

THE
SEEDS
TO PLANT
THE FUTURE

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2019-2020 WITS Student Anthology

Writers in the Schools (WITS) is a part of the Youth Programs of Literary Arts, a community-based nonprofit literary organization centered in Portland, Oregon, whose mission is to engage readers, support writers, and inspire the next generation with great literature.



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925 SW Washington St.

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The Seeds to Plant the Future

2019-2020 WITS Student Anthology

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Editor: Olivia Jones-Hall

Designers: AHA (cover)

Olivia Jones-Hall (interior)

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For Ramiza.

Your joy and passion will continue to inspire.

WITS COMMUNITY

2019-20

WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE

Alex Behr, Brian Benson, Arthur Bradford, David Ciminello, Lisa Eisenberg, april joseph, Cari Luna, Monty Mickelson, Damien Miles-Paulson, Amy Minato, Laura Moulton, Jules Ohman, Jennifer Perrine, Bruce Poinsette, Mark Pomeroy, Rajesh Reddy, Joanna Rose, Miranda Schmidt, Laura Lampton Scott, Matt Smith, John S. Williams; WITS apprentice: Tenzin Sangpo

VISITING AUTHORS

Min Jin Lee, Tommy Orange, Susan Orlean, George Packer, Amor Towles

PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Amy Ambrosio, Barbara Brown, Ilsa Bruer, Gene Brunak, Liam Donoghue, Bryan Dykman, Rachel Fortgang, Crystal Ginger, Kelly Gomes, Emily Gromko, Greg Huntington, Colleen Johnston, Julia Kirkpatrick, Eric Levine, Sara Matano, Nabilah Mohammed, Jennifer Newton, Marta Repollet, Joy Root, Norm Stremming, Shawn Swanson, Amy Taramasso, Keri Troehler, Dana Vinger, Alethea Work, Zena

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INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

In times of uncertainty, we can turn to constants as guides to help us through the unknown. Maybe it's the routine of a daybreak dog walk, the clockwork nature of our bellies asking to be fed, or in the case of Writers in the Schools, a commitment to offering creative space for students to immerse themselves in imagination and literary craft with support from caring professional writers and teachers, and the chance to share their work with classmates, schoolmates, and you, reader, with this book.

This past year has been riddled with duality—the unbelievable alongside the obvious, the heart-wrenching alongside the inspiring, the unprecedented pandemic alongside the social justice revolution. And in the pages of *The Seeds to Plant the Future*, you'll find words that reflect a similarly diverse spectrum of emotions, experiences, and forms. You'll see evidence that in spite of—or perhaps because of—everything, our students have remained as insightful, fiery, and creative as ever.

Writers in the Schools was invited into more than three dozen classrooms during the 2019/20 school year at 11 public high schools in Portland and Gresham. Our WITS writers partnered with 27 educators and had the opportunity to work together with 1,122 students in subjects such as theater, creative writing, journalism, and anthropology. Their creative bounty yielded visceral poetry, cultural critique, flash fiction, and even short films about other worlds entirely. And for the first time ever, we embarked on a virtual residency model in the spring, quickly pivoting to pre-recorded video lessons so we could still connect with our youth despite COVID-19 school closures. We hosted our first online creative writing workshops for teens and opened up submissions for students across Oregon. We have the honor

of publishing the work of 52 students and sharing them with you here.

In addition to creative writing residencies and workshops, our youth programs at Literary Arts continued to serve over 4,000 students by coordinating school visits from world-renowned Portland Arts & Lecture authors and sponsoring tickets and transportation to attend the lecture series at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. We paired volunteer mentors with students for our College Essay Mentoring Project and the spring marked the successful debut of a digital exchange. Finally, we developed and launched #Virtualandia, a digital poetry initiative, in light of the postponement of our youth poetry slams, Verselandia! and East Side Slam!. Five celebrated slam poets and writers produced YouTube-hosted video lessons covering topics such as the history of slam, writing, recording tips, and performing poetry.

We're exceedingly grateful to our school partners, youth, staff, funders, and community supporters who have remained invested in uplifting our literary community at every age by believing in and backing our work. Many thanks to Olivia Jones-Hall who edited and oversaw the production of this beautiful anthology, AHA for branding and design support, and our intern Karina Briski who completed her Portland State University MFA program while offering invaluable administrative and editorial support and insight. Finally, we'd like to recognize and give thanks to Ramiza S. Koya, our Director of Youth Programs from 2017-2020, whose thoughtful leadership and guidance helped shaped our program, organization, and wider literary community into a much more inclusive, equitable, and inspiring one. Ramiza, you will be dearly missed.

To our students and young writers everywhere, thank you and keep writing.

Emilly Prado

Interim Director of Youth Programs

KATY LEI

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: AMY MINATO

Orange as Oranges

Mom comes home
With a bin full
Of the bright spheres
She says there
Was a sale
I can't turn back.

A fruit bowl
A picturesque scene
Fit for a grand
Still life painting
But I can only focus
On one particular
Piece of produce
No color as vibrant
Or enchanting
As this one
Fragrant as if standing
In front of an orchard
Full of the citruses
Bite into it
And feel like a king
As rich as
The robber barons
Of the Gilded Age
A cannonball
To siege castles
A throne
To sit upon

The seeds
To plant the future
So I reach
For a paint brush
And splatter a canvas
My hands turn
Sticky and pulpy
But it doesn't matter

A knife lays forgotten
On a cutting board
I peel and peel and peel
The sickly sweet liquid
Escapes and seeps
Into a papercut
My hands quiver
Pressing a fingernail
Into the plump flesh
I shoot myself
In the eye
My vision turns blurry
I clench my eyes shut
It burns.
Tears flood in torrents
Down my cheeks
That I can't wipe
Away fast enough
It becomes juice
That stains
And can't be removed

It is my dessert.
My assertion.
It is my obsession.

My prized possession.
But we can't all be
As orange as oranges

The Witch's Dove

I looked down from the top of the hill at the stone cottage of my next victim. It sat nestled in the middle of the field, smoke rising from the chimney. I imagined the baby the crone was cooking in her cauldron. This was my first witch and I didn't know how well the stories had prepared me for the encounter. I gripped my dagger and rode closer.

A small garden was planted under the front window, a few stray chickens wandered around the yard. It looked unthreatening enough, but for all I knew the stones of the house were actually skulls. I dismounted my horse, drew my dagger, and went to knock on the door. Before my fist made contact with the weathered wood, it flew open, revealing the wrinkled crone—

Wait. This couldn't be right. This woman was young, and . . . beautiful. Her dark skin contrasted with the soft white cotton tunic she wore over her sheepskin pants. An afro of ink black hair framed her head, where her topaz eyes bored into mine.

A trick. An illusion. Witches had magic at their disposal for whatever evil deed they performed. Stay on track.

"Listen here, witch!" I declared, pointing my dagger at her. "I—"

"I know why you're here. And it won't work."

"What—?"

"You're here to kill me. Unfortunately, I have far too much left to do so you cannot come in."

"Well—I just—we will see about that!"

No witch would keep me out. I made to barge into the room, only to smash into a wall that was nowhere to be seen. My head rang as blood gushed from my nose.

"What in God's name?" I pressed my hand to the barrier that

separated us.

"Sorry about that," the witch said, wincing. "Here, I have a bandage."

She tossed me a roll of what looked like cloth through the doorway. So, things could go out, but not in.

I wasn't taking any chances. As the roll landed at my feet I kicked it as hard as possible, only sending it a few yards away.

"You won't get one over on me, witch!"

"Mave."

"I will call you what I like!" I hissed. "Don't think your façade has fooled me. You will be under my constant surveillance. I will have your head."

Mave snorted. "As long as you wish me harm you cannot enter my home. And I have at least a fortnight's worth of food stored so I do not have to leave anytime soon."

I faltered, taking inventory. A pack of crackers, dried meat, and an apple. That would hardly last me two weeks. If I rationed, though, and found something close by . . .

"You have to leave sometime, and I'll be right here when you do."

With my tent pitched and horse tied down, surveillance began. Mave, as she called herself, kept the door open in the warm, summer afternoon. She seemed to be preparing her supper, tossing chopped vegetables and meat into a cauldron over her fireplace.

I watched, shocked, as she served up two bowls and sat in the doorway. She pushed one bowl over the threshold and glanced at me.

"Would you like some?" she called to me. "It's a chicken stew with carrots and potatoes."

I looked at the bowl in suspicion. She could have put anything in there. But it did smell amazing, and my dried meat looked sad in comparison . . .

No chances.

I continued eating my makeshift supper, looking her dead in the

eye.

She shrugged and continued eating her stew.

A heavy object hit my tent and the canvas collapsed around me, pulling me roughly from my shallow slumber. I managed to find my way out and was met by the sight of Mave standing, arms crossed, in her doorway.

“What was the point of this?” she asked, gesturing to the scattered wood around her lawn.

“An attempt to keep you from escaping,” I answered. “You couldn’t leave without the pile of wood collapsing and waking me up.” I was very proud of this idea.

Mave fumed. “I told you I’m not going anywhere!”

The door slammed with no help from her.

Second day here and I was already forgetting who—what I was dealing with. She was just so distracting.

I went to reassemble my tent to clear my head. Once I had finished with that, I began to gather the wood from my makeshift alarm system.

The door cracked open.

“Pass me a log, would ya?”

Her doe eyes were strong.

But I was stronger.

“No chance. I have to flush you out by any means necessary.”

Mave rolled her eyes. “If you want to do this the hard way.”

The log lurched out of my hands and into hers.

“Thanks!”

I stared at her hands. “Did you do that this morning?”

“No, I threw that one myself. Felt more personal that way.” Her smirk disappeared behind the closed door.

Turns out living off salty, dried meat and saltier, drier crackers for two days made you very thirsty.

My canteen was nearly empty with no clear source of water in sight.

“Witch!” I called through the window. “I need water. Forfeit your supply and your death will be quick and painless.”

Even as I said the words, I had to work to mean them. I wanted this witch to die. I did. I did . . . right?

“I have a well in my home but you need to toss me your canteen!” she called back.

The door opened on its own. I was getting used to this.

I tossed my canteen through the doorway and watched as Mave picked it up, my gaze lingering on her exposed collarbones. She caught my eye and I looked away, my face hot.

As she moved to another room, I put my hand up against the barrier that separated us. It felt . . . weaker somehow. Like if I just pushed through hard enough—

Mave came back into the room and tossed my canteen at me.

“Wait!” I chugged half the water and held it out. “Do you mind?”

She rolled her eyes. “You can last until tomorrow. Besides, I have dinner to make for us.”

“Us?”

“I can’t have you living off salt and no vegetables. Haven’t you ever heard of scurvy?”

She began to chop up an onion, throwing it into a kettle and moving onto carrots.

“Why are you helping me?”

Her knife slowed and she turned to me. “The nearest person is an hour away; I like the company. Plus, it would be nice to change your decision to kill me.”

I didn’t know how to tell her how the barrier felt to me now—less of a wall, more like glass. Dangerous to break, but breakable indeed. “Put yourself to use and grab me some celery from the garden, would you?”

Soon, the smell of soup wafted from the house. Mave poured each of us a bowl and we sat in the doorway, her inside and me on the doorstep. I inhaled the first real meal I’d had in days.

"Tell me about yourself?" she asked.

I inched back. "What do you want to know?"

"Well, your name would be a nice start."

"And how do I know you won't weaponize it against me?"

"Because I don't want to give you any more reason to kill me?"

I grappled with myself. I had an odd urge to open up to her, overruling my urge to protect myself. I felt as if I was prying open an oyster.

"Constance," I whispered

She held out her hand over the threshold.

"Nice to meet you, Constance."

A tense silence settled over us. I reached out slowly, knowing full well I could grab her hand, pull her out of her home, and end her life before she knew what was happening.

Then, I took her hand, shook it once, and released it.

"Uh, how long have you lived here?" I asked, wanting to break the silence.

"About three years. My mom and dad wanted to travel more and I finally wanted a home of my own. I built it from the ground up." She patted the doorway.

"And how long have you been . . . you know, uh, practicing this—this lifestyle of yours?"

"You mean my witchcraft? You can say it, it's not a dirty word."

I blushed. "All my life, really. My parents were both practitioners and raised me with it."

"What do you do with it?" From what I'd heard, witches used their ways to tempt people into great evil.

She seemed to know what I was thinking. "I can't cast spells on people, if that's what you mean. At least, not without their permission. The rule is that whatever is put out into the universe comes back threefold. A lot of what I do is divination, which helped me know you were coming."

"What do you see in your future now?"

Her brow furrowed. "My insight is lacking at the moment. The future seems to be in constant change right now."

The sun had set, leaving only the half-moon to light us. Her dark skin glowed, her eyes full of stars.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, softly.

"Nothing! Uh, thank you for dinner," I mumbled, scrambling to my feet. "I'm off to bed."

"Don't you want to lock me in?"

I turned to her. "Are you going to run if I don't?"

She smiled. "No."

I found myself smiling back. "Then that's that. Goodnight, Mave."

"Goodnight, Constance."

It continued like this for the next few days. I continued under my guise of surveillance, but really I watched. I tried to catalog everything she did: how she analyzed her tea leaves, how she danced through her home, how she put her heart into her projects. At night, we ate dinner together and she told me of her life, of her sister in London who rejected magick, and her parents who were vacationing in Greece.

I told her of my mother, what I remembered anyway, before I lost her to yellow fever. I told her of my father, who loved me fiercely and still lived in our hometown. She asked me about my work, and why I did what I did.

"Usually, it's men who the court see innocent despite their obvious guilt. I track them down, take their life, and collect my bounty."

She was silent for a moment before she responded. "I can't condone your methods, but I can respect your reasons."

"Thank you."

"But I'm not guilty."

I sighed. "No, you're not."

The next morning, I found a plate of bread and jam outside my tent.

She had left her house. For me.

"You alright?"

Lord, the way the warm honey of her voice calmed the shouting in my head.

"Fine, why?"

"You've been staring at your toast for a while now. Not a fan of apple jam? I have others."

"No, no. Apple jam is perfect." Like you.

Shut up!

I took my toast into my tent, where I spent the majority of my day.

I'd killed before. People had tried to kill me. I wasn't afraid of anything.

Or so I thought.

I practiced my bandage wrapping to distract myself. By the time the sun was dipping towards the horizon, a rock floated into my tent. My first instinct was to scream and kick it out of the air. By the time I was done with that I realized what the rock was. My head poked out of my tent.

Mave stood in the doorway, her soft blue dress hanging loosely. She took my breath away.

"Do you need something?"

She gestured for me to join her. What did she want with me?

I stood at her doorstep. "Yes?" I prompted.

"I read my tea leaves today," she said. "And I saw a dove in the saucer." Her hand reached across the threshold to hold mine. I couldn't breathe. "Do you know what a dove symbolizes?"

I shook my head. We had never been this close, our noses almost brushing. My mind wasn't able to process.

Before I could blink, she tightened her grip and pulled me into her house. There was no barrier to protest. How long had it been gone? Her arms wrapped around me, a grin lighting up her face. She had been hoping for this.

"The dove is a symbol of love. I know what my future holds now." Her breath smelled like apples.

“Constance, are you my dove?”
I finally exhaled. “Yes, Mave.” I answered.
Our lips met softly,
There were no more walls, no more barriers.
Just a doorway to something better.

MOSELLE WIMBERLEY DAKE

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Baggage

Piercing sounds,
Shattering glass,
Agonized screams.
The sky
Is a miserable crimson,
Buildings dance
With bright flames.

The Shema
Pops into my head.
In the streets
Bonfires filled with books
And possessions rage.
Flames
Lick a Torah's scrolls.
Shema Yisrael.
People fly everywhere.
Adonai eloheinu.
No sirens
Just screams.

Adonai echad.
The nightmare ends.
Shame and fear
Grips my family
Like a plague.
This was the night
Of Kristallnacht.

Voices
Quaking with fear
My parents
Announce that I am to leave.
Jewels of panic
Shining in their eyes.
We leave with the darkness.
Our house stares sadly
At our backs.

The station is stuffed with people.
A cauldron of emotions
About
To overflow.
I savor
My family's hugs
Though I'm stiff
With fear.

I take a photograph
In my mind,
Memorizing every line,
Color,
And texture,
Of my family's faces.
Love and goodbyes
Pour
From my mouth.
As the robotic arm
Of a guard
Pushes me,
Into the whirlpool
Of children.

The train is bursting
With people,
Stampeding
Like cattle.
Towards the windows.
I frantically
Shove past
Hundreds
Of tiny hands
Wet with tears.
Peeking out
Through a sliver
Of glass
My eyes wander
the station.
Looking for a familiar face.

The people outside
Are a patchwork quilt,
Of every color
Imaginable.
Is that my family?
The train
Not understanding
my wishes.
Eases its way
Out of the station.

We pass by restaurants,
Houses,
Schools,
And streets.
Dotted with the faces
Of my people.

Are they still my people?
The train's speed
Picks up
Wrenching me away
From my family
My friends
Everything I have ever known
And my life.

Through a veil of shock
I see
The city transform
Into farmland.
Familiarity
Transforming
Into the unfamiliar.
Only now
Do I notice
The number pinned
To my coat,
and other children's.
We are all suitcases
Carrying our baggage
Wherever we go.
We are packed
With pain
With fear
And with confusion.

After many hours
The train crawls
To a stop.

A thunderstorm

Of boots
Boards the train.
The sounds
Become louder
And louder.

A Nazi soldier
Appears
At the door.
His eyes
Burn
Into my skull.
His gun glints,
His shoes shine,
And the swastika
On his arm
Bleeds red.
He spreads
Panic
Through the train.

That night
horrible dreams
Infest my sleep.
When the sun
Waves hello
They still seem real.
We stop
And our bodies
Willingly
Get off
The steel kidnapper.
Onto a boat
And into a bunk.

We sink
And discover
Seasickness.

The next morning
We are herded onto
Yet another train.
Soon enough
We stop.
Before us
Is London.
Scared and alone,
England is
An alien planet
That is not home.

Hundreds
Of names
Are read off
A never-ending
List.
A familiar sound,
My name
Is called.
I leave
With a stranger
And go to their home.
I turn my back
On what
I know.

I have carried
My baggage far.
I will gain more

As I go.
I will carry it
For as far
As I need
And I will bring it back home.

CYNTHIA YANG
CATLIN GABEL SCHOOL

Purple

A final point of black acrylic paint dotted my right eye, and there I was!

I stood there, uncomfortable, frigid, as I was enveloped by consciousness for the first time. What a wonder! A pristine blue sky sat atop my head, with little puffs of watercolor clouds interspersed. My paws rested upon an uneven clump of emerald green ferns; sublime, though the color wasn't blended skillfully into the snowy white hues of my fur. How strange it felt simply to be, to exist as a speck of dust in a vast infinity of space, just there, inter-being with the rest of world. I averted my vision to look behind me, my mind wandering lost in a dozen shades of blue that faded into an oblivion of pink and orange that disappeared at a line at the edge of the world.

Perhaps it was then—solely seconds after I began to be—that I was already having trouble wrapping my paws around the concept of self. Here I am. Just the thought that someone else out there may have a life just as complex as mine—even that is an epiphany to me. But also, to billions of Things out there, I fit on an 8.5-by-11-inch canvas, and if they filled their world up to the brim with these canvases? How many me's would there be, how many rabbit ears could all the galaxies hold? And how many more universes are there out there? I know of three dimensions, but to Them my existence is only two. And how . . .

I screeched in surprise as my focus fixated on a distant geometric plane hovering in the still air all too abruptly, and I meekly peeked up at a Thing hovering somewhere in the distance, a place next to the sky, diagonally adjacent to the clouds. Two large orbs, both a startling shade of sea foam green, peered down at my shaking figure. I very

much loved the color, and I felt irked that I was confined to this canvas of limited colors, and . . . this Thing was up there, out of this cage, prancing around foolishly? Why didn't I deserve the same freedom? Who decided that It was better than me? I sighed in bitterness. How much I desired to tear its superiority away, to drag it down to this patch of earth, to breathe in this stale, paint-scented air that never moved, devoid of the molecules of life.

Alas, no matter how hard I tried to jump, I could never reach the window that hung in the sky so enticingly.

And thus my eternity commenced, under the bloody red egg yolk of a sun that would never fully set, the two flamboyant orbs fixated obnoxiously on my floppy ears. Leaving, returning, leaving once more, and The Thing's mouth always ready to bombard my poor, pitiful self with a fusillade of conversation. One-ended conversation, that is. Sometimes I wondered how one could not become fatigued from spouting so many trivial, opinionated statements, always something more to say, each thing more unnecessary than the last.

On any given day, "Hi Purple! I'm back again, I missed you so much, soooo many things have been happening at school! I mean, Eli is SO cute, you know Eli, right . . ." the stentorian voice rang out as I rolled my eyes internally for the nth time (which I had come to do so often my metaphoric pupils had begun to get sore). How would I know Eli? Though at this rate, I had heard enough about him to be able to picture his dazzling, cerulean blue eyes and the way they turned into crescent moons when he smiled. At this, I realized that I had never actually seen the moon, nor was I ever educated on what it was . . . or what anything was, for that matter. These mysteries seemed to swallow me whole! How do we know what we know, or what we don't know? Though I suppose we couldn't really know the answer to that, unless we knew the reason as to why we knew it. I was confounded, too, at how One, at the

age of solely 10, could ponder the complexities of love.

Then, one summery evening as I lounged in the verdant fields, and the man trapped inside the TV screen spoke, “Today we’re gonna have the three H’s outside: hot, hazy and humid! Be sure to . . .” I heard the quotidian sound of footsteps hammering the poor wooden floors. Sure enough, I soon found the orbs hovering in my window of humanity. My pink nose, though, twitched in familiarity at the long paintbrush in its tight grasp, the first sight that I beheld. The Thing’s smile, if it reached from ear to ear in any normal occurrence, seemed to have stretched all the way off of its visage, suffusing the air around it with a layer of happiness as well. Imagine being as happy as The Thing.

“Purple!!! I have a surprise for you, and I know you’re going to love it!” The Thing squealed, throwing its hands up in enthusiasm. I barely batted an eye, shifting my position to begin my beauty sleep. But then, as the voice died down (a rare occurrence, I must say) and I opened my eyes once more, I nearly choked on my own saliva. My window to the Thing was clouded with the brown hairs of the brush, and a streak of red permeated through the still air of my world.

And though I tried, I simply could not refrain from lighting up in absolute euphoria and awe, gazing up in wonder as the stripe of fiery red reached the horizon, and then to nothingness. The red disappeared momentarily, and then came orange, right below it, a jagged stroke of orange that was made with so much love. Then came a honey yellow, a summery green, followed by deep blue. As It walked off to get who knows what, the colors arced magnificently above my head, the most beautiful moment of my life thus far. When The Thing returned, it added another layer to the arc, the layer closest to me.

“Purple, this new color I’m making is purple. It’s your new name, actually!”

Purple was my favorite thing in the entire world, and I was proud to be named after it. It was the perfect velvety balance between fire and ice, bridging the gap between the sky and the earth, the smell of lavender soap and lilacs and like a glowing amethyst. With purple hanging above my head, I was content.

“Do you love this? I bet you totally, totally do! It’s a rainbow! Oh no, my mom is calling me . . . goodnight Purple! I love you.” The Thing sang out, a vibrant smile dancing across its cheeks.

I wonder if The Thing loved me or this Eli as much as I loved purple. And if so, I think that maybe loving isn’t the intricate psychological labyrinth that I had it cut out to be. Maybe love is always in everything, it just needs time to shine.

As I closed my eyes to sleep that night, I smiled. It did not, contrary to my prior thoughts, cause my jaw to ache. I was numb with this drug called bliss, my existence suddenly coated with a honey-sweet layer of joy. Simply that even my world, my speck of existence, could be decked with such embellishments made my heart soar. Figuratively, of course.

It was short-lived.

Another few weeks swept by, the brilliant autumn leaves filling in the shoes of the summery evenings. Seemingly countless days of waiting had not brought a new rainbow, or even an extra cloud, much to my disappointment. I was nonchalantly berating The Thing mentally, when the familiar sea-foam orbs arrived at the window once more.

“Oh my god, Purple!!! You will not believe what just happened!” she screeched at a ridiculously high pitch. If she had the interest, she could be an outstanding opera singer (if I do say so myself).

“Eli asked me out!! Oh my god, oh my god, eeeeeek! Purple, Eli asked

me out!! Why in the heavens would Eli Smith be willing to go with me, Maura Walsh?!” she squealed, as I could vaguely make out her figure from my afternoon nap, hopping up and down like she had stepped on a pile of legos. Maura. What a beautiful name. I wanted an Eli to my Maura, a Romeo to my Juliet. If only I could find love too, relish the same elation that seemed to dance in Maura’s heart whenever this “Eli” was being talked about. If only, if only.

