been strangers, but they had been kind to her. They had listened to more of her in a few hours than most people had in years. She stood up with Simza, who tried not to look her in the eyes.

"Go ahead. They're probably worried about you."

Alice put her hand on Simza's shoulder and pushed away her curled hair

"Thank you for this. I won't tell anyone where you are."

"Of course. I'm glad you still enjoyed it."

The two girls gave each other a sad smile, and parted ways. As Alice walked towards the figures, Mica leaned down to let Simza hold him. He whispered to her;

"If you want, I'll follow them back and make sure she'll be safe."

"Leave her. They're going to try to track us



anyway. I'm going back home to pack up."

She disappeared back into the forest, through the path to their clearing. As soon as she reached her cot, she sat down and started to gather her things.

Mica watched as Alice reached the figures, who dismounted to kneel before her. Turning around, he left.

The taller man stood up, removing his helmet to show his youthful face, framed by faded brown hair. He held his hand out to her and introduced himself.

"Your Royal Highness, Princess Alice of Canica. My squire and I have come to find you and bring you home to your father. I am Crown Prince Douglas, Heir to the Kingdom of Saræte. I am glad to see that you are safe. Come with me, you will be back with your father shortly."

Alice reached forward and took his hand. As the prince helped her onto his horse, she felt almost dazed. He spoke to her again, asking her;

"I was told that a dragon stole you from your castle. What happened? I find it hard to believe that you were just left here."

Alice paused for a moment, trying to think of what she could say.

"I don't remember, I think that I passed out. I just woke up nearby a few hours ago. There was no dragon anywhere I could see."

She watched as the prince scrutinized her, hop-

ing he couldn't tell that she had just lied to her future husband. Just so she could protect that girl. The prince mounted his horse and began to ride. Alice held on to him and thought. This was supposed to be the moment he would sweep her away and show her she could be loved. With all the gifts he had sent to sway her father, he must have been hoping for it as much as she had. Yet, so far, she felt none of that warmth from him. She tried to find it.

"How long have you been planning for our marriage?"

He looked back at her, as if he had not expected her to ask.

"Five months ago, my father met with his old allies to find a wife for me. You were chosen, and I agreed to marry you."

"Well, your gifts were very lovely. Thank you." Alice leaned to look at his face. Prince Douglas only nodded in response. "What did my father say when he told you I was gone?"

"He told us about the 'dragon' that kidnapped you, then he asked me to find you and slay the beast. I think he's gone mad."

"He has gotten quite old."

"You don't have his madness, do you? Did you see any dragon? What really happened?"

He didn't seem violent, but his tone had turned



suspicious. Alice felt a hint of fear.

“No, I’m not mad. I never saw any dragon. I swear.”

“Good. Then I will speak to someone else with some sense, and I will find whoever did this. I will not stand by and let someone take my wife from me.”

They rode in silence for several minutes after that. Alice shrunk into herself and thought. As they slowly came closer to her home, Alice felt like she was drifting farther from safety. Something within Douglas seethed, and she felt his frustration with her father sharpening itself. She thought back to Simza, and her calm dinner on the plains. That girl had given off some sort of warmth that Alice started to miss. Back with her, she had finally been able to see the world that she never could behind the stone walls she was going to return to. The last hint of that experience followed her as a single bird, softly humming so she could hear. Alice looked back at the prince and reached to touch his shoulder.

“Could you stop riding for a minute? I don’t feel very well.”

The horses slowed their trot and stopped. Alice got off and looked up at the sky. She watched as the bird turned and circled overhead, still singing.

“What’s wrong?” The prince dismounted and walked to her.

“Do you love me?” She looked into his eyes. He paused.

“What kind of question is that? Are you feeling all right?”

“Please, tell me. Do you?” She felt her voice strain.

“Why are you doubting me?”

She sighed, and felt her shoulders fall.

“Wait a minute. What’s gotten into you?”

“Do you care about this at all?”

“Yes, I care. My family has invested a lot to have me marry a princess of good standing and wealth. I have no intention of disappointing their wishes. Why are you asking me all of these questions?”

Alice took a breath, and she looked the prince in the eyes.

“Because I think I’m making a mistake. I feel... well, I don’t feel like I can see myself loving you. I feel like I’ve found that love, but I let it go. I’m not sure I want to go back to my father.”

Douglas stepped forward, his gaze staring into her.

“Who is it?”

“What do you mean?”

His eyes darkened as he took another step



towards her.

“Who have you been seeing, who makes you feel this way? Who is trying to take you away from me? Tell me his name!”

Alice started to move away as he approached. His voice had turned harsh, and his eyes were becoming dark clouds.

“Why are you accusing me? I never thought any of this would happen! I can’t help what I feel about her...”

She realized her mistake too late, as he scowled.

“A woman? A woman has been corrupting you? That’s why you’re questioning me. Trying to get me to turn soft. A woman!”

“She did nothing to me! She showed me that there is a world outside of everything I knew. I feel that that world has so much more for me than my home. No one listened to me, no one thought I mattered. She showed me kindness, and patience, which you seem to be missing.”

Douglas stormed forward. He grabbed her by the shoulder and held on.

“What has happened to you? You’ve gotten ideas above your station! Being with a woman, loving her? You need help. Come with me, now.”

“No. Let go of me!”

