

THE SCRIBE

FICTION • POETRY • ART • ESSAYS
2020-2021



RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL
CREATIVE WRITING

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TABLE OF
CONTENTS

06.
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

08.
FICTION

48.
POETRY

72.
NON-FICTION

90.
SCRIPTS

104.
ART

LETTER FROM **THE EDITOR**

The word scribe evokes the woodcut image of a robed figure bent over a writing desk with a sheet of parchment unfurling to the floor. An inkwell sits within dipping distance and a feather rests in one hand. Outside a window, perhaps, a banner flutters from a tower. During the days of castles, scribes were part of the royal court. They were writers.

Going back to the time of the pyramids, we trade parchment for papyrus, the goose quill for a river reed. And yet the role remains the same: record-keeper, archivist, maker of important manuscripts. Thoth was their god. Much of what we know about mythology was gleaned from their fantastically stenciled hieroglyphics. In ancient Egypt, scribes were storytellers.

Jewish scribes a few centuries later adhered to a strict set of rules: They were compelled to say each word aloud while they were writing their scrolls (not a bad approach to composition), and each column could have no less and no more than a prescribed number of lines (formatting mattered, even centuries before that typographical atrocity known as Comic Sans). Yet these sofers, as they were titled, were calligraphers renowned for curls and flourishes. So scribes were artists.

Also creating chirographical art were the monks of the Middle Ages. Transcribing volumes in cold stone chambers called scriptoriums while the world outside fell to plague and ignorance, they not only illuminated—or illustrated—letters in an age of darkness, but they also cut and bound the vellum pages that preserved Western literature. They copied works in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Writing from morning to evening with rest only on the Sabbath, these scribes were scholars.

Today, the scribe endures. Even after the invention of the printing press and the advent of the personal computer, we need them, the writers, the poets, the expenders of ink. Come to think of it, we may need them now more than ever. And we have them here—today's purveyors of the expressive written arts published in the premiere issue of Richland High School's student literary magazine...The Scribe!

SCOTT EVANS
CHIEF EDITOR



FICTION

DOWN

Wind—Kylie Tomlin
Fallen Leaves—Dylan Baldwin
A Fire In Dust—Tanner Jordan
The Willow Gully—Pemberly Farmer
Bricks—Deven Williams
Star Sailor—Stephanie Valenzuela
Drowning—Dallas Martin
The Confession—Connie Gellman
Legends of Synkronia—Natalie Harlos
Rain—Dylan Baldwin
The Choosing—Rylee Lockhart
Natural Light—George Nordstrom
Happy Anniversary—Madeline Ford
Pain Brings Revolution—Kim Sanchez
Natural Disasters—Malerie Haas



WIND

KYLIE TOMLIN

The wind blows us farther apart, almost as if it was on command. I see our school and my car and your bedroom all get thrown into each other in the sky, destroying any remnants of the once-powerful platonic love that lit these places bright as the only star in the night sky.

This tornado, this absolute whirlwind of devastation and freedom leaves no part of our lives untouched. We feel ourselves moving away from each other, but as we fight back, the wind grows stronger and stronger.

The wind has been separating us from each other for much longer than either of us realized. The wind blows in my face, spitting on me as if to declare victory. He laughs as if he can taste our defeat. He twirls and throws and dizzys us in mid air, toying until we drop. I look up at you thinking it's over, the storm has left and nothing remains to stand between us. I am wrong. I feel the wind pick up and my hair blowing every direction in my face. Dirt starts to go into my eyes, and I can't see.

A strong whirlwind knocks me to my knees, and I cup my eyes, calling for you. All I can hear is the grand symphony that is the roaring of the wind storm going past my ears. I can't hear if you reply. Exhausted, I hide myself, stop calling for you, and wait for the wind to stop. And I had no idea how calm it would be after the wind left, after he swept you away and far out past the horizon.

FALLEN LEAVES

DYLAN BALDWIN

Rush woke up, stretching his now-rested legs with a rather long yawn. He had slept like a log, not taking any heed to the loud drones of crickets and the idle trickling of the waterfall he was encamped next to. Unzipping his sleeping bag, he pulled on a pair of cargo pants, along with his warm fleece jacket. He undid his tent flaps and poked his head out into the wooded campsite.

Looking around the camp, he noticed that a fire was live in the small makeshift pit. The coals and embers were fresh, as if someone had been there. Rush wriggled out of his tent, putting on his boots in the process. He was out camping with two of his friends, Cass and June. They were nowhere in sight, which was odd. June was a morning person, always being the first up. Cass usually was up next, and then himself. Rush wasn't a morning person, not one bit. Maybe they went on a short hike? His brain contemplated. Rush approached the girls tent, noticing that the fly was undone and the tent door unzipped.

"Cass! June?" He called into the tent. His worry was starting to grow. Normally Cass left him a note or something, something to stave off his worries. Rush was a very anxious person, overthinking everything and letting it lead to full on panic attacks and hysteria.

"Cass!" Rush called out again, his voice echoing through the trees. With a shake of his head, he sighed. With a gentle hand, he pushed the flaps of the tent aside, revealing two empty sleeping bags. A trail of blood led out the back of the tent, which had been sliced open. Only one pair of footsteps were seen exiting the tent.

"Oh great..." He muttered aloud.

This day couldn't get any better, could it?

A FIRE IN DUST

TANNER JORDAN



Somewhere in the desert, a dust storm raged on with no sign of stopping.

A man, wary from days of traveling in these conditions, lumbered forward as if he were already dead. His goal was no less than twenty yards away, yet in the constant haze, it seemed as if it were miles.

After ten painstaking minutes of sham-bolic walking, he reached it — not the end of his journey, but what appeared to be the decrepit remains of an RV. To the man, this vehicle, half buried in sand and long abandoned, appeared to be an oasis in the constant heat and sand of the desert.

Crawling inside, the floor was covered in a thick layer of sand. He moved to the back of the RV and towards the last remaining window, which had been sandblasted so thoroughly that it was hardly usable as such, not that there would be anything to look at through it. The man set down his cargo and peeled off the gas mask which had been concealing his face. After checking his surroundings, he looked to his belongings and pulled out an ornately crafted pocket watch, a small notebook, and a pen, and he began writing.

“The time is six forty five pm and unfortunately I have lost track of the days. I swear

sometimes there is no difference between night and day out here. If I had to take a guess, I’ve been walking for seventeen or eighteen days, and I have enough rations to last me two weeks before I need to turn to the injection. In other news, the cargo seems to be in good condition it doesn’t seem to be rattling around in the case and it’s still ticking along, so I’ll just guess it’s still in working order rather than risk checking on it. I’m starting to wonder if I should turn back.”

After putting away the notebook, the man twisted one of the knobs on the pocket watch and placed it back into his coat pocket. Opening the bag on his hip, the man pulled out a small food bar labeled “Imperial Food Ration Bar” and a small case containing a standard issue injector and an eye patch. While eating, he checked the device and, after determining that it was still operational, hurriedly placed it back in its case before finishing his meal.

Early the next morning, an alarm rang out from inside the man’s coat, startling him awake. Pulling out the still ringing pocket watch, he twisted one of the knobs to stop the ringing before grabbing a compass from his coat pocket. The compass, in direct comparison with the pocket watch, appeared to be a cheap plastic

trinket held together with a piece of duct tape. Reorienting himself to resume his trek north, while lamenting how he almost forgot how a bed felt, he noticed that due west of him there appeared to be a small light flickering off in the distance, but as soon as he noticed it, it vanished into the dust.

Briefly stunned by this, he considered for a moment investigating, but eventually decided to instead write it off as another traveler who's journey he'd rather not get wrapped up in. As hours passed, he marched forward without stopping for rest or breath, instead continuing on until what little light there was began to dim. When the light reached a point of darkness where he could no longer make out his compass needle, he fell to the ground and began digging with what little equipment he had until he had dug a suitably deep hole to hide him from the constant sand storm.

Pulling out his journal and pocket watch, he began to write.

"The time is seven fifty eight and for the most part, it was just another day. For starters, I'm back to sleeping in holes with the added downside that I lost my shovel. The only other interesting thing about today was this morning I saw some sort of light in the distance. For once it seemed as if I'm not alone out here, although as the day went on, I found no evidence of anyone other than myself having existed out here. Perhaps I am finally beginning to lose my mind to this sand."

After putting away his journal and eating another ration bar, he set his alarm and settled down to head to sleep. Hours later, the man was awoken by his alarm but when checking the time, he noticed something was off. According to the watch, the time was two a.m.. Covered in dirt and surrounded by darkness, the man pulled himself out of the gravelike hole he dug, noticing that it had somehow gotten deeper. Rising to his feet, the man was almost blinded by a bright light shining off in

the distance. He began walking towards it, almost as if compelled by some outside force. With every step, the light grew dimmer and the wind grew more violent, starting as a light breeze and rising into a hurricane of dust and rocks. As he drew closer, he could hear the light humming softly. At first it seemed to be the wind or a trick of the mind, but as the wind picked up and overwhelmed his senses, he was still able to hear the humming all around him, as if it were ignoring the deafening sound of the wind all together.

Drawing closer, the man noticed the light was beginning to take shape around a single point. Coming to it, he found the light was coming from what appeared to be a small pyramid lying in the sand, emitting a dim glow. Moving in to pick it up, the man leaned over the pyramid but once he laid a finger on it, the pyramid let out a powerful blast, sending the man flying back into his hole, knocking him unconscious in the process.

The next morning the man awoke to the sound of his alarm. Pulling himself out of the hole, he checked the time, finding it to be five in the morning. Looking back to his hole, he saw not the modest hole he had gone to sleep in, but a massive hole that must have been at least six feet deep.

Checking his surroundings, he found no evidence of the pyramid in the direction he had gone during the night. Realizing something was wrong, the man jumped back into the grave and opened the cargo container. Pulling it out, he realized the containment unit he had been transporting had been activated. Gone was the constant dull ticking of the containers indicator, replaced now with a stream of radio static, brought forth by it's now active transmitter. It didn't take a fool to theorize what was in the container but the man would not risk it's integrity just to satiate a feeling of morbid curiosity.

Moving on, the man walked for what

seemed like hours until he noticed a large shape, obscured by the dust. Making his way towards it, the man noticed that this structure was much larger than the RV he had slept in previously. As he approached, the shadowy blur began to take shape and resemble a church of some sort, but as he came into clear view of the church, the man noticed it was the only building for miles, seemingly spared from the sand's wrath.

Entering the church, the man saw that its iconography consisted of bizarre esoteric images and twisted altars. Had he not been traveling for so long, he would have dismissed these depictions as heresy and left the church to be swallowed by the dust. But strangely, the man found a sort of unnatural comfort in these images. Sitting down in one of the pews, the man looked upon his surroundings with awe. On the walls and ceiling were murals depicting bizarre creatures alongside dark gods. As the man looked upon these images, he heard footsteps outside the church. A grim-faced man pushed the doors open and stomped into the building. Without saying a word, he marched forward and took a seat in the pew across from the weary traveler.

"You've come a long way to get here," the grim-faced man said sternly.

"I only found this place by accident, and besides I've still got other places to go," Responded the traveler.

"Nobody finds this place by accident, it's much too powerful for that."

"Who are you?"

"Someone who knows what this place is, and you?"

"I'm just a stranger."

"Anyways, I was wondering if you could assist me with something important."

The traveler paused for a moment, wondering if he should tell the Collector what he's seen.

"You see, I'm looking for something of

mine that I've lost. It can be rather dangerous at times, so it's extremely important that I get it back," the Collector said whilst looking over the traveler.

"Might have seen it back in the direction I came from." replied the traveler.

"It shouldn't be hard to miss, it's known to release massive amounts of energy without proper containment."

"I had a dream like that the other day."

"A dream?"

"Well I'm not sure what it was, it felt like a dream but I know I saw something."

"Can you describe what happened?"

"Well I woke up after everything got all wonky and I walked over to this weird pyramid thing that shot me back. Next thing I know, I'm waking up with back pain and an active containment unit."

"And when did this happen?"

"About a day ago I guess."

"Interesting, if it's capable of distorting time then I suppose it's possible," the Collector said to himself. "Do you mind if I take a look at that container you're carrying?"

"NO!" the traveler blurted out. "Uh- I mean I'd rather keep it with me, you know."

The grim faced man leaned in as his voice grew more intense.

"If I am correct in my assumption, then both of our lives could be in grave danger. I am aware of how you feel, but I will not be stopped by a man who cannot even remember the past three weeks!"

"Wh-what?"

"The incident you reported occurred over three weeks ago, and during that time you've been carrying the item in a substandard containment unit."

The traveler, shaken by the news, looked into his bag to find nothing but empty ration bar wrappers. Opening the injector's case, he found the injector loaded with an empty syringe and the eye patch that was once in the

case was now missing.

As the collector observed his actions the traveler ripped the gas mask off his face, finding the remains of his right eye being held in socket by the eye patch. Opening his journal, the traveler found three weeks worth of entries were garbled messes with paragraphs consisting of words arranged randomly and esoteric imagery littering the pages. Horrified, the traveler threw the book to the ground before turning to see the Collector standing over him, holding the containment unit.

Looking through the view port, the Collector said, "So you did have it. I guess the readings were accurate, although the fact that it keeps leading people here makes it easy to track, but it is rather problematic."

"What is that thing?"

"I already told you. It's my property. Is that not good enough for you?"