Yet only days later, “Hey Purple, really sorry but I can’t be here to play with you tomorrow because Eli and I are going to eat ice cream together . . . I’m sure you’ll find something to do on your on! Bye, wish me luck!!” she spoke with an apologetic tone, but a smile also lacing her soft voice.

And then the next week, “Ah Purple, I love you so much but I’m going to the movies with Eli today, and oh, tomorrow I can’t either, I’m so sorry, agh, tell you what, I’ll bring him home next week and you can see him! You’re going to get along sooo well, I’m sure of it!” She laughed, and now it was my turn to applaud wildly inside my teeny little rabbit heart, bubbling with anticipation to meet this Greek god, beautiful, legendary being of a human. If Eli was a color, he’d definitely be a scintillating gold, the grandest color of them all, or maybe the same blue as his eyes. Perhaps he would lighten up my world, recolor the skies with his own brushstrokes!

Even with these glorious thoughts in mind, the days without Maura, I suppose, were not as serene or as enjoyable as the days with It. It seemed like the dozen blues had almost slipped into a subconscious grey, longing for attention, for vibrant colors. And until the day that he arrived even, I yearned for the day Eli would arrive.

It was an afternoon, a Friday afternoon, when Eli finally visited. I’d heard a faraway call of Maura, telling Eli, “Here, I have a surprise to show

you!” and a response from a deep silky velvet of a voice that I couldn’t quite make out. Not long after, though, two dots of resplendent blue appeared before the window, like two shining sapphires, and honestly the Thing was not lying when It said that those colors could “take It’s breath away” because I think my entire existence stopped for about two seconds. That blue, I decided, would be the new color Eli would paint my sky. Maybe I could even—

“This is the supposedly ‘amazing’ surprise you’ve been raving on about showing me? A rabbit painting? Ugh, what a loser.” He rolled his eyes walking off, and I felt something inside of me crumble, feeling hollow. I saw her run off, scrambling after Eli in tears, sobbing, “Please, Eli! Give me another chance, please! I’ll do anything!” and my heart broke in two, for her and for me as well. I wanted oh so much just to extend my paw and run it across the golden locks that cascaded down the sides of her head, to tell her that it was okay.

When her eyes turned back towards me, they weren’t filled with love or care. They were angry and empty, and for the first time, I felt frightened. I bunched up my legs, leaping into the air, towards the window, but the last thing I saw was a can of black, the color of my eye, hurling towards me. Something in my heart lurched forward, and it never occurred to me that the day of my demise might be so soon, that my being here was another fleeting second in the grander scheme of things. Perhaps that is why all those Things say “life is precious.” The tiny scope of time being here in this world can be a limit, but also an opportunity to risk fearlessly. Life is your tiny canvas, and when you leave, it stays. A child, a tree, a melody, a painting, an echoing laugh that someone remembers you by. And I, for one, learned a little about love, and how it can be warm like hot cocoa and sharp like a dagger and amorphous and ever-changing. Today my existence is swept off into a deep abyss of nothing, but purple persists.

The waves of black slammed me back onto the ground, and suddenly my world was drenched in darkness.

The black of my eye melded in with the darkness and then I was no more.

ARI LOHR
WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

Synonyms for Flight

departure; an act or instance of diversion (i.e., escape, exodus, passage)
[+] exit; an act of going out or leaving (i.e., retreat, removal, withdrawal)
[+] the heat preceding combustion [+] the brief procrastination of gravity
[+] the hesitation of the flame [+] the margin between sky and soil
[+] the interval between dancing and drowning [+] to live on instinct + fear survival
[+] to speak static into slaughter [+] to speak chaos into carnage
[+] to flee [+] to fire a bullet into wind + drown the shell [+] to be the shell + the bullet
[+] to enlarge an aperture so hollow as to swallow (i.e., blood, spit, saltwater) [+] to dub the unknown as heaven
[+] to buckle + bend so violent you swear you can touch heaven
[+] to touch heaven

MARCUS HO
CATLIN GABEL SCHOOL

the story of a boy and an island

February 28, 1947

Taipei, Taiwan

A shot rings out. A second. A third.
Kuomintang commanders shout their orders
to Kuomintang soldiers. Men and women
fall like black-haired dominoes
with blood-red dots for numbers.

A young man watches as his best friend
is gunned down fighting for the country
that could have been.

He turns to his loving girlfriend
and she sees the words etched into his horrified eyes:
We have to go.
And so they go, to the land of the rising sun
Japan, where their son will be born.

October 1, 1949

Beijing, China

Mao addresses his countrymen with a speech
at Tiananmen Square. The message:
It is done. The Kuomintang has been defeated
and a glorious communist age can begin.
From here, the People's Republic of China
takes a great leap forward.
And what of that small island to the southeast?
They called it Formosa—Beautiful Island.
Beautiful, but meaningless.
A Taiwanese butterfly, flapping its little wings

struggling against the typhoon of the world.
The world that China is part of.

October 25, 1971

New York City, New York

“Restoration of the lawful rights
of the People’s Republic of China
in the United Nations.”

“Say goodbye, little island,
to your place in the UN. But don’t worry;
we’re sure this new country
will do just fine in your place.”

Taiwan was never meant to be China
but it wasn’t meant to be nothing at all.

Some time in 1988

Oberlin, Ohio

A young man steps onto an American university
for the first time. He breathes in the cold air,
glances at the old brick buildings, listens to students
chattering away in English. He thinks about his future.
He’ll stay for a couple years, for college.
He might even go to graduate school
and get a degree in neuroscience.
But he misses his home in Japan
and his mother’s Taiwanese food
and will definitely return.

Some time in 1994

Portland, Oregon

A young woman plays the piano at church
in front of her family members.

She has lived here her entire life.
She thinks about what her father said to her once—
that she is Taiwanese, her history is Taiwanese,
her blood is Taiwanese, she should speak Taiwanese.
Exactly three times now, she has been to that country
(or what was a country—most of the UN
doesn't recognize it). Her father was born there.
She looks at the man from Ohio
sitting in the back of the church
and wonders if she should go talk to him.

August 2003

Portland, Oregon

The Taiwanese-Japanese man
and the Taiwanese-American woman
sit together in their house and think
about their future. Their future roles in life—
Scientist. Piano teacher.
Mother and father.
What does one name a baby, exactly?
Perhaps Audrey—that sounds like a nice name.
(It's a boy; they just don't know it yet.)

September 3, 2013

Portland, Oregon

A young boy walks into his 4th grade classroom.
There's a map on the wall. The teacher asks four words
to each and every student: "Where are you from?"
It's a crude map, cut out from construction paper
by previous fourth graders. The rough shapes of Europe
and Africa and America and Asia are there.
But there is no Taiwan. The boy tries to draw it
where it should be. He's not very good at proportions.
He points to the deformed potato shape

that should be his grandfather's homeland.
He doesn't understand the world yet.

I don't understand the world yet.

2017

Portland, Oregon

My mother tells me something
her father might have said to her once:
that I am Taiwanese, my history is Taiwanese,
that I should care about Taiwan, past and present.
And I do. I find Taiwan's politics fascinating,
but I find myself wondering why I care.
It is not my home.
It isn't even her home.
It might be my father's home—he works in Taiwan,
looking after the business that was his father's.
Perhaps my grandmother could weigh in on this...

January 20, 2020

Portland, Oregon

"Coronavirus"

I would joke that it was the most epic name
a virus had ever been given.
My grandmother tells me something she heard
on the news—the Chinese virus has spread to America
for the first time. She says Chinese
with something like disdain. I hardly blame her.
But something else worries me—
She says "Chinese virus," and thinks of China.
But others will say those same words
and think of us.

present day

I am Taiwanese,
my history is Taiwanese,
my blood is Taiwanese.
All made irrelevant.
My new identity
is Plague.

Without Light

The chair sits in the middle of the empty room, the bare walls gazing upon it, almost melancholy in their decrepit blankness. There is a hole in one of them, and around it, on the floor, lies some sort of insulation, arranged as the decaying, gory body of the part of the wall that once had been. There is, apart from this, no door, no windows, just a flat roof, a solid, insulated box with a hole torn in it, and a chair. No mold—the air is fresh and clean, but stagnant. No spiders haunt the corners that should have, by now, been slick with rot and slime, but are instead as bright a white—though it is impossible to exactly tell what color they are, seeing as there is no light in the box—as the day they must have been painted.

On the chair, covered with a slight coating of dust, sits a perfect, half-opened flower, untouched by age. Its leaves still a vibrant, living green, soft and flexible. But the dust foretells that it had been there a long time—the floor, already a dim brown, is covered with an inconspicuous coating, undisturbed by even a single footprint. You could say that time had stopped, there in the box, were it not for the dust.

Through the hole in the wall, you can hear . . . whispers. Anxious and petulant. The voice of, perhaps, a small child, or a cat or dog begging for attention. A ray of ruthlessly bright light shines onto the floor, and for the first time, a footprint appears in the dust.

Something shifts. The light shines, curious, upon the chair, the flower. As confident as if the owner of the light owns the dark, too.

The light clicks off.

Curiosity turns to confusion, and abruptly to fear.

Our passage to the outside world—it seals up, stitched together, seamless with the walls. We feel the creature blunder around in the dark, and we laugh. See how pitiful, how useless, how worthless they are without light! We do not need light to know the walls are white and the floor is brown and the dust is settling even as it is disturbed, erasing the creature before it is even gone. We don't need to see to know a hundred years pass in mere seconds, and the rose on the table, covered in dust, has returned to its bud, and there is a hole in the wall.

Tricycle Trio

Chapter 1

"No more TV, Jack!"

"But Mom, Lily got more time than me," he whined back.

"Did not," his triplet, Lily, responded.

Lily had silky, thin, blonde hair that was almost white. The way all blonde hair is at the age of six. Lily had just recently lost her two front teeth, giving her a slight lisp that made her sound like a snake when she spoke with s-heavy words. She loved the color pink, and everything about her showed it. Her room was painted pink and almost all of the clothes she owned were pink. Even all of her stuffed animals were painted pink.

Jack was almost identical to Lily. He had the same white-blonde hair. He refused to get haircuts, so his hair was grown out, resembling a mop. He wore only neon clothes, and his room was decorated with posters of athletes that he didn't know a thing about.

Andrew was the oddball of the triplets. Lily and Jack had their smooth blonde hair, sporty clothes, and a hatred for school, but Andrew was all that they weren't. He had dark brown hair, complemented by thick glasses, khakis, and a button-up shirt. He was getting ready for the first day of first grade. There was only a week until then, and Andrew had been setting early alarms to get in the habit of waking up early. He loved school.

Andrew tried to sneak back onto the TV. It was a dangerous task because he had already used up all of his time, and was supposed to go outside.

"Andrew, don't you dare turn on that TV!" his mother yelled at him as he crawled behind and around the couch.

"But mom," he whimpered, "there's a new National Geographic

on. It's about polar bears!"

By now, all of the triplets had begun screaming at their mother, demanding more TV time, despite multiple warnings from her. She began to count down from three, telling them there would be consequences if she got to one.

"Three," their mother gave a warning eye.

The triplets were used to this tactic, and they knew she didn't have the guts to reach one. So they kept screaming.

"Two."

Andrew began to worry.

And then their worst nightmare came true: "One."

The whole room went silent. There was a faint scent of the cherry pie their mother was making in the kitchen, and there was a muffled noise coming from the TV as Spongebob and Patrick began to laugh. Andrew felt the coarse, green couch as he gripped it in frustration. And the triplets backed away once they saw the anger in their mother's eyes.

Lily began to weep. "Oh mother, I'm so sorry," she pleaded for forgiveness.

Jack anticipated the consequence. No dessert? No friends over for a week?

"I've had it with you all," their mother screamed. "It's obvious that this TV has been causing your bad behavior, so no more TV!"

"For how long?" Andrew asked, his voice shaky.

"Forever!"

Chapter 2

The whole day, the climate of the house seemed off. There was silence. It hadn't been this quiet since before the triplets were born. Their mother enjoyed it, and began to ponder if she should hand out these consequences more.

Little did she know, the triplets were plotting something. Something humongous.

"Let's run away," Jack said with teary eyes and a hoarse throat.

"To a place with candy, unicorns, and TV?" Lily asked.

"Sure, Lily, anything is better than here." Jack choked on his words.

"We need to prep for the journey." Andrew's mind was moving fast, plotting out a good operation.

Lily and Jack both agreed.

So, they began to prep.

"We need food and water." Andrew began making a checklist.

"And I want my stuffies," Lily replied.

Jack began thinking. "We also need a way to get around."

And then, all together, they screamed, "Tricycles!"

The triplets needed to figure out a way to sneak out and into the garage without their mom noticing. Since their rooms were tucked in the corner of the house, with a long hallway leading to the living room, getting there was easy. However, their mom would most likely be preparing dinner for the family in the kitchen, which had a perfect view of the living room. The triplets made a plan to sneak down the hallway and crawl around the couch, under the coffee table, next to the fireplace, and somehow open the front door without being noticed. They thought it was an amazing idea.

Chapter 3

Their plan didn't necessarily go how they wanted it to, but they did reach the garage with little suspicion. Their mom spotted them immediately and asked why they were crawling around the floor. Andrew's quick thinking told her that they were playing follow the leader. She didn't seem to care much.

"Do you need help lifting the garage door?" Andrew asked Jack as he struggled to lift the metal frame.

"No, of course not," Jack said, using all his strength to move the door maybe an inch off the ground.

"You sure?" Lily asked.

Andrew and Lily went and helped him despite his requests. It opened easily.

"I loosened it for you," Jack murmured.

"Yeah, right," Lily rolled her eyes.

They grabbed the tricycles and began to make their way down the street. Jack's back already had begun to ache from the Superman backpack full of fruit snacks and stuffed animals draped over his shoulders.

It started to grow dark as soon as they set off on their journey. They didn't know exactly where they were going, but with the two-and-a-half peanut butter jelly sandwiches that they had packed, they figured they had a week or so to figure it out. The sidewalks were cracked, and their shadows were sprawled out onto the road as they made their way farther and farther away from home. The familiarity of the neighborhood began to dwindle after only a few minutes.

After about five blocks, Lily had a change of heart.

"I don't want to run away," she cried, "I miss mommy!"

"C'mon Lily, we've only just begun," Jack scoffed at her.

Tears began to form at the corners of Andrew's eyes as well, and soon enough all three of them were sitting on the sidewalk crying.

Andrew thought back to the other time they had tried to run away. They had all gotten in trouble because they tried to paint Lily pink. He thought of how relieved they'd been when they returned home and how scared their mother had been. He couldn't believe they had just now made that same mistake again.

Over the course of just a couple of minutes, they had all changed a lot. TV seemed like such a small issue now, and they regretted the choice to run away from home. With their wise change of heart, they all decided to head home, not caring about the loss of TV. But there was only one problem: they didn't know how to get home.

Nicknames

Names hold stories, and stories hold meaning, and of meanings we make names.

My name is my story, and that story is called Olivia.

Before I was born, my parents would come home from their respective jobs—my father a mechanic, my mother working at the Portland State health center—and flip on this old brick of a television to watch *Law & Order*. It was a staple of their home life, even if it made my dad queasy if they watched while eating. When it came time to name that small thing growing in my mother, they looked to Detective Benson. Thus, my first name was chosen.

My second name has more intrinsic meaning. My mom, while taking it easy, could not take it easy. She rode up to an ultrasound five-and-a-half months pregnant on a Suzuki TL1000S, so it's not a stretch to say she had half a coffee beforehand as well. When they went in, the doctor compared my tiny form to that of a coffee bean, and it stuck. Alternatively, they considered my middle name to be Danger, for obvious reasons, but found that when the time came that the former fit better. Then again, they both have differing recollections of the events that took place, so maybe this is wrong.

From there, nicknames sprouted from my relatives, such as Cutie-Patooty, Little Dolly, and the like. The usual suspects, the ones enthralled grandmothers call you while they pinch your cheeks and offer you questionable sweets older than the trees in the yard. My dad was more on brand, with variations upon my middle.

To be fair, I was very bean-like, adorned with round cheeks and big doe eyes. He'd call, "Ollie Bean," as he snapped his fingers expectantly to hold my hand at intersections, or he'd ask my mom how The Bean was doing when we hadn't seen one another for more than a day, or he'd remark how I was becoming a Beanpole and measure my head against

his side.

When I became “Too old” (my words, not his), and refuted his meanings, he changed to match my new labels. Ollie became Livy, but the Bean stuck like a piece of gum on the bottom of a shoe. He held on stubbornly to that little kiddo with the bright pink hair and the knobby knees, but it was third grade. In my eyes, I was an adult. A small, pink adult who had only just discovered that she needed glasses, badly. No new nicknames adhered themselves to me, nicknames were for children—the only notable exception being my brief flirting with the idea of becoming a Minecraft Youtuber who went by the pseudonym TheDiamondDJ. We don’t speak of that.

By the time I hit seventh grade, I deemed myself to good for Livy, dropping a letter.

Liv was the kid who didn’t trust others to be kind, who only had one friend at a school where everyone knew each other and outsiders were rare. Liv was too cool for you, but too cool for me as well. It didn’t last long, and soon I had friends.

Names hold meanings, and Christopherson the Math God was exactly as one would expect. His names told you that he wasn’t just your teacher, he was your friend, someone to goof off with while you learn. Chrispy Cream taught science, math, and most importantly, how to laugh. He’s the reason I got my best nickname, as accidental as it turned out to be. He would hand out graded assignments by calling your name, but one day he didn’t say Liv. He looked up at me and called me Liver.

Dylan, my unrelated sister, jumped up dramatically, and dead to rights, said “Liver Transplant” with unbridled enthusiasm. Needless to say, it stuck then and has ever since.

There are many more names I hold, some good, some bad, but all are part of me. While I may not like all, I refuse to forget the ones that made me. My name is my story, and my story is called Olivia.

CECE AUSTIN

WILSON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

Natural Impermanence

The sky draws my attention, an unbroken sheet of graying white. Looking up feels like being in an empty bathtub, soft, filmy disinfectant over the ceramic. Crows go about their business, exploring and conversing amongst each other. How cold I feel in my pajamas and jacket reminds me of how inept I'd be if forced to live outside. The city doesn't feel like nature until you're out of protection from the elements. Moss blooms, wet and sticky. It is existing here and waiting for something I don't yet know about. The foggy air tastes alkaline, like soapy water. The sky; I could look at it for hours. The color of peace, maybe.

In just days or hours, blue breaks through the fog. Incessantly bright sunshine interrupts the quiet, bringing boughs of birdsong. The sky; it is technicolor blue now, with only wisps of clouds. I miss the lazy serenity of gray skies dusted with mellow rain. Petrichor and dewdrops on verdant blades of grass; I want to halt Summer's imminent reign. The sun is acidic, leaving a bitter taste in my mouth.

Ceramic bathtub

Monotone indifference

It matches the sky

Softer skies dry up

Clouds dissolve, leaving bright sun

Oh wait, it's summer

ELENA SIEKMANN

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: AMY MINATO

Not Born, but Raised

“What if we went back?” I asked.

“And leave here?” she responded.

Complicated. To say the least.

We became the kids in America.

I wasn't really sentient before I arrived here.

All I know is America.

My brother remembers school from back then,

And my sister picked up an English accent along the way.

We took the piano with us, the large golden braid framed mirror,

And the many dust-soaked, old-smelling books.

My father blogged the journey,

And I slept the journey.

At Fourth of July, people sang loudy

“I was born in the USA!”

And I sang along.

I wasn't aware the lyrics didn't apply to me.

I eventually learned.

I learned I could never say I was “born and raised” truthfully.

My father spoke German to me.

I spoke English back.

My grandma barely spoke English, and I barely spoke German.
So we rarely spoke.

We became divided, and
Not only by a body of water.

Memories faded,
And appearances changed.

But I learned the language,
And I returned with my father one chilly Spring.

But we had to go back to America.
We had to repeat the journey.

And this time,
I was awake.

The Madison Music Department's Difficult Transition

With our first semester at Marshall coming to a close, most have settled nicely into the new building. But for the Madison Music Department, this transition hasn't been as easy.

Back in May, the department put on its final music concert in the old Madison building. It included performances from all of the sections in the department, from jazz to drumline, and featured pieces like the haunting "Witness" performed by the Chamber Choir, the jazz band's rendition of "Sing Sing Sing" by Benny Goodman, and a resounding version of Toto's "Africa" by the entire department.

"This is it," said Mr. Dell as he returned to the stage for the finale. "This is the very last song in this building, on this stage." He paused and pointed to the rickety floor beneath his feet, and the audience let out a somber 'aww.' Baton gripped firmly, he turned to the band and began to conduct their last piece: "Brazil."

"There was a lot of emphasis on the fact that it was the last performance at the original building, and I think for most of us it was very bittersweet," said Ronnie Bacab, who has played tenor drums in the department since their junior year. "It was goodbye not only for seniors, but for everyone who will graduate before seeing the new building."

"It was hard to realize that this would be the last time that hall would hear music," said Blue Peterson, a trumpet, French horn, and tenor drum player.

After this emotional final performance, the Music Department had a new challenge ahead: an adjustment to the starkly different auditorium at Marshall campus.

Back in October, while preparing for the fall concert, all of our school's talented instrumentalists and vocalists were finding difficulties with adapting to the new performance space. "First concerts are always very stressful, and added to the fact that it was a new auditorium made it even more intimidating," said Ronnie.

Why was this transition so arduous for the department? According to Blue, the Marshall auditorium has "different acoustics and overall resonance."

"Sound-wise, it was different and weird to get used to because the Marshall auditorium is much smaller than Madison's," Ronnie added.

But despite the new environment, the Madison Music Department continued to thrive. Ronnie said the fall concert went very well, and they were especially pleased with the Wind Ensemble's performance of "Ave Maria," a piece that proved to be quite challenging. "It's a pretty popular ballad, and to be given a piece that intense and widely known was a little scary, but it sounded great," they said. "I was just very proud and impressed by all the work that every group put in."

Even after being faced with the challenge of a foreign auditorium, the Madison Music Department has continued to thrive. Ronnie calculated, "I think getting over the fact that it was a new environment, it was still the same people with the same passion for making music."

Memories

Taylor learns in the newspaper, of all places. Well, more specifically, an old high school friend emails her a picture of the obituaries section of the Silver Creek Weekly. He gives no preface, just her father's name in type print next to a grainy black and white picture of his from a few years ago. It looks vaguely like the one from his business card at the hardware store, his crooked smile and bristly beard, one of the short-sleeve button downs he would wear when he said he wanted to look nice. It's short, like most obituaries, a little of his childhood, a few sentences about how hard working he was, how he always greeted customers with a smile and bought his wife flowers for her birthday. It's bullshit, she thinks. His life all cramped neatly into a paragraph or so, glossed over by time and some sense of grief. People's lives look so much prettier when they're gone, when you can ignore what they did wrong, everything they took and never gave back, because there's no cost to forgetting them.

There's a funeral date at the bottom, and some part of her considers ignoring it, to spite him, maybe, but another part of her is less sure she can just let this go. It was easy to ignore his calls, because there was still the tangible feeling of want in his voicemails, and she was the one choosing to leave them unanswered. There was something about the unspoken implication that the ball was in her court, that whatever she chose to do with it was her choice alone, that she liked. Now he's just gone.

It's September 17th, five days away, held at the Silver Creek Lutheran Church like every other funeral for every other person who never left that godforsaken town. He'll be buried in the cemetery at the edge of town, in the overgrown grass and cheap fading headstones, under the shade of the old oaks like everyone else, and half the town will be there, even the ones who barely knew him because they're so

desperate to hold on to the idea that they did.

She stares at her screen for a while, rereading the type print over and over until the words start to lose meaning. The last time she talked to anyone from Silver Creek was five years ago, that last time she went back was seven years ago, the last time—she left for a reason.

She buys a ticket anyways.

Silver Creek looks exactly the same as she left it: dusty roads and grass everywhere, cookie cutter suburbans and its tiny downtown with the super market down one street and the pharmacy down another. Only the perpetual haze of her memory is gone. Strangers wander the streets where her and Alice used to race one another, and the high school stands the same as it ever did, two stories of old brick and a football field surrounded by dirty metal bleachers. She wonders if they still leave the door to the sports shed unlocked, or if the elementary school students still climb the trees by the front steps. She wonders if she cares.

She gets a room at the old inn by the creek, tucked way behind a cluster of maples, and spends the afternoon by the stables, tossing strips of grass to the horses; a palomino with braids in her mane, an elegantly built Tennessee Walker, a brown and white Appaloosa. There are name plaques on their stall doors, and the Tennessee Walker reminds her of one of the horses she used to work with, the curves of muscle and the dark, sleek coat. The smell is familiar, the hay and dirt and cool air, and no one bothers her for hours, only the inn owner when the sun starts to set and the stables are locked up for the night.

