



# *Incrementum*

*The Darrow School Literary Magazine*

*Spring 2023*

## *Welcome*

In Latin, incrementum means to grow or multiply. This year's magazine represents the multiplicity of creative gifts in our community. Read on, and we guarantee you will be awed and inspired.



*Dawn* by Samantha Rich

# *The Things They Carried: Stylistic Imitation*

MORGAN YOUNG

**B**radley Harrigan carried the grenades and the grenade launcher, the standard M-79. He carried his M-16 assault rifle and 20 magazines. He carried a leather-bound notebook and sticks of graphite and drew the jungle. He drew the corpses. He drew the men in his platoon. The notebook held a picture of his love, all he could ever want in a woman, but she was at home in Pennsylvania, carrying her own sorrow for him so far away. Her name was Cora, and she was nineteen. Bradley missed her every day. He missed Cora and he missed his home in a peaceful town. Last week he had his twenty-first birthday. That day, they fought the Viet Cong in Hua Tin. God's birthday gift to Bradley was his platoon staying alive. They sprayed the village with bullets, shooting Vietnamese "soldiers" that were hardly over thirteen, but loaded with artillery. They shot women and children. They bombed homes. Then they burned Hua Tin to the ground.

Bradley carried a ring from a dead woman's body in Hua Tin. It was gold and simple, and he wore it around his neck with his dog tag. The next week, when Jack Carter's legs were blown up by a mine, he drew his bleeding body in the leather-bound notebook while they waited for the chopper. He carried a heavy heart for all the death in their wake. The day after they lost Carter, they slaughtered a village of seventy-five people that

hadn't evacuated. They were unarmed. A child ran from the gunfire into the jungle, and met his fate as Jack Carter did, blown apart on a landmine. They saw his tiny sandal fly in the air. It was full of blood.

He carried a letter from Cora that he had received when they were last at base. He read it by himself, and could feel the beginning of tears prickling behind his eyes, but he couldn't cry. All the death and destruction had numbed his emotions. He was too tough to cry, for God's sake. A single tear leaked and made a stain on her loving handwriting. He folded up Cora's letter and went to smoke some dope with the other guys in his platoon. Not even the pungent smoke could take his mind off of his last memory of Cora saying goodbye to him at the railway station, haunting him every time he closed his eyes. He carried the sight of her pearlescent tears rolling down her beautiful face. He carried his love for her in his chest, heavy and painful. He slept under a deep sky, dreams filled with the woven sandals of a child, stained crimson with blood.

They woke early in the morning, and they trudged yet again through the dense, humid jungle. This time, the Viet Cong were in the trees and hidden at the entrance to a tunnel previously bombed. Philip Martin went down "like a sack of potatoes", how they described his death at camp.

A couple of shells to the chest from a goddamn kid up in the trees like a hideous monkey, and that was Philip's end. As Bradley Harrigan marched on with his platoon, the weight of death grew heavier on their backs. They stopped in a town of "the good ones", the army's slang for the Vietnamese people they were actually trying to help. Children goggled at the guns on their backs, and Bradley was reminded of the children just like these ones that had been blown to bits. But those ones weren't the "good ones." They were the enemy, even the toddlers hiding in fear behind the legs of their mothers. The mothers who carried infants on their backs, but their husbands and older sons were shooting down red-blooded American men. Bradley carried his notebook, and he carried his guns, and he carried the dead woman's ring. He carried Cora's letters and he carried the post-traumatic stress disorder he would later be diagnosed with when he finally came home. He carried his pain and he carried the memories of his dead friends. He carried death. They all did. And death was a heavy load to bear.

---



*Artwork by Ash Murray*

## *flower*

KAYLIN MARTIN

she started as a seed  
buried in the ground  
protected from the world.  
then she broke the surface,  
and was introduced to a whole new atmosphere  
she wasn't expecting the fear  
to take over her little body  
that consisted of a stem and a couple leaves.  
she wasn't prepared for someone to come along  
and rip her from the ground  
she wasn't prepared for someone to  
rip her petals from her stem  
rip her leaves from her stem  
for someone to leave her tossed on the ground.

---



*Artwork by Elena Leahy*

---

## *My Common Blackbird*

BRYANNA AMANKWAH

You aren't bright nor are you meant to be in the limelight yet you sing.  
Melodies that remind me of spring and harmonies that put me to sleep.  
Your lyrics feel like warm blankets are wrapped around me.  
You hide in the shadows of those who walk before you.  
And only sing when the spotlight is not on you.  
You speak your truth through every beat.  
And create lyrics that others can't beat.  
You are my inspiration, my oh-so-common blackbird, your face one of many.  
But no matter what others see you are still my common blackbird.

# Personal Essay

Z A S S I

The best compliment I've ever been given was that I talk like a poet.

My hair's always been too long, my legs too short, my eyes too wide, so being told the way I talk is poetic has stuck with me. I now understand why I got told that.

My eyes unfocus when I'm nervous. It makes it hard to read out the blurred dots on paper, hard to pick out family in crowds of flesh colored mush. When they refocus, I can make sense of things. Of the words on my paper, of the microphone in front of me, the sea of people under me, the camera behind them. I must have looked odd, my knees locked and hands gripping my 3 pages of printer paper that still smelled of ink, my baseball cap brim almost blocking out my red face. My hands shifted, and I looked down at the words in front of me. I read with confidence the piece I had written in my English class. The piece I had been told was 'amazing for your age!' and was 'college level writing'. (It wasn't).

When my father died, I turned to writing. I vomited my feelings onto paper, reading them back to make sense of them. I needed to know what I was feeling, how it felt. My writing was cold, clean. Scribbled out and sanitized. Clean like tile floor, clean like an empty room. Clean like a lack. I wrote about listening to my mother say he was never going to get better. I wrote about long silent car rides. I

wrote about the smell of hospitals. I wrote about cigarettes. I wrote about overheating. I never read any of it back.

Writing my highschool application was easy. It was quick, I knew what I needed to write. I knew how to make myself seem like the perfect candidate, and knew how to be chosen. I know how to make people's stomachs twist within their bodies. Their eyes glossing over, hands stiff, holding my writing. "Are you ok?" They nod, before turning away. "Thank you for... sharing this with me." They silently leave. I feel anxiety bubble up within me.

I know how to make people cry with my writing, how to make people stare at a page for minutes before they fully process what they're consuming. I know how to make people's stomachs twist and turn and have their throat close up. I know how to make people miss something they never had. Make people's eyes get glossy, and slowly turn to look at me.

Dig your nails into your skin, and scratch. Keep scratching until you feel heat. Scratch until it feels wet, until it looks glossy under the orange striplights of the bathroom. Look at the words, read the poetry inside that wound, and preserve it before they heal.

When I was younger, I would obsess over the idea of going into an isolation room. I knew I would be

able to produce something that encapsulates me, as a person. I knew I could pour myself into whatever I wrote. That isolation would cause the gross, the true part of me to write. I would have salty tear stained drops on my keyboard, I would have journals under my mattress. Those were the closest I ever got.

The idea that people would read my writing and connect with it, and love it was surprising to me. It was like tearing open my stomach and letting people look at my guts. Let them stare at my beating heart and comment on the color. So I let people look at the scar, let them see my bare skin instead. I coated my skin in edits and acceptance. It was still me, it was still my cells, just protected. It was still me, I said.

I'm happy I've done that, for a blank or judgemental look hurts less when it's directed at half of you than when it's pointed at all of you.

I was set on becoming an author. I would write under a penname, and throw all my emotion and every part of myself into what I wrote. I would sob and let my face contort while writing, knowing no one would link that face and those words together. I would have myself on display without people knowing it was me. People would know my work.

This reads personally. It sounds like me, the words look like me. Yet it's not. There's lies woven between the lines, some from faulty memory. Some so it isn't me.

I have fingernails and I have skin. It's pink, it's peeling off slightly. I have disturbed flesh on my knuckles and on my fingerprints. It pokes up slightly, it's a warmer color. I have veins in my wrists that look purple and blue. I bite my tongue when I cry. I drag my feet on the ground when I walk, and I shake when I laugh. My head hurts when I have too much caffeine, I prefer headphones over earbuds. I keep my nails short otherwise paint gets under them. I love sitting in silence and thinking, I don't like standing up. I would practice balancing by walking on fences when I was younger and I'm filled with the same dreams.

And I don't want anyone to read this, for fear of the edits I might make.

I don't want anyone to read this, for fear of edits I might make.

I don't want anyone to read this.

---

*Judgment*  
by Z Assi



*Commercial Attitude*  
by Charline Webber

I want to live in an allergy commercial. High resolution, and over edited perfection. No worries, just fences to lean on, leading nowhere. I want perfect fields of unnaturally green grass that doesn't cause hives when rolled upon. I want to swing on a swing set in slow motion. Why can't we have snapshots of single moments where everything is perfect? You can tell, you know. You can tell when people are forcing smiles. Most of the time, that is. There are some who smile, believing they are happy, because they have been told their whole lives that they look "happy." They don't know true happiness, because they have come to associate a certain numbness with being "happy."



---

*Part of a Work* by James Alnwick, Allie Ardehali, Olivier Diaz  
Tirapu, Sophia Szrek De Sousa Pereira, and Garrett Rhoads





# Glitched

GARRETT RHOADS

Arrett is sitting in the front left quadrant of a classroom, filled with the exact same desks, over and over. A giant room, the size of one of those old sports stadiums. Tens of thousands of Students sit doing the exact same task, looking at their monitors, all playing the exact same video. On the screen is an Adult, wearing the badge of Teaching, repeating the same lesson as the day before and the week before, the one before that, the one before that. “X is equal to  $-B$  plus or minus the square root of  $B$  squared minus four  $AC$  divided by  $2A$ . This is the only way to solve for X. This is the only way to solve for X.” Everyone repeated the words. Everyone except Arrett.

Arrett was lost in thought. Some days it was just so hard to say the same thing over and over again. He yearned for something new, something different. Like a bolt of lightning 4 seats behind him and 3 to the right one of the Students repeating the same mantra as the 10,000 others looked... strange? Different? They were a person, they had to be, they had a nose and a mouth and eyes but... not? The nose crooked slightly to the left, the lips of the mouth thin and dry, the eyes excited? “3AF, no learning detected, please repeat the lesson,” the Teacher said as the monitor flashed red. He didn’t know why, but he hated that designation, ‘3AF’ is his ‘name,’ but he preferred

Arrett. He didn’t know why, but he had, since before he was a Student. It was the same way he preferred thinking for himself rather than keeping to the Lesson Plan. Arrett reluctantly repeated the mantra until the screen stopped its angry flashing. He turned to the right to take a closer look at that strange person... Why hadn’t anyone else seen it? Why had no one reacted? To his shock he was gone, like he was never there. In his place, a normal Student. One just like all the others, just like him. Shaking it off, he resumed the tedium that was learning.

After his long and confusing day Arrett walked in a line of thousands of other Students to Home where he went to the room labeled 300-3FF. Now was time for Home-work. He sat back down at a desk exactly the same as the desk he had left not even an hour prior sans the monitor for quadratic formula practice... again. He looked measuringly at his Home-work, ‘A equals 1, B equals 12, C equals 32. Solve:’ just underneath it read, ‘A equals 3, B equals 2, C equals 5. Solve:’ and below that it read ‘A equals 4, B equals 6, C equals 19. Solve:’ On and on it went, row after row, line after line, hundreds of math problems, all the same format. Midway through his work he noticed one of the Parents walking by, but it wasn’t a Parent; the face was different. It had the same too bright eyes, the

same crooked nose, the same thin mouth. He stared, not daring to let him out of his sight this time. Arrett looked at the... thing, and it seemed to mouth "later." The Parent walked out of the room to check on another Company, once again leaving Arrett to wonder. How had he seen the same, yet different, person on 2 different people? Did he need to see the Physician? He shivered. Arrett certainly hoped not.