"No, I want to know what that thing is!"

"Is that why you picked it up, is that why you shambled through the desert for three weeks, is that why you came to rest in this church!"

"I walked through this desert so I could get that containment unit to the people who needed it."

"You think anyone would need such a small thing delivered in such a costly manner? Your journey was meaningless from the start."

"I know I came out here for a reason, there's no way I came all this way because some trinket told me to."

"You did, and on your way to this church, you've done a considerable amount of damage to both the pyramid and reality itself! Keeping the pyramid in such an insufficient container caused it to grow unstable, if it stays in this church any longer, it could tear a hole in reality, obliterating both our souls in the process!"

The traveler, with reality sinking in, thought of what he had gone through to get here and what this all meant to him. The traveler

was just someone, someone from a place that he had long forgotten over his journey, his origin was probably somewhere in the notebook, the same one he couldn't look at without feeling sick. Perhaps it didn't matter. It seemed neither of them cared much for the life he left behind.

Finding new resolve, the traveler wrenched a piece of metal off the heretical altar at the end of the room while the Collector had his back turned and marched toward the exit. Holding back a scream, the traveler lunged at the collector, stabbing him in the back before he could defend himself. The Collector fell to the ground and dropped the container, which broke open with the pyramid spilling out onto the ground. Falling into a blind rage, the traveler began to repeatedly stab the Collector until his body fell limp on the ground.

Standing over the corpse, the man felt no emotion at the act he had just committed. Dropping the metal shard, he walked forward to the pyramid as it began to crackle with energy. Voices from outside the church became panicked as whoever was outside realized what had happened and faintly, the man could hear the order to evacuate be given. The pyramid began to release a constant flow of energy as magenta bolts of lightning lashed out from the pyramid and crimson fire began to rise all around the man and the church. With his body burning, the man picked up the pyramid and turned to the altar at the back of the room. As the man began to shamble forward, the pyramid released more and more of its power, burning the man's skin and clothes.

Passing over the body in the middle of the room, the traveler heard screams outside. They were mixed with the sound of helicopters as, in the scramble to evacuate soldiers, many were left abandoned and injured. Eventually, as the pyramid began to resonate more violently, even the dead began to scream, beginning with the body on the floor letting out an

inhuman wail.

Stumbling toward the altar, the man was stripped of his flesh and organs as his skeletal hands gripped the pyramid tightly. Moving forward as flesh gave way to bone, the man placed the pyramid down on the altar where it reached the climax of its release. As the man's soul was wrenched from his body and eviscerated by the pyramid, its purpose was

fulfilled as a hole in the fabric of reality was ripped open. The pyramid, in a final act of self destruction, expelled all of its remaining energy, stabilizing the tear and embedding it in the planet itself.

As the dust storm began to clear, the tear could be seen from orbit as a gash on the planet's surface, letting loose unknowable horrors upon the universe.



THE WILLOW GULLY

PEMBERLY FARMER

I was, more or less, just trying to escape them and the house for an hour or two. What better way than jogging, right? Coach Simmons told me I have chicken bones, anyway.

I only had an old pair of running shoes, which had been Ian's before me and some distant cousin's before him. The brand was faded and the color of mud. Regardless, they'd do for some "me" time. Matilda wasn't home yet, and I was pretty sure Ian wouldn't miss me, so on went the shoes and a windbreaker. In hindsight, I probably should've worn socks and some sweatpants because my feet started chafing, and it was cold.

It wasn't technically raining, but at twelve thousand feet above sea level, it's either sunny and cold or almost raining and cold in September. I almost went back inside our stuffy excuse for a cabin. Instead, I pulled up the hood and zipped up my windbreaker all the way to the collar and before I knew it, I was already bounding up the trail on the winding foothills and into the trees. Even through the woods the freezing drops of almost-rain made it to my face, not wanting to miss out on the sting.

There was nowhere else to go jogging than the track around the high school, but

that was almost a mile down the foothills, and I wasn't too eager to watch the team practicing without me. I already watched them enough. So, it was either bike back down and be subjected to your lack of friends, or try to keep on the faded path in the woods. And that's what I was doing before I realized I was actually doing it.

I quickly figured out that, about two-ish miles into the alpine trees, the woods stopped being woods. Soon, I stopped feeling the freezing rain pelt my face and simply thought it had stopped, but then I was the one to stop. There was no sky above me. Canopies of pine, aspen, and oak obstructed the view of anyone and probably any squirrel that didn't have a machete on it.

Whoops.

I wasn't about to let myself become some pretentious protagonist lost in the forest, though. When in doubt, choose something and stick to it.

I found this huge tree that was easy to remember if I happened to stumble by it again, since I had decided to leave the path after my first mile. I think it had probably been a really big spruce, who knows how old. It looked like there had been a fire or it was split unevenly by lightning. It was mostly gray with these charred spots, but what was strange were the shoots of

green branches jutting out of the split. Maybe there was another young tree growing from the middle of the dead one. It was out of place but I didn't think much of it at the time — that tree was the only one with any sign of fire out of the entire surrounding area. Regardless, I made a mental note of the tree's location and sped past it. Why I was still running and not trying to focus on remembering my surroundings, who knows. You're not you when you're hungry for adventure. According to my watch, I'd reached almost four miles, though, and to me that was more interesting than the lack of path I had seen in the past half hour.

Leaves crunched beneath ragged sneakers until they didn't. A skid and a flailing and at last, a crunch. The leaves weren't the only thing that crunched. For the next three minutes, I may have shouted some expletives and convinced myself I hadn't really broken my spine before I noticed what I had, quite literally, stumbled on.

The sky held patches of blue and gray above me. It was still half-raining, but I didn't care about the sting of the cold at the moment. I didn't think I'd made it back, but it was really weird for there to be such a large clearing in such a dense forest. That, and it didn't look new or man-made. It wasn't quite a hole in the ground, it was too wide. There was a pond near the center next to the biggest willow tree I've ever seen. I was hesitant at first to stand up because my spine obviously might have been broken, but I did anyway. It really was a big tree. Not near as big as most of the conifers that surrounded the place, but huge for all the willows I'd seen back when we lived in Missouri.

The crater thing was expansive, too. Large enough for sloping hill-cliffs that made me wonder how I was going to get back up, and big enough for this enormous tree and its own little pond. The pond was green like you'd expect a pond to be, but I could see to the

bottom. There were little rocks that sparkled with bits of silver. That made sense out of everything else, because there are silver mines not too far from the valley. I knew a kid who worked there on weekends. There were little fish in the pond, too, but I couldn't tell how they could've gotten there because there was no creek feeding into it. The willow was even cooler up close. It had some sort of etchings in it, like the kind you see on aspen trees on public property that people have carved into over the years. The carvings on this tree didn't exactly look man-made, but they could've been faded.

However strange the scenery was in there and however much it fascinated me, I eventually decided it was more worth my time to escape it than uncover its secrets. I had a project due tomorrow that I couldn't turn it in from the middle of a forest. It took me a whole fifteen minutes to devise a way out of the crater, because the sides were so steep. Eventually I came across some boulders that I have continued to use to get in and out.

It was my fault that I hadn't looked at my watch since I had been jogging, so once I was finally out of the gully my eyes popped out of my head at the time.

5:56pm.

Matilda would actually bury me if I wasn't home before she was. Ian probably wouldn't care if I died out here, but he would for sure rat me out, so I took off running where I saw the trees becoming less dense. Lucky for me, it was still September, and the sun wouldn't go behind the mountains until after 6:30. Once the trees became more sparse, I could crane my neck to see the peaks colored dust red above the treeline from the setting sun. As long as I made my way south of the mountains, I would reach the edge of the woods soon. Hopefully.

I started keeping more of an eye on my feet this time. I didn't want another trip and fall into a hole in the middle of the forest. Gosh,

these shoes were not fit for running. If I actually made the lacrosse team in two weeks, I'd have to save up for some new ones. Getting on to the team would be harder in two weeks, though. Coach Simmons already had a set group and is giving the rest of the potential players time to "prove themselves", which I took to mean he just wants a day to laugh at our noble efforts and proceed to crush dreams.

Which wasn't far from the truth.

But I didn't want this position just for the athletic credit.

In all honesty, I wanted a spot on the lacrosse team to be somebody. Not for the friend group or clout, or for the preppy uniforms (whatever that means), but to be part of a team, playing a sport, being somebody besides who I've always been. I didn't want to be Ian's twin. I didn't want to be Haven who was bad at football. I didn't want to be "I thought you were a girl when I heard your name." I didn't want people to assume they're looking at a doormat when they know my name and where I've come from. I've never acted a pushover that I can remember, but people never ask. They assume.

There was the clearing. I knew this one.

I finally emerged from the woods (after almost three hours). 6:15. Not bad.

I could even see our house down in the foothills. Ian must have been using the stove, because I could see smoke rising from the chimney. Why not run down?

Running down didn't go well. Foothills aren't really hills, they're basically small mountains without peaks, and I knew that, but didn't take the path. So, I ended up sliding down rock and dead grass and probably some poison ivy and stinging nettles, and I ended up "home" at 6:25. I'd had that crappy Walmart watch with the blinking red digits for three years. Since we started this charade of moving houses. But it was solar powered, so I never had to worry about the time unless

it was really cloudy or nighttime. Which is most of the time in the mountains.

I took off the crappy watch and the crappy shoes and walked barefoot over the pebbles to the back door. The doorknob only jiggled when I attempted to turn it. The curtains weren't open when I checked, so either Ian locked the door for the first time ever and forgot I'd been out, or he knew exactly what he was doing. I walked up the steep soil to the side of the cabin and hauled myself up by a window box. Our room was on the second level. I aimed at the porthole-style window and chucked the shoes in my hand as hard as I could at it. It opened almost immediately and I stared back at my face.

Except it wasn't my face, exactly. The blue eyes of Rillian laughed at me before his voice did and that's when I realized how ridiculous I looked. I was still clutching the window box beneath me, probably killing whatever Matilda was trying to grow in it before the first snow came around. It was going to die soon, anyway. "You'll never make the team with that arm, those barely scratched the window!"

"You're not going to ask me why I was gone for three hours? I would've thought that's what you were going to start off with."

"Well I could, but the fact that you're hanging off of Matilda's flowers by your toes right now and she's pulling into the driveway, I'd consider you one dead man and that's all I need to know."

Before I could even ask him to haul me in the window, he was out of the room. From the angle I was at, I was pretty sure Matilda couldn't see me destroying what used to be morning glories from her old green car. My sister worked at the library downtown in the valley three days a week and at the ski shop up the mountain the other three, plus Sundays off. She had been in college for a bachelor's a couple years ago, but that all went south when she became Ian's and my legal guardian.

It was really nice of her to skip college just to not make us move to Canada with some estranged great aunt.

Even if she loved us enough to do that, she did not love me as much as these flowers and I was pretty sure Ian wasn't too far from the truth about me being a dead man. So with much struggle and several splinters I managed to haul myself up and through the porthole window and into a three-week-old pile of laundry. Gross, but better than death by flowers.

So I sat down on the bottom bunk barefoot, splinters in my arms, and pine needles on almost every inch of my being. And a sort of wonder I hadn't felt since first grade when I was sure the odd noises the drain filtration system was making meant there was a dragon in it. A dangerous, probably stupid sort of wonder, but one I was going to do anything to satiate anyway.

My arm wasn't too badly cut back then, and I did figure out that dragons don't live in drains, or if they do, they don't burn the arms of children.

Normally, I'd have sat on my bottom bunk and shoved my head in my hands and asked myself why I'd been so stupid and that I was lucky to not be in trouble. But this time was a little different. I wasn't unscathed, and I didn't really experience any sort of rush and didn't feel more alive than usual, but there was a purpose for me to go back into that forest. I wanted to. In fact, I couldn't wait to go on another escapade in there. When I refocused on my filthy footprints that littered the hardwood floor, I noticed I had been smiling, and on the back of my windbreaker among the brown pine needles, there was a green frond from a willow. That's all the proof I needed, and Matilda stormed into the room with questions about the window box on the west side of the house to find me smiling amidst the laundry. She promptly threw up her hands and walked

out, shouting something about replacing the soil before the first snow.

My eyes turned back toward the still-open porthole, where the same rain that had frozen my face almost four hours ago spun its way onto the wood floor. I had just climbed through there. After running through a forest on my own, and finding a place that didn't seem like anyone else knew about. I did. I fell and slid down the rocky side of a crater, and touched the biggest willow tree I've ever seen. I got back out and found my way home again.

I looked down at the watch in my hands, discolored from sun-bleaching and three years of nervous sweat. If I could do that today, I could get back there tomorrow. I looked past the window and the rain and even the foothills. Somewhere past the first rows of trees and somewhere closer than the rust-colored slopes of the snowless peaks was a place that I found. And for the first time since I've been alone, I felt like I could call myself what my mother named me. Haven.



BRICKS

DEVEN WILLIAMS

Clack. There is a man by
Clack the name of adam, Clack
who for the life Clack of him,
could Clack not keep his hands
to Clack his self. Little Clack
patience do I have for Clack
someone who acts as such,
and I Clack was sure to have
Clack him know. Clack Little
though did Clack he care for my
words, so Clack little in fact he
struck me there. Clack I am not
a man Clack of great violence
I've said Clack before, and a
liar of myself I've Clack made.
Do not in your right mind strike
a Mason. Clack. Clack. Clack.