The hardware store is closed when she walks by, a sign in the window informing passersby of her father's death— anecdotes about a man she hardly recognizes. There's no mention of the times he'd stay out till midnight, drunk on cheap bourbon from the bar, rolling through cigarette after cigarette until his breath stunk of nicotine and he was surrounded by a haze of smoke, or the pretty blonde girl, an image of her mother fifteen years younger, he'd stumble home with, lips covered in golden liquor and pink lipstick. Maybe they don't know

about the times he'd leave for days on end, leaving their mother to take care of two little girls who wouldn't understand for years to come. Maybe they don't care

She tears down a sign at the church and rips it to shreds, tossing it in the first trash can she sees, and stumbles to a halt at the window of the real estate office. In the window is a collection of houses and apartments for sale: a tiny pale blue shack of a house, a grey ranch style with linoleum kitchen floors and grey shag carpet, and her old apartment. She feels a hollow sense of surprise when she sees it, the brown brick and the windows exactly as she remembers. And it's been sold already, she realizes numbly. Every childhood memory she has of their overstuffed couch and blue tiled bathroom and her fraying quilt painted over and handed off to someone else. She feels a jolt of sadness, swallows down the lump in her throat and continues walking.

At the end of the block is the diner where their mother would take her and Alice for Friday-night hamburgers and milkshakes, with the same red booths and glossy tables streaked with fingerprints in the fluorescent light. This whole damn town is painted in memories of her childhood.

She turns back, something like desperation clawing in her chest, and asks the real estate agent, alone at his desk and surrounded by paper and pens, if she can see the apartment.

He tilts his head, and she thinks she might remember him from high school—Elijah or something like that—and smiles. "Okay," he says, and the tightness in her chest dissipates. Okay.

Taylor wanders the half-empty apartment aimlessly. The flooring is new, some fancy hardwoods have replaced the cheap laminate, and the power must've been fixed in the seven years since she was last here, because the light in the kitchen doesn't flicker when she turns on the one in the bathroom. She finds it doesn't really matter to her. The new family moving in can have all their pretty wood floors and new light fixtures. All she has are ghosts.

There are boxes piled in the bedrooms, and a new bookshelf

covering the wall where her bed used to be. There are candles lit to ward of the smell of dust and other forgotten things, the light smell of flowers and hope filling the room. The window's been fixed, too, with colorful curtains drawn over it. For a moment, she wonders if she'd recognize it if she weren't meaning to, if she'd remember the spot where she used to pick at her guitar till her fingertips were red and bleeding, or the marks, covered by fresh white paint, where the bedpost used to chip away at the old blue walls. All notions of familiarity and ownership are gone. The little girl whose room this will soon be will never know about those things; how their cat liked to sleep at the foot of her bed, or meowed at the corner of the wall, convinced of a wayward spider or ghosts that lived in his head.

Her parent's bedroom, the room that had been her father's alone for nearly eight years, looks more open than she can ever recall it being, a dark, elegant bed frame against the wall, a matching bookshelf-and-nightstand set pressed against the bedframe, boxes pushed into one corner, a rolled up navy-and-white rug leaning against the wall. Gone are her parent's patchwork quilts and the dresser spilling with clothes and the green shaded lamp on her mother's bedside table, always covered in a collection of books that she can't remember the names of.

There are new kitchen cabinets and a small coffee table and a grey couch, and it feels empty and lifeless. Everything is pretty and new and bright, like it's trying to erase every pale, dark, wonder-filled memory she has of this place. Erasing the anger and pain and love she has for this place. It might be working. There are no more Sunday-morning pancakes, or four o'clock soccer practices. Alice is halfway across the country, studying for a master's in veterinary science; her mother is in Austin, pursuing the artistic dreams that towns like Silver Creek leave no room for, and her father is a victim of his bad habits, and she's lost somewhere in the margins, desperately running from a past she can't seem to let go of.

It's just Taylor and her memories, the shadows of a past this family will never know about, and a future she'll never get to see. Maybe that's for the best, she considers as she leaves; there's nothing left here for

her anyways.

The Silver Creek Lutheran Church is a small building with vaulted ceilings and large windows, images in the the stained glass that might mean more to her if she'd ever paid attention at the few church services she went to as a child. It's pretty, prettier than most places in this town, and crowded for the funeral, the pews filled with a few people she recognizes and even more she doesn't. There's a clerk from the hardware store, a bartender who made her and Alice mocktails when they were little, one row filled with the family who own the diner of fifth street.

The service is slow: hymns and readings from the Old Testament and a brief speech from Ed, a friend of her father's who talks vividly about a version of her father she barely recognizes: laughter over appetizers and pickup games with the high school boys and an unwavering dedication to his job. Some part of Taylor wonders where that man was when she was eight and crying on the playground, clutching her bleeding knee, or when she was twelve, shaking and terrified by her first panic attack, or when her and Alice came home with perfect grades, ever eager for their father to just be proud. Some part of her, buried beneath years of academic accomplishments and repressed memories she'd rather forget, wonders if they just weren't enough. Weren't enough for him to change or be better. Why was it that he was only better when they were gone?

Another part of her wonders why it matters so much to her. But then, there would be every desperate question of her childhood answered. Seventeen years of earnestly trying to prove herself to a father who hardly seemed to care, seven more trying to reason her way around it. He was selfish and incapable of changing. He never cared in the first place—the ever-present fear that maybe he loved her, but never enough to change. Or maybe he couldn't—not until he was forced to realize he had to.

She leaves on the nineteenth, five days' worth of clothes packed into her suitcase, watching the streets of her childhood fading from

view. The little park where her and Alice would race the taller boys who swore they could beat them, and only sometimes did, and the corner store where they'd buy soda and candy that they never let their parents see, the grocer's where they'd charm the manager into letting them get free peaches, the middle school field where she gave Simon Dean his first black eye and in turn got her first detention. This whole town is painted in memories of her childhood, painful and beautiful and faded by time all blurring together in the chipping paint and early fall leaves. She thinks she might finally be ready to let them go.

EVA SCHILLING

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Raised By

I was raised by activists

By thick black sharpie and poster boards

TV talking, debate dinners, climate commissions, sexism speeches

Sat on six-foot-two shoulders marching the streets

"If we don't stand up we'll be ignored"

Type of family

I was raised by dancers

By 5, 6, 7, 8, the mirrored bodies, legs straight

Ceilings high, ropes touch the sky

Some lightweight, choreography debated

"Ladies keep those knees up!"

Second family

I was raised by teachers

By straight-A expectations, obligations, endless calculations

"Just try your best if you can finish the rest"

Our disappointment is only a test, kind of temptations

Awaited report cards, green paper, dark letters, all a comparison

But not really we love you anyway

My dad's a teacher, family

I was raised by friends

Somehow all unique but fit each other's puzzle piece by piece

By clumsy cartwheeling, ice cream puddles melting, unexplainable

laughing, dance creating, fashion show making

"Stoppoooo, you're gonna upset the boba"

Chosen family

I was raised by blood
By pastors, lawyers, engineers, social workers, and EMTs
Freckle-splattered faces and blue-eyed cousins
Toppling attempted pyramids with matching pajamas
Yearly calendars, monthly memories
“Just one last picture,”
Generational family

I was raised by love
By the people that inspired me
The ones that lifted me up each time I fell
Supporting the weight I can't carry
Because
Blood or not,
They complete me
The type of people that help me become who I want to be
That's my family

GEORGIA FELD-DENAE

WILSON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

A letter to me, from me in 50 years

Dear Georgia,

I'll bet that you're not even thinking about me right now. You're thinking about how you're going to have to go to work after school and you're not even going to be able to spend the money you earned. You're thinking about how scared you are to move out and go to college, but remember, you'll be with people you were friends with long before you even knew what they looked like. You've waited for this for so long, and you're so scared and you're so, so close, and you're not even thinking about me.

Let me say now that I am always thinking about you. Looking back, it's hard to believe that there was ever a time when I lived in your world. I remember going to school and looking at everyone and wondering what made them who they are, and who they will become, and why? Sometimes I would look at all of you and feel completely alone, as though there would never be a time when I could connect with you and all of you could read it on me.

Other times I would walk into school and feel so infinitely similar to all of you that it could bring me to tears. Every single word that we speak or thought that we think is something that came from all of us together. All of us are human, and it makes me so incredibly happy, I could cry.

I went to your school recently. I didn't remember it being so close to the ocean. I walked through doors I didn't even recognize, and the first thing I felt was an immense unease. Wandering the halls, I was struck by how silent it was. When you went to school here, everything was

so loud and lively. Posters no longer decorated the walls, and instead, announcements scrolled by on outdated flat screens. It was dark.

I left and walked to the ocean. I took the long way, avoiding my old neighborhood. I wouldn't recognize anything anyways. The streets were empty, but the windows glowed. All the lawns were dry even though the sky was grey with rain. I got to the ocean. It was dark too.

The ocean wasn't the same friend from before. It had coated my hometown in her magnificent power, but I didn't hate it. It wasn't her fault.

I thought about you here, too. It's funny because you were ahead of the times, though you didn't know it. I think that might be why I'm here at the ocean—because when you saw everyone becoming like you, you noticed. And you saw yourself in the ocean, too, didn't you?

I don't want you to think about me, anyways. I really do miss you. I try not to, but it's hard not to think about it. You would be really sad if you were standing where I am. I guess I am you. I guess I am sad.

The glow of the windows behind me is becoming very intense, and I don't know why I'm here anymore. No one behind these windows seems very human anymore.

I think you would have left by now, but where would you go?

JAI'SHAWN WILLIAMS

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: RAJESH REDDY

At Six I Was a Champion

At six I was a champion
Conquering all my foes
Trampling over those who didn't agree
Demolishing everything in my path

At six I was a champion
Watching the crackling fire path
Witnessing the gargled moans of the dead
And the flattened, stained-red grass

At six I was a champion
Realizing that there was more to life
That I'm too young to be the best
That life had more for me

At six I was no longer a champion
Just a child seeing life
Witnessing the hunted never truly lose
Knowing that stargazing portrayed to the soul

At six I was no longer a champion
Gratifying those I beat
Praying their souls be returned
Happily remembering the sadness that's upon me

At six I was no longer a champion
Just a child with more dreams
Dreams of denying the help of gods
Refusing the charred love of others

Maybe being a champion means losing what you had
And having what you lose
Destroying things you share
And sharing things you destroyed

Now showing the deep pain of the love
And the great accomplishment of the loss
Maybe the insulted, stained sky shows remorse
Or maybe it shows the true champion

FRED CORTEZ

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Flash Fiction

Chapter 1

David Adams

Over my long career, I met an arrangement of some very interesting people, ranging from the typical locked-door murderers to a man who claimed he could make your household animals hate you through telekinesis (a very strange case, indeed!). But no one came close to David Adams; no one managed to disgust me and rattle me to the bone more than David Adams. He appeared as a young man very much in need of a great amount of sleep! He was thin, too thin, sickeningly thin, and very tall—he looked as though he could break! In our sessions, he always sat straight up, those clear eyes taking in everything and nothing. His fingers were long and thin, accompanied by dirty, badly chewed nails. He always wore exactly what the nurses told him to: a white, baggy, long-sleeved tee accompanied by equally baggy white pants and bare feet. I remember thinking whenever I saw him that he must blend in with the cell he's confined to.

Back then, I was in my midfifties with thinning hair and a quickly greying beard. I was wearing essentially what I'm wearing now: blue jeans just a half size too big and a brown sweater vest. I was, and am, the kind of man who could probably stand to lose a few, but in overall good health.

Early on, our sessions were in silence and all conversations were instigated by me, with few words and seldom any meaning. After a few months, I brought up my daughters; he seemed interested and actually ended up starting our conversation from then on. It was during this short period that I learned a bit about him, the most important being that he saw people in the room who weren't really there.

The room was slightly too dark and slightly too bare to ever seem

welcoming. The only thing on the gray walls was a plain black-and-white clock that was always exactly on time.

“They think I’m crazy.” He tilted his head to one side, eyebrows lifting slightly as he stared at the faded carpeting.

“Are you?” I asked in my professional questioning voice, though with little interest.

“No.” Sure he knew that’s what everyone says.

“The nurses, I know them from somewhere,” he started one morning.

“Where do you know them from?” I leaned forward slightly.

“ . . . Nurses.”

Like I said, just a few words.

Then one day, perhaps out of sheer boredom, or maybe because I was pissed about missing dinner with all three of my daughters, I brought up Marie Atkinson, a nice girl who had a bright future set up for herself as a nurse in some of the most prestigious hospitals. Atkinson was found in a completely white room lying dead on the floor with a stab wound in her side. She was also David’s former girlfriend, his first victim. The case was solved years ago, before he was even taken to me, not that he was trying to hide the murder in the first place. He had a reason for it, but I didn’t know it. He actually seemed hostile when I brought it up. After that, he seemed different, twitchy, unnerving.

Chapter 2

Last Session

I’ll always remember that last session, not only because of what happened during but what I found out soon after. It stands as the scariest, most horrific day of my life.

It started, as usual, him being walked in by guards masquerading as nurses, being locked into his chair, all the usual, but something about him seemed electric; his eyes danced around the room before settling on me, slightly out of focus. I’d never seen him like that before and

there was something on his face—almost a smile. I'm no scaredy-cat, but I had a very strong urge to order the guards to stay in the room with us. Nonetheless, the guards left and I then realized how very alone in the room I was with him, and I began to wonder, not entirely for the first time, how much my safety was valued by my employer.

I was disturbed from my thoughts by the sudden realization that he wasn't looking at me, but behind me to the left. This wasn't entirely new: we had talked briefly before about other people he was "seeing," so I figured this must be one of those times.

"David, what are you looking at, hmm? Another mystery person?"

"Oh no, not a mystery." There was a giddiness in his voice I'll never be able to forget.

"Who, then?"

"Someone of great interest to you." I could see a real smile creeping on his face now, horrific in my memory, though I'm sure it was more to the likeness of a boy in a candy shop.

"Are we playing a game, David? I like games." I was putting on my primary school teaching voice now (I actually taught primary school for a while).

"You don't like this game," he said, shaking his head slowly side to side, that smile splitting into a gut-wrenching grin. "The person I see, she holds great interest to you."

"Do you mean like a friend? A family member?"

"Yes, you've known her for a very long time."

"How long have I known her," I asked, breaking out into a cold sweat.

"All her life." His head came forward slightly, his eyes like fireworks; he didn't look human from that moment afterward as far as I know.

It must sound silly to you now, but at this moment, I was in full freeze, fight, or flight. Not being able to think entirely straight, I asked him a question I already knew the answer to.

"Which one of my daughters are you looking at?" I don't remember much except his laugh. It turned the blood in my veins cold as I ran out of the large building. There's not much left to say.

Chapter 3

Obit

Julia Baker was found dead by her father last night in her room at 7:34 p.m. Although no autopsy has taken place, the family has released a statement saying that after a long day of work, she came home and went to bed early where she had a seizure peacefully in her sleep, which looks to be the cause of her death. She is survived by her friends, family, and parrot, all of whom she loved dearly and fully. She died as she lived, peacefully, gracefully, beautifully, and quickly—

You get the idea, except our family never released a statement, and she didn't die of a seizure. I only saw David one time after that, and it was through a glass with no communication. My daughter's death was ruled, though unfortunate (a courtesy to me—ha!), unimportant and of no relevance to the Adams case. He still got moved, I don't know where, I'm glad I don't, and if I hadn't already quit I would have been fired.

After Julia's death, what once was my happy family fell apart and I ended up moving up to Edinburgh, Scotland with one of my two remaining daughters, Serena. After giving up my old job, I went back to teaching. Instead of primary schoolers, it was a group of gifted middle schoolers. My daughters did well too, both of them becoming doctors in their respective fields.

David Adams doesn't haunt me as much as he once did. Don't get me wrong, I'm still heartbroken over my dear Julia, and traumatized for life, I might add, but I've been able to be happy.

The End

I Scream, You Scream, Ice Cream

I love ice cream.

It's never been my favorite food, not technically, but I think that's only because I was told it wasn't "real food" as a kid. Besides, olives are fierce competition! One eventful day, in kindergarten or first grade, I was allowed to make my own lunch. Since ice cream would melt by noon, of course, I filled my whole Tupperware with sprinkles. I think my mom intercepted that one before we left the house.

Almost everyone in my family has a summer birthday, or a birthday in May or September that we can pretend is in the summer, and then there's that one aunt born in March, but hey, why not celebrate her too, and pretty soon you've got a family-wide summer birthday party in my grandparent's sprawling backyard complete with horseshoes, applesauce, a stray self-invited neighbor or two, and of course, ice cream. Fresh from the rock-salt-and-newspaper, Farm-Journal-recipe, very OLD ice cream maker. On this particular summer birthday occasion, the flavor was, allegedly, peach.

Toward the end of the sweaty afternoon, the newspaper was unwrapped, the lid lifted, and spoons plopped into the ice cream maker to smear all over the multi-person birthday cake. Eager utensils (and fingers) dived in, but no sooner was the ice cream down the hatch that it came right back out in the form of some very confused faces.

The ice cream was salty. Like, really salty.

Turns out, the rock salt, intended for the outer compartment of the maker, somehow wound up in the mix, right alongside those fresh summer peaches. It was gross, sure, but I had an ice-cream-loving reputation to keep up! So I ate my plate clean and only threw a little soiled cake into the blackberry bushes. I hope frosting makes good fertilizer.

Later, my family moved. My mom, a journalist, has never stayed

put for long; when I was informed at Ben & Jerry's that, much to my initial chagrin, we were headed for Jerusalem, Israel, I was consoled by the promise of ice cream.

As long as I could learn to say it in Hebrew. And Arabic.

I went a little overboard, and now, where some people could say "hello" in ten languages, count to ten, maybe even ask for the bathroom, I can say "ice cream." Maybe even in eleven.*

It wasn't all for nothing, either. I slowly grew more accustomed to life outside the U.S. My first close friend at the international school there was new and spoke no English, the school's language. She's Russian, and, luckily, I could talk to her, albeit with one word: мороженое.

Delicious.

*English: ice cream; Hebrew: הידילג; Arabic: آيس كريم; Italian: *gelato*; Spanish: *helado*; Japanese: アイスクリーム; Danish: *Is*; German: *Eis*; French: *crème glacée*; Pig Latin: *Iceway Eamcray*, naturally.

Fractured Fairytale/Little Red Riding Hood

Claret:

I am miserable. My red cloak has turned brown from the mud and my dirty blonde hair has lightened a few shades from the unbearable heat of the sun. Although I am a young, strong, capable male, the trek through the forest has taken its toll. I feel as out of place as a rabbit in a fox den. It has been almost a week of trudging through the dense woods of the northern pass. Everywhere I look, moss and vines weave around giant pines while ferns sprout from the ground. I can hear birds chirping merrily from their treetop roosts. It feels like they're mocking me. Unfortunately for me, I have been deemed the most suitable agent for miles of tripping over roots. As if this isn't bad enough, there are also the bugs to deal with. Big, nasty things that hit you when you least expect it. The only thing that keeps me from turning around is the upgrade I will receive in the future once this message is delivered. I can just see myself walking into my boss's office with a smile on my face. I will say something along the lines of, "It's been an honor serving on this mission, and the dangers I faced were worthy of impressing you, Sir!" Then I'll walk out of the office and go brag to the other employees and maybe buy a house or two with my raise. While fantasizing, I hear a rustle in the bushes. This isn't uncommon, as many forest creatures roam the woods. I nock my arrow onto my bow hoping for a meal and fire into the bush. Someone cries out in agony as my arrow hits its mark. I rush towards the sound.

There's a girl lying there with my arrow protruding out of her arm. She seems to be about my age, maybe twenty, with straight black hair and eyes as gold as the sun. Although she's the most beautiful person I've ever seen, something's off about her. She's flickering as if she isn't

quite here. I stare at her and she stares back, bewildered.

“You just SHOT ME?!” she cries. I blink at her.

“Well to be fair, you were following me,” I respond.

“If you’re going to travel through this forest, then you should be able to tell if someone’s following you,” she shoots back. I think about this for a minute and decide that she is probably right. I will have to be more cautious.

“Why are you following me?” I ask.

“My business is no concern of yours. If you want to continue this conversation later, then I recommend pulling the arrow out,” she replies. I continue to stare at her.

“You know, it’s kind of embarrassing that you watched me trip over, like, a thousand roots,” I blabber in shock.

“Who cares? Get the arrow out,” she screams.

“Fine, fine,” I reply. “It’s going to hurt.” She growls at me in response. “OK,” I say, and pull as hard as I can, freeing the arrow from her shoulder. She lets out a blood-curdling scream and proceeds to pass out.

“Great, one more thing I have to carry,” I mumble. I carefully bandage her wound and pick her up, continuing through the woods.

Rue:

I am being carried through the woods in the arms of a man I’m supposed to capture. I would have survived that particular arrow even if he hadn’t brutally ripped it out of my arm (honestly, I’m kind of embarrassed that I passed out). That doesn’t matter though. The only thing that matters is luring him into my trap. My arrow wound hurts like crazy. I open my eyes.

“Hello again,” the man says. “I’m afraid I haven’t formally introduced myself with you getting shot and all. My name is Claret, it’s nice to meet you.”

I smile at him sweetly and reply, “I’m Rue.”

“Well, Rue, now that you’ve been freed from that arrow, would you like to tell me why you’re following me?” Claret asks. He puts me down. I’m not sure I can walk so I sit on a stump.

“Actually, no, I would not,” I reply, “but I will agree not to question you about your motives if you don’t question me about mine.” Of course, I already know that he is on a mission to deliver a message to one of his spy commanders, but it would be better if he didn’t know what I was planning.

“OK, that sounds fair,” Claret agrees, “seeing that you probably won’t be able to walk for a while, we should set up camp here.”

“Ok,” I respond and slowly get up to gather branches for my shelter while Claret sets up his tent. When we are all settled I ask, “Do you plan on traveling to the other side of these woods?”

“Yes,” he says skeptically.

“Great! Do you want to know a shortcut? It will take us to the East River on the other side of the forest,” I tell him.

“That would be amazing!” He exclaims. “Although you should join me as a guide. I think I would get hopelessly lost if I went by myself. Also, I can’t just abandon you in the woods after I shot you.”

“I’ll help you,” I affirm.

End of Part 1

Claret

Rue is still flickering. I think it might be a trick of the light, but I’m not sure. When I was carrying her through the woods, she felt like I was trying to grasp at clouds. I’ve heard of people with powers before but I’ve never seen one in person. We build a fire and she retires to her shelter. Although she seems like a relatively nice person, I’m still wary of her. I know I can’t just go around trusting everyone who offers to help, and I don’t know her motives. Although I don’t really trust her, I’m glad that she offered me a shortcut because I’d do anything to escape these treacherous woods. I don’t really have any other options

except going through the woods by myself which I am not going to do.

Rue

I can't believe how easily Claret trusted me even after he found me watching him. This is going much better than expected. That night, I wait until I'm sure he's asleep and then I sneak out of my shelter. I have news to report to my alpha. As I run through the woods, my magic transforms me. I can feel my limbs shifting and fur sprouting along my body. I become a creature of the night, faster than the breeze and stronger than the most feared armies. My senses shift so I can smell the faintest trace of a mouse and hear the quietest chitter of the farthest cricket. It feels so good to be free of my human form.

After I've run for miles, I arrive at my family's den out of breath. I find my alpha and kneel before him telling of the trap I've set. My pack growls their approval. He smiles and dismisses me to see it through. As I run back to Claret, joyous howls fill the air and I join their song. This is my secret, my curse of the night, and I become one with the forest. Soon my pack will have their revenge.

Claret:

Light pours through the thin fabric of the freezing tent. I groan and turn away from the forest. Then, I remember the shortcut Rue offered me and drag myself off my sleeping roll. I can smell a fire outside with an assortment of roasting spices. It smells so much better than the dried meat I usually eat. I get ready for the day and proceed to step out of my tiny tent. Rue is sitting by a roaring fire cooking some sort of stew. It smells like all of the world's finest dishes combined in one meal.

"Hello," I mumble while packing up my stuff. "What are you cooking?"

"I'm making stew," she replies. "Would you like some?"

"Yes please!" I respond. She hands me a wooden bowl that seems to

be handmade and fills it with stew. When I take my first bite, it tastes like the world's best foods have combined themselves in a bowl.

"What's in this?" I ask.

"It's a mixture of ingredients found in the forest," she answers.

"It's delicious," I say through a mouthful of stew.

After breakfast, we set off on our journey through the woods. She takes us on a winding trail visible only to her. We have to go slowly because her arrow wound hadn't healed yet, and I keep tripping on roots and ferns. While we're walking through the woods, I try to figure out her story. She seems to know a lot about the forest, so must live nearby. She also moves with a grace and leisure I can only describe as anthropomorphic. Other than that, I don't know much about her except that every once in a while she flickers as if she's light moving through the leafy branches of an old oak. At around four o'clock, we come across a small, tilting cabin.

