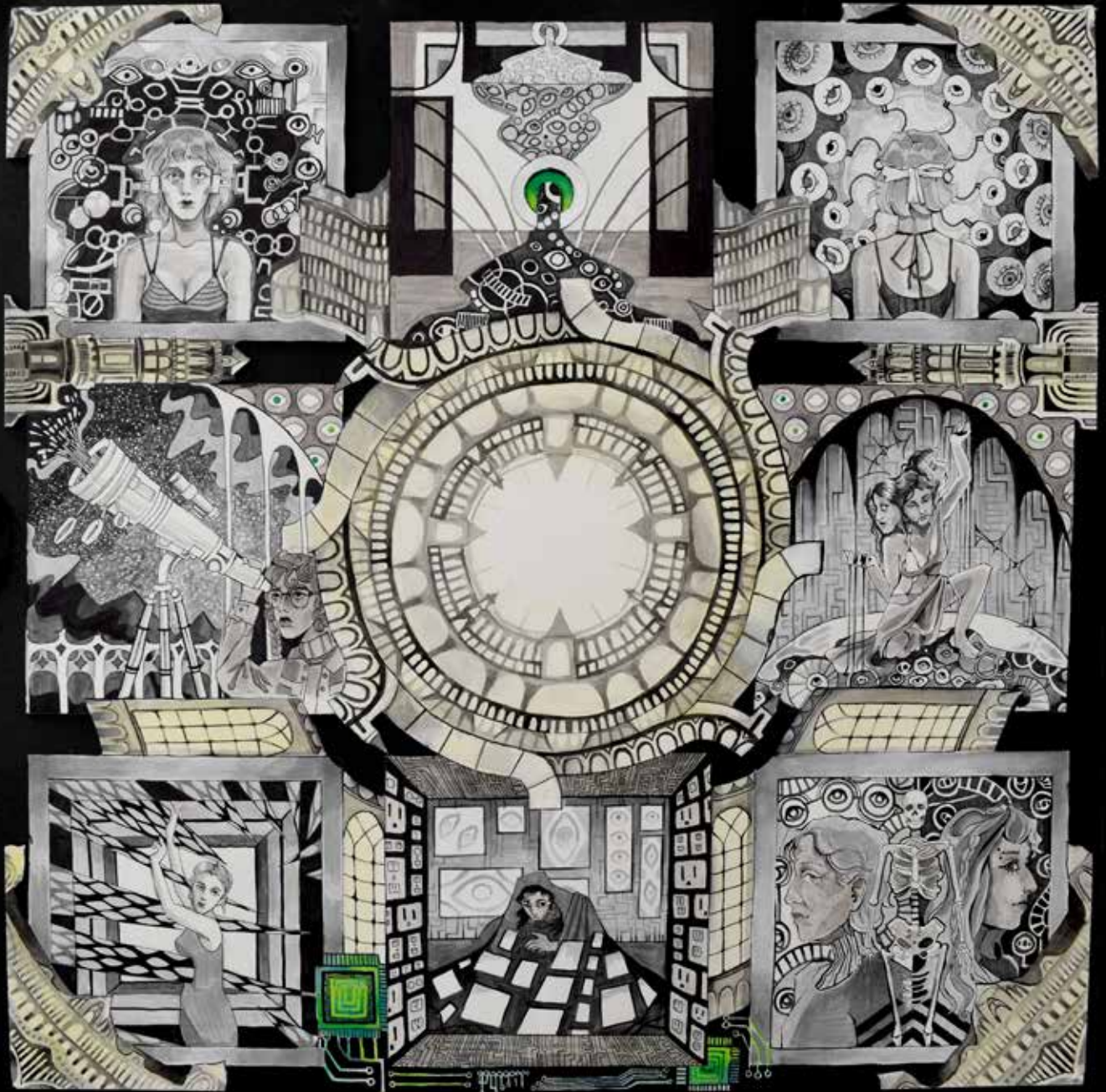


ANTHOLOGY 20 24



April 2024



DR. SCOTT ROWE
Superintendent

High School District 214 proudly celebrates student talent, creativity and voice at every opportunity. Nowhere is that more true than in the realm of fine and performing arts. Against that backdrop; we proudly present this latest edition of the Arts Unlimited Anthology.

This anthology, as many of you know, is but one component of Arts Unlimited, which this year marks its 48th anniversary. During this, my first year as 214's superintendent, I have learned one intriguing piece of 214 history after another. Among them: That today's Arts Unlimited stems largely from the vision of former Elk Grove High School teacher and division head Richard Calisch, who imagined and launched the event as a means of giving student creativity broad community exposure. What a success it has proven to be.

This anthology showcases the extraordinary artistic and literary works created by our talented students. I invite you to delve into this year's collection of poetry, short stories, visual art and essays. There is much here to ponder and enjoy. Spend some time with it over several sittings. You'll be amazed by the diverse array of student perspectives, articulated through unique creative expressions.

The anthology serves as a perfect complementary piece to the annual Arts Unlimited reception, which further highlights student performances and artworks. Yet another key component of Arts Unlimited is our partnership with the Daily Herald, which each year sponsors the Community Art and Writing contest - another avenue for celebrating creative expression.

All of these elements require, of course, a deep reservoir of support, planning and just plain hard work. For that, I thank our students and educators and also the Board of Education, which wholeheartedly supports these kinds of opportunities for students to explore and excel in the arts.

Special thanks go to the Arts Unlimited Committee, whose members give so much to make this all possible. I am proud to be part of a school district that is so committed to promoting and celebrating the arts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Rowe, Ed.D.
Superintendent

ANTHOLOGY

A collection of works by students of High School District 214



The mission of Arts Unlimited 214 is to provide all students with exposure to process-oriented perspectives through an ongoing celebration of the fine and performing arts.

Arts Unlimited 214 strives to inspire imagination and creativity amongst the District's diverse student body and to foster an awareness of the arts within our community.

COVER ART

Grace Schiltz | **Perception** | Prospect High School

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Damaris Abundez	Wheeling	20	Matthew Neswold	Buffalo Grove	56
Jude C. Ayala	Prospect	7	Eliana O'Connor	Wheeling	39
Scott Bartsch	Prospect	12 - 13	Alyssa Okulitch	Wheeling	38
Itzel Bernabe	Buffalo Grove	58	Julia Olson	Rolling Meadows	60
Christian Bivian	Elk Grove	18	Efe Ozalp	Prospect	37
Alex Bonnette	Prospect	52	Nate Parks	Elk Grove	34
Elana Brush	John Hersey	11	Triya Patel	Wheeling	44
Sydney Cabitac	Rolling Meadows	6	Bethzy Peralta	Wheeling	7
Mikaela Carreon	Rolling Meadows	43, 48	Claudia Podurgiel	Rolling Meadows	35
Akari Czyzewski	Wheeling	54 - 55	Dominic Polenzani	Rolling Meadows	27
Polina Dembitska	Buffalo Grove	10	Anastasiia Rusnak	Buffalo Grove	15
Zoe Dessimoz	Rolling Meadows	59	Ashtin Sagerer	Elk Grove	38
Salema Dordoeva	Buffalo Grove	23	Elina Saha	John Hersey	32 - 33
Adi Fox	Elk Grove	26	Noemi Sanchez	Rolling Meadows	37
Izzy Frye	John Hersey	25	Aaron Sang	Rolling Meadows	59
Sean Galolo	Buffalo Grove	53	Grace Schiltz	Prospect	cover
Aylin Garcia-Solis	Rolling Meadows	14	Liz Schrenk	Elk Grove	61
Haley Gayle	John Hersey	35	Zoi Siciliano	Prospect	21
Daria Gross	Wheeling	15	Gennesis Sosa	Buffalo Grove	41
Leah Hampton	Buffalo Grove	34	Miguel Suarez	Wheeling	53
Deanna Ilieva	John Hersey	22	Rhianna Tandy	Prospect	42
Daniella Jacob	John Hersey	20	Amreen Tejani	John Hersey	46 - 47
Anna Kartel	Elk Grove	23	Liyah Thomas	Wheeling	16 - 17
Wesley Koepl Jr.	John Hersey	58	Isaac Thompson	Rolling Meadows	36
Kelly Kurka	Rolling Meadows	21	Arianna Tiu	Prospect	31
Kiyomi Lee	Buffalo Grove	45	Clarissa Quintana Tolentino	Buffalo Grove	41
Ash Lehning	Elk Grove	8	Carolyne Torrejon	Wheeling	29
Sophie Luczak	John Hersey	28	Arturo Torres	Wheeling	50 - 51
Sophia Magenta	Elk Grove	40	Joaquin Valdecantos	Buffalo Grove	18
Andres Mejia Deleon	Wheeling	49	Lanna Vo	Elk Grove	19
Rupsa Mitra	Rolling Meadows	43	Audrey Wagner	Prospect	24, 25
Gabriella Murray	Elk Grove	57	Adeline Wind	Prospect	58
Valentina Mycyk	John Hersey	40	V. Wirth	Elk Grove	51
Maria Negrete	Elk Grove	49	Calvin Yao-Xing Wong	Elk Grove	9
Audrey Niezyniecki	John Hersey	57	Angelina Zayats	Buffalo Grove	30



Consumption | Sydney Cabitac

Laborer of Love | Jude C. Ayala

A life well lived
Is a life of many stories.
With poppy-seed-specks
Of pure energy
Pouring from a picture
Of a baby
Yet to become.

With soul-and-heart-hugs
With a prefix of advice
That's hard to swallow,
And a suffix of love
That acts as water to wash it down.

With long-decrepit-days
And the stress to match it,
But a heart of pure
To directly contradict
The way your brain worries.

With momma-bear-boldness
You act a damsel in dominance
And you work,
And work,
And your focus drifts to us...
All for a life well lived.



I See You | Bethzy Peralta

Timeless | Ash Lehning

Infinity is a stronger word than we all think.

Do we realize how big it truly is?

If you walk for infinity, you'll never stop walking. You will never stop

Never stopping.

So much.

Too much.

Too much to grasp.

And yet,

Here we are throwing it around like it's nothing.

So casual, unaware, and unassuming.

So what truly can be infinite?

Well, I don't think anything material can truly be infinite because how am I supposed to understand and believe such a thing?

But how about something like influence?

Hundreds of years pass and we still stare at a statue.

It's been broken,

And all of those pieces have been scattered across the earth, into the earth, spreading whatever it meant.

(Will we ever know what it meant?)

Interpretations ranging from beauty to power until we realize it's all the same.

The same object, the same painting, the same broken statue.

The thoughts, beliefs, and speculations of others based on one single object can be infinite.

Because this is the place where no one can be wrong, and all can be right.

The place where thoughts are thoughts are thoughts are welcome.

The abstract makes sense and the realistic leaves minds blank.