STAR SAILOR

STEPHANIE VALENZUELA

The ship has been set and ready to go, right now they're about to make history, something never done by mankind! Oh the excitement that flowed through them. They had been preparing for so long. They had their suits and nets ready.

Kyle and Alex were on their way to space to explore the great unknown. More importantly, they were being sent by their friends to catch and bring back stars, yes stars. A tough mission, but Alex agreed to go. He's a big fan of space after all, he wouldn't pass up such an opportunity. Kyle had volunteered to go along with him. He thought how cool he would look when he mentioned to his cousins how he had the chance to go to space. They were also the smartest amongst their group of friends, so having them two go was the best choice.

Once they were on the ship, Kyle turned to Alex, "You know the word astronaut comes from the greek words star and sailor," declared Kyle while waving the catching net in his hand towards Alex, who seemed rather curious by the statement. Kyle continued, "We should be called star sailors since we are going to catch stars for the gang, it makes more sense, plus I think it sounds cooler." Alex brought his hand to his chin, humming. He nodded his head. "Yeah it does sound cooler," he replied. He turned to face Kyle, standing up straight and mighty. Kyle was taken back from the sudden action, though he did the same, trying to level the height between them, but at last Kyle was much shorter than Alex.

"Star Sailor Kyle, are you ready for take off?"

Smiling Kyle responded, "Yes Star Sailor Alex!"



DROWNING

DALLAS MARTIN

There is a girl and she is drowning. There is a cat and it is drowning. She tries to save it over herself, but the waves won't stop coming. There is a house at the end of the street. It is flooding. There is a girl trying to stop the water. She is drowning. There is a couple, dragging each other deeper and deeper into the water. They are drowning each other. There is a girl trying to save them, but the water stops her. She is drowning. There are friends in a boat on the water trying to pull the girl up. She can't swim anymore. She is drowning. There is a girl trying to save everyone but herself. The weight is pulling her deeper and deeper into the water. She is drowning. There is a girl almost to the top of the water, so close to the top. There is a girl unable to pull herself all the way out of the water. She is drowning. So close to the top, she stops trying to make it. The waves crash and crash over her. She is drowning. There is a girl watching the ones she loves drowning. There is a girl saving them over herself, but still she is drowning. There is a girl who finally makes it to the top of the water. She did it, she stopped everyone and herself from drowning in the water. There is a girl who thinks she is free from the water. There is a girl being dragged back into the water. She is drowning once again. There is a girl looking up at the people she loves. They are safe, but she is still being pulled deeper and deeper into the water until finally, she drowns. She has drowned. Everyone she saved is now back to drowning with no one to save them.

THE CONFESSION

CONNIE GELLMAN

I confess that I've succumbed to the Whispers of the Warp, but what choice did I truly have? Within the Imperium, if you are not useful in labor or seen as a "degenerate" you're either executed or cast into the shadows. Humanity is supposed to shine in our Emperor's light, but he does not shine upon those he deemed to be the lessers of Humanity. The mutant, the queer, the disabled, the ugly, the lame, the poor, and the colored. Through his doctrine, he has allowed the powers of chaos to grow in ways he never would have imagined, and as his poisoned legacy sits atop a dilapidated throne with the blood of innocents sacrificed poured into his rotting jaws, he supposedly protects us from Chaos. As he sits as a corpse on that throne, the rest of Humanity suffers, through religious zealotry, ignorance, and power mankind plummets further and further into decay and ruin. Those who we are told protect us do not even consider our lives worthy of meaning, as we die in the millions in pointless skirmishes. Humanity languishes in a galaxy that is poised to devour us, and all our "guardians" do is keep us in line and wait for the opportunity to burn the next world that steps away from the Emperor's Holy Light. Yet I have found an even greater light, one where I may live my life as I please. They promise me great pain for even greater pleasure, but no pain will ever amount to the pain of the shackles the Emperor placed upon me at birth. I have become the heretic many fear, but under my new goddess I've realized my full potential greater than anything the Imperium could've offered me. The Emperor's Light is blinding and harsh, but her light is serene and loving.



LEGENDS OF SYNKRONIA

NATALIE HARLOS

A variation of sorts exists upon Their initial upbringing, as written by many other High Priests before me. However, this variation, I must say, is certainly the most accurate as it is a first person account from that of myself, and my proof of such exists within the crystal I currently house in the Temple of Chorus. This crystal, once thought to be lost to the Mayhems, was found by the Lyricist and returned to its rightful place in the center of the main chamber floor. The knowledge of all known history and legends of this once eerily silent land has now been placed open to the public. But for those who are unable to fully harness and understand its knowledge, or visit the crystal, I have taken it upon myself to share the rich history and stories of this land with all through writing. I only hope that this is found useful enough for one to pursue ways of spreading this for everyone to receive and roost on for further motivation of life.

-High Priest of Synkronia: 2000 P.W.-present David Y. Lollabot

For centuries, many have deemed Him the God of fire, flame, war, victory, adversity, and many other similar nomenclature. All names that are but His. But if these are not his name, then what may it be? Why has no one else kept account of this? What exactly, then, is it that was so significant to humanity that gave him such standing?

Before man began to take account of history, the first Lyricist had given birth to her first of four sons. He was born into darkness, no light, no distinguishable features, there was nothing. However, when his first cry rang throughout the abyss, his frail form emanated a deep golden glow of luminous rays before combusting into a soft, orange flame. His mother was startled by this new component of life, but she was nevertheless more proud of her son as it was then she knew he was destined for something better than that of another poor, lingering, lost soul amongst the surface. He was also the first being to be seen, and was what gave all of humanity the ability to see others and distinguish individuals.

When he was merely a toddler, he had created a ball made from his own fire that he would play with. His truest desire, however, was to use it to someday put light in the sky and allow everyone to see the beauty that he could with his own light. So it was from then on, he would practice in the darkness, throwing anything he could find to strengthen

his arm enough to pitch it into the great beyond and light the world. But as he got older, the ball began to expand as well, making it more difficult to play with and throw. The young god began to ponder as to what he could do in the meantime to maybe ease the people into sight, so he tried to take the ground and form it, but he was still too weak. He went to his mother for guidance as to what to do.

“My sweet mother, I want to share my gift with the people, but I can not because I am too weak to lift the ground and play with my ball. I can’t seem to get any stronger,” he pleaded.

“My brilliant son, you are right. You are but a child, you could never raise the ground or lift the ball...yet,” she replied sweetly.

“Yet? What do you mean?”

“I mean, you have yet to reach your full potential. You are very weak now, but if you keep working and let your passion ignite your heart, then you can most certainly give us the light you possess.” And he took that personally.

Many years had passed and he was a young man at this point. After several years of training and throwing, he had grown four times from his previous stature and had grown strength enough to form fiery mountains, heating and gently lighting the earth with its powerful glow of the constantly flowing lava. The world was only candescent and still did not have enough light. Despite the god’s great strength, he was still far from strong enough to hurl this now

fairly large ball of light into the sky. He had then taken this opportunity to build his largest mountain yet, Mount Candezxen, to house this great energy.

But as he built this great mountain, the fires beneath the earth became restless as the weight of the ball had become too much for the crust to hold. The light began to sink into the ground. The god tried to save it, using all strength he could muster and more to keep from losing this precious item, before losing it forever to the depths of the planet. As the ball sank, magma from the deepest part of terra had erupted from the mount and gave way to the creation of a man made of the molten rock beneath. His eyes cracked open, leading on a terrible red glow of a low fire. The man took movement stiffly as his limbs broke from immobility and gave way to a curdling cry of anger and despair. Thus was born the Hellfire Mayhem. The hardened shell of ash had broken away and revealed a being with smoking scales, and talons of deep crimson. Its wings a pure golden hue that took on the appearance of fresh molten rock. Its horns curved round the top of its mighty jaw. Its massive form was still far from the fearsome demeanor within that of its bright scarlet eyes.

The Mayhem then began to wreak havoc upon the small population of the civilization. His mother was nowhere to be found, as she was vulnerable to this demon's power; she had only just given birth to his youngest brother. Even still, he continued to worry about his lack thereof of strength and patience.

"How could this happen? None of this would have ever happened if I just trained harder, or if I just waited until I was ready. I shouldn't...I shouldn't have tried to store the ball. It was made for the sky, not the ground. I just—"

Then in the midst of his grief, his second younger brother screamed for him.

"Brother, this is no time for grief or pity.

Now is the time for you to help us!" he shouted from afar.

"Precious youth, do not waste your breath on me! I am no more worthy to be your brother than the light was to be in the ground. I am too weak to protect you. Now escape, go! Mother can not make it to safety without you," he cried to the young lad.

"Brother of light, fire, and fight! I call to you in aid, and only now did you turn me away because of your personal squalor! You were the first light to be born, and you created more to share with the newly formed mortal race amongst us. And you're too weak? You raised the earth to unimaginable heights, moved literal mountains and raced valleys, you brought fire to the surface to illuminate the ground we walk and still can not find your strength?"

Tears ran down the young boy's face as the Mayhem behind continued to destroy the fiery vulcan field behind the god.

"For the sake of our mother, for the sake of these people, and for mine, destroy this monster, please! He torments the innocent souls I thought you cared so deeply for."

The young god shed a hot tear of molten gold.

"My young brother, I will not fail you. I swear it that once this beast lies far in the depths, I shall redeem myself and throw the light into the sky," the god promised.

The young boy smiled, but ran back in horror when the Hellfire Mayhem took place close behind the god. He turned around to face the brute, determined to either destroy it, or seal it back into the fiery pits from whence it came. The Mayhem breathed its fiery breath directly at the young god, reducing him to ashes...or so it thought. As the fire ceased, the Mayhem stood in awe of the man before him still burning, but not in writhing pain. The fire on his body extinguished suddenly.

He grabbed the ground beside him and managed to obtain a large chunk of obsidian

the size of a human man and bashed it into the form of a crude blade. He ran at the beast, lifting the weapon over his head in intent to throw, and the Mayhem began to move. But as it moved, he brought the blade down to his side and jumped in the direction in which the Mayhem moved and crushed its skull with a downward smash of both his hands atop its awful head. It screeched a nightmarish call of anguish, but was not defeated. As it stumbled disoriented, he opened the ground beneath it, creating a gash in the earth that led all the way down the light in the center of the world.

The beast fell, screaming the whole way down, its blood staining the muddied rock on the crust. He then mended the ground back to its original state. He took his blade high over his head, tired and dirty from the extrenuous battle. He yelled across the land, exclaiming his victory over the monster.

The mountains that surrounded him erupted at his cry. His hair turned to flame, his eyes to gold, and his body obtained a red hue with a soft glow. He grew taller than his own mountains. He took his now dagger and stabbed it into the ground where the Mayhem once stood.

The soil cracked, the land quaked, and a crown of gold and obsidian emerged from the mountain before him that had once held his ball of light. He took notice and went to grab it, weary and weak, but halted before it.

He remembered back to his promise, and decided such a gift was undeserved until he had done what he wanted to do from the beginning.

He clenched his hands in front of his face before concentrating the heat from his body into light between his fists. It rapidly grew to the size of the ball he had lost. The weight, however, did not phase him. He spun in prep of his momentum, then effortlessly flung the light into the sky where it stopped after hitting the darkness above, lighting the

world and turning the sky from red to bright blue and white.

He turned to face the crowd beneath him that he now towered over. They cheered, grateful and joyous for their safety and sight. He couldn't help but smile and be proud of his work. His mother had climbed the broken mount to see her son. The crown rested on the side of the mountain awaiting its wearer. He went to face her and take the gift the planet gave him for his ultimate victory. The woman kissed her son's nose. His second younger brother grinned from ear to ear in gratitude of the god, and king of the volcanic fields of present day Synkronia. And it was here when his name mattered most as the savior of the First Calamity, the God of Fire, Flame, Victory, Sun, Battle, and so on. But the name the people cried in celebration was the name of their king and light, Torvocmel.



RAIN

DYLAN BALDWIN

It was a rather cold evening, the days activities having been spent on the couch and at the desk. I was sitting in front of the sofa, with my back to the cushions, being sick of sitting on the settee and doing nothing.

It had started to rain, the gentle serenade of water hitting the roof of the house soon met my ears. The TV made a gentle background of white noise, the channel unknown. Course, I was too tired to care anyways.

I reached up to the couch behind me, my hands searching for a pillow so that I could rest my heavy head. Coming up fruitless, they reluctantly returned to their posts on my legs.

The bark of a dog broke my plain of lazy thought. My dog, specifically. She seemed to be after something in the yard again, this being a usual occurrence with her, and most dogs, really. My mother was sitting in her recliner, by the backdoor. Dad was in the shower, and the faint whistles of a tune unfamiliar to my brain was mixed in with the monotonous sounds of the TV.

My dog, Oreo was a black lab blue heeler mix, a big bundle of hyper terror that reigned over the backyard, attacking anything that came in to it's borders with loud barks, growls, and the occasional bite. Course, this only really happened with animals; to people she was a loveable ball of joy that adored attention. She had to stay inside at night, because if we let her out all night, she would keep the whole neighborhood up, which would be an HOA complaint, and possibly a city citation. We didn't want that, so between the hours of about 10pm and 6-8am, Oreo found her place inside the house, in a crate in the living room. This also gave the animals of the yard some time to build up their defenses before she was let out to go back to her usual daily routines.