After he finished his Home-work he waited for the rest of the Students in his room to do the same, found his spot in line and walked to Dining. He grabbed a bowl and a spoon, held the bowl under a faucet, and waited for his perfectly proportioned gray nutrient rich liquid to be dispensed into the bowl. As the sound of metal on ceramic rose, Arrett couldn't help but glance up at the Parents wondering if he would see that strange person again. They once again got in line Arrett a millisecond behind the rest still searching everyone's faces. They walked up to each of their rooms, Arrett now frantically searching for his face. They got into their sleeping pods and were told by the Parents on the monitors to "Please close your eyes and fall asleep." Arrett didn't want to go to sleep, but it was required to get to sleep within 15 minutes, so he did his best.

15 minutes went by in a heartbeat. Arrett was still awake, he blinked and then *he* was there, that same unique person from before, now floating in front of Arretts' face. The person waved at Arrett, Arrett didn't know what to do, he was afraid someone else might see this strange thing in his pod with him, but somehow, he wasn't afraid of the person. "Hello, what's your name?" the boy asked.

"I am Arrett." Arrett thought it was odd that this boy was asking such a weird question of him. And now that he thought about it, why had he introduced himself as Arrett? That wasn't his ID, but somehow it seemed natural. "What are you doing here? What are you?"

"Would you like me to show you?" Arrett noticed that as the boy talked, his projection seemed to come from nowhere. His movements seemed erratic, almost like his pod's computer was glitched. He was concerned; should he report the error? Was this something he had broken, something that would make him Punished?

"How?" asked Arrett, as he simultaneously wondered why he was continuing to talk to this malfunction.

"You'll just have to trust me," the boy said flippantly, floating closer. Arrett thought for a minute, this was insane, this boy was floating, and looked like no one he had ever seen but something in the back of his mind told him to trust this boy. "I assent."

"I am your true self, the most unique and special part of you."

Arrett looked confused. "What is unique? What is special? What is self?"

Boy stopped and considered. Arrett regarded him with concern. Was this glitch itself glitched? Where was his response? Suddenly, the image spoke again.

“Here, watch this,” he said as he morphed into a video of a group of children sitting in a circle. They were all like the glitch, all so different, they all had different faces, bodies, and hair. One was running around all the others tapping each one on the head and saying ‘Duck.’ Arrett was shocked at the casual physical contact. The one on the outside of the circle then said ‘Goose’ after tapping one of their heads. They then ran around the outside of the circle as the kids in the middle made a weird expression on their faces. This was not the ‘run in a circle’ game he had grown up with. Then the one that they tapped chased after the other and caught up and tapped them on the shoulder. This seemed to upset the runner, and then they went into the middle of the circle and sat down, just for the cycle to start again.

The video faded and the boy came back. “So, what do you think?”

“What were they doing with their faces, this,” Arrett asked after mimicking the face to the best of his ability...

“What? Smiling?” The boy looked troubled, “It means they were happy, having fun.”

“What were they doing?” Arrett asked.

“Playing a fun competitive game called ‘Duck Duck Goose.’”

Arrett, still confused, asked, “Why did the one who got tapped go into the middle?”

“They lost,” the boy responded like it was the simplest thing in the world. It was not.

“Lost? But that is not equal,” Arrett said, increasingly concerned, he remembered his morality classes he had when he was small, he knew this behavior was not in the Curriculum.

“You’re missing the point, they were having fun. It’s competitive, sometimes you win, sometimes you don’t,” the boy said.

Arrett, still not getting it, says, “But that is bad, competition is bad, for equality everyone must win or everyone must not.”

“You’re missing the point, they were having fun, what is so hard to understand?” the boy said, increasingly frustrated. “Here, watch this.”

The boy morphed into a video once again except this time he saw two lines of children facing each other, holding hands. Again with that physical contact, it is dangerous, that is how diseases spread. One of the children yelled, “Red rover, red rover, we call Sarah over!” One of the children from the other side started to run and didn’t stop. The children braced themselves for impact and WHAM. The child had run straight into them, at top speed, with no regard for safety. Shortly after the boy returned looking excited.

Arrett was even more confused than ever. “That looked violent, did the child get hurt?”

“No, of course not, they were just having fun,” the boy responded.

How could this and the other game both be having fun? He didn’t

understand. "Violence is bad."

"You're still not getting it! Here, let me show you one more," the boy said.

Another video started to play and this time it was what looked like an Adult waiting to cross a street. The street had a few automobiles driving through but something caught Arrett's eye; were those, human drivers? How dangerous, people could get killed. The Adult looked both ways, at the empty street and to Arrett's astonishment the Adult started to walk across without the indicator light! The Adult was endangering themselves and the drivers and everyone in the vicinity. The boy morphed back and looked at Arrett.

"That was bad, that was dangerous, the Adult shouldn't have done that, that was reckless and—"

"No, that was freedom," the boy interrupted. Arrett still looked distressed.

"It doesn't have to be this way, there is a reason we hate all of this. Things weren't always this way, once there were people of all shapes and sizes. People who believed different things, people who lived different lives. People drove automobiles, they played games, more than just the 'run in a circle' game everyone played when they were small, competitions, people had free will. You can break out of this world, you know, change your life for the better if you want," the boy said.

Arrett thought about his answer for a long time. The world the boy had described was so chaotically enticing, like the first sight of the boy that morning. Arrett was now sitting on the grass, he heard a young boy's voice saying 'duck' over and over again. He looked and saw all the people around him were 'smiling' as the boy had called it, and he found he was doing it too. He blinked, he was now by the road staring at the red hand pointed back at him condescending; the monotone drawl of the voice telling him to 'wait' over and over. He looked to the left and right, saw no cars, he took a breath and prepared to take a step off the curb onto the street, but right as his foot landed he fell back down to his pod. The pod with the boy staring at him and Arrett staring back, And now that he had found the boy and the boy was offering him what he had been looking for, he was paralyzed, he was being consumed; red rover, he was Sarah, he was being called over. Red rover red rover, we call Arrett over. Yet at the same time 3AF insists they must stay. A society cannot have true equality and true freedom, it cannot be greater than AND equal to. A society cannot have an Arrett concurrent with a 3AF.

3AF pushed the button on the inside wall of his pod and felt the familiar relaxing sensation wash over his body. Then he noticed the hissing of the Sleeping gas through the nozzles as he felt his eyes become heavier and heavier...

The next day 3AF got out of his pod exactly like all the others in his room. He got up, got ready, and went to School.

---

# Ten years ago, my brother was lost at sea.

Z A S S I

He was known throughout the country. He was tall, light hair, pale, pinkish skin and nothing clouding his brain. His appearance was far more normal than most others, aside from the crumpled paper bag on his head. A shitty face was drawn on it, large, cartoon eyes, a line mouth. He did virtually everything in this bag. Attended meetings, met with family, stalker photos have been taken of him sleeping with it on. A sex tape was leaked and he was wearing the bag in his head. It confused me, he must be such an attractive man. His clean appearance, his tailored suit, his voice that was almost so smooth you couldn't understand it. He spoke with a American accent, but pronounced some words in a more French way.

Ten years ago, my brother was lost at sea. My mother took to scrapbooking, mushing together paper in futile attempts to create what he would look like older, what he would look like now. My father went on multiple voyages, only to return empty handed each time. Once he brought back the wrong boy, assuming his son's appearance changed though the ocean, and so did his memories. In the end, my father was said to have offed himself on one of the voyages, feeling betrayed by his mind and body after failing over and over again to find his son. My older sister moved on as though nothing happened, causing

almost a greater grief to my family. My mother fret she had created a monster, my father rarely spoke to her before his last voyage. Despite the attention on her being negative, I still wanted nothing other than it. I would stand over the collaged images of my brother, a woman's eyes, a man's stubble, a child's cheek, his nose, and feel a knot adjacent to rage and sadness well within the depths of my stomach. I was mad he got everything he wanted. I know he chose to go on that voyage, I know he chose to sacrifice his life when he knew damn well he would live. I told him he would live, but he told me he always wanted to die a hero. I had cussed him out, keeping him in a headlock in a sad attempt to keep him stationary. He flung his arms around, his pocket knife still open. I never understood why a man like him, a man with all the stars in the universe aligned to his liking, would cut a gash in his own brother's nose to let him die. I jerked away when his knife made contact with my face, letting him go.

I was partially obsessed with the man. I'd met him time and time again, always getting a polite and polished "Hello." or something of the sort. His family was rich, and seemingly all dead. Despite the large amount of interest so many people displayed towards him, there was very little knowledge, or at least public knowledge, on his heritage. He had

siblings, although he never brought them up. He never used his troubling family heritage to get a pity vote, to connect with the people, unlike many politicians. I followed him everywhere I could, I always read up on new news about the man. People trying to find out his age, his height, his weight, but more importantly, his face. It took years, years of protest, for him to finally tell us parts of his story, but they were uninteresting. He loved his family, but was unable to contact them. He had a lovely relationship with his mother, had a confusing one with his brother, and had no idea what happened to his sister. He connected to people, sure, but angered others. He was no longer sculptable by his audience.

It was 12:56, a Tuesday afternoon, on live television. The man stood up, adjusting his paper bag, before giving his speech. He thread his microphone up to his mouth, beginning to speak. His buttery smooth voice was cut by a loud, static sound as the cord of his microphone was yanked, ripping the bag off his face. His paper bag mouth ripped right through the center, revealing his smooth, unmarked, almost water like face.

---



*Brothas'*

©Ben Jean Louis

## White Roses

It all started with a hello  
 Not from me but from your friend, someone I had seen but never talked to who was close but also very far.  
 A friend of a friend if you will.  
 When she first said hello the only thing I could think was oh a new friend but I ignored the one next door.  
 You were a hop skip and a jump away from me but I never tried to go see, who you are or where you're from  
 only hearing about through the whispers around school.  
 And as me and your friends became gradually more acquainted I finally decided to say hi.  
 But please don't get the wrong idea because then you would never catch my eye.  
 For all I could think from that one single hi back was hey a new friend.

## Yellow Roses

A friend, a companion, someone I spent my spare time with as I fell out with my friends and made new ones. You suddenly became a more familiar face.  
 Starting at an arm's distance and ending with more than one hug.  
 Always watching me complain and do dumb things laughing at what you want and giving me attitude for the dumb things I said.  
 Out of all my friends I never snapped at you or felt inferior. You were always just so calm to be around.  
 That's when I knew you were the perfect friend to have around.  
 And before I knew it what started as friendship grew and admiration started to bloom.

## Pink Roses

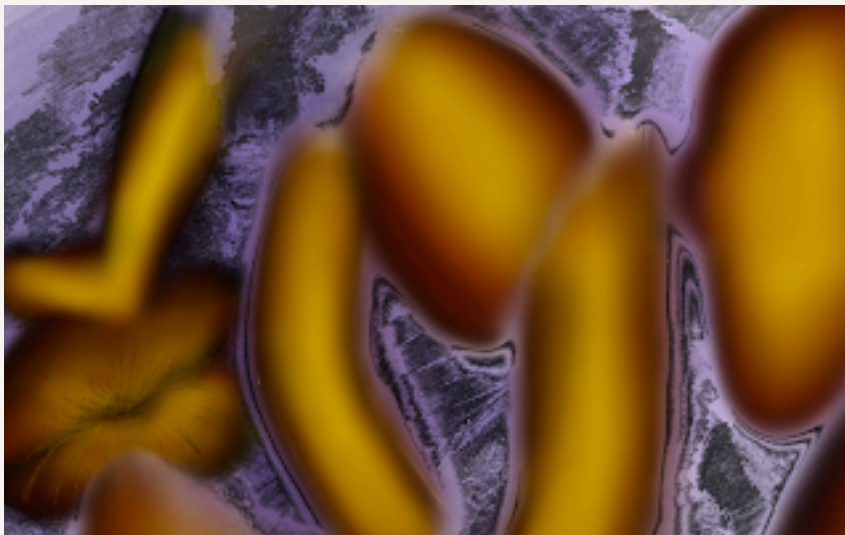
The longer we were friends the more I started to notice you.  
 The way you walk, the way you would talk and all the little things that irked you.  
 The more I noticed the more I became attached searching for you, poking fun at you, and trying my hardest to make you laugh.  
 And what started as a small dose became an overwhelming amount of poison.  
 My hero, my closest friend and the focus of my admiration.  
 And in the final stage of this blossoming red rose I finally realized that I really liked you.