As Alice struggled to escape his grip, the shrill cry of a bird pierced their ears. The songbird from above dove towards them and bit hard on Douglas’ ear. He recoiled in shock as Alice escaped, and the bird jumped around him where he could not reach it. It flew between the two, and its body started to shift. The small form of the bird exploded into smoke, and started transforming into a large, four-legged shape. The smoke reformed, and Mica stood between Alice and the prince, snarling at her attacker. The prince stood stunned for a moment, before drawing his sword and shouting to his squire, who was trying to calm the panicked horses. Mica raised his voice, calling to Alice.

“Get back and run. Find Simza if you can.”

The prince took up his shield and helmet, raising his sword to charge. Mica roared to meet the challenge. The dragon extended his claws and swiped at the prince, keeping him at a distance. Both attacked, Mica biting down on Douglas’ shield and trying to wrestle it off his arm. The young squire charged him, and he let go to face them both. Alice turned and tried to find the way they had come. Mica held his ground, knocking the prince to the ground with a swipe. He spun around to pounce on the squire. He knocked the weapon out of the younger man’s hand and tried to pull his shield away. Behind him, the prince stood up and regained his posture. His squire drew a dagger



from his him and slashed at Mica's leg, causing him to growl in pain. He let go, and roared again, scaring the horses into running.

Alice saw Simza searching the plains and called out to her. The girl turned and ran.

"What happened? Why did you come back?"

"The prince... I told him I couldn't stay with him... he grabbed me." Alice gasped for breath. "Mica is there, they're fighting each other."

"The stubborn sonuva... Where is he?"

She was carrying her sword again, holding onto the grip. Alice took her hand and brought her back. Mica was trying to keep track of both men, snarling and biting to keep them away. Then both rushed him at the same time. He chose to pounce on the squire, then turned as the prince ducked under his wing. He roared as Douglas plunged his sword into his stomach. The prince pulled the blade out and backed away as Mica staggered. The dragon growled, then started to cough, and fell on his side. The prince removed his helmet and saw Mica fall still. He turned and saw Simza behind him, shielding Alice.

"You! You are the one who has tried to disgrace me! Step away from my wife immediately, you witch!"

Simza drew her own sword and yelled back.

"If you think she's yours, then come take her!"

Both charged forward, and their swords clashed with the sound of thunder. Douglas blocked Simza's strikes with his shield, but he could not hit her either. She dodged to his left and grabbed the edge of his shield. The two of them wrestled to control it, and she managed to pull it out of his hold. Both started to duel again, following blocks with counterattacks, then shifting their angle to strike again. Alice watched, starstruck by their skill. Simza kept up with blow after blow, matching every strike with equal force. Nearby, the squire held his position, patiently standing by. Simza managed to push Douglas back, and knocked him down with a strong kick. At that moment, the squire attacked, trying to stab her from the side. Alice held her breath as Simza stepped to the side, then used the grip of her sword to hit the squire in his stomach as he charged. He doubled over and fell. Alice heard a groan, and a voice nearby spoke up.

"Nice work! You've been practicing!"

Simza smirked at Mica, who raised his head to watch her. Alice was shocked.

"How are you... I thought I saw you die?"

He grinned and shifted upright.

"Because of this? It's just a little flesh wound."

She looked at his injury, then quickly looked away, feeling sick. Meanwhile, Prince Douglas had gotten up, and was aggressively trying to force Simza



off balance. She barely managed to keep her stance, ducking under a swing to shove him backwards. Furious, he tried to thrust his sword into her chest, which she blocked, and struck him across the cheek with her fist. Douglas yelled at her, attacking viciously. The two traded blows again, and the prince managed to get Simza's sword out of her hand. He raised his blade, then tried to score his finishing blow. The girl jumped out of the way, then raised her hand to his face and snapped her fingers. A flash of light made the prince drop his guard, letting Simza knock him out with another punch. She rubbed her knuckles and took his sword from him. Mica stood up again, and Alice walked to Simza.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm feeling fine. You might want to ask them, though." She looked where at the prince and his squire lay unconscious in the grass. Alice stood in front of Simza and embraced her.

"Thank you. For all of that. I think I've realized what I'm feeling now. If you would still give me my chance, I'd like to give you yours."

Simza smiled and held her shoulders gently.

"We don't have the luxuries of a castle, but if you really want to stay out here, we'd be glad to have you with us." She gave Mica a side look as he came to join them.

"Hang on a minute, that looks awful, go clean that up. I don't want to scare the poor girl away already."

"Tell your princess not to worry so much. I've had worse."

He leaned down to the two of them, grinning. Alice smiled back and scratched him behind his ears. He stepped back and looked at the two men.

"I'll get those two back home, let them sleep it off. If you wouldn't mind helping a little, that is."

He shapeshifted again, taking the form of a dappled grey horse. Simza took the two men and sat them on his back, using a rope to tie them where they wouldn't fall off. As he began to trot, Alice remembered something, and called out to him.

She walked back to their clearing, taking Alice's arm in hers. The two girls packed up blankets and supplies, then sat together on the plains, watching the sunset. By the next morning, Mica had returned, having somehow stolen some of Alice's belongings, and packed them into a stolen wagon. He and Simza had packed everything else while Alice slept. Simza helped her get up, then brought her a breakfast she had just made.

"Before we go anywhere, do you want to visit your mother? Just to make sure she knows you'll be okay. You don't have to tell her anything about me."



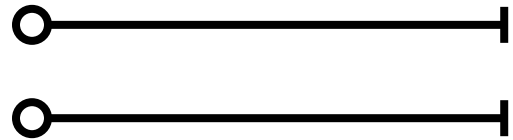
Alice finished her meal and stood up.

“I’d like that. Just a little visit, before you show me how much more of the world there is out there.”

“Of course, my fair lady. I promise that you won’t be disappointed.”