Some time passed, and soon more yips and yaps of Oreo broke the serene silence. With a frustrated huff, mom stood, walking to the door. "Stupid yappy dog..." she muttered. Mom had also had a long day, spending it cleaning and doing paperwork for the family business.

The curtain was drawn back, and the light outside was flipped on. More barking ensued and in reply, my mother roughly knocked on the glass of the backdoor. The barks stopped for a second and quickly returned.

The deadbolt was thrown open in exasperation, and the door was roughly handled open. There was a scuffle, and my mother was pushed out of the way as a big black beast ran into the house, covering the carpet in mud and filth. I could hear the scratching of claws on carpet and the loud heavy pants of doom.

“Get her, Dylan!” Mom yelled, though I was too tired to stand. My eyes were barely open as I saw a black mound head towards my post. My brain begged me to stand, run, or at least protect myself, but my body was too tired to obey its commands.

As the shadow came upon me, my mind was screaming with more commands of flight instincts. A wet tongue attacked my face, along with my neck, and then I felt something rest onto my legs. A thumping tail beat the carpet beside me.

Oreo had found her place, her reign of soggy wet terror ending with the warm comforting legs of her master. Of course, now her master was sopping wet too, along with cold, but it didn't matter, I was happy for the company.

I gave my mother a stupid grin, patting Oreo on the head, only managing to muster two words from my exhausted lips.

“Got her.”

My mother sighed and shrugged, too tired to argue. She closed up the door and returned to her chair, and the house returned to normal.

Other than the sopping wet dog resting on my legs, of course.

At least she wasn't barking, now.



THE CHOOSING

RYLEE LOCKHART



“Hailey get up you need to be in the council room in an hour,” I hear as I open my eyes, seeing the golden sun beam through my window past my sheer white curtains onto my wall.

I look over and my mom is standing at my door, clearly frustrated with me, so I get up and start to get dressed. I look in the mirror and see myself in my flowing, short, sage green dress with my golden blonde hair curled and pinned up, and I take a deep breath before heading to the council room with my mother.

This is the first time I’m entered into the draw, since I just turned sixteen, and I worry it will be me.

All the fear and anxiety disappears, though, when I see Taylor; the love of my life, with her dark brown hair and piercing blue eyes that I just fall into.

“Hailey come stand by me,” Taylor says, looking at me sweetly, I go and stand by her and give her a soft kiss.

“Are you worried?” I ask her holding her hand

“Not really are you?” she asks.

I look down at my feet and feel a lump in my throat. I try to swallow it, then I feel her soft hands lift my chin

“It’s okay, it won’t be you.” She gives me a kiss then we hear the mayor start to speak.

“Today is a very special day for our town, today we give a gift to the universe for good fortune in the year.” He smiles brightly and I hear claps all around us as he continues his speech. I can’t help but think “what if it’s me?” and how messed up this tradition is. I look over to Taylor and whisper, “What if we just leave what if we run away together and leave this town behind and start a life together without all of this?”

She just kind of smiles and laughs softly as if she’s dismissing the idea

“That’s crazy Hailey, we will be fine.”

She squeezes my hand and I look back at the mayor.

“Okay, you know the drill. Are there any volunteers for the game?”

He looks around the room and as always, nobody volunteers.

“Alright, then it’s time for the draw.”

He sticks his hand in the big bowl of names and pulls one out. I hold my breath and start shaking as I feel my heart pounding

“The participant in this year’s game is…”

I feel my heart sink, I collapse to the ground and can’t hold back my tears anymore

“It will all be okay. I promise, you can still get out of this if you win,” Taylor says as she’s holding me on the ground as everyone stares at me.

“Nobody has ever won in the 50 years of this game. You’re so stupid if you think I will win,” I scream at Taylor.

She continues to hold me and stroke my hair. “You will win I know it,” she says softly.

Everyone starts to leave the council room and I go talk to the mayor to see what I have to do.

“You have until dawn to prepare for the game. As always, if you survive until midnight tomorrow, you win. If you don’t, your body is gifted to the universe. Good luck.”

He puts his hand on my shoulder then walks away. I look over and see my mother in shock just standing there. I walk over to her and we walk home together in silence.

After dinner I go to my room to prepare. I gather a pack of water, snacks, rope, and extra clothes just in case then I hear a knock at my door. I open the door and see my mother standing there with a trunk.

“This is for you.”

She drops it in my room and leaves without another word. I open the trunk and see knives, guns, and extra supplies that may help me. I get a handgun and put it on my bed and grab a hunting knife and put it in my pack. I keep looking in the trunk and grab supplies to make a trap and supplies for shelter. Once I have my pack ready, I hear a knock on my window. I look over and see Taylor. I open the window and let her in and she gives me a kiss.

“You will win I know you will,” she says.

“I won’t. We both know it. Look at me, I am going to be so easy to find,” I say as I feel a lump in my throat

“I have to believe you will I can’t live without you.

She starts crying as well.

“Lets run away before the game starts we

can start a new life.”

“They will find us.”

“Not if we go straight for the woods and don’t stop.”

“We can’t go, you know that.”

“Please,” I look up at her and kiss her. “I know we can do this”

“Let’s just lay together for the night.”

We lay together and hold each other like it would be the last time, because it might. Once Taylor goes to sleep, I crawl out of the bed and get dressed. I put on a black shirt and black jacket with black jeans and put my hair up. I get my pack and put the gun in my waistband. I head for the door then look over at Taylor and give her one last kiss before I disappear into the night.

I take one last look at my house and run into the woods near my house.

I’ve had a hiding place since I was six years old and I made sure nobody knew about it. I run deep into the woods and find the broken branch that I used as a marker for my hiding spot. I run behind the tree and start to climb until I get into the thick leafy part of the tree where I’m sure nobody could see me from below. I tie myself to the branch so I don’t fall and I sit and wait. Hours go by, and every now and then, I hear people yelling for others to find me but I feel safe where I am.

I haven’t seen anybody yet, and it’s around noon, so I grab my pack and open it and grab a water and a granola bar to eat to keep my energy up. I slowly open the package to keep the crinkling noise soft so nobody hears me. As I take a bite, I look down and see someone looking around the area I’m in and I freeze. I don’t make a move. I don’t even take a breath. I just stare and pray that they keep moving.

I see her dark hair whip around as she’s looking around like she knows I’m near. She has a small hunting knife in her hand and a gun on her hip; that’s when I realize who it is.

Taylor is below me looking for me. I knew

she would have to look but I never thought she would actually try to kill me.

I cover my mouth to stop from crying as I remember how I met her. It was three years ago. We were in school and I bumped into her in the hall. We fell to the ground and as soon as I looked at her, I knew she was the one for me. We are meant to be and everyone knows it.

So, seeing her now looking for me to kill me makes me wonder if it was just me feeling all this.

The next thing I know she looks up at me with those piercing blue eyes and perfect porcelain skin and my heart sinks.

“Hailey I’m so sorry,” she says a tear running down her face.

“Please help me you don’t have to do this,” I say, sobbing.

She pauses. I see a short boy around my age with thick shaggy brown hair and dark eyes run up to her.

“What are you doing here? We have to look for the girl,” he says, pushing Taylor a little

“She’s not just some girl. she’s my girlfriend.”

“You know we have to kill her”

“I know I just needed a minute, does anyone have any leads?”

“No not yet we need all eyes on the lookout,” he says dismissively.

“Okay. I’ll be a couple more minutes.”

“Fine, just don’t dawdle,” he huffs, and stomps away and twirls his knife into its holster.

“Why did you do that?” I ask Taylor, tears flowing down my face, my heart pounding out of my chest

“Because I love you Hailey.”

She wipes a tear.

“I’ll be back at nightfall and we can go away together someplace where nobody will find you...I love you so much.”

She blows a kiss and runs away towards the town.

“I love you too,” I whisper as she leaves.

I sit in the tree trying to contain myself as I hear people screaming at Taylor for stopping to look for me. I fear for her. The people of our town don’t do well with people who disobey.

I watch the sun start to set and I prepare my things for Taylor to come get me. That’s when I hear a man with a deep voice barking at people “FIND HER!” he yells, “WE ONLY HAVE SIX HOURS UNTIL SHE’S PARDONED WE CANNOT LET THAT HAPPEN PEOPLE NOBODY IN THE HISTORY OF THIS TRADITION HAS EVER BEEN PARDONED.”

It’s like I could hear the vein in his head popping out. Who would’ve thought the little blonde sixteen year old girl could live through this. I smile. For once since I got picked, I believe I’m going to live through this.

I sit and wait for Taylor to come get me then I see her run to the tree. I slowly climb down and once I get to the ground, I hug her tightly.

“I knew you would be here for me,” I say.

“How could I not be?” she says “You’re the love of my life.”

I let her go then kiss her

“We should get going.”

I pick up my pack and then I feel her grab me into another embrace.

“I’m sorr,” she whispers into my ear.

Then, I feel a sharp pain in my neck and everything goes black.

I hear talking but cannot open my eyes.

“when should we wake her up?”

“I think we should let her wake up on her own.”

“What if she doesn’t wake up before midnight? Its almost 11.”

“It will be fine”

“Tradition is that the sacrifice has to be awake for the ceremony”

“Fine we will wait”

I feel rope holding my arms and legs across a table and I realize I have to think of something, and quick, to get out of this.

I only have to live for one hour.

How could I get out of these ropes? Then I remember I put a small knife under my sleeve. I move my hand slightly and feel the cold plastic of the handle against my wrist.

They didn't check my body, which means my gun in my waistband is probably still there as well.

“I think I saw her move,” I hear a voice say. The voice seems familiar, a little too familiar. Then I realize it's Taylor's voice.

I feel my heart shatter as I remember I'm here because of her. How could she do this to me? I thought she loved me I don't understand.

“Lets just go eat. She will still be here when we come back we tied her good,” I hear the voice of the mayor say.

I then hear various murmurs and okays then footsteps fading away. As I hear the last of the footsteps, I open my eyes and look around. They all left. I know I have limited time before they come back and I need to hurry. I twist my hand to where I can grab the knife from my sleeve and once I do, I start to cut at the rope. I cut through the first rope and then I work on the others.

Once I'm free, I look around for my pack and that's when I see the short boy who I saw earlier with Taylor. As soon as I see him, I run up to him and cover his mouth so he doesn't scream for the others.

One hand is over his mouth and my other hand holds the knife to his throat.

“I'm sorry but it's you or me,” I say as tears roll down my face and I slide the blade over his neck and his blood covers my hands. I start to run away and as I hit the treeline, I hear screams and I knew they found the boy's body.

body.

I had no choice, I say to myself over and over, trying to convince myself.

So many thoughts race through my mind. I just want to scream, but I know there's no time for that.

I look at my watch and see that it's 11:30. I have thirty minutes until I can come back, so I go into a tree and wait and hope.

The next thing I know, I see who else but Taylor.

I jump out of the tree to face her.

“Why did you do this?” I ask, knife in my hand, still stained with the boys blood

“Why did you?” she asks looking at the knife

“I wouldn't have had to if you didn't turn me in,” I say crying. “You betrayed me.”

“I had to I'm sorry,” she says tears falling from her eyes.

“I love you.”

“And I love you,” she says before screaming, “GUYS SHE'S-”

I watch as her body falls to the ground.

I sob as I kiss her forehead.

“I'm so sorry I had no choice,” I say, and then I run into the night and find a street out of town.

So many thoughts run through my head as I feel all my emotions flow out, tears streaming down my face.

I find a pond near me and I sink my hands into it and roughly try to wash the blood off my hands.

I start to sob harder and harder. I look over and I see a bus stop on the road and I run and get on it.

As I sit in the seat, I watch the clock tick to midnight.

“I win,” I whisper to myself as the whole day runs through my head over and over.

I realize this night changed me, this night changed everything, my life will never be the same. I have to live with everything I did for

the rest of my life.

After being on the bus for hours, I get off in a new town.

This is where I start over. Everything changes I can be whoever I want, like that night never happened.

I will never forget Taylor.

She will live forever in my head as the one who will always be mine.



NATURAL LIGHT

GEORGE NORDSTROM

There exists a place where light is cast from shadow. There is a dark and hidden realm beyond human comprehension or understanding. Nothing that has entered there has left the same, if indeed it has left this domain at all. The place defies logic and possibility. Some say it's the beginning of the end, this place...

HAPPY ANNEVERARY

MADELINE FORD

“**Honey, dinner is ready!**” Meredith called up our main staircase at me. I grunted, waiting with my fingers hovering over my keyboard, hoping she wouldn’t call for me again.

“I made your favorite, lamb chops with buttery mashed potatoes and roasted asparagusssss!” she howled. I winced at the sound of her “s” pronunciation. It rang in my ears as I shuffled down the oak staircase.

“Could it be? Mr.Reilley has finally emerged from his cave?” she asked sarcastically. My head wrung from working on my newest court case, and the last thing I needed was to hear her sarcastic remarks.

If it weren’t for the lamb chops, potatoes, and asparagus, I wouldn’t have moved a muscle in response to her calling.

“Why the long face, Jonathan? Today is a very special day! You must have some sort of surprise for me, what is it? Quit the poker act and give me my anniversary gift!”

My stomach rumbled, not only at the sight of the beautiful dinner, but at the thought of the long night of apologizing I have ahead of me. I had completely forgotten our sixth anniversary, and she thinks I’m faking my “I want to burn this house down with you in it” attitude.

I force a smile as I feel a heat wave flush through my body.