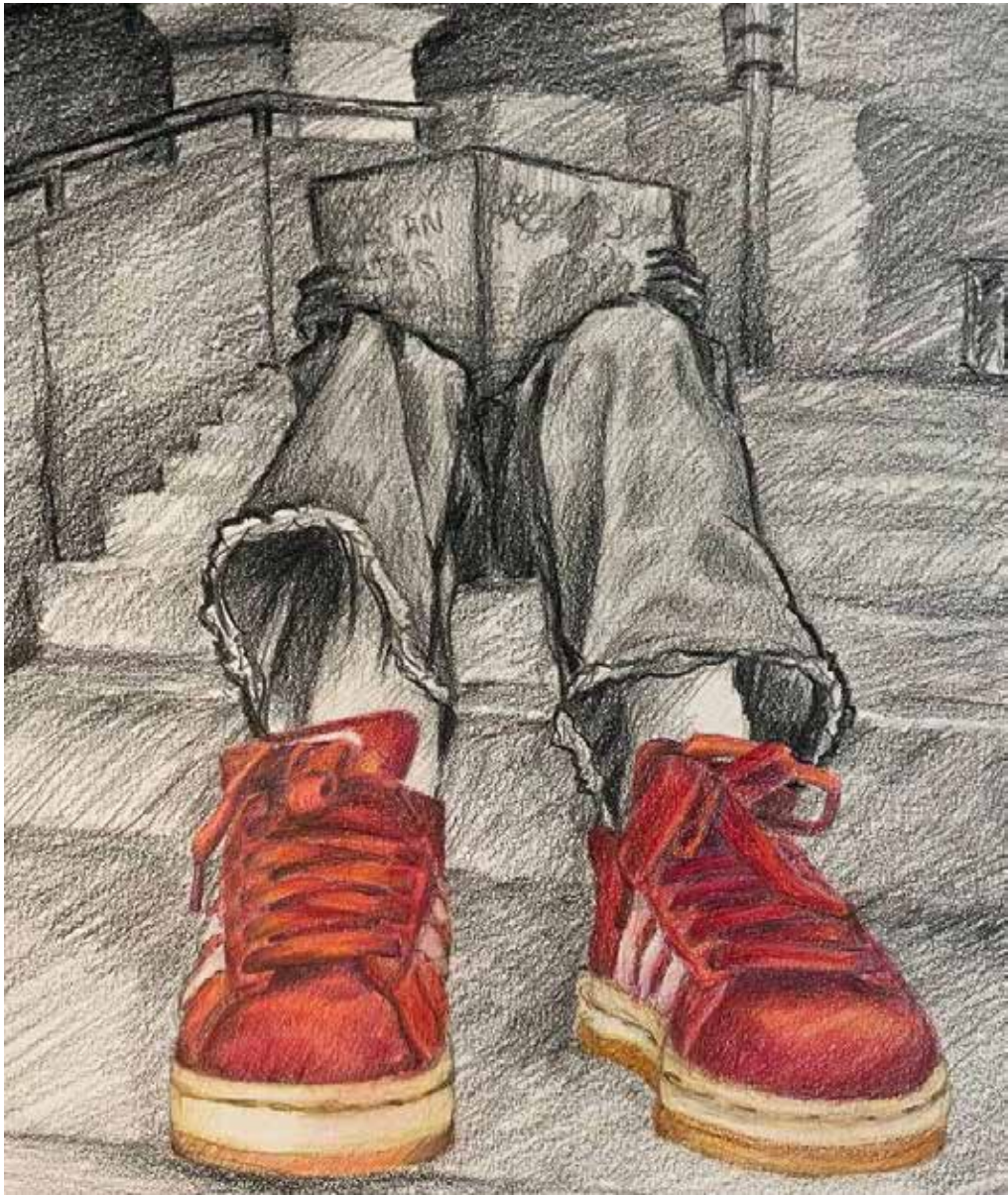
But blank is good.

Blank is the beginning.

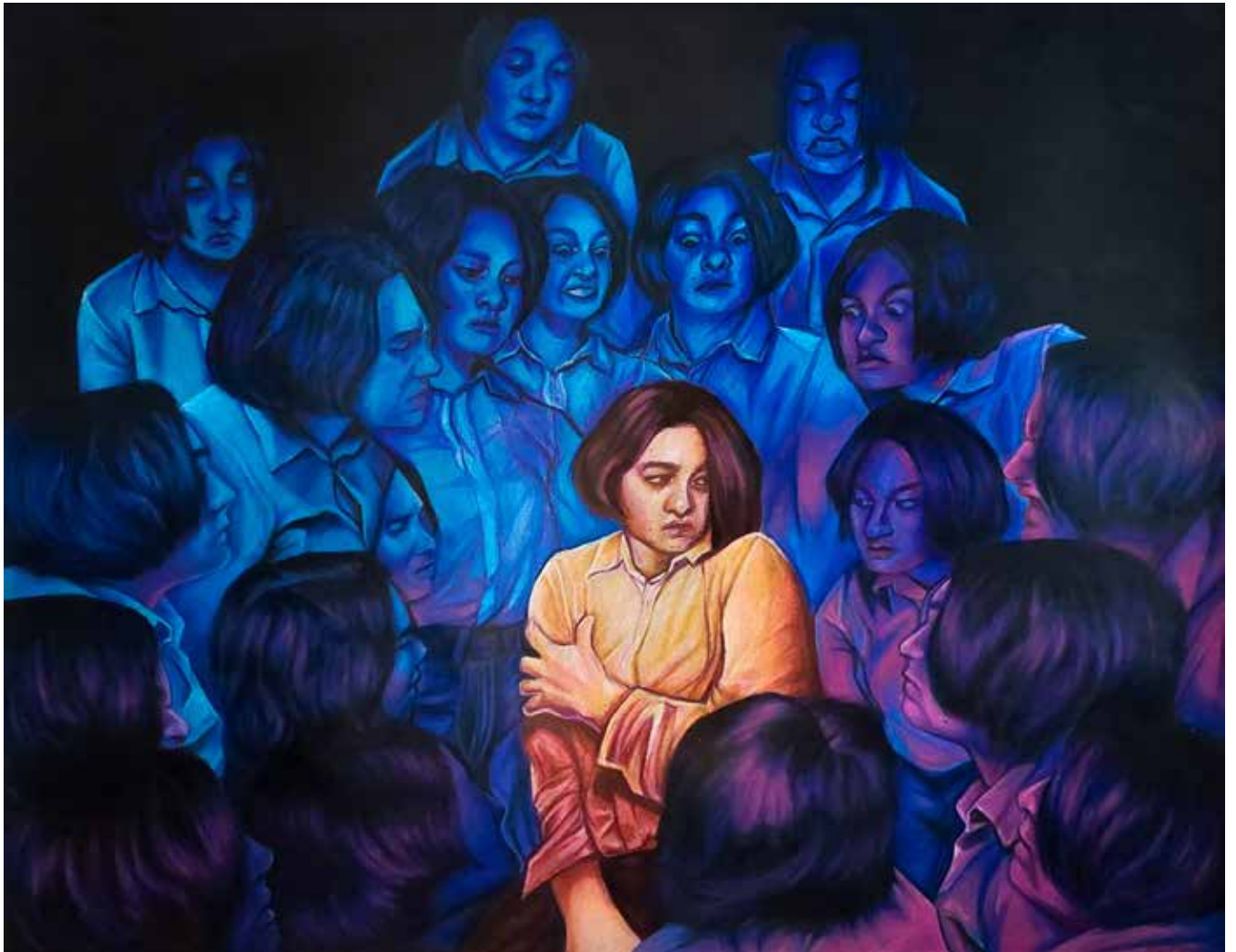
And infinity has to start somewhere.



Sweet Reflection | Calvin Yao-Xing Wong



The Sneakers | Polina Dembitska



Panopticon | Elana Brush

Not With A Bang, But A Spark | Scott Bartsch

“COME SEE THE END OF THE UNIVERSE IN JUST A MINUTE’S REST!” Announced the holographic ad outside of the QT terminal. My quiet steps echoed throughout the empty terminal, the dead air only interrupted by the advertisements lighting up the chamber. I stopped a few feet from the hologram that had disturbed my trance as it yelled once again to the still empty terminal.

“Why not?” I asked nobody in particular, not that there was anyone I would’ve asked in a more crowded space. Below the hologram was another with a join button, my fingers passed through it, and the strange tingling of quantum tunneling filled my body.

It took me to a small office similar to the terminal I’d been in only an instant ago in no way beyond its population. Outside the window was a black hole seemingly eating its way through a small binary solar system, as a brilliant particle jet shot out the top, spinning thousands of times a second. The warm brown walls were clearly holographic, and when I placed my hands against them, I felt them go through the illusory wallpaper and touch the cold neutronium steel.

A few short seconds later the wall opened, and a tall figure stepped through, its translucent skin revealing a miasmic pattern of circuits looping through the whole figure. These had existed for centuries, but they still fell dead-center on the uncanny valley, their movements always a little too fluid or jerky.

“Hi there! Welcome to the office at the end of the world!” The robot announced, laughing the same canned laughter all of its kind let out. I did not react physically, or mentally beyond the briefest recognition of its words.

“Follow me!” The robot declared, turning far too quickly, and walking back through the door. I followed, not much else I could do, and sat down in the chair opposite the robot.

“Just to confirm, you are here for the ‘End of the universe experience!’ Correct?” Its lifeless voice raised in pitch as it reached the name.

“Seems like it.” I replied, staring out the window, refusing to stare into the robots soulless gaze.

“Fantastic! Now just to be clear, you are aware this is one way correct?”

“Yes.”

A week later I was on the station, situated just outside the event horizon of the supermassive black hole which resided in the Great Attractor's center. Through the windows was its boundless darkness, and leaning my head I spied the station's reflections that surrounded it, the light curving around from the massive gravitational well. The single robot in the station announced it was time, and looking back towards the two other people filling the far too large station, I walked towards my bed.

A few centuries ago cryogenic stasis would've been the only solution to these expedited exoduses of the universe, but these days a far simpler one exists. I lay on my bed, and a thin sheet passed over me. A few seconds later I heard the fans turn on, filling my small biosphere with the most potent tranquilizers invented. I was out before my brain had fully registered the fans. A minute later, now that every human in the meager station was asleep, the solitary robot plugged its arm into the wall, slumping over shortly afterwards. The shuttle changed course, and rocketed into the event horizon.

I awake an incalculable amount of time later, at least to the universe. To me 27 days had passed, the monstrous gravity turning millennia into milliseconds. I couldn't see when I woke up, as any light that would have filled the shuttle had been siphoned away by the black hole. The robot finally turned back on, not that much different was notable, as its eyes remained in that dead stare they always had been. The robot turned on the small computer at the front of the shuttle, activated the Anti-Higgs field generator, stripping the shuttle of any Higgs-Boson's, briefly disassembling us, and allowing us to escape the often thought unbreakable barrier of the event horizon. We reassembled just outside, and my three compatriots and I stepped outside of our beds for the first time in 1.7×10^{106} years according to the ceiling mounted screen. The computer's light illuminated the whole shuttle, showing that out the windows there were no stars, and the black hole's accretion disk had vanished.

The shuttle prepared itself to quantum tunnel, and a few short seconds later we were there, just a few kilometers from the last black dwarf, the last remnants of the once beautiful universe that had fueled it. The massive iron sphere was visible only on the thermal vision screens, which showed it was seconds from supernova, the last supernova.

"Gather round folks, it's about to happen." Came the robots' still lifeless circuits. Through the window I watched the end, a seemingly infinite amount of time had passed yet even now, humans watched their weary mother give one last gift. I watched it until it finished, the brilliant explosion of the universe's finale. And when it ended I looked around and saw nothing, the ghost light of dead stars gone for trillions of years, humanity likely gone with it. In the end there was no answer revealed, no portal opened. In the end there was a spark, and then nothing. I still miss the spark, but now all there is is the nothing.