Simza took Alice’s hand, and helped her onto the wagon. She climbed up next to her, and the horses began to trot. Mica walked alongside them, holding his head high. As they traveled, they watched the

world come alive in front of them. Deer scattered across the plains, disappearing into the forests. Overhead, they heard the sweet harmony of a pair of songbirds, finally united. Simza put her arm around Alice’s shoulders, and she kissed her.



“Cliff” - Sydney Cornell

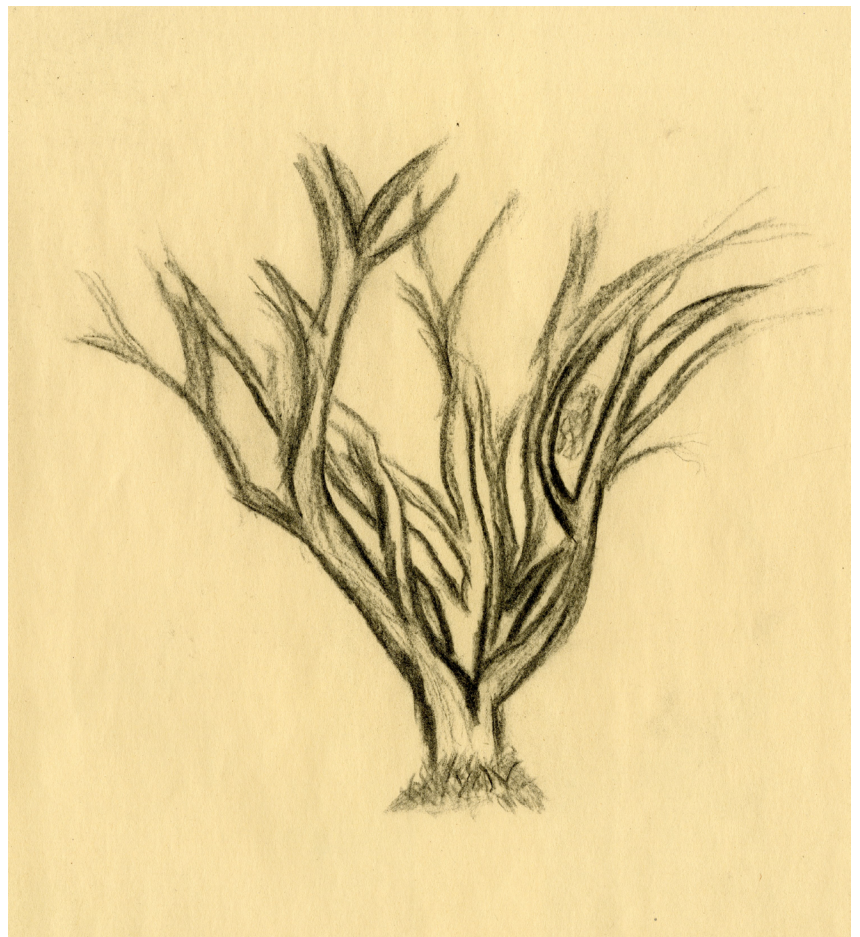




"Politiclash" - Dara Rozen

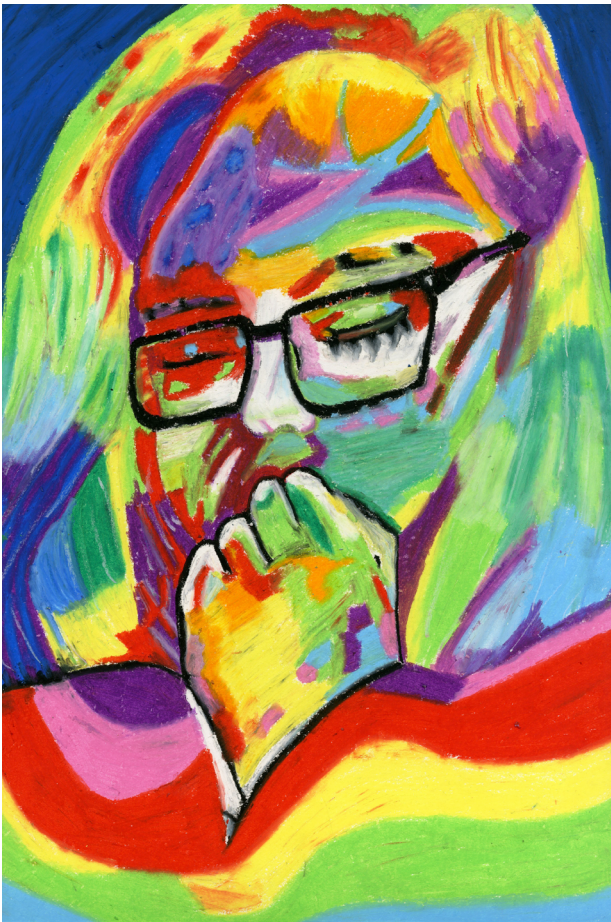


"Bottle" - Elizabeth Husarek



"Img143" - Elizabeth Husarek





"The Colors in my Mind" - Victoria Vice



"Hush" - Kay'ana Reaves



"You're in My Bloodstream" - Keegan Beck





"Stool Boy" - Katrina Khawaja



"Cat" - Elizabeth Lennarz



"Berries" - Somayya Upal



Church Hymn for the Condemned by Johnny Hobo and the Freight Trains Makes Me Want to Set Things on Fire

Elise McCamant

Drugs doomed the punk movement. You don't need riot control
when binge drinking and heroin are haute couture,
when the leather jackets line themselves up stiffly
behind needles and beer bottles and smoke a pack before every show.