“Oh, you caught me, Merry! I’ve been waiting alllll day for this very special surprise, I couldn’t even tell you happy sixth anniversary because I was scared I’d spoil it!”

“It’s our seventh anniversary, Johnny, but I’ll let that slide because I know you have a good trick up your sleeve tonight!”

She seemed so excited for my nonexistent gift, she completely ignored my obvious cluelessness. This could be a completely fake anniversary and I wouldn’t even know.

We ate our dinner in silence, and Meredith frantically cleaned up afterward, overly excited for her nonexistent gift. I sat at the dinner table, surrounded by all the beautiful artwork money could buy. I peered into the kitchen, hoping there’d be a broken appliance I could say I’m replacing for her. Needless to say that was an unlucky idea.

I quietly got up to explore, looking for something just special enough she’d like it, but ordinary enough that she wouldn’t realize I had already bought it for her. I checked all four of the bathrooms, and thought of nothing. All six guest bedrooms, nothing. Our bedroom and bathroom, nothing. It was time for plan B.

I quickly replaced my slippers for running shoes, and crawled out the downstairs guest bedroom window. She'd be occupied for another twenty minutes, which meant I had to go fast. I peeled out of our mile long driveway and sped to the nearest jewelry store.

It took nearly ten minutes to get there, five minutes to pick out a bracelet and a charm, and ten minutes to get back.

I ran around the back of the house to pick some flowers from the garden, and slipped back in through the guest bedroom window.

Holding her gift behind me, I tiptoed back into the dining room, where to my surprise, she was waiting for me. She was seated in her usual spot, staring at the walls, with some very official documents and a pen laying on the table.

I pulled out the flowers and her gift.

"Ta-da!" I exclaimed. She looked over at me, unamused.

"I think you should have a seat, Johnny."

My stomach sunk to the floor.

"What's this?" I motioned to the papers as I took a seat next to her.

"You didn't know today was our seventh anniversary, did you, Johnny?"

"I did, Merry! I got you this gift, open it!"

"Do you really think I didn't hear you fumbling to get in and out of that window, and didn't hear your car leave the driveway? You think I am that stupid? Plus, you're still wearing those stupid tennis shoes."

"I just needed some fresh air, is all. I had the gift for you, I've never forgotten an anniversary."

"Johnny, you have forgotten the last three anniversaries. Which is why this year, your present is divorce papers. You never make time for me, I sit in this big house all alone all the time. You stay cooped up in that office, doing God only knows what. I can't live like this, Johnny."

"Oh, what the heck." I sighed.

I really didn't have time for this.

I had a call with my client at eleven and it was ten forty five. I signed the papers, went to the kitchen to grab the bowl of leftover mashed potatoes, and walked to my office to continue my work.



PAIN BRINGS REVOLUTION

KIM SANCHEZ

The king's eyes meet with the man who has been tormenting his kingdom. The breath he had been holding in since the beginning of this whole ordeal is let out.

Aéd, as the people had called him, was finally on his knees, bloody faced and staring into the eyes of the king, seemingly unafraid. One of the knights had his blade pressed up against Aéd's neck and looked up at the king for orders. The king raised his chin looking down at the criminal and smirked.

"You think this would last much longer?"

"Long-" Aéd only could let out one word before the king kicked his stomach causing Aéd to cough up blood.

"Who said you could speak pig!" The king drew his own sword from its sheath. "To think one person is behind all of this."

The king shook his head and looked away from Aéd.

"Nine villages, all burned down. Only ash to remember them by."

Aéd let out a soft chuckle making the king turn and point at the man's chest. "You think I'm the only one?"

The king pressed his sword into the man's chest drawing blood, but not deep enough to take his life.

"I said, what right do you have to speak? After you there will be no one." The king plunged his sword into Aéd's chest. "I can guarantee that!"

The cool rain brushed against the trees' leaves. The smell of wet dirt masked everything else as the strong wind grew restless. A single child stood before everything else, clothes soaked looking up at the sky in wonder, watching as the clouds fought and the sky filled with brief flashes of light. But he didn't shake, didn't cry from the loud thunder, just stared up at the sky.

If he looked away long enough it would all go away. If he paid attention to the clouds, his chest wouldn't stop him from breathing. If he felt the new droplets of rain against his skin, he wouldn't feel how cold his hands truly were.

Looking down though, his world set back in.

Distant screams as his house glowed red. His home, now immersed in fire. The home he felt safe in, the home he learned he could always go back to, the home his mother told him she would always be at, but hearing her now, his mind watched the plank of wood fall on top of her as she pushed him out of the bedroom door.

All he could do was look up, look up and hope he could finally wake up from this nightmare.

So he gripped his chest, fell to his knees then to his side holding in his knees. The king made a promise though, to protect everyone, to protect him and his mother, to never let the bad man take the lives of anyone else.

She would be fine. The king made a promise.

Years of bitter pain seeped through that child though and the once broken retaliation against the king grew weak without a leader. But that wouldn't last too long.

The king had failed to protect his mother and now he swore to make him pay, whatever the cost. His own reason, rational, sanity, all bent on killing the man who failed to protect the one person that loved him.

So now, cross bow in hand, perched on a ledge, his finger ran over the trigger remembering the screams his mother made.

NATURAL DISASTERS

MALERIE HAAS

I stood there, watching him buy a horse. Probably another one of his experiments. I looked around the town square, stepping back as a group of kids chased after a ball rolling past my feet.

“Listen here! I’m not lowering the price for anything, not food, not endorsements, and sure not ‘in the name of science’, or whatever you’ve been rambling about. \$270 flat or go away!”

I flinched away from the man, my joints creaking.

My creator slammed his fist on the cart, looking over at me “W1N570N, get over here and tell this man he’s being ridiculous, and maybe I’ll repair your arm.”

The string of numbers and letters was my name, I just called myself Winston though...close enough to what it actually is right? I asked him to use it, but he insisted it made me too “human.” I mean, I have a TV for a head and a bundle of exposed wires coming out of a socket, i dont think being called Winston is going to confuse anyone about what I am.

Ah yea, my arm.

I held up the bundle of exposed wire. He hid my silicone slip so I couldn’t protect them today. He was cruel enough to give me an actual sense of feeling and then rip off my arm when I wanted to do anything other than serve him, although I don’t know why I’d want to do anything different, I have a decently nice life.

“Oh, yes sir.”

I walked over to the stand while my creator walked off to get his cart.

“I’m sorry to bother you sir, but after an assessment of your horses and the price you’re selling them for, it seems like you’re raising the price 8.3% above average... which isn’t a very sustainable way to run a business, as we can get the same quality horse for far cheaper two blocks from here.”

The seller grabbed something from out of view and slammed it on the surface. I saw it was a knife.

“If you and your psychotic little science freak want to heckle, you can go do it with someone who isn’t violent. Now run along before I leave you with far more exposed wires.”

I’d be lying if I said his threat didn’t scare me, but I wasn’t allowed to show it. That being said, my face did it for me. I saw a flash of glitching run across my eyes, which sucks because that means my screen is doing it too.

I didn’t have a chance to keep going before my backpack was being pulled by my creator. I didn’t have time to process what was going on before the yelling started and

I ended up being pushed into our cart. I gasped when my body hit the hard metal, pulling my arm to my chest as the nerves slapped against the hard wall of the little cart.

After a few moments of pain and inability to process what all the screaming was about, I realized why I was moving so fast. My creator had stolen a horse. Maybe that's why he decided to look for one two towns away from ours. There was so much screaming and I could barely make out who was saying what. I just know everyone was loud and my systems had not been updated in fifteen years.

Despite us being far away, I could still hear what was going on in the square as my processors finally got it through. The horrible thing about my systems being so slow is that if something entered for processing, it was gonna process no matter how long it took, which involved everything.

People were yelling while we were escaping.

“Get back here! Thief.”

“Call the police!”

“What was up with that little tv guy?”

Oh, that last one. Haha yeah, I guess I'm a little strange, it's not necessarily common to find humanoid robots like me... it's even less common for them to be made out of random junkyard parts and have an actual human soul. I don't actually think any other robots have human souls, so does that really make me a robot or would a be a cyborg? Or do cyborgs have to have human limbs? Ugh, it's confusing so I'm just going with robot for now.

As soon as we slowed down it felt like he was barking orders at me and I couldn't even get out of the cart. He pushed me on my back and I'm not really equipped with the machinery to get up.

“I'm sorry sir, I would love to help you more than anything, but I really can't get up from here! I don't have the strength to lift my head.” I tried lifting it again and hit the bottom of the cart with a hard thunk...that sound was definitely reverberating inside my head for a while.

“I don't care what you think you can't do, you've gotten your useless self off the floor before, I think you can get yourself off the bottom of a cart.” His voice would have killed me, had it been possible. The anger in it made me shiver.

We had stopped a good three miles away from the shop. I tried to lift up again and only hit my head on the cart. I looked around for an option and sighed. This was gonna hurt.

I put my arms on the sides of the cart to lift myself up. I was pressing so close to the damage, and it was all I could not to scream, but I didn't want to be rude and bother my creator. He was stressed enough already and didn't need me causing a headache.

“See! I told you you could do it!”

I felt him spit on me before I even saw it on my screen, mostly because I glitched when it hit.

I nodded the best I could and wiped it off on my shirt.

“Thank you sir... now to repeat you wanted me to prepare the food, find water, and set up for tonight correct?” I asked him. He looked at me and rolled his eyes,

nodding at me like I was stupid. To be fair, I kinda am. I'm outdated and I can't process as well as other models, with the added disadvantage of feelings and a human memory rather than some sort of storage like other robots, so it's unlimited but I can still forget things.

I got fully out of the cart so I could go gather things for the fire. I don't know why he didn't have me bring our full set of supplies. It would've been much quicker. Maybe he just wants me to service him for no reason. It seems like he gets satisfaction from making me run around like a dog, even if it hurts like it does right now.

I filled up his purification canisters from a nearby stream and got as much dry tinder as I could fit in my backpack, which made me not only top heavy but also back heavy and my balance is definitely not suitable to be going up a hill like I am right now! But oh well, it's not like I can die.

I can shut down until I get repaired, but I can't die.

"I'm back sir! I brought firewood and filled up the canisters."

I set my backpack in the cart and relaxed now that the weight was off my shoulders. I sat down for a moment until a bag was roughly dropped on my legs.

"You're not done yet," he spat, dragging me up by my antenna. "You still have to set up the shelter, and because you have no form of respect for me you can spend the night in the cold."

He let go of me and I nodded the best I could, picking up the bag that dropped on the ground with a stick.

"Yes sir, I was going to set it up shortly after sitting down, I was just aching."

I don't know how he managed to make me feel pain and warmth and such, but it feels more like tingles than anything, I guess what humans call "pins and needles," but a lot more intense.

"It takes you 30 seconds to set it up, you're just lazy and don't know your place apparently. Now go."

He walked off to examine the horse as I went to the clearing in the grass. I tossed the bag on the ground and sat criss cross, pulling out and connecting the different components before standing up and hitting a button, watching the little makeshift shelter expand into a little shack.

"See? Thirty seconds and you wasted time by sitting down when it could've been done before now, useless machine."

He bumped my shoulder as he went inside. I didn't bother responding since I doubted he wanted more excuses.

I went back to the road and pulled the horse to the shelter, attaching its reins to the bar made specifically for horses and other livestock. The use of horses rather than cars became popularized in small cities and country towns when we realized that vehicles were unnecessary for shorter distances, and now vehicles are really only found or sold in large cities at this point.

I set up the fire outside the shelter and grabbed some food packs, ripping open the box. I went through the cans of sauce, dry pasta, and greens for his meal, grabbing the prep pan and plate out of the bottom and putting water in it.

It took approximately 20 minutes for the food to fully cook, and when it did I took

his plate to the door, knocking. I hoped maybe he'd change his mind about making me stay outside, but as soon as the door opened and he pulled the plate from my hand, I didn't even have to register the slamming of the door in my face to know he wasn't going to let me in.

Now began the hours I would be alone.

He wasn't coming out of the shelter again unless it was absolutely necessary, and I wasn't allowed in tonight. I don't know why he's so mean to me. I have the soul of his son, you'd think a father would love his own son, but I guess he resents the fact that his real son is dead and he loathes that the metallic replacement isn't the same.

My creator used to enjoy me until he found out he couldn't train me to act like his son. My creator, John (as I learned from a dry cleaning tag that I never mentioned to him), put me through months of basic training to be like his son, but I was never able to get it right and he hates me for it. It got even worse after I started questioning if I could do things other than run around the house and do meaningless work for him. That's what got my arm removed.

But even though he's cruel and unjust to me I love him like he's my father. That's the one thing I did inherit from his son — his love for his father. I did call him dad once. He was filled with so much unbridled rage, I was sure I was about to get dismantled, but he just slouched in his chair and started drinking, sending me away. He didn't have any tasks for me for the next few days, but as soon as he did have more orders for me, he told me that if I ever called him that again, I'd get shut down and he'd try again — he'd create a new robot and transfer the soul from me.

I know the only reason he hasn't done that yet is because he's had a low success rate with multiple transfers. He's tried with other animals and only succeeds once every fifty times, and I know he hates me but is too fearful of losing his son completely.

I know that's the only reason I'm still technically alive. If I lost the soul, I would officially die, but honestly would that be too bad? I'm a robot. I would fade into non-existence like I was before I was created.

I wouldn't even know that I was dead.