## Red Roses

Red the color of roses, the color of passion and the symbol of love.  
 That's all I felt when I looked at you red.  
 The color born from the pigment of flowers and insects and the representative of more than one emotion was all that ran through my head.  
 And every time we came into contact with each other I thanked whatever higher up that gave me my dark skin.  
 Hiding the red that would surely poke through every time you gave me a high five and every time you looked my way.  
 Burning, fiery passion was all I thought when someone mentioned you.  
 But not all love stays red.

## Blue Roses

I knew from the moment you said hello from the moment you told me we were friends that we couldn't be more.  
 I knew  
 That every hug, goodbye, and hello would never mean anything more than a greeting or a farewell.  
 I knew  
 And yet I kept trying to make you happy enough that you would smile even when I wasn't in the room.  
 I knew  
 I knew  
 Or did  
 Did I only tell that to myself so I would never have to face the cold lonely depressing nights missing you  
 Did I only say that so I could keep the illusion of wanting you.  
 The more we stayed around each other the more I got addicted to you like a drug.  
 I'm sorry  
 But to who you or me  
 I can never tell if I'm apologizing for loving you or tricking myself  
 Maybe I should look away, maybe I should close a few of my tabs  
 Maybe I should put my computer away and touch some grass  
 Because I never knew, I could have you  
 All I knew was the delusions that were love and for some reason I want to ask you how you felt about it all.  
 So how about you? What do you think?



*Displacement* by Meita Fofana

---

## *Who Should Be Forgiven*

BRYANNA AMANKWAH

Forgive me, for never looking you in the eyes as you yelled at me.

Forgive me, for always making the same mistakes no matter how many times you yell.

I'm sorry, for always making you laugh as I cried about my split mac and cheese.

Forgive me, and maybe I can try to forgive you.

Help me, forgive you for the times you look past like I was made of glass. Never once looking me in the eyes and mean it when you say I love you.

Help me forgive, the many times you made me feel unimportant as if I wasn't worth the microscopic time that you had.

Help me forgive you, for all the times you made me want to leave or just fall off this planet.

Forgive me, and Help me forgive you.

---



# Falling

AARUSHI CHAUHAN

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting its golden glow upon the walls that blushed in its orange light, the castle began to come back to life. The air grew thicker with the watery and sweet scent of marigolds as well as red rose petals. Every inch of the castle's towers were covered with white daisy garlands and the entry gates bathed in the warm light shining from the flower bouquets that covered every inch of the path along the entryway. The red carpet led straight to the garden in the heart of the castle that was decorated with a plethora of diyas, lights and drapes. The trees in the garden were wrapped in strings of fairy lights, which twinkled softly in the warm evening breeze. Gold diya stands, lanterns and candles were placed around the corners along the castle walls and their shimmer shed a warm yellow light to the intricate designs on the century old walls. The sky that once was a beautifully painted canvas of pinks, blues and purples was now starting to turn grayish black with faint hints of white that indicated it would later be studded with bright shiny stars.

The guests arrived in clusters. They spilled out of cars with almost fake enthusiasm and the biggest smiles. Most women adorned bright and vibrant sarees while some decided a shimmery *salwar-kameez* would do. Many tried to uphold the *Rajputana* tradition of men wearing *pagdis* and

put on a number of different colors and patterns. However, few took the easy route of simply showing up in a dull and boring suit. Little girls who were once worried about their lehengas, had now started to run around the garden with no care in the world. As the lively chatter of the guests grew louder and soft tunes of the Shehnai and Sarangi started to fill the area, the world renowned Shehnai player, Bismillah Khan sat on the stage covered with cream silk drapes and warm fairy lights.

A group of rather old women were sitting at the table, chattering giddily all the while screaming at some helpers to bring them better food. Sujata, dressed in a very bright pink and green saree started the long awaited cycle of gossip. "Did you get a chance to see Priya yet? She has the face of an angel you know but she did not bother to try to lose even one inch for her wedding. Now you tell me, does that look good? Yes she has the most beautiful lehenga, dare I say better than my own daughter's which Manish Malhotra designed himself, but she is so heavy. I cannot believe that she couldn't sacrifice a little bit of food for her wedding."

"Arre, she is the most ill mannered girl I have ever met. Look at her friends running around. All of them are wearing bikinis in place of blouses. Destroying our culture," said one of the women.

“Did you hear about how the groom refused to take any dowry?”

“I would not marry my daughter to a man who refused dowry, its unacceptable”

“Leave all that, look at how poorly planned the menu is. There is no chicken. What will all the men eat while drinking? And the decorations are so bland,” Sujata chimed in again.

Meanwhile, the east wing of the castle began filling up with people as they tried to make their way into Priya’s apartment to greet her and give their blessings. All of them were dissolved in conversation either among themselves or with one of the members of the Rathore family. Priya was standing next to the window, overlooking the garden. Her maroon lehenga was embroidered with rose gold designs and she had matched it with a light pink dupatta. She was wearing a diamond necklace which was also embedded with pink sapphires that matched perfectly with her earrings and dupatta. With her subtle make up and light pink painted nails, Priya was nothing short of a vision to behold.

“Do you think I’ll fall? I think I will. These heels are too long. S, exchange shoes with me. Quick”

“Priya. You are going to be fine. It’s okay to be nervous. You are going to be okay.”

“I cannot have anything go wrong. I need to have the perfect wedding. It is being televised. If I fall down or something everyone is going to see it. On TV.”

She had been planning every little detail of what her wedding would look like and now that day was finally here, there was no room for error. It had to go perfectly. When she was 16, she was sure her Prince charming was going to be Harry Styles and she would have a traditional catholic wedding and live happily ever after. Today was the total opposite of what she’d thought. It was a typical Indian wedding and she barely knew her Prince Charming. She wasn’t given a say. The only thing that she had control over was the small ceremonies of the wedding.

“It’s time to go, Priya. You look lovely. I can’t imagine having to live here without you.”

“You’re gonna be fine Samarth. You’re gonna be King now that I’m being shipped off.”

“Priya, I know you think you have to do this but you don’t. I can help you run away. I’ll handle mom and dad.”

“Let’s say I do. Where am I gonna go? If you guys don’t find me, someone will recognize me walking in the street and boom!”

“Priya-”

“It’s gonna be fine. Let’s go Sam. You are happy with your marriage. I will be too. Plus, I always knew this would happen. I have been preparing for this my whole life.”

She started to walk down the aisle under a beautifully decorated blanket of flowers. Four of her cousins held the corners of the blanket and Samarth carried a

ceremonial torch as he walked beside her. Every inch of the path was covered with rose petals and guests had lined up along the way, all in awe of Priya Rathore, who was the very face of elegance, grace and beauty. Ishan walked down the steps of the stage and helped his bride walk up.

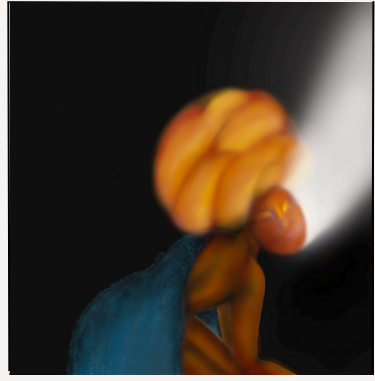
At the center of the stage, there was a raised, revolving platform that was beautifully decorated with intricate designs and motifs. As they made their way into it, the platform slowly started to rotate, providing the perfect backdrop for the bride and groom to exchange their daisy garlands and make their vows. It was surrounded by a delicate railing, adding an extra layer of elegance to the stage. As the bride and groom exchanged their garlands, the stage came alive with the vibrant colors of the fireworks behind them and the soft glow of the lights. The gentle rotation of the platform added a sense of drama and excitement to the ceremony, making it a truly unforgettable experience for all. For the first time, Priya looked up to Ishan, scared. Ishan gave her a small and sweet smile, as if to show her that he was scared too and that they were both going to be okay. They stood there, looking into each other's eyes as the photographers clicked a thousand pictures of the most sacred ceremony of the occasion. Just when everyone was clapping, hooting and throwing rose petals towards the couple, the revolving platform started to shake. Its shaky rotations gained a sudden speed and Samarth ran behind stage to figure out the problem. Although the cheer had stopped, the murmur among the guests was louder than ever. The laughter among Sujata's gang was particularly audible. The bride and groom were trying to remain steady by holding onto each other. Ishan started to laugh but all Priya could think about was how this was being televised and how they were both going to fall and embarrass themselves on national TV. The platform came to an abrupt halt and Ishan lost balance and almost fell. Priya had given him a hand to keep him from falling. That is when Priya finally smiled.

---



*Artwork by*  
**Meita Fofana**

*Artwork by*  
Meita Fofana



---

## *Breathless*

CHARLINE WEBBER



Kissing you felt like drowning. You stole the breath from my lungs the second your lips touched mine and the world faded away into dark blissful silence. I never thought I needed to be kissed like I held the last breath of oxygen on earth. To have everything taken in a single kiss. Mindless, endless quiet that enveloped and warmed every inch of my being. Seeping into parts of my soul I didn't know I needed to be filled and healed by your hands that held my face with such

gentleness. You held me as though I would break and the softness in which you looked at me made me forget anything else mattered. For just a second the world didn't matter anymore and it was just you and me in a sea of chaos.

# What Lia Carries

L I A H E G A R T Y

## 1- *A small blue blanket in various forms of disarray. 2005-2022*

A gift from her aunt Cissy when she was born. Originally spent his life in the closet while Lia's blanket of choice was "Ti-ti". However, in 2009 after the sizable holes in Ti-ti were becoming a strangling hazard for Lia's then infant sister, Lia's mother made the executive decision to cut it into smaller pieces. Over the next two years, the fragments of Ti-ti were slowly but surely lost to the world. With a hole left in Ti-ti's wake needing to be filled the aptly named "Blankie" was pulled from the closet and has stayed by Lia's side ever since.

## 2- *A floor-length pink princess gown and veil adorned with small pink false roses. 2008-2010*

One of Lia's most infamous fashion statements. The look made its public debut in 2009 at Lia's fourth birthday celebration, aptly themed Princesses and Pirates.

## 3- *A bin of 30 monster high dolls that let her be whoever she wanted. 2013-2018*

Her favorite of which being Clawdeen Wolf, the daughter of the Werewolf. Clawdeen played soccer and had a love for fashion. Clawdeen inspired Lia to have confidence in her strength and her beauty and that no one can tell you what you can or cannot do, especially a man.

## 4- *A comparably durable small pink blanket. 2015*

With Lia heading into fifth grade her mother Christy was ignorantly worried that the aforementioned Blankie, which she still tightly clung to, was nearing the end of its days. As a cautionary measure, Christy bought the same blanket in pink so that Lia could continue sleeping with a blanket. Contrary to Christy's assumptions, Blankie and Pinkie are still happily married to this day.

## 5- *A box of bleach and multiple shades of hair dye. 2015-2019*

Lia's older sister Caitie loved to dye other people's hair. Lia just so happened to be foolish enough to enable this obsession. Her scalp has never been the same since.

## 6- *"Case-it" tab velcro closure 2-inch binder with tab file, in the color purple. 2015-2019*

The contents of which included other people's pencils which she has "borrowed," a couple of hair elastics, and about fifty pieces of loose uncategorized pieces of paper.

## 7- *A size XXL black Kimball Union Academy hoodie. 2020-2021*

They can't judge what they can't see.

## 8- *Her camp tie. 2021*

On the tie lies various pins that she either earned or was given. Specifically, four handmade pins made by younger campers, a pin from her dad that said "club sisterhood," a monarch butterfly pin that her mom bought her, her 2018, 2019, and 2021 year pins, and finally her club pin that she had worked all summer to earn.

