

PYRA 2021



Pyra

International Community School Authors Society 2021 Literary and Art Magazine

We are thrilled to share *Pyra 2021* with you! Please enjoy this curated selection of creative work of our community from the past year.

We received more than two hundred submissions this year and selecting the final seventy-three pieces was a very challenging process.

The cover image illustrates a view from remote school, an isolating and novel experience we all shared. Nevertheless, our community persisted, resulting in the creativity exhibited in this magazine.

The varied themes of the pieces suggest the complexity of growing up during a pandemic. Beginning with reflections on the struggles of creativity, we move next into challenges of personal identity. Continuing with reflections on what it means to be human, we then shift to multilingual works and ruminations on family and grief. Next, we move to creativity inspired by the natural world and by time, and then to musings about the nature of our future. We conclude with political pieces and thoughts on reconnecting with language.

Please listen to the music submissions by scanning the QR codes and visiting the magazine website.

It's been an honor to publish your work, and we hope you enjoy reading *Pyra!*

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Writer's Bloc

Clio Erignac, 10

I'm supposed to be writing a poem.
But here I stand
no thoughts,
head empty.

Like a wall has split my Left
and Right Brains—
Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

Halt.

Maybe don't.
David Bowie owns an apartment
in my Left Brain.
We best not disturb him.
We need Heroes.



Girl in the Rain

Lily Pogue, 7

If I Were a Pretty Girl

Anonymous, 9

Throughout my life, I've always wondered: how would my life be different if I were a pretty girl?

If I were a pretty girl, would I look in the mirror and feel content with what I saw? Would I try to mold the shape of my chest with my hands, only the hands I was controlling weren't my hands, and the body I was feeling wasn't my body?

If I were a pretty girl, would I put on feminine attire and walk with confidence, hips swaying, long hair brushed over my shoulder? Would I show off my physique without feeling sick at the thought, choking back tears when I felt my skin exposed to the cold air? Would I still tug and pull at the dress I was wearing in a feeble attempt to cover my legs and torso?

If I were a pretty girl, would I dread the thought of going to the beach or the pool and having to wear a swimsuit? And would I cry in the shower every time I looked down at the body that was supposed to be mine?

If I were a pretty girl, would I hesitate before responding to the name given to me by my parents? Would I feel so disconnected, as if the word was foreign and unfamiliar, even though I've been called that all my life? Would I cringe inside at airports and border crossings whenever the TSA agent read my name aloud?

If I were a pretty girl, would the word "she" slide off my tongue like oil, sticking to my skin uncomfortably every time it was used to refer to me? Would I feel a pit sinking in my stomach every time we were divided into girls and boys, and I had to slowly walk to the girls' side of the classroom?

And if I were a pretty girl, would it have felt so revolutionary when that person on YouTube said, "I use they/them pronouns?" Would I have wanted to dance and shout from the rooftops when I learned the word "non-binary?"

But I'm not a pretty girl. And I never will be. Because I'm not a girl. I'm not a boy either. I simply am. And even though I won't ever be a pretty girl, at the very least, I'm learning to feel pretty—just the way I am.



She Stands in Red Shorts

Julia Lee, 11

Catharsis in the Shower

Julia Lee, 11

Eyelashes nearly interwoven, she embraces privacy—
Protective marble walls and opaque flower curtains
Conceal her from the cacophony of the world
As she wades in vulnerability.

Above the marble walls and opaque flower curtains,
Comforting steam rises, beckoning catharsis;
Drowning in vulnerability,
She wraps her hueless arms around her ribs.

Steam rises, beckoning catharsis;
Her frigid tears trickle, drop onto
Hueless arms wrapped tightly around her ribs
Where warm streams embrace her bitter pain.

Her frigid tears trickle and drop until,
Eyelashes disentwined, she parts with privacy—
Where warm streams embraced her bitter pain,
Briefly concealing her from the cacophony of the world.

Pictures

Anna Paulsell, 10

You look so beautiful in all these pictures,
looking at me from all over my room.

You were always beautiful,
even when you thought you weren't.
But you sure were a photographer,
one of your countless talents.
It's almost like I've known you your whole life,
and not just fifteen years,
almost.

Maybe that makes up for lost time.
Maybe that makes up for all the mistakes you made,
the mistakes I made,
the mistakes everyone made.

Just pictures are all we have left.
You at your best moments,
smiley, nuzzling against your beloved dog,
serenely posing for a wedding photo, one of hundreds,
hair tied back, desert rose lips, and beautiful blue eyes
just like mine.

In another picture,
mine next to yours,
me in my pint-sized light blue dress,
you gently nudging me closer to your cashmere sweater.
You look tired here,
but you look happy.
I guess.
I hope.

Perhaps pictures aren't the only thing that's left.

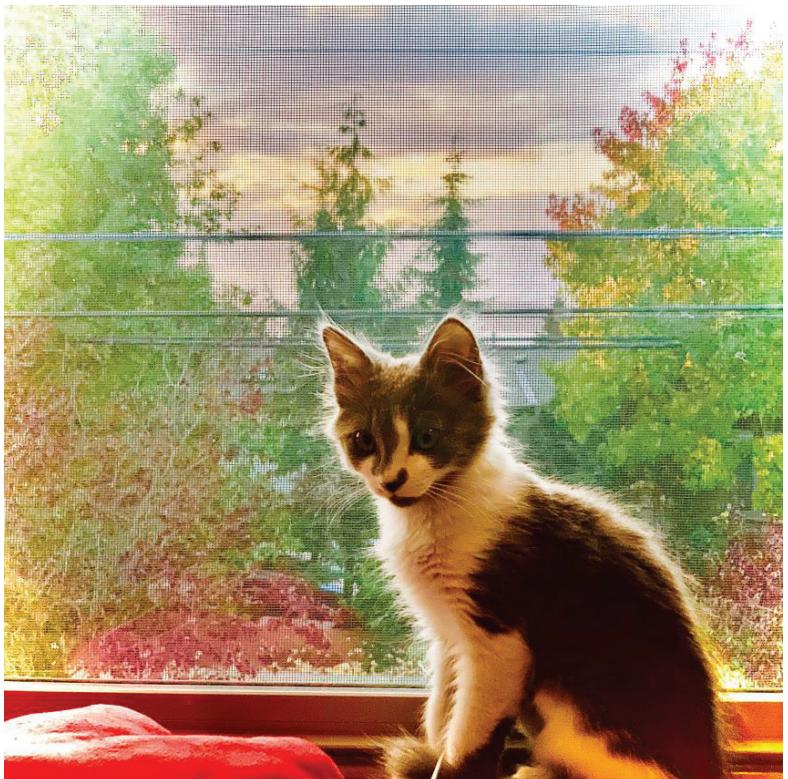


Book Thief

Noa Hamudot, 8

(Music)

git.io/JsEWw



Sunset Cat

Jennah Badr, 6



Candy Floss

Rachel Li, 12

Where Dreams Are From

Ayla Bosworth, 10

after Elizabeth Brewster

People are made of dreams. They take with them
Pieces of fiction and fantasy, a winged angel
Or the hefty weight of laden purses. Auras of dreams
Have different themes to them, like the simplicity of night
with the mixed-matched-vibe of thoughts in a blender,
Daydreams soothe minds from taxing reality
With an endless fountain of imagination, ideas flowing.
In second grade classrooms kids begin flying:
the back of a dragon, a broomstick perhaps,
Gold-plated racecars, tang of lemonade
Dreams of summer days.

Where I dream of, people
Carry freedom in their hearts, old days' pain forgotten;
Fairies nest in the old-growth trees;
Self expression, fearless, no need of varnish,
Self doubt burned by fires of loving pride,
Wild magic, thrilling adventures
Behind which lurks reality. Day and night
Our dreams are continuously inspired; real prompts the making of fake.

An open book in an open mind blows forth inspiration
I give the bearded wizards my salutations.

Smiling faces of my dear friends, features
Appear & vanish as drifting thoughts.
And am I here, too

Living in daydreams? Yes. I am
Pulling the strings
Like puppeteers, running the show

All alone? The touch of reality,
A slap to the face
Relentless, an infinite source of change, runs

Every mind. Only reality persists
Solid, always there & never curtsies to
Puppeteers' daydream creations.

Prisoner to the Palace of Dreams

Reya Velamoor, 6

I lay my head upon the bed; my sleeping soul fills with dread.
The white stone walls resonate, trap me in my never-ending fate.
Prisoner to your perfect wrath, a dream that never goes like that.
Salty tears run down my cheeks, "LET ME OUT, LET ME OUT" I shriek in my sleep.
Icy air blowing tangled hair, a visitor emerges from the lair.
Dark-cloaked with distorted fingers. I think to myself, "This is no angel."
Dark thoughts cloud my mind; a black void is born in my heart.
But I know all too well this is not the end, just the start...
I panic, my hands clawing at my head; death to this miserable dream that never ends.
Fidgeting, waiting for life to arrive, if this is death then how do I survive?



Canto XXV

Jenny Pyon, 10



Public Market

Iziash Suklan, 11

The Curse of Omniscience

Tobin Sudo, 10

I am. I was. I will be.
Streams of consciousness,
of memories
impossible to grasp.

Experiences from standing
at the green foothills,
untouched by civilization.

Looking at the construction
of the one-story adobe
huts, their sides
streaked red by the sun.

Slide over and see
the glistening panes
of the skyscrapers,
which hold on to
the sky like a lifeline.

Peek up again and feel
the fading heat of the
dying, red sun.

Take a deep breath
And smell the
clean but rotten
smell of the fuligin Citadel,
its vast hovering rooms preparing
to leave the blue green
landscape behind.

Feel the indifferent cold
of the void, no longer
restricted
by flesh. Circle around
endlessly around
compressed pinpoints,
matter that cannot
be seen.

Time slows down
gently, the mind shuts down
gently.

I am. I was. I will be.