"I think this would be a good place to stay for the night," she says. "I'll go in first to make sure it's abandoned."

"OK," I say as she disappears inside.

End of Part 2

Rue:

I walk into the cabin. As the alpha promised, it has been abandoned for years with mice and racoons as the only residents. I call on my power. I can feel myself getting taller and more muscular. My hair turns golden brown and shrinks to a buzz cut. I walk out of the cabin. Time to see if this plan will work.

Claret:

The commander walks out of the cabin. I am stunned.

"Your Honor," I say as I drop into a bow. "How did you find me?"

"That's a good question, boy." He seems to think about it for a while and then responds in a strangely girly voice. "Well, when you didn't show up a few days ago I decided to come looking for you. I happened to know of this cabin and decided to spend the night. I'm as surprised as you are." I stare at the commander. This message must be important if he came all this way into the forest. I'm still confused about why he wouldn't send one of his messengers to get me and why doesn't he have guards with him. Also, where is Rue?

"Now that we're both here, why don't you give me that important message. I've been expecting a reply for weeks, boy, so out with it."

"Rue," I call and start searching for her. The sun starts to set.

"Messenger, I need this message," the commander says.

"Rue? Where are you?" I call.

"Boy, we can find this Rue you're so concerned about later, but now I really need this message," the commander growls.

"RUE?" I scream.

"Boy, come on, I don't have all day!" the commander orders.

"No, you don't understand," I yell. "She was shot with an arrow and now she's probably wandering through the woods alone with no one to protect her. If that's not enough for you then I at least owe her an apology." The commander's face softens.

"Ok boy, I promise I will help you find her, but first I need that message," he says.

"OK," I reply. I take out the letter and hand it to the commander just as the sun slips behind the horizon. He snatches the piece of paper and starts to change shape.

Rue:

The night is calling to me. I can feel my disguise slipping away. For a split second, I am suddenly back to my natural human form of a black-haired, golden eyed girl before I start shifting into a creature of the night. Claret stares at me.

"Why would you take my message? How could that possibly help

you?” He whispers. I am now fully in my beast form, and I can smell the fear rolling off him like waves on the beach. I nudge open the letter with my nose. Just as I thought. It is a statement declaring war. Now that I know for sure when the humans are going to battle, my family can strike them when they’re at their weakest. With their armies exhausted and supplies running low, my pack will have a chance at revenge against the people who confined us to this forest.

“I trusted you and you took the message that would promote my country to glory and victory, not to mention now I have to go back through the woods again,” he shouts angrily. “You know they’ll just send another person to deliver another one,” he says. I know that and it’s perfectly fine with me. I just had to confirm when the humans would go to war so we could be ready. I must deliver the news to my alpha. I grab the letter and run through the woods despite Claret’s cries of betrayal. I am the guardian of my people, loyal to them through hardship and praise. This is the forest and I am the wolf.

GABRIELLA LUNA
NORTH MARION HIGH SCHOOL

My Favorite Color

Is the sun you used to draw
In the corner of your paper
The endless fields of sunflowers
I'd swim through if I could
The lemons that you were always told
To make into lemonade
When you received them
The vanilla bean candle
Lit for its pleasant warmth
The sweet floral sensation
Received only from local honey

My favorite color
Is everything I want to be
Bright, bold, and intense
Illuminating everything it touches
Not afraid to be loud
Yet mellow and collected
Spreading inspiration
And light to those
It reaches

My favorite color
Is the reminder that
A glimpse of light
Has the ability to overpower
A sea of darkness

Stale Blue

I've never liked the color of my eyes. Stale blue, like the color of your childhood bedroom, or that one doll named "Princess Elaina" who was always the villain. They always seemed distant, void of knowledge of now. I suppose that makes sense since I got them from my dad, according to my mom. I've never really met my father, but I've heard him mumble. After he got fired from his last job, fifteen years ago, he kind of gave up on life.

Every day at nine, on the dot, he trudges down the sloping stairs. The stains of twelve years of kids prominent against the once white rugs, which have now become off-white with years of wear. Then, every day, he slowly descends onto the exact same spot on his La-Z-Boy recliner, his prized possession. Sometimes, I think he loves that thing more than me. Once his dumpy self has sludged into the slumping recliner, he'll start mumbling. We don't know what he says, and, honestly, I don't care. All I know about my father are two things. His name, Good Ole' Dad, and eye color, stale blue.

My mom always goes on about how she fell in love with my father because of his eyes. She loves talking about them and the good days before me. She speaks a lot about the past. Sometimes, I wonder if she misses the past so much she regrets having me. Mom has never been short of a perfect mother, and I despise it. Good morning kisses and cards that always say the right thing at the right time. Sticky notes labeling all the foods for who, each neatly packed into their corner. I have to admit, at some points, when my mom isn't talking, I see myself in her. However, those thoughts are quickly trampled as she begins to speak of how she wishes her eyes were like mine, blue. I hate my blue eyes.

The tiles of the kitchen floor are cold as my bare feet pad against them. The kitchen is the only room in the house that is kept pristine.

Yes, my room is neat, but the kitchen is pristine. Pale tiles that burn the eyes because they're so white, everything on the fridge is lined in neat rows from top to bottom and left to right from biggest to smallest and then by color. The assigned sticky notes sit by the fridge, lined up by color, and the stink of bleach and home-cooked meals slosh and mix together as they seep through the walls. It is vile and grotesque and calming at once. I hear the muffled sound of high heels against our stairs that echo behind me like a whisper in the wind. That is the sound of my mother.

"Sweetie, if you're by the fridge, can you check to see if Addie's lasagna for tomorrow is still good" she sweetly questions as both feet, in unison, hit the ground floor. I nod my head in reply and stroll over to the fridge. My calloused hand wraps around the steel handle of the fridge, and in it I can see my reflection and my crass blue eyes. With a harsh tug, the door of the fridge swings open. The bottles of condiments lining the sides clink against each other as my arm comes to an abrupt stop. There, in the bottom left corner, sits Addie's lasagna, eight weeks old and beginning to become straight ooze. It holds no form at this point and reeks of mold and expired love. Yet I turn to my mother, whose warm fawn eyes face at me in hopes of hearing the expected answer. I force a grin onto my face as the edge of my lip twitches sporadically.

"Yes, mom," I politely reply, and at my words, a large smile that stretches from ear to ear blooms onto her rosy cheeks. The edges of my cheeks still for a moment as my gaze falls onto her gleeful expression. Although I often have trouble understanding emotions and what I feel, I understand that my mom's smile always makes me smile. Addie must have inherited that from our mom. The rank smell of the remains of the lasagna slowly falls dull as I close the crisp white fridge. My eyes flicker around the room as I let my mind wander. Sometimes I ponder what life is like outside of this prison. However, I have no idea what holds me captive. My cold gaze drifts from one shiny object to another as I neither admire or disparage the bleakness of the kitchen but watch as if it were to grow old and moldy any second, like Addie's

lasagna. I wonder if I hate my eyes because they remind me of the blue walls of the pristine kitchen, or if I'm slowly becoming like the rest of the world, profound with my justifications of who I am.

"Darling, we have Julie coming over at four, so could you be a doll and tidy up the upstairs?" my mother asks politely in a voice that seems to drip with the same bleach that she scours these walls with. My lips fall to a still expression as I angle my eyes to fall on her. I shift my head the slightest, in a similar gesture to a nod, and she understands my subtle movement. My bare feet drag across the tiled floor as I make my way to the stairs.

The carpet claws at my feet as I lumber up my steep stairs. My legs grow wiry and flimsy as I reach the top of my climb. My bony shoulder presses against the stale blue walls that seem to hold hollow cheekbones and chapped lips. The hallway comes into view as I ascend from the landing, and my eyes waver onto the closest door, Addie's door. It's shut tight against the frame, as it has been for the past eight weeks. I'm starting to worry that it, like the lasagna, will mold and become forever stuck to the doorframe. The room reeks of her, the pleasing essence of home in all the wrong ways. If you could capture her scent like a candle, mothers would rave over it during the fall season, and you would be a millionaire. I crinkle my nose at the overbearing scent, yet my legs carry me over to her room like honey to a fly. Then, before I can contemplate my actions, I am in front of her freshly painted door.

Eight weeks. It has been eight weeks since this door has moved, and here I am, contemplating opening the door as if it is the cause of the confines that hold me in their willowy grasp. This door is not the answer to my life's overcomplications, but even though I understand that, every time I look at the door, I search for answers. I'll go out on a limb and say that this identity, me, who tries to find answers in the cracks and crevices of that door frame, is also looking for Addie. I miss Addie's blue eyes. They were beautiful and so similar, yet different, to the sunken pools that lay in the canyons of my irises. Hers were like diamonds that glistened in the effervescent fountain of youth. They were sharp like a blade running through the pale silk trail of the moon's

gown. Yet they held the softness of a child's laugh in the field of moths. Warmth pooled from her gaze like flames ooze from a bonfire in late July, but they were colder than the tundra on Christmas day. Addie's eyes were beautiful and they were blue, like my father's. However, I have never understood my father, but I could gaze into Addie's eyes and know her whole life story in milliseconds, even though she claimed I knew nothing about her. Her last words still brush against the edges of my ears on thin days like these.

"The only things they see are my eyes and I hate it. Sometimes I wish that I could just gouge them out and shove them in the glass jar to show others I'm more than just my eyes," she had proclaimed, but she then began to falter as her bottom lip quivered. "But then, I fear, others will begin calling the glass jar by my name," she followed up as her shaking hands collapsed on the trim of her lacy sundress. They pulled at the seams of the daisies as her nails press against one another.

It pains me to remember how delusional I thought she was at the time, which was about eight and a half weeks ago. My hand firmly grasps the knob as if a demon has possessed me in that split second, and I now have no control over my actions. Slowly but surely, my wrist turns as the knob rotates. A click rings though the halls as the door, by just an inch, opens. I huff out a breath I didn't realize I was holding as the door opens another inch, and, as the strong scent of her washes over me, everything comes flooding back. The cane. The blood. The screams of poor Addie, and my inability—my unwillingness—to help her. My sister, Addie. Do I even have the right to call her my sister?

My lips part as a silent scream passes through them like a ghost exiting a host. The door is now a ninety-degree angle to the frame that it once clung to like a child to their mother. Her room is spotless—almost as clean as the kitchen—yet it is covered in the filth and grime of the past. All the memories seemed to linger in this single room, and now, it's like I had opened the floodgates of despair. My knees wobble and my legs ache, and I can't stop myself from falling to my knees. The weight on my back is too heavy to carry and I collapse. My heart is heavy, head is pounding, and the worst part is that I can't stop

it. Everything for the past eight weeks had been numb and void of everything, but now, it's as if there's a heavy hammer bashing against every nerve of my being. It hurts and I can't stop it, and admitting that fact that it hurts hurts on its own. I want it to end. I want it so terribly.

Her gaze had fallen on me, and I was the last thing she saw before I landed the final blow directly on her skull. The cane collided with her head with a sickening crunch as I mumbled sweet sorrowful apologies out of my blubbling lips.

"I'm so sorry, so sorry. Mom says, she says—I'm so sorry, Addie. Mom is making me and I—" I had rambled on and on as my unsteady hands clutched the cane. All Addie did was weakly smile up at me. She didn't curse at me or shame me for my actions. She just smiled as if she understood everything, as if she didn't hate me. She didn't reassure me or forgive me. She just smiled, and then I landed the last lethal blow. It was as if mine and Addie's eyes had switched views for one moment, and I understood her and she understood me. She understood why I had put her in pain, and I understood that she would rather die to my hand than mom's. And in that moment, life was peaceful. It didn't hurt.

However, now it does. It aches in every fiber of my being, and I can't stop it. I want to lie here forever and melt into the very ground where I kneel, but I want to jump to my feet and bash everything in sight. I do neither. Instead, I stand, my knees weak, and stumble my way through the door frame. I reach the stairs as my breath hangs heavy in the air like it's a support for my weary body. One foot at a time, I make my way down the creaky stairs. Left. Right. Left. Right. Left. Right.

My gaze doesn't lift from the ground as I make my way to the kitchen. Mom is too busy cleaning the sink for the millionth time today to notice my macabre presence. My hand lurches forwards and tightly grips the handle of the fridge, and, in a similar manner to what happened with Addie's door, swings it open without a second thought.

"Sweetie, dinner will be done in a few, so don't eat anything too big," she warns me while her gaze stays glued to the rim of the steel sink. I pay no mind to her words as my free hand shoots out and seizes the lasagna—Addie's lasagna.

“Mom, where’s Addie?” my trembling voice warbles out as I cling onto the plastic container that reeks of eight-week-old lasagna with both hands. Her head shoots around to face me. The stern gaze pressed against her youthful face makes her appear ten years older than she often does.

“Addie is in her room, sweetie,” she calmly replies, yet her words are laced with anger stronger than any poison that could course through a serpent. I turn my body to face her and lock eyes with the beast, my nails digging into the container that’s being squeezed in my grip.

“Where’s Addie,” I repeat, my voice booming as it echoes off of the pristine kitchen walls. Her eyebrows furrow as she slams her sponge down to the bottom of the sink.

“You know damn well where she is! You put her there,” she spits out as she points an accusing finger at me. I whimper at her words as I press my back to the fridge. The cold shocks me, and I quickly jump away from the frigid steel.

“You made me! You made—” I begin, but, but my mother stops me before I can continue as she begins advancing towards me.

“I did what I had to do, you ungrateful brat! Addie had to go or else He was going to take me away,” she snaps back as she presses a hand to her heart. Her heel digs into the tiles, and the tiles begin to chip and crack under the pressure. The pieces turn to a fine white dust like snow on a perfect December’s day. The powder reminds me of the time Addie and I went sledding on her birthday on the old kayak we never used. We flew down streets and alleys as we used the paddles to launch ourselves farther down the snow-filled streets like the canals of Venice.

“You hurt her,” I mumble out as my grip on the plastic container grows weak. My fingers begin to slip off one by one like leaves on a tree in autumn. Mom grits her teeth as a toothy smile chips at her frustrated expression. The deafening noise of her teeth rubbing against each other like sand paper fills the silence in the air.

“Sweetie, why don’t we just put Addie’s lasagna back in the fridge so we can have dinner,” she reasons with a grotesquely sweet tone. My vision brims with tears as she begins to reach for Addie’s lasagna. I

shake my head vigorously as my back presses against the refrigerator.

“You hurt her! You hurt her! You bitch, you hurt Addie!” I scream at my mother as she lunges at me, realizing how unstable I have now become. My hands, container still in them, raise above my head as her spotless hands go to latch onto my elbows. Just as her red painted nails dig into my sweater, I bring the container to her head. A sickening crack—just like Addie’s—ends the curses my mother had been spewing at me. I gasp for air that I seem unable to swallow as my grip falters and the lasagna container falls from my hands. I can’t look at the scene below me. My gaze flickers over to my father, who is staring back at me. His hollow blue eyes gaze at me, and, in them, I see myself. I grimace as I see my reflection in his shallow eyes.

I’ve never liked the color of my eyes. Stale blue, like the color of the water you wash blood off with, or the color of the blanket that covers your sister’s dead body. I guess I’ve always preferred the color green, but who am I to say what the best color is? They’re all the same when you mix them together. They all end up a disgusting lump of brown. I guess that’s the same with us. No matter what you try to do, in the end, you’ll always end up a vulgar lump of brown in a world of stale blue.

CECILIA TRUONG

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: MARK POMEROY

Wind

To my enemy who comes during fall,
Who evolves in the winter,
And lingers around in the spring,
You are not a breeze that blows gently across the sky,
Not a puff of air that blows out the candles on a birthday cake,
But the wind that comes anytime,
Unexpected.
You live your life flowing in thin air
Blowing leaves away
And letting dandelions fly.
You play in the sun,
You play in the rain,
You come so very often blowing my bangs away.
My hair you blow,
Tangling strand by strand,
Visually looking like a bird's nest in the end.
My ears you make become invisible,
My nose becomes red, icy cold.
Why can't you just come as a breeze?
Blowing gently across my face,
Swiftly passing by.

To a girl who's always walking by,
A girl who walks outside.
It is I who makes leaves fly.
It is I who paints your fantasy sky.
Of magical dandelions swiftly swinging,
A moving cloud flying daintily across the sky
Or hair beautifully flowing.

I bring a refreshing breeze to a hot sunny day,
Like eating ice cream in a desert.
If you still don't find me pleasing,
Why not just stay inside.

Lost Child of the Dimen

It's cold . . . and scary . . . feels like no one there to help me. Feels like I'm lost . . . well . . . I am lost. Sitting between two buildings all along under the rain, everybody walking by me, all, even dimens like me, even elves, all of them. They can't see me in my wet, black hoodie and old brown shoes. No one stopped by me, none of these people or cars. I doubt if I was a homeless kitten they would take me home. But I'm just a kid who ran away from home, and after from pain that I felt.

It's cold in here . . . maybe . . . if I sleep a little bit it will get warmer in here . . . maybe . . . if I try. I fall asleep . . . no it's still cold, it doesn't help me at all. I need to get up and hide somewhere else, this place is too visible, they can find me . . .

I feel how something touched me. I opened my eyes, it was a dog, small and lost just like me. He looked at me, he was thin, and he was shivering from the cold rain . . . just like me.

I open my dark blue bag and give him some sandwich that I made before running away. He ate it, and even under cold rain I felt myself warm. This dog is still shivering so I put him under my black hoodie. He was warm. I thought that we were going to become best friends and I decide to give him a name.

How about Brosu, no, maybe Baro'-mu, still no . . . so . . . now here's one Katu'-ro . . . no, still no . . . maybe Doma, neh, Baro'-mu was a better name for you.

"I'm going to name you Baro'-mu. Do you like it?" The dog barked. "That means you like it!" He licked my hand. "Yep! You definitely like it." And I smiled. That's something I didn't expect from myself.

"Well, you need to know my name now." I looked at my new pet and friend. "My name is Daru. I ran away from my parents and, after, I was kidnapped by someone. I don't know what their face looks like, but I'm never going to forget their voice." Baro'-mu looked at me with

eyes full of interest. "In one day, I'm going to show you the place where I ran away from. All my friends, all my family, you'll see the dimens like me." This dog looked so happy. "And some of them have wings just like mine, and some of them don't have them, but all of us (dimens) have tails. They can be pointy like an arrow or maybe fluffy, and all of us have horns, and some of us have wings."

We seated under rain for a long time. I told Baro'-mu all about my old life, before I was kidnapped, about the village where I lived. I wanted to fall asleep again, but I couldn't.

I heard the voices, voices of old men and women. They were really familiar to me. I stood up and started running. I was curious what they were talking about, but there's no time for it, I run from there, run as fast as I could run, I run so fast that I couldn't hear the sounds anymore, the rain, the sound of my steps—all of them mixed into one sound. I couldn't feel the ground under my legs, everything that I feel was fear, animal fear, fear of getting into the hands of these bastards.

I didn't want to be tortured again, I wanted to go back home to my mom and dad, and now I hold someone who I need to protect, Baro'-mu, my dog, my new friend. If they find us, they are going to kill him on my watch.

I run for so long, so fast, and I stopped. I didn't hear the sound of voices, the sound of the steps—nobody was around me. And I started to run toward a police office.

"Please help me!" I run into the building of the police office. "I need help!"

Some of the police officers were around me (maybe five out of thirty of them). They were scared for me.

"What the hell is happening?" starts screaming, no, roaring, their boss. "Get back to work!"

"But kid, sir—"

"I said back to work!" All of the officers started going back to their seats.

"What happened, kiddo?" He started leading me to his office. I sat on the chair and he gave me some water. He was a creature called

Monster, he had light grey fur, and really dark hair on his head. It is short.

He sat on a chair on the other side of the table. He looked at me and after that he started looking for something. He opened his table shelf and started looking for something, I think documents.

“What’s your name, kid?”

“Doru.”

“And last name?”

“Beast.”

“Hm . . . so . . . where are you from?” He asked without looking at me.

“I’m . . . from the village Katu’-ro.”

“That village located by the City of Old Dimen, right?” Now he looked at me, but he still tried to look for papers.

“Yeah, right.”

His eyes were an orange color. He was confused. “It’s on the other side of the Island. How the hell did you end up here? Have you been kidnapped?”

“I ran away first.” I pulled my head down. If I say I wasn’t scared of him, I will lie. He was an enormous old Monster, with big teeth and hands with sharp claws. I was scared of him. But he was nice at the same time as he was scary.

“How long have you been here, in this city?” I didn’t answer, because I didn’t remember how long I’ve been in this city. “Okay, I’ll try to find you in our missing lists. And you need to fill out this paper, this orange one.” He points at his table and gives me a pencil from his pocket. “I hope you can write.” He left me in his office. I hope he got to the archive to check me in the missing lists.

Baru’-mo started barking really loudly. I heard the sound of guns.

Shortbread

The infamous shortbread cookie: an unspoken Christmas tradition for the family. Every year is a messy struggle, and in the end, only a few are eaten. Cooking trays, parchment paper, cookie cutters, and baking decorations cover every available surface in my kitchen.

Flour, sugar, and eggs are mixed into an unflattering tan dough and tossed onto the granite countertop. My mother rolls and wraps the dough in saran wrap before placing it in the fridge to set. We then start on the frosting.

Heavy whipping cream and sugar are blended together, and occasionally flung onto the walls with bursts of laughter at the mishaps. We place small dollops of our whipped cream into small glass bowls and add food coloring to the miniature snowy blanket, mixing the two together with toothpicks. I pick a forest green and a deep river blue. I make waves and hills as my mother makes sunrises of bright oranges and deep reds.

When the dough is ready, we roll it out and use our array of cookie cutters to make all kinds of shapes. After the cookies are decorated, I gingerly place the trays full of our masterpieces on the oven racks to bake, careful not to mess up a single cookie.

While we wait, we make Tom and Jerrys to sip on; mine is just heated up batter, not brandy or rum.

The house is now filled with all sorts of aromas, and it makes me hungry. We finish our drinks and clean up the kitchen while we wait for the cookies to finish baking.

When the cookies are done, I pull them out of the oven and inspect them. Some survive and retain their shape; others aren't as lucky. They're deformed, their decorations melting to a liquid and fusing them to each other. My mother and I glance at one another, and the sight makes us giggle.

We eat a few cookies as we set them out to cool, even though no one in my family really likes shortbread cookies. My mother and I make them every year for Christmas and, to this day, I don't know why. My mother would insist on making them no matter how much I complained when I was younger, and after a while, I gave up

Through the years, the best answer I can give as to why these notorious cookies are made is that they may have something to do with my great grandmother. I believe it was something she and my mother did together. It's my last year at home and even though I can't appreciate the taste of a shortbread cookie, I want to continue my mother's tradition, no matter where I am for Christmas.

ELLIE X. HOWARD

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

Dear Portland

Dear Portland,
Dear 82nd Avenue, dear Hawthorne Boulevard,
I've never quite known where to fit in.
Not Asian enough for 82nd,
Not enough Cantonese to communicate,
I picked the wrong language.
Not White enough for SE Portland,
Too much yellow staining the blank canvas.
I walk a careful tightrope along,
The two identities fighting for dominance.
I remember getting excited when,
I would see someone who looked like me,
In the grocery store.
It didn't happen very often.
Confused looks from Chinese elders,
When I tell them where I'm from,
But explain why my parents are White. Sometimes I give up,
I lie and say they're Chinese,
Just to save the time.
Portland has become my stage,
Providing practice switching between,
Two warring identities.
Dear Portland,
Thank You.

Trypophobia

“Not typophobia. Trypophobia. I’m afraid of holes, not typos.”

“Really? I’ve known you for five years and this is the first time I hear this? And anyway, why holes? I’m sorry, I just don’t get it.”

“Well, it’s like being scared of heights, except worse, because you can’t see how far down they go. No, I don’t mean little titchy holes like the one you just dug with your foot in the lawn my dad spent two hours ‘perfecting’ yesterday. I mean ones you could fall into and either die at the bottom because it’s sharp and jagged, or you die at the bottom because you get stuck down there. And it pops up everywhere. Example: Percy Jackson. Percy and Annabeth fall down into Tartarus through a hole.”

“But the reason they fell was because of a mad minor goddess.”

“No! You don’t get it. That’s not the point!”

“Okay. We could try this then . . . Maybe, no. No way. Too crazy.”

“Spit it out.”

“Fine. You know that hole they’re digging for the condo on Rex and seventh? I was thinking you leave me in there overnight. And then in the morning the workers would pull me out and you can watch from behind a bush. Everything will be fine. Would that help?”