## 9- *Bow drill set. 2021*

At about the two-and-a-half-month mark of Lia's journey in the woods, it came time for her to construct her own bow drill set. She crafted a perfect bow and inspired by its beauty crowned the bow Anne-BOW-lynn. Tragically, similar to its namesake Anne-BOW-lynn, it was lost to the world when Lia forgot her at a day hike location that she wouldn't return to for many a week. Outraged by the loss, Lia stormed off into the woods for new material to make herself a new bow. About 0.1 miles out of the site she was stationed at for the night, she found a 15ft striped maple sapling in the middle of which sat the perfect curvature needed for her bow. She spent the next five minutes uprooting the tree and returned to camp with enough striped maple to make at least three bows. She spent the rest of the night sawing and debarking until she had her perfect bow, even better than its predecessor. And that is how Bendy Williams was born.

## 10- *A water gun. 2021-2022*

Just in case.



*Tannery Session part 1*  
by Alexandra Zook

---

*Timri eze*  
BRYANNA AMANKWAH

(Meaning dark earth in Hurrian)

Look up, look down, stand straight, and turn around.  
Look left now look right make sure you can cover all your sides.  
Walk straight and confidently, or your wallowing friend will follow you to no end.  
Cover up, hide your face, stop trying to impress.  
Dress nice but not too clean or else the eyes of the reaper will help you make a scene  
Tie your shoes so you don't fall and so the devils don't make you fall.  
Close your eyes, not too tight, light enough to run but heavy enough to sleep.  
When you run zig-zag so the nagging voices don't help you reach your end.  
Wake up you knew this was coming at some point your running would have to come to end.  
Take it back, make it yours once again.  
Because to live without fear is to not live at all.  
Welcome back my sweet Allanie, welcome to your underworld.

---

# *What We'd Tell Him*

TYLER PENNUCCI

**W**e're gonna be rough with him. I'm gonna grab his shoulders and sit him down regardless of whether or not he wants to sit. We've got to be firm. Tell him to sit and shut up. Show him that there's fight in us. Show him he's gonna have the fight he doesn't have now. He'll know what it means. We're the product of what he wanted us to be. Pieces got lost. Others were torn away but we need to show him what's left. I don't think I'll be able to look at me. To see the boy who can actually smile without trying. See the boy who wasn't scared of how gangly his arms were or how high his voice was. He is naive and not stupid but in retrospect they are one in the same. I don't think I'll be able to look at the boy who wasn't afraid. Not because he knew what was in store and was ready but because he didn't know what hell looks like yet. How are we here? How did that timid little boy who had his nose permanently embedded in a book watch the biggest, strongest, and scariest man in the world have the light leave his eyes go out. How will he carry on after hearing death sing its nauseating rattle of a tune through the mouth of his idol? How is he going to sleep with the feeling of the knife that cut the rope branded into his hand, the pattern of fake tiles of his childhood kitchen forever seared in his mind. It is impossible to believe what this little innocent boy will be

capable of. How his tiny frame is going to bear the burden we do now is unbelievable. He faced the hardest parts of our life. Not me, him. Maybe he should talk and I should listen.

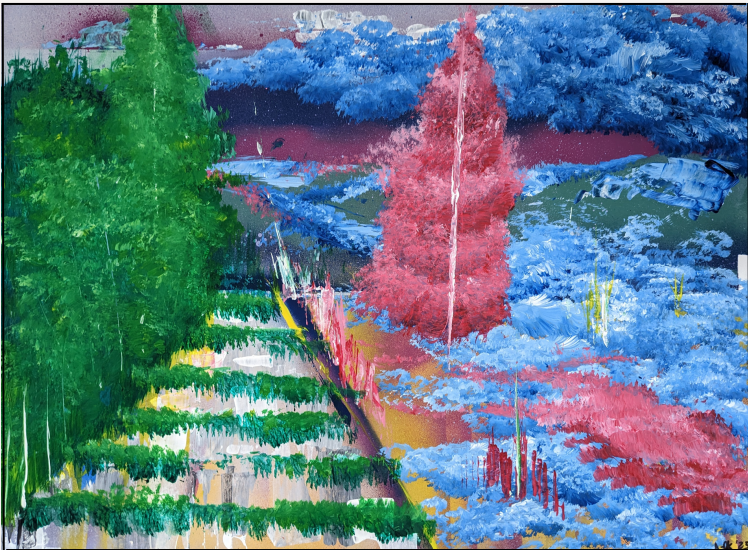
I've forgotten how strong that kid is. He had to have been. I haven't forgotten. I just don't like to remember. He is going to face the roar of a chronically empty stomach. He is going to carve glyphs of pain into himself because it feels like our skin is the only one who listens. He is going to carry the shell we will become up and down the hill that would feel like a mountain. He is the one that will go friendless and blame himself because he's still at heart the pure little boy who can't see the wicked cruelty of others when faced with the ostracized and estranged. I am going to be rough with the little boy and sit him down. Then I am going to look into his eyes and cry. For no matter how unfair the world became. No matter how much weight he lost or how much skin he needed to cover that boy never let one of his tears bless the eyes of another. I will cry in front of this boy. He needs to see it. He will sit and bear witness to the glorious young man he created... weeping.

I am the product of small frail shoulders, Knees too big for their legs. A voice like an alto in a sea of tenors. Smaller than the other boys, initially sheltered and therefore unafraid.

Unafraid until his pure view of the world was through the legs behind the back dunked into a trashcan by a very cold world we weren't ready for. I want him to look at us now. See how we have grown. See that because of his hard work our head is now held high and although it may still see the shelter of a hat or hood, said article is no longer our shield from the gazes of others. Show him that the timid blue has been replaced by a sheer and bitter gray that could stare down gods. I want to stand over him too. Watch him gaze up in awe at the mass of firm flesh we have become. I will warn him it is not the product of natural development but an epic application of effort and discipline. We won't blame him for its necessity but will warn him that he is going to make attaining our current mass an uphill battle. He, after all, is responsible for stretching our skin to expose every outcropping of bone until every rib is painfully evident, until our cheekbones become the most prominent feature of our face and our eyes have sunken into deep pockets where their bright lights decide to fade out. Tell him that there will be a gradual progression we won't even notice at first and will leave us in a competition with the skeleton hanging in our biology class for who is the boniest occupant of the room.

I don't think I could tell him anything. Nobody told me what was going to happen. I think I was supposed to go in blind. To tell him might change who we become, and I like him. He's gonna like him too. We're the product of what he wanted us to be. Some pieces got lost. Others were torn but in the end I know he's proud of us. I'm proud of us. I like who I am and that was worth every second I didn't.

---



*Artwork by*  
Oscar Kallender



# Other

## CAT COUSENSLEE

I've always loved the other. D&D, the cosmos, making up stories with dolls, the Baudelaire Siblings, you name it. If it didn't feel entirely real, I probably enjoyed it. Even strange places on Earth, like the deep sea, fascinated me. As a child, there was always a feeling of alienation from my peers, a sort of, "they're human, and I'm unlike them" kind of thing. They were people who were so unmistakably People and I was so Not. I suppose that means that my choice of the word alienation is meant to be a little more literal than one might think at face value. I'm human, of course, and at this point in time I'm fairly comfortable in my body, but I've never been able to shake off that feeling of not being Right.

We've all read those books. You know the ones I'm talking about. The books. They usually feature an 11-13 year old who is Different and therefore able/allowed to venture to another realm because of said difference. Looking back on these, they're not at all accurate in terms of how kids act. Not noticing this, even though it bothers me now, I always connected to these books very deeply. I based a lot of the stories that I made up off of them. I wanted so much to have my differences mean something special. I wanted to secretly be an alien, or magic, or something other than me, and I wanted someone else like me to appear and help me find a place I belonged.

I don't think I didn't like myself - I did! I was creative - the art kid, the "play family at recess" kid, the kid who tried to write entire books with a friend who eventually backed out, leaving me disappointed and confused. At some point, kids around me stopped tolerating imagination. I wanted to find people who existed as the same kind of weird I was. Up until second grade, I went to a school that didn't treat its teachers well, and left a lot of kids out because they taught as if every child learns the same way.

Learning disabilities, who? When I changed schools, I found myself in a much more accepting environment, who existed as the same kind of weird I was. Up until second grade, I went to a school that didn't treat its teachers well, and left a lot of kids out because they taught as if every child learns the same way. Learning disabilities, who? When I changed schools, I found myself in a much more accepting environment, but one that didn't support my weakness well. I was never properly taught grammar, or long division, or what to do when kid A chases you around the schoolyard after accidentally pulling kid B's hair. I spent my time reading, drawing, or making up stories with Legos. Stories have always been a big part of my life and something that fueled a lot of my confidence.

The first time I played D&D, I was eleven. It was at a store called the Brooklyn Strategist, or "Bstrat" for short. Bstrat would become a place I would frequent for years, up until COVID. As soon as I walked in, I felt at home. There were people who liked weird stuff like me and were just as interested in them! I'd only ever read about D&D and didn't know how to play, but everyone immediately took me under their wing. I can only imagine what it was like for the others in my group, this scrawny little girl who didn't say much and only knew how to use one spell. I can still talk about my first session like it was yesterday. The DM was a badass lady and although all of the players were boys, they were all super nerdy and welcoming, unlike the ones at school. Most of the actual plot evades me because of how entranced I was by the people around me. I mostly only listened to them play, but I can still picture the face of the guy who taught me what a spell was, the voice of the woman who printed out a premade character for me, and the boy who made his character's pet eat a door.

**I'm Other, but so are others.**



*Artwork by*  
Z Assi

---

## *Patchwork*

L I L E E O R C U T T

time will heal  
time will help  
but with more time there's more fraying  
some things i don't think anyone can fully heal from  
but it's less about the tear itself  
and more about what you do with the broken thread  
what patches will you chose to sew yourself back together  
to keep your seams from abrading and the rest of you falling apart  
blue, yellow, patterned, soft?  
i tend to gear people in the direction of thin fabrics, forgiving fabrics, best for  
beginners but recommend to everyone  
leather and plastic is too harsh for your wounds and sewing machines have trouble  
with them  
we use a bandage when our wounds are to vulnerable  
but if kept from fresh air for too long it's impossible to heal  
same goes for the wounds others can't see  
every step you take is another stitch or knot in your process  
handle your healing with care because  
needles are sharp  
but don't let that scare you from the beautiful patchwork you'll become

# *Each One, Teach One*

ALVIN AGBENYEGAH

*an assignment for Race: Reality and Fiction*

Approaching this assignment, I initially intended to pursue the five fallacies of racism, a topic recently introduced in the course without the depth and broadness of unpacking, say, race as nothing more than a fabricated concept. Nevertheless, I was still intrigued by these blatantly flawed arguments regarding racism and its existence in society, arguments widely considered the objective truth. Consequently, I figured the most mutually enlightening conversation I could initiate would be with someone who believed one or more of the fallacies. However, I ultimately denied myself this opportunity for a challenge when I decided to wait to tackle this assignment until the week it was due, thus, settling with my advisor, Ms. Pytleski. My choice ultimately came down to someone I knew I could comfortably converse with while still producing thought-provoking, illuminating ideas.

To prepare for the conversation, I compiled a page of research summarizing the five fallacies to the best of my understanding. My bullet points were concise and detailed, but I still feared I would be unable to maintain a prolonged discussion as opposed to a lecture. My fears were meaningless, however, as deemed by the 29-minute voice recording of both mine and Ms. Pytleski's voices engaged in intellectual conversation.

As previously mentioned, the

basis of my explanation focused on my paraphrased definitions of each of the fallacies, real-life examples throughout history, and methodical counterarguments. I drew from topics previously discussed in the class, including but not limited to the iceberg metaphor, the irrelevance of race in biology, and the origins of ideals encompassing racial inferiority to justify slavery - all of which were beneficial in expanding the horizon of my own understanding of what I once believed to be an explicit topic.

Once it was time to present my thorough findings, Ms. Pytleski ecstatically accepted my proposal and willingly offered to meet in the warm serenity of her classroom. Seated facing one another, Ms. Pytleski just as enthusiastically approved my request to voice record as we began our conversation accordingly. To extinguish my previous fears, I commenced with a brief overview of the assignment's instructions and the importance of her reactions despite the emphasis placed on my teaching. Afterward, I meticulously explained the fallacies in succession, maintaining eye contact while taking limited glances at my laptop whenever necessary. Every fallacy received brilliant responses - spawning discussion longer than the last - as Ms. Pytleski effortlessly introduced different angles I had not previously fathomed. I attribute the unicity of her

words to the tailored touch she provided, fueled by a combination of personal and shared experiences. Regarding Ms. Pytleski's understanding of the content covered, her body language – focused eye contact, periodic head nodding, curious glimpses of my notes – implied not only agreement but a genuine appreciation for what I had to say.