I'm not sure how much I believe that art is anything more than
addition of parts or that music is just absence of Satan
and space to breathe. You want real art?

Gratuitous sexual imagery, none of it appealing,
what Allen Ginsberg would have wanted.

I have no time for serious artists.

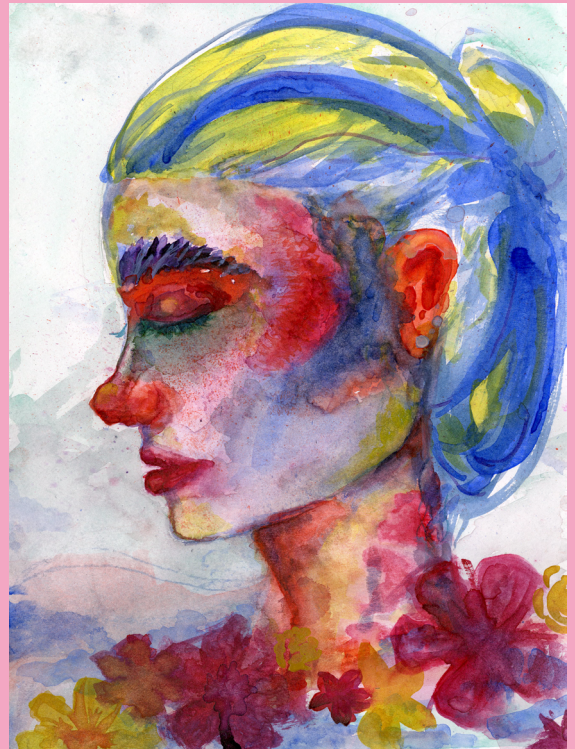
I drench my art in turpentine the morning after I make it
and set it ablaze in the alleys to project at bureaucrats by lunch.
I've been told no one writes epics anymore but
Hell, what could be more epic than my wandering monologue,
destruction and daisies woven together
and shot through God's cold, capitalist heart?

I don't bleed ink so much as I pant it out,
humidity into the air, use yoga trained dragon breath
to mistreat the water cycle and paint the cumulus clouds black.
Octopus heart.

Brain dead always came easy but my hands are an enemy of the people
and continue to betray me, tentacle their way towards yours.

Lord! call the FBI, lock these knuckles down in Guantanamo Bay
(I'm still mad about the Spanish-American War).

I'm going to kill God.



"Floral" - Elise McCamant



I used to throw myself off of bridges looking for salvation or fish,
hoping maybe to swallow enough mud to build up my sarcophagus
from the inside-out.

I still hope to hop a train someday,
find my roots in the crust punk movement and make friends with banjos,
but I fear the glamour of drinking myself to death
and I shiver too easily in the wind.
There are punks in New Mexico too, but I could never live there.

I used to write power,
zucchini, love and suicide in the time of Jeff Bezos.

Now my poems are just puzzling,
the give of thighs and the easy rising of the fog in the morning.
Is this what plummeting feels like? love? I suppose I'm melting,
like a stick of butter left
in the sun that streams through my window at noon.

I'd rather be a musician,
learn how to scream and play the mandolin,
bring my friends back from the dead and scream at cops.

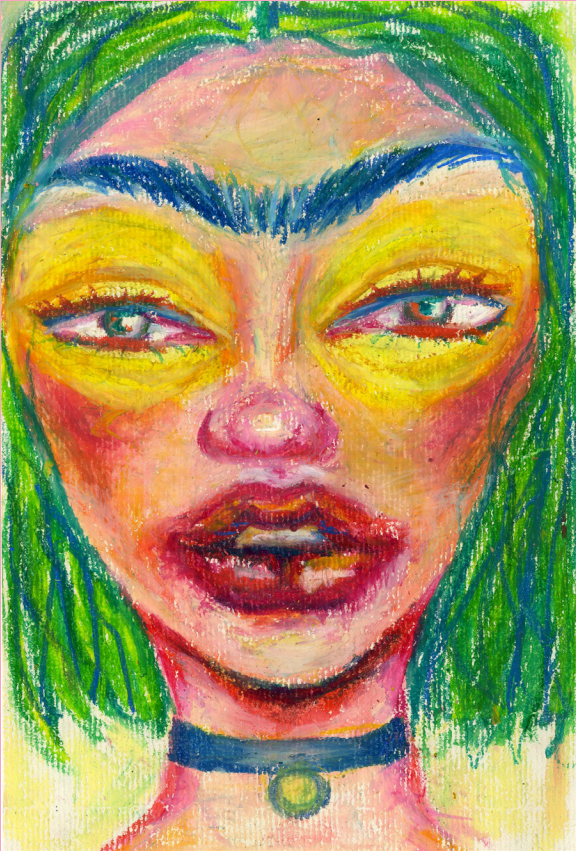
There's a flower above my bed, in a vase
shaped like a cat and colored an unsettling shade of mint.

It's been there for two years,
passed the gross stage and withered into flakes and silk.
The petals and leaves are nearly the same shade of dead.

It's a rose, or once was-
So dramatic, even in death. I cannot decide if it is still
A rose. Does it continue to be in death? I think

I'm beginning to understand the Romantics, or at least the transcendentalists.

While I don't crave hunger like I used to
I still like feeling my ribs pinch through my skin.
Every friend I've ever had has been betrayed by life, so
I'll stop wanting to kill God when I stop caring so much,
If I burn so be it.
I lied when I said I fell.