“I doubt it, but I think it would be funny to see you get stuck down there all night. Let’s come back here after the sleepover at . . . maybe eleven?”

“Great. And you’ll be there the whole night, right behind the bush, right?”

“Sure.”

“So, I brought a flashlight, some snacks just in case, a rope for getting out if the workers don’t come, a sleeping bag, a book, and my phone.”

"No! If you bring all that stuff, it defeats the point. You can have the flashlight, the snacks, the book and your sleeping bag. Nothing else."

"Whatever. I still think this is a bad idea."

"It was your idea!"

"Who knows? Maybe my sister planted the idea in my brain while I was sleeping last night."

"There is no way you're getting out of this one by blaming it on your sister. It's easy to blame a seven-year-old for a lot of things, but not for sleeping in a construction site overnight. That idea is just too dumb to be something your sister came up with. Anyway, head on down."

"Aren't you going to help me get down?"

"Just jump. It's only ten feet. And there's no way I'm getting near that thing. I don't want to get stuck down there for infinity with you."

"But I—"

"Just do it."

"You actually think that this will help you, don't you . . . Don't walk away! Fine, I'll jump down."

"Max . . . Max! . . . MAX! Where are you?! It has to be after six, and that's when the workers are supposed to show up!"

"Al! I'm ba—I mean, I'm still here!"

"Why haven't they shown up yet?"

"It's Sunday. They don't work on Sunday."

"You knew that this whole time?"

"Nope. I just figured it out."

"Will you get me out of here then?"

"There is no way I'm going anywhere near that hole. Plus, if I fall in, there'll be no one to save you, so it doesn't make sense for me to try."

"I'm pretty sure there's a logical fallacy there."

"I just got an idea. You see, the reason I don't like to go near holes is because of the risk of being stuck in them alone. So as long as I'm here, this isn't going to help that fear. So . . . I'll see you when you come out."

“That was not cool, man.”

“Hey, you got out! And it only took an hour!”

“Yeah. Except it really only took until the sun came up. There were stairs on one side.”

“Well, I think I’ve gotten over my fear of holes. There’s always some way out. If there hadn’t been stairs, then someone would have happened by, and if no one came by, the workers would have found you tomorrow! Thank you very much.”

“Really? That’s your takeaway from this?”

“What? What’s yours?”

“That I’m never going anywhere near holes again.”

The Audition

I've done a lot of waiting in my life, but this time it felt even longer than usual. But it's worth it. Ever since I heard about this audition, I knew. It would be mine. Of course it might be hard, surely lots of work, but this was exactly what I was good at. I fully believe that my ability to spend as much time as possible on something until it's completed (perhaps too much time) is responsible for half of the auditions that I get. And this audition is extra special. This could be, or will be since I know I'll get the part, the unofficial start to my career. Certainly, I've had other roles, but this, this is exactly what I've been working toward. For three years, all I've had is tiny parts. Barely enough to call myself an actor. I haven't even been recognized on the street by anyone. That's my goal. To be able to walk around and expect someone to stop me and talk about my work.

As I walk up to the front door, I'm a little nervous. I feel the wind lightly blowing my hair into my face. I open the doors and walk toward the receptionist desk.

"I'm here for the audition," I say confidently.

"Great," he says, barely glancing up from his computer. "Wait in there with the other candidates until your name is called."

He points halfheartedly to the left. I thank him and walk to the room. "Surely there's only a few people," I think to myself. "I mean, we were only given a couple days' notice." I feel my heart beating faster. "Stop it," I tell myself. "You'll be great. You have to get the part." I open the doors. There are about fifty chairs scattered around the room. It's significantly brighter than the hallway. I stumble in and take a seat near the back. Glancing around, I count over thirty other people waiting, going over lines, or pacing. Most of them don't look threatening at all. Several seem to be very nervous and many others look almost bored. "Well, there are more people than I thought," I tell myself, "but I'm

sure most of them don't have much experience. I'm sure I'll still get it." Name after name is called but there is no sign of what happened. I get more and more nervous as, slowly, the group shrinks.

The man next to me is frantically looking for something in his bag. After a few minutes of panicked searching, he finally gives up. I see him glance around and finally he turns to me and asks, "Do you have a copy of the script? I can't find mine."

I consider saying no—he is my competition after all—but he looked close to tears. I hear him nervously tapping his chair with his fingers. "Yes, I do," I sigh. "You can borrow it if you want."

I'm annoyed with myself as I hand the script over. I shouldn't be helping him! But I couldn't refuse him when he was so desperate. Now with my script gone, my nerves grow. I know my lines but maybe I should look over them again. It couldn't hurt at least. The door opens with a loud creak and I jump. Someone with a clipboard walks out, and I can feel the whole room's anticipation. He slowly looks at his clipboard and reads a name. It feels like it lasts forever. I know it is no more than a few seconds but to me it takes hours to read the name.

"Benjamin Hart," he calls loudly.

My heart leaps. It's my turn. I get up and walk toward him. The last things I hear are the creak of the door and the whispers of others as I leave the room.

The man with the clipboard leads me down a long hallway. Too long. Obnoxiously long. It does give me time to prepare myself though. I can feel the sweat on my forehead spreading. "Calm down," I think. "You'll be great." I try to distract myself by looking around the hallway, but there is nothing to look at. The walls are completely blank.

"You work here long," I cautiously ask the man leading me down the hallway.

"Yep," he mutters, "too long." I chuckle awkwardly. He certainly looks like he's worked here for years. I can see him limping slightly. Occasionally, he flinches but he didn't seem agitated as though it is an old pain that he had learned to live with. I consider asking about it, but I decide against it. "If he didn't want to talk about his job, then

he certainly doesn't want to talk about an old injury," I think. I stare at him, noticing for the first time how different he looks. His hair is long, white, and curly. It stretches down almost to his waist! I imagine it might be an annoyance, but he hardly pays any attention to it, only pausing to brush it away from his eyes every minute or so. It seems almost like he can't be bothered to remember his hair until he's forced to move it. He is wearing a light blue suit with no tie, maybe as a gentle protest against his obviously dull job. I realize that all the times I saw him come into the room to call names, I never actually noticed him. It's funny how you can see someone but not really see them.

"You gonna go in?"

I blink and look around. We're at the door. "What?" I ask.

"Are you gonna go in or stand there staring at me all day?" I get the feeling that he doesn't care what I do as long as it has nothing to do with him.

"Uh . . . yes. I'm just . . . preparing."

"Okay, great, well I'll be here when you're done."

I stand there for a few seconds and then finally push open the door and walk through.

"Hello," I hear. "Name?"

"B-Benjamin Hart," I stammer. "Great," I groan to myself, "off to a perfect start."

"Okay, so whenever you're ready."

I take a deep breath and open my mouth to say the opening line. Not a word.

"Mr. Hart? You can start."

No. I thought I was past this. It hasn't happened for so long. Why now?! I see them looking at me, judging me. I have to speak. Now. Do it now.

"I forgot my lines," I murmur.

"Mr. Hart," one says, "this is hardly excusable. You've had plenty of time to prepare."

"Hold on," another says, "maybe we should give him a chance. We could give him a break. See the next person and have him come back

after.”

“Fine. Mr. Hart, you have five minutes to get ready.”

I stumble out of the room in a haze. The man who led me to the room stands there inspecting me.

“Bathroom?” I ask.

He points at a door to his right and I walk through. It’s a cramped room. There’s barely room for anyone to stand, but I manage to fit in. I stand at the sink staring at myself in the mirror. This is exactly what I didn’t want. A repeat of my last failed attempt at success. That day was remarkably similar to today. There was a light breeze, the weather was beautiful, and I had just wasted my one chance for fame.

I had just gotten a call about a possible audition. I had only been in a few commercials at this point, but this was a part in a real high-budget movie. Apparently, the director had seen some of my work and wanted me to audition. I was thrilled. This was my chance. I practiced over and over for weeks. When it was time to audition, I knew I was going to get the part. I told myself that no one else had practiced as much as me. No one else wanted it as much as me. I waited for hours, watching person after person walk in to try out, but I knew the part was mine. When my name was called, I was excited. Too excited. I thought it would be the start of everything that I was waiting for. It was so close. I walked through the doors and opened my mouth to start my future. But nothing came out.

I didn’t have work for a month after that. Eventually, I had to tell myself that it was a fluke. That surely it was a one-time thing. I was so nervous at my next audition, sure that it would happen again, but it didn’t. And it hasn’t since. Until now.

I walk out of the bathroom and turn to walk back down the hallway, back to my own life. I can’t go back in there just to forget my lines again. Maybe I can get a job at some office. Right now, that sounds a lot nicer than this.

“Hey,” I hear. “Where are you going?” I look back and see the man with the clipboard walking toward me. “You’re not leaving, are you?”

“I can’t go back in there,” I say. “I forgot my lines. I’ve humiliated

myself for the last time.” I turn to leave but he puts his hand on my shoulder and spins me back around.

“I know a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity when I see one,” he says. “And that’s what this is. You have to go back in there.”

“No, you don’t understand. I can’t do it. It’s not about giving up. It’s just not meant to be.”

“I was like you once. An actor, I mean. Yeah, I know what you’re thinking, pretty depressing to work here after being an actor. Well, you would be right. It was a big change. Right now, you have too much freedom. You get to do what you love. But you have to be careful. I lost it. My story is not so different from yours, I imagine. I had done a few small roles and I was getting a little confidence. I set my sights on a big role—something that would really get me recognized. I thought that if I could get it, I would know that I was doing something right. I spent a while practicing, getting to know that character, and eventually it came time to audition. I felt sure the part was mine. And when it was my turn, I thought it went very well. I was pretty confident about it. But they didn’t look impressed, and I learned later that I wasn’t even being considered for the part. I was crushed. If I couldn’t get that part, then I thought I would never be an actor. I quit and took the first job I could that had anything to do with acting. I’ve been here ever since.”

I felt that I could see right into him then. We really weren’t so different. I guess I was destined for nothing great. He turned back and started walking to the door.

“You can leave if you want. Just before you go, ask yourself if you want to say, ‘I’m an actor’ and if there’s anything else you would rather do. If there isn’t, then I wouldn’t throw it away for nothing. Why waste a chance for success because you think that you won’t make it?”

I stand there and think about his words. “That’s ridiculous,” I think. “I’ve had my chance and I blew it.” But I still don’t leave. I lean against the wall and slowly slide down to the floor. If there was a chance, then maybe it would be worth it. No. You can’t walk in with nothing and expect something in return. I really should go.

I gently get up and start to leave. It was probably not going to

happen anyway. Most actors don't make it. I'll just have to get used to a more practical job. But still, if there is a chance, maybe it would be worth a try. Maybe, just maybe, I could get it.

"Mr. Hart," I hear, "are you ready to try again?"

I hesitate for a second trying to find an excuse. Any excuse to do something feasible for once, but I know what I have to do. I turn around and walk back to the room.

"Yes, I am."

SIMONE GUTE

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

The Girl Next Door

You were there for me since I was just two months

You were older by just a wee bit but it made you like my older sister.

You always wore your hair in a braid with a different colored scrunchie every day.

But I will never forget the day you moved away. The U-Haul packed I didn't shed a tear but inside I was crying because it felt like you were dying.

Gone, gone, gone. Even though you're only three hours away, it seems like you're a million years away. You were everywhere and now you're here and there. You're gone, gone, gone.

You used to try and play guitar and I would mash the piano but we thought we were great.

You sold your house and moved up a state. I guess we won't live next door forever like we planned when we were five.

No more cooking green mystery cakes or dressing up like pop stars and singing to stuffed animals.

No more lemonade stands or making mud pies or even combing Barbie's hair till it falls out.

But our friendship will never end, no matter how far we get, because you will forever be the older sister I never had.

Gone, gone, gone. Even though you're only three hours away, it seems like you're a million years away. You were everywhere and now you're here and there. You're gone, gone, gone.

I remember pretending to be cheerleaders for the Super Bowl while your dad tried to watch the game.

I remember putting game pieces on your doorstep when you were sick so we could play Clue on the phone.

I remember playing in the sprinkler in your backyard on hot summer days. Our laughs and screams filled the world with such joy that nothing could ever go wrong. And we laughed and played and had a good time. We were with each other every second, we weren't alone, but now we're all alone.

Gone, gone, gone. Even though you're only three hours away, it seems like you're a million years away. But I know you will always be there no matter how far.

JASON ANAJOVICH

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: RAJESH REDDY

A Field of Daisy's

Ivy

I was walking through a field of daisies.

I was never fond of flowers. They're just fancy weeds. After being plucked they wilt, they fade and fall apart. Petals litter everywhere, pollen stains your hands, they wither away sadly.

I was never fond of flowers, but I was fond of Daisy.

She was always bright, always bubbly, always popping up unexpectedly.

Like a daisy.

She had a grin as wide as the sun, eyes as deep as the Atlantic, hands delicate as spider silk. Every step she took left colors and paint trailing behind her, every look she gave me felt like pure oxygen.

Despite that, I never felt like I could breathe around her.

I admired every quirk about her. Her uneven dimple, her forest of freckles, her voice like a mourning dove. I admired everything about her. I became obsessed with her, worshipped her. No one compared to her.

So why did she tell me she doesn't love me?

Standing in that field of daisies, I wanted to burn them. So I did the next best thing.

I ripped them up, tore apart roots and vines, dug up bundles and mangled the heads. I tore petal after delicate petal out of each flower, twisted stems until they burst, peeled veiny leaves into uneven pieces.

I destroyed that field.

Soil was upturned, buds were crushed under my boots. I screamed until my throat was raw.

I burned down a field of daisies.

I burned down a field of Daisy's.

Daisy

The bus stop was cold. Freezing, actually. I couldn't feel my hands, and I cupped them in front of my face and blew hot air into them. Bus stops are never the pinnacle of modern art, but my eye traced every jagged line of graffiti spray-painted on the steel bridge above me.

The world was buzzing, people talking on their phones, cars roaring by on the busy street, crows squawking, the wind howling, raging to be heard.

No one was listening.

My eyes transfixed on a stone wall, parallel to the bus stop in this concrete jungle. It was green—not a light, feathery green you envision when you see a rainbow; it was thick, heavy, murky. Dense vines of ivy were draped down the wall, inching their way slowly across the bridge. They were wrapped tightly around the trees on the other side of the road.

Constricting them. Suffocating them.

It was ivy.

Invasive ivy, worming beneath the roots of other plants and cutting off their connection to the world. Choking them out, dragging them down, ripping them up.

It was Ivy.

Invasive Ivy. We started off as friends, she was kind, she laughed at my jokes. We got to know each other, exchanged phone numbers, and began texting.

It was light, like a rainbow. Being with her was easy, always enjoyable. We danced together at parties, shared clothes with each other, and slept in the same bed at sleepovers. The more emotionally intimate we became, the more I felt like we understood each other.

We were friends.

Good friends.

Best friends.

“—and best friends aren’t supposed to pressure each other into doing things they don’t want to!”

Ivy

The next day, frost covered the field of daisies, and all the damage I had done could no longer be seen. Sure, it might melt by midday, but for right then my tracks were covered.

I didn’t want to see Daisy at school. I knew it was inevitable, and sure I wanted to see her, to see her body, to watch every graceful movement

and be enraged by every laugh she gave to someone else. But I didn't want to see her, because I didn't want to talk to her, and I didn't want to talk to her because I didn't want to explain myself to her.

I don't need to explain myself to her.

She was blowing things way out of proportion. She was overexaggerating, like she always did with everything. I was her friend, we trusted each other, and I had needs that needed to be met.

She knew how much I liked her. She knew how much I loved her and she knew that she didn't love me back but she still played along and said she was my friend and smiled to my face and dug a knife into my back.

It was one picture.

I asked for one picture.

Daisies grow in batches, dozens at a time, erupting from the ground and covering the earth beneath your feet. I could have found anyone, I could have found any other girl, but no one else was her. I wanted it to be her, I needed it to be her.

I asked for one picture of Daisy, showing me things she didn't show other people, and she did it.

She should feel lucky. She should feel special. The fact that I wanted to see her, to examine her, to paint her beauty is special.

It was one picture.

I asked for one picture.

I asked for one picture of Daisy, and she said yes.

She said yes.

It's not my fault. She said yes.

It's not my fault she said yes.

Daisy

The school was bare. Mid-November, no leaves on the trees. Nothing but the withering remains of what used to be grass turned to straw underfoot. Nothing green could grow here.

And that's okay.

I saw Ivy outside the doors, standing with her face to the wind. The chill in her eyes dropped the temperature from high sixties to below freezing, while she bundled herself in jackets and scarves.

They used to be mine. The star-spangled blue one I recognized immediately, she'd never given it back. We were in my bedroom, dancing around one another, laughing, smiling. I'd thrown the scarf around her neck, and pulled her closer to me.

"It looks good," I said. "Makes your eyes pop."

Seeing her now, her pale blue stare was about to pop out of her sockets, and I watched as it shifted towards me. Nothing changed on her face as we made eye contact. Some frosty leaves crunched underfoot as I took a step towards her.

She made no indication that she knew I was approaching. Yet she didn't turn away. She just stared at me, transfixed, observing. Somehow, that

unhinged me even more than if she were screaming at me, pulling my hair, telling me how lucky I was to have won her affection.

I didn't win anything.

She was staring at me, reminiscent of the way she used to stare at me before we were close. The ache, the slow, dull ache of her heart as she watched me. I could feel it pull me closer to her, magnetic energy flowing, thick vines dragging me into her embrace.

Before I could say anything, do anything, think anything, her arms had snaked their way between mine, clasped behind my waist. My chest constricted, her ball python tactics inched around my ribcage so I couldn't breathe, couldn't think, couldn't speak to call for help.

And suddenly, I was swept up in the feeling of her gaze on me, around me, and I was lost to the tidal wave of her affection.

"I missed you over the weekend." She tapped my nose with the tip of her finger, smiling.

I knew she was hiding something, her repressed feelings, perhaps? She seemed to be looking through me instead of at me, holding my body more than my heart, speaking towards me instead of to me. She wasn't acknowledging Daisy, she was just seeing a pretty daisy.

Ivy

"Ivy, we need to talk."

Here we go.

"I'm—I'm just not . . . comfortable . . . with what happened over the weekend."

She's choosing her words so carefully, so carefully censoring herself around me. Lying to me, to my face, just like she did before.

"I don't want to do that again. Not ever again."

It was one little photo, why the big blow up? Why is she so obsessed? Why is she so unhinged?

"Ivy, I want you to acknowledge what happened, and I want you to apologize for it."

Why should I apologize? I asked her for a picture, she said yes. I never told her what I wanted to do with it, and she never told me I couldn't do what I pleased with it.

"Ivy."

Why doesn't she love me anymore?

"Ivy."

"I love you. I told you I love you. I said it Saturday night. You want me to apologize for loving you? For loving everything about you? For wanting to see your face?"

"Ivy, you know that's not what I was talking about."

"Everything I did, I did it for you. The photo wasn't about me, it was about you. It was because you're beautiful. You want me to apologize for thinking you're beautiful?"

"Ivy, you're avoiding the issue. It doesn't matter why you asked for the photo—"

“Doesn’t matter? Doesn’t matter? The reason why is the only thing that matters! It’s because I wanted to celebrate you, see you, let you feel yourself. You should feel lucky—you should feel privileged—that I want to see your body. Daisy, you make me so happy. Am I supposed to apologize for wanting to be happy?”

“No. But if naked pictures of me are the only way for you to feel happy, I suggest you find a new hobby.”

Daisy

She blinked, slowly, processing what I had just said. Her lips parted, her mind racing, trying to think of how to respond. I watched her open and close her mouth a few times, before finally responding.

“You’re not a hobby. You’re my passion. You’re lucky,” she choked out.

“No. I’m not a pet project, not a passion project, not a photography project. And you’re the one who’s lucky you got to take advantage of me once I smartened up.”

She paused, torn, trying to find the sugar-sweet words to say to keep me hanging on.

I wasn’t buying it.

“I love you,” she echoed, finally. “I love you, Daisy.”

“Go home, Ivy.”

I watched her blink back tears, and realized too late that I had done nothing to stop my own. Frigid streaks ran down my cheeks, her hands shook as I tried to breathe. Something burned in her eyes, burned me

down until I was just a dull, green stalk.

She stormed off, casting the scarf on her neck aside on the pavement as she exited the parking lot. She was swept away among the babbling crowds of people, lost from my sight.

I knew that wouldn't be the last I saw of her. She might try to talk to me in the hall, or call me at midnight like we used to do. Maybe she would come to my work, or casually drive past my house on her way home. She was doing to come back, like she always did, because that's what Ivy does.

That's the thing about species like invasive ivy:

They keep coming back.

HANNAH NELLEN

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: AMY MINATO

Persona Poem/Claude Monet

The wildflowers they stand still
Small trees, they grow in the soft banks below
Their leaves dance and flutter in the cool breeze
Rolling hills of red and green their colors sway
The sky lightest shades of blue, not a cloud to be seen
Small houses they hide behind the trees

The trees

The trees they hide the shoreline from onlookers above
Their roots they dangle in the salty mist
A small stone house sits gazing at the sea below
Boats sail in the distance slicing through the small waves
The sea it sparkles in the sun
The sandy ground is coarse and light, layering over each and every
wave

The hay

Cut hay sits in small piles
Fresh from a hard day's work
The setting sun casts shadows over the golden dried fields

The boats

Small green boats sit on quiet lakes
The sun sleeps deep under the roots of the nearby trees
Small houses sit at the edge of the lake, quiet in the young day

The sun

The sunset is lit with color

Outlining the large tower with smaller ones following in the distance

Reflecting off of the small ripples in the water

The water

The water, it shows rippled reflections as I gaze

The lilies they flout, reminding me of my own reflection

Snapping me back to my own reality

The willows hang, out of reach of the water below

They lightly swing

I, Slowly, Paint

ELLA FORNESS

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

A Ray of Sunshine

Dear wonderful friends and family,

Today, August 3rd, 2001, at 3:32 p.m., we welcomed Ray into this world. She weighs seven pounds, five ounces, and we love her to pieces. The moment we saw our beautiful daughter's face, we knew that our lives were fulfilled. Eric and I are so excited to start our lives as a family in Portland, Oregon. Here is our new address: 6335 SE 66th Ave, 97206. We will be having a welcoming celebration at Mt. Tabor Park on August 10 from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Please come meet our beautiful Ray!

Full of love,

Alyssa and Eric Blackwood.

August 3rd, 2001, 3:32 p.m., Ray

Cold. I am in this cold, cold place, and the only sound that I can hear is my own voice screaming. I see a man crying while holding the hand of the woman above me. Another woman wearing green scrubs comes over and lifts me off the table. I continue to scream. She wraps me tightly in a scratchy blanket and puts a hat on my head. Forget about cold, now I'm just uncomfortable. The lady in green whisks me away and puts me in a woman's arms. The man peers down at me, icy blue eyes glistening with tears. Then I look into the eyes of the woman cradling me close to her chest. I immediately stop crying. My mother.

September 9th, 2017, 4:32 p.m., Alyssa

"Mom, why did you do it?" Ray asks me critically. The air around us buzzed with buried emotions.

"Do what?" I said, tiptoeing around the subject.

"Why did you turn dad in?" Ray replies, eyes blazing with the kind

of rage that only forms after years of bottling up your emotions. I think back to that day and I can still sell the chocolate chip pancakes cooking in this kitchen.

August 3rd, 2008, Alyssa

Today is Ray's seventh birthday, and it must be perfect. Laughter and the smell of chocolate chip pancakes drift up the stairs. I look at my alarm and gasp. I have thirty-two minutes until Ray's party starts. I scramble around, putting concealer on the bruises on my arms and trying to find clothing that will cover them. If anyone ever saw the bruises I think I might just die of embarrassment. I rush downstairs to see that everything is already set up. The house is eerily silent. My heartbeat quickens.

"Ray! Eric!" I call out with no reply. I start to shake with nervousness and run outside to see Eric and Ray setting up a bouncy house in the backyard. I exhale, then inhale the morning air. I wave to them as I approach.

"Mommy, look what daddy got!" Ray exclaimed while jumping into my arms. Seeing her beautiful smile, so innocent and full of genuine happiness, makes my heart flutter with joy. She is safe. Eric comes over and puts his arm around us. He kisses my forehead so gently with no trace of the aggressive person he was last night. As Ray runs toward the bouncy house, a man with a llama walks up to Eric. I turn to look at Eric as he thanks the man for coming, one insistent question throbbing in my brain. How can we afford this? I push the thought away, not wanting anything to taint Ray's seventh birthday.

As Ray's party is wrapping up, I go into Eric's office to look at the credit card statement after the llama guy started complaining about not getting paid. When I log into Eric's bank account, there is something really strange pulled up. Someone under the name of Susan Harris's bank account is paying for the llama. I go into his history and it all clicks. There are twenty-six different people's bank accounts that he has accessed during the last three weeks. I take a deep breath and I know there is only one thing I can do. I get on the phone in his office

and dial the number.

