

And We Created Worlds



LIGHTHOUSE YOUNG WRITERS ANTHOLOGY 9.0
2018

And We Created Worlds

Edited by Sherrye Henry Jr.

**LIGHTHOUSE
YOUNG WRITERS
ANTHOLOGY 9.0**

What is your life
when you know that you are
a picture but somehow also
know about the days
where your life was
full of color.

—Violet Sparrow Nolan Flood

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Introduction

JESAKA LONG

LIGHTHOUSE YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR

Lands scorched by alien invasions; urban corridors busted by zombies in pursuit of brains; ocean beds desiccated into unreliable new territories courtesy of climate change; rich forests where water nymphs toil in service to wicked trolls; houses tricked out with micro-managing technology following an apocalypse. This is a small sampling of the new worlds created by young writers to host their stories.

In the years I have taught as a Lighthouse Young Writers Program instructor, I have been floored and inspired by the imagination displayed on the page. Concerns about global warming often peeked through descriptions of a new world where basic human needs, like oxygen, mandated an extreme above- or below-ground existence. But usually, these futures felt far away, more a marvel of vivid imagination, a direct reflection of the powerful “what if?” question.

However, in 2018, a small shift emerged in the work being produced in outreach classes and in-house programs. Post-apocalyptic fiction read like it was set as close as tomorrow morning. Creative essays, mixing personal stories with news headlines, wrestled with what it meant to be classified according to gender in sixth grade or detailed fears of a planet without polar bears. Elementary school kids asked for help in how to write about anger that they couldn’t quite find in their words. Informed high school writers penned searing poetry protesting decisions they could not influence because they are too young to vote.

The question prompting many of these writers now was less “what if?” and more “how did this world come to be?” And, perhaps most importantly, they are digging for the elusive answer to “why?”

At the middle school camp this summer, students dug into character development and one of their prompts was to write from the perspective of their story’s antagonist. The writers responded with surprise at how it felt to pen something while metaphorically

wearing the shoes of a “villain” and many said it gave them a better understanding of why their antagonists made their decisions.

This exercise led one student to consider writing a novel-length work with alternating chapters: one from the protagonist’s point of view and the other from the antagonist’s perspective. This writer wanted to understand how a person could come to hate a group of people based on their skin color, religion, gender expression or orientation. By achieving such an understanding, she hoped to find a way to change another person’s mind: to challenge that hate from a place of empathy and love.

It is this new world, one of understanding and connection, that our young writers hope to create, both on the page and in person. You can see some of their visions—alongside Happy Potter fan fiction, instructional guides, screenplays, songs, personal essays, poems, and more—in this book. We hope their words help us imagine how we might reach a better tomorrow.

LIGHTHOUSE YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM
2017-2018 SCHOOL OUTREACH

Arapahoe High School
Blessed Sacrament School
Broomfield High School
Broomfield Public Library
Clayton Elementary
Columbine Bridge Project
Denver School of the Arts
East High School
Elevating Connections
Emily Griffith High School
Escuela de Guadalupe
Fox Creek Elementary
Glenarm Recreation Center
Godsman Elementary
Green Valley Ranch Branch Library
Heart & Hand Center
Highlands Ranch Community Association
Hulstrom K-8
I-Team Manor
Jefferson County Open School
Jefferson County Public Library, Lakewood
Legacy Project
Louisville Public Library
McLain Community High School
Merrill Middle School
Most Precious Blood K-8
Mountain Vista High School

Newton Middle School
North Arvada Middle School
Northfield High School
Parmalee Elementary
Pennington Elementary
Quigg-Newton Bridge Project
Rainbow Alley
Ross-University Hills Branch Library
Sam Gary Branch Library
Schlesman Family Branch Library
Southmoor Elementary School
St. Charles Recreation Center
Summit Ridge Middle School
Thornton High School
Westwood Bridge Project

FALL 2017 & SPRING 2018

Tickle Your Taste Buds with These Seven Brand-New Cooking Techniques

LILAH AHNSTEDT

Food is the most important part of everybody's lives—well, my life, anyway. So why make your family sad with mediocre food *and* spending hundreds of dollars eating out? With these seven new cooking techniques you'll have your family drooling for more. Who knows, you could even invite me over to try your new treats.

Tip #1 How to thicken a soup or gravy with roux:

Make your roux with flour and butter (for soup) and fat droppings from a roast (for gravy). These two ingredients are whisked together and cooked for a few minutes. Then, add liquid to the pan while “whisking vigorously,” says our chef. When you get to this point you could turn it into a béchamel or a silky-smooth gravy like this one. “A roux is the building block of a creamy mac and cheese and is great for thickening gumbos, clam chowder, casseroles, and dips,” states the chef. Now you will have the perfect Thanksgiving gravy, fit for your whole family!

Tip #2 How to cook the perfect Steak Florentine:

First you must get your wood-fire grill ready to make some magic (turn it on). You'll know that the grill is ready when the cooking metal of the grill turns white. (Make sure the grill is close to the embers.) When the metal begins to glow, put that beautiful piece of meat on the grill. When you're ready to cook: cook each side for 15 minutes (“standing up”). While your grill is staying hot, keep a tray hot, too, so that when your steak done it can sit for three minutes. This ensures that all that wonderful juiciness stays along with all the flavor. All you have to do now is eat, and you can think, *Look I just made dinner for you.*

Tip #3 Make your own vanilla extract with this amazing recipe:

To make this sweet treat, you use a ratio of one vanilla bean to one mini-bottle of alcohol, or use a full bottle and drink most, whatever floats your boat. Cut the vanilla bean upright, like it's standing. Then slip the freshly cut bean into your mini-bottle (or almost empty regular bottle) of rum, vodka, etc. "You may begin using the vanilla extract after a week, but the flavor will be stronger the longer it steeps," explains our chef. Look how easy that was: you just made homemade vanilla extract.

Tip #4 Blanching and shocking (for green beans):

First wash your green beans, but remember: don't use too much water, we want to be green bada ching; also chop off their ends. Next, prepare a pot boiling hot water, and a freezing ice bath (made of ice and water). "You can add salt if you wish—salt will permeate the outer walls of the vegetable being blanched and enhance the flavors—but salt also breaks down the vegetables over time and causes them to become mushy," says our chef. Makes you think, "Hmm, do I want them to be salty and mushy, or bland and firm?" That age-old question, almost as old as, "What's for dinner?" After the full hour of deciding whether to put salt on or not, put your veggies a few at a time into your hot water, remember not to crowd them (don't tell anyone I told you this, but they're claustrophobic). Keep the water at a constant boil, test the vegetables for doneness after a minute or so. "Green beans should be crisp, yet cooked," states our chef. If you are doing this with larger veggies—let's say, broccoli—then insert a small sharp knife, and don't cut yourself, into the thick part of the stem. If the stem sticks to the knife, then it needs more time, if it doesn't then your broccoli is ready. I'm sure your kids won't be too happy about that, but you will. Once they are ready, it's time of shock them out of their warm state. Quickly take them out and throw them into the freezing ice bath. "Immersing the vegetables in ice water will halt the cooking process completely," explains our chef. Keep your veggies in there long enough to stop their cooking straight in their tracks. Then drain all that cold water out. If you take them out too early they will become mushy (like if you add too much salt). So, even though you spent that hour debating

whether to put salt on or not, make sure not to take them out of the ice bath too early.

Tip#5 Make your next Thanksgiving the best one yet by deep frying your turkey:

First make sure that the turkey is not frozen and is at room temp. Make sure that the drain valve on your shockingly new electric fryer (haha, get it, *shocking* electric . . . okay not my best one, I'll admit that), just make sure that your fryer is OFF and the safety tap is ON. Fill the fryer with oil to the MAX/MIN fill line. "Turn the temperature to 375°F. Inject the turkey with your desired marinade," explains our chef, who also recommends one oz. marinade per pound of turkey. Rub the turkey with lots of seasonings such as salt, pepper, or paprika. Place the empty fryer basket in the fryer for two minutes. Then take it out (but hopefully you already knew that, because if not, maybe you should not be making the turkey for Thanksgiving). Place your Thanksgiving masterpiece in the fryer basket, and lower it into the smokin' hot oil, make sure to put it in slow, like you don't want to lose your precious turkey, but you do, so you send it to its death in the hot oil. "Cook the turkey four minutes per pound (for instance, a 14-lb. turkey will be ready in 56 minutes). Lift the turkey out of the electric fryer and allow to rest for 15 minutes before carving," explains our chef. Now you have a new spin on a Thanksgiving classic.

Tip #6 How to grill halloumi cheese on the barbecue:

This cheese is amazing for a classy dinner or a summer BBQ. One way to prepare this cheese is to grill it. First, you cut the cheese (ha-ha, no, but seriously), cut the cheese into thick slices and try not to fart. Place your thickly sliced cheese on a grill pan or outdoor grill. "No added oil is necessary as the cheese will release its liquid and natural oils," explains our chef. Don't touch the cheese; let it cook, no matter how much you want to touch it, no matter how much it pains you to not to touch it, just don't! Allow to cook till golden brown, then flip the cheese. Once this is done remove from the grill. Use as hors d'oeuvres or your main course.

Tip #7 Halloumi grilled cheese:

In Tip #6 you learned how to grill halloumi cheese; in this we will build on making a halloumi grilled cheese. First you spread butter on your two slices of bread. (I mean, you can do one slice, but that's just not enough flavoring.) Place these two (or one) slices of bread on the grill or skillet, then wait till golden brown or however you like your bread. Then flip the sandwich, “so the golden-brown side is facing up,” explains our chef. Then place the halloumi cheese on top, along with other desired toppings. After that, cover the sandwich with the remaining slice of bread. Cook your sandwich on medium high until golden. Then flip to the other side, and *boom!* You just made a fancy-named sandwich.

Now you can make any meal from fancy grilled cheeses to your own vanilla extract; hopefully, you will want to cook one or all of these for your own family sometime. Maybe now they will actually eat your food—at least I would. As a cooking fan on Pinterest says: “Happiness is Homemade,” and now you can bring happiness to your kitchen.

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Morgause

LIZZIE F. ALEXANDER

Prologue

My name is Morgause. I have always been told by the people who work here that my parents are dead, and that before they both tragically died they gave me up to this wretched place. Ever since last year, when I turned 12, I have suspected that they're not telling me everything. Now I know that they were lying. Lying to keep me imprisoned here.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I am Morgause 1,234. 1,234 is not really my last name, it's my number in this place: all I do know about it is that there at least 1,234 people here. I have never really known my last name. I expect that I will never truly know my last name. But I still have plenty of life ahead. I am only 12. The average lifespan here is 30. I have approximately 18 more years of life ahead of me. Most of the people living here die sooner, never seeing the sun.

I trailed my pale hand over the dank moist walls of the building as I was led to room 101, the Observation Room.

Chapter 2: The Observation Room

The Observers were sitting in their box with those dreadful clipboards when I walked in.

"Hello 1,234. You are the Impossible, are you not?" the lead Observer, Selsis, asked me.

"Yes," I replied simply. This is how they have always started these sections. "I am the Impossible. I am 1,234."

"Well . . . go ahead. Show us what you can do, what you have *learned*," Selsis said coolly.

I looked around and wasn't at all surprised to see a cement wall in the middle of the room. I walked over to it. I thought—no, I *imagined* that my hand was non-existent. I stretched my arm out and placed my hand on the wall. It sank into the cool stone. I tasted that familiar rusty taste in my mouth.

Now I could hear the scratching of pens on paper on clipboards. I withdrew my hand from the wall, sensing that my work was done. Nighteram had told me not to reveal anything else.

“Is that all?” the second-in-command, Necrumer, asked my personal “care” agent, Nighteram.

“Yes. For now,” Nighteram said curtly, grabbing my wrist and pulling me away.

I walked in silence to my room. I sat on my metalstone bed and thought. And thought. I wanted to know more about my parents, I really did. So, I walked over to my door and peered through the tiny barred window set into it. I was going to find out what happened with all the details, and this was how.

To be continued . . .

Don't trust the workers . . . or anybody here . . . It's for your own good.

Thumbelina

AMELIA ALLEN-SEELEY

I want a child
Small and cute
Born on a flower
She's stolen away
Before the day
And surrounded by water
My bride to be
Is small as a thumb
But leaves before the wedding
Flying, soaring high above
Is placed on a lily flower
The mighty king takes her heart and hand
And whisks my small daughter away

Could Preventing ‘The War to End All Wars’ Have Saved Millions, or Caused Even More Destruction?

DREW BARBER

Gunshots ringing around you, bomber planes soaring above you, dust rising from below you, and constant danger around every corner. This is what life was like in the core of WWI. Men—soldiers and women—nurses or suppliers fought for what they believed in. . . . Or were they forced into it by their government? As the governments would clash over just about everything, these soldiers were forced into action. The real question is, would we be better off if WWI never happened?

What Was It Like to Live in WWI?

So, what was it like to live in WWI? We always think about ourselves while talking about events that occurred more than one hundred years ago, but we never think about those who were impacted by living in the time, by losing loved ones, or by being a part in the war itself, to name some of the impacts. So, what was it like in WWI? Horrendous.

As a soldier, the world around you is being destroyed, bomb by bomb, until finally, it will crumble to the ground and, bit by bit, society itself will fall to the ground as well. This is the view many soldiers had, and the view was not entirely wrong. The lives of almost ten million soldiers were lost and, as a soldier, the only thought that would be going through your head is: Am I next—and, if I am, how will my family cope with it? There was constant danger around you after you were put into battle against people in the same situation as you . . . “volunteering” to fight in their country’s war. Bickering governments that could trigger a war among themselves by somebody breathing too loudly didn’t know it at the time, but they were entering the sixth deadliest war in history. Bombings around them and the mere idea of imprisonment made these soldiers lose sight of the true reason that they were fighting in the first place. . . . This is for their own survival, and for the survival of their country.

Many soldiers were caught by the enemy when they surrendered, and these soldiers were called POWs (Prisoners of War). There were over eight million of these POWs and under 250,000 died. That shows that just less than 3.2% of the POWs that were taken, died. Though this number is true, it shows none of the actual hardships that POWs had to face. A quote I found in Wikipedia is from a survivor of a POW camp. After the war, this man spoke out, saying, "We were driven along like beasts; to drop out was to die." This was on the mind of so many soldiers during this time. Added to the stress of an entire country relying on you, you had to worry about inhumane treatment after a surrender as well. Though the punishment was not as bad as WWII, the POWs were treated like animals.

As a civilian, life wasn't much better. There was danger everywhere around the battlefield, but nobody ever knew that. The government only let the civilians see what they wanted them to see. They only wanted help put into the war effort. Britain had 500,000 men enlisted in the army within the first four weeks after war was declared. All countries wanted were more and more people. It didn't matter to the government whether or not they were lying to the civilians or whether or not they were leaving families of children and wives to fend for themselves, they only wanted to win the war. That was their only goal. As these "brave" men went off to a battle that had many more horrific truths than let on, they left their families in the dust. The women had to help in the war effort. Some women worked directly inside the war effort, while others were more behind the scenes. Many women actually worked to replace the men that were off in the war, and though many people at the time were against the idea of it, the women were doing much better than the men at these jobs. With all the misery that happened, this could have actually changed the view on women's rights.