The Chained Beauty | Aylin Garcia-Solis

Ukraine | Anastasiia Rusnak

Her heart is broken
scars on her face
they will tell you
more
about her history
the green grove
became a black hell
everything dear to me was pelted with a
hail of steel
her warm hugs
will remain in
children's memory and now only the roar
of the wind
will wrap around
your shoulders
warm summer
the smell of flowers
and first trees planted with grandfather
endless sky like
endless childhood
my dearest I will
protect your dreams
remember your silent nights and loud carols
the most famous
in the world
which were born
under the bright Christmas sky of Lviv
smiling through the tears and pain
my beauty
black soil is only
for grain and poppies not for your heroes
my darling
the clear and deep
blue sky
is not for our
souls
oh the dearest place to my heart



Personal Surrealism | Daria Gross

Dear Santa | Liyah Thomas

Dear Santa, all I really want for Christmas is a nose ring, preferably one made of twenty-four karat solid gold straight from the Malabar Coast. After all, you owe me from what you put under the tree six Christmases ago. My fingers trembled with excitement as my eyes darted from present to present, admiring the snowmen on the ultramarine blue wrapping paper, each addressed "To Liyah" on top. The first gift I picked up had a rectangular frame. Using a left Riemann sum, I approximated the dimensions to be that of a new Macbook Air. I frantically ripped off the wrapping paper, only to be met with a cardboard box. Quizzically, I read the words "Three-pack Softsoap Body Wash Set" at the bottom. Seriously? What's a ten-year-old supposed to do with a lifetime supply of liquid soap? Hey...are you calling me smelly?!

Dear Santa, whoever was bored enough to invent Calculus deserves coal every single Christmas.

Dear Santa, why is making a left turn at a green light so nerve-racking? Typically, every time I approach an intersection, I merge into the left turn lane, fingers crossed on the steering wheel, lashing out at the traffic light, "TURN RED, oh, God, PLEASE TURN RED!" Why can't I just get the green arrow every time? I think the source of my apprehension when it comes to driving alone is my trauma from *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*. One of the most infuriating games ever created by mankind! Don't get me wrong, I start off pretty good. I remain focused, calculating the amount of torque I approximately need to push Luigi on the left into the vat of goopy lava. However, it's the whiplash turns that get me. Every time I attempt to turn, I somehow swerve off the entire course. Then, I awkwardly watch the vibrant parachute descend to receive me and put me back on the track. I don't even know why they try to save me after the first five times. Just let me drown in peace in those chocolate milk waterfalls of Sweet Sweet Canyon. As I'm strategizing, "So if the net centripetal force equals mass times velocity squared over the radius," I helplessly watch my five-year-old cousin pass me up. Then...I rage quit before the first round is over, refusing to cross the finish line and forestalling the next round. If I can't win, NOBODY wins.

Dear Santa, I think my optometrist is lying to me. There MUST be something wrong with my eyes because I don't know what I saw in that guy.

Dear Santa, how do I get my cat to stop locking himself in the first-floor bathroom? His name is Casper, and he's been acting very edgy lately. It's like he's summoning something in there. He sneakily moves into position, pounces with his little white paws, and SLAMS the door shut. With each THUD of the bathroom door, I expect the entire house to collapse and the walls to crack open demonic pathways to the pet underworld. The strange thing is, he doesn't even meow for help. Not a single sound, like he enjoys being locked in a dark, tiny room. But when I take him to my room, he stands at the door whining for hours, crafting a plea for help. Like, calm down, this is not a hostage situation! I didn't think he was religious. Well, then again, I guess I'm the one to blame for naming him after a ghost, so I guess it's justifiable that he would conduct some seances periodically. I bet he's attempting to curse the doberman next door. If that's his motive, I'll be more than happy to join Casper in his unorthodox ways. Extra candles? Rotten fish carcasses? No problem, I got it!

Dear Santa, next Christmas could you make my sister better at math (or even better, give her some common sense)? I lose brain cells everytime I try to help her.

Dear Santa, my thoughts abuse me, and sleep is a privilege. They accumulate like a glass plane shattered into a multitude of fragments. Some leave scars on the surface, while others pierce through my mind. Each day I prepare for battle, but the worries counterattack too quickly, always one step ahead. They now realize I am getting weak. Plunging their sharp blades deep in my spine, they come and go as they please, leaving me paralyzed. I've succumbed to overthinking, and I think I need some help before my mind consumes me.

"Wait, Santa?" I thought I saw you the other day, but it was just my dad.

Power Shots | Joaquin Valdecantos

I will never pick up a ping-pong paddle
without thinking
of you.
A warm spring evening moves us down
to the basement's cool air.
Mom's still setting up
karaoke, but
you're already leaning on the black table
holding a paddle as faded as your red shirt.
With a confident smirk, you beckon me over.
And I accept your challenge, smiling back.
We swing and shuffle and scramble
back and forth in worn house slippers.
It feels like we are pros
who just happen to miss often
and whose "power shots" fly straight over
somehow diving into a toilet bowl.
We lay our paddles down with
sweaty hands and goofy grins
and realize no one kept score.



Necromancer | Christian Bivian



My Love is My Own | Lanna Vo



Our Story | Damaris Abundez

The Death of a Dreamer | Daniella Jacob

No guarantees lie in simple yearning.
Oh, one's sole purpose in life?
Albeit passion can lead to success and earning,
Too much faith is placed in hope, until one feels the burning.
Pain sears hot through realization's blunt knife.

I love this dream reality; I'd rather never leave.
This love I feel, I'm expected to simply suppress?
Terror is to want so strongly and yet never receive,
But giving up on these hopes is one feat I cannot achieve.
Oh wishful thinkers, is intelligence to dream less?

An entire being, allowed to attach itself and wholly dedicate.
This longing makes my heart a heavy stone.
Drugs can help without the need to medicate.
Without these dreams, can life still end up great?
A happy ending should have no specifics, so why do I feel so alone?

Acceptance seems impossible, please, don't make me move on!
But the hardest part is over! You see, it's not so scary.
Realization's knife is long past drawn.
It struck into your heart upon
The moment acceptance seemed necessary.

Serendipity | Kelly Kurka

The rain cleared and the sun came out
And way she came, skipping about
The smell of petrichor hung in the air
She skipped with happiness, without a care
Lying in the creek is a pretty serendipity
But all the girl cared to do is pet the kitty
Running through the soft grass to do what she wished,
She leaped over grey stones, to see what the cat had fished
Peering over the cat, she asked, "What have you found?"
"Oh, why, you found a wedding ring made with love so profound."



Loud Static Noise | Zoi Siciliano

Peering through a frosted window,
her younger days she reminisced
Whilst her mood ebbed like the tide
under a black moon of memories
from those she thought she knew
seeking out ones that she had forgotten
Her essence floated on a course
without the compass of a sure mind,
All she saw were parallel lines that never connected,
transparency which did not come so clean
A memory of a hike in the woods
Her mother was in a hurry
The sun was setting and it was starting to rain
The girl was at home now
Sitting before a table with a lonely bowl of soup
She remembers that she had been cold
A long winded hike and the twist of hunger
As the soup steamed she didn't raise her spoon
She wondered if everything is destined to hold something
Should she persist in a life she isn't living or a life she is living?
Should she accept a life held within the bounds
Of a circular prism with its inverted possibilities
she disregards the nourishment she had tasted before
She walks down a wet road
A darkening sky and trees around her like shadows
A mother's voice is distant up the winding path
she no longer sees that aspect of her mother
Only the sound of her fading footsteps
If she does not succumb nor become,
Her life would be like that trailing sound
Somewhere in the wilderness
She will soon be ushered into a great herd of beasts
Does portrayal matter more than her humanity,
She had wondered.
She could not understand what was asked of her
To know is to give up something
To not know is to give up another thing
It looks like she loses either way,
As predetermined by the flaw of her crystalline prison



Retribution Collage | Salema Dordoeva



Grumpy | Anna Kartel



Justice | Audrey Wagner



Doe Eyed | Izzy Frye

The Universe is a Woman | Audrey Wagner

The universe is a woman.

All men want to do is disrupt and explore her.

Exploit every detail.

Try to reach every corner with their dirty boots and pride.

They cannot just admire from afar.

They have to touch her.

To say that they own and have seen every part of her.

They don't care about all of the stars that have been born.

They care that they've stepped foot on the moon.

They focus on the black holes that vacuum up planets, then call her dangerous and scary because they cannot handle her power.

They see her as some foreign creature as if we are not all a part of her.

Made of her.

They want to grind up her stardust and sell it, forgetting they are selling the very thing they are made of.

They find her beautiful,

But at what cost?

Pride of an Intellect | Adi Fox

From the moment you spoke there was nothing stopping my lacrimation,
A scientific word that I use when my face is filled with condensation,
Preoccupation with my own unfounded pride that faces no devastation,
My non participation with the fundamental values of our nation,
“Free Speech For All”, they speak, they preach,
They impart.
Yet my speech cannot be free like the eagles above
Because the limit is not them, but me
The values of intellect that I cannot concede,
My ego, My narc,
My fragile glass heart,
Overshadowed by my haunt and flaunt.
A confidence that covers up my gaunt.

12

The minimum amount of letters in the words,
Sorry,
Commandments that I tell
They tell me, “Oh wow, what an arrogant freak.
Isn’t it better if you leave you stupid-”

I then realize that my intellect is not what it seems
For I’ve done the most elementary aberration.
Aberration? I’ve even forgotten what stanza I’m on,
No reason nor rhyme to any word that I speak,
My one personality trait I’m losing as I confuse the basic English choosing,
But the problem isn’t my depreciation but the confusion of my lang,
The pronoun them and I are not the same as one would decide,
Who told me those words?

Only one intelligent deduction left, let me rewrite my mistakes,
just like the mirror that I embrace.
I told me, “Oh Wow, I can’t believe that. In front of me is this unspeakable guide.”

Not even can my pride escape this public reading that I anticipate.



Mountain Landscape | Dominic Polenzani



Clothed with the Sun and the Moon Under Her Feet | Sophie Luczak

How to Avoid Getting Bit by a Zombie | Carolyne Torrejon

Yikes! The apocalypse has spread worldwide within a week, and over half of the population has turned into zombies. Power lines have fallen onto houses, wildfires have expanded, and you've eaten all of your rations. A mad scientist is to blame. But there's no time to point fingers; all of humanity is in danger and so are you. Which is why I suggest you begin to RUN.

First of all, assuming you have agreed to take my direction, let me specify by saying that I wanted you to run as if you were running for your life and find any kind of shelter where there are absolutely no zombies. Screaming bloody murder while running will only draw the zombies' attention to you. And let me remind you that the #1 goal of surviving a zombie apocalypse is to keep all zombie teeth away from your brain, or any part of your body for that matter.

By the way, did you know that not all zombies eat brains? According to a recent study, only 5% of zombies identify themselves as ceretarian and will avoid consuming the cerebral part of the human body. Ceretarians follow a special diet that does not include the nervous system or the spinal cord because they consider that to be an unappetizing and nauseating part of the human body. If you ever come across a ceretarian, keep in mind that they'll only hunt you for your delectable living human flesh.

If you ever see any humans while looking for a spot to hide out, why not be kind and invite them to join your journey to survival? Besides, you're both in a man vs nature conflict. So it's best to stay together.

Oftentimes, humans and zombies can be indistinguishable. But always remember that dark circles, grogginess, and fatigue does not mean it's a zombie. In fact, most teens will look like this because they often get little to no sleep from all the essays they have to write in a week.

The chances of you meeting a friendly zombie who has no intention of eating your brain is very rare. But if you do come across one of these zombies and fall in love with them, you might have created the sequel for the 2013 film, *Warm Bodies* without realizing it.