Wisdom Is a Hoodoo

Wyatt Moore, 10

Wisdom is a Hoodoo
Stone standing high
Making itself known
Among the pebbles and cliffs

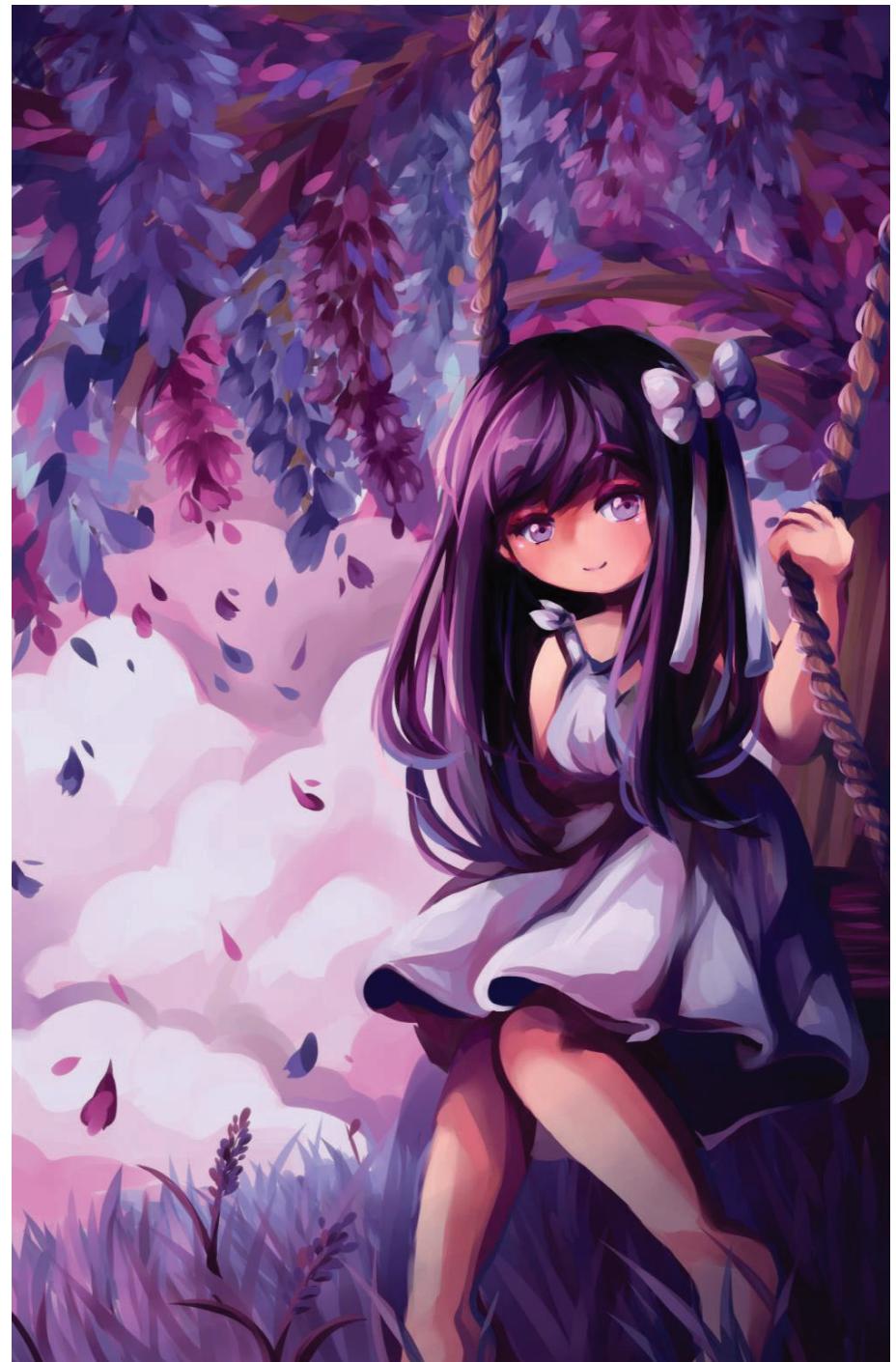
It is not apparent in a day, nor a year
No one moment creates it, only the slow hands of time
A thousand gusts, nights, and storms are his tools
Making apparent with a million things, a pattern, undefinable

It is something that is sought after
Something that young ones look at in awe
A thing many desire, they want it soon, they want the same
But Father time and Mother nature do not speak of their methods
Almost as if to say, "You will learn when you are older,"
Wisdom is a Hoodoo, a witness of time.



Orange Slice

Rachel Li, 12



Wisteria

Ella Yuen, 12

The Runaway and the Thief

Divya Kurma, 8

Serena

As I peer down the crack in the chilly vent where Jax and I crouch, I think back to how my sister and I would play hide and seek with our parents, and how she would always be found wherever she hid. Just thinking about them makes my breath constrict. I remember my mother's eyes, the same golden hue as my own, and my father's hair, the silvery strands passed down to me. I remind myself then. They are gone. I try to forget. The memories come back as if it happened yesterday.

I am only ten. I see the king's army march up to our home, gleaming swords hanging from their belts and polished badges shining at their shoulders. They knock down our door. My father screams at us, "RUN" but it's too late. They are dead before they hit the floor. I shrink under the bed, my heart pounding in my chest as the commander's crew shatter the glass vases and knock down our furniture before turning around and walking, as one, out the door.

The next day, I ran, swearing on my life that I would get revenge. Seven years later, I end up on the king's doorstep, ready to fulfill my oath.

Jax

I never thought I would be back here, stepping back into my home after running away from it three years ago. I take in the same marble floor and the bronze sconces and tapestries on the wall from where I perch behind Serena on the frame of the stone castle. We have been in the castle for almost five days, hiding in the rafters and eating stolen food from the kitchens, and sleeping in the cramped hidden passageways that my brothers and I would sneak into when we couldn't sleep. "Can we go now?" I grumble to Serena, my impatience kicking in. She snarls at me, her golden eyes flashing.

Serena

I jump down from the rafters, silent as a cat, and listen to Jax's shoes loudly hitting the ground. I whip my head around and glare at him, arrogance simmering in his green eyes. Clicking quietly, the lock I pick on the door swings open. As I press close to the damp walls, my skills as a thief in the city of Avalon come in handy. I wonder again why Jax is here. I remember back a few days ago when I snuck into the castle in the delivery wagon. When the servant's backs were turned, I crept into the passageways, so excited about my first victory that I missed the other person in the room. In a flash, his knife was pressed to my throat, but I swiveled away, catching a glimpse of his face. I didn't expect to see Jax Hale, the king's runaway son. His face was on wanted posters all over the city for committing treason to the throne. He came at me with his knife again, but this time I pulled out my own, sheathed at my waist.

"Who are you?" he asked, venom in his voice.

I smiled and was about to leave before I realized that he could become a resourceful ally. He grew up in the castle, he would know every nook and cranny in the towering obsidian spire. "Serena Caddell," I say, responding to his question, "and I have a deal for you." I explained to him why I was here, knowing I was taking a risk. He just stared at me for a while, and then gave a reluctant sigh and held out his hand, waiting for me to shake it.

Jax

Serena and I arrive at the other end of the castle, in the great hall. She scurries up the wall, as nimble as a spider, while I repeatedly hit my head on the ceiling with my six-foot frame. We then walk along the shadows of the room, perching on the thin railing around the ceiling.

I think back to our plan we concocted when we first met in the passageways about a week ago. I didn't want to trust her, but the sadness in her eyes as she told me what happened to her family, reminded me that we had the same goal, killing the king.

"Are you ready?" Serena whispers to me. I nod, fingering the small vial of night weed with enough to kill fifteen men. One drop of it is deadly, but the entire vial is lethal enough that no antidote could help the victim.

Serena

I glance behind me to make sure Jax is following. When we come to the corner, right above the king's seat, I look at Jax and then down to his brothers who are seated next to the king. They look remarkably similar with their dark brown hair and pale green eyes. This must be hard for him. The king is still his father. I hold out my arm, and Jax places the night weed in the palm of my hand. I grab the vial and just then, my foot slips on the damp stone, I swing precariously from the grey rafters on the ceiling, only feet away from the king himself. I feel Jax's hand slipping from my ankle and I close my eyes as the wall rushes toward my face. I take a deep breath and think about my promise to my family. I will not fail them.

Jax

As soon as Serena slips, my reflexes jump in. Straining heavily, pain shoots up my arm as I grab onto her ankle. She swings toward the obsidian wall, eyes squeezed shut right before I use my entire body weight to pull her up. "Are you okay?" I ask as soon as she regains her breath.

Serena

"Yes," I reply. "And the poison is in." I watch the king as he moves his fork toward his mouth. I watch as the drop of poison I managed to squeeze onto his plate as I almost hit my skull kicks in. The king's eyes drift closed and his body gives a final twitch. I smile.



KDA Evelynn Prestige

Ella Yuen, 12

萬里征途

Riding along for a Thousand Miles

Yuen Hang Fung, 12

心裡想兄
手裡拿刀
一天百里
箭馬追殺
關刀閃陽
鬍子雲飛
逃離曹賊
護劉夫人
衝過五關
斬殺六將

In his heart, his brother
In his hand, his guandao
Guan Yu gallops a hundred miles,
Chased by arrows and horsemen.
His blade gleams under the Heavenly Sun.
His beard flies free with the wind.
To escape the villain Cao Cao,
To protect his sisters.
Cut through 6 Generals.
Charge pass 5 Gates.