As the war went on and on, less and less food kept coming into and from the countries that were fighting. This forced heavy rations onto many different countries. This may have changed what insight the civilians got. Common sense would suggest that these civilians finally realized that something was wrong. But at that point, it was too late. The war was already at full force.

What are Impacts and Reasons Behind WWI?

This leads to the question of what the world would be like if WWI had never happened. This question has no right or wrong answer. The answer will almost always be an opinion. Some examples of these opinions are from the *Quora* blogs. These gave some very interesting thoughts, such as:

“There would have been numerous smaller wars in Europe, even today.” This idea is based off the fact that all of the European countries were on very thin ice. One wrong move and anything could happen. That is exactly what did happen. If, somehow, WWI was prevented, many more, smaller wars would break out across Europe. WWI was a factor in finding an agreement within European countries. If WWI had never happened, these issues may never have been solved and they may never have learned their lesson that long-term wars truly were unsustainable.

“The following nations would not now exist—Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria (part of a Greater Russia or whatever state took over in that region), any of various states of the former Yugoslavia, the former Czechoslovakia, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Cyprus, the majority of the African states and the majority of nations in Asia, particularly South Asia.” Some reasons behind these accusations are that these countries were large powers in that time period. The World War lessened their power, in a way, helping them. Their power could lead to violence, and even civil wars.

“The United States would be an important world power, but not the dominant one. The United States would have still ‘ruled’ the New World, but it would have far less influence in the world than it does today.” This final idea is based on the United States and its help in the effort from the Allied Powers. We were still a strong power, but we were weak compared to multiple other countries. The war would have weakened us even more if we had lost, and winning strengthened us to the dominant world power. This along with many other factors created our military strength.

Let’s face the truth. There is no way that we possibly could have avoided WWI. It is just a simple fact. All of the world leaders were on edge and anything could have sent them off into a huge war. The only thing that could have been fixed is that the war did not

have to be as major as it truly was. Some of the things that elevated the intensity of the war were:

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which took place on the 28th of June, carried out by a Serbian nationalist. There was also the bombing of Belgrade by the Austrians. These were just some of the causes for the intensity that WWI took upon itself. After these two events, most of the powerhouse countries entered a war with each other, thus starting WWI.

WWI was much more dangerous than wars today, but it was much more important than them, as well. Now there are agreements put in place to protect the general public (not that they are always followed), and there are much more trained militaries. This is both good and bad. Soldiers know more about the situations that they go into, but the warfare is much riskier. The First World War helped us understand more about warfare, and about the ways to minimize the amount of it. WWI, I hate to say it, sort of saved humanity.

You would think that WWI would be destruction enough, right?... Wrong. Not having WWI would have created many more catastrophes than the war actually did. You would think that the approximately 10,000,000 soldiers and 8,000,000 civilians' lives would have been spared if the war never happened... You are partly correct in that statement. Those lives may still have been spared, but many more lives would be plowed over to take their place. The Great War was as deadly as any, behind WWII, but preventing the war to gain back the lives of many would do much more damage to society. There is absolutely no way that preventing WWI would have helped society, and having the warfare would have a lot of fatalities as well. That being said, the lives that were lost, while heartbreaking, could have saved Earth's human population forever.

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A Haibun Experiment

NELSON BELANGER

Gravel on an icy path.
Frosted dew flows from a heavy branch
Blood flows from its wounds.

The creature thus emitting a mighty call. A serpent with an open maw. I lift its head for a lack of paws, and present my equal's fall. In there, they celebrate my victory, while in the tavern I feel so empty. In the night sleep, thinking of what spoils I should keep. Thus, dawn I pack for there out yonder.

I wonder why I wander.
I never look back, always ever forward.
Have I helped, or hindered.

A dying breed, us hunters are. For a lack of seed from the rituals' scar. We came from town of little impact, running from a past we wouldn't reenact. Seeking glory, we quested for plunder. Now we sit feeling hollow with thoughts gone asunder. A challenge I seek, but never meet. With every battle they feel more weak, and with an ever-growing a sheet. A list of feats of monsters doing, so they seek a monster of better knowing. A primal bloodlust imbued in us, by which now prosecuted by those they sought refuge. Subterfuge the tool of men. Men the monsters. The monsters of men.

Monsters kill men.
Men slaughter the beasts and man.
Man is the beast.

We travel across this gravel to find a better adventure. Never staying to see our employers' torture. Never waiting for the next danger, for it is often the anger of a rotten city. No longer filled with the tail of a common enemy. For a beast is man and man is a beast. For then I am a monster for I am him, a man. These thoughts hurt for

they break my stride and twist my pride. I musn't dwell for long, for every fight could be my last and time is the enemy of a soldiers past.

I wander because I wonder.
Our time is almost nigh, yet
So is my purpose...

In a world of Men.

We hunted beasts to kill our threat, but tear each other apart by the neck. Monsters of old have nearly died. And now I only hear here of those who cried to a noble's steed. Begging for a pound of feed, or a keg of mead.

Now what will be the end of this monster we call man and his victims' time.

The Basement of King Soopers

SOPHIA BOBIER

What a terrible day to be locked in. It was my second day of my new job working at the local King Soopers. The boss had trusted me to lock up. He wanted everything perfect, but—big surprise—the power went out because of a raging thunderstorm. At least I had some shelter.

I had made a new friend in the time I'd worked here. Her name was Shelby. She seemed nice, but I didn't know her that well yet.

"I should at least go try to see if I can get the power back on," I muttered to myself. I walked through the aisles and down the stairs to the basement with a flashlight. I had to backtrack several times. It was like a maze down there! At last, I found the breaker box. I was about to flip the switches when a horrible sound stopped me in my tracks.

Deciding it was nothing, I turned back to my work. The sound called out again. It sent a chill down my spine. Curiosity got the best of me and I followed the noise. Down one hallway, past several cobwebs, and finally, I reached a door.

I trembled without knowing why. Goosebumps erupted on my arms. Slowly, I turned the knob. Inside was something I'd never imagined. There was a table with something on it. And a person crouching over a computer. Electricity sparked the air.

"Hell—hello?" I stuttered.

The figure turned around. It was Shelby! Maybe she could help me figure out how to get the power back on. I'd never actually tried to get the power back on before. I grinned at her.

"Oh, hello, Cassy." A sinister smile played on her lips, making mine disappear. "Pleased for you to join us. Please have a seat. Since you've found us, we need to make sure you won't reveal us." She gestured to another table, still smiling wickedly.

"Uh... uh," I gasped.

"Come on Cassy. Sit on the table!" She scratched her face in frustration, and let out a terrible, inhuman scream. The same one

I had heard earlier, “No? Fine. I’ll have my friend help you.” She pressed a button and the monster on the table flared to life. I didn’t get a good look at it. I was already running out the door.

I flew through the halls, imagining the monster on my heels. That’s when I heard it. *Boom, boom, boom.* It was catching up. A burst of thunder shook the building and I fell to the side. The creature didn’t bother to look my way and continued tearing down the hall.

“Ha, ha! That’ll show you, Shelby! And your stupid monster!” I screamed into the hall. I froze. The monster did too. It had heard me.

I sprinted down the hallway, in the other direction, away from the monster. It turned around to see my figure dashing away. I didn’t bother to be quiet now. A scream ripped out of my throat. I found the stairs and took them, three at a time.

I fumbled with my keys, trying to find the right one. Finally, the lock clicked. I burst out the door. Lightning lit up the night. Rain pelted my head and back. It blurred my eyesight. I continued running, nevertheless. Abruptly, I heard a smash and I turned my head to see the monster had broken through the glass. Then, I fell. I hadn’t been watching where I was going. I slipped and hit my head on the road. Just before my vision went black, I felt the claws of the monster curling around me.

Untitled

FRANCESCA CASTILLO

Chapter 1

I get off the plane, the coolness of the AC in the airport hits me like a violent wave. *Too cold, I hate this.* It's been five years since I've been here. I have no relatives here since the accident. But it's nice to be back. I open the door to leave the airport and am greeted with a coating of warmth. I look out and see all the beautiful greenery, the trees, and the grass, both stretching out to the other buildings. Then it all hits me, my memories, my momma's hugs, and even that time Billy fell out of the tree. That dumb kid broke his arm, didn't stop him though, because he did it again a couple months later. I remember the neighbors and even that crazy cat lady. But over everything else, I remember one feeling loud and clear, sadness.

The last time I saw this beautiful scenery, I was forced out of a house my momma was paying for. I was being sent to a whole different state with an uncle I barely knew. They never did give me a chance to say goodbye, not to Billy, Carol, Shaun, Timmy, not even to the guy at the pizza place that gave me free pizza every now and then. The last time, I saw this... My life was ripped away from me, my home, my school, my friends, even my dear sweet momma. Gone, every aspect of my life, changed in an instant. I miss my momma so much. But, I know coming back was good, she'll be proud to see me stop running away. My momma raised me well. "Can't do anything if you don't try." Right, momma?

Chapter 2

I manage to get back to my neighborhood, the clouds paint a shadow over my house. I walk up the driveway of the abandoned house. Looking up at the garage door, I realize how bad the car crash was. Only a gaping hole is left. I look around, this neighborhood isn't the same. Tricycles are replaced with run-down cars; the

new neighbors have a small dog with a high-pitched bark. And, of course, the tree that Billy fell out of now has a treehouse with a swing on it. Looks like everything around me changed except my dull brown house. I see a few people pass by. Tiny droplets start coming down from the clouds, and then, as suddenly as it started, it begins to pour. No one is still outside, and I am soaked like a rat. But I don't feel cold, the heat didn't wash away with the rain. It never did. A warm breath of air waves over again, but only for a second. Of course, that warmth is unmistakable, never could I ever forget my momma's warm, welcoming hugs. I look back at the gaping hole and slide my hands over the sharp ridges. There's still dried blood. The texture both disgusts me and gives me comfort in remembering that they *did* exist.

Our memories are real and can never be replaced. My childhood wasn't much, but still my old home is flowing with very precious memories alongside some I wish I could forget. I can't stand the thought of stepping into that house, yet part of me was desperately clawing to go back to the room I grew up in. A part of me is trying to indulge myself in the illusion that, if I step into this door, I can restart. I could go back to a time when my biggest problem was the fact that I ran out of bananas to put in my cereal. But I know, that the moment I give in, I'll never snap out of it.

Next thing I know, everything was black. I am being pulled back and thrown into something. I hear a loud clank of a heavy door. Before I realize what's happening, I hear an engine start. I'm being kidnapped

Chapter 3

Crap, I've been back for a couple of hours and this happens? The thick walls allow no light through, it's pitch-black. We take a sharp turn and I am slammed against the side of the dirty van. We speed up, a lot. This is going to be a long drive. *Okay, okay, think. An abduction happened in a small neighborhood, no witnesses. This had to have been planned. Okay, the big question is who? They would have to know I would be there in that exact spot in that exact moment. However, there is one key element missing, how did they know I*

was coming. I landed here only three hours ago, yet this was planned perfectly. But, who? My uncle couldn't care less about anything I'm doing, let alone resent my actions. My cousin is only ten so I can rule her out. So, we're down to my six group members. I honestly can't say I'd be surprised to see any of them think this up. That's what you get when you're in the "smart kids" group. I knew I shouldn't have joined.

The van slams to a stop and I'm thrown to the opposite side of the van. I grasp around the floor of the van, looking for something to defend myself with. The door creaks slightly as it opens halfway. I don't see anyone, I push open the door slowly and peer out, no one. I step out, I don't have the slightest clue as to where I am. A landscape of dirt with subtle patches of weeds occupies my vision. The driver and passenger are bloodied and still. The front of the van is smashed up as if we drove into a wall, but nothing is there. The sight brings me back to years ago, to blood, the bodies, the car, all fresh in my mind, yet so distant that I can't bring myself to apologize anymore. I take one glance at their blood-stained uniforms and realize exactly why they're here.

"Hey." A hand grabs my shoulder. "You good?" I squirm away before I turn to see who's behind me. She has a slim figure, long golden hair, one eye hazel and one blue. A friendly smile plastered across her pale face.

"Hello? Anybody home?"

She flicks my forehead playfully. I don't know her. Actually, it's a little closer to I wish I never knew her. I need to get away from her. I need to leave now. But I won't. I have to stay, I promised I would. I'm staying but I know I'm going to regret this.

Chapter 4

She holds my face in her palms, her cool fingers remind me of a time when we used to play together.

"It's been a while, how've you been?"

I pull her fingers off. "Why are you even here?"

"What? I just saved you, can't you be a little grateful?"

She turned and took a couple of steps away from me. She stopped and turned her head ever so slightly, only far enough for me to see

the very edge of her face.

“You stopped talking to me since then, you’ve only called out to me when you want to show off. I’m the reason you’re here, the reason you’re in your stupid group. I’m the one who that stayed beside you even when your own uncle scorned you. Why do you ignore me? You’re the only one whose acceptance I’ve ever cared about.”

She turns to me, sadness is painted over the entire area around her.

My fists clench as I yell,

“You’re the reason they’re all dead!”

“I only did it because you told me to!”

And with that she was gone again. My cursed talent.

I’ve used a murderous talent to climb my way up. I turn back to the men in uniform. Police uniforms soaked in blood. But of course, they, too, knew how strong my power is. I turn on the dusty road and started walking somewhere. I’m not exactly sure where but... Now I had two things to run from.

Light Bulb

FRANCHESCCA COSTILLO

The light bulb on the far-left corner was out of most people's direct line of sight. Ignored, unnoticed, yet never defying its purpose. Not particularly special, after all, there are 144 light bulbs just like it within the same room. It might only be noticed if it stops serving its purpose. If it happens to go out, people will look over and complain, yet it wasn't appreciated when it lit up the room on the darkest of nights. It will be last known as the "bulb that went out" along with the millions of others. Then, when it's gone, it will be replaced with another bulb destined to the same fate. After a while, the first bulb is long forgotten, then the next, then the next. The only one remembered will be the one that goes out with a *boom*, quite literally. Otherwise, it's just another of millions.

Mouse King

FRANCHESCA COSTILLO

Yes! My brother is asking me to Texas Roadhouse! The bus will be here soon, then I can stuff myself with steak and life will be good! The seat at the bus stop is cold and there is a breeze that is just strong enough to make me cold. Suddenly, a man resembling the homeless guy from *Oliver & Company* was in my face, joyfully telling me about someone he beat up. His words were slurred and extremely hard to decipher. Of course, he had to be right there in my face where I could smell his nasty breath that smelled like a mixture of rotten eggs and beer. His clothes were disgusting and half a bottle of . . . something . . . was in his right hand. Once he stopped talking, he marched straight into the street and started dancing. He danced out of sight behind a pawn shop. Once there, he never came out, you know why? He decided the dumpster was a very comfy spot to live out his childhood dreams of becoming an astronaut. And you know what? Apparently, this place would be perfect for sleeping and making an alliance with the mouse king to get revenge on that girl who dumped him, Brenda. As he lay in spikes of broken computer screens and soggy cardboard, he recited the ritual to summon the Mouse King. As he was speaking, he picked up a cockroach, split it in half, and painted a mickey mouse symbol on the inner wall of the dumpster. Then he slit his finger with the tip of a shard of glass and marked an “x” on the symbol. ALLSHABADA! he screamed It was silent, he turned and looked in the corner. And there it was... the Mouse King.