Now that you've found shelter and a zombie boyfriend, it's time for the last and final step. Without this step, you're better off being fed to the zombies because there's a 0% chance that you'll survive with what you currently have. Not only can weapons help you fight brain-hungry zombies, but they can also come in handy when hunting for food. In all my years of playing *Legend of Zelda*, I can definitely say I know a thing or two about hunting animals and cooking hearty meals. I know you may be angry at me for not making this the first step, but honestly, you should be thanking me for keeping you alive this long during a zombie apocalypse. Besides, weapons can be found almost anywhere! You can even make your own by sharpening the edge of a stick with a knife. Well, if you can find a knife.

If all else fails, maybe it's time to accept that becoming a zombie is not the worst thing in the world...as a matter of fact, there are many benefits to becoming a zombie. If you happen to turn into a zombie, all of your senses are enhanced and you automatically gain superhuman strength. Isn't that awesome?! I will warn you right now that once you turn into a zombie, you've become a target for apocalypse survivors. I know this isn't the ideal situation to be in, but if you're willing to be bitten by a zombie, make sure they're a cute zombie.

In the end, unless there's a cure to turn zombies back into humans, you're going to be fighting for your life, for the rest of your life. But if you continue to follow these steps, you are guaranteed to live a good life.

And if you have a minute to spare, try looking for the book, *Zombies Hate Stuff* by Greg Stones. It will tell you everything you need to know about zombies.

I wish you good luck in finding a zombie-free bookstore with unharmed novels and sturdy chairs to sit on. Bring your zombie boyfriend along to the bookstore and enjoy looking at the stars under the broken rooftop. Even when you're living in a doomed world, at least you found your universe.

Midsummer Eve | Angelina Zayats

Last Midsummer Eve

What happened to me, you wouldn't believe
I was strolling through the forest that night
When in the distance, I saw a bright light
Laughter I heard, and music of glee
My curiosity peaked, I wanted to see
I pushed through the trees and the bushes and leaves
The foliage trying to catch on to my sleeves
And as I approached, the wood parted
A meadow appeared, and my eyes widened
Below me were fairy folk, suddenly silent
They stood still below me, small and I giant
Their tiny wings trembling, seemingly frightened
And there I then stood, in the center of their fairy ring
A sudden surprise to them did I sure bring
But soon they saw that I was harmless
And their festivities continued regardless
They danced and they sang
Their movements flowy yet sprang
They laughed, their voices like bells, they called out to me
"Come thou fair maiden, we invite thee!
For many a dance we will prance 'round the tree!
Come with us fair maiden, and you will see
The best dance to have is with fairy folk, we!"
I watched it all happen, my feet in the grass
Their glimmering butterfly wings as clear as glass
Such sweet words were alluring, they enchanted me
And then did I join, a dance I could not ever foresee
So I danced and I sang
My movements flowy yet sprang
I laughed as they laughed, calling out to me
"Oh fair maiden, thou move so enchantingly!
How pretty thy feet prance 'round the tree!
Come now fair maiden, we'll dance all night long
We'll dance till we drop, our thoughts drowned out in song!"
It could have been hours, it could have been minutes
For the next thing I knew, I woke up, their presence just spirits
I stood up, and realized it was morning
The birds chirping, the sun rays so warming
And the fair folk were nowhere to be seen
All but a fairy ring left at the scene
And that's why if I tell you, you wouldn't believe
What happened to me
Last Midsummer Eve



Outside In | Arianna Tiu

Where the Peaches Grow | Elina Saha

The first time the girl and the farmer met, it had just rained. Dark clouds rolled tiredly above a valley of dripping trees. She was sitting under one when he came up to her, boots squelching in the grass.

"Do you know what these are?" She asked him, pointing to fruit that had fallen around her.

"They're called peaches." His voice was charming. "Here, have one." He plucked one from a nearby tree and handed it to her.

"Why?" She asked.

"Just try," he said. "See if you like it."

So she took it from him. For a second, she only looked at it, observing the changing shades of orange and yellow as she turned it around. When she brought it up to her mouth and took a bite, the flesh of the fruit was soft and ripe in her mouth, bursting with a sweet flavor that went straight to her head. She'd never tasted anything so good.

"It's amazing," she told him truthfully.

His mouth tugged into a smile. "Thank you."

That night, after she'd finished the peach and thanked the farmer, she lay awake, still thinking about it. *That was delicious*, she thought to herself, *I wish I could have one of those every day.*

Around the same time the next day, she was still thinking about it. The sun burned bright into the sky, and the fields seemed to shimmer, so she told herself she would go outside and enjoy the day.

She enjoyed the day all the way back to the farmer.

"You came back," he crouched by a basket of peaches, looking up at her.

"It's pretty here," said the girl.

The farmer laughed, like he knew what she really meant. "Here you go," he said, and gave her one. She tried not to look too eager as she took it and began eating.

Day by day, the girl started to look forward to going to the peach fields. She told herself things like *he likes giving them to me and he'll miss me if I don't go*, but really, she just liked how they tasted. In fact, she liked it so much that eventually, she began to eat two, three of them a day.

One day, she came back and was waiting for him to show up with her peach. When he did, it was soft and sunset-orange and his eyes followed her as she took a bite into it. Only this time, it wasn't as good. She waited for the sweet taste to fill her mouth and make her warm all over, but it didn't happen. At least, not as much as it used to.

"Do you like it?" He asked her expectantly.

And she was puzzled. "Something's different."

"What's wrong?"

"It doesn't taste as good." She swallowed, the fruit going down slow. "I don't like it as much."

He gestured up. "Look at the trees. Look at the sun. It's all the same."

"Yes, but I don't like it as much."

To her dismay, it tasted worse the next day. Even worse the day after that. The girl went back again and again, hoping each time that she'd take a bite out of the peach, and it would be just as sweet as the first time, but it never was. Within weeks, she could barely stand to put it in her mouth. And yet every day, she went back for more.

Eventually though, she got fed up, and she stormed into the fields, looking for the farmer. He was standing under the trees.

"Back for more?" He smiled wryly when he noticed how disgruntled she looked.

"I don't want your peaches!" Cried the girl, crossing her arms. "You're trying to trick me. Each day you give me one that's more rotten, and each day, you tell me nothing's changed."

"Alright," he nodded after a pause. "Pick your own, then."

She hesitated. "What?"

He took a step away from the tree they were under, a step towards her. "Yes. Go get one on your own. Go anywhere you want." He gestured to the trees.

So she did. She ran as far as she could away from the farmer, looked around to make sure he hadn't followed her, and then reached up for a peach. It looked perfect. She took a hungry bite out of it, and then immediately spit it out. It was like sand in her mouth. The girl felt like crying. What had happened? She looked up at the skies, at the trees. The farmer was right—nothing had changed.

The girl went looking for him again, and it was late evening by the time she found him.

He looked up at her. "Did you find anything better?"

"You've ruined all of them." She fumed. "I'm not coming back tomorrow."

That night, she laid in bed, angry. *I can't believe I ate those things for so long*, she thought to herself, *I'm never going back*.

But when the next day rolled around and it became time for her to go to the fields, she was horrified. She wanted to go back. No, she *needed* to. The memory of how they'd tasted became faint, and her stomach ached with a craving for them. *You can't*, she told herself, *remember how awful they were?*

But it only became harder to convince herself of that. The girl wandered around every afternoon, a bitter kind of pain filling the spaces between her teeth and ribs. Each day, she grew more desperate.

It was confusing, to say the least. She remembered her life *before* the peaches, remembered being perfectly happy. But somehow, she couldn't fathom going back to that.

A few days later, she was walking around and came across a basket of oranges. The girl looked around to see if they belonged to anyone; no one was there. She lunged for them, tearing one open, and biting into it. The pulp ruptured, and tart juice filled her mouth. It wasn't the same, but she was so hungry that she kept eating it, and with every bite, she missed the peaches more and more.

That night, the girl was overcome with abandon. She realized sadly that nothing could make her feel better. So she crawled all the way back to the fields in the darkness, ashamed and starving. The farmer was sitting under a tree, waiting for her, eyes shining in the moonlight.

"Hello," he greeted.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you," she shook as she neared him. "There's nothing wrong with your peaches."

"Come here," he beckoned her. When she hesitated, he revealed his hand from behind his back, and in it, was exactly what she needed. She was so desperate that she ate it right from his hand. And it made her feel better. Not whole, but better.

"I can't believe I came back," she said after, juice dripping down her chin.

"Of course you came back." The farmer's smile was crooked. "Where else are you going to go?"

The Storm | Nate Parks

They gave us a gift.
Not wrapped in ribbons or bows
Wrapped in a tornado
We ask what's inside.

We'd rather have coal
Then be swept by the tide.
Even a peek into the abyss
Is too much for anyone's mind.

He's trapped in the storm too; he says he's unwise.
The gift we don't want, changing anything
Already in his worst form, into what we despise.
At least we have a light, while he tells lies.

You could fight using swords,
But that isn't enough.
What about birds?
What about words?

What about what you've learned?
You know what's inside, why open it again
For the three hundredth time?
It's a page.

A page full of scribbles.
A page full of rust.
A page full of old elephant tusk.
A page that can't be read.

It would damage your head.
It's water that cannot be tread.
It's a squirrel that cannot be fed.
It's a zombie that cannot be dead.

He's smarter than we thought, or we were unprepared.
Too many have dared to unwrap him again and again.
You, all by yourself, can defend
Against a storm that will never end.



Farm Reflection | Leah Hampton

Little Love | Claudia Podurgiel

Little love, little love,
Planted like a tiny seed
As something that all the world might need
Small, but mighty little love,
Which shall soar o'er the world
Like a peaceful dove.

Little love, little love,
Into a tiny green sprout it has grown
That the sun with its glorious light has shone
Strong roots will it grow
And it shall live
Even in the cold winter snow.

Little love, little love,
Just a humble plant reaching for the sky
To touch the world like a gentle butterfly
It shall touch the human heart
To awaken compassion deep within
Just like the most beautiful piece of art.

Little love, little love,
Now a beautiful tall tree
Grown for all the world to see
That even the smallest good deeds
Can make the greatest impact,
For they are just like mighty little seeds...

Seeds that shall grow a wonderful tree,
And fruitless it will not be
For the fruit of kindness it will bear
For each and every one to share

Oh, how wonderful is the gift of kindness,
Which shall bring the world true happiness!
Our human hearts it shall light,
And against greed and anger will it fight...

You, too, can plant the tree of love;
Plant it in your heart, and let it show above
Remember that you need not wait for the world to rearrange,
For YOU yourself can be the BRIGHT CHANGE



Blow Out the Candles | Haley Gayle

Love You | Isaac Thompson

Every year, my father's family would gather in Florida for the holidays. Each Christmas, we would wake up bright and early on the first day of winter break. Bleary and half asleep, we would stagger into our car and begin our journey south to my grandmother's. This year as we stumbled in, I immediately dug around in my black and green backpack, pulling out whichever book had caught my attention. Countless hours and miles passed as I was huddled in the backseat of the van, miles passing as I flipped through each rough page. My eyes poured over thousands upon thousands of words, passing the time with story after story. Tales of mighty dragons, epic fights for freedom, stories of the human struggles, and many more like them I held in the palms of my hands. Often I would go through a couple books just on the way down. More often than not, I would end up rereading the same book several times on the way to and from my grandmother's house.