Under the Sea

Samantha Pollard, 11

I craft my home beneath violent waves
Making my bed where no men dare venture
This unforgiving sea, the only home I've ever known, but
I am no creature from your fairy tales

I am serrated teeth and deformed bone
Webbed fingers and sickly-green scales
Faded black hair, tangled and brittle
My eyes, porous and bloodshot
Abused by salt

The ocean is no friend to me
Dark depths and killer creatures, lurking
Never touched by the golden sun, they
Hunt me and haunt me

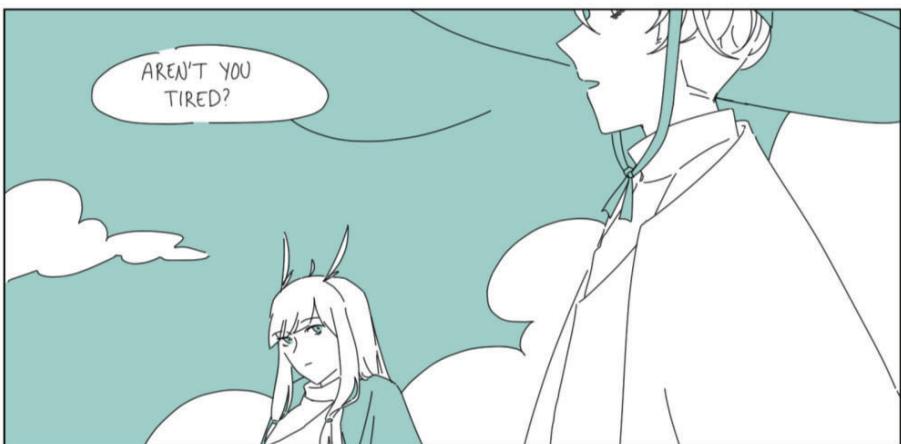
I am no siren singer from your foolish fantasies
My voice: an earsplitting shriek
leaving my throat raw and bloody
I was made to repel, not
To attract lovesick sailors
To show them the sea is no place for mortal flesh

Alas, I am weak now, swimming listlessly
This vast sea invades me and chokes me
Fat tears drip down my cheeks
Blending with this cursed ocean water
As I am drowned by this vengeful sea I once
Blindly served



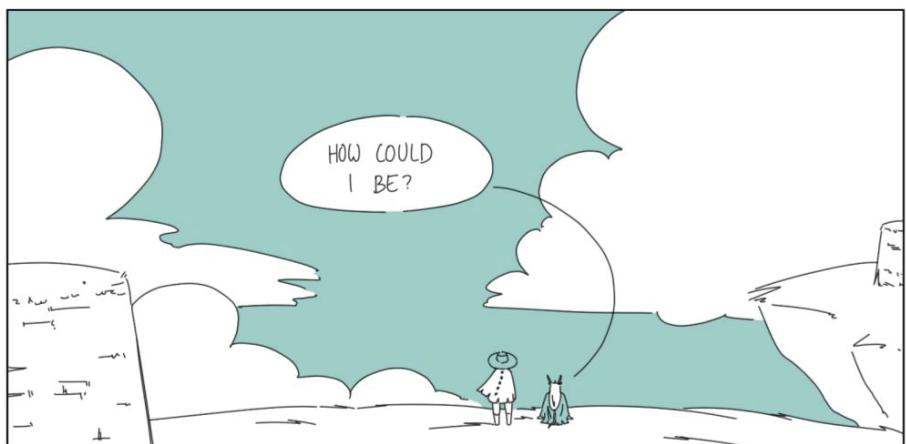
Lost

Selin Filiz, 9



A Long, Long Time

Ellen Ma, 12



I HAVE
SO MUCH TO
LIVE FOR.

Pentel Pen to Grand-père

Clio Erignac, 10

Pentel Pen, Old Friend.
Please take these words to my Grand-père
on Boulevard Raspail.

If you can,
deliver them in French.
His English resurfaces frail and whittled down by time.

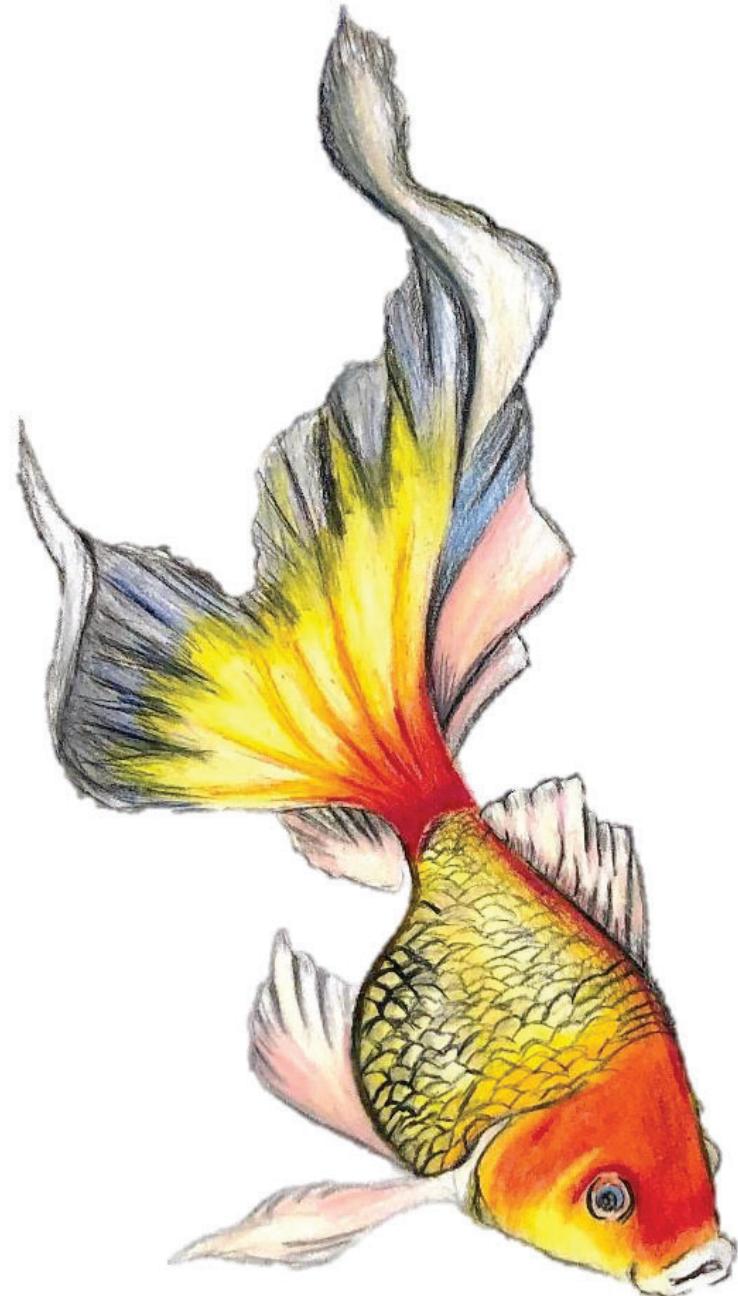
When you arrive to the red door
with the bulbous golden handle in the center,
be patient.
It may take a minute for him to rise
from one of his worn-in lime velvet couches.

He'll insist you partake in provisions.
He always keeps a replenished stock of
sweetened fruit juices in glass bottles
(apricot, peach, orange, strawberry),
plastic tubs of butter
(unsalted, slightly salted, and heavily salted),
and an accumulation of small bonbons he's collected from the cafés
(caramels, taffies, hard candies).

Once he tends to his correspondence,
I apologize in advance,
for the tremor in his liver-spotted hand,
like a tectonic plate that rattles dishware, may
nauseate you.
And the illegible loops and scribbles
of his distressed seismograph handwriting may
disorient you.

His words will spring with the tragic optimism
with which a young pup waits for kibble—
still wishing for another visit.

Ever the entertainer,
he may don his admiral's cap, still sharp from the navy,
and shakily salute you with a sweet grin as he sends you on your way,
then stiffly gravitate back to the concave seat of his verdant couch
to doze off until your return.



Beta Fish

Aditi Ramanan, 6



Life of a Witch

Melody Sakiya, 7

Sestina

Ella Yuen, 12

A familiar smell drifted through the damp summer air,
Carrying boisterous chatter of old aunts through the hallways.
The draft, tinged with childhood and the slightest pinch
Of flour, tickled my nose, faded memories flooding
Back as the chipped mahjong pieces crash
Into the worn table, barely saved by a single piece of thin green felt.

Once as thick as the shawl my grandmother bore each day, the felt
Was now a sad whisper of its former self—when held to the air,
Cheeky light showed itself through. Another booming crash,
Another round later, another loud laugh bounced around the hallways.
Each gathering bringing more noise, more memories flooding
Throughout the halls, another hug, another cheek pulled with a pinch.

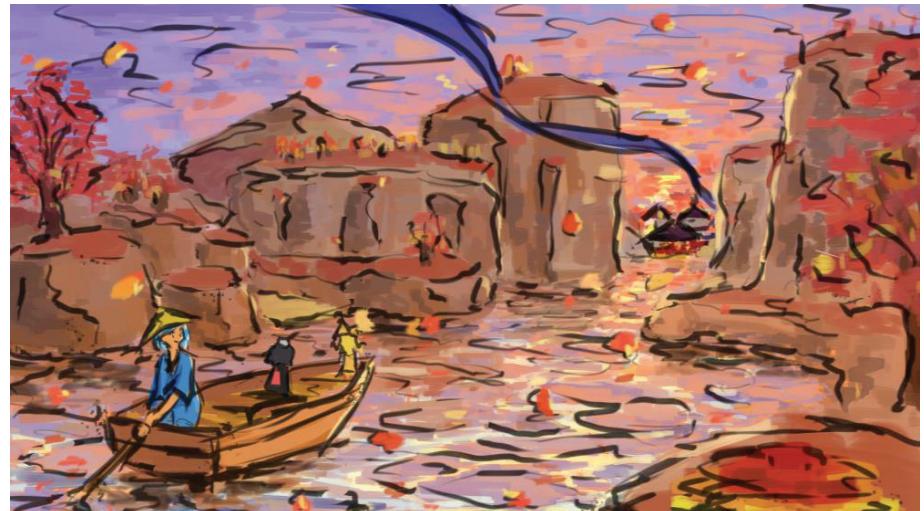
Shrimp chips, buns and cakes lined the low table, masterfully pinched
Away by the careful handywork of snickering children, who felt
Great satisfaction in their small heist. Snacks piled on the ground, flooding
The “secret” room under the stairs as laughter pierced the air.
Crumbs lined the aisle, with bits of flour trailing the hallways
More and more snacks pilfered, tucked into the room with a muffled crash.

Memories tucked into thin dough, bowls clanging together with a crash,
My fingers carefully folded them together before sealing with a delicate pinch.
Family spread across the tables, squishing into the narrow hallways.
Flour and spices fill the cracks, fractures in the once smooth wood the felt
failed to protect. Dumplings plopped into baskets, steam filling thick air
as grandparents scurried around the kitchen, chatter flooding.

Food came pouring out of the kitchens, flooding
Every open surface of the house. The children’s bowls, with a crash
And a clatter, lined the small side table, an air
Of pride filling the territory, an area pinched
Away from the crowd. Cheerful chatter shook the tables, tremors felt
Throughout the entire house, as people reached for dishes lining the stuffed
hallways.