Piece Twelve of Twelve

ALISON CHILD

I never liked art galleries, but goddammit that paint splatter really spoke to me. It was seemingly random (and probably was) but somehow conveyed and levied some unforeseen purpose. Give a toddler a bottle of red paint and it might be better than this piece. And, as I stood in this eye-burningly white gallery with my hands clasped behind my back, I almost appreciated it. It took guts to purchase an enormous canvas such as that for the sole purpose of waving an overzealous hand armed with a paintbrush over it. Perhaps the piece was ancient enough that the “artist” had to actually go through the labor of creating the canvas itself.

Personally, if that were true, I would gain a whole new appreciation for the arts. It seems (and is) such a waste of time that the people who actually go through with it earn some sort of award for their trouble. It’s like giving a child a huge hug because they jumped in one place for an hour. *Good job, you’ve officially destroyed an hour of your meager life. What’s next, kicking one leg under a desk for a day?*

The irony is that *I’m* the one standing here. I completely accept the fact that I am an art-hater, but somehow, I ended up in one of the more prestigious art galleries that the United States has to offer. I could probably yell, “Vincent van Gogh *sucks*” and be beat to death in a matter of minutes, which would be a feat of strength, considering that artists are rather wimpy. The only reason why I am here is because you need to know what you’re talking about when you make an argument. Most people that shit on other people or their likes don’t know what they’re even opposing, and in turn, lose traction on what they believe. Well, here I am in an art museum with some of the greatest pieces in the nation and I feel successfully educated.

As I finally turned to exit the horrid museum, I caught the name of the painting imprinted to the side of the frame, probably intentionally hidden.

Bird Flies into Window, piece 12/12

And I smiled.

What If the Weapons Didn't Matter

BENNETT DAVIS

The French had 3,870, the British had 2,636, the Americans had less than 100, and the Germans had 20. None of these mattered, although they were important. What mattered was who did what in the time of crisis; the weapons just happened to be pawns being played by the hand. For that was what really mattered in the war to end all wars.

World War One, the strategic bloodbath, the War to End all Wars, the Great War. These are all just titles for the war from 1914 to 1918. There were two major alliances that constructed this awful beast of death. There were the central powers, which included Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Italy. Also, there were the Allies, and they were made up of mainly France, Great Britain, Siberia, Russia, and the United States of America. The allies also were provided infantry and resources by many other countries including Brazil and New Zealand. The central powers were provided with supplies from Bulgaria and Turkey.

Three thousand eight hundred and seventy tanks for France. 2,636 tanks for Britain, less than 100 for America, and 20 for Germany. It was the first war to use tanks and the first war where tanks didn't matter as much as the hands who controlled them. It was the revolutionary war, revolutionizing how we fight. There were machine guns that fired "450–600 rounds per minute, allowing defenders to cut down attacking waves of enemy troops like a scythe cutting wheat," says *Historynet*. Aerial attackers were introduced. There were Screaming Mimi's, which were poisonous smoke bombs. This led to gas masks. All of these were to help win the war. Still, after all the technology and work that went into the inventions of death, none of it mattered as much as who would use them.

America joined the war because, "in 1915, the British passenger liner the *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine, killing 128 Americans and further heightening tensions," *America's Library* proclaimed. The American government was furious with the Germans

and decided that it would side with the Allies. The war started in Europe caused American soldiers to go over the Atlantic Ocean to help. This wasn't the best predicament for the Americans.

The U.S. participated in many battles and lost 116,516 people in this war. France lost 1,400,000, Britain had 700,000 casualties, and the list can go on and on with more deaths. The total number of lives lost was 41 million, which included armed forces and civilian lives. All of these deaths were caused by the gears and workings of World War I. It happened to be one of the deadliest conflicts in history. All this caused by one death which, seemed to be the most important in 41 million of them.

This single death was, of course, Archduke Ferdinand. *History.com* stated, "On January 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie [were] shot to death by a Bosnian Serb nationalist during an official visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo." He and his wife were traveling to Sarajevo to inspect the armed forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which Austria-Hungary controlled. There was a group of nationalists in Bosnia at the time, who wanted the territories that were ruled by Austria-Hungary to be ruled by Serbia. They were as angry as bees when their hive was taken and put into enemies' territories. Six men hatched this plan but a 19-year-old, from the party, actually shot the Archduke and his wife. He was at the right place at the right time. This assassination made sparks fly between all the countries, which soon occurred into the fire of WWI.

The Allies were already fighting the battles and they greatly needed as many American angels that were ready to fight, although the monster of the Atlantic Ocean stood in the way of them, and Europe they had to face the monster head on. It made it 100 times harder for any Americans to provide diligent resources that they needed to do, but, nonetheless, they still had a vast impact on this great war.

Imagine if the United States of America hadn't participated in the War to End All Wars. If the course of the war had changed, we would have not been part of WWII. Everything we have today could be gone. All of this is important because the weapons didn't matter, but what did was: where countries were placed, how countries were politically, how many countries were on each side, that is what mattered and forged the fire of WWI.

Untitled

AHN DO

Even as the sun descends from its blazing throne, the Heat never intends to slip away. It stays back and guards, waiting for the return of its friend. Day or night, the ruthless Heat affirms itself as the scornful ruler to the inhabitants. No person, dead or alive, could escape its power. Every minute, fed by the cry of its people, it grew bigger, and soon became giant. Greens and animals crouched down beneath its feet. They cover themselves in a listless yellow like desert sand. The earth grew exhausted and filthy, with deep-rooted scars like children's scribbles.

Secluded from the rest of the world, sitting at the end of urbanism, Prasino, like an abandoned child, is the most hated. It is called the scumbag of the surface, the undesirable, the hell on Earth. The Heat, at Prasino, is more cruel and merciless than in any other place. It seeks chances to torment every sign of life in its eyes. It had long killed the land and the crops. No buyer desired the exhausted soils, any vegetation nor wished to reside there. Yet, the people are not dead. They live under the shade of crooked structures, with irises that reflect no light and mouth seal off from sound.

Occasionally, strangers would arrive with their ancient science. They talked about restoration as if it was some kind of voodoo. Their eyes glistened with the dream of salvation. But for years, they gathered no result. Eventually, the Heat caught up, chewed on them, and put chains around their necks. The moment it touched them, they were no longer free. No one was free at Prasino.

Despite how horrible Prasino is, no one ever harbored the thought of leaving. In fact, no one can leave, unless he desperately wants to. Even if he does, his attention will shift. He will no longer remember why he was packing his sacks. If he was to talk to his neighbor, they would simply shake their head and walk away. Left alone on the street, the Heat will push him back into the shade and eat up the idea. In his old age, he would remember all the names of women he has eyed and all the rhythm he has heard, but there will never be

a single memory about the spur effort of escape. There was a time when the people knew about what the Heat would do to make them stay, but that memory also faded away. The Heat permits no running, no rain, nor any tears. It had taken and sealed off everything, except for one well.

I was not the only one who had seen the true appearance of the creature. Yet I am the only one who had seen it as a child. It was the uniqueness and pureness that drawn me in. I stood there for hours, months, or perhaps, centuries, staring at the creature's back. I could not afford to blink, to miss a second of that godly beauty. There were other children, but it was only this one that carried life. I was not thirsty; I was not hungry. I had lost the sense of time and space, as if this universe existed only of me and the child. I wished for it to turn and look at me, to love me deeply. I wanted to approach it, run my fingers through its silky hair, and feel the freshness of its skin. Yet I did not dare taint its pureness or interrupt. Then, it turned and look at me. A brutal air rushed through my trembling body; my feet felt no weight and my soul was filled with happiness. The halo of its soul had cleansed me of all my worries and of life. Soon I realized I was dead and lying in a dark space. The child was there, but it had grown bigger. Its arms were amputated and its skin was injected with filth. The child was crying. Its tears crystallized and echoed in my consciousness. I was in pain, not because of my death, but for the loneliness of the creature. People came to hurt it, even when it had loved them so much. They had drained its tremendous power and left it to rot.

Yet, it still treasured them so much and only wanted them to love it back. The more it offered them, the more they robbed of it. Did it kill me? I do not care; thus, I have never loved anything as much as I loved it. I decided to make it happy. So, I used my shadow and trapped the people inside. I tortured them miserably and made them hated me. Yet, I also made them treasure the creature, for it is their only salvation.

Golden Swan

VIOLET SPARROW NOLAN FLOOD

I am a swan, a golden
swan at that. I am truth
full but not good, rusted but not
evil. For I am good nor evil.
I am simply a golden swan.
I reflect light and shadow,
I am an object. For me, every surface
is a lake, a pond, or a beach.
I have never stood before.
I swim everywhere I go.
I have been swimming for 76 years.
I am a golden swan,
and I am good nor evil.

Girl on the Wall

VIOLET SPARROW NOLAN FLOOD

What is your life as you
stare at the wall.
Sit on the wall.

What is your life
as you stare at
a hidden frame?

What is your life
when you look at your
frame and see nothing but
a frame with a woman.

What is your life
when you know that you are
a picture but somehow also
know about the days
where your life was
full of color.

What is your life
when you know
that you were a
being, a living being
at that.

What is your life
when you
knew, you
were real.

All This for the Girls

PARTICIPANTS IN THE "FOR THE GIRLS" WORKSHOP

By the participants in the "For the Girls" workshop, who each wrote a haiku to contribute to this collective poem: G. Bentley, Willa Grimsley, Laila Hilton, Sukaina Juwale, Yusra Juwale, Helen McLellan, Maile McManis, Finn Polito, Bella Schulz, Meilin Wiencke.

She's not typical.
Cares not what you think of her.
She's in her own mind.

We are true rebels,
Independent, ecstatic,
Constantly changing.

Girls can be rebels.
Girls can fight better than boys
Strong girls inspire others.

Girls, we will rebel.
We will protest for what's right.
For our equal rights.

Powerful and kind,
Girls do as we please to do.
And we won't back down.

Inspiration is
A power that brings light to
A world in darkness.

Shut down again.
But we won't give up for hope.
Because there is hope.

Girls give us all hope.
Girls will not have hope taken.
Hope is what girls give.

Hope is important.
Everybody does need hope.
Hope is a special need.

Girls are powerful.
We help raise our families.
Tough times don't stop us.

Ayoko's Change

CALLIE FRANSEN

I was asked to go to a sleepover and I sat under the cherry tree for a few minutes and I saw Hibiki walking around in the field so I walked up to him.

I asked him, "Hibiki-kun?"

"Gah!" Hibiki yelled like a little girl and said, "What?"

I said, "What are you doing?"

I smelt his sweat . . . The air tastes of silence . . . I hear the birds chirping . . . I can feel his heart pound . . . He's still silent.

I hug him and whisper, "Hibiki-kun, you know you can always tell Kawaii-chan what's going on."

He hugged back. I could hear and see that he was holding the tears back. I feel worried. What was happening to Hibiki? He never acts like this. I should speak to Lucy about this since she has the mind-reading powers.

I say, "Hibiki-kun, I have to go. I'll be back ASAP."

He waved goodbye as I run to the computer lab.

"Lucy-chan!" I yell.

Lucy replied, "Yes, Kawaii-chan?"

I say Hibiki-kun is acting strange. Lucy said, "Bring Info-chan!"

I look for the Information Room. "Ahah!" I run into the Info Room. "Info-chan?"

I hear a deep voice in the dark room. "Yes, my dear?"

I turn on the light and say, "You don't have to be so dramatic."

She says, "it was cool, you have to admit it!"

"Ok," I say, and then I say, "Um . . . Lucy-chan needs you to hack into the security cams."

Info sighed and said, "Easy-peasy lemon squeezy." She'd hack into the cameras and give me a paper with the code. I run off back to the computer lab and I find a paper on my locker and some art supplies.

I read the paper: "Meet me on the roof-top, Ayoko-chan."

Was this my blessed art set? Why would Ayoko have my stuff? Maybe she used it . . . I gave Lucy the code and ran to the roof top

to find Ayoko with her shoes off.

“Ayoko-chan! Please don’t jump!”

Ayoko smiled and said, “I wanted to give you your art set before my life ended.”

She goes to jump but I grab her foot.

She yells, “LET ME GO!”

I refuse and pull her up. I say, “Ayoko, so many people care about you!”

She stuttered, “Y-you j-j-just s-said, Ay-Ayoko!”

I broke character. “Agh!” I said, “Ayoko you mean so much to me, to all of us!” I broke into tears.

“Thank you, Kawaii-chan!” she said.

I say, “You can call me Callie.”

“Huh?” she says, “Callie? Callie I’m sorry for what I’ve done!”

She yells. I look down at the field and Hibiki is on his phone. Ayoko slips on her slippers and runs off downstairs.

I sit, still as a statue. I look at the school fading. What was happening? I wake up.

Happiness

MICHAELA FRITZ

Happiness is joyful.
Singing sad songs is bad
whenever we are together
there is happiness to be shared.
Whenever we are apart, let's think
about our heart and do the best
for others to fill the world
With Happiness.

The Ghost in the Met

WYNN GILBERT

Once there was a small ghost in the Metropolitan Museum. His name was George. One day, he was flying around the front steps and he saw the most magnificent thing in the window. The most beautiful pottery he had ever seen.

George knew he could fly, but it would be rude to not get a ticket. So, he flew all the way to the front desk. When George got there, he saw the grumpy old man sitting at the desk.

“One ticket, please,” George said, quietly.

“No,” said the man, firmly.

“Well, I can give you fifteen gold bars,” said George.

“No. But what about twenty-five?” said the man.

“I’m sorry that’s all I have today,” said George.

“Fine. Then no,” said the man. “Anyways, you’re a ghost.”

As quickly as he said that the ghost was gone. On the way out, he spotted a small girl in a wheelchair in a corner crying. He skidded to a stop and flew over.

“Are you OK?” George asked.

“I’m lost!” she yelled. “I’m Judi, by the way.”

“Shh, it’s OK. What does your family look like?” he asked.

“Here. There is a picture in my locket,” Judi said. She held out a heart locket and popped it open. Inside was a tall, auburn-haired woman and a handsome, pale, blue-eyed man.

“I think I saw them at the luggage stand— Oh! There they are now!” said George.

“Oh, honey, we were so worried,” said the woman. “We’re leaving now, so say goodbye to your little friend.”

“Goodbye,” Judi said. “And what’s your name?”

“George,” he said.

And then she rolled away.

“Mommy, I saw him at the ticket desk and he couldn’t buy a ticket. Maybe we can buy him one on Saturday,” said Judi.

“The tickets are twenty-eight dollars,” Judi’s mother said.

“I have twenty-eight dollars,” said Judi.

The next day they went to The Met and got one extra ticket and a mini-statue of *The Thinker* at the gift shop.

“Hey George,” Judi called. “I bought you a ticket.”