Before I have time to think about what I have just done, the dispatcher says, “911, what’s your emergency?”

August 3rd, 2008, Alyssa

I look at my beautiful daughter, who is not that carefree seven-year-old anymore. I tell her everything.

October 23rd, 2017, 11:16 a.m.

I don’t think; I just drive. Anger for my father wells up in me and could explode at any moment. I park quickly and run into the prison in which he is doing time. After an hour of waiting around, I finally see him. He sits across the table from me with tears glistening in his eyes. His face looks just as I remembered it, icy blue eyes, graying blonde hair, and his round, soft face.

“My baby,” he whispers so quietly that I almost didn’t hear him. Hearing him say this after nine years is enough to make my heart crack. But there is nothing left of my heart to crack. The rage is relentless.

“Why did you do this?” I blurt out, not able to hold in the rage anymore. Rage for my mother’s efforts being too little, too late. Rage for the eviction notice taped on our front door. Rage for my father, the man sitting in front of me, whose actions have created a ripple of pain through my life. He holds his head in his hands, searching for an answer.

“I thought that the money would give us a better life, give you a better life. If I could, I would take it back, I . . . I never meant to cause this much . . .” Before he can finish his lame answer, I stand up so fast my chair clatters to the cement floor. It makes an ear-shattering noise through the now-silent room.

“Go to hell, Eric!” I yell, releasing all that pent up anger on him. Then there is just one thought on my mind. Run.

November 1st, 2017, 4:15 p.m.

I come home from another day at school and see the eviction notice

on the door. It has been up there for almost a week now, and I can no longer stand the sight of it. I tear it off of our yellowing door. I crumple it in a ball and throw it in the yard, some part of me hoping that if I can't see it, then it's not there. The door makes a familiar creaking noise as it opens. My house feels so empty and dead. With my mom always working, school, and my job after school, there is never really anyone home. A wave of hunger hits me. All I have eaten today is a piece of hot lunch pizza. I swing open the door to the refrigerator only to find some condiments that must be at least five years old. My hunger consumes me. I sink down to the ground, my head in my hands. My frustration quickly turns into sadness, and all of a sudden, I am bawling like a baby. That awful nagging voice in my head turns my attention to the knife set. "You could end it all now," it says with malice and a kind of persuasion most will never know. With the last bit of hope I have left in me I push that voice away. But I know I don't stand a chance against my demons inside. I succumb to the sadness.

November 15th, 2017, 4:57 p.m., Ray

I couldn't do it anymore, Mom. I'm sorry.

It is with great sadness that we announce the unexpected passing of my beloved daughter, Ray Aspen Blackwood. Ray passed at our home on November 15th, 2017. Ray was born to Alyssa Blackwood and Eric Blackwood at 3:32 p.m. August 3rd, 2001. My beautiful daughter had a hard life, but she still kept a smile on her face and spread joy to those around her. Ray was on the varsity track team at Franklin High School. She was going to get a full-ride scholarship to the University of Oregon. She will be missed deeply by many. Though her bright light is now out, she still is alive in the memories of those who loved her. Ray's service and internment were held privately.

A Glove's Life

I was forced into this life. It was never my dream. All I wanted was to be good. To be at peace, to spread positivity, to make a difference. If I couldn't be great, could I have at least been average? I would have even settled for being a food item. Although I would be eventually eaten, I could have made someone happy.

I've spent all my years hoping, wishing, praying for something, anything, better than this. But fate chose me, the lonely red glove, to be the bringer of violence.

I was the opposite of everything I admire in this world. I hurt others, not only physically, but mentally. I destroyed brain cells and careers. I crushed dreams. Dreams of athletes, of gamblers, of fans. The humans used me as their slave. Some gloves take pride in their work, boasting about the men they have defeated, and the crowds who cheered and screamed. "A small price to pay for fame," my mother once told me. I, on the other hand, could not have felt more differently.

My life was changed forever on that infamous day. That was the match that would end it all: all of the pain, all of the doubt, all of the loathing myself—gone. I left that ring feeling completely transformed. The best way to describe it would be like a rebirth. A restoration of my self worth. A resurrection of the belief that I could do something with myself. A revolution had begun, and I could finally see the glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel.

ALEXANDRA REYNAUD
JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL

A Fear of the Dark

There we were, masses
Made huddled and nameless
The shining empire didn't dare call us yearning Each of us something
a cog had spat
After all, free
who was to say we weren't but a man?
The nation's many mouths moved silently
A tree fell in the dark but nobody heard it
A man died in the light and nobody listened
And hearts beat the prayers to missing and dead gods Who here had a
death sentence
Ten years of indenture without saying a word
Hear
appeals to the grace of the human
the Human ingenuity, the Human vision, television the Human
discourse and the Human feel
the Human assigned a different name of modern sensibilities A reason
to will away the rain
The way hearts pounded in an arrangement of oddities Blood, itself
treason
To the state!
See the state
Of our triumphant nation
In the back of minds are dips and brutal valleys Razored edges of fifty
shining stars
Indivisible under the strangest of doctrines
Unimaginable to anything but ourselves.

The Irrevocability of Change

October 12, 1987

Carter's mother tentatively pulled into the parking spot; three spots down from last time. She turned off the ignition and glanced over, offering him a meek smile, one that looked more forced than genuine. She opened the door with a click as if it was the heaviest thing in the world and stepped out, the damp air brushing against her cheeks.

Carter closed his eyes and took a deep breath, one that felt like the first in a long time, and stepped out of his mom's Corolla. He stood up for half a second, his vision blurred with dizziness, and then fell back down into the seat.

Finally, he was able to summon enough strength, and he stood up with shivering knees.

His mother looked him over, as if she was examining each limb and notch in his body. She looked up at him, his tall, lanky body reaching a mere six feet, and although he had grown, he seemed smaller lately. They met and walked towards the entrance, forcing their feet to cooperate and stretch forward.

When they reached the doors, they automatically whooshed open, somehow startling them both, even though they'd been there countless times. Stepping in, they were immediately greeted by the sterile, slightly cool air along with a young, beaming receptionist.

The receptionist had long brown hair that was pulled tightly back into a conservative bun. Not one piece of hair flew astray, and her expensive clothes fit perfectly to her slim body. Her cheerful smile—misleading for the location—and calm words guided them to pediatrics; Carter and his mother didn't need the direction, though. The numerous visits lately and rows of cardboard cutout bears with balloons allowed them to recognize the appropriate ward.

After talking to the lady at the front desk, they followed the signs to pediatric. The beige tiled floor squeaked under their worn Nikes, the fresh wax shining up at them. Carter stared at his feet, not wanting to look up and read his fate. Carter stared at his feet, inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale . . .

Carter stared at his feet, his toe pushing against the tip of the toe bed, a small hole starting to form.

Finally, he looked up. He glanced at his mother, her dyed hair perpetually bouncing on her shoulders as she rushed anxiously down the hallway.

They sat down in the scuffed chairs and waited for the doctor to say their names. Carter perused the monotonous magazines from years before, with scantily clad supermodels ensuring him that their five secrets will help him lose ten pounds in a week, when a phone rang in the distance. The scream of the phone startled Carter, helping him realize that he had been clenching his jaw. He slowly unhinged his jaw and glanced down at his knuckles, noting that they were now a ghostly white. He unfolded his fingers and squeezed his eyes shut.

Tap, tap, tap, tap . . .

His leg bounced as each second ticked by, tap tap tap against the hard linoleum . . .

He laid back, his shoulders hitting the chipped beam behind him, sending a jolt down his spine.

Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale...

“Carter?” boomed the doctor. She was probably six foot one, with thick fingers and a round nose. Her gray, thinning hair fell loosely around her thick, drooping neck, and a large lump protruded out from her ear. She was a funny looking specimen, really, but that didn’t seem to break the tension that lingered in the room.

Carter tried to answer, but all that came out was a meager croak. He stood up, his legs giving out once again before he was able to follow his mother towards the peculiar-looking physician.

He hoisted himself up onto the beige exam table—everything seemed to be beige here—and clenched the side of the table to ensure

that he wouldn't fall back onto the paper, or worse, fall forward and land on the dusty floor.

As he sat there, he remembered his grandmother, how they would plant tulips in her garden every May. He hoped that that would never change, that he would still be able to plant those flowers and drink the lavender lemonade that she made for him, with juicy, plump lemons from her trees and fragrant, floral lavender from her bushes, even after what was going to happen today.

The doctor started talking, but all Carter could do was close his eyes and lay back on the table, the fragrance of tulips and fresh rain and simple syrup filling the air.

June 27, 1988

"Is it too late," breathed Carter.

"Not yet," beamed his grandmother.

They gently placed the bulbs into the fertile soil, their hands black with dirt and nails adorned with a thin, dark line of mud that had crept under: proof they had been gardening.

"They'll still bloom, don't worry."

"So much is different now. I don't want this to change too. I don't want them to not bloom because of me."

"They will, my dear. It is not too late, they will just bloom later."

They sprinkled the damp soil around the beige bulbs, and his grandmother handed Carter the watering can. He gently grasped the handle, careful not to let the chipping paint or water droplets fall onto his lap. He hovered the can over the bulbs now encased in the earth, and poured the water on top, making sure it wouldn't wash away the dirt. Carter handed it back to his grandmother and looked up at her with those vibrant blue eyes, once so familiar, but now so old, tired, like he was just waiting for the light to come back. She placed the can next to the bulbs and adjusted her stance.

"Just because something changes doesn't mean they won't flourish. Change is inevitable, and we are strong, we are resilient, we can change

too,” she said slowly and calmly.

She was always so sure of herself, so tranquil and stress-free; all of her years on this earth had taught her how to be truly human.

“At least we can do this now,” she smiled.

Carter’s grandmother wiped off her hands and placed them on his head, once a thicket of brown hair, but now smooth to the touch and wrapped carefully with a blue scarf. He began to cry, but not the way someone sad cried, rather someone who’s defeated, someone who has tried so hard, someone who has seen too much and has kept the weight of the world on their shoulders.

“Now, honey, don’t cry. It will be okay, my love. You’ll be okay.”

She took one boney, papery finger and brushed his tears away.

“Come now, it is time to go.”

His grandmother stood up, adjusted her stance once more, wrapped her ancient fingers around the handles, and pushed his chair away, leaving the flowers to grow.

JACOB COOPER

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

An Empty Side Street

Every step I take brings me close to my own death. Leaking blood leads to me feeling weak.

My life is flashing before my eyes. I think about what I had planned for my life.

Now there's not even time to say goodbye to everyone I knew and loved.

I'm going to die all alone in an empty side street on a rainy, thundering cold night.

The city around me is loud, and there is the sound of cars honking at each other far away. Sirens are screaming all over the town.

After taking one step further, I collapse and fall to my knees, pain rushing through my body once more. Walking on my knees in my own blood.

My life starts flashing faster.

It's almost at the end.

Trying to enjoy the last few breaths that are possible for me—I collapse another time.

Crawling on all fours, I see the last nice moment that happened in my life. It was a poor but good, very good, life that is going to end lonely, cold, scared, and weak.

How did I end up here? After unsuccessfully robbing a Safeway to try to get food and money for my family, I got chased by the police. Even running like my life was on the line, they caught up with me. Shouts everywhere around me: "Stop running!" I pulled out my weapon as I zoned out and everything around me blurred and seemed to stop. But a loud bang interrupts this memory and brings me back to this end. A bullet flying through the rainy air, landing right in my chest. Immediate pain rushing through my body as I start realizing that I'm screwed. I turned around and started running again. Running until I got into that cold and empty side street.

One last breath and it's over.

Laying in my own blood, dead.

The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Thomas A. Coleman

Tommy Coleman was born on March 27, 1981 to Barbara and Doug Coleman. He grew up in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, along with his two brothers and one sister. He had wild brown hair and green eyes that always looked like they were laughing at something, or someone. His summers were filled with swimming, exploring, and running wild with his siblings. As a result, he was always covered in scratches and bruises, and trips to the doctor's office were nearly monthly traditions.

"Where you goin', Tommy?" was the chorus of his life, as he couldn't sit still. His best friend in the world was his older sister, Delilah, or as he knew her, Delly. He drove his parents crazy, for even though he was a smart, kind boy, he had an undeniable sense of adventure.

"Where you goin', Tommy?"

"Just o'er to the springs to go swimmin'."

"Now Tom, you know damn well you can't go to the springs by your lonesome."

"I'll bring Delly with me!"

This was the nearly daily exchange Tommy would have with his father, usually followed by Tommy sprinting out the door with his father yelling after him. Delilah was to Tommy what an anchor is to a ship. She grounded him, kept him secure, made him feel like he had a place. She spent most of her time looking after her siblings or doing schoolwork, without much time for herself. As a result, she grew up into a scrupulous young woman. As Tommy grew up, his wildness evolved and made him the kind of fellow who was funny and kind, but always up for a good celebration. He was the only one able to loosen Delly up and make her have fun. And so, as Tommy and Delly grew, they depended on each other, and started making bigger decisions.

Before they knew it, they were all grown up. Delilah got into college and went to Ouachita Baptist University, majoring in secondary education. A couple years out of college, she moved to Holly Springs and started working there. Tom, on the other hand, didn't go to college. He worked odd jobs in Siloam Springs until 2004, when he decided he was tired of his hometown. He then started a habit that would plague him: moving around. First to Waldron, then to Conway, and finally, out of Arkansas to Carroll, Iowa. Carroll was about ninety miles southwest of Des Moines, and with a population of just over ten thousand, it was a classic Midwest small town. It had a couple hotels for people passing through, some parks, a railyard, some grocery stores, and an inordinate amount of churches and bars. It constantly smelled like gasoline, and the screech of trains was the background track to the small-town life. It was here that he started to fall apart.

By this time, he was twenty-six, jobless, single, and as he saw it, hopeless. He started going to Kerp's Tavern every night and drinking, then staggering home and collapsing into bed. His debts grew, and his health declined. He started to lose his boyish hope and became cold and angry. One night, he got into a fight. A knife came out of nowhere and Tom ended up stabbing the other man in the gut. At the police station, he got a call from Delilah.

"What in God's name are you doin' Tom? You think this is some kind of joke? You are throwing your life away! You are lucky something worse hasn't happened! And if you don't sort yourself out, something worse WILL happen! Figure it out! I don't care what you gotta do, but I swear to God, if I hear about even one more thing like this, I will MAKE you come live with me because OBVIOUSLY, you are not grown up enough to make your own choices!"

Tom had never disobeyed his older sister, and he wasn't starting now. The man he had stabbed wasn't seriously injured, and they were both trying to attack each other, so Tom took a plea deal and got off with parole, service hours, and a hefty fine. He sobered up. He got a job as a mechanic and started paying off his debt. Soon, he met a girl

named Cheryl. She was a paramedic just out of town in Fort Dodge. They started dating, and after three years they got married and moved to Des Moines. For the first time in many years, Tom felt hopeful.

Thomas A. Coleman

Mar. 27, 1981—Jul. 12, 2065

Tom passed away on July 12 in Des Moines, IA at the age of eighty-four after a long battle with lung cancer. He was preceded in passing by his mother and father, Doug and Barbara Coleman, and his sister, Delilah Richardson. Tom is survived by his wife, Cheryl, his two younger brothers, Marcus and Jake, his three children, Robert, Charles, and Holly, and his grandchildren. Tom was born on March 17 in Siloam Springs, AR. His siblings fondly recount memories of his childhood and his wild ways. As a child, Tom loved swimming, biking, and getting into trouble. Jake Coleman, his youngest brother, remembers how Tom always kept their mother guessing.

“Even with all his crazy antics, he still had a heart of gold,” Jake said.

At the age of twenty-three, Tom left Siloam Springs. He moved around for a few years, until, at the age of twenty-six, he landed in Carroll. He took odd jobs until he got a job as a mechanic.

“Even though he had faced some rough times, he was always an upstanding type of guy,” recalls Ricky Hernandez, a close friend of Tom. “He didn’t care about showing off, he just wanted to make other people happy.”

In 2013, he married Cheryl Coleman and moved to Des Moines. They were married for fifty-four years. Tom’s eldest son, Robert, says his parents were everything a couple should be.

“Even after they’d been married, you know, forty, fifty years, my dad still brought my mom flowers every weekend. They were perfect for each other,” he said.

Tom was a kind, loving man who loved being with the people he cared about. He never lost his sense of adventure and enjoyed traveling

and hiking all across the United States. There will be a memorial service for Tom on August 24 at Dunn's Funeral Home. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in Tom's name to The Conservation Fund.

ESMÉE COWING
CATLIN GABEL SCHOOL

Nowhere Station

I'm making a collage

I'm cupping
the sticky black
night in my hands

so that I can glue together
the peeling paint on windowsills
that rises like a cloud of moths

The strands
of grumbling clouds
in the sky

The spat-out rain
poking holes
in the concrete

My grandmother's
story of a train
that crept across the rooftops

You don't see it
because you're too slow
to look outside

The pale ghost
of my window
is canvas

The collage is the best I can do

It's alright
to only be
a part of it

The wheel can only love to spin
The destination is paved the same

Boats of Death

I walk through the Constant. It feels as if I'm walking through clouds, if clouds could be so depressing. The Constant is a place of bleak nothingness with strange, white mist constantly swirling around me. Mist is the only thing here. It provides a deep contrast to my black, shadowy robes.

I feel a strange sensation like a small string pulling against my entire body; someone has died. I follow the feeling out of the Constant and I see a city with tall building and a beautiful structure that looks like an inverted top balanced on three curved spires.

I glide past the skyscrapers until I come to a young boy, likely no older than nine. His limbs are snapped at unnatural angles. His head is askew and there is a mass of blood pooling underneath, staining his blonde hair to a reddish brown. I look up at the balcony where the boy had fallen. I could hear his mother's screams echoing from above and the distant wail of a siren. They are too late; I can already see a translucent white shadow of the boy rising from his body. He looks around fearfully, eyes darting around like a scared rabbit, until his gaze rests on me.

"Hello little one," I say. He looks up at me with fright, my tall frame and black robes probably doing nothing to help soothe his nerves.

"W-who are you?" he asks in a timid voice.

"No one of importance. I am simply a guide here to take you to your next journey." I move in between the boy and his body; it would not be good for either of us if he saw it.

"Where is that?" he asks.

I smile, though of course he cannot see it, for my face is hidden behind a shadowy veil. "I do not know. I simply take you to the Gates. What happens next is a mystery to me."

I take the boy's hand and begin to walk away from his body. Mist

swirls around us, and within moments, the city is gone and we are once again in the Constant. A few feet away, there is an opening with a pulsating yellow light coming from within. The Gates, they are the only place in the Constant that is not covered in a blanket of nothingness.

I walk to the Gates, the boy's hand in my own. I look down and see him staring at them in awe.

"Go on, child," I say as I let go of his hand. The boy looks back at me and I give him a slow nod. "Your next journey is though there."

"I don't want to go."

"I know you don't, but you must," I say as, without warning, I shove him through the Gates.

He screams in surprise as he falls back into nothingness. I spend a few more minutes staring after him. It is the least I can do for the dead.

I sigh as I turn away from the portal to the unknown, black robes billowing in the mist behind me. I ask myself the same question as always. What have I done to all those people I lead through the Gates? Have I given them a new life, an eternity of torture, or worse, a fate akin to my own?

The only way to find the answer is to step through the Gates myself, something that I can never do; there is too much work to be done.

Letter to Myself

Hey Kristian,

I know you're probably confused but, I'm you two years into the future. I want to tell you some things. One, stop getting to school late, you'll regret it. Eighth grade is gonna be the best year for you, and if you aren't there, you're going to miss a lot of events. And be smart, think before you do something. Also cheer up, you gone be happy later on the year, trust. God is with you, watching you. I had money and my phone and my charger in my bag and when I checked, it was gone, so keep checking your bag if you got everything. Also, stop lying to people, keep it real, talk to the truth cause lying gets you in trouble. Stay loyal to the people that love you. Show your true feelings to someone that makes you happy. Step over everybody and everything that's in your way. I also want you to look for someone that will inspire you. For example Nipsy Hussle, XXXTentacion, Juice Wrld, those people have inspired me. When I was down, their music helped me go through everything. Hope you feel better soon. I'm 15 by the way.

Sincerely, Kristian
C ya.

KAI MILLER CASTLES
NORTHWEST ACADEMY

Ghost Town

You can see the desecrated movie screen at the front of the theater
You can see the open doorway through which
You can feel the cool air blowing
You can see the broken seats extending in front of you
You can see the old crates of reels past the half-rotted wall
You can smell the scent of mold and must in the book hidden under
one of the seats
You can hear the long dead languishing, craving to be freed from their
eternal prison
You can see the crumpled skeletons in their mass grave in the movie
scene, stuck forever
You can taste copper, reminding you of things done, things not only
gone, but forgotten
You can see
beyond the broken seats
beyond the the movie screen
beyond the crates of reels
the wide expanse of desert
forever continuing on
long into the fierce white sun.

The Butterfly Effect

Timothy Jay Greene was a rather introverted man. He was the most mediocre guy you'd ever meet, and he didn't have many talents. Despite his lack thereof, he still attempted to achieve success and always seemed to have a sophisticated dialogue. He was poised, yet insecure at times. He was an open book and didn't have many secrets. His round face and elongated stance matched his incredibly decent posture. His eyes were a deep shade of green, and his naturally straight, ginger hair was styled the same way every day. Oh how he loved his routines. Timothy did the exact same thing every day since he was about six years old. Of course, this would periodically change as he got older, as Timothy did not work in stocks at age six. However, for the past decade, he ate the same food, went to the same job, and did everything at the same time each day. His parents, Gwendolynn and Harold Greene, took pride in their lives, but not particularly his. He had matured quickly in his childhood and always seemed to be the odd one out. He didn't bother the other kids, and they didn't bother him. He was as quiet as a mouse. At a young age, he indirectly realized that his brother, Flynn, was the obvious favorite because he was far more interesting than Timothy would ever be. Surprisingly, Timothy decided not to be bothered by this fact. Sure, he had tried to win over his parents' love at one point, but he realized that he didn't need his family as much as he needed himself. In fact, he was actually happier without them and proud that he had isolated their negative energy. He was lonely, but that was how he liked it. He was a kind young man and in his early thirties when the incident occurred.

He pushes snooze this time,
Sleeps in for nine minutes.
This is his first mistake.

He doesn't have time to brush his teeth.
Fix his hair.
Or even eat breakfast.
Slept in for nine minutes.
He rushes out the door and hops in the car,
the frosty cold air enveloping his body.
He reminds himself to keep his eyes on the road.
If only it wasn't so foggy out.
He hears a ringing coming from the middle console.
His phone.
He can hear the vibration next to his seat, but as he glances down, he
can't see where the phone is placed.
It seems to Timothy that the "fog" is inside the car.
Inside the car?
Timothy realizes that this fog is inside of his eyes.
"Eyes," ee mumbles under his breath.
"Road."
He didn't have time to brush his teeth.
The clearly red light flashes before his eyes. "Red light."
He reminds himself to keep his eyes on the road.
A look of horror freezes in its position on Timothy's face as his entire
life flashes before his eyes.
"This was his first mistake."
Glasses? His last thought as black static envelops the flashing red.
His body slumps over to the opposite side of the car.
This was his first mistake.
His body slumped to the opposite side of the car.
"Eyes.
Road.
Red light."
Black static. He pushed snooze this time.

"K8 NEWS LIVE: PHILADELPHIA MAN CRASHES ON I80
WEST. POLICE CONCLUDE TIMOTHY GREENE WAS

MISSING HIS PRESCRIPTION GLASSES.”

Gwendylynn Lynn Greene is a “mother bunny,” as she calls herself. She is a timid and shy woman. Much like her son, she is an introvert and likes to participate in calm, peaceful, activities like knitting, sewing, and macramé. She is responsible for all of the household chores and is the embodiment of a stereotypical mother in her early fifties. She is a wife to Harold Greene, and a mother to her two sons, Flynn and Timothy. Gwendy loves her family unconditionally. Despite what Timothy might’ve thought, the Greens love him as much as they do the rest of their family. When Tim left, Gwendy, among others unknown to him, became extremely sad and confused. She didn’t know where he was going, or when she would see him again. She liked having him around the house to talk to, and she was interested by his personality. She never really truly understood him, but this didn’t affect her love for him in the slightest. Yes, she did have trouble showing it—she realizes this now—but this was only because she had trouble relating to him. She spent more time with Tim’s older brother because he frequently talked to Gwendylynn about himself: his hobbies, what he liked, what he didn’t like. She didn’t quite know what Tim was like, and he seemed happier alone anyway. Of course, Gwendy, like the rest of the Greene family, wanted him to be happy, so this is why they let him be. If only she would have told him all of this when she still had the chance. And if only he would’ve listened.