Meals wrapped up, people clamor through the hallways
Sweeping and wiping surfaces, bits of food flooding
The trash bags deposited at the ends of tables. The mahjong felt,
folded and put to the side as children piled dishes into the sink with a loud,
metallic crash,
parents plucking soiled napkins and tablecloths with a practiced, careful
pinch.

The lingering smell of dinner drifts through the air, final goodbyes flooding
the hallways, a final pinch on the cheek as the door closes with crash
left with piles of dishes and the same worn, tired felt.



Strollin’ Down Eddy

Ben Yu, 11

Hi, Grandpa?

Madeleine Goertz, 12

Do dark thoughts tremble through your head?
Does the sunlight ever bathe your face?
Do you still curl up the corners of your lips?
Does your heart still thump steady?

We haven't forgotten you.
I mail 69-cent cards from Trader Joes,
scrawled with sweet memories in
LARGE-PRINT HANDWRITING
To the gates of the compound
Do they nurse you there?

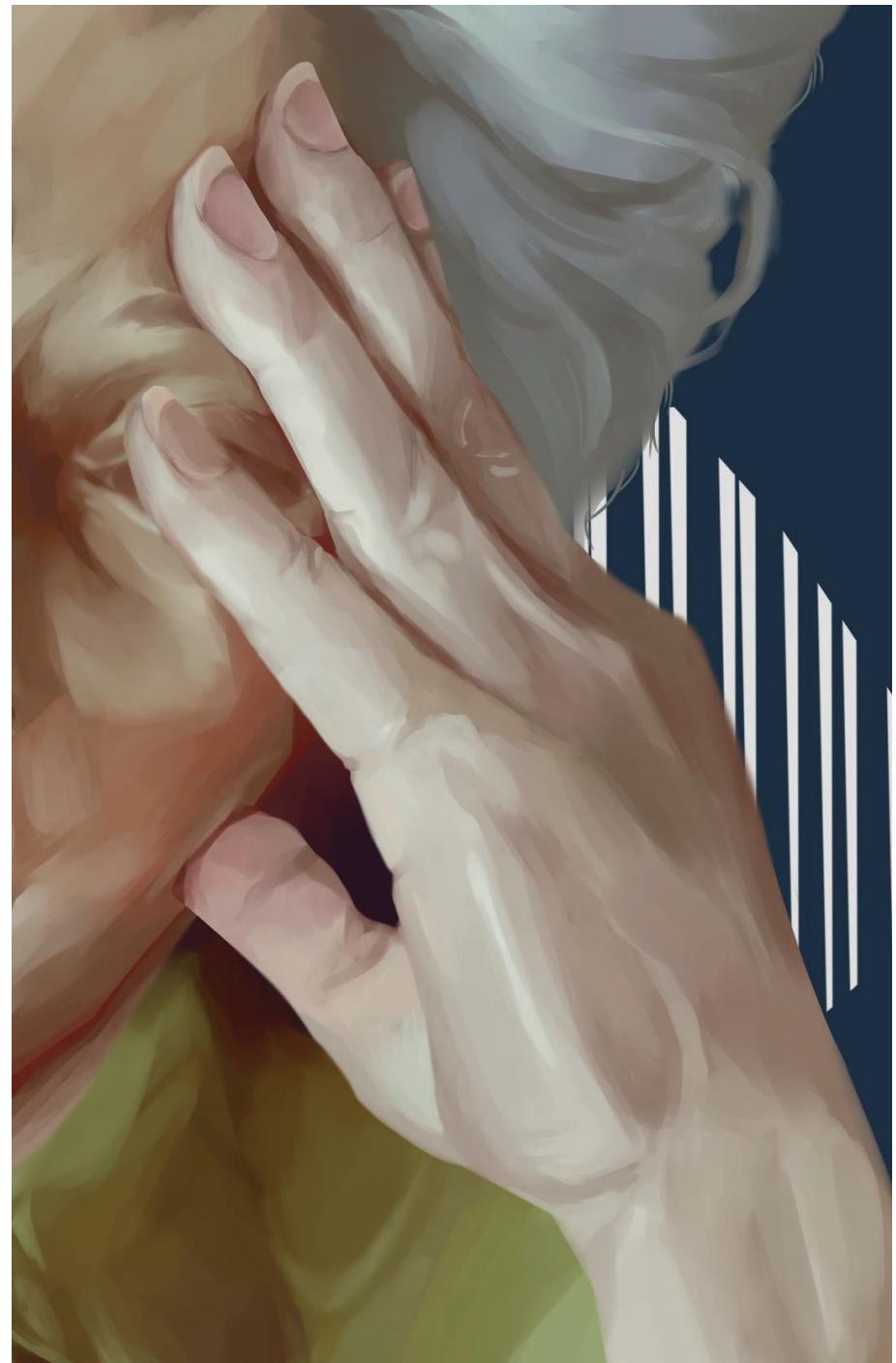
*Please read aloud loudly and show to Grandpa.
He cannot hear you.*

Do the names of your girls still roll
around like greased pebbles
under your tongue?

We're still here, Grandpa. I'm
still here.

One day, I hope I can embrace you again
Arms wrapped tighter than binds,
Grandpa, you haven't aged a day!
Sighs escaping through grateful streams of tears
Staining your ruddy cheeks.

Will I find you in your wise, watery eyes?
Will I still see your grateful glances?
Will you see your face in mine?
Will you face me?
Will I face it?
Will you recognize me?



Where Did the Youth Go?

Sharon Oh, 11

The Betrothed Baby

Lucy Zhang, 11

1922

A gush of wind loosened the union between a viridescent, young leaf and a plump node. Four branches down, a blue-throated bee-eater chirped eagerly at the sight of a buzzing wasp flying roughly three feet below. The intermittent threats of the bee-eater were briefly discontinued as the young leaf sauntered downwards; the bird's pupils hypnotically visited the two vertices of the elliptic eyes, tracking the zig-zag motion of the dancing leaf. A few moments later, the first rays of sunlight pierced through the tips of the w-shaped space formed by the intersection of three notable (despite the most unoriginal names) mountains: 小山 (Little Mountain), 中山 (Middle Mountain), and 大山 (Big Mountain). As the sun slowly peeked through the space, like the grand entrance of a royal figure, the coveted "alarm clocks" squawked, each vocalizing its unique rendition of "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Inside the smallest mud hut of the sparsely populated village, lived a young couple. Both man and woman dressed plainly; tattered cloth hung loosely from their frames. Crammed into the corner of the hut stood a makeshift bamboo bed, providing a rigid place to rest at night and a generous space for meals. That day, red paper lanterns hung stiffly from the straw roof, red ribbons were tied to the slender green shafts of bamboo, and bundles of red cloth laid strewn on the bed. A plate of chicken dumplings was left to cool on the lone stool that lived by the door. Woman and man's eyes were magnetically drawn to the plate of chicken dumplings. It was a wondrous sight: three beautiful chicken dumplings, four pleats each, sat drooping in the center of the plate. An invisible force seemed to be dragging the edges of the dumplings down, now generously spread to twice the area as before. Woman and man's dreamy thoughts of tasting chicken were suddenly interrupted by the cacophonic cries of their newborn baby joined by the flamboyant bee-eater.

"听到她哭，我的心已经碎了。今天下午，那位女人来的时后，我无法在屋子里。" (When I hear her cry, my heart shatters. Later this afternoon, when that lady comes, I will not be able to stay in the house.) sputtered woman as her thin frame shook uncontrollably. Her short hair, recently chopped, lay flat against the nape of her neck. Occasionally, her chest expanded and subsequently deflated with sharp exhales, accompanied by a singular drop of water pulled towards the ground by that same force. Woman's eyes drifted back to her baby. A head full of sesame-colored hair, asymmetrical yet captivating eyebrows, a pair of alert and deep-set eyes, and a wide, flat nose. As woman spoke, baby's wails simmered down, her penetrating eyes softened, slowly. The vertices of her elliptic eyes curled upwards, revealing double-fold

eyelids and a deep dimple on her left cheek. Momentarily, her attention was captivated by a green leaf dancing just outside the window.

"有没有搞错！那位女人来后，我们会变成有钱的人！" (What is wrong with you!? After that lady visits, we will finally have money!) man whispered tremulously. Grateful for any excuse to diverge from man's utterly ridiculous thought, woman steered her focus to the sliver of light seeping through the makeshift window. She noticed the young viridescent leaf; carefully observing her daughter's steadfast eye contact with such an odd object, she gently retrieved it. "你要给她树叶？你疯了吗？她会把他吃了！如果她吃了，有可能那位女人会不要她了！" (You're giving her the leaf? Are you crazy? She's just going to eat it! If she ate it, it's possible that the woman will not want her anymore!) Woman turned around; a ray of sunshine illuminated the left side of her face. Her eyebrows were tightly knit, eyes staring intently, cheekbone accentuated, and lips firmly pursed. She locked eyes with man, seemingly inviting him to an intense round of a staring contest. Despite her thin frame, she now shook vigorously, her eyes stood electrified, and her gaze could cut rocks. "你要是在说一句，你就看着啊。自私的男子汉" (If you talk once more, you just watch and see. Selfish man.)



Summer Lemon

Selin Filiz, 9

Tree

Wyatt Moore, 10

Proud
the Old
Tree stands
swaying in the wind.

Its needles are new, they flake
in the breeze, temporary slivers. Its
branches stay the seasons, young and flimsy,
strong and sturdy, not fleeting, not timeless either.

Some will fall, torn by wind and weighed down
by snow, likely the youthful buds, the perching places of
hummingbirds. All reaching for the sun, naïve to Dedalus.
Venerable branches buttress the homes of hawks and forts of children,
respected after so many winters. However, not immortal to the whims
and wills of human newcomers, whose way they may block.

Summarily amputated for ignorant defiance.

To all of nature, though, a single part rises above.

Honored and envied, it bends to the wind.
For its ancestors learned that to be inflexible is to perish.
Alone, it will break before a mighty gale.

But together they form a mighty pantheon.

The trunk, the center
of this prideful being,
the Atlas carrying
tall a green empyrean.

To no lesser entity
will it bow; it must be
broken. Even then
keeping its dignity.

Leaping upon its assailant
with decades of fury.

It remembers lost branches,
now naught but knots, gnarling the bark.

It protects the nests of smaller birds,
provides support for ambitious vines.