George, sitting on the bench, looked up in amazement. “Do you mean it?” he yelled over.

“Yeah,” yelled Judi.

So, Judi and George put on their stickers and went to see the beautiful pottery. And in one thousand years, the grumpy man turned into a ghost who had a job as a stinky old janitor.

Untitled

ANGELO GOMEZ

The walls have faded white paint that keeps discrete the gashes and scratches spread along them. The old splintered wood floors could catch a frictionless surface. Dirt, dust, and hair coated every surface. The chipped metal frame gave it likeness to a prison. The air was very wet and humid. The heat and density of the air was suffocating. Water streamed down the walls in the rain as if it was a leaking dam that was about to burst. A small step stool was against the wall and below the window. Names were written in what was obviously children's handwriting. The fact that it was underground made it even more sickening.

He watched as the woman unlocked the heavy door by typing the code into a small number pad that made slow suspenseful beeps. He heard the door slam shut and it alarmed him. The woman walked down the stairs ushering him to follow. He hesitantly followed. The steps made his calves ache. The air grew more humid as he descended. He began to slowly suffocate. The intensity of the prison like basement made his heart beat at an increasing pace. The spiderwebs lining the walls increased the intensity. He felt regret for everything that led him there.

Haibun

ANGELO GOMEZ

The space was cold but provided the ease of solitude. You could faintly hear the sounds of the house but they can't hear you. The lock on the door ensured loneliness. The brown color of the wall and floor were soothing. The rhythm of the water dripping gave a calming feeling. The echo of every breath made a white noise that invokes the most powerful drowsiness.

Into my focus
The crack stretched across tile
My gaze will never be l

Coming 'Home'?

ANGELO GOMEZ

I carefully stepped out of the low-standing vehicle and slipped on the hood of my jacket. The rain was heavy but soft and misty. I parked on the left side of the lot next to two large dumpsters that awaited garbage that would never grace its hollow inside again. After each slow and cautious step over the cracked blacktop, I felt an eerie, nostalgic, and scary feeling creep into my soul. I reached the gates of the church and continued to find the entrance to my Auschwitz. I tried to think of myself as I am today, not as I was then. This church was abandoned so I reached for the crowbar in my bag and knocked the lock of the thick and heavy door. I peered into that dark hole for a moment, as if an evil creature dwelled in there.

I pondered the intense attraction to come here. I desired the closure of a final goodbye to this wretched place. I wanted to come back to reinforce the awareness of the dissolution of my helplessness. I want to be reminded of what I escaped. I tried to make myself believe that I needed this, but I just wanted this final experience here. I crave the nostalgia of this place. The fear of this empty chasm delayed this visit. I found out that they were going to tear it down, so I was forced.

I stepped into the doorway and the cold wet air encompassed my body. I rediscovered a feeling that I had forgotten. I stood at the top of the stairs unable to see the bottom. I carefully let myself drop onto each new and uneven step. As I descended, I began to slowly lose my will to keep going. Soon, I reached the bottom, and hesitantly ran my hand across the right wall in an attempt to find the light switch. I found it, but my finger hung on it for a moment to prepare myself for the flood of visuals.

I turned it on and it all came back. Directly in front of me was the door to the first room. As I moved toward the door I felt my shoes catching on the splintered floor. I turned the knob and slowly opened the door. I quickly turned on the light as if ripping off a Band-Aid.

I'm Sorry

LEONARDO GOMEZ

I slowly took a step forward. I could hear only the sound of my foot against the floorboards and the crunching fall leaves between the two. It was comforting to know that I was alone. With that hope, I continued down the short hall that was cut off by the main room. It was small and empty. All that inhabited it were the dry leaves and the gray dust. I turned to my right and walked along the south wall, running my index finger across it. All I could feel was the layers of growing dust that had formed over the years.

My thoughts then came to a sudden stop with the sound of whispers. I froze where I stood, not sure of what to do. My curiosity forced my neck to twist and face the terrors in this dark basement. There across the room, hiding behind the corner of the north wall, was the pale figure of a child. To my eyes he seemed to be fourteen years of age.

Come . . . it whispered. Its voice echoed throughout the room, sending shivers down my neck. I could feel the hair on my body stand up in that moment. I reluctantly followed it through the longer, much darker hall. I peeked into the old kitchen as we passed by. I couldn't see much in the dark, but it appeared as if a few things were out of order, knocked down on the floor.

We finally came to a second hall that led on to two different rooms at the ends. Across it from me were two doors, one a makeshift bedroom, the other a women's restroom. The child stood before me and pointed his index finger at the last room on the right. I walked passed him, reached out my hand and grasped the door knob.

The door swung open to reveal another small empty room. I slowly walked in, seeing only white walls and a window on the east wall. I looked down at the floorboards. They were the same as the ones outside the room, except they weren't covered with leaves.

My mind drifted back into deep thought again as I walked to the window on the west wall. Because the rooms were not level with the outside world, I had to peer up a small opening in

the ground to see the sky and some tree branches. I remembered this room. That window and the tree branches. So many memories came back to me of those three months. It felt as if I had lived there just the day before.

Suddenly, my thoughts ceased again, hearing the sound of a shutting door. I quickly turned around and saw that the door had indeed been closed. I walked over the door and attempted to reopen it, but to no avail. I then stared down at the space between the door and the floorboards as water began to rush through. My shoes became drenched, forcing me to back away. I looked around and saw that more water was seeping through the walls and any other place it could.

I ran back to the window and looked up only to see the world rolling on top of itself like a wave. Suddenly, a big rush of water came over the building and broke through the glass and walls. I shrieked as I was swept under. It felt like an eternity, rolling around in the flow of the water. I closed my eyes in hopes that I would run out of breath soon, to end my suffering. But, my body finally emerged above the water. I could feel beneath me a hard, solid surface holding me up and a light shining to the right of me.

My eyes slowly opened up after I was sure most of the water was away from them. I lifted myself up and sat against the wall of what appeared to be a polished white tub. To the left of me was the matching white-tiled wall. To the left was a small open space for people to walk through to get to the toilet and the sink. I pulled myself out of the tub and walked up to the closed door. I pulled on the doorknob and felt a sudden rush of cold air go passed me. I shivered as I saw a small hallway ahead. I stepped forward on the gray carpet that seemed to be around the entire room. On both my left and right were small bedrooms. I could see an old box TV in the room to my left in the corner of the room. To my left I saw a table with a smaller, flatter TV on top and some drawers farther on. I continued to walk forward down the hall. I could see another open room with another TV on another table. Just before that to my right was another room but this one was a little different. I could see a large bed and a lamp next to it.

Haibun Experiment

LEONARDO GOMEZ

Time is an interesting word. It's the name of almost a complete mystery. As with many other things, we don't know everything about Time. As with many other things, we can't control it. But what makes Time so precious? Is it because we only have so much of it on Earth? I suppose Time can be considered a balancing table that holds many things together. It's the only thing constantly working. It was before we existed, it will be long after we are gone.

It tries to work in our favor
 It tries to keep us safe
 But sadly, we want much more

Time for me is precious, but not just because I have a limited amount. When I die it'll be my time and I'll have to accept that. No, because Time is an infinite amount of storage space. Time remembers and never forgets. Imagine an endless sheet of paper with no measure of width or length. Written into it, everything.

When a leaf fell to the ground
 A big record, forever
 I don't want to forget too

A Concept

WILLA GRIMSLEY

A poem, which nobody understands
A song's melancholy tune, rising above all else
A book that stays only intact with great care
A creature, deadly, but humble and kind
A mere spark, igniting the forest into flames
that lick the sky
A bear killing mercilessly, only to protect her young
Love is a concept unknown to all.

Nostalgia

EVELYN HERNANDEZ

It was a dark place, a place where bad energies mingled. Coincidentally, it was a basement, windows settling under the top floor of the conjoined townhome. She walked in and stepped on the clay-colored tile, the staircase waiting below. Shadows played in the darkness that already settled at the bottom. Beside and above the stairs, a Mardi Gras mask stared at your back once you turned into the other room. It was well-decorated with feathers and jewels, feathers shaking from an unknown breeze, moving the dark shadows below the holes where eyes should've been. She didn't know but there was something there, something watching the calm manner of her steps as she walked down. She felt a pressure, a tense, unstable energy. Something in a room shuffled, another item squeaked. She felt as though the house was being roused, she paused at the bottom of the steps. A room on the left, a living room on the left. A rush of nostalgia came to her. Memories of Christmas, news, movies. The feeling was suddenly broken by a picture brought to her mind of chains, she felt confused, wondering what brought up that image. Then she remembered, it was an old dream of her past. The floor above her squeaked. It was from the outside, she thought. Nothing had lived in that townhome for a long time.

She walks into the kitchen, a different energy overwhelming her. It's safer, calming, a mother-like feeling. She feels warm, escaping from the frigid emptiness that encompassed her before. Lonely magnets settle atop the yellowing fridge. She goes into another room off of the kitchen, walking to the back of it. A big window fills the space in the wall and she is able to look up at the leaves on the trees. Their big green leaves turning yellow because they sense the change in atmosphere. Soon they would change into a cranberry color, aging like fine wine. She sighed, examining the tree. It is like a bridge, she thought. The trunk is connected to the earth, branches creating a bridge for the other pieces of life that sit on the branches. Distracted by the way of nature, she didn't notice that

they had come up behind her, slowly. They brought their pressure and great stress of energy. They grab at her stomach and pull her into the shadows, devoured.

Room Observation

EVELYN HERNANDEZ

Like black stripes on a tiger, the ceiling was indented with similar stripes. Small holes scattered across the ceiling panel like a pencil was taken and stabbed through. The room smelled like paper and pencil shavings, growing familiar to the point where it smelled like nothing. The walls were white, some stained with a gray-like powder. The floors were similar to walls, and the ceiling. Gray splotches in different areas of the floor, decorated in tiger-like gray stripes.

Haibun

EVELYN HERNANDEZ

I look into the lake, a calm and gentle clearing; made of water. A stream above flows into it, the calm rush of the river through the rocks echoing around the valley. Nearby, pine trees surround it, settled with their roots deep in the wet soil, surfacing under the lake.

A sudden jerk,
His scales shimmering beneath,
Angry, disturbed.

The Lost Dog

AKALJOT JUNEJA

The sad dog looks like a drowning tulip. This time it is drowning in sand, not in water. The dog was ditched by its owner, found its way to a desert, and got lost there. Now there is a sand storm. The dog is trying to find his way back to his family. The tulip is getting away from all of the sand. The dog looks like it is getting away from the sand blizzard, too. The dog is underneath the sand and getting back up again, just like the tulip is growing and becoming as healthy as it was, again.

An Orange Dog

TEJBIR JUNEJA

The dog is heavy.

It is made out of copper.

One of the ears is up and one, down.

The dog is sitting and is very cute.

Its mouth is shut. If its mouth were open, it would probably bark.

The dog is circular on its head and less round on the bottom.

It looks a 100-years-old. Looks like the little dude has been touched a lot.

It has orange on its face, ears, bottom, legs, and back.

It is an orange dog.

Untitled

JACKIE KINDER

It was such a short and rainy day in my house, just as we were all sick too. We were too tired, and exhausted to move around, let alone take care of ourselves. As I am a strong reliable person, always searching for the best, I took it as a favor to take care of the rest of the family. Even though I could've left them alone and ridden my new bike. But who was I kidding? Even if I was that senseless and selfish I wasn't nearly energetic enough to ride the bike. I would fall off half way to the park or my drowsiness would lead to someone me with a car or something. So, time took its course and I tried my best to feel better, but it was just too much. I wouldn't normally try to but thinking about it, my apartment complex is in a hilly area so I would have a lot of run riding, yet it seems like too much exercise for my current condition. The flu is what they call it. Horrible, a chilling flu swept through my city like the bubonic plague. Everyone was sick, and if you weren't, you were going to get sick. The only reason it was too hard to ride my bike was the flu attacked our sinuses, our throats, and what seemed to be every inch of our brains. Raging headaches, nausea, and sneezing made us feel like walking zombies. My mother, stubborn as ever, refused to get us cold and flu medicine, said it wasn't that bad, but had eventually given in. Although this week was very bad, I feel confident my drive for exercise will push me to ride that brand-new bike within a few days.

Happy and Me

LYLIA LAI

One day I was in the backyard watching my guinea pigs eat weeds when I heard a tiny *POP*. I looked around. Right there standing before me was a rainbow unicorn. I was so surprised, I nearly fell over on top of my guinea pigs!

“Hey!” I said. It just cocked her head and ran towards me to let me pet her head. Her hair was very soft and shiny. “We can’t let mom see you,” I whispered.

The Attic

JARED LAMORA

The bitter cold latched onto my cheeks and every limb of my body. What looked like rain was dripping down the attic's wall. It transformed into a green gooey substance that drowned my every thought. I was afraid to turn my head in any other direction, I kept my eyes locked onto the liquid substance that scarred me for life. I stared and stared, for what seemed like hours, days, and weeks of my time. I started to close my eyes, staring off in the distance as I fell asleep.

Darkness has fluttered my mind completely. I feel mad, angry, sad, and most of all shocked. Shocked, I opened my eyes in disbelief, knowing that someone or even something was in the attic with me. The glow resonated across the room, it seemed to be weeping, cold to the touch. I struggled to get up off the floor, my body was frozen, the attic was frozen. I walked towards the beast with great struggle. I grabbed it by the shoulder, it was human. I immediately fell to the ground and passed out.

It must have been at least a week since I approached the cold heartening beast and failed to comprehend what was going on, as I woke, my body's temperature was rising as if I was in the deepest caravans of hell itself. Sweat was profusely running down my entire body, the heat was burning me alive. Another spirit was among me, the further I moved to the middle to the room, the hotter it got. My eyes could not take any more bright lights, my body was shutting down, I could not move. I jumped into the middle of the room with all my force and closed my eyes

The beeping of the projector has oriented my senses to believe there was a ship next to me, an emergency.

Godo and Kenzo

LUCA MCMURRAY

Kenzo was walking down the street, passing the bakery, when he saw a puppy lying in a small box lined with soft material. A sign on the box said, “Puppies for sale.” But the “s” from “puppies” was crossed out, leaving only the small white and brown beagle. Kenzo’s heart nearly stopped when he saw the dog. The scraggly little bundle of fur was curled up in a corner, trying but failing to keep out the cold of December 2153. Kenzo squatted down and ran his warm mitten over the puppy’s shivering back. The little beagle relaxed. Kenzo got up from the ground, hopped on his hoverboard, and flew back home.

Outside his house, Kenzo hesitated, and then decided he would make a formal entrance and stepped off his hoverboard, powered it down with his iPhone LXII, picked up the oval-like board, and entered his house.

“Mom, Dad, can we get a puppy?” One of the robots in the foyer said, “Master, your parents are not home.” “Where did they go?” Kenzo asked. “They are at the supermarket,” the robot replied. Kenzo groaned, then got out his phone again, powered up the hoverboard, closed the door behind him, and shot away.