Speaking of, the slugginess of my processing and movements can also be linked to my dying batteries.

I went to the cart and grabbed my batteries out of the side drawer. Six 9-volt batteries and I can go for a few months. I actually have two separate battery compartments just so I can change them on my own... which I got fifteen years ago. It's been my only upgrade since being created 20 years ago.

Some hours later, I heard a crash near the shelter. I thought it may have been my creator, but as I rushed to where he was, I saw the fully collapsed shelter. T

he odds of him surviving a malfunction like that? Maybe 12% but, regardless of that...

I was free, I could run.

I let the horse free, I didn't need it. I collected anything I needed from the cart, including my arm, which John thought he had hid perfectly. I was beaming. I could finally be free, maybe get my arm fixed so I didn't have to live like this. If not I'll get another silicone sleeve and clip the wires, maybe.

With that, I was on my way to town, jumping and getting batteries wherever I could, occasionally stopping by a mechanic or two to find someone to repair me. The problem is, I have no money and robots can't get jobs if they don't serve a specific purpose, which I don't.

I was on my way to another mechanic to get fixed when I felt myself get body slammed by someone running out of a drain pipe.

I hit the ground and heard the person groan in pain and shift around a little bit.

"God dude what are you? Made of metal?"

I heard him stand up and I saw him walking over to help me out of my peripheral.

"Ah, it seems you are in fact made of metal, old metal too." He tapped me with his foot.

"How rude! You ran into me and you aren't even offering to help me up, you're insulting my build, and even hitting me with your foot!" I grumbled, trying to get myself off the ground by myself until I felt him pulling on my stub.

"Ow ow ow ow, please don't touch that it hurts." I got myself off the floor and looked at the man who helped me off the ground.

"Sorry, sorry, I didn't know you could actually feel." He put his hair in a low ponytail, picking up the things he dropped and making sure they didn't get damaged. "Ah, lovely."

He examined his arm. I hadn't noticed that it was metallic until now. "Busted my finger, I'm gonna have to find a new hook for that."

I was too busy staring at his arm to actually say anything else to him.

"You okay over there? Did I knock something loose?" He laughed when my eyes darted away from his arm.

"No no! I just don't know what to say. Are you a mechanic?" I could hear myself getting louder. That happened when I was excited. He nodded in response to my question. "Your handiwork is amazing! My name is Winston!"

The man smiled, "Thanks, I'm Daichi, and if you like it so much I can fix yours, as a little apology for knocking you, and then insulting you, and then grabbing your messed up appendage... etcetera."

He shoved a few smaller parts in his pockets.

"I should have the parts for it. If not I can stop back at the junkyard."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I could barely contain my excitement, but I didn't wanna blow my voice box even more. Then he wouldn't be able to understand me.

"I would absolutely love that."



PO



POETRY



DANCING IN THE RAIN

MICHELLE DONAHUE

As the blazing blue sky loses its color,
When the clouds of gray gallantly gloom over,
The earth has now become much duller
Except for gracious grounds of bright green clover.

For now rain rampantly falls
And mother nature is our magnificent caretaker,
She cries silent streaming waterfalls,
Bringing forth our souls to thank her.

And I can feel her salty tears scintillating my skin
My body soaked of silver,
We continue dancing in our world of sin,
While provoking pouring river.

And the exhilaration emanates elusively,
Our minds imitate delusively.

AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE

ISABEL PLASCENCIA

What's that chirping I hear?

I look to my left and nothing appears.

I keep walking and there it is once more,

so I look down to the floor.

To my surprise,

there it was, right before my eyes.

On the ground lay what I thought I heard,

a little baby bird.

SAVIOR

KDYN LE

Like my heart, I lay broken.
Beaten and battered,
exhausted and dejected,
Ruined and rejected.
Lacking direction
I lay helplessly
As life drags me along.

None to lend me hope.
None to guide me.
None to save me.
Loneliness is my only fate.

But, only for so long.
Someone will come.
Someone will save me.
Someone will guide me.
Someone will bring me hope.

But, I wait to no avail.
None will save me.
For I must be the Savior.

THE VOICES

BROOKLYN LAMPRECHT

“Just do it,”
it whispers behind my ear.
I spotted my rusty tool kit,
and stared at my dad in fear.

“Pick up the hammer”
it whispers to me again.
I’ve seemed to have lost my manner,
as if I’m age ten.

I travel close to my father,
hammer in my hand.
I would never actually bother,
without this voice’s crazy demands.

The ones inside my head,
they act upon all my fears.
They want my father dead,
which only causes me tears.

My wildly intrusive thoughts,
they control me every day.
They say to hurt him a lot,
or they’ll surely make me pay.
Sometimes I feel like a robot,
I wish this pain could go away.

THE END OF A CHAPTER

AUDREY WASSON

The first day of kindergarten my mom cried
while I walked into class with the biggest smile on my face
She was sad to see me grow
I was happy to finally be in my place

The first day of middle school I walked in with my best friend
while her mom warned the years would go by so fast
we simply laughed it off
not understanding how quickly time will truly pass

The first day of high school I cried
while my mom watched me walk in with the biggest smile on her face
I was terrified of what might lay ahead
while she knew I had so much to embrace

SIXTEEN

ANDY HERNANDEZ

Wandering through an endless fog. Blinded.
No direction of where to go.
As the years went by, the eyes seem to see
The fog as if it wasn't there. I was Sixteen.

I tend to forget all about what has happened to this point.
I tend to not worry about the consequences.
Day and night pass like a breeze.
Now I take in everything I see. I was sixteen.

I say goodbye to that free self. The realization hits
Like a wrecking ball. I have responsibilities.
Now tethered to the ground.
Not sad, just wanting to go back up from time to time. I was sixteen.

Looking back into that free self, I had it good.
I can still make the most of every day.
Tomorrow is a better day and the past is guidance
For what comes. I have people to help me grow.

I stood there, sixteen.

BROWN

NOELIA GONZALEZ

I am still being hated for the color of my skin
It's the year 2020 and racism is still in
My people coming here for better opportunities
forgetting that they'll be getting new identities
Equality is all that we wish to obtain
but it seems America likes to see us in pain
You come to my country as tourists looking for fun
but when my people come to America they're immigrants and you run
Why don't you try looking beyond our color
and instead observe our daily struggles
Seeing people in the streets when I visit back home
Begging for a Peso so that they can eat a meal alone
It's heartbreaking seeing all this poverty
so why is it when they leave it's considered a robbery
Stealing your jobs as you people claim
When in reality we all just want the same
The land of the free is why so many flee
But don't be fooled it's not what it seems

LOVE IS BEAUTIFUL

JASMINE GRANILLO

The beauty of a waterfall coming down back to the earth's ground, is what he has shown me.
True beauty is what our love is.

Perfection isn't hard to define because I know it begins with him.

Minerals in water add life to it. He has his own magic, he added life to my sad personality. Each day now begins with a smile. Like the sun that shines down to earth, he does the same. He shines light on any of my gloomy days.

We are always in our own world, hand in hand.

A waterfall is on land, somewhere on earth and so are we, while on our two feet we still feel as if we could fly.

How thankful are flowers when they receive sunlight or water ? I know how the flowers might feel.

Water pouring down the waterfall, you simply can't help but to be captivated by its beauty.

That's how him and I are.

Our love is beautiful.

LITTLE HATS

WILL HERRON

There once was a scientist who liked little hats.
He wondered how to get one,
And became a nurse like that.

DOWN BY THE RIVER

DEVEN WILLIAMS

Down by the river
Where the deranged find rest

Down by the river
Where the people of the water dance
Pulled by the strings of the Moon's man

Down by the river
Where children make their stay
No longer people of the people
No longer the children of their homes

Down by the river
Where the lights are never dim
Where the music is a hum in the air
Not a place of peace
But the place to be

Down by the river

10 HAIKUS

KEVIN DOCKERY

A lizard can smile
nobody can tell you why
maybe just for fun.

The hands of the clock
never seem to rest or stop
always ticking by.

You stand wondering
Like rivers, they flow and fall
Leading to the end.

It's stuck to the ground
It follows you everywhere
A shadow is found.

Whispers in the air
Secrets move around all scared
Hushed lips never tell.

Mystic and wonder
Performing for everyone
Respect is needed.

A lasting friendship
No distance can separate
Knowing they are there.

The fortune teller
Tells you very truthful lies
Never fear their words.

Beyond the blue door
Lays the dark and cold unknown
Waiting to be searched.

The silent village
Was full of nothing but fear
The dragon was near.

SEE - THROUGH

ANGELINA PIZZINI

The world seems colder
I'm searching
Digging
Looking for answers

It's as if I'm a ghost
Drifting through the world
Aimless
Afraid

I thought
I could trust them
I've been misled
Dropped
Forgotten

Having "friends" is a distant memory
Now I'm alone
It's almost as if
I'm see-through.

STAR SAILOR

KDYN LE

The term “astronaut” comes from greek words that mean “star” and “sailor.” Sailing with the stars. That feeling must be the greatest. To feel the empty space as you float into the great beyond where none have ventured. To be amongst the stars and see us from heights that are unimaginable. Oh, what a great feeling that must be. The feeling of when one can shout yet never be heard. Oh, I wonder what is up in that blank empty space that lies amongst the stars. I see it every night, but I never get any closer. For I am not an astronaut. For I can not sail amongst the stars. But, no matter how long I stare I can not satisfy my thirst. My thirst for the knowledge that only lies amongst the stars and space above. As I remain here on earth I can only feel my mind drift away to the land of the stars above. Perhaps it is just my curiosity or my desire for adventure, but I wish to travel with the great golden lights and witness the land beyond our land. I wish to go to the places that none could dream. I wish to sail amongst the stars.

SIXTEEN

GLORIA TREVIÑO

Like an injured butterfly barely
able to flutter along. I blindly followed
those around me. Not realizing I was
only a miniscule and insignificant fly
in their eyes. I was constantly getting
entangled in their sticky webs of lies.
I was only sixteen.

Struck down and washed out by societal
views I had nowhere to turn. Every where
I searched seemed to lead to a deafening silence
with no one to patch my broken spirit.

Surrounded by false promises of friends
who all played their roles well. I just wanted the
truth. I just wanted to be understood. Yet they never
looked back. It was all an act and I believed it.
I was left behind. I was only sixteen.

History kept repeating itself. I couldn't escape
them I was being preyed upon. They followed
me wherever I went. Waiting for their chance
to pounce. With nowhere to go and barely
hanging on I hoped for a miracle. I was only sixteen.

As I was finally succumbing to my wounds
I noticed a beautiful flower calling out to
me. She was willing to listen. I couldn't believe
my eyes such a beautiful being wanted
to help me. I ran into her open arms and
at last I could breathe. I did it. I lost them and
this time It was for good.

There I flew, sixteen.

WATERFALL

ANGEL DE LA CRUZ

Rain starts as a storm going up high to sky to form a cloud it clumps together like a perfect match an match literally made in heavenand then

D. D. D. D.

R R R R

O O O O

P P P P

All the rain drops flow down

Down down they flow

Getting closer to the P

Point where they rest. U

For a little while before.

They.

S. H.O.T.

SIXTEEN

ANGELINA PIZZINI

The world seemed to stop,
And my breath was halted.
The tragic reality of death
Loomed over me.
I was sixteen

It was the week of my Junior Homecoming,
How could I feel so down?
What was supposed to be the most exciting week,
Is now the most upsetting of my Junior year.
I was sixteen

My first eulogy
Was written, and delivered
As the tears began to build.
I was sixteen

Tears raced down my face like mini streams,
Each one hitting my skirt with a quiet tap.
Why is this so difficult?
As the world froze,
I stood lost, at sixteen.

CASTELLUM INTER SCOPULOS

PEMBERLY FARMER

A young mind remembers turrets of green
That didn't seem to belong against an apple-cider sky,
And the foothills waving with tan, dead grasses,
Or the mountains, spotted like cows with cold cloud shadows.

There were monoliths of red on weekends,
On the weekdays kids pulled on boots for the leaves
And looked for the fox that lived somewhere
Along the river bank, the owls sleeping in orange leaves.

Gold and red wood, an old mining town, the water wheel
On the side of the mountain somewhere.
Rocks, rocks, always entertain seven year-olds, and
Deep dish pizza and bubbles outside of the shop.

Sometimes it seems that Strange, Sad October
Was happier than a summer of flat opportunities,
But one is safe and both will shape,
And you didn't know what was safe until years after.

It wasn't too long ago, but long enough
For a heart to ache for the rocks and the pines,
For the molasses in Uncle Thom's hermit cookies,
For recess on an icy blacktop and a fox in the hedge.

From there was uncertainty, and uncertainty's bane
Was a ground much less steep to crawl over,
The same earth, the same sort of rock, formed
By the same Hand was steadier- a stronghold anywhere.

The only thing that is different now
Is that the heart would now ache more for many people,
For rolling fields of green and muddy summer shoes,
And for rocks.
Rocks, rocks will always entertain eight and eighteen year-olds.

Per angusta ad augusta.

10 HAIKUS

KEVIN DOCKERY

A lizard can smile
nobody can tell you why
maybe just for fun.

The hands of the clock
never seem to rest or stop
always ticking by.

You stand wondering
Like rivers, they flow and fall
Leading to the end.

It's stuck to the ground
It follows you everywhere
A shadow is found.

Whispers in the air
Secrets move around all scared
Hushed lips never tell.