The last part of the tree. The first, the eldest.

From here this mighty column sprung, only gaining a name after it's felled, a stump. A
headstone celebrating defiance, showing boastfully of its rings of age.

And now we reach the roots.

The anchor the foundation of this mighty being.

Built from air and rain, here it trades with mycelia
alien things from far far far away from the land this tree
knows...

Who could have realized that something so grand
could come from such a
small
seed.



Steel Crossing

Rory McNerney, 12

Drown There

Kaylee Allen, 11

i dreamt u're alive...pretended u had more
we playacted in my dream that somehow
u had come up for air and not that
u're laying there. and not that i left u there.
with your friend drowning there...why i never
wept is beyond me. it's not like i had a spare
when i left u there. believe me, it's not like i meant
for u to be deprived, denied, unrevived.
i dreamt u're alive, but your attempt crept
up on me, clawed its way through your prayer
all i know is i'm not exempt
from your grave. we reap what we sow. so
if u're not there, i may be the one drowning there.



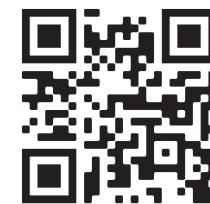
Deceived

Josh Leader, 8



Dolphin

Ann Li, 10



Anthem of Death

Judah Lee, 7

(Music)

git.io/JsEWa

3 hour poems

Sia Gaind, 10

2am

a dark sapphire sky peppered with golden sparkles,
like spots on the leaf of a birch tree.
an ashen orb brooding in the corner,
she's just nobody in a room full of diamonds.

the earthy smell of soggy sienna-colored bark,
each chip chiseled aggressively, scattered splinters.
emerald needles snap from scrawny branches,
pine and dust in the crisp air.

the empty night lingers, no beginning, no end.
cold metal of the park slide, coated in silvery frost;
goosebumps under my baby blue jeans.
angry wind shoves a nearby swing back-and-forth.

no ghost torments my mind, mouth full of gum—
the mint numbs my cheeks, and my lips part
as i struggle to relieve the stinging on my tongue.
the turquoise stick soon loses its tang.

once the sun stirs, so will its army of nothings,
and they will awaken the endless cycle of everything.
but for now, i have my pearly, faraway friend.
for now, i have 2am.



Painted Parrot

Areebah Khan, 8

5pm

peach juice trickles down my chin.
a lone drop soaks through the Scrabble
game board, and i rub my index finger
over the champagne-pink stain.
i don't even like peaches. or word games.

northern cardinals soar across the rosy sky—
each craving the solace of their own home.
i shift beneath our patterned quilt, my hand
still in hers. the October wind rustles the
cherry tree above us. autumn blooms fall.

apple pie in the air, strawberry shortcake
and watermelon gelato. the picnic basket
overflows with love, like a boiling pot of
apricot jam. but if love is for fools and
Eve is for Adam, then i'm a lost cause.

she turns to me, reachable yet unreachable.
her iced-tea breath, her perfume of magic.
banana-taffy lips—sticky and sweet.
better than an orange gummy bear.
i like these 5pm dates and figs and raisins.

9pm

pop rocks dance on my tongue, and
neon bursts shimmer in the 9pm sky.
buttery fingers from curly fries and
giant pretzels, but i'm empty-handed.
i'm in slow motion, everyone else in 4x.

a Ferris wheel with a single seat, so
i'm the only one on top of the world.
the fall from the drop tower's greater
than the ride up, no doubt. i'm stuck
in a dunk tank. and no one's laughing.

a polka-dotted green balloon, filled
with confetti and helium and cries
no one hears. until it pops, of course.
i'm floating away, watching my life as
though it's a movie. the genre's horror.

if you can't tell—it isn't glitter, it's a tear,
and this isn't an amusement park, it's hell.



Union Station *Maryam Iqbal, 11*

Dollars and Dust

Eric Shi, 12

EXT. THE DESERT

Open with extreme wide shots of the vast red desert with the tiny outline of RUSSEL riding horseback barely visible. Colossal sandstone buttes surround the area.

Upbeat, adventurous music plays with heavy emphasis of brass instrument and the guitar.

EXT. RAILROAD

Long shot of RUSSEL riding parallel to a pair of train tracks towards the camera, dressed in brown denim pants, a jacket, boots with spurs, and a light brown cowboy hat. The music fades and sounds of wind blowing replace it. The heat of the environment causes the air to visibly bend.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF SHERIAH

Medium close-up shot of RUSSEL as he dismounts his steed and ties it to a fencepost.

RUSSEL inventories his supplies and takes a drink of water when he's alerted by a shout.

DRUNKARD 1

And stay out ya dusty panhandler!

Long shot of the town's main road with the entrance to a saloon on the right.

A scraggly OLD MAN, wearing a dirty button-up shirt and black pants, has just been thrown out of the town saloon and jeers emanate from inside.

EXT. TOWN SALOON

RUSSEL approaches the saloon when the OLD MAN grabs his pants and begins to shake.

High angle shot looking down at the OLD MAN

OLD MAN

They took all my money those lying cheats...
Everything I made from working on that damn railroad...

Low angle, close-up shot of RUSSEL looking down at the OLD MAN. His expression is stern but there isn't a trace of disgust or arrogance.

INT. TOWN SALOON

The saloon is noisy with the sounds of racket piano playing (diegetic music), men laughing, and the clinks of shot glasses. Several tables are occupied by poker playing and the rest are packed with an assortment of shabbily dressed, beer drinking men. A couple waitresses dodge and weave through the chaos.

(Shot of men playing a game of poker.)

POKER PLAYER 1

Didja hear? Railroad's finally finished.

POKER PLAYER 2

Mayor should be headin' back any day now then.

FOOL 1

Boss-man's comin' back!!

POKER PLAYER 1, who's seated next to FOOL 1, hits him upside the head. POKER PLAYER 2 throws a couple poker chips into the table center.

POKER PLAYER 1

Keep quiet, he's the M-a-y-o-r, so shut it with that boss-man talk.

FOOL 1 gives an indignant look and rubs the back of his head when RUSSEL enters, and the entire establishment turns silent as people turn to stare at the newcomer.

SCENE END.



El Toro

Lucien Yoong, 9



Meowrick Fanart

Jenny Pyon, 10

Your Friendly Neighborhood Garden Snail

Ayla Bosworth, 10

Hello Tall Humans:
It's me, David.
Yes, beneath you, please look, over by your left shoe!
I am your friendly neighborhood garden snail.

I apologize for eating your strawberries, but
This is my home too!
So I would really prefer
If you would not douse me with your Kosher salt.

I know we are different,
Like a mushroom and a tractor,
But do we not both breathe,
And wish to live another day on this planet?

Although you find painful murder easy,
I see sympathy comes harder for you, like seeking pirate's lost treasure,
Or remembering where you last put your glasses (on your head!)
A feeling that may challenge your ordinary grey timeline.

But I beg of you,
Put yourself in my shell for once!
It's not easy, being me.
Tiny, Small, Slow, Pathetic,

I don't have the LUXURY,
The ARROGANCE,
To slaughter the weak and helpless
For simply living!!

So please,
For once in your life,
Have some mercy,
Some kindness,

Hear me out,
I can eat your weeds instead,
We can make an agreement!

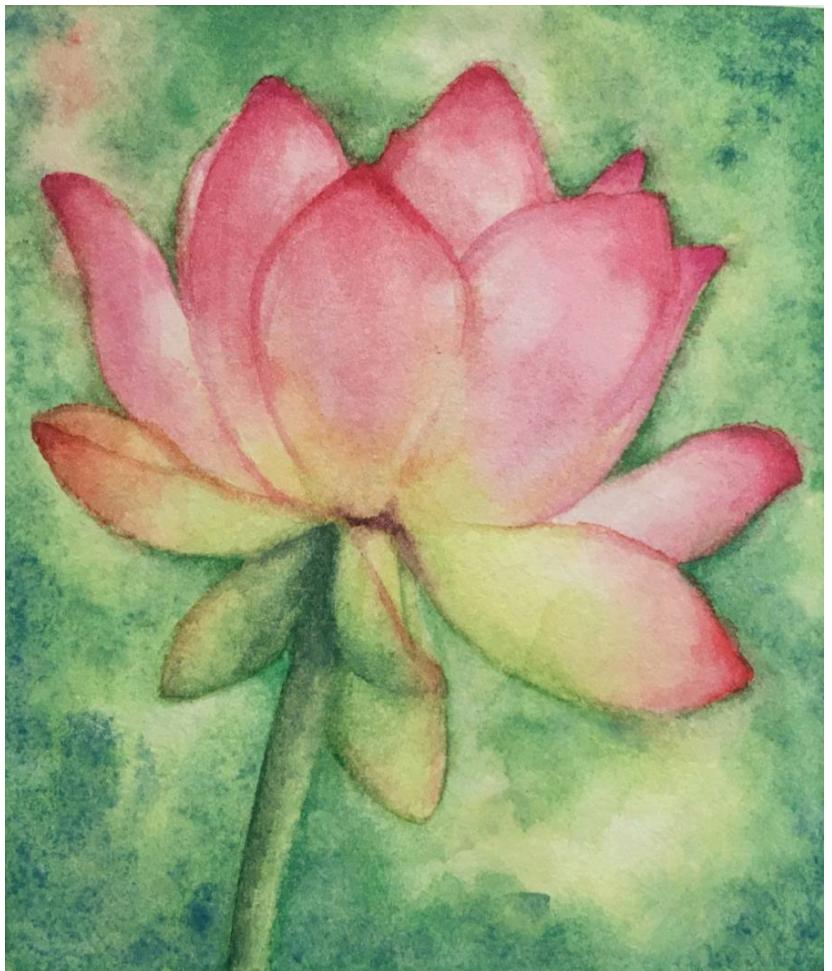


I Hope You Don't Mind ...

Ben Yu, 11

(Music)

git.io/JsEWK



Lotus Flower

Sophia Kim, 9

continued

So please,
Give me a moment of consideration, like when you choose between petunias
or daffodils,
Listen to your beating heart, I know you have one somewhere.
Find some sympathy, think of when you baked cookies for next door
neighbors,
Some kindness, I believe in you!
And please, help a little guy out.

From,
David,
Your Friendly Neighborhood Garden Snail.