At the supermarket, Kenzo’s parents were just exiting, holding grocery bags. Kenzo hailed his parents’ hoverboards and they stepped on without a word. “Follow me,” Kenzo said, and shot away, his parents close behind. Kenzo swung to a stop and stood, facing his parents. “Can we get a puppy?” Kenzo asked. “Absolutely not,” his mother replied. “You haven’t even seen him yet,” Kenzo complained. Kenzo’s mother muttered something under her breath and cruised towards the box. His mother’s gaze softened when she saw the puppy. “He is cute,” Kenzo’s mother said. Kenzo held his breath. “But that is not enough.” Kenzo sighed. He leaned closer to the puppy. At the smell of Kenzo, the puppy turned around. Kenzo scratched the puppy’s ear. The puppy gnawed on Kenzo’s finger in return. This exchange seemed to give Kenzo an idea.

“I’ll pay for it myself,” Kenzo said. Both his mother and his father looked skeptical. “I doubt that you want to spend your money that way,” Kenzo’s father remarked. “And feed it. And take care of it,” Kenzo added. “Sounds good,” Kenzo’s father said. “Okay,” Kenzo’s mother agreed.

Kenzo nearly exploded with joy. First, he powered down his hoverboard. Then he reached down and picked up the puppy, tucking the puppy into Kenzo’s hot-wear. The puppy snuggled up in the warmth. The sliding doors opened as Kenzo led the way into the pet store. As his hot-wear adjusted to the heat, the puppy poked his head out of the pocket because of the change of temperature. When Godo saw the new place, he squirmed. Kenzo scrambled to catch the puppy as the puppy slipped. A firm net shot out and snatched the beagle out of thin air. The puppy was suddenly terrified. He was trapped. Then the puppy felt the warm hands of Kenzo and instantly relaxed.

At the counter, the clerk said, “Hello, what would you like to buy?” in a robotic monotone. Kenzo held out the puppy and said, “How much would this puppy happen to cost?” The clerk looked at her holo-watch and said, “Twenty dollars, please.”

Kenzo placed the puppy on a soft mattress that expanded from the front of his jacket and pressed his thumb to the back pocket of his jeans, unsealing an invisible seam and reaching in to grab his collapsible safe. Kenzo pulled it out and the safe unfolded. Kenzo quickly did an iris scan, a thumbprint scan, a voice test, a blood test, and typed in a password. The lid of the safe slide opened, and Kenzo reached in to grab a twenty-dollar bill. He handed the money to the clerk and re-collapsed the safe to return it to his pocket.

“Okey dokey,” the clerk said. “The dog’s all yours.”

Kenzo tried to take Godo off the mattress, but Godo resisted, wriggling out of Kenzo’s hands. Surprised, Kenzo flinched. His parents must have seen his face, because they laughed. “What?” Kenzo asked, astonished that his parents would do this to him. His dad said, “Nothing,” with a secretive glance at Kenzo’s mom. “Let’s go, then,” Kenzo said, impatient to introduce his puppy to its new home. Kenzo nearly ran out of the store, then powered up his hoverboard and stepped on. His parents stepped on their hoverboards

as well. Kenzo shot back to the house.

On the ride home, Kenzo thought of a name for the puppy. At the front door, he had an answer. "Godo!" Kenzo shouted. His parents both stopped behind him, sharing a confused look. "The puppy's name is Godo," Kenzo explained. Godo looked up at Kenzo with his tail wagging. Kenzo's father assumed a thoughtful expression. "Sounds good to me," he agreed. Kenzo looked at his mother. She shrugged. "Okay." Kenzo then said "Godo, you live at 1728, Est. 28th street, Boulder, CO." Godo seemed happy with this news. Kenzo said, "Now, do you want to see how it looks inside?" Godo barked once. "Okay," Kenzo said, and opened the door, taking Godo off the mattress. Godo bounded inside.

K'Raeva: The Maw

DUNCAN MONROE

Kraven walked slowly over the fallen branches, careful not to make a sound. He knew the beast he was hunting, and it would attack or flee at the slightest noise. It was a tricky one.

He pictured it in his mind, a hide speckled with silver and bronze, teeth and claws made of solid gold, and eyes of pure, nearly glowing emerald. He knew what money like that could buy, and he could picture himself feasting on the finest breads and meats, drinking the sweetest of wines, and the freshest of the crops.

But that came later. Now, he had to hunt. And he could not be distracted from his hunting. The trees seemed to go on forever, swallowing the light, leaving him alone with the sounds of the wild. He was haunted by every shadow as he slowly made his way to the Centroak, the known nesting ground of this beast, and what was said to be the greatest of all the trees in the forest, the watcher of the god of forest, N'aiko. Kraven was no man of religion.

He did not believe that any gods presided and watched over them. There had been no god to teach him how to hunt, only him and his will to survive.

There. A tree so tall and wide it was a clearing in itself, not to mention the luscious green field around it, filled with flowers and animals galore. But today, it was silent. As if the world was anticipating his kill. At the base of the tree, he could see the fur of the beast. He dropped his spear and drew his bow, Dae'ka, the Dreadshot. Its massive weight was enough to puncture stone. He fired, but his aim was slightly off, and his arrow punched into the tree above. The beast stood, almost glaring at him with those precious eyes. He drew his spear and the two began circling, the creature feinting with almost humanlike action. Then they both charged, the creature's maw open wide and Kraven's spear readied.

They ran straight for each other, and Kraven's spear pierced the beast's heart. He stood in appreciation of his kill, thinking of the feasts he would soon have, the food put into his maw in satisfaction.

Up, far above, the goddess of hunger and the hunt, Fasta, watched with rage as her child was slain. She saw what was going through his mind, and a cruel thought came to her. “Fine,” she muttered. “You wish to feast? Then feast.”

And the hunter began to change. His hands stretched and cracked into paws. His fingers spun and cracked, his nails screeching into claws as sharp as knives. His back arched, his spine cracking out and growing needles as thick as branches. He screamed in agony, but it became a roar as his mouth grew indefinitely, stretching into a horrible maw of immeasurable size, lined with teeth like broken glass. He snapped down onto all fours, his feet growing to the size of his hands, and dozens of eyes spreading across a balding head, as what was once a great hunter now turned into a horrible beast, a thing deserving of no name but its most prominent feature: The Maw. It struggled to pull itself up, now almost as tall as the Centroak itself. It scampered away, impossibly light when it was nearly twenty-five meters long standing straight up. So, beware, all who venture into the thick woods, if you come across what looks to be the greatest tree around surrounded by a beautiful meadow, you may soon fall prey to the beast of the golden teeth and the emerald eyes: K’Raeva, The Maw.

Happiness

Chadd Neustaster

There was a guy who fell in a lake and he sank to the bottom and he was saved by another guy. When the other guy found him, he was all covered in seaweed. So, the other guy saved him and the guy who sunk was happy because he was alive.

MAGICATS (A Script)

ELLA PETERSEN

BLACK

A flash of purple goes past the screen. A red dragon flies overhead, a purple cat runs onto the screen watching in awe at the events happening. A crocodile with glowing blue eyes walks across the screen. An orange cat, a pink cat, a white cat, and a gray cat sit next to the purple cat. Red eyes appear in the background.

ZOOM IN

CARD: MAGICATS

CUT TO: INT. ZUMA'S ROOM—DAY

We see a plain room, with a pillow on the ground and a small floor lamp in the corner. Everything freezes in time.

ZUMA V.O.: Hi, I'm Zuma, I'm a purple magicat.

(The purple magicat appears sleeping on the pillow.)

ZUMA V.O.: I have the power of speed. (Beat)

There are many lands on the planet of Meowzi.

(We see a planet in the shape of a cat head.)

ZUMA V.O.: There's Aquacat Land, Pyrocat Land, Telecat Land, Goldcat Land, and Magicat Land.

(We see Zuma's room again.)

ZUMA V.O.: There is a rumor that pyrocats have two powers! But that must be fake.

(We see Zuma wake up. Everything un-freezes.)

ZUMA: Another day to try and make a group.

ZUMA V.O.: You see, groups are very important on Meowzi, I had been trying to make a group for two years! Today was my lucky day because, 731st time's the charm, right?

(Zuma walks out the door she walks down a strange path outside.)

ZUMA V.O.: Now I'm about to do something stupid but you

can't make fun of me: this was a year ago!

ZUMA: Doo doo doo, la la la, I'm a cat looking for a group!

(We see Zuma face-palm, disappointed at seeing a "past" version of herself.)

MOOCH: Hello, did you say you're looking for a group?

(Zuma looks over to where the voice came from; we see a gray cat wearing a detective's hat and balancing a basketball on her tail. She's with a white cat who is floating and is holding the gray cat's paw. They are obviously friends.)

SNOW: We are looking too!

ZUMA: But for a group don't you need five cats? We are only three!

MOOCH: But we'd be one step closer!

ZUMA: What power do you have? I have the power of controlling speed.

MOOCH : I have the power of shape-shifting!

SNOW: Mind-altering over here.

ZUMA: Wow, compared to yours my powers sound dumb.

SNOW: I'm sure they're not.

MOOCH: You wanna be our leader? We are both pretty bad leaders.

ZUMA: Sure, I always wanted to lead something.

(The cats high-five each other.)

ZUMA v.o.: Being a leader needs great responsibility, but I'm the leader of this same group today and do pretty great.

WAG v.o.: Hi Zuma, what are you doing in here? I heard you calling yourself a great leader and had to join the laughs!

ZUMA v.o.: I'm narrating our story!

WAG v.o.: Let me help!

ZUMA V.O.: You're not in the story yet!

(We hear tussling of Wag and Zuma.)

ZUMA V.O.: Sorry, back to the story, just don't ask about Wag.

(We see the three cats continue along the path.)

ANNOUNCEMENT BOARD: Hello Magicats: I come with breaking news. Estai, the ruler of Meowzi, announced that she has enough of the peace. She's taken control of beasts that are being sent to all the lands of Meowzi. All groups report to Lester's office immediately.

ZUMA: We're a group, let's go!

(We see ten groups [including Zuma, Snow, and Mooch] go to Lester's office.)

ZUMA V.O.: You see, Lester is the mayor of Magicat Land, and he did not approve of Estai's plans. You also now see how hard it is to make a group, only twenty exist on all of Meowzi, half of them are in Magicat Land.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Darkness in Wyoming

SHREYAS RAO

“Take off your glasses!” exclaimed Dad.
“But it hurts my eyes to look at the sun.” protested
Sujay, my little brother.

“It is okay just this once,” replied my Mom. “And quick, don’t miss it!”

“This is the point of our whole trip. It only lasts for two minutes!” Dad responded.

We had woken up before sunrise that morning to start our long drive. It felt like hours and hours of driving. We had planned this trip for months, for something that was only going to last for a couple of minutes. Finally, we reached the state park that we were going to park at and wait.

My favorite part of this trip to Wyoming started when we reached a small hiking area with a vast landscape of spines and yellow-brownish grass. There was a sound of birds chirping, water rushing, and bushes and trees rustling.

Our family decided to go on a short hike. As we walked our way through the fields of cacti, I heard the water rushing get louder and louder. Then I saw that we were standing on one of a few canyons, and that below us was a river.

When we returned to the trailhead, the sky had darkened. Suddenly, we were standing in a huge shadow. We were in a circle of sunset all around us. It was the solar eclipse. The air was quiet as we stared up in awe. Then a few voices talked excitedly and those multiplied, and everyone was talking and whispering about the eclipse. And then it was over.

Soon we packed up all of our stuff and hit the road on Interstate 25. I was trying to get over the fact that we saw a miracle that only happens once in a few decades.

At last, we reached home and I stretched out my arms and legs. In a few minutes, a delicious meal was waiting for us. I climbed into bed. Soon I drifted off to sleep.

Ode to My Treehouse

ROSIE RISCH

Grandpa,
We need a house
A house higher than
The Highest birds
With a pole
For Fleeing
With a slide
Too
And that's what
We got
2 balconies
1 slide
1 firepole
1 mailbox
1 ladder
1 tire swing
1 swamp to prank cousins
1 haunted sauna to prank cousins
2 areas to play in
And 398,096,812,349 grains of sand
We started a
Business
Selling sand
Now we never need the store
Because we have 398,096,812,349 grains to use!
But thank my grandpa for making
Everything so perfect
Now all we need are some customers.

Akari's Wish

AUDREY SHEPPARD

Dear Diary,

I am writing in you while washing my dishes. I'm concerned that I might get you kind of wet. Maybe I'll go for a walk. Be right back! Hey, check out this new teapot I found! I think I'll wash it off. Some orange smoke is coming out! "Hey, Mia, come check this out!" I called. Instead, Catherine came down. "Mia is out shopping, remember? Anyway, ahh! What's that gold fog stuff!?" "I don't know." Catherine ran out the door. A see-through human came out of the teapot. "Konichiwa." "Hello. I am a genie I will give you one wish." "To be honest, I don't have any wish, so I guess I wish for you to have a wish." The genie smiled. "I have waited for this for thousands of years. You get granted one power." "Okay, I choose the power of peace upon the world." I wake up. My diary is full of these events but no sign of the genie. I looked out of the window, cats and birds were cuddling together, the sun had a picture of a peace sign on it. Looks like I get my wish after all.

Letter to the Dark

LIANA SHINBEIN

Hello, Darkness.

I have seen you here before.
Yet, I don't remember the way
you look so livid as you glare,
as you seem to taunt me,
to play with my mind.

Hello, Darkness.

I've been here, this entire eternity.

Waiting.

Would you believe it?

I've fought my way out of depression,
I've found freedom from entrapment,
Yet,

I can't escape you.

Hello, Darkness.

You've fought your way into me,
fueling my doubts,
you're the only thing I fear.

The only one.

Yet even as you stare upon a sky,
clear as glass,
sprinkled with stars,
you cannot find beauty,
only that, it's not enough.

Too little.

Half empty.

Farewell, Darkness.

Someday I will move on,
and I will never have
to see your burning eyes
staring me in the face.

I only wish to be freed
from your grasp.

Someday, I will escape.

Ode to the Milheim House

LIANA SHINBEIN

There, between the gray clouds and the rain-touched earth, lies a house of dusty furniture and cobwebs of an old spider, delicately woven between books that tell our stories. Run up the aged stairs of splintering wood, shove open a locked door, explore every nook and cranny, find every comfy corner calling for you to snuggle up in. Sit on the stairs outside, and let the words flood from your dull pencil onto your rain-soaked notebook, watch the squirrels run along the side of the building, seeking shelter from the rain. They watch you laugh, how you sit on stone steps, letting the rain cover you. Sometimes, your minds block out the world, focusing only on the written words held in front of your face.

When the rain falls, all in the Milheim House is quiet.

SUMMER 2018

My Room

SAM ALEXANDER

A warm, comforting blue bed on lighter blue walls as blue sky pours in from the window; a giant mess that brings you no worries for it is completely your own, and you remain knowledgeable of everything in it: home. Your room. Your freedom and paradise in isolation. Your own blissful blue world telling the story of you.

The board on the wall highlights your interests, and your bookshelves filled with scattered books show your constant love for reading. Once it may have been organized? It's hard to tell—you'd think the books moved all on their own. Your windowsill is stocked with books, papers, cards, and games that you were too lazy to find an actual place for. (But they aren't on the ground, so they pass the inspector's test.)