Mystic and wonder
Performing for everyone
Respect is needed.

A lasting friendship
No distance can separate
Knowing they are there.

The fortune teller
Tells you very truthful lies
Never fear their words.

Beyond the blue door
Lays the dark and cold unknown
Waiting to be searched.

The silent village
Was full of nothing but fear
The dragon was near.

ENDS IN GOODBYE

ARTHUR BAN

I cant be independent
 I need someone by my side
 And when you helped me not feel lonely
 When you helped me feel alive
 All i wanted
 All i needed
 Was to make your smile stay
 But my heart was torn the moment
 That your light faded away

Their are no tears to shed
 Cant find meaning
 While lying in bed
 They tell me that I'm special
 That my dreams arent superficial
 But i know that when i wake up
 I'll be feeling non-official

When there was no reason
 And the world was grey
 No one listened to my voice
 Gave a thought to what I'd say
 You came along
 And you saved me from the fray
 But the moment that you left
 I knew I wouldnt be OK

You found my seams
 Listened to all of my dreams
 And pulled with all your force
 When you said we were a team
 You ripped up all my stitches
 And then left me for the worse
 Left a hole in my heart
 And i know that im the source

I cant be independent
 I want you by my side
 As long as youre here
 I think i might survive
 I'll lie to myself
 As long as i can
 But i know the truth
 That I will never be happy again

I cant be independent
 I need someone by my side
 And when you helped me not feel lonely
 I was happier inside
 All I wanted
 All I needed
 Was to make your smile stay
 But my heart was torn the moment
 That your light faded away

I was left a broken mess
Just some scrap
Or maybe less
The whole world lost its color
And my life was in distress
Whats the point in being happy
When its painful just to try
All those love stories are sappy
It always ends in goodbye

I guess
All I'm saying
Is I was scared to be alone
overthinking thinking
from the blinking
From the text
Left on my phone

Back when whatever you said
Could change my mood of the day
To be real you changed me up
In every single way

I know it wasn't healthy
To be this infatuated
Was a constant form of discourse
That my friends and I debated
They told me I'd regret it
That I'd end up getting hurt
How was I supposed to know
How badly I would've been burnt

Shouldn't dwell on the past
But its too much to forget
When i remember being happy
I start to feel some regret
It was sweet from the start
But turned to toxic in the end
And I think I really snapped
When we couldn't be friends

I want to be independent
Cuz you left me on the side
And even though i have a smile
I was suffering inside
Just sit back
Relax
Come along for the ride
In this song
Are my feelings
That I hope I can confide

I can't be independent
 I need someone by my side
 But you just left me feeling lonely
 To my friends I'd have to lie
 Say i wasnt feeling hollow
 Claim it wasnt meant to be
 Lay awake
 With my thoughts
 Getting lost
 Losing sleep

I will clean up my own mess
 Try to deal with
 My own stress
 Return color to the world
 Stop saying that im worthless
 Find a point in being happy
 Even if it hurts to try
 Maybe love stories are sappy
 Cuz they end in a goodbye

Just cause I'm lazy
 Dont mean I dont try
 My memories are hazy
 Im sorry I lie
 You left me all broken
 Tore fabric to pieces
 Could not find the will
 In my thousands of thesis
 To pick myself up
 And move on with my life
 I know it sounds real stupid
 Lingerin on strife

Its time i go forward
 And walk past the past
 And start to feel alive
 Just cuz you left me
 Dont mean I dont cry
 But i will just move on
 And stop asking why
 Sew fabric to fabric
 Attach a new heart
 With the beat of a drum
 As to give it a start
 With my hair made of string
 And buttons on my eyes
 Was a doll that you'd play with
 And you were my prize

Nothing good ever last
 And for now you're a memory
 A stitch in my past

I cant be independent
 I need someone by my side
 And when you helped me not feel lonely
 I was happier inside
 All I wanted
 All I needed
 Was to make your smile stay
 But my heart was torn the moment
 That your light faded away

Hell yeah, I am a mess
 And my life is filled with stress
 But with the colors that I see
 I can't imagine any less
 Ill try hard to now be happy
 What the point if you dont try
 Guess this endings kinda sappy
 But its time I say goodbye

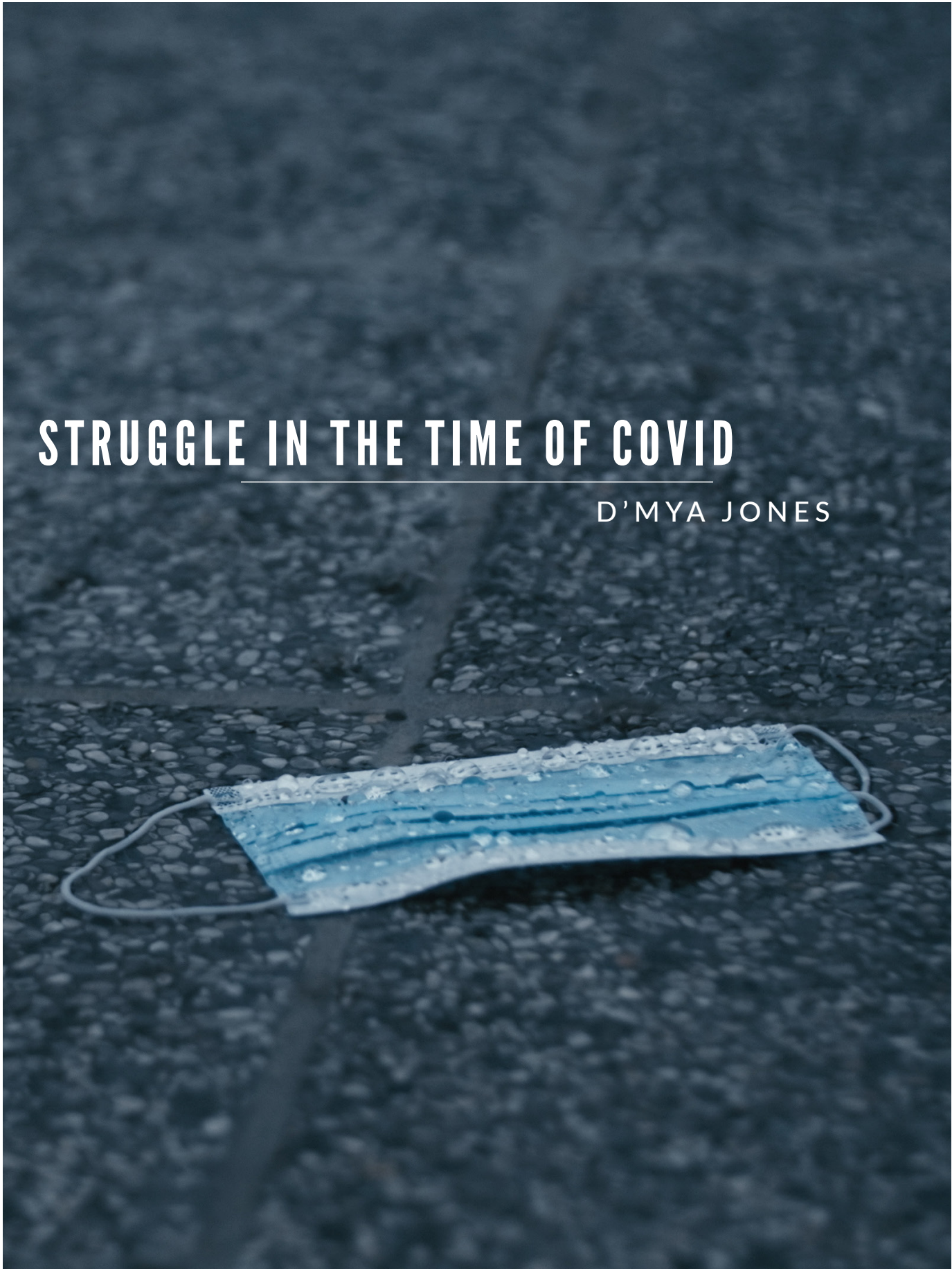
NONFIC

Struggle in the Time of COVID—D'mya Jones
A Door—Kali Torres
Memories Under The Bridge—Kyle Tomlin
Change—Jose Perez
Swimmer's Solace—Reegan Miller
The Impact of the Internet—Camilla Marin
Our Tree—Emma Harris
Timeless—Bradlee Klares
Expectations—Bradlee Klares
COVID-19 Changes—Sam Trinh

STATION

STRUGGLE IN THE TIME OF COVID

D'MYA JONES



I don't let just anyone see me cry.

I only let the people I trust see me cry because they know when I cry, I'm really broken.

On September 19, 2020, my Grandpa died from Covid.

On September 19, 2020, my heart got ripped from my chest.

Sometimes I feel like I don't even know who I am anymore. But I do know that pain is something you're going to experience in life.

There can be different types of pain: The pain where you get hurt or injured. The pain where you just want to be alone and isolate yourself.

Sometimes, that's all I really need. To be alone. To not have people asking me what's wrong every single time they see me cry. Because life has more to offer than tears. Sure, sadness is part of life. But I've learned that you have to move on from yesterday. You have to embrace tomorrow.

You will always have that dark part of your past. You may have flash backs. You may overthink. But I have grown to understand that there's still light. That I can face the future with hope and optimism.

I don't let just anyone see me cry.

And that's getting easier and easier.

Because these days I smile more often. Even if it is under my mask.



A DOOR

KALI TORRES

I recall a door opening.

Every moment before flew past my grasp and into the abyss of my subconscious. This door, in my mind, was an all mighty gate. Shaking the house as it opened, it slowly revealed a stranger from the other side.

The man gestured in a manner of invitation, exchanging a few words before walking further indoors. My parents were the first to step inside, then my sister, and before I knew it, I was the last to walk beyond the doorway. My fear of being left behind urged me to follow, and doing so gave way to a strong surge of unfamiliarity. The familiar scent of uncertainty and newness wafted towards me, like the inside of a stranger's home or car. Bright, yellow walls guided me down a hallway that appeared to stretch continuously with the sole purpose of not letting me reach the end. Looking more closely, the walls were decorated with a rough texture, creating lines and shapes at random until it connected to the ceiling and floor.

Finally reaching the end, I was greeted with the sight of my family talking to the man as he gestured to a large couch with equally huge pillows stacked up and aligned into a neat formation. The room they were in was vast and boundless. I could jump and climb and still never hope to reach the ceiling fan that hung seemingly miles above us, like a brilliant chandelier within a palace.

My parents spoke to the stranger through casual talk and polite banter, and though my elder sister seemed engulfed in the conversation.

I, on the other hand, couldn't understand a word. Being only three, I had no understanding of the English language. My concerns, my amazement, my curiosity; none was spoken through words. Instead, my thoughts were pictures and undistinguished feelings beyond my comprehension.

Everything was so foreign to me and every little detail left a feeling that I could never describe within the years leading up to now. In a way, I felt disconnected to the world, like an alien being brought from place to place as these greater beings conversed above me. Unknowing of how to respond or react to the things around me, I imagined that this must be how pets feel on a daily basis.

All I could do was either listen to the gibberish that left their mouths or explore the strange place I was in.

Choosing the ladder, I allowed my eyes to wander, letting them land on everyday things I didn't even know the name of. Time was slowed to the point where it felt like it could stop at any given moment. Every breath and every blink of my eyes felt so surreal to me. Every second that passed by was an experience that imprinted itself onto me like paint, and I was only a canvas.

It was around that time when I seemed to notice just how small I was in this huge, undetermined world.

With that wordless thought, I stood there. It was the only thing I could do as my parents wrapped up the conversation and led my sister and I to the exit. We stepped outside to be welcomed by the sun that shined in patches through the neighboring trees. The four of us drove off in the car without any exchange of words.

It was unbeknownst to me that I would soon see that house again not just as another one time visit, but as a long-term home. My child-like mind took it as an opportunity to explore every nook and cranny so that I may be a little less alienated from my surroundings.

Fourteen years later, the same rough walls were now painted blue and littered with poorly drawn doodles in both crayon and pen alike, and the memory stands as my earliest.

MEMORIES UNDER THE BRIDGE

KYLIE TOMLIN

I long for that day, us walking on the other's side under the bridge. There's no path, no concrete except the steep slants that curve the sides. The bottom is filled with plants, dirt mixed with little rain overflow.

The whole of the nature surrounding us is hot, dry, but under this makeshift shelter is cool and damp.

You show off your newest camera, ironically a camera that is a couple decades old. It is large, clunky, and uncomfortable to hold in your hands. But you hold it with pride and excitement, taking well-timed photos of the wildlife, trickling stream, whatever catches your eye.

I long for that day, the last time we really ever talked. I can remember your smile as you lead me through the surrounding woods, taking detours and cutting through the brush to find the most magical spots. The serene mood of our surroundings allowed any apprehension, tension, and stress to melt down as if it was never there in the first place. The light gleaming through the treetops lit our way as we wandered, unsure of how much farther we would go.

This moment seems to go on forever, uninterrupted by the reality that lies beyond the trees. I long for that day. I long to not find my mind wandering back there, back to you. I long to forget. I long to heal.

CHANGE

JOSE PREREZ

Fields of dry heat met with one side of the mountain, covered in grass and orange trees. Left and forgotten in the dust of the desert. Finding myself in a very moist heat covering the fields of grass miles and miles beyond.

“A new future“ I thought, a growing industry with a growing mindset.