"The Girl Who Sold Mangoes"
- Elise McCamant



A Poem

Andrew Turturro

N.Y. rats can spin 3 am
Nothingness into
Punch-drunk love,
and burn down houses
With day dream church bells,
Echoing out of our ears.
They were smiling.

Thoughtfully locked away
In a breeze,
Always profound.
With fingertip songs, and
Boots retracing their steps.
All the symphonies breaking
Emptiness.
Cutting open air like water
At night, with the sidewalks in
Funeral gowns.

We drank typewriters in
Seaside towns flowing into
Synecdoches and silences,
Watching houses lie where
Black lakes rise and
Federal reserves drown.

We were languorous
And fake.
I copied Chinatown and
Briny literature,
Wiped away piano flakes
From a glossy mind--
Galvanized with ephemera
And vulgar weather.
Rain so placid,
I Wondered if the expansion
Was just a cartoon nestled in my head.

Pooling in street lights at EZ Pass lanes,
Something more than symmetry in a star that's
Floating or rolling;
Just light, fixtured. Static.
You were nothing but
Veins spilled into rivers.
Promising a life in the moment,

Or one single second
Sucked in
By a relative vacuum of a heart.

We could be like luminous
Neon skulls
Cracked and stretching their arms over,
And across
Jeune driveways, propping up sybaritic
tires rolling over sycophants.
It was that harsh line between
Black and green.
And we could tell.
Despite hyacinth spices smashing into
Waves of consciousness,
We could tell.
We are nothing if not souls in transport.

Nothing,
With warm intoxication,
And with blood as a gift,
We inhaled the chlorine;
Letting the scenery
Enter your body.



Memory Loss by Skanda Sriganesh



Ode to Dino Nuggets: An Open Letter

Nugget Advocate Nicholas Kinney
Nugget Consultant: Elliot Gamble

Imagine the juiciest, most tender, most succulent, most tastefully toasted, most flavorful piece of chicken. Chances are, you are thinking about a Dino Nugget™. For years, Dino Nuggets™ have been the staple of the American culinary arts, providing not only a delectable snack for all ages, but perhaps the greatest edible plaything; you see, Dino Nuggets™ lend themselves to being played with. You cannot truly enjoy the wondrous atmosphere of Dino Nuggets™ if you don't use the creative shapes to make a scene unfold before your delighted eyes. Kids in homes across the nation have been enjoying this delicacy for decades; why should we miss all the fun?

The time has come to recognize the obvious: there is a blatant omission of Dino Nuggets™ from the lunch menu at the Sutherland Cafeteria. To deny the student body the chance to enjoy breaded Dino Nuggies (pardon the colloquialism) is an infringement upon our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The heartless condemnation of a food which can only be described as scrumdiddlyumptious is the most heinous act to date from our tyrannical—or rather, Tyrannosaurical—overseers. The time has come to stand up for what is right—DINO NUGGETS™ NOW!!

For those who wish to cook Dino Nuggets™ for enjoyment at home, instructions are as follows:

1. Drive, bike, walk, skateboard, or bum a ride to your local grocery store.
2. Locate the fossilized foods aisle.
3. Carefully compare the competing brands of Dino Nuggets™ and select with confidence the best one.
4. Choose the optimal check-out aisle for time efficiency.
5. Check out. Don't forget to pay.
6. Drive, bike, walk, skateboard, or bum a ride home.
7. Follow the directions on the Dino Nuggets™ packaging.
8. Enjoy Dino Nuggets™ responsibly!



Testing 1, 2, 3

Lucy Yang

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Cough.

The sounds of pencils scribbling away furiously dulls to nothing in my ears. Blank. The Room is cold. The colors are bland. The only light comes from the sterile fluorescent bulbs in the ceiling. I can't will myself to keep moving pencil.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Sniffle.

I peer down at my nails, carefully picking at each cuticle. Picking away the layers. My fingers still don't look any different than they usually do. My leg bounces, but the sound my shoes make on the tiled floor is too loud. I stop.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Clatter.

A pencil has fallen to the ground. I look at my own, sitting in my limp grip. I should finish. But that sounds like too much effort. I don't want to try, anyways. I'm probably going to fail, either way. Who ever thought that teaching myself a years' worth of material was smart?

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Squeak.

Rubber soles against the dusty white tile, abused by months of use. From students. Teachers. Parents. Janitors. I look at the clock. My papers. The proctor. The kids. The desks. So many forms, left empty on desks with no one to complete them. The firmly shut door.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Tick tock.

Time is passing, but are you? My hair tickles the back of my neck. My hands shake. Click clack go the sounds of my nails on the desk. No. That isn't a good idea, either. It could become a "distraction." Stale grey light streams through the windows to an even murkier sky.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Rustle.

Pages are turning. Test booklets are already closing. There is a lump in my throat. Looking down at my test, I realize how miserable I am. Stuck on one page, and not even because I can't answer it. Because I don't want to.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap.

"We're nearing the end."

So soon? But I'm not finished! Too bad. No one will wait behind for you. Speed up. My gum has gone bland. I chew, chew, chew. It's the only way to stop me from chewing the inside of my mouth. Better bland than blood.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Shuffling.

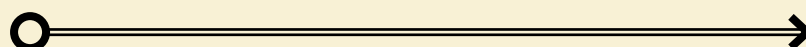
Papers being gathered, calculators being closed, protractors and rulers being collected. The clock hasn't struck yet, but things are already moving faster than you can say "time's up." In a world like this, it's hard to survive if you try and take things slow and steady.

Scratch scratch. Tip tap. Sigh.