Two chairs lie in opposite corners. (Both are—you guessed it—*blue*.) The first is worn but well-loved, hosting the blankets that comfort you when days get cold. The other chair belonged to your grandparents, and you think of them as you rock back and forth in it. You use it every time they visit and more, and while inside its warm embrace you rest easy. A deep red carpet stretches out to tie it all together and form your favorite metropolis: the beautiful blue home that calls itself your room.

Memory [song and lyrics]

JEYLIN ARCHER

My patience for the memory of anxiousness.
 My mind is bare with the feeling of blankness.
 The cold-blooded nothing, my consciousness.
 The soul-gouging feelings of nothingness.

The blackest night is creeping in...
 and It's pushing hard, it's the darkest sin.
 I am the man with no sleep at all.
 The times they stand and sometimes they fall.
 I am the man and that's enough for me.
 This endless loop that keeps my head empty.

I get this feeling of loveliness
 Can't you see? I am hungerless
 You may hurt me with hatefulness
 You can't save me I am helpless

The blackest night is creeping in...
 and It's pushing hard, it's the darkest sin.
 I am the man with no sleep at all.
 The times they stand and sometimes they fall.
 I am the man and that's enough for me.
 This endless loop that keeps my head empty.

No need to feel that shard
 Coming from your heart
 You're thinking too hard
 You don't need to fall apart

The blackest night is creeping in...
 and It's pushing hard, it's the darkest sin.
 I am the man with no sleep at all.
 The times they stand and sometimes they fall.
 I am the man and that's enough for me.
 This endless loop that keeps my head empty.

I am the man and that's enough for me.
This endless loop that keeps my head empty.

The Clock Shop

CHLOE AREND

Prologue

Tick-tock, tick-tock. Each clock bellows its simple pattern over and over again, speaking a story different from the one beside it, yet with the same motions, the same sounds, the same words. As my fingers run against the smooth, rusted, old, loved, newness of each one, I listen and learn. Tales of things I never could imagine myself. Stories and secrets filled with life, death, happiness, sorrow, and friendship. Things you'll never learn from watching, or hearing from others. You must listen to the original storyteller. You must learn from its precise movements and sounds. Time must flow by smooth, fast, slow. Any way except how it normally would. Still not learning? Well, do as I do and look deeper into the clocks, into the stories. Watch as I open each one up and study the inner gears, each placed in a place where the entire system flows together like water flowing into your body, filling you with life and energy again. I take a deep breath, inhaling the musty scent of the clocks, detecting that hint of copper and metal amongst the fresh wood. I listen to the steady heartbeat of the clocks heart, going *tick-tock* in an endless motion. I walk down the endless aisles, not even thinking about who I am, or why I'm here. Yet at the same time, I need to figure out who I am, and that is the reason I am here. As I walk through these endless aisles, I listen to the stories, trying to hear my story. The story of who I am, how I know this place, and why I must endlessly search for my very identity... I've walked this aisle before, I recognize it, I remember it. I listened to all the clocks but this one. This small, table-size clock. Wooden, with a gold frame outlining the time. I feel a strong connection with this clock. I feel a pull, a strong pull towards it, and I didn't feel it before. I watch my hand move closer to it, reach out, and eventually feel its wooden grain. The memories begin to flood in, and the sight of that little clock on the shelf in that clock shop filled with stories, is gone.

Lightning

KATE BESTALL

The rain falls. Asteria isn't sure how long she's been standing there, thinking, as the raindrops slide down the window. All she knows is that everything has crumbled. All the things she thought she could always depend on have been ripped away. Her life, withered away in a single night.

Asteria has always been a dreamer. She knows the world can be cruel, but she never thought it would feel like this. She never thought everything could unravel in such a short time.

Lightning flashes. Cressida loved lightning, Asteria thinks, turning her head to watch. The rain has always calmed Asteria, but nothing can help her now. How can she move on when she keeps replaying everything? Asteria doesn't feel like anything will ever happen again. It feels like this is all there will ever be: Asteria watching a rainstorm, thinking about everything she once had.

She lingers a little longer. She knows she has to move on, but everything seems impossible now. Still, she forces herself to turn away from the window and face her room.

Her room. It doesn't really feel like hers anymore. Nothing seems real at the moment. For a moment she contemplates going to bed and waking up to find it was all just a bad dream. Then she shakes herself out of it. But this is no dream, no matter how much she wishes it is. This is no dream, no matter how much it feels like she's trapped in a nightmare.

She scans the room. It looks exactly like it did yesterday. It looks normal, as if her world hasn't collapsed. Her bookshelves are in order. Her viola is resting in the corner, right where she set it yesterday. On her nightstand is the bracelet her friend made her. So is the pen she borrowed from Cressida.

Asteria bites her lip, trying not to cry. Cressida will never get her pen back. She never will, because she's dead.

Cressida, who loved as easily as she breathed, who was kind to everyone she met. Cressida, Asteria's sister, who died and left Asteria behind.

“You said we’d go everywhere together,” Asteria whispers, her voice hoarse. “You said we’d live happily ever after.”

But Cressida hasn’t lived. Cressida is dead, and Asteria is still alive. She *has* to keep living, Asteria realizes. She has to, in honor of her sister. Asteria is alive, and she will live. Maybe she will never get *over* Cressida’s death, but she has to get *through* it.

With her head held high, Asteria walks outside and into the rain-storm. Lightning flashes once again, but this time Asteria doesn’t look back.

Nature

INDIGO CRAANE

See Nature all around us.

While the human race has destroyed Nature so much in their entire existence, it still remains.

If the entirety of earth's existence is condensed into a single year, humans have come in a few seconds before New Year's. Already within those two to three seconds, humanity has already destroyed nearly, if not even more than, half of the existing trees in the world. They have polluted this earth, largely helped to the extinction of over 332 animal species, and caused a hole in the ozone layer protecting us due to us adding too much waste into it.

However, despite all that, Nature still remains thriving. There is Nature within animals playing with one another, Nature within the dewy green of the grass underneath our feet and Nature within the bright pinpoints of the stars that lie above us as we sleep as a blanket.

We as humans also have Nature within us.

There is Nature in our pure instinct from our ancestors, Nature in our movements from natural reflex, and Nature in the millions upon millions of thoughts that pass through our mind on a daily basis.

And once the human race tries to manipulate Nature further than they already have, Nature will fight back and win.

So, while we do hold pieces of Nature in ourselves, Nature is also what will inevitably *overcome and destroy us*.

Untitled

LILY DEFNET

Flora never really left. Her name didn't leave the conversations of our neighborhood, much less the backs of our minds. Her photos weren't moved, remaining on posters and in pamphlets families put on their refrigerators. Her impact didn't leave, the slight hesitation in their voices when bringing up anything Flora related lingering, even after two years.

The week following her death was an obscure blur of memories. Teachers, weary and anxious, urging us to focus on the lessons. Students refreshing website pages and waiting as news about Flora streamed into the news outlets. Counselors in the back of classrooms. People speaking in hushed voices, offering possible explanations for what happened to her and dishing opinions about which theories were the most realistic. No one got a real answer of how Flora died.

Nearly the entire school attended her funeral. The venue was bright and vibrant, the exact opposite of what a funeral embodies. It was mortifying, watching all the families paste on false smiles and talk casually about celebrities and their children. Pretending that it wasn't a funeral. Like a sixteen-year-old girl hadn't died. The only decorative items that suggested this was for Flora was a wooden table stocked with photos of her. A recent school portrait, a badly timed headshot with the trademark blue background. Her blonde hair braided and her flowered dress ironed to perfection. Her face lightened with a natural glow, the kind you can't get from makeup. It was then that I recognized how beautiful she had been. Examining the other array of photos, I saw the same daunting smile. A photo of her in front of the local ice cream shop. A photo of Flora next to her younger brother, his hair disheveled and unkempt next to her intricate bun. The same boy at this funeral, sitting at the end of the front pew with a deadpan expression. No longer was he the boy in that photo. No longer were any of us the same people we were when Flora was alive.

The Room

GABRIELLE FRENCH

An entire life is contained inside this one room, all of the wishes and fears packed in so tightly they might spring out at any moment. Colors glint and shine across every surface like a thousand eyes watching you, manipulating the texture of each object. Light shifts from one point to another and a buzzing hijacks the back of your head, grappling for control. This room is livid and dangerous. All moments coexisting inside a single word, a messenger, a god, a temple. This room is everything you've ever been told like a slap across the face. It contains multitudes, waves and waves of pain, doubt and love. A knife is pressed to your throat and this room is saying, Look at me, look at me, I am the most important thing. I will split your conscience into so many stray threads, you won't be able to weave it all back together again.

Nature's Wedding Perspective

EMILIE GARNIER-TOBAR

I stand there tall and proud they hang the gold garlands on me
I watch the guests arrive one by one dress-ready for the wedding
 Silence takes over as the bride shows up in an embroidered
 pink dress
She makes her way past the *awwwing* guests to her soon-to-be wife
 The lovebirds stare into their eyes with happiness and affection
 They kiss
 Everyone cheers!
 Congratulating the new couple!

Cigarette's Flame

HUNTER GROGAN

I stand in the hospital where my father died, among the haunted corridors and the glitching overhead fluorescent lights. The excited buzzing from above moves to my core. The bright yellow light washes me in a tacky, heavenly glow. The stink of alcohol lingers in the air. A memento to my father's dying breath. The excited buzzing moves from my core to the floor, shattering and shaking the world around me. Reality's way of saying it wanted me back in the present.

"What do you know about the murder of Lindsay Long?" the interrogator across from me asks. His blue eyes are gorgeous and bright, like my father's, but hollow, like a carved-out pumpkin. His suit has the glisten of money, hiding the musk of his cheap cologne. He stands above me, trying in vain to assert the power he'd been denied his whole life. I pick the pack of cigarettes off the dented, metal table, hands trembling. The buzzing had not completely departed.

The cigarettes were a guilty pleasure, but one I needed.

"Is that a trick question?" I answer, eyes flickering to the cup of water that sits alone on the opposite side of the table. I disappear into it.

My feet dig into the fresh dirt beneath my toes. The fluorescent lights do not find refuge in my mind, replaced by a gorgeous, gleaming sun that hits the stream, causing it to explode in glimmer. The wildflowers at my feet are emblazoned with the colors of sunset. I glance up at the sun, catching it in my eye and blinding myself.

"No." The interrogator grapples for the right words. "I'm just inquiring about the relation between your father and Ms. Long."

My fingers grope over the light, causing a small flame to burst. Oranges, yellows, and reds danced in my interrogator's empty blue eyes.

I light the cigarette and bring it to my lips. "I didn't know of any relationship between my father and Lindsay till today, officer."

The edges of my vision darken. I am back among the stream,

caught now in the black pit of night. So cold, so isolating I could choke. Not a thing could be seen. Not my hands, not my feet. Not the cigarette trapped between my fingers.

“I’ve been told you and Lindsay were close.”

“We were.” I take a puff. I open my eyes.

“So, surely . . . ?”

“I suppose we weren’t so close, after all.”

My Day at Camp

CARSON GURLEY

“Ugh,” I complained. “Do I have to go to camp?”
“Yes,” my mom replied. “It’ll be fun.”
“Yeah, but what about last summer?” I reminded her.
“I’m sure it won’t be like that,” she said positively.
When we arrived I still was a little uneasy.
My mom checked me in, handed the instructor my EpiPens, and left.

After a round of the game “Shark and Minnows”—by that I mean I was the only Shark—we sat in a group circle. They told us to share our names and told us safety rules.

Soon we huddled in the small van. After what felt like days, the van came to a halt. We toppled out onto the pavement. In order to get to our campsite, we had to climb a small hill, and a little secret about me is that I can’t climb.

After what felt like hours of trying to climb the “hill,” I found a small trail off to the right. When we entered the “campsite,” we found tons of weeds. And where there’s weeds, there’s spiders.

I can already smell my lunch. I can also feel hairy, long-legged spiders on my legs. I start talking to my friend, so I forget about the spiders. After a while, the suspense is too good, so I reach for my sandwich, open my mouth, insert the sandwich. Then my friend’s face turns pale. Before I take a bite, something puts its leg on my tongue, like, “Hello, don’t mind if I walk on your tongue.” I suddenly jerk the sandwich from my mouth, sending it into the forest of weeds.

After the cheese stick and strawberries my mom packed, I wasn’t that hungry.

It wasn’t a long walk back, except someone thought twisting their ankle was a good idea, so what used to take thirty minutes now took an hour. And that hour is the hour I’m about to tell you about. The walk was treacherous, with tons of holes and spider-infested ditches.

When we reached the van, everyone let out a sigh of relief.

When I got home, my mom asked, “Was it like last summer?”
“Nope. At least no spiders falling out of trees onto my face.”

Where Do You See Nature?

SOPHIA (ROBIN) HANSEN

I see nature everywhere.
In the behaviorisms of people.
In the interwoven structures mankind has created.
In the ever-changing sky
and the treetops that line it.
In the curtain of mountains
and hills
shrouded by impossible clouds of flowers
that have been worked into a tumultuous tapestry.

 We are surrounded by nature,
as vines interweave between broken signage,
or within the tendrils of a fractured light bulb.
Nature is the flesh and blood of our existence—
the tailbone of rigid pines at our back,
with oceans that swell for a heart
and rocky shores to spill it from our daring mouths—
and as such,
our green-tinted eyes
constantly search for it.

Ink

KAIA HAVELY

Ink in water is thick and dark,
Clouding and spreading as it pulls apart.
Ink in water merely grows,
Wiping out all that's left of what clear water shows.
Blooming, it opens, a dark flower, a bane,
A blight called humanity, every person its name.
When once there was water, so clear, bright, and fresh,
Now only remains that black smudge against flesh.
Disturbed as is nature, who for so long grew free,
Wrapping claws around order, and ripping out trees.
Ink in water is thick and dark,
Our own human footprint, it pulls the whole world apart.

White Picket Fence

ILEANA HILLS

This short short-story is inspired by a quote:

“My body is a haunted house that I am lost in. There are no doors but there are knives and a hundred windows.”