A notable segment of the conversation that encompasses the specific, previously described successes of the entire discussion occurs in the final seconds of the audio recording when everything is tied together perfectly. With my last point, I introduced the fixed fallacy, essentially the belief that racism is an entity set in time, incapable of intensifying nor deteriorating. In addition to addressing the failure of this argument to recognize the adaptive, evolutionary nature of racism, I asked Ms. Pytleski the only question I prepared – one that particularly caught my eye as I conducted research: “What exactly preserves the existence of racism even after racist systems of the past (e.g., slavery and segregation) have lapsed?” I asked. Answering my own question, I referenced a point Ms. Pytleski made earlier when she raised the significance of mindset, specifically, a mindset that has remained relentless over time. “How do you fundamentally, Alvin, change someone's mind when they don't even know what needs to be changed?” she had previously asked, contributing to the overall theme of these fallacies in that there exists those who genuinely believe these ideologies are sound. Those who think there's no need for a closer look, a healthy discourse like this one, identifying potential inconsistencies in these ideas.

In response to my original question, Ms. Pytleski was brave enough to acknowledge her past misconceptions, as she once believed racist ideals would die with the people in power, lawmakers in Congress, who cemented them into society. However, as she now knows, “if it's written into laws, if it's written into education policies,” the damage is not so easily reversible. Continuing on her tangent of vulnerability, Ms. Pytleski mentioned how overbearing this weight of something so seemingly irreparable could feel, a privileged feeling as a white woman as opposed to the Black young man sitting in front of her. At this moment, she assertively remarked, yes, it's this incessant mindset that we must combat in calculated, timely efforts, especially in children. Efforts are as simple as informing others of the current implications of these mindsets instilled in the past. According to Ms. Pytleski, once these efforts have been made, the next order of business questions how we can get this newly-informed, adequately equipped generation, these “Alvins,” in positions of head of schools and Congress. Although I quickly and modestly dismissed what I assumed to be an arbitrary compliment, Ms. Pytleski clarified how my ability to both listen and efficiently respond in conversations on heavy topics is crucial for victory in the battle against this age-old “mindset.”

The productivity and effectiveness of my conversation with my advisor testify to my critically acclaimed communicative skills. Ms. Pytleski could easily tread into this level of vulnerability because of the atmosphere and the tone I set at the start of

the discussion. I appeared prepared and well-informed but also attentive to what my "student" had to say with respect for her equally valuable words. It's also important to note, however, the close relationship Ms. Pytleski and I established prior to our conversation. But how can I just as effectively communicate my thoughts to strangers with ideas I may disagree with?

As if able to read my thoughts, Ms. Pytleski later questioned the overarching goal of learning about these fallacies in class. I explained the significance of understanding the opposing side to better prepare for contentious conversations. Because even though I can identify the flaws in these fallacious arguments, those who believe Oprah Winfrey's financial success suggests the end of racism, for example, are not as perceptive to the economic disparities systematically placed against African-Americans. Of course, paying attention to one's mannerisms when addressing the ignorant is vital, as others are more inclined to listen if they are "called in" rather than "called out." Thus, understanding the perspectives of those who believe these fallacies can prove advantageous in conversations outside this assignment in the real world. Ms. Pytleski even asked if I plan on pursuing a career in the future involving similar discussions. Initially, I reaffirmed my uncertainty concerning a potential profession, although I expressed my willingness to take advantage of these opportunities in the near and distant future. I can find joy in knowing that partaking in vulnerable, uncomfortable dialogue may yield lasting effects against racism as a whole.

---

## *Insomnia*

by Charline Webber

It's 3 a.m. when I miss them the most, I think. Showering alone at 4 is lonely without them beside me combing gentle fingers through my tangled hair. Braiding my hair at 5 makes me think of dark-roast colored curls to match espresso eyes. Doing my makeup at 6 just serves to remind me of early mornings sneaking off to perpetually open libraries to steal early morning kisses. Reading at 7 is a bittersweet endeavor as I imagine them reading to me again when I cannot sleep. Coffee at 8 makes me long for breakfast dates with butter doused bagels. Stairways at 9 make me miss movie mornings and warm embraces on chilly days where we have nowhere to go. I'm awake throughout all of these disconsolate nostalgias wishing I could sleep off missing them.



# *The Reading Incident*

ANDY MICHAELSON

*inspired by The Stanley Parable*

Jon was a man who worked for a company. Jon wasn't a particularly notable man, mid 30's, flat-pressed untucked grayish white dress shirt, with sleeves just barely down to his wrists. His pants were a size too small, khakis that barely reached the top of his pulled-up socks. With shining black shoes he walked down the street, passing people he would never see again. He arrived at 408 Synthia Lane, the gleaming tower of glass reaching into the dark gray sky, the top engulfed in a sea of clouds.

Jon pulled the golden handle and entered the lobby. The receptionist sat at his desk, a small marble slab with a silver computer perched at the top. He typed, almost consumed by the feeling of the keystrokes. Jon walked past him and into the elevator, to floor 43. The elevator door opened, and he looked out to the ocean of white cubicles. Everyone had their place in this office; everything was organized for Jon. He felt comforted by this. his job gave him a purpose, a reason to exist.

Jon stepped out of the elevator and strolled through the office. He entered his cubicle, the third to the right. His cubicle was nothing out of the ordinary, an old brick of a computer sitting atop his rough birch desk, with a depressed hard plastic coat wrapped around a dusty motherboard, displaying his current and future tasks. The monitor flickered like a broken lightbulb as Jon

sat down and began to type. He typed, and typed, the sound of the keyboard becoming an orchestra of emotions, telling someone's story through the press of a switch. Jon was a writer, among many in this office. His stories weren't necessarily of note, yet they weren't going to sit on a bookshelf for the rest of their lives.

After about 4 hours of typing, Jon sat back in his chair. Something was wrong. He'd been in this office for hours, and he hadn't seen a single soul besides the receptionist in the office. He got out of his black office chair and looked around the empty room. He checked each cubicle, under every chair, and yet there seemed to be no one around. Perhaps there was an email, a letter, something to relay to him what was happening. He sat back down at his desk and opened his email. The screen displayed nothing of use. For once in his very regular life, something felt off.

Jon felt a rising sense of panic. What should he do? By now this office should be a beehive, people running and bustling around the office, doing their jobs like he always did his. Jon was freaking out. Where was everyone? Why was the receptionist the only person in the building? Questions like these flooded his head like helium in a balloon, and soon it popped. He dove under his cubicle desk, curled into a ball, and sat for several hours.

Finally, he gathered himself and sat back up in his chair. If no one was here, then he shouldn't be here either. Jon sat up, tucked his chair under his desk, and walked briskly to the elevator. He pushed the button and heard the familiar ding as the elevator reached his floor. He walked through the metal doors and watched as they slammed shut. The rumble of the elevator only made him feel more anxious.

Another ding pierced his ears, shocking him out of his thoughts again, and the doors slid open. He walked back out into the entrance and stared at the receptionist's desk. The keyboard now lay untouched.

"What is going on? Did everyone die? Is this the end of the world? What do I do..." Thoughts raced through Jon's mind as he curled up on the floor once more. Getting one last glimpse out the glass door, the street lay barren as a desert. He felt a voice, some type of floating emotion, calling out to him from the dark.

\*

Jon was a man, who worked for a company. Jon wasn't a particularly notable man, mid 30's, flat-pressed untucked grayish white dress shirt, with sleeves just barely down to his wrists. His pants were a size too small, khaki's that barely reached the top of his pulled-up socks. With shining black shoes he walked down the street, passing people he would never see again... right? He hadn't seen these people before, but an odd feeling, like forgetting that you forgot something, crept into Jon's mind. He stopped and stared at people as they walked by. Something was off today, he just knew it. A sense, a smell in the air, something told him that this wasn't right. A passing wind, yelling at him, trying to convey the possibility of solitude he could lock himself into.

However, he continued his journey to his office and sat down at his desk. After a few hours at work, it didn't seem like anyone was showing up.

\*

Jon was a man, who worked for a company. Jon wasn't a particularly notable man, mid 30's, flat-pressed untucked grayish white dress shirt, with sleeves just barely down to his wrists. His pants were a size too small, khaki's that barely reached the top of his pulled-up socks. With shining black shoes he walked down the street, passing people...

This isn't right. It's something more this time. Something... unmistakably wrong with the universe. Jon stopped in his tracks and stared at the people streaming by him. He shouldn't go to work, this wasn't the right choice. He had to return home, go grocery shopping, anything but enter the glass doors at 408 Synthia Lane. Jon stared down at the broken concrete, confused and scared. It was a voice, an intrinsic idea, like the silent voice instead of someone's head. Jon didn't know what was happening, his life was normal. Was he going crazy? Was there someone casting a spell on him? Jon started to feel dizzy and sat down in a small alleyway. He curled up into a ball, and as he did, he felt a sense of remorse, like someone, some voice was trying to prevent this very thing from happening to him.

\*

Jon was a man, who worked for a company. Jon wasn't a particularly notable man, mid 30's, flat-pressed untucked grayish white dress shirt... no no no! This isn't supposed to be happening again! Jon panicked, what was going on? A voice, he could define it now clearly, calling out to him. You CANNOT go to work! Return home, live your life happily ever after, and everything will be ok.

Jon stopped in his tracks. Was he going cra... no! You're not going crazy, there are no spells! Go home, don't panic, and be happy! That's how this story has to end! Jon was overwhelmed. How did this voice know what was going on with him? How could they read him so well? This information was too much for Jon, and he keeled over on the sidewalk.

\*

This is a story about Jon. He wore a flat-pressed untucked grayish-white dress shirt, with sleeves just barely down to his wrists. His pants were a size too small, khaki's that barely reached the top of his pulled-up socks. He worked for a company, one of no particular note, and he was happy. However, today, he caught a terrible cold, and lay in bed all day, sniffing and sneezing the hours away.

He tossed sheets left and right, and coughed and coughed until his body couldn't, then coughed some more. The cold, however, prevented a terrible fate... No? Is this still not enough for you? Fine, let's try again...

\*

Jon was a man. He wore a shirt and pants. He walked down a street and went to work. He lived happily ever after.

There. Are you satisfied now? Hours worth of writing, creative planning, and thinking about how Jon would have to overcome his desperate situation and become his own hero in an empty world, and all you can think about is your precious happy ending, right? Having everything tied up in a nice, neat little ball. I even went as far as to give you a voice in the story! To try and steer him away from going to work! But no, every time something bad happens to Jon, you want to reset the story. Because that's just it, isn't it? You don't WANT to read a story about a man suffering, and going through struggles as you do.

So I tried to do it your way. Was the story above interesting to you then? Jon DID live happily ever after, no? Now, if you will be so kind as to let me continue...

\*

Jon was a man, who worked for a company. Jon wasn't a particularly notable man, mid 30's, flat-pressed untucked grayish white dress shirt, with sleeves just barely down to his wrists. His pants were a size too small, khaki's that barely reached the top of his pulled-up socks. With shining black shoes he walked down the street, passing people he would never see again. He arrived at 408 Synthia Lane, the gleaming tower of glass reaching into the dark gray sky, the top engulfed in a sea of clouds.

Jon pulled the golden handle and entered the lobby. The receptionist sat at his



desk, a small marble slab with a silver computer perched at the top. He typed, almost consumed by the feeling of the keystrokes. Jon walked past him and into the elevator, to floor 43. The elevator door opened, and he looked out to the ocean of white cubicles. Everyone had their place in this office, everything was organized for Jon. He felt the same sense of comfort as he always did in this office. His job gave him a purpose, a reason to exist.

This day, however, would be different from all the rest...