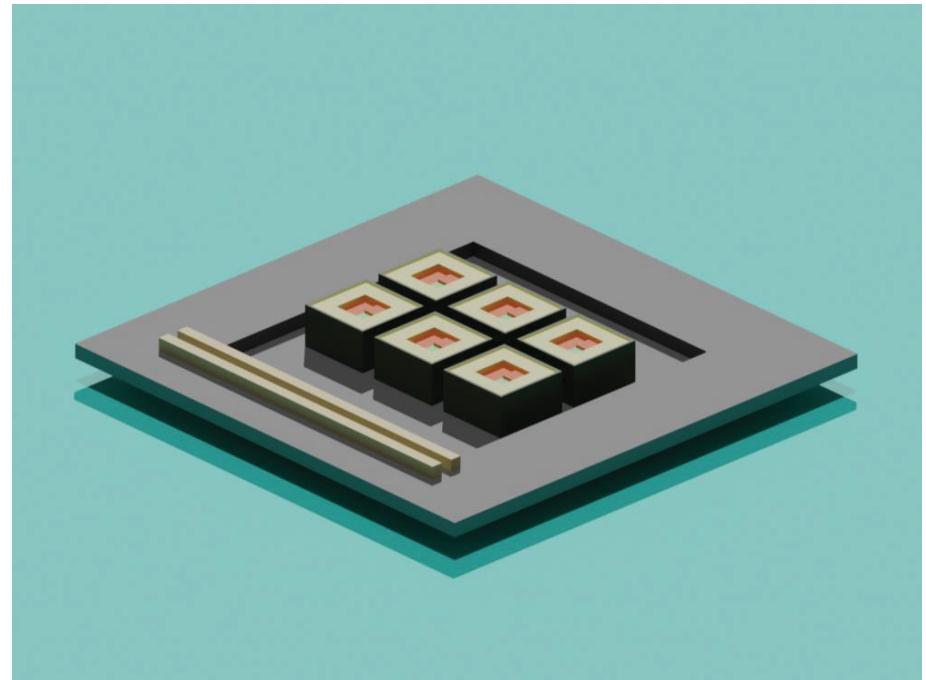
2002

Matthew Lin, 12

The last time our year consisted
of only twos and zeroes
we were busy taking selfies
and doing parkour.

CRISPR hadn't made it
into my AP Bio textbook,
and dogs didn't bark –
they barked.

A virus called norovirus scared us all
but COVID did it better.
music called dubstep scared us all
but now it doesn't matter.
TL;DR:
things were much simpler
in 2002.



Sushi

Yilin Zhang, 6



Purple Sky

Hadassah Ho, 6

The Reporter From the Future

Pranav Gopalkrishnan, 11

The reporter asks me, *What do you think about apple pie?*
Would you say it's "tart and chewy," or is it "sweet and crispy?"
Does it go well with ice-cream?

He's asking such nonsensical questions!

Yet when I state my confusion, he retorts, *These are all important questions.*
Don't ask why.
And, within a blink of an eye, switches back to asking, *What of this "phone"?*
Or is it "smart-phone"?

*Tell me about the screaming rivers and
The bears and salmon that traverse them.
Have you seen a lion? Are they extinct yet?*

What crazy questioning! And he replies,
As a proper reporter, let me
Thank you for your time.
And give you
Some advice.
The future is approaching faster than
You would imagine.
And many facets of your life—the things
You take for granted
Will die. Perish. Be gone forever.

A crooked smile crosses his face,
Although you can't do anything to stop it.

Space Prison

Kyler Baumoel, 10

"Name and Species," croaked the guard. "Tesla, Human" replied Tesla the Human. Tesla then proceeded to the next room, a sensor. The scan finished and Tesla was led into the changing room. Here, the clothing dispenser reviewed the scan and created appropriate garments.

Now the outfitted prisoner was led through the prison. The windows looked out upon the capital of this world, a vibrant and colorful place, as opposed to the clean monochromatic white of the prison.

The prisoner arrived at his new home, Cell #456354. Tesla entered the cell and observed his cellmate, a shybalt. Shybals were notoriously friendly due to their social nature and easygoing attitude. His cellmate was currently in the process of reading a news-holo. The shybalt proceeded to rise and greeted Tesla with a slight wave.

"Hello there. My name is Zraoken," said Zraoken the Shybalt.

"My name is Tesla."

"Where did you learn to speak in such an antiquated manner?"

"Here and there. I believe that one doesn't learn a language but merely absorbs certain sounds and syllables then proceeds to attach meaning to the meaninglessness of it all," spoke Tesla.

"Indeed. Indeed. You seem to be an interesting fellow, although I can't discern your species," spoke Zraoken as he took a seat on his bed.

"My species calls ourselves humans, and we believe ourselves to be the greatest species in the universe. As such, we have yet to search for any other species." Tesla took a seat on what was evidently his bed. "I am the first human to venture out to the depths of space and, to my astonishment, found that most other species had already strived to create a civilization."

"Interesting. I have never heard of these humans, but one stands in front of me, so I must believe it. How did this human end up in a prison such as this one?"

"I started without money and without linguistic capabilities. Eventually, I found a library and began teaching myself Common." Tesla leaned back into his bed. "I lived on the street, although, to my surprise, sustenance was no issue due to the Vendors."

"Are you telling me that on your planet people die from lack of sustenance? Like how people would starve in those heroic tales? Or how people would need to search for carbon? On my planet, there was a tale of Zigzag, who found himself in a place much like how you describe and had to defend himself from the ravenous locals who had destroyed themselves over pointless arguments."

"My planet is exactly like the one you describe." Tesla told the shocked Zraoken. "So, there I was thinking of a way to get more money, when I saw a

continued

jewel by the side of the road. It was a shiny green pearl, and so I picked it up."

Zraoken laughed, "You picked up the Street Jewel, hah."

"I picked it up and the street collapsed, all of the pretty shops and vehicles parked on the street. No one died when the buildings turned to dust, but multiple people got hurt from falling merchandise. The police saw me on the cameras and captured me. I calmly explained how I had just arrived and didn't know any better. The judge agreed and gave me a light sentence of 100 years."

"You are very lucky, my friend, removing a Street Jewel is a felony of 1,000 years most of the time."

"Indeed," replied Tesla the Human. "And how did you end up here?"

"There I was, a mournful and humid echo of a shybalt, living life without direction or purpose as one does. I ran across the wrong people at the wrong time and here I am." The answer was completely vague, but Tesla did not pressure Zraoken for fear of being impolite.

"Are you religious?" Zraoken asked Tesla with a definite shift in conversation topic.

"Not particularly. What about yourself?"

"Same with me. Qajar doesn't really fit with me."

"What is Qajar?"

"Qajar is the principal and only shybaltean religion. It states that we are all the dream of a peasant who wishes to be king."

"And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"

Zraoken thought on this concept for a time before their discussion and thoughts were interrupted by the green light above the door signaling them to lunch. And with that, Zraoken the Shybalt and Tesla the Human left for lunch.

<Prison Log>

Prisoner Tesla died on the 6th of Drivien after serving 72 years of his sentence. Prisoner Tesla claimed to be a "human," an unheard-of species. Examination of the dead body indicates death of natural causes, which in turn indicates that this species has a mere 100-year lifespan. After examining recordings of Prisoner Tesla and cellmate Prisoner Zraoken, we have determined that these humans live on a planet they call "Earth." We have also located the approximate location of Earth. We have notified the government of the existence of Earth.



On Cold, Cloudy Days

Maya Skakun, 7

Cold Hands

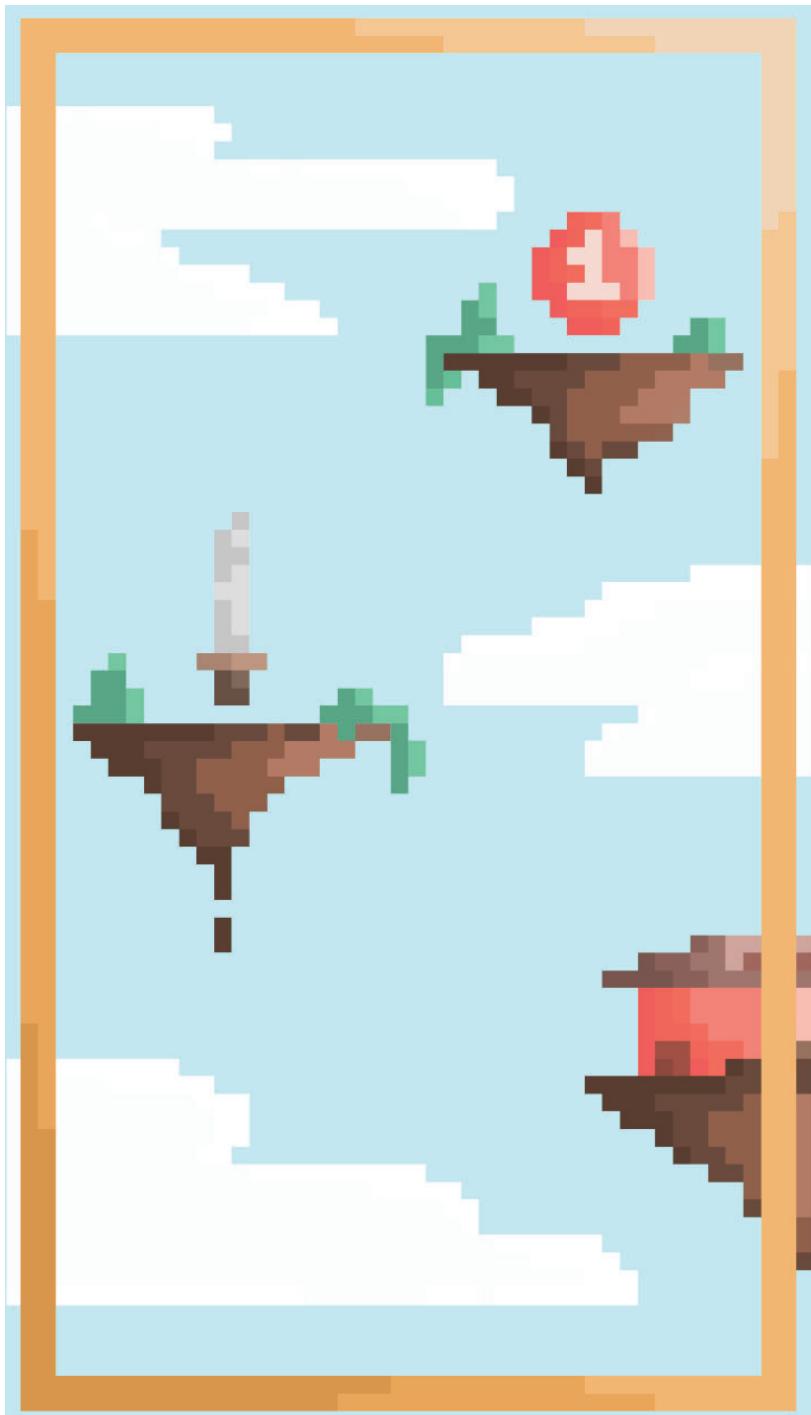
Andrey Piterkin, 12

Together, meet at the heavy, frigid glass door
Grasping hands, a unity of her warmth and my cold together.
A brush of warm air greets two friends into
a shared drink, perhaps, to spread coziness to the tips of our fingers

Grasping hands, a unity of her warmth and my cold together;
There and gone, her head turned away, searching for something in the night,
A shared drink, perhaps, to spread coziness to the tips of her fingers
Without me and my cold hands.