—Jacqui Germain

This is not a house I want to be in. The rooms are big, and cold. The kind of cold that aches deep inside, that makes you wonder if the chill isn't from the air around you, but from your bones themselves. However, if I idle in one place for too long the walls start to close in, suffocatingly. I choke on the stifling air as they fold inwards on themselves. Crushing what is left of me. So I opt to tiptoe from room to room, across moaning floorboards, up and down spiraling staircases that seem to lead nowhere. Avoiding carpet tacks that pierce my soul and shards of glass that leave cuts too deep to heal. Shadows chase me, nipping at my heels like more sinister poodles. I playfully dodge them and they grow. I'm being chased by wolves and bears. They watch without eyes, staring into my core. I flee (run) from them. Foot after foot, desperately dashing (fleeing) from room to room. Through closets and cupboards, across mantels, and up book shelves. They are always just behind me. Until I'm scooped into their arms and their darkness engulfs me. Wrapped in their cradling arms I become them. The absence of light a familiar comfort that I fall into and embrace. They make me feel special, significant, like they have chosen me. They are mine, and mine alone. I cling to them and their normalcy, until their darkness suffocates me, like the walls, and I'm forced to swim from their murky depths. They lurk back to their corners, underneath ottomans and twin beds, to watch and wait until the next time they come out to play. The house is filled with silent screams that pierce my mind. It smells of death and decay, with a hint of roses. There is room. A room I try to avoid, but always find myself standing in. A room of mirrors. Mirrors that taunt and whisper, but when I search for the source or their mutters, I only see myself staring

back at me, sneering. How could someone be so cruel? They can't be shattered, even if I tried. Occasionally I hear the wails of a little girl that time forgot. She screams to be let out, and I try to find her, to comfort her, but her cries are everywhere. Reverberating down empty hallways and corridors. I can never reach her. She is as lost as I am. Windows cover almost every surface. They watch indifferently, seeing right through me like glass. Unknowing eyewitnesses to my torture. Knives chase me, their blades scraping the wooden floors. They slice at me, taking bits of everything I am, until there's nothing left but shaking hands and wisps of hair. Because maybe that's all I am. And maybe that's all I will ever be. And maybe, I'd do anything to get out of this house.

Too Depressed to Express How He Feels

S. JASON LEE

It only seems as if he's alone.
As he sits motionless mind speaking different tones
To him it's confusing,
To his demons amusing,
Is it the loneliness that he seeks
Or just a world less bleak.
Slowly he feels his emotions slip away
His anger now feasts on events not from today
Stuck in an endless loop of existence
He cannot muster up the courage for resistance
Those thoughts are not wrong
More like serpents so he's careful where he treads

Don't let your past make today your last
He's going to try
It's a trick to tell yourself you're not allowed to cry
A man that strong is doomed
Over him the darkness looms
It will never leave him
One day it will deceive him
Force him to say goodbye to his friends
Tell them how his happiness is a broken lens
His sadness cannot be cleansed
At this point it's not his anymore
He is so empty you could put his whole world on tour
However he is being built
If it does not kill him he will flourish

Toothbrush

EZRA LEWKOWIEZ

I'm sitting with my fellow people on a smooth white surface. It's dark and cold but we have each other. I looked around for a fellow toothbrush and spotted one. I rolled towards him. He was old and . . . OH THE HORROR! What happened to him!?! His face was chewed and beat-up. "Run," he whispered under his breath. "*Before it's too late!*"

Suddenly a wall opened wide and cold air rushed through. The old toothbrush was seized.

A huge, hairless claw tossed him into a metal cylinder. I was next. I tried rolling away but it was too late. The beast snatched me. I felt its oily, warm skin rub against me. I expected it to toss me along into the cylinder, but instead it shoved a sticky white paste onto my face and threw me into its jowls. I was violently swung back and forth. When the beast was finished with me, it put me back where I was. I found myself drenched with a gooey clear liquid. Could this be the life of a toothbrush?

The Unexpected Day

MEARA MCBRIDE

I was in Town Square, playing my guitar. I had a suitcase out and a crowd of people around me. Then the Queen of England appeared out of nowhere. Nobody knew about her visit. She apparently hates music, so she arrested me. I did not know how she had the power to do that in America. Then I heard someone in the crowd say that Queen Elizabeth was president for a day.

She flew me all the way to England from Denver with two of her security guards. Once we were in England, the guards took me to some gift shops. I don't really know why, I guess that they wanted me to have a little fun before I starved to death in a dirty, bad-smelling dungeon. I got two souvenirs: a new cell phone with an English accent, and an English flag.

Then I rode in a limo to get to her castle. When I was in the limo, I got a gallon of water, some pizza, and a Jolly Rancher.

When we got to the castle, the guards dragged me to the dungeon. It smelled like rotten cheese. I sat in the dungeon for a week.

On the seventh day, I had drunk all of my water.

I noticed that there was a large vent that was loose. I crawled through the vent and escaped out the back door. I escaped with only my fold-up guitar and two souvenirs in my pocket.

I used the limo to get to the airport. Then I saw a family with six children. They had a huge carry-on bag. So I slipped into their bag when they were not looking.

After we landed, I got out of the bag when all of the family went to the bathroom. Then I called an Uber. And when I got home I took my souvenirs out of my pocket. Then I went to bed.

I guess the queen could have put me in juvie in Denver, where I wouldn't have escaped, but I guess the queen is too old-fashioned.

Fortune and Ivory

GRACE MCCLUNG

The corner of Fortune Road and Ivory Avenue was as much of a highway as it was a parking lot. Sometimes it was a shadow, blending into the thorns and prickly brambles of the rose bush or lost in the flickering darkness of the street lamp. Passersby, people toting stroller and briefcases and shopping bags, passed the corner without even stopping to notice the rose-colored blossoms sprouting from inky green leaves. They didn't notice the street lamp or how it dipped its head and curved its neck to shine light on the ground.

But sometimes the corner of Fortune Road and Ivory Avenue was a place to stop. On occasion there would be people standing on the corner, admiring the traffic on the streets that they were lucky enough not to be caught up in.

Sometimes the little girl with corkscrew hair and dimples on both cheeks would stop on her way home for the store and set down the bags of vegetables and milk her mother needed for dinner to smell the roses. She would delicately lift one to her nose and inhale the scent, the worries of returning home late fleeing her head. Then she would continue on her way, skipping as the milk sloshed in the carton and the smell of rose buds lingered on her fingers.

At night, the street lamp would struggle to shine a little brighter, and sometimes the old couple who lived a few blocks away would step into the darkness of the corner, the street lamp soon giving up, to look at the stars during their moonlit stroll. And when the street lamp was at risk of being removed, it was argued by the little girl with corkscrew hair and the old couple on their moonlit stroll that it should be kept to illuminate the cracks in the pavement, to give the rose a spotlight, to allow the stars and the pitch black of the night to wash over those who stood under it. So, plans to remove it were forgotten and the corner of Fortune Road and Ivory Avenue became both a highway and a parking lot once again. Weeds squeezed through the cracks in the summer and snow dusted the ground in sugary layers in the winter. The street lamp no longer

tried to show off what little light it had because it was appreciated in small separate ways.

For this the little girl with corkscrew hair and dimples on both cheeks and sloshing milk was delighted because the rose garlands she wrapped around it made it look brighter, prouder. And the old couple on their nighttime walk blocks away from their home were satisfied because they could gaze at the stars in company of the street lamp, a dull figure turned friend.

Clock Work

EMMA MORROW

Here lies Claire Handelson, she was as diligent as the time. 1990-1999

The repetition of a ticking clock is indecent. Claire itched with a hate for every marked second she sat there. Keeping her distance from the incessant noise on the lengthy couch with its sleek, white leather and pillows designed to look soft that were actually quite rubbery. It was cold and lonely. Tucking herself into the vacancy of the couch like a blanket, she tapped her index finger in tune with the slipping seconds. The room had a certain malice, the desk and wheel-y chair across from her a metallic silver and she could almost taste the bitterness of the color in her mouth. There was a bookshelf lined with fat books all luring in gullibility with claims they could change her life. Claire wasn't a big reader anyway, too many words and not enough colors. The voice of her psychopharmacologist was murky, becoming sound traveling through water that incoherently bounced and echoed around her ears. She was listening to something else anyway. The clock on the wall, a classic black-and-white one hanging by the books. Today he was particularly rowdy, ranting, mocking, "Your life is nothing but trash the sewage rats turn their noses up at. You're a waste of space and time that I count. Every second you live will just count down to the next fruitless event until you're nothing at all. I count the days of your death, my dear, not because it's important, but because I find your mortality amusing."

Annoyed by his antics, she simply gritted her teeth and laxly shifted her gaze over to the doctor who wore an impatient scowl that highlighted every deep wrinkle in his face.

"Miss Handelson, were you even listening?"

A smile quavered on her lips; she felt nothing but lethargic and fatigued with the man. "No, not at all. Your clock is rather loud, you see, and likes to talk over you." The doctor's eyebrows slowly retreated to his tacky toupee "My clock?"

“Yes.”

There was an awkward silence that was filled with an amused tittering of the clock.

“He talks to me every day, but for some reason he’s being very rowdy about death.”

A bewildered snort left the man’s hairy nose. “Is that so?” he asked, eyebrows creeping a bit higher, wrinkling his forehead in a nasty prune-like fashion.

“Yeah, but usually he just talks about you and the pretty girls you do ugly stuff to. Says he’s counting down the days you have left until your wife finds out.”

A sickening paleness washed out his face, revealing a pulsing indigo vein in his forehead. A belligerent red crept up his neck and infected his face like a wildfire.

“You little *bitch*.” His voice hissed and sizzled like hot coals dying under cool water. As if her eyes were flowers, they bloomed. Large and terrified, consuming her face. Nobody had ever talked to her in this manner; her body shrunk into itself.

“The clock told me...” she whispered, trailing off under the sting of his enraged glare. A cold tremor grabbed her vertebrae and shook her spine like a storm rattling house windows.

There was another lingering silence, but this time even the clock was still from anticipation. Without the ticks to tally fated breath, Claire was stuck in eternity.

Eyes wandering like curious mice scouting for a prize in the maze, she met his gaze once more and was surprised to find no venom left in his eyes.

“What I was saying was, taking this pill every night with dinner will hopefully clear your mind enough for sleep. I’ll just need your mother to sign for them and they’re yours to try.”

Still shaken, she nodded and slipped from the room doing a rehearsed exchange with her mom at the door. Sitting in the plastic waiting chairs, all a feverish yellow that reminded Claire of her grandmother’s worn eyes. She intertwined her fingers in her lap, the sweat blending on her palms and creating a numbing sensation.

“Hey, girl.”

Claire looked to the grandfather clock, the only authentic decora-

tion the room possessed. The rich brown flavor of the wood standing out boldly in the dull minimalistic style, hopefully counting down the days when humanity gets their taste back.

“Time’s a-wasting!” he called in his creaky tones, cackling maniacally. The trivial comment made her redirect her attention to the woman at the counter. Her dark skin shining sweetly under the silver lights as she scribbled away at her paperwork. Claire wondered if she was still doing heroin when the office room was vacant, but she wasn’t about to ask that nosy clock. The gentle creak from the door signaled her mother’s return; she felt a careless pat to her head. Her aloof mother distant from the moment.

“Let’s hope these are the magic ones,” she murmured in a weary tone as the automatic doors slid shut behind them.

Claire’s eyes lay on the digital clock that read 9:00, waiting for dusk to consume itself and make way for the parade of stars. Her room was dimly lit by the amber glow of her flower-shaped night light. A vague green warmth of worn stars on her ceiling provided a nostalgic and comforting feeling that dulled the painful wait for the “magic” to kick in.

“Won’t be long.” The clock strained his voice from the hallway, trying to reach her, and Claire genuinely smiled.

9:30, Claire twitched her left arm. It was numb and still, reminding her of the poor imitation of her ceiling stars. Her chest felt constrained under glass, weakening her light as if she was the night light. She rejected the once-snuggly blankets that now held her in a deathly grip. Wearing a coat of sweat like a second skin, she fought out of the walls closing around her and burst through the door. “You were such a smart girl,” cooed the hall clock, and she stared into its red, angular face that was permanently smug.

“Did you really think he’d let you go after what you said? We told you your time was wasting, why don’t you ever listen, Claire? I count another thirty minutes of your life, use them well.”

A sob cut through the stillness of the house.

10:05, the home was vacant. The echoes of the past ushered away from the ticking of a clock.

The Key

ANTOINETTE NGALULA

The door creaks open and closes tight. I try to open it but it's locked. I look around seeing nothing but a damp room with a rusty couch in the center. I take a seat and close my eyes, but then open them into a whole new world inside me. I look up seeing an image painted with darkness and fright. As it disappears into the depths of my mind I try to be calm but it feels like I'm strangled and locked inside. I close my eyes tight, thinking it'll all be gone, but deep down I know that I must brave and trust my heart, for it's the only key I have left to explore.

A Rare Part of the World

ALMA ORTIZ SAWAYA

There's a part of the galaxy that no one really knows about, a small sliver of space that inhabits many types of species, animal hybrids, wizards, etc. This place is known as Alexandria.

These inhabitants have something in common: they each have a crystal residing somewhere on their body. The crystal gives them a unique ability (power, if you will). For example, a woman has a rose-colored crystal on the palm of her hand and it gives her the ability to control others' movements by manipulating their blood flow. However, the crystal doesn't manifest until someone has reached the age of 15 years old; they are born with the crystal but do not receive their power until their 15th birthday, or a few weeks after.

Alexandria has been around for centuries and no harm had come to it—no serious threats have reached this beautiful world until one day, in the month of the Peridot, a baby boy was born with a black stone on the left side of his neck. Prophecy says that if a baby is born with a black stone anywhere on its body, he will more than likely inherit a dangerous power and potentially become a major threat—become a bloodthirsty killer and destroy Alexandria altogether. The baby's parents decided to hide the truth from their child, so he won't find out the truth about his formidable future. They named him Elias, meaning "lord is my god," his parents praying that the savior will purify his body and soul from becoming a horrific killer.

Fifteen years later, in the month of the Peridot, (or August, to simplify things), Elias was celebrating his 15th birthday and was very excited to find out what his power was. After a full day of bombarding his parents with questions that remained unanswered and only enlarged his curiosity, he went to bed with a mind full of possibilities and a never-ending trail of thought.

In the wee hours of the morning, the deafening sound of silence filled the house, not a creak of the floorboards, no dripping faucets, nothing. Elias was sound asleep in his bed when all of a sudden, his eyes shot open and—instead of being their natural teal-green

color—his eyes were a deep shade of red. He sat up slowly, his sleeping attire changed into an eerie black robe, and his light brown hair began to turn a snowy-white. An enormous midnight black scythe appeared in his hand. He was an exact copy of the grim reaper.

Mirror

MADISON PATTERSON

You'll see you backwards,
But the same.

What if that's what they see...

You backwards,
But the same.