With the help of my books, time would pass and slowly, the flurry of buildings and cities I couldn't name would pass as well. After a day of driving, we would start to enter the more rural parts of Florida. The buildings thinned, and the smooth road gradually transitioned into rougher and bumpier patches—eventually manifesting into barely anything more than gravel. The tall green trees loomed overhead as we traveled along the path. The bumpy road made the car jump up and down as the crunching sound filled my ears. My legs ached to be stretched after hours of travel and reading. After arriving at the small white house that belonged to my grandparents, tucked away in the Florida countryside, we would spend the week or so celebrating with our extended family. We were getting to know them, as it had been a year since we had been in the same state, making our reunion much sweeter. Those weeks we spent in that house over the years have always been the highlights of my year.

Unfortunately, as much as I wanted Christmas to last forever, we eventually had to depart. After goodbyes to the rest of the family in the days prior, we would wake up once more as early as possible into the muggy Florida weather as the sun slowly rose over the horizon. After making the last of our preparations, we would head inside one last time. When our grandparents had mustered the energy to say goodbye, we hugged them, savoring every second of it as we could, knowing it would be ages before we could again. As I finished hugging my grandfather, I said "Love you" as I began to head out to not keep my parents waiting. Right before I headed outside, I heard my grandfather exclaim to my grandma "He Loves Me!" in a voice filled with childish energy I hadn't seen in him before. Those three little words were ever meaningful to me. Even years after his unfortunate death, those are the words that I associate with him. Those three words rang in my ears as the years passed. Those echoes helped teach me the value and significance of them. The same words that I endlessly devoured in my desire to read could do more than entertain. It felt like a whole new world was unlocked, one that revolved around drawing emotion from words, not just entertainment. Ever since, I've done my best to understand that use of words, stories that evoke feelings that can linger like those words have with me.

Sunscreen | Efe Ozalp

Today, I woke up with a smile
and let the sunlight filter through the shutters
Stood up and soaked in the warmth of the wood
On the soles of my feet

Turned the AC down a degree or two
Put on a thick layer of sunscreen
and listened as the familiar chemical tang of it
delivered me dear memories
of ocean mist on my face and warm smiles on theirs

Opened the door
and laughed as the humid air let itself in
With visitors of birdsong and pollen

Laid my grades out on the porch
Wrung them out, folded them neatly
And packaged them;
A gift for the wind

Went on a walk
And found myself lost in the sweet hubbub of summer
days
Of fresh citrus and parfaits,
Garden hoses and tingling sunburns

If only for a fleeting moment,
I forgot the world at large
And felt the sun on my skin.



Floral Sky | Noemi Sanchez



Reaching for Light | Alyssa Okulitch

Golden Bird | Ashtin Sagerer

Oh you poor thing.

Who plucked your feathers only to write in ink?
Who took away your chance to fly
With your friends in the endless sky?

Who stole this gift from you?
Who ripped your golden feathers from your wings now covered in black ink dulling their shine? Who took this from you?

Who took your chance to soar in the sky?
Oh you poor thing.
Is this why you can't fly?

Oh I'm so sorry.
If only they had wings of their own to pluck instead of yours.

A golden bird, meant to fly becoming one with the stars in the never ending sky.

A golden bird, with broken wings; plucked of feathers left to die.

The Tang of Tabasco | Eliana O'Connor

30 seconds ticked on the clock.

My mom glared at me as she poured the Tabasco sauce onto my tongue and made sure I kept it there for the whole 30 seconds. The Tabasco sauce was like lava on my tongue as I felt my eyes starting to well up. This was my parents' form of punishment for lying. Specifically, it was for lying about my mom's signature.

In 4th grade, we had to get our parents' signatures on reading, on math, on science, on social studies, on Bible study, on cursive. That night I didn't want to do my homework and saw an opportunity arise.

I sat down behind the kitchen table facing the fridge, and my mom worked in the living room right next to me. I was told to do my homework in the kitchen, and I knew she wouldn't see me here. If I needed to, I could run to the laundry room that was in clear sight and only a few steps away.

Carefully, I took my pencil and traced the intricate messy curves of my mom's signature from the Monday before. First the J, then the extra loopy L that looked like it had a funny hat, then to the O.

The O was the hardest part because every time I wrote an O, I would leave a little circle inside. But her signature was the perfect oval, like the opening of a top hat, so I took extra care with the execution of this letter's appearance.

Finally, I had finished. I had copied her signature, almost perfectly to my eye, and rushed back to sit at the kitchen table so my mom wouldn't think anything of it. I was Da Vinci, Picasso, and Van Gogh combined; people would gawk at that forgery through binoculars in years to come because it'd be too precious for anyone to go near it. They'd ask, "How do I get to her level?"

The next day I came to school with my faulty signature. My forgery might have been good, but would it pass Mr. Schustak's eagle eyes? I was sure that he would call me out. Send me to the principal's office and call my mom so that I would be banished to my house for the rest of my life. I focused on keeping my hands steady and my face straight; I couldn't give anything away. He glanced at the signatures and then said okay and looked to the next person. I quietly breathed a sigh of relief as I rushed back to my desk.

Friday, I was finally done with the day. My mom glanced at me and then asked me the simple question, "Why haven't I signed the past few days of your homework?" I had been caught. The sweet carefree Friday melody that rang in my head was attacked, dismembered. It was slowly ripped apart, note by note, by the appalling sound of a scraping metal lid against a glass jar of Tabasco sauce as I handed her my "signed" paper.



The Modern Scream | Valentina Mycyk

Content | Sophia Magenta

I lay there, thinking, wondering
I suddenly think about what I could've done
I try to push it away but then
BOOM
another one comes
then another
then another
I think about my worst fears
my regrets and dreams passed by
I toss and turn, wishing for it to stop
stop stop stop stop STOP

I take in heaving, gasping breaths
air whooshes in and out of my lungs
in. out. in. out. In. Out. In. Out.
In Out In Out IN OUT IN OUT

I want to scream
I don't want this
I want it gone
I wish
I wish
I wish I could live
without spikes surrounding me
I wish
I could live without an overbearing mind
I wish
I could be fulfilled
happy
satisfied
content

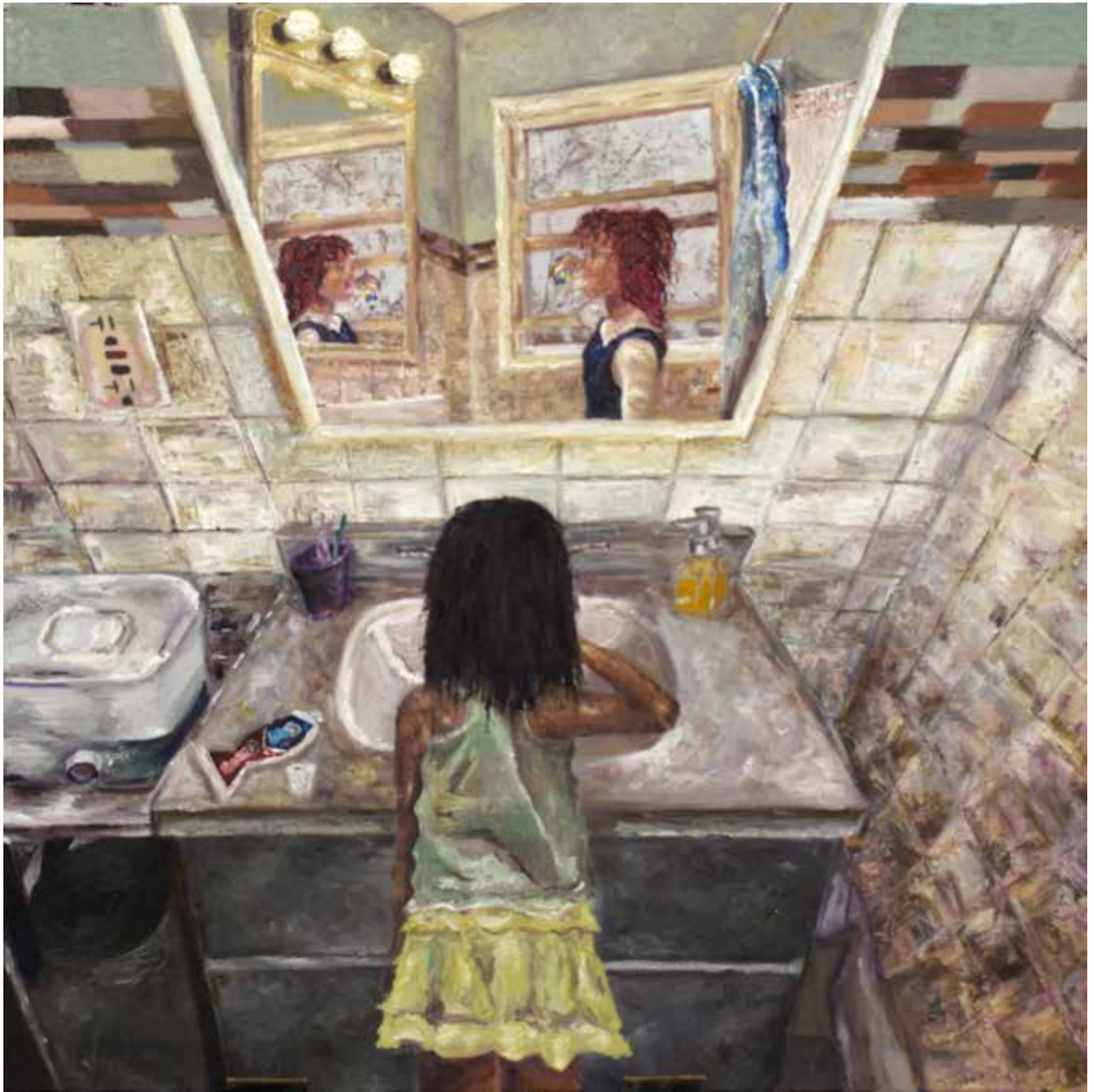
yes
content.

Ode to Tortas Fritas | Clarissa Quintana Tolentino

The drops begin to fall
letting them know it's time
the women
collect the water
in their wooden buckets
the boiled water
added to the mixture
flour
pinch of
salt
joining the dough
with their hands
full of love
kneading the pieces
of dough-until
they are thin discs
fried in fat
turning golden and crispy
but still soft
fluffy inside
sprinkled with sugar
on the small table
children waiting excitedly
with their mouths ready
I will always remember
my grandma making
tortas fritas
on a cold and cloudy day
the grassy smell
of home
makes my heart warm
and my stomach full.



I'm Desperately Craving | Gennessis Sosa



Another Me | Rhianna Tandy

A Soft Remembrance of Rolling Meadows | Mikaela Carreon

Clouds gaze upon us,
As the grassland whispers
Beneath my breath,
And the trees trade secrets
With the wind.

Deep breaths in...

Time flows gently, like our salted creek.
Slow and passing near willow's bend.

I find solace in
The flowers bursting from concrete sidewalks;
The birds chirping in the tempo of rustling leaves;
The ripples from fishes' flapping fins.

Wherever I go...

I will always carry
The ensemble of nature's sounds,
Our Illi-noise.

The merry memories of mini me,
Gathered just across the street,
A soft remembrance of Rolling Meadows.