There and gone, head turned away, searching for something in the night
Her eyes and lips wave goodbye, feigning sweetness but secretly happy
Without me and my cold hands.
Her scarf, warm and bright red, fallen on the ground behind her.

Her eyes and lips wave goodbye, feigning sweetness but secretly happy,
As I try to catch up with her and return
Her scarf, warm and red, fallen on the ground behind her
But she is lost to me, among the endless black sea of cars and people.



Floating Islands

Rosha Roudaki, 7



**You Find Yourself Lost, But Where
Is that Beat Coming From?**

Ben Yu, 11

(Music)

git.io/JsEWP

Trust Fall

Sarah Yi, 8

Mr. Aldini

I was there when the boy fell from the sky. It happened about an hour after school. I had stayed to grade papers, for I was a language arts teacher. Suddenly, I heard a thud, loud and alarming, coming from the schoolyard.

"EDEN!!!" Someone screamed, their voice echoing throughout the halls. I immediately rushed out, already dreading what had happened. The school's courtyard was big, spacious, and rarely used, just an empty space with patches of dead grass, rusty benches, and ivy climbing the concrete stone wall. However, something was different. A young boy, about the age of twelve, lay lifelessly on his back, his arm twisted in an abnormal position. I knew who the boy was; he was in my class. His name was Eden, Eden Ordelia. He had pitch-black hair and unusual green eyes. He was a bit small for his age, but he wasn't particularly bullied or picked on. However, seeing him on the ground, his once green eyes now a dull gray color, blood slowly coating his jet-black hair, was sickening. I looked up the tall building where he fell. Another boy, Atlas, with a horrified expression on his face, stood on the roof, leaning over, tears streaming down his eyes.

"Eden..." His voice, strangely, was loud and clear, causing the gathering of teachers to stare.

I stood frozen in my place, unable to move from the shock. I don't even remember when the rest of the teachers came.

"Oh, how horrible..." one of them said in a strangely monotone voice.

"I didn't think he would do this," said another.

After what seemed like an eternity, the police came. By the looks on their usually serious faces, you would think that they had gotten used to this type of thing. One of the policemen, old and experienced, called the boy on the roof, a witness of the event, to come down. I glanced back up at the boy on the roof, and I thought saw him smirk.

continued

Eden

It's about 3:30 in the afternoon. I'm on the other side of the railing on the school roof. My hands gripping the pole, I lean forward. If I fall, there would be nothing to prevent me from hitting the patch of dead grass below me. But I know I won't fall. I am confident in my grip. Plus, this is the only way to get the best view of the autumn sunset.

"Eden!" A familiar voice says behind me, startling and surprising. I turn around, to see my friend, Atlas, standing near the doorway that connects the roof to the rest of the school.

"Don't do it!" He manages to make out, panting with exhaustion, "Don't kill yourself!"

"Kill myself?" I ask in confusion, "Why would I kill myself?" Then I realize how the position I'm in right now looks to other people. "Oh! No, I'm just trying to see the autumn sunset! I don't want to kill myself!"

He looks at me with an astonished face. "Really?! It looked like you were going to commit suicide!"

"Sorry if I made you worry. But I'm not here to kill myself! I was just about to climb over anyway!" I smile.

Atlas walks over to help me climb over the railing that was supposed to prevent students from falling. But instead of helping me, he gives me a push, making me lose my grip and plummet towards the ground. I see him smile as I fall. I hit the ground, and everything turns black.



it wasn't me

Rosha Roudaki, 7



Peace Girl

Vera Berezhnyuk, 8

The Electoral College

Madeleine Goertz, 12

America's old College, scam to all.
These villains of democracy provoke
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The swing state voters matter most, they drawl.
Firm partisans view it as a big joke,
America's old College, scam to all.

The gerrymandering serves to forestall
Any solutions attempting to stoke
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The NPVIC[1] could end this brawl;
Then finally our country could revoke
America's old College, scam to all.

The Bayh-Celler Amendment, you'll recall
Was filibustered by the South, which broke
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

The founding white men had no wherewithal;
They disenfranchised people with their yoke.
America's old College, scam to all
Quadrennial thoughts of an overhaul.

[1] The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact



I Belong

Nathania Lim, 11

Learning Telugu

Sravya Ganti, 12

Despite the jet lag, my grandma and grandpa always woke up at the crack of dawn. They shuffled around downstairs, sipping chai, staring out the window, completely oblivious of each other, until the rest of us woke up four hours later. It's like they were teleported from their breezy coconut grove house in India to a suburb in Redmond, Washington, and everyone knew besides them.

On those summer mornings, the sun would peek through my window, bathing my room in soft yellow light, smooth like the inside of a mango peel. I unwrapped myself from the blanket, skipped downstairs for breakfast and spent every day at the park laughing with the other girls in the neighborhood. My freedom from school tasted sweeter than a cardamom-spiced frothy cup of mango lassi. Every day I would dip my mouth into that cup and take a greedy sip, coating my upper lip in the thick yogurt-mango mixture. But a cup of mango lassi isn't bottomless.

One day as I jumped off the fourth step of our staircase onto the downstairs hardwood with a triumphant thud, my grandma shuffled up to me with a little steel cup of chai. I followed the tendrils of smoke extending delicately from the surface of the chai, all the way up to eye level with my grandma. Her green eyes, which brilliantly contrasted her coffee-colored skin, offered all the kindness that her stoic face and tone were missing. They crinkled in at the corners as she said, "Here Sravya, sit with me."

"Oh—ok, sure Nama, I have to go to the park in ten minutes, I don't think I have time to drink this." As I lifted the chai to my mouth, my lips pursed in aversion. I didn't want to lose the intoxicating sweetness left on my lips from a summer of no responsibilities, no studying. But when I let a hot drop of chai hit my mouth, searing my lip along the way, I realized it was sweet too. Just in a different way. It didn't leave me in a happy, mellow trance, but kept me alert.

My grandma rolled her eyes. "You see those girls every day. Today you can take a break and spend time with your Nanama. Thategaru and I want to try something with you."

She pulled out a colorful, distressed paperback booklet with peeling corners. When I realized it was a Telugu lettering book made for first graders in India, I knew my cup of lassi had run empty. I guessed the chai would have to do.

We began learning the basic vowel sounds, "ah, ahhh, ee, eeee, u, uuu." They had the same basic sounds as English, but the structure was very different. I didn't know languages could work in so many ways. Telugu is built on syllables, not letters like English. Each character is a base consonant



Watercolor House

Yilin Zhang, 6

continued

sound. And then, like accessorizing a Polly Pocket doll, you attach emphasis and/or vowel endings. After a month of studying letters with my grandparents every day, I'd gotten the hang of it.

My next challenge was to read a Telugu children's book. The memory of the name is fuzzy, but the feeling as I tried to read the first sentence is burned into my mind forever. I was able to decipher every syllable of the first word. But when I put it all together and spoke it out loud to my grandma, I didn't have the slightest clue what it meant. That was the first moment I realized I knew probably two percent of the Telugu language. I knew all the words that are necessary to compose sentences like "Why does it keep raining?" "What are we eating for dinner?" "Can I watch TV for another hour?" But beyond the activities of my green-brown house in Redmond, WA, I didn't know a single word of significance. I suddenly felt very small. I was glad my cup of lassi had run out and my grandma had coerced me into learning Telugu. It might take me a year to get through this book made for a 5-year-old in India.

It amazed me that my parents, who are now also limited to the same two percent of Telugu as I am, read and wrote in this language for 20 years of their lives. I wondered if they were still able to do so as proficiently as my grandparents. I couldn't picture my dad writing an essay in Telugu, like I'm writing this essay in English right now.

It's been five years since my grandparents visited. Every time I pass our spice cabinet, I try to read the labels scrawled out in my grandma's Telugu handwriting, stuck haphazardly onto stacks of metal tins. I daydream about spending the next thirty years of my life in Kakinada with the rest of my family. I could wake up every day at the crack of dawn, enveloped in a sweaty coconut breeze, turn off the ceiling fan and sip chai with my grandparents with the staticky sound of radio and mosquito flies buzzing in the background. Maybe, I'd eventually forget how to read and write in English.

Mother Tongue

Jasmine Zhen, 8

Grandmother's mother tongue is thick with the
Promises of good and better,
Cultures interwoven yet
Rooted at the core.

Her words dance through the air,
Fast footwork, airy frivolity that
Plants the rough seeds of
Blame in my chest.

I am alien to such beauty
An admirer with their eyes closed.
Her sentences scold my soul.

Language devours our cobblestone bridges,
Melts my useless hands and
Foreign mouth in a cesspool with my
Double-headed heritage that is
Mute in one face.

She screams, "Bang ta!"
I shout, "Help!"

But my guilt plagues the
Echoes of my cries
A depression of what-ifs
In a language I do not know.

The Humble Klein Bottle

Madeleine Goertz, 12

A small armada of Klein bottles line the top of my headboard. Two knitted, two fuzzy, two large, two small, one hat, one pendant. Allow me to introduce you.