Reluctantly, I pick up my pencil, and start writing again.



Figure 1 by Katherine Moon



City Planet

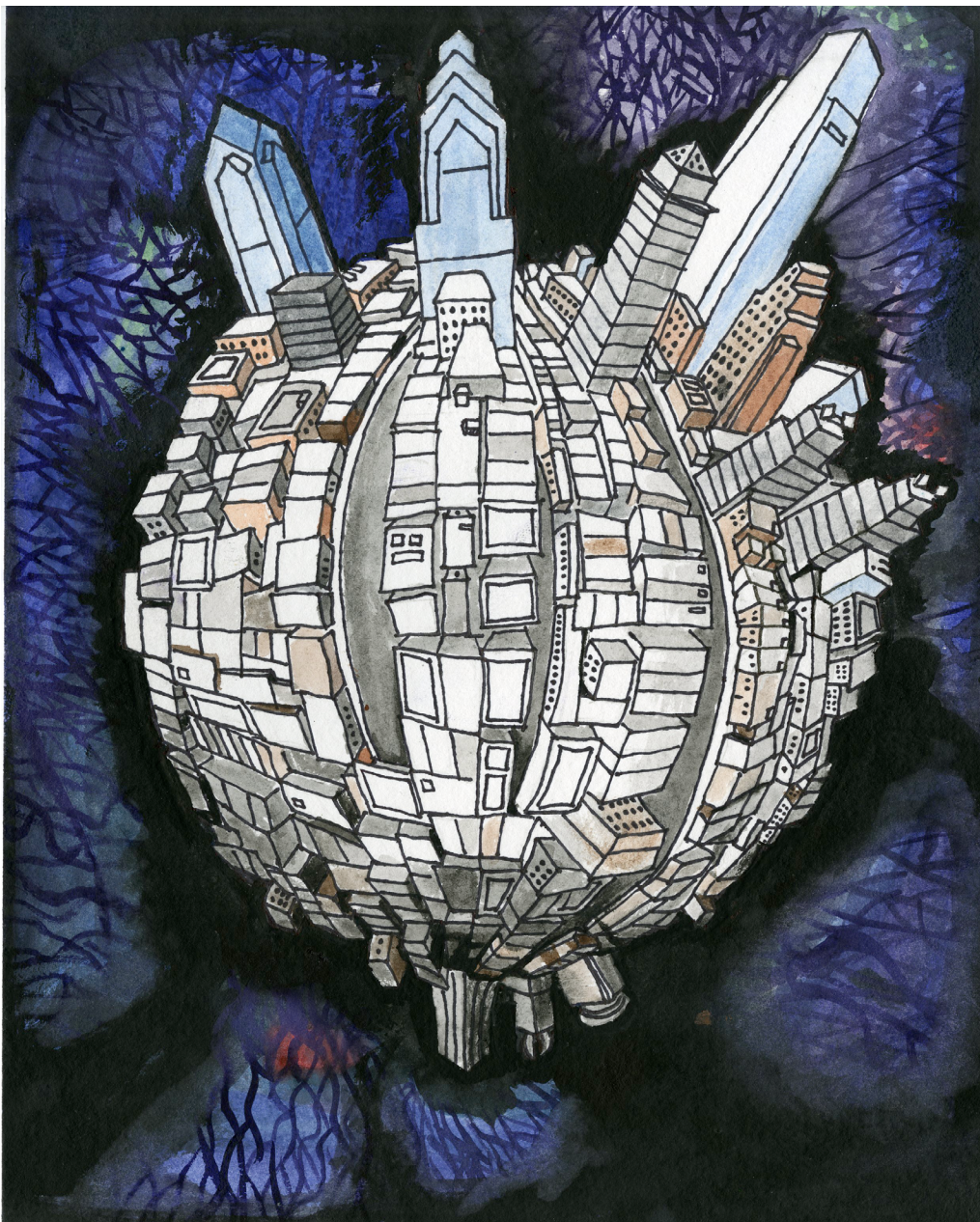
Sierra Bornheim

I am fascinated by the concept of ziggurats—whether they're the Mesopotamian originals, smooth-sided Egyptian pyramids, Mayan lost temples or Mississippian mounds. Ziggurats have developed independently multiple times. Traditionally, they come with the city-state, an ancient concept almost lost to us. Classics professors like to speak of the city-state, or *polis*, as being invented by the Greeks, while ignoring the fact that their Mesopotamian neighbors had come up with the idea a thousand years before. Later,

the Romans modified the concept of *polis*. Instead of having many city-states, Rome was the center of the world. (Similar idealization would happen later with Paris during the Enlightenment, or New York City now.) As civilizations have developed, they have continued to emphasize the importance of cities.

With a population of over a million people, Rome at its peak was the biggest city to date. After its fall, the

population decreased to only thirty thousand (Twine). Where did these people go? The easiest answer is that they went to the farms of Western Europe as the serfs on a manor system. However, we often forget the independent townships that came together almost immediately. They formed guilds and governments, making a *polis* of sorts. These only expanded, and now over half the world's population lives in cities. It is only our perception that cities are more important now than before, that they are fundamentally different than they used to be. Isolated populations all over the world have created cities independently. According to history, no matter how many times your city gets destroyed—there are nine layers of the mythical Troy—you will build a new one. While Johnson claims that the trend towards urbanization can be reversed by natural disasters or self-destruction, history shows that we will rebuild our cities. Our conversion to a city planet has proved irreversible.