Ma Cherie | Rupsa Mitra

To
the girl I pass in the halls
the girl in my classes
the girl I find myself dreaming of
the girl I've found myself falling for

You're the prettiest person I've ever seen
You have my heart bursting at each seam

I wonder if I'll ever be the reason why
You'll smile at your phone
I wonder if one day
I'll be able to tell you about the way
You've made me feel all this time
Each time our hands brushed against each other's
Each time our eyes met one another's

I've been waiting so long to ask you
Ma chérie,
May I take your hand..
And be your good old-fashioned lover boy
Your Romeo,
My Juliet?

How to Avoid Indian Aunties | Triya Patel

It is the sixth day of the Hindu wedding festivities for your Mom's uncle's third cousin's son-in-law. Your shawl slips from your head during prayer time, and you quickly reach to readjust it, but it's already too late. The Aunties saw the whole thing and have already made sure that everyone knows that you're a disrespectful, two-faced, uncultured swine who's trying to swindle all the eligible doctors for every penny they have. You are shunned; your life is now a tragic Bollywood movie filled with depressing, melodramatic dance numbers. This whole shebang could've been avoided if you knew what I'm about to tell you.

Rule No. 1: You aren't Hindu anymore. Your religion is *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* by Stephan Chbosky. Aunties spawn out of thin air and will sneak attack you like the wretched witches they are, so you need to be able to disappear at a moment's notice. This means being as forgetful as possible, so braid your hair down your back and make sure you're wearing navy blue. You must stick with a group of people who look similar to you. You cannot have any individuality (no straight hair let loose, no fancy manicures, no perfume or makeup, and definitely no sparkly bindis on your forehead). Zebras do this too, and they are quite successful. Whatever you need must be within five feet of this group. If it's not, then you don't need it. Even if you haven't had water in what feels like days and you are very, very aware of the dry ridges on the roof of your mouth, you must never back down. Cotton mouth and foul breath may be an atrocity, but you and I both know it's nothing compared to the out-of-pocket things you'd hear if you dared to venture into the kitchen:

Don't drink too much water. It'll make your stomach bloat even more.

So I heard you're not planning on applying to Ivies? That's good! Don't waste your money on whims.

Beta, don't you have any other shoes you can wear? I've got a pair of sandals that would definitely make your feet look smaller; they're in my car if you want to borrow them. Just don't stretch them out, okay?

Do you still want water?

Yeah. Didn't think so.

Rule No. 2: DO NOT, I repeat (from the depths of my soul) DO NOT make eye contact with Aunties. While I may be the expert on this topic, even I can't tell you why eye contact seems to me the middle finger equivalent in Auntie world. It just is, so don't do it. The ground that you are walking on is the most fascinating thing you have ever seen and will ever see in your entire life. Do not take your eyes off it. If you do, their eyes will find you and then KACHOW your life is now, once again, a tragic Bollywood movie.

Rule No. 3: Gatekeep the details of your life. Be as mysterious as possible. Do not reveal anything about yourself unless it is absolutely necessary. The details of your life will travel by word of mouth and get twisted and turned into something different. If you tell someone you're taking Art 101 in high school for a Fine Arts requirement, everyone's going to hear about how you're 'dropping out of school to become a hippie.' During my trip to India, I briefly mentioned my interest in fashion and had to spend the rest of my vacation doing extra-selfless deeds to undo the hyper-materialistic image of me that my extended family created in their minds. Avoid putting yourself in a crisis, just don't tell anyone anything.

-If you ignore my advice, you're putting yourself in a pickle again. You're literally putting yourself in a glass jar and pouring brine over yourself and sealing the jar. Don't be like that. Listen to my advice, and you may get to live out your life like Rani, from the Bollywood film "Queen."



Shapes of Delusion | Kiyomi Lee

Between Women and Danger | Amreen Tejani

"If Senator Renders wins the Presidential election, a genocide of children across the nation will ensue. We only have Senator Lemonstone as an option now. Congress would never be able to pass Bill 742 if Lemonstone wins," the news of a local murder witness flashed onto my phone. The election, which ripped the nation into jagged pieces, ignited chaos. My chest tightened. Nobody should ever know what I have done.

I shut my phone to block the haunting thought looming over my head, placed flowers on Emory's tombstone, and held his passport in my right hand.

Three months ago my brother died from arson. The tensions had always been high for us, and they only increased. I must protect my Lily. Yes, I must protect her. I did the right thing. I did the right thing.

But, suddenly, my throat clenched, and I couldn't breathe.

I scurried to the nearby well and reeled in a pail of water, downing it instantly.

The cool sulfuric water burned my throat, triggering flashbacks. The dark coats of gentlemen. The bleak, sterile, white walls of the polls. I fetched another bucket and gulped the water faster. The eyes watching my every move. The taste of metal. If I showed a trace of femininity, they would shoot me. I drank faster, drowning my dress. They can never know I voted as a woman. They would kill me. They would come for me. I stumbled backwards and crashed onto the grass below.

"How unladylike; nobody will want to marry a hog you know," a mocking voice sneered behind me. I felt eyes size me up, like prowling wolves to prey. I clutched Emory's passport, gathered the superfluous fabric of the dress I wore, and ran, hiding my face. The bottom of my heel caught on the restrictive dress, and I bent over to catch my fall.

"Naughty girl. Don't let your father see," he continued and the group cackled. I felt my face boil with embarrassment and then anger. I carefully rose.

I turned back for a glimpse at the attacker's face and left. Lily waited for me at home.

—

"Mommy! Look! That's you, and that's me in my black robe," Lily gushed, sharing the rocks she drew faces on. She dreamed of becoming a judge; I didn't have the heart to tell her they didn't allow women to preside as judges. I stroked her hair and tucked straying strands into her bobby pin.

"Why do I have red eyes?" I teased, pointing at the stone.

"Uh...to show your love for me? Hey, you're supposed to say how amazing I am in my judge uniform," and she fell into a fit of giggles at the base of the couch.

"I love you, Lily." I softly smiled.

"Hmph. You don't love the red eyes I drew for you," she turned away, veiling a smile with her hand. "Wait, why do you have Uncle's passport?" she inquired, turning back. I shoved it into my purse.

"No reason. I just wanted to see his face. It's almost like he's still alive," I sputtered, forcing a strong smile. At least that's what the election polling guards thankfully believed. Twins, we looked alike except for gender.

The TV instantaneously burst with light.

"The results of the Presidential election are in."

Please, after all this. Don't let my efforts come to nothing. Please, for Lily.

The announcer opened the plain envelope.

"The next President of the United Kingdoms of Cammaria is Lemonstone."

I hugged Lily and my vision blurred. My Lily would live. It would turn out alright.

"Maybe I love you, too," she mumbled and climbed onto my back. I lifted her, and she struck her arms into a superhero pose.

"This just in. Senator Lemonstone has won by one vote. Senator Renders 17,562,330 votes to Senator Lemonstone 17,562,331." My heart stopped. I was that one vote. I saved Lily.

But, the minute they found out, they would tear that door apart hinge by hinge.

Fear permeated my body. Fear of them finding out a woman voted; the police would rebuke my vote, and Senator Renders would win. Fear of Lily then being killed in the genocide. Fear Render's supporters would discover I voted for Lemonstone.

No, I did the right thing. I did the right thing. Stay brave, a voice peeped. You did right, regardless of the law. Rise for yourself, for Lily. The local supporters of Renders always harassed Emory for showing the slightest inclination towards Lemonstone, but I could not fear them or anyone. I am a woman, and I voted.

BANG!

The door broke off its hinges, and a familiar bearded man stomped into the living room.

"Mommy-" Lily trembled.

"Hide behind the couch," I ordered.

"But-" she protested but then vanished behind the couch.

I turned to face the intruder and recognized him from the polls: a drunkard, intoxicated while voting, while I, disguised, stood to vote.

I wearily put on a ladylike smile in hopes of subduing him and diminishing any chances of him recognizing me.

"YOU-" he shouted. I didn't dare breathe.

BANG! The drunkard crashed at my feet.

Blood.

I glanced upward: a police officer stood in the doorway.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you," the officer chuckled and stepped into the light. The cemetery man. The officer was the attacker from the cemetery earlier.

"But, I suppose that's not really what you're worried about. He didn't recognize you, Emily, or should I say Emory? Quite clever to fraudulently vote using your brother's passport. Who gave you the idea?" His eyes turned cold, and he slowly aimed the gun at my head.

NO. Lily. Genocide. Slaughter. Lily. Genocide. Slaughter. The reality crashed like a thunderous waterfall.

The police found out. Did they already know when I went to visit Emory's grave? But, then why did he not end me at the cemetery? I saw his face, but maybe he did not see mine. It was over. All over. NO. I tried so hard, so much.

"Without your illegal vote, Senator Render and Lemonstone are now tied, which means the presidential candidate would be chosen by Congress and Render would assume the presidency. You should know your place as a woman. Pity your effort mounted to nothing," he sneered, snaking closer. He raised the gun to my head again, but suddenly rocks began to pelt the officer.

"Not nothing!" From behind the couch, Lily hurled stones at the officer's head, who began misfiring.

"So what if she voted? Women have intellect and passion. I will be a judge, you know. The world will know," she cried, then flailing to the ground as a bullet tore through her arm.

– 72 Years Later

The department hanged Emily in jail that day. But her vote revolutionized Cammaria. Boycotts for women's rights spread and protests flared. She became the spark igniting dynamite.

The police department later rebuked the officer, and laws were passed to protect citizens against abuse of power.

Senator Renders eventually took the presidency, but the genocide never passed in Congress: the country, itching for more rights for women, saw Emily's vote as legitimate, so the parties settled a compromise: elect Renders as President but ban Bill 742.

Finally, Lily became a lawyer and fought until judges proclaimed only-male suffrage undeclamatorical, or unconstitutional as the West likes to call it. She then took her place as an Executive Judge in Cammaria with the same spirit of her mother.

Progress charged ahead, one woman at a time.



Kulisap | Mikaela Carreon



Doves | Maria Negrete



Colosseum | Andres Mejia Deleon

How to Avoid Mr. Scoggins After Dropping AP Literature | Arturo Torres

If you are anything like me, you've probably been on the "advanced" pathway for English throughout high school, and AP Literature is the first class you have dropped. If you're not like me, stop reading this essay now. I mean, seriously, who enjoys analyzing somebody else's text? How am I supposed to know what these dinosaurs from the 1800's were thinking as they wrote broken English? How can you even read that?! Although you may have crossed the first hurdle of dropping the class, you have to deal with something arguably worse, Mr. Scoggins. Luckily, you happen to be in the hands of an expert.