According to Wikipedia, an ever-exacting source of information, a Klein bottle is "a two-dimensional manifold against which a system for determining a normal vector cannot be consistently defined." That's not terribly romantic. Let's try again.

Imagine you're an ant. Your name is Alfred—just go with it. Spindly legs resting on a cold glass surface, quivers of terror reverberate up your body.

continued

Where the hell am I? Like any normal creature, you begin to walk forward, at first with trepidation. Then you accelerate, your legs slipping on the shiny surface. Hours pass. Everything looks the same. Desperation drops to the bottom of your stomach.

Relax, you're just on an infinite surface. You can walk as far as you like without ever reaching an edge. You can make it back to the point where you began, but you'll be upside down. Strange, right?

Oh, I forgot to mention something. This entire ant nightmare plays out in a universe with four spatial dimensions. If you'd rather think in the pedestrian three dimensions, you'll have the ability to walk through the glass wall if you happen upon a vertical one. (Klein bottles self-intersect in three dimensions.) Imagine passing through glass! I'm sure crows would love such a skill.

Now that you're intimately aware of your predicament, allow me to introduce you to the man who created this wonderful nightmare: Mr. Cliff Stoll. A delightful astronomer made mildly famous by his capture of an infamous computer hacker, he sells glass Klein bottles from the warehouse located under his crawl space, maintained entirely by his robot built of junk. The man cannot bottle up his excitement about math; it escapes through his Einstein-like hair and constant need to bounce like a pogo stick whenever he speaks (I promise I am not indulging in hyperbole). A true treasure, Cliff and I are now friends, trading lively emails filled with mathematical irreverence, and we delight in sharing our Klein bottle creations, such as my new Klein bottle hat.

But back to you, Alfred. How could a man so joyous create a world so vast and frightening?

After hours of trotting along and passing through self-intersections and dismayed at the vast infinity of sameness, you spot another ant friend. A quick chat reveals her name to be Bethesda, and she introduces you to her friend Caroline. Companions! How lovely! I'm not alone. Some small talk about the weather, sports, and your glass world, and you discover how utterly befuddled B & C are as well. Oh well, not much any of you can do. Caroline's son Damien steps out from behind her and lays out the picnic he schlepped along. Mmmmmmm, raspberry jam on buttered English muffins. Your tummy full, a sense of calm lulls you to sleep.

You can't ever fall off this glass world.

There is no edge, after all.



New Colony 9

Ben Yu, 11

The New Dawn

Judah Lee, 7

The woman sits alone, drinking water; the TV is blaring. The room is messy to say the least. The couch is littered with food wrappers; the living room smells of Cheetos. The woman hears a knock on the door. She goes to answer the door and a black silhouette awaits her. She screams as the man walks into the light. Her body hits the floor. The mystery is only beginning. Far away from her, a man's phone begins to ring. He changes into his suit. It's a part of his life, but this announcement is of some concern. His black cape and red mask. He wears his black and white tuxedo, it's his calling card. He rises above the city and glides, admiring the yellow lights, and nearly barfs when he zooms through a puff of smoke. He floats back down to earth; the woman's average house is being investigated by police. He walks in—nobody stops him. He investigates her body; bullet holes are apparent. "This doesn't make any sense," the man says.

"Tell me about it," a man says from the shadows. His face is barely concealed, only slight blocking of his mouth. "How can someone who passes through walls get killed by a bullet?" the man in black and red shakes his head. "Whoever it was, they were careful," the man in black says, examining the floor where the bullets would have gone if the person was normal.

"Maybe she was off guard?" the man from the shadows asks. The man in black shakes his head.

continued

"No, she was one of the best," the man in black states. "Maybe someone killed her another way? Then he shot the bullets through her to make it look regular," the man in black ponders.

"Nobody knows she's one of us, right?" The man from the shadows says.

"Her identity's secret," the man in black replies. "But whoever killed her knew it was her," the man in black continues.

The man in black heads back to his apartment and turns on the news. It's 2022, the world is depressing, but nothing compares to the death of the woman. "Today, the Oracles announced the death of teammate Cougar. She had the ability to pass through walls and was the team's only female hero. Mr. Bullet released this statement." A clip rolls of the man in the shadow reading a statement.

"Cougar was a good friend. Not only that, but she was a good person. She lived her life trying to save every person. She felt that, with our gifts, we should all do the same. She may not have led the team, but she was one hundred percent the heart of The Oracles. May her heart rest in peace. Thank you," Mr. Bullet says, quietly crying.

"What does this mean for the Oracles? After this," the blonde woman says as hopeful music plays. The man in black looks outside his window, waiting. Suddenly, the sky becomes a light, the bright "O" symbol displayed like a shadow puppet show. He opens the window to his balcony and jumps, letting adrenaline get to him like a skydiver. He boosts himself back up into the air at the last second. There stand his three teammates: Nightman in his black cloak with a mask that covered his entire face; Mr. Bullet, his mustache waving in the midnight wind; and Roboman, his grey and yellow metallic body shimmering despite the darkness. The man in black steps back down to earth.

"Oracles, what do we do?" the man in black asks. They eye each other carefully.

"I don't know, Angelman," Nightman says to me, turning off the bright light, our meeting consumed by darkness.

"I think someone doesn't like us anymore," Angelman says. "In 2020, everyone had to wear masks, not just us, and the police were allowed to function, and we weren't," Angelman says.

"So?" Roboman asks. Angelman turns to the sky, admiring the stars.

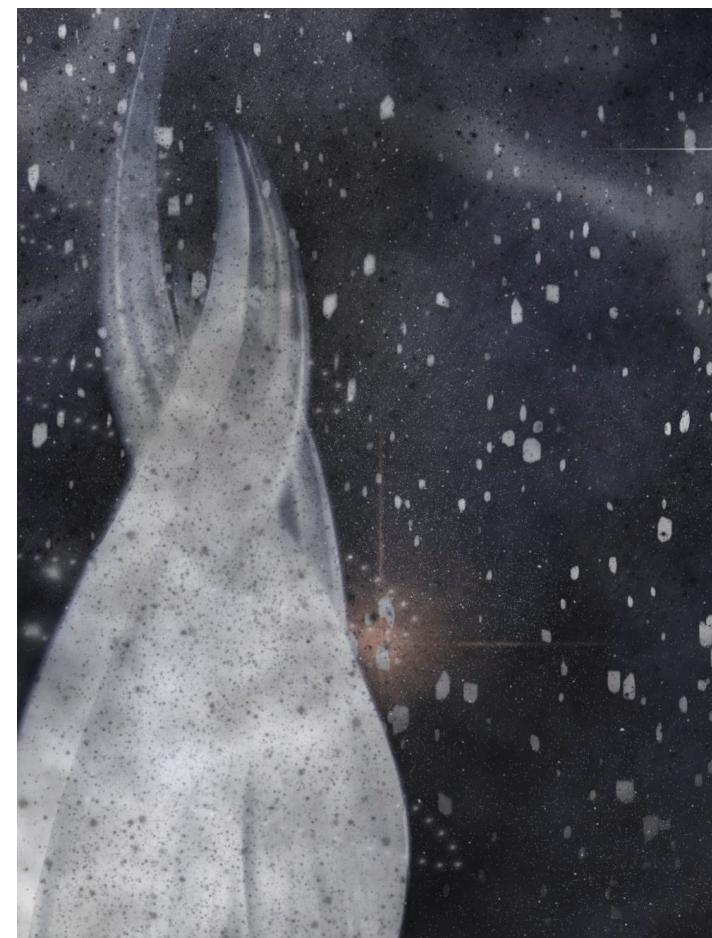
"Ever since the end of lockdown, crime numbers have gone down." Angelman says, veering to the bottom of the building. "But whenever we stop something big, crime numbers go drastically up," Angelman says.

"But we knew that walking in, that the numbers can lie," Mr. Bullet says, fiddling with his pistol.

"I guess there's one thing we should do," Roboman says. "Go to her funeral."

Five days later, Angelman is dressed in his black suit, but takes no cape and closes his door solemnly. He doesn't feel like flying today, so he walks. The parade isn't hard to miss—journalists crowd the area, children clutch to their mothers. The sky is white, the clouds crowd the sky, almost like the crowd for the funeral. Angelman remembers the group's forming in 2014, how Cougar brought them together, made them put aside their differences, work for a brighter tomorrow. Angelman remembers how Cougar led them against the gangs that used to flood the streets. They hunted in the night, but also forged a trust with people in the day. The fights they had were legendary, and their reputation even taller. But now without the link that bonded them together, would the Oracles fall apart like a crumbly cookie?

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Incandescence

Melody Sakiya, 7

spiraling

Julia Lee, 11

stuck in my world
of meaningless perpetual thoughts:
my internal monologue just
won't shut up.
“are there people who
don’t have an internal monologue?”
i can’t imagine people who don’t
have an imagination.
what do you see
when someone asks
you not to imagine an
elephant? i saw elephants
like the sound of a piano and
moonlight sonata – swaying.
sway left, then sway
right, then flail
your arms
meticulously;
learning a dance at 75
percent speed, struggling
to keep up. driving 5 below
the speed limit and
slamming the
breaks—
yellow is
scarier than red.
seeing less red in
the mornings; i must
be getting sufficient sleep
(but when will it surprise me?)
surprised to find the time running
a marathon, adamant on getting
gold. “slow down,” i tell it.
i have so much more to
think about.

The 0th Hour

Amy Shrivastava, 10

Under the black expanse above the crisp night
wind blows through the tall, dry stalks,
rustling their blades
as they whisper secrets to

the lonely crickets chirping,
each clicking a different tune,
hoping to attract a new mate.
Hiding the sound

of rabbits softly
Rushing through the grass
on swift feet, sniffing, as
you feel them, invisible around you.

Above you, the stars
glisten like diamonds
always changing as they fall
through the dark sky,

chased by owls
looking for their scuttling prey.
Though on silent wings,
they screech, triumphant
as they swoop down.

But when you finally sit
listening to the
movement around you,
nature in its cycle,

Then you feel it—
The 0th hour—
The grass stands
Like the hair on your arms
As the crickets pause their mating
Rabbits nowhere to be heard

For just one moment
The end,
The beginning.



Whistling in the Dark

Rosha Roudaki, 7