“Hey honey, it’s your mom. Just checking in on you today. I was wondering if you . . . were doing alright and um, just wanted to wish you a good day. Oops, sorry, I know you’re probably busy on your way to work right now but uh, I um, just wanted to give you a call. I now realize this probably isn’t the best time for you to talk about this but just call me back when you get the chance; I want to talk to you about something, so ring me up after work. Okay love you, bye.”

Hey You

Hey you.
I know it's been so long,
I'm sorry for abandoning you.
I might have lost
Your line of contact,
But I'm praying to God
This message gets through
To you.

Hey you.
Remember the light in our eyes?
The feeling of dancing
On weightless tip toes?
Remember the make-believe worlds
We made it real?
The place just for us,
Where no one else could find us?

Hey you.
I feel like I've forgotten
Our best memories.
The late nights
On the wet pavement,
And the way the street light
Glowed a way home.
I feel like I've forgotten
The place we called home.
I haven't lost it all,
There's still a shell.

I feel like I've forgotten
The places we used to roam.
The adventures we found in
The little bits of magic.

Hey you.
I still see
The fractured pieces
Of our childhood,
Glittering like glass.
I still see
You,
Staring back from my reflection.
I still see
Our mud-caked clothes
And the water running all through summer.
I still see
A flash of the hope
That once lit up our eyes.

Hey you.
I'm begging you,
To hold on to that light.
Whatever it takes,
Don't ever let it go out.
I'm begging you,
Because someday it will be
The only reason you have to live.
I'm begging you,
Keep going.
Never give up, no matter what they say.
I'm begging you,
Don't forget us.

Hey you.
Hear me now,
I'm calling out to you.
Hear me now,
One chance to tell you.
Hear me now,
Because I may never say this again.

Hey you,
I love you.

Only One Day

Victoria's alarm clock went off at 5:00. She looked at it and groaned. She closed her eyes for a moment and thought. All of a sudden, she bolted upright and jumped out of bed. She put on some clothes on her floor left over from earlier in the week, grabbed her keys, and rushed out the door. As she stepped into the early dawn, though, she paused for a minute. She took a deep breath and the cool morning air filled her lungs, and the feelings of contentedness with her life washed over her. She shook her head as if to clear her thoughts and got into her car. She arrived at the bakery, where she worked when she didn't have classes, with two minutes to spare. She unlocked the door and started getting ready for the morning rush. The first customer, as always, was Victoria's best friend Claire. She leaned on the counter; her shoulder-length red hair fell over her dark green eyes and her freckled face. She had on a cute summer dress that perfectly reflected her lovable, bubbly personality.

"What's up, loser?" she asked.

"Not much, moron," Victoria said from the back kitchen. "After my shift is done, do you want to grab some lunch?"

"You know it," she replied. Fifteen minutes, a latte, and a scone later she said, "Well, I better get going. David will get annoyed if I'm late. Today we're picking out the napkins." She rolled her eyes and walked out the door. She was engaged to David Miller, the millionaire CEO of Vortex Energy. Victoria smiled. When most people met Victoria and Claire when they were together, they usually thought that Victoria was jealous of Claire with her marrying a millionaire, Victoria still being single as ever and all. But Victoria was genuinely happy for Claire. Plus she knew if she wanted, she could get any guy. Her long brown hair, striking dark features, and her adventurous, thoughtful personality didn't usually escape their notice, but Victoria was perfectly happy

with her life the way it was.

The next day, Victoria was sitting on her bed reading her latest novel when she heard a knock at her door. She opened it and there were two police officers standing there. She was taken aback and her mind raced back to that time in seventh grade when she had stolen a candy bar from the local convenience store. She quickly regained her composure, though, and calmly asked, "Hello officers. What can I help you with?"

The taller of the two spoke. "Are you Victoria Williams?"

"Yes," she replied, a little hesitant.

"We're here to ask you a couple questions about your friend, Claire Montgomery."

"What? Did something happen? Is she okay?"

"Unfortunately, no," said the other officer. "She was found in an alley last night, dead."

Victoria couldn't believe what she was hearing. She sank to her knees. No. There was no way this was happening. Just yesterday, she had had lunch with her. They had laughed and talked about their lives, and now she was dead. How was this happening? It just wasn't possible. Victoria stared numbly at the wall in front of her.

"Miss Williams? We need you to come with us down to the station to answer a few questions. We have reason to believe that you were the last person to be with her."

After what seemed like hours sitting in the police station answering question after question about where she was and what she was doing yesterday, they finally let her go. Victoria sat in the car, processing the day. Only one day. It's amazing what can happen in just one day. The news had finally sunk in. Her best friend, the girl she had known since third grade, the girl who she did everything with, was dead. She hadn't cried all day, but now she let the tears stream down her face.

Nothing was ever the same once you died. For months after you died, Claire, I just went through the motions of my life. Got up. Went

to work. Went to class. Studied. I thought about you for weeks on end. Every once in a while, when I thought about you, a painful memory would come up, like the time we jumped in the fountain at the mall in high school, or when we stayed up for two days straight studying for our finals together (I remember you drank at least six shots of espresso in a row), and it was hard for me to drag myself out of bed. But little by little, things are starting to get better. I'm dating this guy who I know you would love, and I'm finding myself starting to enjoy things without your presence. Every Tuesday, I eat dinner with your parents. I'm pretty sure your mom changed her lasagna recipe, and just between you and me, it's nowhere near as good. It hurts me every day that you're not by my side, laughing and talking, but I know that you would want me to be happy. I'm trying my hardest, Claire, I really am, but I won't ever be the same without you.

Coming from Nepal to US

Moving from Nepal was very emotional for me, my mom, and my sister. I remember waiting for my dad and uncle, weak in my wheelchair in the Seattle airport. After my dad and uncle got there, we drove to Portland, driving three hours. It was nothing like I had imagined it to be, even though it was a completely different part of the world. I thought it would be like money coming out of nowhere, and unrealistic. When we got to my uncle's house, there was everyone who moved to the U.S. in the past. When I saw my older cousin, not the oldest one, the second older, I cried, but I don't know why. Probably because I had not seen her in a while. We were so exhausted that we slept in my dad's room and slept for a while. I never thought we could eat Nepali food again, but we ate Nepali food later that night. Coming here from Nepal was alright but I never thought I would stay here for this long.

Where Have You Been?

I will be turning eighteen in a week, and that means that my foster parents will no longer be responsible for me. I don't have anywhere to go. I have decided that I will try to track down my biological mom. After a lot of digging and so many dead ends, I located her. She lives in California. I live in Portland, Oregon, so that's not too far. I bought a plane ticket and packed my bags. As I left the house I was staying in, I was a little afraid, but I know there's nothing left for me here. I got in the cab and started going towards the airport.

"Wake up, Veronica, we're going to the city," is what I remember my mother saying to me on the last day I ever saw her. I think I was around five years old. "Hurry up and eat your breakfast, we need to leave," my mother said.

She looked sad and almost guilty, but at the time, I had not realized why. I hurried and finished the rest of my bland, soggy cereal. My mom was in the kitchen talking on the phone to someone. She was whispering, and I was never able to find out what they were talking about. I don't remember much of that day, but I do remember the way my mom was acting was strange. My mom had been a single mother for as long as I could remember, and she always told me that my father was awful and had abandoned us when I was born. We got in the car to go to the city. The drive was long, and my mom didn't say anything the whole way there.

The cab driver turns around and asks, "Where are you headed?"

"The airport," I say, not wanting to give away too much information. It's better not to tell every stranger you meet your life story, in my opinion.

"How old are you? Aren't you a little young to be going to the airport by yourself?" says the cab driver.

"I'm seventeen, I'm going to visit my grandparents," I lied. I know

that I look young, but this guy is starting to pry too much into my life. We don't talk much the rest of the way. I think that he can tell I am annoyed by him asking so many questions. He drops me off in front of the airport and I head inside. I go to my gate right away but realize that I still have an hour until we board, so I sit down and wait. I must have been so excited to leave that I got there early. An hour passes and I board that plane. I sit down in my seat. There is an old man with grey hair and a long wiry beard sitting next to me. He smiles as I sit down. I smile back.

"I'm Gus. What's your name," the old man asks me.

"Veronica," I reply.

"Where are you headed to?" He asks me.

"California," I tell him.

"So am I," he replies. "Do you have family there?"

"Yes," I say, "I'm going to see my mom. What about you?"

"I'm going to see my daughter," he says, "I haven't seen her in years."

"I'm sorry," I reply, "I get it though, I haven't seen my mom since I was five, and I have no idea what she will think of me suddenly showing up in her life."

"Oh, she must be really excited to see you," he says.

"I don't know that she will be," I say.

"Why wouldn't she want to see you?" he asks.

"She has no idea where I've been, and I haven't seen her in years," I reply. I think to myself, what am I doing telling a stranger my whole life story?

He says, "I don't mean to pry, but may I ask you why it's been so long since you've seen your mother?"

"Well," I hesitate to answer, "that's a long story but let me try to summarize it. My mom abandoned me when I was five and I've never seen or heard from her since."

"Why would she abandon you," he says.

"I guess she was overwhelmed by being a single parent and just couldn't take it anymore," I say.

"Have you thought about the possibility that she may not want to

see you," he says.

"Yes," I reply.

I remember how crowded it was in the city that day. My mom had gotten me out of the car and we walked a ways away from it. Now that I look back, that was probably so I wouldn't be able to retrace my steps back to that car to find her. She looked at me with hesitation and then told me, "Wait there, Veronica. I'll be right back, so don't leave this spot." I nodded without hesitation. Being the innocent child I was, I believed her wholeheartedly. I had watched her disappear into the crowd of people. That was the last time I ever saw her. I'm not sure exactly why she left me that day. I used to think that it was my fault and that I hadn't been good enough, but now I realize that she was probably scared of being a single mom and couldn't handle the pressure. I waited for her for a few hours that day. At some point, I realized that she wasn't coming back. I had no idea what to do. Tears started to well up in my wide blue eyes that sparkled like diamonds. So many people walked by and none of them paid any mind to me wailing there on the street all by myself. To me, it felt like the buildings surrounding me reached all the way to the sky, and the overwhelming crowd of people would swallow me whole. I started to panic and completely forgot about what my mom said about not leaving this spot. I started to run, thinking maybe I could find my mom somehow. Bammm! I had crashed into a police officer. I stood in front of the officer, shaken, as my jet back hair hung messily in front of my face. To them, I must have looked so fragile that one touch and I would shatter.

"Are you lost?" they asked. I realized that they weren't mad that I had run into them. I felt an internal sigh of relief. Then I realized that I was still lost. My lip started to quiver, and before I had a change to notice, tears were running down my rosy cheeks.

"Yes," I replied, "I lost my mommy."

"Don't worry, I'll help you find your mommy," said the officer. They tried to locate my mother, but it was no use. She likely wanted nothing to do with me and had no plan to come and get me.

After that day, nothing was the same. My home and family were all

gone in the blink of an eye. I bounced around from one foster home to another, never staying in one place for long. Now we're back to where this story started and I'm on a plane on my way to find the only family I have left.

"The plane will be landing shortly, so everyone please remain in your seats," says the flight attendant.

"I hope everything with your mother goes well," says the man sitting next to me.

"Thanks, I hope the same for you and your daughter," I reply. We exchange smiles as I get up to get off the plane.

I get into a cab and tell him to go to the address that I found was my mother's. As I sit in the cab, I think about what the old man had said about how my mother may not want to see me. I told him I would be prepared for that, but will I really? My mom's my last chance at having a family, and if she abandoned me, it's possible she still wants nothing to do with me. I have to be prepared for her to not want me.

The cab driver pulls up to the house. It is a large white house with a big yard and picket fence. "Looks like she's got it together now," I think to myself. As I approach the front door through the stinging December air, I feel a warmth from the house as the fire can be seen emitting through the window. I can hear a young child as I get closer. "Is that my sister?" I think. I can see a young girl through the window sitting on a middle-aged woman's lap. That woman looks familiar. That can't possibly be my mother, can it? A man enters the room and kisses the woman. My heart sinks as I realized that that is my mother. In that moment, I realize that she has a whole life without me. It is as if I had been discarded only to have somebody else fill my place. I hesitate to knock on the door but realize that I've already come all this way so why not just do it? The woman opens the door. She has grayish hair and some wrinkles under her cold, grey eyes. She looks way older than the last time I saw her. She says to me, "Hello, can I help you?"

"It's me, Veronica, your daughter," I say. She looks at me, confused by what I've just said.

"Is this some sort of prank," she says to me.

“No, it’s not a prank,” I say. “You abandoned me when I was five, don’t you remember?”

“I remember,” she says, “but I don’t want you anymore. That’s why I left you.”

“I see,” I say, “well, have fun with your picture-perfect life, I don’t want you either.” I turn around and leave without ever looking back.

ALLY KEEFE

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

Anywhere Else

Is not here a place? Is anywhere else a place?

I would rather be so many other places.

Like the library in my old town, multiple stories and so many shelves and quiet. All sorts of comfortable chairs to read in in front of large windows.

And just behind it, under the shade of pine trees, was a meandering system of streams and creeks to jump over and play around.

Or the bare beams of the old mill nearby, fun to climb on but with a healthy streak of apprehension. The brown pine needles and fallen branches on the ground below would blur out of distinction as the stilts grew longer and the ground sloped lower.

I would rather be in the tea shop near my dance studio,

Drinking tea and reading a book,

Sinking slowly into the cushions of a couch or chair, feeling my backpack leaning against my leg.

With the sound of conversation and tea mugs clinking in the background.

Warm lights hanging from the ceiling, and lamps on all of the tables.

I would rather be so many other places than in my house, in my room,
Stuck, isolated

I would rather go so many places

than spend all my time at my computer in the same corner of my
bedroom

Doing schoolwork day in,

Day out,

Day in,

Day out.

Regret

"We can't afford all of this! The bills are piling up and money doesn't just grow on trees," John Shade yells to his wife, Marie, in the kitchen. "I know you keep telling me to be patient and try to help Lea in every way, but the physical therapy bills on top of the hospital bills. We don't have enough money."

"Hush," Marie whispers, "we can't have Lea hearing you. She already feels awful for having us pay the medical bills, we can't have her knowing we might now be able to afford to."

"Look, it's not my fault our daughter was clumsy enough to fall out of a tree and break her foot. She must have gotten that from your side," John says as he shakes his head aggressively.

"You need to lower your voice and calm down," Marie says, her voice rising above a whisper.

"Fine, but I need to go out for a little bit," John says as he slams the back door.

"Where are you going?" Marie shouts.

But there is no response. Marie sighs, pulling her dirty-blond hair up into a messy bun, and leans against the wall, exhausted from the day she has had. The kitchen is a mess. Plates piled up in the sink. Pots and pans piled up on the stove, with the sauces still in them. Marie starts to clean, humming to herself, trying to calm her shaking hands.

The house is quiet when Marie's husband is gone. No yelling or cursing. People always ask Marie why she settled for John, and she always responds with, "He's my high school sweetheart. We've been together for as long as I can remember." He was different when they had first gotten together, more caring and free. He was the captain of the football team, tall and handsome, with piercing blue eyes that sparkled like sunlight reflecting off a pool of water. Their kids had gotten most of his features. Between their eyes and strong jawlines, Lea and Henry were replicas of their father.

When John was sober and playing catch with them, his laugh could be heard throughout the neighborhood. But he hasn't been sober enough to do that in almost a year. Now, with the stress of life tearing him down, it is rare to find him without a drink in his hand. There are bills to pay and a family to feed. Marie feels the tears start to build up behind her eyes.

A loud crash brings Marie back to present.

"Mom!" she hears. "Mom!"

Marie brushes the tears out of her eyes as she rushes into the living room saying, "Is everyone alright?"

She gasps as she sees her husband lying on the floor, with her children huddled in the corner. The lamp is on the floor and the shaggy gray carpet is scrunched up in the middle of the room.

"What happened?" she screams, running over to John. She looks into her children's wide, blue eyes, terrified about whatever had just occurred.

"Dad came in the door all weird and loopy," Henry replies in a scared voice. "He was using bad words and couldn't walk straight, as if the floor was wobbly."

"Yeah," Lea added, "and then he tripped over the carpet and hit his head really hard. Is he okay? Why isn't he moving?"

"Shit," Marie mutters under her breath. "Dad is fine, he's just not feeling very well. You kids go into your room and get into bed. I'm gonna talk to Dad alone."

As her kids walk away, Marie props her husband up and gets him some water and Advil. When she comes back into the room, she whispers into her ear, "That's it. This has gone too far. You keep coming home drunk, and this was the last time. You are moving out tomorrow morning and we are taking a break from each other." And Marie walks out of the room to say goodnight to her children.

One year later, Marie proudly watches as Henry and Lea dance across the stage in their school's version of the Nutcracker. Her ex-husband, John, sits next to her with a big smile on his face. After Marie

told him that he had to move out, John got his act together, sobered up and found a stable job. He now has a good relationship with his kids and his ex-wife.

“Do you see that?” he excitedly whispers to Marie. “Those are our kids, dancing their little hearts out!”

“Yes, aren’t they wonderful,” Marie exclaims. “I’m so proud of them.”

When John moved out, Marie felt much calmer. She discovered herself doing more activities with the kids and she found a loving boyfriend, Matt, that moved in with them last month. He sits on the other side of Marie and is the first one to stand up at the final curtain call.

“That was incredible,” he says.

When the kids come out from behind the stage, they rush over to their mother’s open arms, cheeks flushed with excitement.

“Did you see us, Mom?!” Henry asks jumping up and down. “I was amazing!”

“Yes, I saw,” Marie says with a laugh, “You both did so well. I think we are going to go out to celebrate.”

“Yay!” Henry shouts. “Can Dad come?”

“Sure,” Marie says as she looks at her ex-husband. “If he wants to.”

“You know what, kiddo,” John replies, “how about I take you and your sister out some other time.”

“Okay. Bye, Dad. Thanks for coming,” Henry says, waving goodbye as they walk off.

“Goodbye,” John says quietly, as he watches his family walk off. He wishes to be in Matt’s place as Lea jumps into his arms, laughing. John leaves the theater with a heavy heart. As he walks to the car, he wonders if things would have been different if he got his act together sooner.

SAM G.

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: RAJESH REDDY

I Am an Eraser

I am an eraser

Erasing the bad habits in me
I'm like Thomas Shelby

Pencils writing and creating
they make a mistake
The eraser is erasing

There's nothing to lose
Nothing to take
Erase the mistake

All I have is an eraser
As I grow
I erase some more

Keep on erasing as I age
Until the eraser is done for
I'm erased to the core
I reached my goal
I die
The eraser is no more

RUBY SAMUELS-ELLINGSON
GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

I Was Raised by Family

I was raised by faded carpets
Broken thermostats
And microwaved milk
By banana bread and cereal at midnight
Making forts with pillows and sheets
“The troll in the basement”
Kind of family

I was raised by book reading
Rollerblading, CD playing
Yelling and screaming
“I hate you!” “I’m sorry”
Hiccapped apology
Type of family

I was raised by power outs
And putting up sheets
More clothespins and space heaters
“Are you sure you’re warm enough?”
Sort of family

I was raised by dad’s projects
Safety goggles and hammers
Sawing wood and melting metal
“Come help me in the backyard.”
Kind of family

I was raised by mom’s quilts
And classical music

Couch spots and Tension Tamer tea
Knitting needles and felt
“We’re people who do things!”
Kind of family

I was raised by growing up
And falling down
Raindrops on car windows
Getting pulled into a warm embrace
“I can see my breath!”
Type family

I was raised by summer in Chico
Grandma and Grandpa’s house
Hershey’s minis transferred by handshakes
Grandpa’s beard and Grandma’s blintzes
“Grandpa Chuck isn’t going to get better”
Sort of family

I was raised by mom’s cooking
Lentil and kale soup
Frozen latkes while we set up the Christmas tree
Food comas and sleeping at the table
“Put your napkin on your lap!”
Kind of family

I was raised by family

Everest

July 12/3:15 a.m./Winnipeg, Manitoba: “Wake up, sit up, get out of bed,” is what I say to myself over and over again as I lie on my back staring at the ceiling hopelessly. My mind, filled with confusion and fear. I lie still, very still, thinking. Quivering. Hoping. Building up the courage to arise from my bed and get ready for the most challenging two months of my life. Slowly but surely, I stand up, take a deep breath. In, and out.

“This is the day, this is the day it starts,” I tell myself in my head as I walk to my bathroom to splash cold water on my face. I sit up from the sink, take one more deep breath. In, and out, as the water trickles down from my face onto the rusting white tile on the floor. 3:15 a.m. soon becomes 4:00 a.m.; I look at the clock on my bedside table and now start to hurry as I get everything I need ready for the next sixty-plus days that await me. As I finish packing the final things I will need, my taxi arrives. I step into the car in a rush and once I’m in, once I fasten my seatbelt, my body relaxes, the stress fades away, and a feeling of excitement fills my mind as I start thinking about the amazing but extremely dangerous and difficult task that I am about to take on. For the past three years of training, I’ve been waiting for this day, but for much longer, I’ve been looking for a change, a getaway from my everyday life . . . and here it is. My name is Clara, and I am getting to the Summit of Everest.

July 13th/4:30 a.m./Lukla Airport: When I finally arrive in Lukla after a total of twelve hours and fifty minutes of flying, I’m exhausted. The flight was awful, and having three layovers didn’t help that. First in Dallas, then Miami, then across the Atlantic to the last one in Yemen. And finally, to Nepal. I step off the plane, and as my feet touch the ground and I feel the cold, fresh air hit my face, I take a sigh of relief. I look around trying to find the sign to lead me to where the shuttle

will take me to the trailhead. I'm confused and I don't know where to go. I turn around to see if I'm going the wrong way and I see another passenger from my last flight with a huge duffle bag. I noticed that she's wearing a very high-quality Patagonia; she looks like she might be going towards the shuttle in a hurry, so I walk up to her.

"Excuse me," I say, trying to get her attention but failing. I say again a little louder this time, "Excuse me?" and it works, she turns around and looks at me. "Would you be looking for the shuttle to the trailhead by chance?"

The woman responds with a smile on her face. "Yes! It's this way at the end of the hanger."

"Thank you so much," I say with a sigh of relief as we start to rush to the shuttle, hoping we don't miss it. We get there just in time and hop in. From the trailhead, me and nine others make the eight-day hike to basecamp.

July 22/5:15 p.m./Mt. Everest Basecamp: When we get to basecamp, I'm a lot less nervous about the upcoming couple months. The group of people that I've come to really like over the past eight days has made me even more excited than I was before. Two of the ten I spent most of my time with throughout the trek. One of them is a man named Paul from Gap, France, and the other, a woman named Charlie from Arlington, Texas. Paul is a twenty-four-year-old structural engineer. And Charlie is just out of grad school at TCU. They are both very nice people; Charlie is funny, spirited, hopeful, and positive. She has two other siblings. She is the youngest of three, she has two older brothers, and was raised on a farm. Charlie is strong-willed which is just what we need on this mountain we are about to take on. Paul, on the other hand, is not so easy to figure out; he is unbelievably smart and fluent in French, English, and Japanese. From what we know, he was born and raised in Gap, and he is a graduate of the American University of Paris. He is quiet, but when he does talk, his words influence people in a way that most other people's words won't. He has been training for this trip for six years, since he was seventeen. If there is anyone to go on this expedition with, it's Charlie and Paul.

We go up tomorrow morning at 6:30 a.m., once the sun comes up and it's warm enough to make the first climb. I'm nervous, but the excitement I am feeling is overriding the nerves. They split us up into the two groups of three and one group of four. I'm with Charlie and Paul, and, luckily, these are the people we will be sharing tents with throughout the course of the adventure; these are the people who will give each other support, comfort, and help for the next month and a half. We each have our own mattress tonight at basecamp. There are five bunk beds in the room they put us in, and I'm bunking with Charlie. It's almost 11:00 p.m. now and we are all supposed to be asleep, but I can barely lie still on my mattress. It's rough, thin, and makes noise when I roll over and try to get comfortable.

Charlie whispers to me from the top bunk, "Clara, you awake?"

I opened my eyes and say with a droopy voice, "I don't want to be, but I'm too anxious to sleep."

Charlie laughs and says, "Yep, same here. These mattresses are horrible." We both laugh in agreement.

"Yeah, I agree, but they are a lot better than what we are going to be getting for the next month and a half."

Charlie hears that and stops laughing. "Maybe we should just try and go to sleep then. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow."

"Yeah, you're right, let's get to bed."

"Okay," Charlie says with a sound of fear in her tone of voice. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight," I say as I roll over onto my side and close my eyes.

Morning comes and we arise to Paul's voice. "Time to get up and get ready, we will head up in an hour."