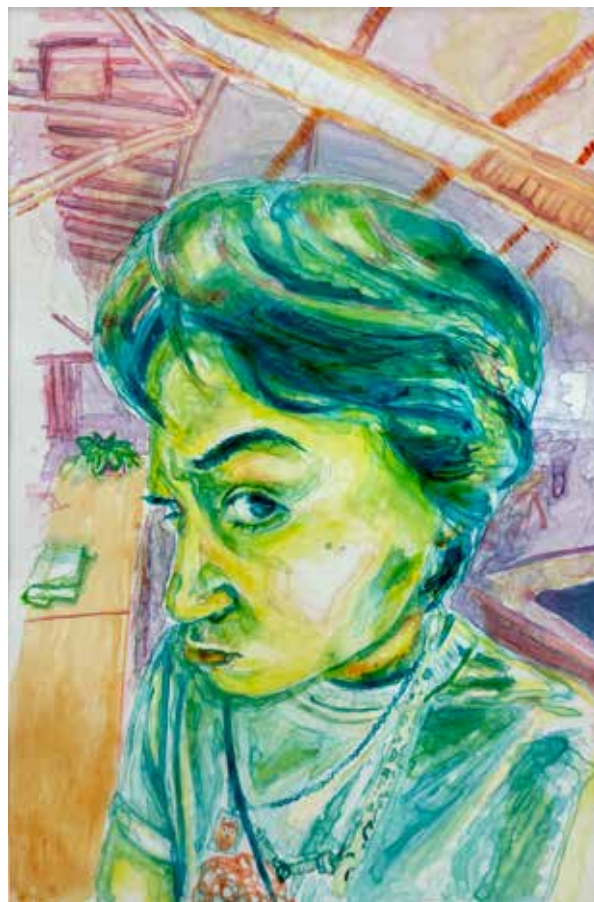
Let's get the most obvious solution out of the way. If you truly want peace, you should move away. Moving schools is unrivaled, as even if you drop to Mrs. Wagner's College Composition class, Scoggins's dream-crushing, soul-shattering room is one door away. Some place outside of the district would work just fine as you won't run into the risk of bumping into him around other schools. Although this seems like the obvious solution, a risk arises when you go out in public. You could be mindlessly shopping at Walmart without a care in the world, buying deodorant as Scoggins slowly approaches you. With some sort of bloodlust, you suddenly hear "YOU! YOU DROPPED MY CLASS!" You would have to stay on guard at all times and be scanning around all the time. Personally, I believe that the best solution to this problem would be moving to some place in Mexico, as it is not too far, and you run zero risk of seeing him there.

However, if your parents decide to torture you and keep you at WHS, all you have to do is hire one of your friends to become an informant. I personally recommend you hire the smartest person you know, since Mr. Scoggins is an AP teacher and all. You have to keep Scoggins away, as any interaction or sighting can have serious repercussions and/or lead to death. I advise you to hire a friend to follow Scoggins around the school, so you know where he is at all times, making it easy for you to avoid his foreboding presence. A constant stream of information on his whereabouts can save you a world of sneaking around. If worse comes to worse, your friend can always just keep him busy by talking about Shakespeare or something. If you really want to hold him up for a long time, you can get him to furiously rant about Hamlet, praising it as Shakespeare's "best" work. If that doesn't work, ask him for a summary of *Othello*. You'll instantly see his eyes beam with indignation, such as if he were personally affected. If these two don't do the job, you can always talk about the classic, *Romeo and Juliet*, a forever relevant love story that is sure to pull on his heartstrings. I can just imagine his face now, reminiscing about his past lover as he sits in silence with his eyes shut, puckering his lips almost as if he was sent back in time. Not only is this a fool-proof strategy to keep Scoggins away, but if the friend that you hired is the smartest person you know, they also probably wouldn't mind talking more to Scoggins.

Now, if you have no friends, you have no other choice but to disguise yourself. The most important

rule of this stage is that you have to be unrecognizable, even to yourself. You should change your hair, or just cut it all off. Hair is just temporary, but the ego-annihilating shame of being confronted can last a lifetime. Most teachers have a bunch of students they see every day, and Scoggins definitely would remember if he had a student with a follicle-less, uninhabited head of hair, reminiscent of a freshly baked Texas Roadhouse roll. Now that you have your hair sorted out, a mask will be perfect to hide behind to seal more of your face. The pandemic was horrible, but at least the masks aren't totally strange to still wear. If anything, this will keep him away from you even more as he may assume that you are sick. If you want to be even more cautious, you can always just change your name, ultimately getting rid of any evidence or suspicion of who you are. Teachers definitely don't remember their students' names on the first day of school, but the name cards Scoggins had us make can come back to haunt you at any time.

Ultimately, avoiding Scoggins comes down to a formula. Matter of fact, I am so confident in my skill that after months of applying my strategies, I feel it's now time to come clean to Scoggins and face my fears. I see him in the hallway and tell him all about how I have been avoiding him throughout all this time. You won't believe what he responds with...there's no way.
"Wait, who are you again?"



Big Head Meepmeep | V. Wirth

A Trail Once Walked | Alex Bonnette

"Go east."

These words echo in my mind like a relentless afterimage. How long has it been since its meaning changed? The words shift and grow and shrink and twist until it takes upon a foreign form. My fate isn't wholly my own. There are others, albeit few, who I have seen in my monodirectional travels. It was like staring into the eyes of a predator.

Naturally, we kept our distance from each other. I was frozen in place. I can still remember the feeling of my muddied boots being hungrily consumed by the still moist mud that once coated the now dead ocean.

But that is all I can remember of the encounter. *The feeling*. Browns, grays, and whites blot away any semblance of vividness from the memory. The other person, veiled by a heavy coat and shrouded face, seemed like a person in no other way than my logic. They walked like a person, looked like a person, so surely they were real. But even now, whoever knows how much later, I still cannot shake the idea that they were a manifestation of my psyche, conjured as a way to communicate whatever obscure message my mind wished to share. I regret admitting that both ideas are equally possible to me.

We never spoke. The same haze was there, watching our every move and growing more opaque the closer we came. It wasn't long before I walked away in shame.

And here I am having come full circle. The two words never halted their assault on my thoughts. In fact, they've grown more restless in my time of quiet recounting. Those memories are food to them. Like a blood drop in shark infested waters, they tear into it in an instant, morphing my thoughts, altering them to better fit my purpose.

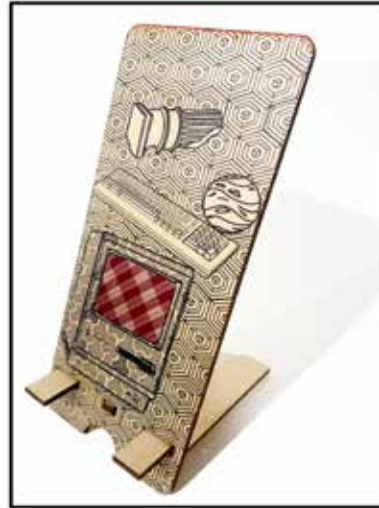
"Go east."

Emotions once absent from memories now become its driving force. Once upon a time, 'east' was nothing more than a direction to me. But my definition of it has changed since then. As the skies turned dull gray and the oceans dried away, east meant something new: A place unburdened by encumbering fog and the corpses of oceans.

"Go east."

It means salvation; to where I can forget about the desaturated world.

"Go east."



Ancient | Miguel Suarez

Balikbayan Box | Sean Galolo

I'll never walk into that petite, green room
Without thinking of you.

The miasma of plastic irritating our noses,
We ruffle through neatly packaged and
Organized supplies in a cardboard box,
Surgically shedding each package's exterior.
My eyes light up on the sight
Of a "Talk To Me Buzz Lightyear" toy
Resting against your rough palms.

You watched with a grin
As I scurry around
Against the warm, cracked floors
Smiling, as the sunlight
Pinches both Buzz' and my faces.

Hello, Lyft Driver? | Akari Czyzewski

Hello, Lyft driver? I know it's dark outside, but why does it say on the app that this is a white 2016 Honda Accord when you've pulled up in a Red Nissan Altima? (CON) You roll down your window and make sure I'M the one who called a Lyft to where I am going. I am skeptical, but I do see that your phone is nicely propped up on your left air vent and has all the normal Lyft Driver screen information on it. (NEUTRAL) Once I do get in, because it is very late and I need to get home, I notice you're driving stick shift and the car rattles every time you switch gears. (CON) There are LED lights on the bottom of the seats and you're blasting "Time of Our Lives" by Pitbull. (PRO) You've really set the vibes in here. Don't think I trust you though. I'll just sit right behind the driver's seat—that's what all the self-defense baddies on social media say to do. I swear I won't try to choke you with your own seat belt... unless you leave me no choice.

Hello, Lyft driver? Why is the bobblehead on your dashboard locking eyes with me as if it has some kind of quest for me to fulfill?

Hello Lyft driver? I would love to hear more about your 4th divorce to your 2nd wife, "Meredith," but you're starting to sound emotional. Do I need to tell you everything will be okay? That there are more fish in the sea? Maybe talk it out with your 3rd wife whose name is (creepily) Meredith too? My job is close to 15 minutes away and it doesn't help that we're stuck in traffic. God. I actually can't believe Meredith took his "Lux" Lyft car for a drive one night and returned in "3 business days" with no car but divorce papers and as the leader of a notorious motorcycle gang, "vroom vrooom." If I have to tell this grown man everything will be okay, I'm going to start crying with him too. At this point, Meredith took everything from both of us.

Hello, Lyft driver? F.Y.I. I'm on the phone with someone else right now. They're just making sure I have my knife, pepper spray, and gun in my purse. XOXO.

Hello, Lyft driver? I'm doing okay tonight, but is this a side gig? You spend the first half of your day in the office with the boys. Then once that 9-5 is over and the sun is setting, you slap that "Lyft" sign on your 2019 Toyota Corolla you're still paying off, turn that LED sign on like you're Batman in the Batmobile, and start picking randos up in the dark. To top it all off... you're playing classical music off a radio station and don't say a word throughout the entire ride. Once we've come to a complete stop at my destination, you turned around from facing the road and proceeded to offer me a mini candy cane (it's the middle of June) from a bowl that mysteriously appeared from under your passenger seat. Is this what "the grind" is?

Hello, Lyft driver? I just saved \$2 by clicking “wait and save” but it says you’re already here. Now that’s what I call excellent service!

Hello, Lyft driver? It feels like each and every one of my nostril hairs is painfully screaming in agony from the suffocating smell of cheap cologne I have now been encapsulated in by the leather upholstery and fake wood doors with windows that need to be manually cranked down. When I asked to roll a window down, you shut me down with your response of, “I have the AC running. I can turn it up for you.” Sir, respectfully, the lukewarm air coming from that dust box that sounds like a printer overheating is not doing anything. Turning up the rock music playing off of your CD mixtape will not overthrow the heaving cries of help coming from your supposed AC. C’mon now, Mike, you could’ve just told me the window was broken. Now I feel bad getting out of a car that has a lopsided rolled-down window.

Hello, Lyft driver? No way this car model was approved by the company.

Hello, Lyft driver? I absolutely love how you ask for the rider’s name after the fact that they just opened the door to your vehicle in full confidence. “Is this a ride for ___?” Noo. It’s not. I just felt like getting into your car. As if I’m not the only one in this sketchy Joann Fabrics parking lot. What do you mean, “Is this a ride for___?” Dude...I’m already in YOUR car. It’s too late to save yourself.

Hello, Lyft driver? You forgot to lock the doors. What if I just jump out of this moving vehicle?

Hello, Lyft driver? During this awkward silence from a stranger driving another stranger to a random unknown location, I always wonder if you have any good and entertaining stories to tell. Having to pick up randos and drop them off cities away in some cases, every Lyft driver must have their own unusual experiences to share. Imagine. Two people had the same god-given name of Fred and ordered a Lyft at the same time, let’s say... at a ginger cosplay convention. Now what are the odds that their drivers are both named Vladimir and have the EXACT same 2017 blue Honda Civic, with a minor dent on the bottom left side of the passenger side door, which they acquired from driving too fast on a rocky road in Colorado?

If no one mentions the destination or if Vladimir and Fred get too lost in the sauce in a deep conversation about the hardships of being ginger...who knows. God bless, I’ve arrived at work. That train of thought was going nowhere.

Hello, Lyft driver? Should I have called an Uber?