Untitled

ISABELLA PEREZ

You gave me just enough to pull me in
You had more than enough to keep you busy
Everything
I gave you my everything
Thinking the more you had, the longer you would stay
Maybe this would be made into forever
A promise of forever
A promise of fulfillment
But it would never be
Only temporary heart-wrenching lust
Like a fly stuck in a web, I was stuck
Stuck in your empty promises and little white lies
Why were you somewhere else?
Where the hell were you?
I was gripping onto something so tight, not knowing it had already
 slipped through my fingers
You promised the pain gone
At first, it had never been worse
But the relief
The relief of letting go was like finally exhaling after holding my
 breath for so long
An oversized weight off my chest
You were faking it
Maybe so was I
When looking through the telescope of my heart I saw an illusion
 of something that wasn't there
I only see memories dripping with regret
Memories of your once sweet scent only to turn rotten as a corpse
The corpse of our bliss almost-relationship
Now I can fight everything in my head
In my head, my thoughts are keeping me busy giving you blame
Now they're on paper spitting on your name

Biking on a Field from a Blade of Grass's Point of View

AARON PRATT

I have billions of brothers and sisters. As a blade of grass, solitary moments don't come often. A sibling is either on top of me or rubbing up against me, so I've gotten used to these uncomfortable situations. But it is always a relative, and I'm fine with that, but when an enormous black wheel rolls on top of me at high speeds, pinning me to the ground and de-rooting my cousins, it is a different story. I am relieved when the giant destroyer comes to a halt, but the peace doesn't last for long. The terrifying foot of an adolescent *homo sapiens* slams me and my family members back against the muddy ground. To make matters worse, the two humans sit on us, and begin talking! As if sitting on us wasn't irritating enough! The last thing I want to do is hear them babbling about "school" and "Comic Con" and what not! Luckily, I can tune them out by thinking about how *pathetic* the human race is. Who do they think they are? Thousands of years ago, they came here and the plants welcomed them. And how do they repay us? They take their gleaming, silver axes and hack down my grandparents (trees) and use them as a place to live! Yet we plants are so graceful, we remain peaceful. Imagine if trees cut people's arms off and used them as shelter! They would charge at us with their vicious battle cries and make sure every tree, living or dead, would be turned into mulch, yet these two kids talk about Comic Con. How typically human.

Man

WILLIAM QUALLS

Once upon a time there was a superhero. His name was Man. Man loved tattoos. So, on his tenth tattoo, he decided to get one that said, “Super Tattoo.” But actually, it said, “Sooper Tato.” When the skin reacted to the ink, it went inside his veins, and then it went to his brain. And that’s how he got his superpower. His superpower was that he could give misspelled tattoos.

For his sister’s birthday, he got her a Skyland action figure. The figure was a girl with horns. He bought it just so he could use it. She didn’t like it at all. So he gave her a “Happy Birthday” tattoo on her forehead, but it spelled “Hepepe Borthday.”

Stranded

SELEN SERDAR

July 12, 1:30 P.M. I think I'm the only one who survived the plane crash. My compass says I've been walking northwest. I don't know why, but I'm drawn to this direction. I've been going for about an hour and I just stopped under a tree to write this and rest a little. The plane crashed in the middle of nowhere and all I see are grass, trees, and a really big rock really far away. I'm going to try to go to the rock. Maybe it can shelter me or something. Also, there's no cell service here. I wish I could call someone for help.

3:00 P.M. You were probably thinking I reached the rock. Well, I haven't because it's far away, and also I've been taking a lot of breaks. I'm kind of in a bad situation right now because I just ran out of water and the thing is probably at least a few miles away. My GPS works, and it says that something's there, but it doesn't say what. I guess I just have to see for myself.

3:15 P.M. I don't know how I'm so calm. It doesn't feel very real. A plane crashes and the only survivor is a 14-year-old girl. This only happens in books, right?

4:00 P.M. I'm here. How could I have thought it was a rock? It's a house! Like a house people would live in! It's empty, but I'm going to try and get in. Maybe there's some source of water in there. It's really creepy how there are iron bars over the windows.

The door won't open. It's probably locked. I'm going to look into one of the windows and see what's inside.

The windows are really hard to see through. All I see is a dusty old table. There's a kitchen, too. Maybe their sink still works. As far as I can see, the only floors are an attic and the main floor. None of the windows will open. There isn't anything in the tiny garage besides a really deflated basketball, and there isn't a pump for it. Since the garage was open, I went in. Yes, there was a door leading inside, but it was also locked. But still! There's (hopefully) water in there! I need to find another way in. I think I see a chimney. Though, I haven't seen any possible way to climb up this house yet.

4:20 P.M. I found a ladder attached to the side of the house and now I'm writing this on the roof. I'm not going down the chimney, that was a ridiculous idea. I found a skylight. Since I'm desperate, I'll just break it and get in.

It's too thick. I threw a roof shingle at it and it broke the shingle instead of the glass.

4:34 P.M. I found another skylight! The good news is, it's already broken. Hmm, wonder how that happened. The bad news is, it leads to somewhere really dark.

I went in. The ceiling is really low. I'm short, so that's saying a lot. I think this is the attic. There aren't any lights or anything really. There's a door leading somewhere, but I'm too scared to go through it yet.

4:40 P.M. I went through the door. It's a bathroom. There's an oil lamp on the counter, but I don't have anything I can light it with. There's a sink, but when I turned it on something really weird happened. As soon as I turned the knob, a whoosh of stinky gas escaped. Now the whole attic smells like sulfur and it's making me nauseous. I'm going to try to find a way downstairs.

5:00 P.M. I keep hearing footsteps, but I know that I'm the only one here. I'm starting to panic. Maybe this house is haunted.

5:27 P.M. Silly me. Ghosts don't exist. But I'm starting to regret getting into this house. I always feel like someone—or something—is touching me, but when I look, there's no one there. I should start looking for a place to sleep. Or a way to get out. It's getting dark outside.

7:00 P.M. I found a way downstairs! There was a door in the floor that opened to reveal a staircase, and the staircase led to the bottom floor. Right now, I'm in the kitchen. I tested out the sink and it works! I let it run for a few minutes because I don't know how long the water's been there. This house seems pretty old. I wonder why no one cut their water supply. It doesn't look inhabited...

8:00 P.M. I decided I'm not going to sleep. I need to keep watch.

I made myself a comfy place with my travel pillow and my jacket. Now I'm just going to read my book until the morning.

9:00 P.M. Never mind. It's a scary book. So far, a little bit of scary stuff has happened here. Once I was looking down at my book, then I heard a creaking sound so I looked up. One of the chairs by the table might have moved a little bit. I don't know for sure because if it did, it was only a tiny bit and I've convinced myself it was a trick of my eyes. I also still hear footsteps, even though I'm the only one here, I hope...

6:23 A.M. I think I fell asleep. It's light outside. I can't find my jacket anywhere. It's not on me, on the floor, or in my backpack. I feel like there is a tiny, tiny chance of this house being haunted. Probably not, though. Ghosts don't exist. But something really weird just happened. I actually saw a chair scoot back, at least two feet from the table. I think I need to find a way out of here.

Bob's Nature Super-Story

KEVIN SCHWARTZ

One day in the forest a nine-year-old boy named Bob got separated from his hiking group because he saw a rock that was red, orange, gold, and yellow—the boy's favorite colors. But when Bob touched the rock he fell asleep.

One year later, Bob woke up and looked around and said, "Where am I?" He looked around some more and said, "Hey, look, my favorite-colored rock."

Bob picked up the rock and heard a crazy voice. "You were chosen by the forest to help save the world with nature. Nature gave you the power to think of what you want to do to someone or something and then it will happen. But you have to keep the rock with you."

Bob picked up the rock and shot the rock in millions of pieces. Then Bob made all of the pieces fly up and then slammed the pieces into his body. Then he flew up into the sky with fire. Then he flew around the world looking for forest problems.

In Washington, Bob was in the middle of the forest when he saw two people cutting down tree by tree. And Bob said to himself, "I need to stop those tree cutters." Then he swooped down and the fight was on.

First, Bob destroyed the people's axes with lasers. Then Bob shot out handcuffs that clung to the people's hands. As the people fled, Bob soared ahead of them and grabbed their handcuffs. Then he called the police.

After the police left, Bob restored all the trees the people had cut down.

The End

Just Another Monday

SAGE SHRIVER

My alarm buzzes and I attempt to click snooze, only to be overpowered by it and force myself to open my eyes. I click on my phone and read the date, nothing but “Monday” processes and I let out a groan. Monday. The most hated day ever. If Monday were alive it would spend all its time crying because of how hated it is. And being a “Monday” is its very own thing because there’s no other day like it. The day when you have to wake up at six from being used to waking up at twelve, even if it was for only two days, and find motivation. And if motivation were alive, it would spend all its time hiding from Monday because, as demonstrated many, many times before, it’s very hard to find motivation on a Monday. And I subconsciously look for motivation in the morning, but I completely consciously look for motivation on a Monday. And even though I dig and dig, I just can’t seem to find this thing called motivation! So, I have to make up my own motivation, at least enough to get me out of bed. And then once again I dig and dig but it seems to appear when there’s nothing to wear, even though I have a fine collection of clothes! If clothes were alive they wouldn’t do anything but make me lost and confused, like I’m drowning in oceans and oceans of clothes that match perfectly fine, but decide to play evil tricks on my eyes until I reach the bottom and end up wearing whatever! So, then I go to get some breakfast and as soon as I open the cabinets, my God! So many choices! If food were alive it would make itself look more delicious than the other thing to the point where I want everything! But decide on the typical Cheerios. Then I look at the time and oh my! I’m going to be late. And if time were alive it would fast forward on me unexpectedly until I’m half ready and sprinting out the door, only to await my doom, school, on a Monday! And of course, if school were alive it would make itself so boring so that I’m half asleep. Every. Single. Class. Until I can go home and finally declare, That I do not like Mondays!

An Ode to Brown Eyes

ELAINA WEAKLIEM

My best friend from middle school had eyes the color of the “wine-dark” sea Homer described in *The Odyssey*. There were these little gold flecks towards the center that I used to count like blessings when she laughed. I wanted to have the sparkling Mediterranean in *my* eyes; I wanted to have eyes that people wrote love songs about—the kind that you only find for those with crystal blue in their irises. I wanted to have eyes the exact shade of grey as rolling rain clouds, or eyes so green that even those who never liked poetry in the first place couldn’t help but compare them to light shining through aspen leaves. I didn’t want to look in the mirror and think of the color of mud. *I* wanted only the most beautiful parts of the world in the windows to my soul. I didn’t think that brown eyes could be beautiful, because they were the most common color, and I mistakenly thought that beauty was only real if it was rare.

So, my brown-eyed people, know this. Your eyes are the color of the soil that makes the green trees grow, the cliffs that hold back the swirling sea from the land. Your eyes range from oak to cedar and cinnamon and chocolate; we need cliché descriptions for brown eyes the way every pair of blue eyes can be compared to the ocean or the sky. In the morning, your eyes are the color of the coffee you can smell from downstairs. Your eyes have shades of crimson and gold that’s only brought out under the light of the afternoon sun, and they gaze with the intensity of the bonfires you and your friends huddle around at night. When it gets dark, the stars make gold flecks in your eyes that the ones you love count like pennies in a wishing well. Your pupils are large, dark planets that will eclipse all light the longer they’re stared into. Your eyes are beautiful, they are love-song worthy, and they are never, never “just” brown.

My Trip to Disneyland

ELISE YANG

One day on my birthday, my family and some of my mom and dad's friends went to Disneyland. The first ride we went on was called Space Mountain. Space Mountain is a roller coaster in the dark.

That evening in Disneyland we went to eat dinner. After dinner, there was a Disney character parade. I went to the parade with my family and my mom and dad's friends. The parade was so good.

The second day we went somewhere else in Disneyland called Adventureland. I went on some fun rides that day, like when some people go in two cars from the *Cars* movie and we would race to see who won the *Cars* race. I won the race.

After dinner that night, I went to watch a water show, just me and my family. When we were watching the water show my mom went to buy me some blue cotton candy. The cotton candy was so sweet.

After the water show was over, we walked back to our hotel, and we went to sleep after we brushed our teeth. We got to sleep on bunk beds. I got to sleep on the top because it was my birthday.

The last day in Disneyland we drove to the movie theater to watch *Finding Dory* with my cousins. When we were watching *Finding Dory*, I wore a Dory shirt and a Dory skirt. We got to buy popcorn and candy. I love buying popcorn and candy at movie theaters.

After the movie, we went to eat noodles. The noodles were so good that I wanted another bowl of noodles. At lunch we talked about how good the movie was.

I hope we can do all this fun stuff again.

Monster

SONYA ZAKARIAN

The moment my eyelids banged open and I saw my bedroom ceiling I knew something was wrong. I sat up, panting, pressing hard against my pillow, trying to remember what nightmare had plagued my dreams this time, but the short, desperate breaths that my lungs squeezed out weren't mine. The raspy throat, the diaphragm nudging my ribcage felt like strangers, like pieces of cold metal weighing down my warm, soft flesh.

Shaken, I got up and poured myself a bowl of cereal. But when I reached out for the box, I caught a glimpse of the hand in front of me. Every finger was encased in blotchy pink skin, with scars running up and down the pinky finger. And then I saw the black fingernails. There was no way my mother would ever even let me near nail polish that dark. As a matter of fact, my nails were pink—or they should have been. Mariela and I had painted them together last week on her back porch. Mariela. The blotchy pink hand that wasn't my own moved slowly towards my neck, groping for the cord and the little beads that spelled out B-F-F. The necklace was still there. Thank God.

My mother's voice pierced the empty space around me suddenly, snapping me back to attention. "It's time for swim practice! Come on!" And so I pushed my thoughts away into a separate compartment of my mind, stumbling towards the door and shoving my feet into shoes that seemed to have shrunken overnight.

Before practice that day, I went through my daily routine in my head, perhaps for the sake of some much-needed normalcy. *How much are you going to give it today?* I decided on 85 percent. Sure, it was a step down from my usual 120, but it was a cutback that I could afford for one day. A cutback that I needed.

I plopped my bag down on the bench in the locker room. The pungent smell of chlorine and thick sweat overwhelmed me. I started to pull my clothes out of the bag, then froze. The presence of the other girls around was suddenly heavy, the presence of the thin,

Barbie-doll girls with perfect skin and perfect hair. I glanced over at Priscilla, who had already changed into her suit, and saw that, to my surprise, she had been looking at me, too. She had always ignored me up until that moment, and I had always ignored her. Not to be mean. That was just the way it was. And now, it felt like she was seeing me for the first time. I could feel her examining every part of me like a teacher would an art project, slowly taking me in, and there was something so critical about it all that I began to shrink away from her. There was a look in her eyes. I knew that look. I'd seen it before, time and time again, in Brad's eyes, in Mariela's eyes, even in my parents' knowing eyes.

Disgust.

I bolted out of the changing room and into a toilet stall. I let the door slam behind me, and my pudgy stranger fingers fumbled with the lock. *What was wrong with me?* Blood bubbled in my throat. I looked at myself, stared and stared and stared with ravenous eyes the way Priscilla had. And I understood that look in her eyes, for that same feeling was beating in my very heart and taking over my mind with fear. I, Jenny White, was living in the body of a monster.

Split

ALVINA ZHANG

I am scared of vulnerability,
but,
I'll be vulnerable for 90 seconds

People ask me who I am
and truly I am not sure
I am pulled by an ocean
floating, fluid, free

I am a list of words,
that build page after page,
but,
I'm not defined by ink.

I am me,
you can tell because
I'm the girl that laughs too much,
the girl who eats too much at the buffet,
the girl who refuses to conform,
yet cares too much about what people expect

I am my favorite shirt,
that I'm not confident enough to wear
I am an adventurer
living a bubble
I am a wannabe writer
and too much of a dreamer

I am scared of judgement
And embarrassment
And being too happy

I am scared of loving
and failure
and straying away from faith
and stepping away from comfort

I am me in the straightness of my hair,
in my always rosy cheeks,
in the one dimple carved in my right cheek

I am all these things,
yet nothing at all
Somehow at the same time,
I haven't found
who I truly am.

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