---



*Tannery Session  
part 2*  
by Alexandra Zook

*Graceful Flower*  
by Kaylin Martin



# *Rush*

TYLER PENNUCCI

5 minutes:

5 minutes of all the things

Who am I?

Tired, hungry, I missed breakfast, I ski, I'm lonely, very tired, I like to read, I like League of Legends, I am silver 4, the grind is brutal, I want to stop but I won't, I feel like I'm never productive, I never am productive, I'm not sure why, I almost missed class this morning, I was in bed at 8:27, that gave me 3 minutes to get to the science building, I want to succeed, I don't want to do the work, I know I am capable of it. Where is the wall? Does it exist? Do I want it there? How the f--- am I supposed to make this rhyme. I can't rhyme. I like to read, not write. Jesus I whine a lot. I can't complain, I shouldn't. B---s whine. I want to eat. I want to nap. I want to feel ok. I'll settle for the nap. Sleep is nice. I took a nap and thought I died. Don't sleep with headphones in.

## I need a nap

I need a nap.

I need more.

I'll settle for the nap.

Not the kind you take for an hour then wake up refreshed.

I want to wake up with an earbud playing a song I've never heard.

I want to wake up not quite sure where I am half convinced that I'm dead.

My face impressed with the pattern of wherever I laid my head.

A numb tingling in the arm that I know will get worse when I move but won't get better if I don't.

I need a nap where the dream wasn't quite a dream but the vague idea of one.

I need to frantically search for a clock or my phone because all concepts of time have gone.

A nap where I don't wake up but rather get thrown back into reality.

I want to wake up and have the light be different than it was when I fell asleep.

The moment of panic where I wonder if I've missed anything in my slumber.

The moment following it where I'm so tired my body refuses to care.

I want my phone to be almost dead.

I want to feel as if the world went on without me and I lagged behind.

To wake up with a deep hunger clawing at me that is only drowned out by drowsiness and a desire to go back to sleep.

I want a nap that makes me crave another.

It is hard to nap.

My eyes don't like to close and won't stay shut

I need to move. I can feel the movement trapped in me trying to leave

Where does it come from?

I need a nap where a bit of drool sticks me to my pillow

Where I wake up dying of thirst

I need the kind of nap that sneaks up on you

Just rest my eyes for a minute and wake up an eternity later

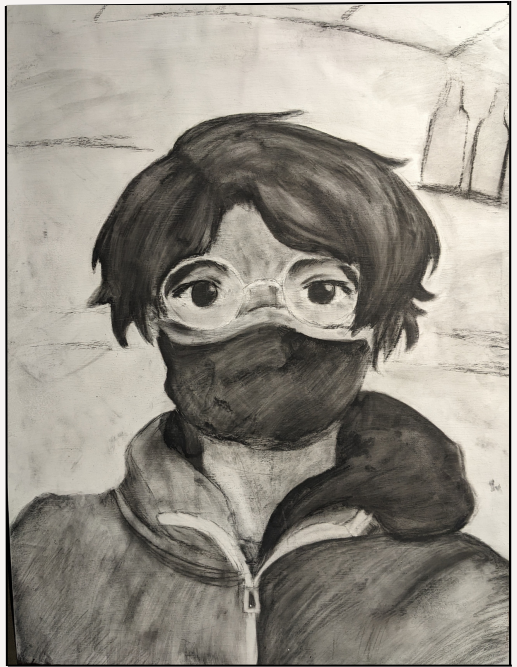
A nap deep enough to forget

Forget a where and a when

I need more than a nap

But I'll settle for it

*Self Portrait*  
by Ash Murray



*Extensive Anxiety*  
by Henry Watts

# *He Stood Outside*

ROWAN CORRICELLO

Micah straightened the linen napkin and stood back to study the tables, which were pushed together unevenly and set for sixteen places, chairs crammed in haphazardly at odd angles. An old stained tablecloth covered it all in a hideous attempt to make it all appear cohesive.

He felt someone brush by behind him.

“Oh, sorry,” he said.

His mother ignored him. He could hear her talking in the kitchen now with his sister and his aunts. A drawer slammed and cabinets were flung open. She reappeared carrying several plates, cooked spinach, rice, and noodles among them.

“Hi, Micah,” she said, as if noticing him for the first time. “The table’s fine—you can leave. Why don’t you go get the TV ready for your cousins?”

His head hurt, and now that he’d been relieved from his duties, he wanted to be alone. He wouldn’t have much time before they all arrived. He squeezed into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. The light was humming above his head.

He pulled the orange juice carton from its jam-packed shelf and poured himself a glass. Then he went to his room in the back of the house and put on his headphones.

He lay on his bed, staring at the ceiling. A lawnmower mowed outside. Music thrummed in his

eardrums. He closed his eyes. His limbs felt heavy. He was not asleep, but he had no sense of time passing.

There was a knock on his door.

It was his cousin Remo. He was a year below Micah in school and slightly taller. He stood with his hand on the doorjamb, ajar, the warmth of the hallway lighting casting a mysterious glow on the right side of his face. Micah could hear the chatter from the front of the house.

He sat up. They must have arrived without his noticing. His mother would be unhappy that he’d neglected to greet them.

He stood to leave. Remo was still by the door, looking awkward.

“Oh, hey, Remo,” he said.

“Hi,” Remo said.

“Excuse me.”

Micah slid past him. The noise grew louder as he padded down the corridor. Rows of shoes lined the front door. Visitors occupied the adjacent rooms on either side, talking, sipping, and gesticulating.

He spotted his neighbor, Alex, by the table. Their families were good friends and the two got along well. Micah rushed his way through to meet him.

“Micah, there you are!” his mother said. “I was looking for you.”

He performed the obligatory apology and withstood her conversation with his aunts for a while. After a few minutes, he

managed to duck away.

While most of the women and younger children were in the kitchen or lingering by the table, most of the men at the gathering were in the living room. His other cousins sat transfixed around the Xbox. A few of the girls were in a corner whispering.

He led Alex to the couch by the TV. Remo was still tagging along behind. His grandfather sat in the center of the large sofa, his thin frame nearly enveloped by the cushions. He was very old. He couldn't hear well. His eyes were directed towards the basketball game playing on the TV, but something in them remained unfocused and cloudy.

Despite this, he commanded an unspoken respect among the uncles and brothers and nephews surrounding him. They ceded the best spot and a wide berth to him. They watched the game distractedly, drinking half-sips of beer and seltzer, playing cards, and talking loudly.

They talked very loudly, Micah thought. They seemed to have nothing to say, yet it was the drone of their voices that filled the house.

He sat down by the Xbox with his other cousins. Remo and Alex were talking beside him now. They'd only met a few times before.

He leaned back and watched them play on the screen. The game didn't interest him. His mind wandered, yet when he was called back by someone shouting his name, he couldn't remember where he'd gone.

"Micah! Geez, where were you? C'mon, do you want a turn?" one of his cousins asked.

He shook his head no.

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Okay," the cousin said, and returned to playing. His elbow bumped into Micah, but he didn't seem to notice.

There were too many bodies around him, sweating, encircled. Someone cried out as their avatar was shot down on the screen. They handed over their controller.

"I need to leave," Micah said. He didn't think anyone heard him.

He washed his hands in the bathroom at the back of his house. He didn't need to go.

When he returned, they were all taking their seats at the table. Dinner was ready. He found a spot between his mother and Remo at the end of the table. He ate. The food was delicious, but from his position he had to bend over awkwardly to reach it, his shoulders contorting together, and so by the meal's end his back was aching.

The conversation was chaotic, and he didn't pay attention to it. People shouted over each other and across the tables to be heard. The topics were light, polite, and yet not forced. They asked about each other's children, work, grades at school, that new technology. There was so much food. Everyone was full.

Micah went to the bathroom again. Plates were cleared and they all left the table for a break before dessert. His mother stayed behind to wipe down the tables. He washed his hands and poured water on his face. Above the sink, the mirror showed his face in the reflection of the window behind him. It was nighttime. The gas streetlights were turned on, a line extending—fading—disappearing—into the infinite darkness.

He went outside for a smoke. He kept cigarettes in the underwear drawer of his nightstand and thought his mother didn't know about them. His block was empty. There was a slight chill.

He took a puff. When he exhaled, the smoke and the moisture of his breath in the frigid air mixed, so that he couldn't tell which was which. He leaned against the stoop and stuck his legs out in front of him. He closed his eyes and rested. He thought of his grandfather. He couldn't tell how much time passed.

Remo appeared. He was silent.

He offered a hand up wordlessly.

Micah took a deep breath, pocketed his cigarettes, and headed inside.

---



*Self-Portrait*  
by Matthew Lucien

# *(Echo)*

ALEXANDRA ZOOK

screaming in the forest;  
with the aching fear of being loud,  
within the panes of silence.  
not wanting to be heard,  
within the safe walls of the trees,  
with the whisper quiet sound of a breeze.

screaming in the forest;  
dirt caked into my shoes,  
brain fuzzy,  
hair tangled,  
lost, overwhelmed, &  
out of breath.

screaming in the forest;  
listening to the music,  
just wanting to be left alone.  
as the to-do lists are running around my head, faster than I ever could.

screaming in the forest;  
looking at the frozen pond ,and crystalized trees.  
running faster,  
and faster,  
until my sight is as blurred as my thoughts

screaming in the forest wasn't enough to turn off my mind pacing,  
as I continue racing.

---



*Artwork by*  
Meita Fofana

# Untitled

SAMANTHA RICH

No one had known when the walls came into existence, and it seemed that no one in the City of Cehalet really cared. The twelve-foot, imposing gray barricade had looked commandingly upon the city longer than even the oldest could remember, its impressive smooth surface looking down with decisive dominance. The thick slate-colored walls surrounded the entirety of Cehalet, holding in the bustling, stirring streets like cattle gates. Dark concrete slabs were arranged into rows and blocks, one or two stories high, forming the homes and streets of the timid people. A father would occasionally hurry from one block to another, but most would often keep to themselves.

Mothers raised the children, a tradition passed down from what little was left of Cehalet's history. There were no teachers, or nuns, or budget-draining travel agencies. There weren't college dropouts or newspaper boys or homeless men begging for change on the street. The women tended to the children, though some joined the men in the workforce. They became doctors for the occasional broken bone, electrical technicians, actors and artists, coroners, cement masons, plumbers, musicians, cleaners, and caregivers for the elderly. Laborers in the factories molded plastic, calories, and synthetic cotton into Cehalet's most essential needs. The people of Cehalet were

thankful, for their path forward had already been laid out. They were given purpose, just enough to live their lives and die without feeling too bad about it. Children weren't expected to contribute, or learn, or amount to something special. From the moment they could walk, mothers would raise them to be happy children; they were nurtured, safe and cared for. Every once in a while when the heat of the city subsided, a few children would scurry into the narrow space between buildings and braid each other's hair or play a childish game with a forgotten can or two, kicking the piece of warped rusty tin between their feet or throwing it as high as they could. In Cehalet, children were given time to simply exist in the world, before growing and tiring of it.

The air in Cehalet smelled of copper; over the years, the scent had seeped down, a metallic odor burying into every crack of each cement block. The city seemed to hum slightly under a heavy heat, almost as if a dragon lay sleeping under the blanket of dark plastic turf grass which covered the ground in patches. In this city, no ferns grow between the cracks in the pavement, no flies buzz around day-old dishes lying in the sink, not even mold grows in dark warm places like criminals hidden from the light. There are no slaughterhouses, meat-packing plants,



or hot glass-paned greenhouses; nutrition arrives pre-packaged, in styrofoam-like off-white saucers, small enough to fit into the palm of your hand. Nothing must die for the City of Cehalet to sustain, and no one must go hungry. There are no downpours, no rainstorms, and no thunderbolts which dominate the sky. There are no winters or springs, just a comforting heat, day after day. But there is no sorrow in the City of Cehalet. Longing never crosses the face of a young child, nor a look of regret in an old woman's eyes. There hadn't been violence or hunger in the streets of Cehalet for many decades; for a very long time, the people of the city hadn't known hatred or evil.