Expressive Hands | Matthew Neswold

People Pleaser | Gabriella Murray

I think the first time someone elected me mature
I was six;
It was parent-teacher conferences.
I hadn't yet been met with a feeling like this,
One that left me satisfied.
And just like that,
my most imperious quality had commenced.

When I was eight,
A relative told me I was a precocious child.
She went on and on;
I was unaware what it meant,
Yet I took pride in this attribute

And then when I was nine.
I heard someone applauding my mom,
Telling her how proud she should be,
how deferential I was.

I felt fulfilled.
I achieved greatness once again.
But like clockwork,
My urge to people please returned,
An itch that begged to be scratched.

But lately, I can hear the little girl in me.
She's throwing a tantrum,
Imploring me to let her be a little immature.

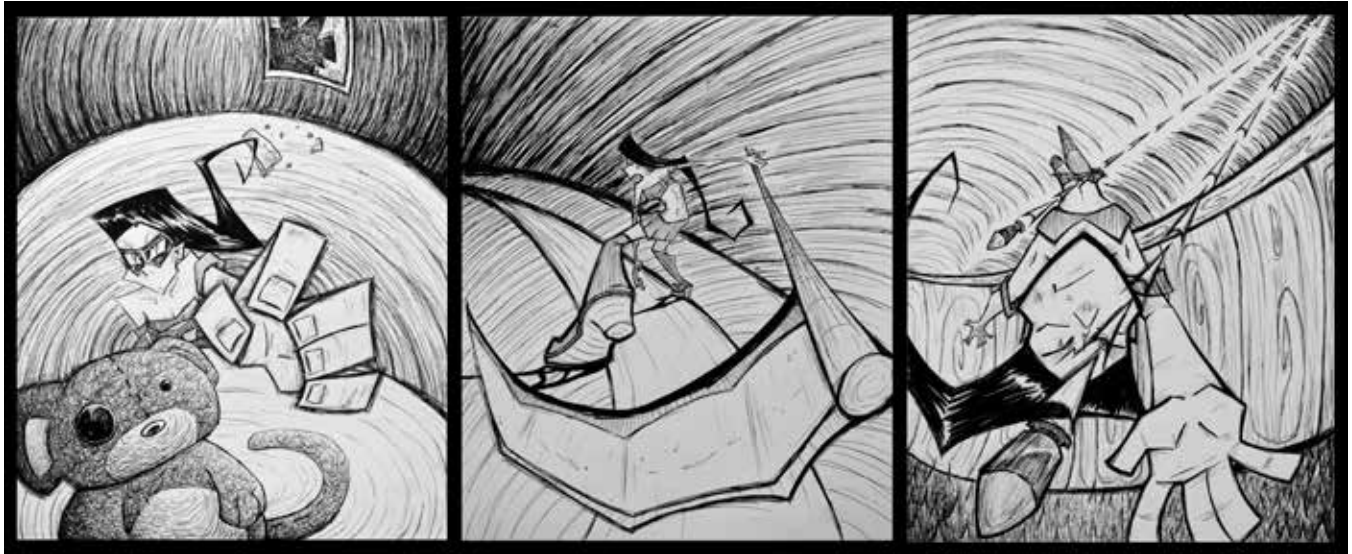
So now I desire to erase this facet.
Because if being a people pleaser
means I'm the only one that's not pleased,
What is it for?

But last week,
Someone called me mature,
And I heard the subdued little girl in me,
Calm and softly,
With merit, she sighed.

But she left the room with a smile on her face,
Because at least one of us was pleased.



Pull Yourself Together | Audrey Niezyniecki



Steal, Fight, Escape | Adeline Wind

Lost | Wesley Koepl Jr.

It's said:
 In darkness, light finds its way,
 Forever flowing, through night and day.
 And yet the question will remain, what is it worth?
 A truth to obtain, a truth to coerce.

So what does it cost?

Lost.
 I am lost in a maze with glass walls.
 These corridors of long hauls.
 The only thing left is to perish beneath the rubble,
 And save humanity from trouble.

Everything | Itzel Bernabe

Money travels soul to soul
 Left to right without a word
 Fireworks in the sky
 Leaving the grass with a small goodbye

Feeling accomplished like I have never felt
 Showing off my Mexican flag
 Waving high above me
 Feelings of hope and honor

People joining the army to
 Become fulfilled, missing Christmas
 And other holidays to fight for our country
 With that thought, we climb uphill
 To be successful, not just stay still.

My Mother's Bracelets | Zoe Dessimoz

My mother's bracelets chime together.
With her every step, they chime.
When she knocks on my door to check on me.
When she is carrying the hot steamy soup.
Right to my ill self.
While she brushes my hair back with her soft hands.
The motherly touch that radiates love.
"Can I get you anything else?"

They clink together when she is "freshening up".
Carving her lips with her dark maroon lip liner.
While she twists her hair around her curling wand.
While she rakes her fingers through it until I hear
"Hey Zo! Does my hair look okay?"
And every time, it looks just perfect.

My mother's bracelets.
A part of her.
Just like me.
My outspokenness, sensitivity, and ability to work hard.
It is a part of her in me.



Lily | Aaron Sang

ROLLING MEADOWS SENIOR RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS CALISCH AWARD FOR THE ARTS



Julia Olson
Rolling Meadows

Julia Olson of Rolling Meadows High School, a two-year drum major with the Mustangs marching band, and an honors performer in jazz band and orchestra, is the 2023 recipient of the Richard W. Calisch Arts Unlimited Award. The award is presented annually to the District 214 graduating senior who best exemplifies creative excellence in the arts.

Julia was “a diligent, motivated, hard-working and compassionate leader” in her musical pursuits, and worked to become “one of our school’s best musicians,” said her band director, Christopher Buti.

At the heart of Julia’s musical career at RMHS was the oboe: She played oboe for four years in many ensembles and venues, serving as principal chair for both Symphonic Band and Orchestra Winds. She was selected for the ILMEA District VII Honors Orchestra on oboe, and attended a summer program at The Julliard School in New York City.

Because oboists don’t march, Julia played cymbals and jazz vibraphone for the Marching Mustangs, before assuming the role of drum major for her junior and senior years. She was named outstanding drum major at a variety of RMHS’ marching band competitions over the past two years.

Julia also played violin in the RMHS orchestra, serving as section leader and student conductor. She was a violinist for Chamber Orchestra and Madrigal Strings, and was in the pit orchestra for school musicals. “Julia has set very high standards in all endeavors, and is an intelligent, talented and hard-working person,” said her orchestra director, Kevin Carroll.

Julia found even more ways to be involved in the arts at RMHS: playing vibes in the Jazz Band and Jazz Ensemble, performing in the Variety Show, and dancing in Orchesis. She was a member and two-year president of the RHMS chapter of the Illinois Music Honors Society. She plans to study business and music at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The award was established in honor of Richard Calisch, a former English teacher and division head for humanities at Elk Grove High School. Calisch was a passionate advocate for the arts; he created the District’s Arts Unlimited event and anthology, the Friend of the Arts annual award, and at one point, partnered with the Elk Grove Village Public Library to establish an Arts Guild to expand community access to cultural programming and information.

This year’s other Calisch Award nominees represent that sort of passion, talent and leadership in band, dance, orchestra, theater, visual arts and vocal music across District 214’s schools. They include: **Amanda Briggs Elk Grove High School, Luis Hernandez Prospect High School, Jake King John Hersey High School, Hyunyoung Mo Wheeling High School,** and **Audrey Yang Buffalo Grove High School.**

2024 FRIEND OF THE ARTS RECIPIENT LIZ SCHRENK

There is a quiet magic that happens when Liz speaks about the arts. Whether in an art room full of students, in her photography studio, or in a community gallery space, she shares ideas and invites conversation. Her positive advocacy continues to influence students as well as local community members. Liz Schrenk is a lifelong champion of the arts and the 2024 Friend of the Arts recipient.

After graduating from the University of Illinois, Liz began her career at D214 as an art teacher at Elk Grove High School. Adored by her students, she never allowed them to miss out on artistic and cultural opportunities. Liz is fearless and tireless in bringing enriching and monumental experiences to students. She took AP Studio art students to New York City to see the opening of *The Gates* by Christo and Jean Claude in Central Park. In the four days they spent in New York, Liz planned as many cultural experiences as possible. From an opera at Lincoln Center and a show on Broadway to visits to MoMA, the Whitney, the MET, and many galleries in Chelsea, Liz made that trip one they would never forget. She went on to take AP students to New York the following two years, quite an undertaking for a young teacher.



Liz Schrenk

While at EGHS, Liz created Grenaissance, a full school day dedicated to the fine and performing arts. Liz transformed the school overnight into every art student's dream. She found guest artists and performers to instruct classes and share their experience and joy of the arts. Students chose workshops not only in the visual arts but also in creative writing, music, and dance. The opening ceremony for the Grenaissance included aerial artists and a well-known action painter to dazzle the entire student body. Lunch periods took on a carnival atmosphere. Students took photos with friends in the photo booth, a DJ played music while cotton candy was served, and students played games before running off to their next art class. Liz created a magical day to spread art and culture to every student at Elk Grove High School.

In 2008, Liz became the district coordinator for Arts Unlimited. With thoughts of the legacy set forth by Richard Calisch, Liz reimagined Arts Unlimited. AU became a student-focused platform to give students real-world opportunities. Liz created the blueprint for how we celebrate and honor our student artists and performers today. Student work now graces each cover of *Anthology*; our annual reception showcases student performances in dance and music, student artists discuss their work and artistic process, and students' statebound speeches are shared on stage. As the district coordinator of Arts Unlimited Liz developed district-wide event days such as Visual Arts Day, Creative Writing Day, and Drama Day to create opportunities for artistic expression and personal growth among the youth.

After a successful career building a strong art program at Elk Grove High School and transforming Arts Unlimited, Liz went on new adventures, sharing her love for photography and developing a hugely successful wedding and family photography studio in the Chicago area. Channeling her passion for creative imagery that clients say captures the beauty and emotions of the day, she was named Best Wedding Photography Business of the Year several years in a row.

Liz has remained deeply committed to supporting young artists. As a resident of the area, she was determined to continue spreading her love of art in the community by running an art program at her local church every summer in conjunction with the vacation bible program. She and her talented team, many of whom began as District 214 student interns at her studio, have hosted photo workshops for the next generation of budding photographers. She continues to give back to the District 214 community, hosting a plein aire painting festival and creating D214 Rising, a scholarship program for up-and-coming student artists of D214, among many other art events for the community. By providing space for art clubs and promoting cultural activities, she enriches the broader northwestern suburban community.

Liz Schrenk's impact transcends her role as a business owner; she is a catalyst for creativity; she is a champion of the visual arts in District 214. Her unwavering dedication and passion continue to inspire and uplift countless aspiring artists, leaving an indelible mark on the community she so gracefully serves.

The annual Arts Unlimited Anthology is a collection of poetry, prose and visual artwork created by District 214 students. English and art teachers from across the district submit work for consideration. Each school is invited to submit six pieces of writing and six works of art.

Submissions are reviewed by the Arts Unlimited Committee which is comprised of seven teachers and one administrator. In reviewing the works, the goal of the committee is to ensure that the pieces selected for publication represent the excellence and diversity that is associated with the district's art and writing programs. Also, every effort is made to provide an authentic public forum for student expression. Finally, since this is a community publication, committee members also consider appropriateness of subject, style and length. Arts Unlimited publication will not distribute material that is obscene, libelous or will cause material and substantial disruption of school activities.

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