Spheropolis by Jasper Owens



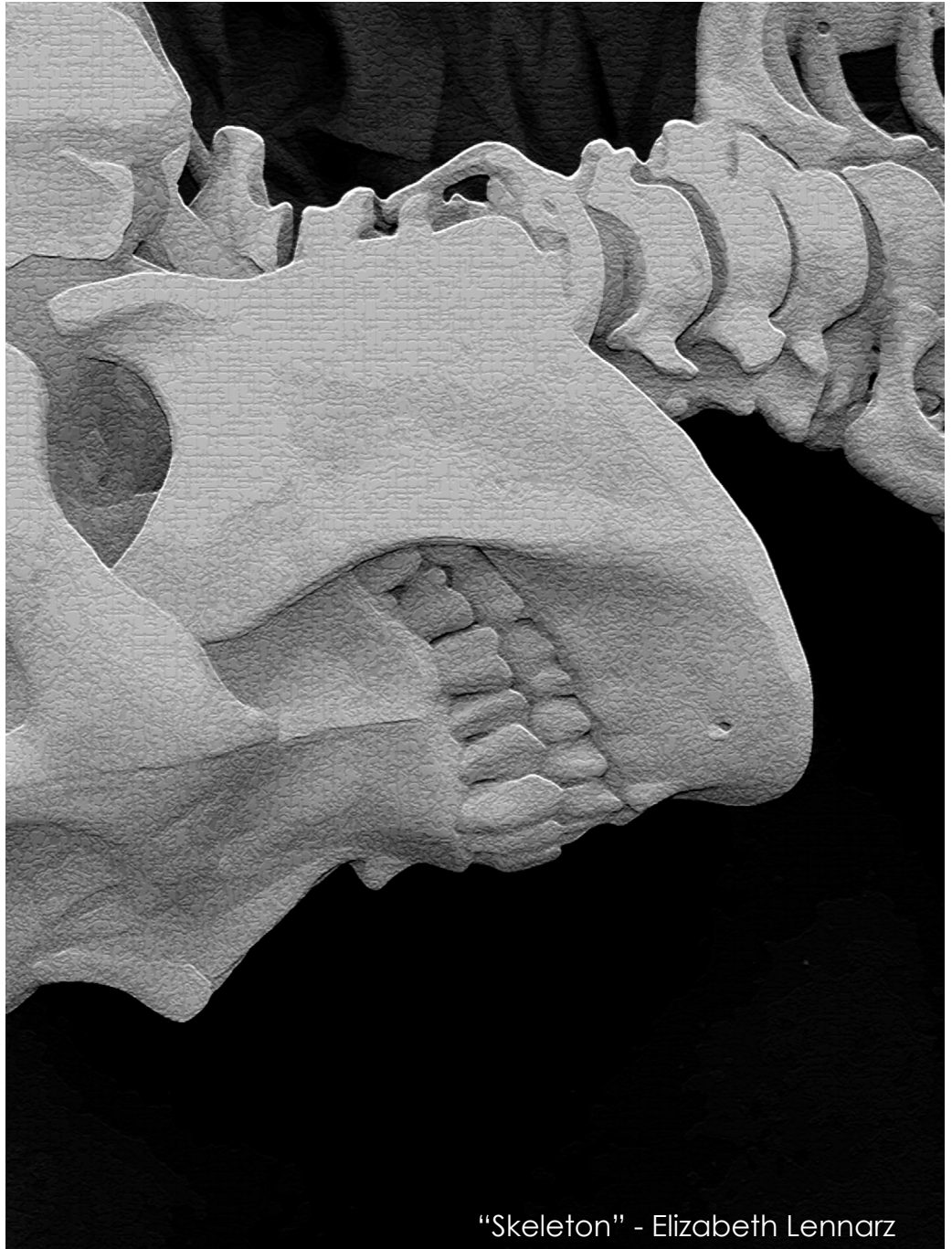
A Great New Frontier

Alexander Kazacos

As I looked up at the heavens that night, I was blessed with a sight so awe-inspiring that not even the likes of Albert Bierstadt could have possibly managed to capture its beauty. I wasn't sure if my senses were skewed by my excitement in the moment but I could've sworn the stars in the sky shone brighter than I'd ever seen them that night. It was as if a divine force was looking down on us, showing its support for our journey. We felt like we were settlers setting out for the next great American frontier. "Where were we headed?" you may ask. Our destination was the already urbanized, and extremely past-its-peak city of Rochester.

I was planted on a bench at our town's war memorial while I waited be picked up with my good friend Dalton Isle Kelly. I've known him since our formative years at Jefferson Road Elementary School. For as long as I've known him he's always amazed me with his ability to half-ass his way through any homework assignment, quiz, test, or project the public school system would throw at him and still come out the

other side with a decent grade. His careless attitude towards school was also apparent in the way he dressed. You'd never catch Dalton dead in a pair of sweatpants that had fewer than two holes and more than a few food stains. Despite his contempt for traditional education and affinity for troublemaking, he was oddly well versed in philosophy. Occasionally he would even cite figures



"Skeleton" - Elizabeth Lennarz



such as Immanuel Kant or Aristotle in arguments to prove that humanity's greatest thinkers would agree that whoever he's upset with at the moment is being an asshole; he also has the more than occasional habit of bringing up moral particularism to justify the prodigious amount of horrible decisions he's made in his life. I'm glad philosophy has given him some solace while trapped in a system that frowns upon his extraordinary lack of ambition. However, I can say without a doubt that the time he's spent studying philosophy has ironically given him a monumental ego, as he clearly believes his studies have left him more in tune with the world than his mindless peers. Despite his many quirks Dalton is one of the few people I've been lucky enough to meet in my lifetime that I can look up to as a free thinker and because of this he is the perfect person to go on a journey into the unknown with.