I look down at my watch and it's five a.m. Charlie, barely awake, says to me, "No, no, no, no, it's too early."

I chuckle and reply as I get out of bed, "Come on, Charlie, get up before the whole group leaves us behind."

I wait for Charlie to finish packing her belongings into her small pouch that surprisingly fits a lot more than meets the eye. Once she's finished, Charlie and I walk into the dining hall where everyone is

eating and talking nervously about what we are all about to do. We walk over to Paul to find him sitting alone, eating a banana. "Where's all the food?" Charlie asks.

"There is a kitchen through those doors. You guys should have been up earlier—I don't know how much is left," Paul says as he shakes his head at Charlie.

When Charlie is done shoving the last slice of her apple into her mouth, the group finishes packing up and heads to the main hall for information from the Sherpas about today. We had all heard this information fifty times before in training and in the safety class I took. It isn't anything new. I am very eager to get started but at the same time very, very nervous. When the Sherpas are done talking, we head outside. Our group's Sherpa pulls us aside and tries to give us a reassuring pep talk. While I'm listening to his advice and encouragement, I look over and see Charlie staring up at the mountain with a look of fear on her face. What finally catches her attention is the Sherpa saying, "Alright everybody, if there are no questions, let's get started!"

July 26/9:00 a.m./17,500 feet: So, on we go. At first, there isn't that much snow, maybe a couple inches. It's easy to balance and there's a fairly steady ground beneath our boots. For the first couple hours, it's surprisingly easy going until we hear the Sherpa shout out, "Everyone stop! We are about to enter an extremely dangerous section of the mountain. The snow is going to start to rise and there will be quite a bit more ice under the snow. Everyone put on your clips now. We will continue once everyone is ready."

Charlie and I sit down and take our clips out of our packs. Once the group is finished, we continue on, but this time carefully and slowly. The Sherpa keeps telling us to put the balls of our feet down first then our heels so our clips make enough direct contact with the ice. I'm trying to do what he is saying, but it's hard to keep my balance—very hard. I keep wobbling from side to side hoping I don't fall on my ass and look like an idiot, or furthermore, break a bone and become unable to continue on. I can see that everyone is struggling to stay on their feet; now all we can do is pray everyone does stay on their feet. If not,

we might be too far up to take an injured one back to basecamp. On Everest, the death causes stretch in a wide range. I've heard the story of two men who were the last to survive of the group of five, a month and a half in on the descent down the mountain. They were caught in a storm and couldn't go on for six days. The harsh temperatures and low food supply drove the two men crazy. After ten days, one of the men died from hypothermia. The other was forced to eat some of the flesh from his partner's body to survive. Two days later, he died of hypothermia before he could make it down the mountain.

August 8th/9:00 p.m./24,500 feet: Today was one of the most challenging days we have had. It was brutally steep, the temperatures dropped to as low as negative fifteen degrees Fahrenheit, and everyone was having a really hard time breathing. It was hard for everyone but Paul; somehow, he always finds a way to stay positive. He was really shy with Charlie and I when we first met, but as we've gotten to know him over the past month, he's not what we thought he was. He's always on the top of his game, he's always helping the others in the group who are having a hard time, he's always cracking jokes and making the whole group laugh when some of us are down and out. He is one of the core pieces to this group, and in the end, will keep some of us sane enough to make it up and down this mountain.

August 9th/7:30 a.m./24,500 feet: We are heading out again. Yesterday was probably the hardest day we've had so far. Everyone is very tired this morning and is having a hard time waking up to get ready.

Paul is going around to everyone's tents saying to them with an encouraging but harsh tone, "Come on, let's go, get up right now. I'm not going to let us waste daylight sleeping when we could be climbing." It takes a while for everyone to get up, but we finally get going. It's 9:45 a.m.: we have about seven hours before it gets too dark to climb. Nobody is worried because we have been making pretty good time, but I can notice some of the group getting slower. It's getting harder for one of the pack. I just hope they get their energy back soon. The difficult part is only just beginning. We have about 5,000 feet until we reach the summit, but the last 4,500 feet is the slowest and the steepest.

We have been hiking for about two hours. Everyone is exhausted. It's slippery and the snow is thick and deep. We can't even tell if we are walking on solid ground or if we are about to drop fifty feet into a snow hole. Most of us by now are pretty discouraged; we are trying to stay positive, but it is getting very hard.

We are all stumbling and wobbling back and forth when we all hear Paul shout out from the back of our group, "We haven't come this far just to give up. Stop thinking about how challenging it is and think about what it's going to feel like when we get to the top."

Everybody stops for a second before Charlie says, "Well, you heard Paul, let's go."

And with that, we are back at it. It is still slow going, but I can tell the mood was brought up by Paul's words of encouragement. We go on slowly for a couple more hours before we all are too tired and too cold to continue, so we stop for the day. We get out tents and quickly set them up as the weather is getting harsh; the wind is picking up and it's too cold to be outside. This is the last stop we have to sleep before we hopefully reach the summit. Tomorrow is going to be very challenging.

The next morning, I wake up, I slip on my snow pants, then my rain pants. I unzip the tent to find snow blowing into the tent. It's freezing, much colder than it's been the past couple of days. I can barely see anything through the snow, but then I start to see a person moving towards our tent and I can't make out who it is because their face is covered. When they are inside, I zip up the tent and it's Paul.

"The weather is too harsh for us to move on as of now. The Sherpa said there's a storm coming and we should prepare ourselves. Our food is going to be limited until the storm passes so we can make sure we have enough for the way down," he says to Charlie and I. We sit there for a second. I look over to Charlie and she looks horrified.

I say to Paul, "Alright, let us know if anything changes. We will be alright." Paul puts his balaclava back on and rushes out of the tent back to his.

Charlie looks over to me with a frightened expression. "It will be alright, we will all be okay," I say with a shaky, nervous tone.

August 14th/5:00 a.m./26,800 feet: We've been stuck here for five days. The storm hasn't let up, and Charlie is barely holding herself together. We haven't been able to talk to anybody else in the group because Paul said we might not be able to find our way back to our tents if we leave. We've been rationing the food the best we can, but it's getting harder and we are getting hungrier.

August 15th/8:00 a.m./26,800 feet: Charlie and I wake up this morning to silence. We can't hear the wind, we can't hear the snow hitting the tents violently, and that can only mean one thing. I unzip the tent, take a look around, and it looks safe—it looks clear. This is the first time we've been outside in almost six days, and it feels amazing; the sun on my face warms my body temperature and calms my body as I take a deep breath. In, and out.

The few moments of peace I have are interrupted by the Sherpa yelling out, "Pack up your stuff . . . now! We are wasting time, we are low on food, we need to leave now."

Everyone picks up a sense of urgency. We pack up our things as fast as we can. Most of the group is worn out; I can barely move my joints they are so brutally cold. When I breathe in through my nose I get a head rush and I get very lightheaded, it is getting really hard. We were all warned about something like this happening, but I can't let my joints slow myself down. If I slow down, I will get hypothermia and die most likely before I reach the top, let alone basecamp.

Once everyone is checked for hypothermia by the Sherpa, we keep going. After a couple hours, we are so close we would be able to see the top if not for the low clouds. We keep going, we aren't stopping until we get to the top, we've trained for three years to complete this task, we've been on this mountain for twenty-four days and counting, we can't turn back now. By this point, we are willing to reach the top even if it runs the risk of our lives on the way down. We don't know if we will have enough food for the way down, so we need to move fast. But the thing is, if we move too fast, we are dead; we can't ascend too fast or we don't have enough oxygen and energy to keep moving because of the elevation. It's going to be challenging to make it down, but the focus

has always been the summit.

August 15/11:00 a.m./28,850 feet: We are so close, we have slowed down a little to make sure we don't slip, it's hard to breathe, my body temperature has gone down. I can barely bend my arms without feeling horrible pain. But all I can think about right now is seeing the top of this mountain.

I can feel the pack slowing down in front of me. I yell up to the front, "Why are we slowing down?"

Paul responds with the most joyful voice I've heard this whole trip, "Because, Clara, we have reached the top of this goddamned mountain!"

I look up from the ground and I'm about fifty yards away from the summit. It is like all the pain in my body has gone away. I pick up my speed and start passing some of the others in the group to catch up to Paul. By now the ground has flattened enough to the point where Paul starts to run as fast as he can to the top. I'm twenty-ish feet behind him.

We hear the Sherpa call out in the distance, "Slow down! You need to catch your breath."

Ignoring everything he is saying, Charlie is right on my tail. We are almost there. Fifteen feet maybe when we hear Paul yell at the top of his lungs a scream of happiness and joy. When we get to the top, he is on his hands and knees shedding tears of joy. I look around; it is beautiful. I can't believe it. I'm speechless as I look around in amazement. I take in the fresh air as chills run through my body from head to toe. I've never felt this way before—hell I don't even know what I'm feeling, I just accomplished something only thousands of people on the planet have done. I can't believe it. I run over to Charlie and hug her so tight she has to tell me she can't breathe.

"We did it, Charlie, we did it," I say as I shake my head and smile. Charlie is speechless, with the biggest smile I've ever seen on her face.

I go over to Paul still on his knees looking around, "You made it, Paul!" I scream. He jumps up and wraps his arms around me as tight as he can. Everyone is silent, turning and turning, gazing into the

distance.

“It’s incredible, it is truly incredible,” I say to myself with a slight grin on my face as I take one more deep breath . . . In, and out.

Five weeks later: None of the ten climbers made it back to Mt. Everest basecamp. Three weeks after the radio signal saying they had reached the summit, they had still not returned to basecamp. Two weeks later, six of the ten climbers were found dead buried in the snow. One of the climbers found was Paul. Clara and Charlie’s bodies were never found. But after a period of time, the remaining four were presumed dead.

BLAKE TSAI

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL • WITS WRITER: BRIAN BENSON

To My Twenty-Year-Old Self

Hi twenty-year-old me.

I have a few things to remind you. First, I want you to be happy but don't spend too much time on video games because that is a waste of time. Second, I want you to walk out the door to see the world, connect to people, make more friends, also don't forget to work out. If you lost yourself, don't be shy to ask questions, ask about words that you don't know, ask about how to make important decisions. And most importantly, cultivate some interests like sports, music, and eat: that will help your life get better. Wish you luck.

Prodigy Turned Bad (Maybe Not That Bad)

One day, Brock Stephens was sitting in his dark room with a little ray of light seeping through the gap in the blinds. There was an aroma of old pizza from nights ago drifting through the room, and you could barely see the floor because of all the clothes and trash. Brock was huge, 6'11", and he had eyes like the sky on a beautiful blue morning. He had dirty blonde hair and a sharp jawline, which is why the ladies always fell for him. He was beefy too: he could deadlift five hundred pounds before breakfast and five hundred before bed. Brock got up to reheat some leftover pizza and get dressed for his morning workout. This was a normal day for Brock, getting up and working out at six in the morning, when not even the earliest of birds were awake. Brock was the starting center for Duke, and he was all set to be the first pick of the draft. No one messed with him, partly because of his size, and partly because he was the valedictorian of his high school. But deep inside, Brock was soft and loved to volunteer at the animal shelter and help in soup kitchens. He made frequent walks outside and saw the trees dancing like they were throwing a party, listening to music that only they could hear. He saw some kids passing by and remembered when he was learning to play basketball with his grandma. He was only 6, and he was a bright-eyed little boy full of wonder and joy. He would shoot around until it got dark and then go eat ice cream while watching a movie. Those were the glory days. Then it all changed.

One morning, Brock's life was flipped upside down. Duke had just beat North Carolina by one point, but there were arguments because the referee didn't call a foul on Brock that would have given the best shooter on North Carolina two free throws. While Brock was beating himself up, the rest of his teammates were ecstatic and partied until the sun came up. Brock was drinking to forget what happened, and

he became so tipsy that he fell asleep without turning the lights off or locking the door. Brock awoke to a drunk party boy, almost doubled over, standing in the door frame. He was scrawny with short, curly hair and green eyes. The worst part, though, was that he had North Carolina clothes and an evil smile.

“What are you doing in here,” yelled Brock.

“You are a big fat cheater!” sputtered the young man, stumbling around the room in a drunken rage.

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” Brock replied with a little bit of quiver in his voice.

“It doesn’t matter now, all that matters is that you pay,” said the mystery man, reaching into his backpack.

Now thoughts of terror were racing through Brock’s head, and he thought about all of the people that would miss him if he died. The intruder pulled out a gun, cocked it back, and aimed it at Brock. Brock said a quick prayer in his head and, in an instant, heard a bang, followed by the smell of smoke wafting into his nose. He opened his eyes only to see the man disgruntled by the kick back, barely able to hold himself up on his knees, struggling to find his bearings. Brock looked at his left arm and saw a patch of skin missing on the outside of his bicep where the bullet had grazed his arm. He suddenly had an adrenaline rush and charged the man on the floor. The last thing he remembered was swinging at the man with full force, then blacking out.

Brock awoke to the police standing over him and asking questions. His head throbbed from all of the sirens blaring and people yelling. He was confident they would take his side, and the man would go to jail for a long time. He was wrong. The judge ruled in favor of the intruder because there was not enough evidence that he was the one at fault. Brock served a one-year sentence, and it changed him forever. When he got out, he stopped talking to people, he stopped volunteering, and he stopped being nice to himself. He went to the Bahamas and started getting drunk every night and partying. One night when he was in the back of a bar passed out drunk, a girl saw him and took him home. He woke up on her couch the next morning with yet another headache.

“How did you sleep?” asked the stranger.

He saw that she was beautiful with green eyes and blonde hair. Her smile was as soft as a cloud. She was petite with bright clothes on and a sweet but puzzled look in her eyes. She smelled of a sweet lavender perfume.

“I’m so tired,” Brock moaned. He had been out until two in the morning every day for the past three months, so there was no surprise that he slept the entire day.

She worked as a social worker and felt bad the second she saw the state that he was in. She was nice to him, and in a few weeks, he softened up and saw the world a little brighter once again. He married her and settled on the beach, where he helped people going through a hard time just as he himself had been helped. And that is how he lived out the rest of his long and fulfilling life.

WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE

2019-20

ALEX BEHR'S debut story collection, *Planet Grim*, came out in 2017 (7.13 Books). Her essays, interviews, fiction, and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *Tin House*, *Salon*, *Nailed*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*, among others. She teaches intermediate fiction at Portland State and has led fiction and creative nonfiction WITS residencies since 2014.

BRIAN BENSON is the author of *Going Somewhere* (Plume, 2014) and co-author, with Richard Brown, of *This Is Not For You: An Activist's Journey of Resistance and Resilience* (OSU Press, March 2021). In addition to his work with Literary Arts, Brian teaches at the Attic Institute and facilitates free Write Around Portland workshops in schools, treatment centers, and affordable housing. His short nonfiction has been published in *Entropy*, *The Sun* and *Off Assignment*. He is at work on his third book, a novel.

ARTHUR BRADFORD is the author of the books *Dogwalker* and *Turtleface* (nominated for a 2016 Oregon Book Award). He has told stories for The Moth Mainstage and Back Fence PDX and is a Moth GrandSLAM winner. He is also an Emmy-nominated filmmaker, most recently working with the creators of *South Park* and *The Book of Mormon*.

DAVID CIMINELLO is a Portland-based writer and educator. His fiction has appeared in the Lambda Literary Award-winning anthology *Portland Queer: Tales of the Rose City*, *The Frozen Moment: Contemporary Writers on the Choices That Change Our Lives*, the literary journal *Lumina*, the online anthology *Underwater New York*, *Nailed Magazine*, and on *Broadcastr*. His poetry has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*. He is a 2011 Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction and a proud recipient of a 2013

annual Table 4 Writers Foundation grant. His original screenplay *Bruno* appears on DVD as *The Dress Code*.

LISA EISENBERG is a cartoonist and teaching artist based in Portland, Oregon (by way of the Garden State). She has self-published the print and webcomic series *I Cut My Hair*, a collection of fiction and non-fiction comics. Her work has appeared in a variety of comics anthologies, including *Papercutter*, *Love In All Forms*, *The Strumpet*, and *Digestate*. Lisa's current projects include comics for the online magazine *The Nib*, and the graphic novels *Middle* and *My Plath Year*. She teaches comics-making throughout the Portland area with Young Audiences, Right Brain Initiative, and at her studio located in Comic Cave PDX—the comic-shop jewel of St. Johns.

APRIL JOSEPH is a poet from East L.A., California, who creates mixed-media performance art by employing movement and music to mourning songs. Her performance art is informed by her study of ancestral trauma, healing through Buddhist-psychology, musical composition, Contemplative Dance Practice, evolutionary astrology, and working at a mortuary in Oregon. april earned her MFA in Writing and Poetics from Naropa University and a BA in Literatures of the World from the University of California, San Diego. april's chapbooks include *Excerpts from: Rose Body Fell* and *First Call Home*. Her work has appeared in *TAYO*, *Gesture*, *Galatea Resurrects*, *Bombay Gin*, *The Lune*, and can be found at bodyfulspace.com.

CARI LUNA is the author of *The Revolution of Every Day*, which won the Oregon Book Award for Fiction. A fellow of Yaddo and Ragdale, her writing has appeared in *Guernica*, *Salon*, *Jacobin*, *Electric Literature*, *Catapult*, *The Rumpus*, *PANK*, and elsewhere.

MONTY MICKELSON is the author of the novel *Purgatory* (St. Martin's Press), for which he received a Bush Foundation Individual Artist Fellowship. Mickelson's short fiction has been published in

Loonfeather, in *Minnesota Monthly* magazine, and online at *The Whistling Fire*. His creative journalism and essays have been published online at *Gently Read Literature* and *Salon*. Two of his YA feature film scripts have been produced for cable television. Mickelson has an MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from the University of California, Riverside.

DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON teaches slow dancing, writes, and still dreams of an overseas basketball career. He is a founding member of the now-disbanded experimental German noise band, Flu Shot. His stories, poems, and sounds can be found at *The Whole Beast Rag*, *The Washington Square Review*, *theNewerYork*, *Alice Blue Review*, *Marco Polo Arts Mag*, *Everyday Genius*, *Past-Ten*, *Axolotl*, and *The Alarmist*. He now walks the world with an MFA in Creative Writing from UCR in hand.

AMY MINATO is the author of a memoir *Siesta Lane*, (Skyhorse Press, 2009) and two poetry collections, *Hermit Thrush* (Inkwater Press, 2016) and *The Wider Lens* (Ice River Press, 2004). Amy has been a recipient of both a Literary Arts Fellowship for her poetry and a Walden Residency for her prose. She teaches writing through Literary Arts, Multnomah Art Center, Fishtrap, and at Breitenbush Retreat Center, as well as a community service course in sustainable living at Portland State University. She holds both an MFA in Creative Writing and an MS in Environmental Studies from the University of Oregon.

LAURA MOULTON is the founder of Street Books, a bicycle-powered mobile library that serves people who live outside in Portland, Oregon. She has taught writing in public schools, prisons, and teen shelters, and is an adjunct professor at Marylhurst University and Lewis & Clark College. Her social art practice projects have involved postal workers, immigrants, prisoners, and students. She earned an MFA from Eastern Washington University.

JULES OHMAN is a writer and teacher based in Portland. She co-founded the nonprofit the Free Verse Project, which teaches creative writing in juvenile halls. Her chapbook of stories, *Vertical Streets*, was awarded the Merriam-Frontier Award, and her work has been published in *Willow Springs* and *Camas*. She earned her MFA in Fiction from the University of Montana. She has completed her first novel, and is represented by Dan Conaway and Taylor Templeton at Writers House.

JENNIFER PERRINE is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Again* (Airlie Press, 2020). Perrine's other books include *No Confession*, *No Mass*, winner of the Publishing Triangle Audre Lorde Award and the Prairie Schooner Book Prize; *In the Human Zoo*, which was selected for the Agha Shahid Ali Poetry Prize; and *The Body Is No Machine*. A recipient of fellowships from Literary Arts and the Vermont Studio Center, Perrine lives in Portland.

BRUCE POINSETTE is a writer and community organizer whose work is primarily based in the Portland Metro Area. A former reporter for the Skanner News Group, his work has also appeared in the *The Oregonian*, *Street Roots*, *Around the O*, and *We Out Here Magazine*, as well as projects such as the Mercatus Collective and the Urban League of Portland's *State of Black Oregon 2015*. In addition to his professional writing work, Poinsette also serves as the Media Action Team Leader for Respond to Racism LO, a grassroots anti-racism organization in his hometown of Lake Oswego, Oregon.

MARK POMEROY'S first novel, *The Brightwood Stillness*, was published by Oregon State University Press in 2014. He has received an Oregon Literary Fellowship for fiction, and his short stories, poems, and essays have appeared in *Open Spaces*, *The Wordstock 10*, *Portland Magazine*, *The Oregonian*, *NW Book Lovers*, and *What Teaching Means: Stories from America's Classrooms*. He holds an MA in English Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, where he was a Fellow in Teaching.

RAJESH K. REDDY teaches at the Center for Animal Law Studies at Lewis & Clark Law School. Rajesh earned his PhD in English with a concentration in postcolonial literature from the University of Georgia and his MFA in Creative Writing from Indiana University. His fiction has appeared in the *Asia Literary Review*, *Silk Road Review*, *Mandala*, and elsewhere.

JOANNA ROSE is the author of the award-winning novel *Little Miss Strange* (PNBA Fiction Prize). Other work has appeared in numerous literary journals. Her story “A Good Crack and Break” is in the new Forest Avenue Press anthology, *The Night, and the Rain, and the River*, and her essay “The Thing with Feathers” (Oregon Humanities) was listed as a Notable in *Best American Essays 2015*. She is known to readers of *The Oregonian* as a reviewer on the books page and contributor to Poet’s Corner. She started out with the Dangerous Writers oh so many years ago, and now she and her teaching partner, Stevan Allred, host the regular Pinewood Table prose critique group.

MIRANDA SCHMIDT is a writer, editor, and teacher. Her work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Orion*, *Catapult*, *Electric Literature*, *The Collagist*, and other journals. She has taught creative writing at the Loft, the University of Washington, and Portland Community College. Miranda grew up in the Midwest and now lives in Portland. They are currently at work on a novel about haunting and a series of lyric essays that explore ecology through a queer feminist lens.

LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT’S work has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Tin House* and *The Guardian* online, *Electric Literature*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Okey-Panky*, and *No Tokens Journal*. She has served as assistant and managing editor on books in the McSweeney’s Voice of Witness series, and she’s a MacDowell Colony fellow. Laura has taught fiction at the University of Montana, Literary Arts in Portland, and Hugo House in Seattle.

MATT SMITH grew up in Iowa and Arizona. He earned his BA in English Literature from Arizona State University. He spent the subsequent four years after college in South Korea as an ESL teacher. His short fiction work centers on the intersections of race and identity. He is currently working on a collection of short stories focused on what it means to be multi-racial in America. Matt was a 2017-18 WITS apprentice.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize, 2019), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize, University of Nebraska Press, 2019), *Summon* (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize, 2019), *Disinheritance*, and *Controlled Hallucinations*. A nineteen-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous literary awards, including the Wabash Prize for Poetry, Philip Booth Award, and Laux/Millar Prize. He edits *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a poetry editor, writing coach, workshop leader, and literary agent. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Rivier University and an MA in Book Publishing from Portland State University.

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WRITING EXERCISES

These exercises by novelist (and former WITS writer-in-residence) Jules Ohman can help you get started on your own piece of writing.

WRITE A PORTRAIT POEM USING THIS TEMPLATE:

I am (first name)

I wonder . . .

I believe . . .

I understand . . .

I fear . . .

I dream . . .

I need . . .

I am . . .

I will be . . .

I will wonder . . .

I will believe . . .

I will understand . . .

I will fear . . .

I will dream . . .

I will need . . .

I will be . . .

CHARACTER PROMPT

Write a scene from the point of view of a character encountering a place that disgusts or delights them.

First, make a list below of ten things that your character sees or experiences. Use as many descriptive details as possible.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Then, write a scene using seven of those ten details in paragraph format. Experiment with the senses, with figurative language (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.), and with concrete details. Consider: Who is your character and what would they notice about the setting?

CHARACTER EXERCISE

Choose a person that you know well and make a list of their characteristics, both physical appearance and personality traits. Do not name the person.

Character traits:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When you're done, write the opposite of each trait you've listed on the line beside it. Now imagine this person as a character. How would this person exist in the world? Name your character. Consider their age, occupation, how they operate in the world. Brainstorm below, and revise as you go.

Name _____

Age _____

Occupation _____

Biggest joy _____

Biggest pet peeve _____

Favorite thing to do when they're alone _____

Person most important to them _____

Their biggest regret _____

Most important achievement _____

Favorite place in the world _____

Least favorite place _____

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Personality traits:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Physical appearance:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____