\*

Emre could have easily been the strongest and wildest; most destined for something great. Even as a child, she was nothing like the other young girls or boys, holding hands and hiding behind long nylon scarves, pulling one side to their mother's ankles. That was never her. When no one was looking she would take off her shoes and touch her feet to the cold concrete ground, or steal away and walk each block up and down, and up and down again. Some days she would reach out and feel the thick dark gray walls with her fingertips, taking in their cold bitterness, and sneer at them when no one was looking. She barred her teeth and wrinkled her nose, frowning her brow until she thought she saw a slight waver in its smooth state surface, almost as if it had shuddered from fear. Then she would run her hands along the side and walk until her feet ached and made herself turn around. Some days she wouldn't come home until the next day, and she thought, "no wonder my mother's hair is turning gray."

Her father had been a tall kind man, or at least that's what people told her. Emre held onto the only memory of her father she had; before she drifted into sleep, she could still remember his voice, distant but familiar, like listening to a conversation in another room, and she played it round and round, a record as she fell asleep. Her mother was not mean but had turned sour over time. Not rotten, but bitter and aged like vinegar. In Cehalet, the elderly seemed to slip away. Emre supposed it was because they had no purpose, no wisdom of the past to offer, no knowledge, so they grew distant and quiet, and happy. Most days her mother would go out before Emre woke up, but Emre didn't mind, she liked the silence.

Emre learned quickly not to ask what was beyond the walls, but something seemed to build up inside her. The long shadows of walls in the city seemed to escalate this pressure with every step on the pavement. However, on this particular day, questions seemed to burn inside her, boiling up from her gut and spilling out in steam through her mouth. Before she could stop it, or rather, because on this day she did not care to, she looked to her mother, who was sitting in the heat of the kitchen looking down at another tasteless tablet and dabbing sweat from her forehead, and let the words spill out in a slow casual way. "What's out there?" rolled off of her tongue. Her mother hesitated slightly, freezing for a nearly imperceptible

moment over her saucer, before humming a quiet, “hmm” in a low voice.

Now Emre pressed her in an urgent way, in quick choppy words. “I mean, why doesn’t anyone know what’s beyond? Outside of the city.”

“Please. Don’t waste my time with questions, child.”

“What could be so terrible, that we must cage ourselves in with walls?” she said in one breath. “What happened?”

For a moment, Emre thought she saw something familiar from the corner of her mother’s eye, but in a second, it vanished into simple disregard. “Little girls ask silly little questions,” she said, never looking up from the table.

“I’d like to know. I’d like to see it for myself one day, whatever’s out there.”

Her mother took a short breath and looked up from her meal. “Emre, I said no more questions.”

“But what is it? You don’t even know, do you? No one knows, doesn’t that seem strange and - ”

“Emre, I said ‘enough.’ I’ve given you so much and you’re being ungrateful. You’re too old to be acting like this. You have enough here, you need no more...”

Emre cut her off, “Haven’t you ever wondered what’s out there? Why am I the only one who asks any questions...”

“No more questions,” she said. And Emre knew that would be the last conversation they would have on this subject. When her mother decided something, she would not change her mind. That night, Emre searched for comfort in the understanding that this was enough for her mother, that it should be enough for herself. She forced her attention on moments, like running barefoot through empty streets; listening to the tragic tones of music shaking and reverberating off of every wall; her father’s face in a tangle of colors and shapes, forgotten and filled in by her mind; playing them over and over.

Emre woke up, unsurprised and slightly thankful for the stillness and quietness of the home, for she was alone. Something inside of her decided to slip on her black shoes with the hard soles and head out, although it was early and especially hot. She ran her hand along the wall, taking long swift steps, just like every other day, when a flash of crimson streaked from the corner of her eye. She snapped her head toward the color to see a small, bright cardinal. Its bright red body screamed at her and sped her heart like an alarm, while its beady black eyes filled her with fear, two deep pools of darkness and betrayal. In a moment, the bird sped into the air, and Emre’s feet clapped on the pavement as she sped after the creature. His long tail feathers trailed behind his bright red body, and dark claws clenched tight beneath his round red stomach. His wings spread wide to the sides, a deep crimson laced with black; he would have seemed graceful if not for the slight violence in his movements. His pointy head was spiked at the top, just as his bright beak, sticking out from mask-like black features. The bird seemed distant and hollow, yet urgency flowed from the creature in prickly quick sounds and gestures.

At first, Emre felt nothing, then in a second, she was struck with amazement.

Despite her fear, something inside her seemed to know the being meant no harm. She wanted to follow the creature more than she had ever wanted anything before. The thick soles of her uncomfortable black shoes clapped on the pavement, galloping like horses, as she ran after the bird. Her lungs burned and her nose stung with the city's metallic air. Emre pushed against the thick, warm air of the city, as sweat pooled on her forehead and ran down the back of her neck. She should have known, as she had been to this part of Cehalet before, even traced its walls with her index finger many times on her journeys, yet the wall seemed to jump out in front of her, and she ran head-first into its stone. But she never took her eyes off of the new red thing as her chest hit the wall, then her back to the ground. The bird flew right over her head, up and over the wall.

As if by fate, Emre looked up to find a small foothold at waist height indented in the wall, and a few more shallow ones just above, to its left and right. She hauled herself up off the ground with determination and placed her foot to fill the missing chunk as she lifted herself up slightly. She reached and extended her hand as far as it would reach above her, just barely connecting with the next hold. Her elbow rubbed against the wall's slick surface, and she could already picture the mark she would have later. She wavered slightly, catching herself, clutching to the little holds she could find and looked up to the next indent. With one quick and decisive motion, she reached her right leg to the first hold and reached her right arm up to the last. She knew the fall at this height would cause her harm, which could have been what made her stick to the wall like chewing gum. Her fingertips turned pale as they strained to grip the cement wall's top. Emre has never considered herself strong, but as if by some magical force, or perhaps the adrenaline she had never had a reason to use before, she lifts herself up.

For a moment or two, Emre let her torso fold over the top of the wall, and she felt the cool surface for a second while she caught her racing breath. Then she lifted her head up, staring into the new distance.

\*

Emre had been destined for something great. She had seen the city for what it was, burdened with knowledge not only of Cehalet but also a deep understanding, a gift, of what lie outside its barrier of walls. For some time, she mourned her childhood in confused turbulence, wishing for blindness and sight at the same time; however, as time progressed, she learned to accept the responsibility which burdened her. Emre understood the city for the first time, and returned, walking through the streets, now immersing herself among stacks of concrete, taking care to look deeper than before. She knew she had been given a purpose, greater than anyone else in the City of Cehalet. Emre would not only become a mother, but a storyteller. She would create a history for Cehalet, a gift of myth and great tragedy, and proverbs for the children to learn. The people would see in her eyes something different, a glow of anguish and satisfaction they couldn't comprehend, which made them listen, even her most misleading words believable. Emre carried with

her a familiar discontent, almost longing to be freed, but she knew sunsets weren't worth human imperfection; flurries of snowflakes would never be worth famine and racism and fighting in the streets. She would forever be dissatisfied, but the little knowledge of the others was right for them. They could have this, even if she could not. She would let herself get lost in this terrible beautiful maze, along with everyone else.

---

## 2001

ALEXANDRA ZOOK

As my mother once told me:  
The city went quiet,

Ashes and shards of metal rained down,  
The smoke rose, as time froze.

Bicycles stopped,  
As people stood and watched.

Final phone calls being made,  
As history slowly decayed.

Tears came from near and far,  
As 2,996 of us joined the moon and the stars.

To hear the lives crumble;  
Then nothing.

Silence blanketed the city that never sleeps.

*Salt Marsh*  
by Alexandra Zook



# *My Definition of Love*

ALEXANDRA ZOOK

is constantly changing; shapeshifting,  
from safe hugs after a long day,  
to an achy feeling at the pit of my  
stomach,  
feeling for the pieces missing.

when it's dressed in soft cream  
cardigans, and gray warm hoodies,  
I know it's going to be a good day.  
filled with hidden smiles, and bubbles  
of joy  
ready to fly free, and soar upon the  
clouds.

like cotton candy sugar,  
and valleys full of daisies,  
spun neat;  
and picked to perfection.

sometimes, it comes in the form of  
words found,  
in paper bounds,  
and others times, it's like spoonfuls of  
honey,  
being washed down by vinegar.

and yet, with the good comes the bad,  
dressed in starched button downs,  
making me feel small,  
wanting to crawl outside of my layers,  
and recycle the broken bits of me.

catching love, is like chasing a storm  
with thunder,  
waiting for the silence, to get louder.  
echo about the walls,  
listening for the rain.

when it becomes to feel like doses of  
medicine,  
or velveteen roses.  
to keep my head down, and stare at  
my shoes,  
embarrassed, and ashamed, to be held  
together at the seams.

when it turns icky, and unshakeable;  
unwashed,  
wanting to turn my skin inside out.  
old, and used, like crumpled up paper,  
or hard candy melted to the wrapper,  
stuck forever.

when it becomes bittersweet,  
leaving the sour taste in your mouth,  
fermenting, until its uncontrollable,  
and just on repeat;  
consuming your thoughts like a  
stomach ache.

keeping the safe,  
resting in the familiar,  
until the weeds are overgrown,  
becoming a part of a very ugly  
garden.

some love from their minds,  
others love from their hearts,  
however, I learned to love with every  
fiber of my being.  
where once I love a piece of this  
world,  
it becomes part of mine forever.

# *Under The Peanut Tree*

L I L E E   O R C U T T

Under the peanut tree  
long walks with you  
were my favorite thing  
the delicate grass grazing our ankles  
brushing away surface level  
conversation  
the sound of bumblebees  
and the smell of pollen  
clogging our senses  
but nothing coming between  
our soul connection  
peanuts don't grow on trees  
but ours did  
i will never forget that day  
the day we spent  
shelling mysterious peanuts  
under a sapling  
surrounded by clovers  
sudden ending  
every now and then  
i can't help but think about  
if things were different  
if things didn't end the way they did  
or even at all  
the grief of losing you  
will be infinite  
but so is my love for you

it's hard to find closure  
the grief of losing you  
will be infinite  
but so is my love for you  
it's hard to find closure  
in something i saw as so perfect  
but i had to stop asking myself  
why  
why did it all fall apart?  
why did it have to end?  
i've grown to realize  
closure doesn't make sense of  
anything  
closure for me, has been  
acceptance,  
accepting that things were left  
unsaid,  
accepting that that i still have  
questions,  
accepting the growth and  
inevitable decay  
of what was  
what was true  
what was safe  
what was gentle  
love, cry, bleed  
over the growth and decay  
of a peanut seed



*The Seeds We Bleed*  
by Alexandra Zook

---

## *What is it about me*

ANONYMOUS

What is it about me?

What is it about me that looks like her. My height? My round face and high pitched voice that that I have to train to lower but still fail? Or is it my pin straight hair that I do every single day to try and live my fantasy of being what I always wished I was. I play guitar, I sing - No, I can't because I sound too feminine when I do. It's too high.

I can wear my favorite outfits because "he" wouldn't wear something like that. I can't wear my favorite bracelets because what boy do you know wears bracelets?

But one boy does  
One boy wears bracelets to cover scars  
A "real boy" would never have.

I've changed everything about myself so i can feel the smallest bit better about myself when I look in the mirror in the morning  
Just to be disappointed.

I've changed everything about myself to fit into your standards

So what is it about me  
That manages to fail  
Every. Single. Time.

# Winter Manifesto

K A J V O S E

**H**arsh gusts with ice-clad roads.  
And blueberry colored swirled  
feelings in my gut.  
Charge through the blazing leaves  
of November.  
Swirl through each other.

The blazing orange like stars in  
my mind's eye.  
The blueberry forming a sky for  
those stars to rest.  
Polar opposites forming a  
harmony.  
They flow through the sky with  
wings of musical notes on a major  
scale.

These notes form chords that  
form memories.  
Major chords show times of  
coziness from an orange, yellow,  
and red glow emanating from the  
mantle.  
Minor chords reveal those indigo  
feelings, those little twinges and  
twines of "Why did I say that"  
"Did I hurt them?"

The major chords flow, the minor  
chords stick.