My nerves shook rapidly as we stood outside enduring the cool chill of autumn. Each crisp blow of the wind served as a haunting reminder that this was our only chance to go on an expedition like this; if we waited this long for a damn Uber to pull up in December we'd be moribund, buried under seven feet of snow. While our Uber driver was taking his sweet time, Dalton and I sat silently.

My excitement dwindled while I thought about what we were actually doing. We were about to visit Dalton's friend Titus who had a house in the city. Other than hearing people discuss theories about how he affords to live in his house (none of which reflected on him kindly) he was never really talked about. I never bothered to ask Dalton about Titus before we

made this trip because I didn't really care about who Titus was; I just wanted to know if I could really get away with lying to my parents and taking an Uber to some strange man's house in the city. I wanted a taste of freedom.

The gentle buzz of crickets was the only sound that could be heard as Dalton and I sat next to each other. I became oblivious to the passing of time while I zoned out. Before I had the chance to wonder if Dalton was also having second thoughts, my serenity was interrupted by the screeching brakes of a Honda Civic that had seemingly been fighting a losing battle against rust for quite some time. Our transport had arrived.

We hopped into the back of the car and glanced at each other, sharing a smile of nervous excitement as the car began to move. The interior of the car fit the exterior, with all the seats being scratched up to an unsettling degree and a disgusting but indiscernible scent that was so strong I worried it would seep into my skin. The driver was sporting a worn out cap that was fraying at the bill, but to his credit his face looked as clean shaven as the day he was born. However, it was hard to get a good look at him because his eyes were fixated on the road. Without saying anything he turned on the radio and "That's Not Me" by the Beach Boys played. While the driver quietly hummed along to the melody, I was struck with a horrifying thought that not even the soothing sounds of Brian Wilson could relax. I looked at the rear view mirror to see my paranoia manifest into reality as I read the words "VIETNAM VETERAN" stitched in bold white text. I put aside my patriotism a minute and feared that these two words could mean bad business for me and Dalton. We were



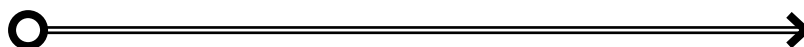
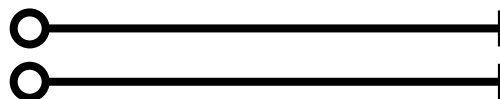
in the presence of a baby boomer.

I didn't have anything against our elderly population, but in my experience with boomers, they're typically the type to be sticklers for the rules and tend to be lacking in support of any juvenile activity taking place later than 5:00 PM. Considering that Dalton and I were both minors, it was technically illegal for us to be using Uber, and I don't think the average boomer would be proud to be driving two high school juniors to the city at night so they can execute their nonsensical experiment with freedom. I managed to prevent the situation from going sour by shutting down any attempt of conversation the old man made with us so as to protect our secret identities as minors. First I just started yawning loudly as the man asked us if we had jobs or what we did for fun and then just outright ignoring the question, I was glad to see Dalton follow suit without having to say anything. As the old man desperately tried to initiate a conversation I lowered my voice as much as I could while still sounding human and said "listen old man, I understand you probably get lonely having to drive strangers alone all night but that doesn't make it our problem and it doesn't mean anyone wants to talk to you." He tipped his hat down a bit and continued to drive. I saved the day.

I was filled with relief as we stepped out of the car and our noble chauffeur rode off into the distance. I wondered how many more degenerates like us he would have to drive around before he made enough to go home. The poor man went off to fight in the name of this great country's freedom, but I wondered if he ever experienced it. That didn't matter now, we were in walking distance of Titus.

The neighborhood felt languished and neglected. Potholes were scattered across the road and sidewalk. Unfortunately I didn't realize this until I stepped in one and onto the sidewalk. I let out a sharp yell of pain that was followed by an eerie silence. There were a couple kids that looked our age sitting on their patio when this happened; I thought they'd laugh at me but they just stared blankly into the distance. We kept walking for a bit until Dalton pointed at a house and said it was Titus's. The exterior of the house was nice enough- paint seemed to be falling off in a few areas but it wasn't very visible at night.

Dalton knocked on the door and just like, that it opened. When the door opened a wave of body odor rushed to my nostrils. Behind him was a house that didn't contain a single item that hadn't depreciated greatly. I was immediately shocked with the creature that stood before me. His smile looked like it was ripped out of a dentistry encyclopedia with sharp brown teeth pointing in every direction and gums redder than his inhumanely sleep deprived eyes. His back made loud cracking sounds with every movement, his shoulders contorted towards me at a degree that I had previously thought wasn't humanly possible. He looked malnourished as his figure didn't provide him with any muscle or body fat and he was constantly shaking. This man came out here to claim his own freedom, but he fell victim to it.



September 27th, Apparently

Noor Lima Boudakian

It's 6 am, once again.

My hair is longer than it was yesterday, though

I cut it just last night

The faded handle on my new hairbrush frowns.

My pen runs out during the

Test for Unit Two, though

I can't have already bought

September stationery

Heartbeats pass in Times New Roman 12 pt. font.

Of course this poem is double spaced.

I fold clean clothes that I took off only seconds ago

While my nail polish already chips from

3pm's procrastination-

It's not even dinnertime.

My hair should still be damp, though

My towel is dry when I step in the shower again.

Years will have passed when I wake up in the morning

At 6 am

again



"Unknown Control" - Katherine Moon