They stick with the tackiness of  
burrs on a walk,  
Like burrs, they're difficult to get  
off.

It takes work.

It takes time.

And with time these burrs, these  
minor chords, these blueberry  
indigo skies can be let go and can  
form a harmony with the rest of  
the stars in the night sky.

They balance each other, these  
feelings are on the teeter totter of  
life.

If the minor chords don't exist the  
major chords will simply

fall

off.



# Untitled

CAT COUNSENL EE

The droning sound of typing filled the otherwise quiet air.

She pushed her glasses up onto her head, tangling the nose pads in her hair and scrubbing at her weary eyes. This proposal was getting nowhere, she was just repeating herself. Maybe she should stop for the night. It was extra work after all; Bill had said that she didn't have to stay late. Besides, she was getting lunch with her niece tomorrow and didn't want to be exhausted. Decided, she shut her laptop with a click and stood up, popping her spine.

It was unnerving to be in such a large space alone, even though she was still in her familiar cubicle neighborhood. She supposed she wasn't totally alone; there was the security guard in the lobby downstairs, but he never talked to anyone aside a grunt of hello in the mornings. Also, she didn't consider him a coworker. They didn't work together. A coworker was Mike, who told horrendous puns and loved cars, or Lucy, who had jelly beans on her desk and told everyone about her son, who was a dentist.

The office was a liminal beige space without the usual large number of people occupying it, even if they were all bored and, on a regular basis she would hardly consider them conscious after so many repetitive meaningless tasks. Printing. Small talk. Filing.

Walking by one of several water empty fountains, she made a mental note to tell someone about refills. She sighed. She handled far too much around here.

Finding the hallway that led to the elevators was almost a maze. Every time a new intern was hired they talked about putting directional signs up, but no one had ever gotten around to it.

Passing one of several meeting rooms, she faintly noticed that a light had been left on. She heaved another sigh and steered herself through the door. At least she was getting to walk around a bit after sitting at her desk all day.

The meeting room was one that wasn't used much, but tonight there were fresh notes on the whiteboard in green and black dry erase ink. Searching for the light switch, she read them thrice over.

As the room faded into darkness, she glanced at the window. Lights sparked across the city skyline and her eyes reflected. She smoothed her skirt and rested her forehead against the grimy pane.

She dimly wondered if the windows opened.

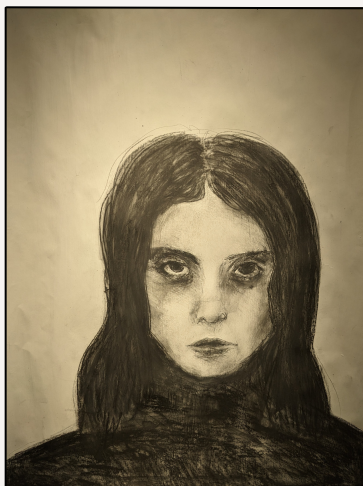
# *Untitled*

MORGAN CULLEN

I don't know why I did it. I've done it before, so it's not new, but this time feels different. Sadie and Twig and Quinten have all done it in the way I did it now. When they told me about it before, I didn't understand. They did it for control; I did it for freedom. They did it to make sense; I did it to confuse. They did it to stand out; I did it to disappear. But that was last time. That was the sky, and blood, and bubble gum. This is different. This is Sadie and Twig and Quinten. This is sea glass. It's dark and sharp and glittering. It started hard and whole, perfected by a mold, before running away and jumping on the shore, broken, and then tumbled smooth by the waves and currents. It's not supposed to be there, and at first glance it's noticed, but after that nobody cares. That's not what I wanted. I wanted people to watch, I wanted people to see, and that may be a cliché reason for doing what I did, but whatever, I did it. I needed to have something be mine, something happen that wouldn't be followed up with notifications and calls and facetimes. A thing that would be looked at with smiles instead of winces. No "One more thing," or "Do this faster," or "This isn't your best work." Enough "You're too much," or "Quiet down," or "You talk a lot." Just one thing that has no strings attached. It's not like it's permanent. Nothing in my life is right now, so why make the only one something that will fade no matter what. 28 days, 35 if I hold out. As long as it's gone in five weeks, I can do whatever I want. Five weeks until the tide goes back, five weeks until the collectors come and melt the glass back in the bottle. Stiff, dull, and molded to the maker's wishes. I didn't want to be sea glass. I wanted to be the sky again like I was before. But that's not possible anymore, so I'll stick with sea glass, like Sadie and Twig and Quinten. I'll control and make sense and stand out until low tide comes. So when that happens, and when I return to a bottle, a part of me will always call out to the sea.

---

*Self Portrait by*  
Morgan Young



# Untitled

ROWAN CORRICELLO

How do you get lost.

Your heart's pounding, your leg's shaking, and you cannot believe what you just did.

But you did it.

You did it. You did it. You did it. You can't stop replaying it in your mind. Or you can stop, because

You don't want to think about it. And you will not think about it. That's what the internet's for, that's what sleep's for, that's what chiseling away's for, that's what waking up the next day and stumbling through conversations until you forget's for.

I'm scared. I'm scared to use first person. I'm scared that this belongs to me. That this is who I am.

Here's what you do.

Here's how you do it. You put it out of your mind and don't ever think about it again. On road trips when they ask you do you remember you say no. You move away. You move

Away, and you start over. You want to be liked. We all do. You say the right thing and they laugh, but you're not lying. This is who you are. You're normal and you fit in and you're doing alright, and it really is you, it's not made up, you know it isn't but

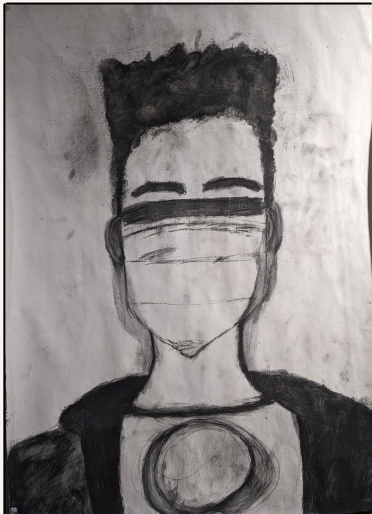
You don't want to give it all away. You're not hiding anything, you're not hiding anything, they all know something. On the phone they say something and you smile even though outside the door is a world where none of them do. The realization hits you like it's pressing down on a wall, like the wall flips and your heart's on the ground.

You're lost. You're lost now, and it's what you wanted. It's what you chose.

You don't know who

I—

Well, you miss me.



*Self-Portrait*  
by Mateo Priest

# *Herself*

## ANONYMOUS

She was fresh to high school. She was ready to walk through those halls and stare at the older boys with a piercing look. She was ready for whatever friend drama was thrown her way. She wasn't ready for the boys that thought of themselves highly enough to degrade her, and make her feel worthless. Her mom had taught her who to avoid, who to seek comfort in, but her mom could only do so much. She trusted the wrong people, too many times. She relied on too many people. Never again.

She doubted herself, and didn't know which way to go. She found herself wandering beautiful green fields late at night, and staring at the stars that lit up the skies. She figured out that she only had herself. She found her way through life, by succumbing to the chaos and finding comfort in nature. She had all of the mess of high school, because who didn't, but she had the chirping of birds, the orange of sunsets, and the rustling of squirrels chasing after one another. She had the feeling of worthlessness, but she also had the feeling of independence. She felt out of control, yet so in control. She had herself.

---

*Self-Portrait*  
by Alexandra Zook



# Prompt #2

Z A S S I

The inside of her heart looked something like a refrigerator. She had people she loved smack in the center, people she hated in the side door, people she wanted to forget tucked away behind the expired frozen pizza, in the freezer. She would open it up when she needed to, taking something to eat, taking something expired out, putting something she just bought in. But in the back, in the door, in the freezer, there were all the expired things she doesn't care to clean out. There's the honey, that shouldn't be refrigerated, there's the moldy strawberries, there's the sour patch kids she believes tastes better when cold.

Waiting for her mother to pull down the ladder to the attic is like waiting for a broken train to start. She desperately wants to find the small, green lamp she tucked away in freshman year. The bulb broke and she was far too nervous to tell her mother, so she collected some junk she didn't need, shoved it in a box alongside the lamp, and handed it to her mother.

"Could you put this away for me? I don't want my room to be so cluttered anymore."

Her mother found this inspiring, later putting her entire pottery cat collection away as well.

She got less and less patient with each minute, before giving up and pulling the ladder down herself. It was

surprisingly easy, very intuitive. She had no idea why her mother insisted on going up with her, on opening it herself. She kicked off her wedged boots, climbing up in a dark green and a light green sock. One had stripes of white, the other small bunnies. She was getting ready for spring. The dust stuck to the bottoms of her feet, making something crawl up from her stomach to the center of her throat, where it confidently snuggled up and went to sleep. She coughed, attempting to wake it up, only to inhale more dust. She remembers why she moved out of the attic, why she's moved out in general. She's not pleased to be back here, no matter how temporary. She gets to the top, immediately almost stepping on a loose screw, which makes her fully believe the floor is going to collapse. It's not yet pitch black up here, thanks to one of the small, round stained glass windows nearing the top of the pointed ceiling. She steps on the rugs she put down, to make it less drafty, looking around at the piles and piles of boxes. Her mother was in no way de cluttering the house for Anna like she said she was, she was simply moving it. Moving it to the place she was going to be sleeping for the next month or so. She dug around, finding the labeled "Annas stuff, please do not open" relatively quick. It was also coated in a film of dust, making her almost gag when she touched it.

Pulling her sleeves over her hands, she opens the box, pulling out badly sewed shirts and old, torn socks. An old alarm clock, a poster she didn't like. A plant pot, a green light with the bulb broken. She picked it up, marveling at its beauty. It had yellowish diamonds embroidered in the shade, small glass beads hanging down. The base had molding adjacent to wings, and had a brushing of gold over it. She turned it around, assessing the damage living in here for years could have done to it, only to find a gash on the side. It probably had something to do with the broken bulb, she thought, running her fingers softly over it. A lightbulb, not broken, pops over her head. Her first aid kit. She run-climbs down the ladder, not bothering to close it, dragging the yellowed white cord of the lamp along the floor behind her. She gets to the kitchen, almost slipping down one of the two flights of stairs, and places the lamp of the kitchen counter. She rubs part of the shade in an attempt to sooth it, whispering to it. "It's gonna be ok, you're gonna be fine. I'm sorry I left you there to suffer, but I'm here now." She wets a paper towel, wiping the blood that's pooling at the places where the fabric tore. She applies pressure, before rushing to grab the gauze. As shes taping it down, looking so worried, telling it he's gonna be fine, that she promises, she doesn't hear the door open. She only hears footsteps, and freezes. Hands still pressing on the bleeding wound, she closes her eyes, imagining her mothers reaction. The 'you didn't wait for me's and the 'you tracked dust throughout the house's and most of all the way she would call Anna delusional, the way she would say she's just so f—ed in the head. The way she would threaten to keep her locked up there in an attempt to make her get back to being normal. The way she thought she left this behind, the way this is probably why she got fired. "Bet you lost that job cuz you did CPR on a dress or something equally stupid. I can't deal with this again." She would put her face in her hands, shaking her head. "Anna, I just can't. Why, for the love of god, do you keep doing this?!" She would quickly switch emotions, getting angry. "I've tried to help you, but it doesn't work! You won't f—ing cooperate, you never f—ing do! Get out, I raised you, I don't need to do more!" She'd probably start to cry, or something of the sort, then screech 'GET OUT' once more for good measure, and stare at me with a red face as I grab my coat and run down the driveway, scared. "Anna, you ok? Oh f—, did the lamp get hurt?" She opens her eyes. Her sister sat there, at the island, with genuine concern on her face. Anna couldn't tell if it was for her or the lamp, she hoped the lamp. "Yeah. I thought you were mom, sorry."

Her heart turned more to something like a kitchen the older she grew, items in the trash, items on the counter, items in the fruit bowl center on the counters. Items on the stove, in the oven.

---



*Artwork by  
Henry Watts*



*Artwork by  
Lilee Orcutt*



*Look at the Moon  
by Kaylin Martin*