Lightning strikes every time the wind moves, I feel like I’m living through every geographical climate here. Out of the plains and into the high city of the big state. I come from a small town far away, I only mention it because I’m ready to stay and change.

Shining light like a diamond upon the very dark sky, unbothered by the city lights. All seems bitter sweet but I’m here now, not going back. Letting myself be who I’m meant to be, creating a start of the ending of a new beginning.

There’s Ice here in the winter and fire in the summers, and fall and spring both met with damaging spiral winds. A big change of place, people, behavior and problems. More of a striped down type of place mixed with the new age of technological and modernist ideals.

But i’m not the only one, everyone follows along as if the second gold rush was occurring.



SWIMMER'S SOLACE

REEGAN MILLER

The narrow windy path made from the chlorine covered plastic seemed to invite me with a sense of hunger. My legs bravely dangled as I pondered my fate.

The deep waters seemed to carry creatures from the depths of my nightmares. Creatures just waiting to grasp me and pull me under, forcing me to succumb to the fate they chose for me. I've always been sheltered and watched, protected from any danger that could come to me.

My small hands gripped the edge, my decision was made. I felt a sudden push, a push that was unnecessary, yet given. I watched as everything swirled and mixed around me, everything happening too fast for me to comprehend.

In a matter of seconds, I was in the water, my tiny limbs kicking as hard as they could manage. One of the floaties had been ripped off in the tumble, unfortunately, the other was still intact, forcing my head into the dark depths of the water. I swear I could feel the creatures clawing at me, drooling in anticipation for my descent.



I tried to keep my head above the water, but the floatie was too much for my tiny body to conquer. My short life, that I thought was so long and boring, seemed to dwindle into non-existence as everything unfolded. I thought I was strong, but the water was like dead weight, pulling and tugging me down, yet the one floatie kept me up.

It felt like a lifetime had happened before I heard a splash. I felt a small wave jostle my exhausted body. I felt a warm embrace as I was somehow quickly lifted above the water and onto solid ground

I opened my eyes in time to see my drenched mother climbing out of the pool and running over to me. I immediately felt her warm embrace as she asked her onslaught of motherly questions. She was my lifeline once again, she protected me, saved me, she held me and made sure I was safe. How could this have happened? She'll always be there, always, to watch over and protect me, always.

THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET

CAMILLA MARIN

The Internet has turned our existence upside down.

It has revolutionized our lives completely. For almost everything we do, we use the Internet. The Internet itself has been transformed and is still transforming. It has become a sophisticated multidisciplinary tool enabling us to communicate with one another, create content, and even escape reality with its many forms of entertainment.

Yet, people argue it's isolating us as individuals more from reality.

The internet shouldn't be blamed for the way society manages it, instead it should be seen as a tool that can be managed in order to get the best of it. Today people are more connected to one another than ever before in human history, yet deep down we are more lonely from another in the "unplugged reality," for two realities are formed these days — the Internet virtual-based reality and the real world reality, each very different from each other. It would be impossible to just pick one.

According to The Massachusetts Institution of Technology and American Psychological Association, the Internet is not only changing the way we interact online, it's also straining our personal relationships as we are changing the way people relate to society. The survey was conducted on more than 300 children and 150 adults and proved that people who devote large amounts of their time to the internet are more isolated than ever in their not-virtual lives, leading to emotional disconnection, anxiety and mental fatigue leading to a loneliness epidemic across the world just alone.

According to The University of Wollongong Australia, more than a quarter of the population of Australia in 2018 reported feeling lonely more than three days a week, having episodes of depression, and suicidal thoughts.

The Internet has blessed society with social media applications allowing us to be more connected with family, friends, celebrities, etc., yet with every good thing comes a negative side.

Social media has seduced us into believing that a perfect reality actually exists. We all want to be rich, famous, have a perfect body with no imperfections and a world where no one suffers. This reality is promoted by celebrities and influencers and when you look at them, you envy everything they

have and wonder why you don't have their life. This can lead to eating disorders, mental issues, and self harm.

The perfect digital reality goes hand to hand with harassment and cyberbullying. When you aren't what social media portrays as ideal, you are brought down, your confidence is no longer there, everything you do and say is wrong, leading to isolation.

Like everything else, the internet has many positive aspects. It helps society be more educated than ever before. According to The Pew Research Center, the Internet has many learning benefits sharing and diversifying the flow of information into our daily lives. In the research conducted by The Pew Research Center, 87% of online users say the internet has improved their ability to learn new things.

Today we are able to educate ourselves on problems happening not only around us, but across the world. We are able to bring awareness and make a difference for future generations.

The Internet is also an excellent resource to explore our interests, helping our journey of identity be much easier, according to a research conducted by the Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking organization.

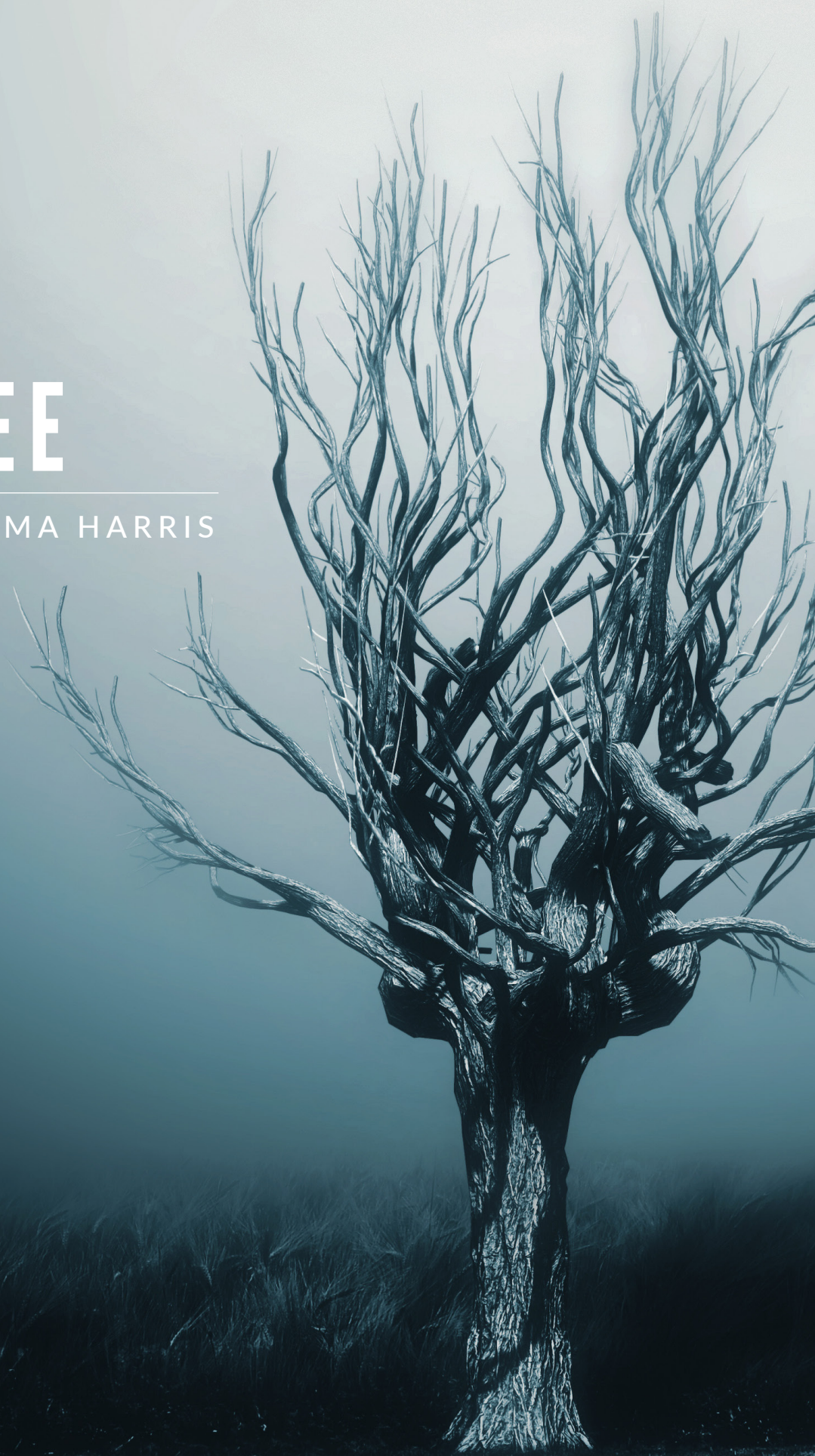
With the rise of the Internet, people have been able to publicly and privately explore more about their sexuality. 70% of the American population reported using the Internet with the purpose of discovering more about themselves and their interests.

The internet is also a portal of easy access to entertainment. With millions of platforms like Netflix, Tik-Tok, Youtube, etc. it's easy to be entertained for hours. Before the existence of the internet, people would seek entertainment by watching television or listening to the radio, but now you are a touch away from entertainment everywhere you are at any time.

With the rise of the Internet, and the power it has, it's on us as individuals to manage it in a proper, healthy way — to understand the limits and control it so it doesn't interfere with our lives in negative ways. Instead, we must use it as a tool so society can unite, learn, and create bonds.

OUR TREE

EMMA HARRIS



It's a cool November day, the wind blowing calmly through the barren branches scattered throughout the park. My boyfriend and I are sitting under our favorite tree, talking about our day. As we're here longer, the wind continues to pick up more and more, prompting him to offer me his jacket. I accept and he hands it to me.

I put it on, and immediately I felt warm. It wasn't necessarily because of the jacket, but more so because it was his jacket. I can't explain it, but when I'm with him I feel whole. It's as if without him I don't laugh as hard, smile as bright, or even think the same. Just his presence completes me. Being with him here is the best way I could've spent today. When it's almost time to go, he kisses me under our tree and decides to carve our initials into it, marking this spot as ours forever.

Looking back, the way I felt about him was toxic in and of itself. Allowing myself to fall so helplessly like that for someone was bound to end in disaster. But I thought that was love. How could I have known any better that the sweet feeling could turn bitter so quickly?

To this day many years later, my stomach still turns when I visit that park. The tree is no longer a symbol of love, but rather of my pain and loss. I would give the world to see that tree the way I saw it before.

TIMELESS

BRADLEE KLARES

Time. An unstoppable, unseeable, unknown force. No matter what occurs, time remains constant. We as humans tend to learn to feel unwelcoming to time, for it takes, takes, and takes from us. Many blame time for the loss of pets or loved ones, or some will blame it for pain. Time tends to take a beating from us, we blame it for things that we can't seem to be able to find something to blame for, so we resort to blaming time. Whether it be the days going by for what seems like forever, or quite the opposite with time moving for what feels like too quickly when we want time to move slower. But that's the thing, no matter what changes, how we feel, how we act, time moves on. Time moves on at a constant pace, no matter how unreliable or how flexible time feels, it is the one thing in our lives that remains constant, it doesn't change and there is no way to change it. One second is one second, regardless of where we live, the clock goes tick tock, as we slowly approach our bitter ends.

EXPECTATIONS

BRADLEE KLARES

Expectations. They hold you down like rocks pulling you underwater, preventing you from crossing that threshold to go back above water. Expectations. They hold us back from doing our best by creating unnecessary stress and anxiety. Expectations. We learn to have expectations, and this learned behavior will continuously let us down. Expectations. Learn to expect the unexpected so we don't get let down by, Expectations.

COVID-19 CHANGES

SAM TRINH

Every once in a while, a pandemic happens.

In the past, there was the Spanish Flu that happened during WWI. There was also the Black Death and the cholera outbreak. It seems as though that even with our technological advancements throughout time, we still can't contain a respiratory disease from spreading.

Bill Gates once stated during a TED Talk, "If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it's most likely to be a highly infectious virus..."

Masks should be more normalized and required to help prevent another pandemic.

What we have to understand as a group is that everyone is connected more than ever before. What affects one person in another country has an impact on what another person does in a different country. Of course, this isn't always the case, but let's agree that this assumption is true in the case of a pandemic.

When one person gets infected in one country, they have the ability to move to another country and infect the people there. This infection no longer is a problem locally or even regionally; it becomes an international problem.

What can really take down a population is a disease that doesn't kill immediately but lasts long enough to spread to another and then kill. Most respiratory viruses are like this. Because of their ability to spread through the air and not through physical contact or sexual activity, their infectious capabilities are superior to other types of spreading diseases.

What a mask will do to help prevent this is decreasing the chance of spreading to another person. Of course, masks don't completely take away the risk of spreading to another person, but it helps. Masks shouldn't be required to wear in a time where we're not in a pandemic, but if you're sick and still want to go to work, they should be required. In the case of traveling to another country, they should be required to wear it because this can help prevent the case of people spreading the disease internationally and causing a pandemic.

In conclusion, masks should be more normalized and required in many more countries. I think that COVID-19 has brought forth the many problems within not just our country but many others. COVID-19 has indeed been a tough time for all of us and we don't want this to happen again.

Of course, if you're sick, the best thing to do is isolate yourself. However, we can't always do that. We have a family to feed or we paid a lot of money for this, either case, some people just don't want to give up whatever it is at the time and just keep others completely safe.

Masks should be more normalized to help others that can't and keep the world a little more safe.



sci

SCRIPTS

Agoraphobic—Haley Callahan
Momotarou—Steven Nguyen

"AGORAPHOBIC"

Written by HALEY CALLAHAM

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DAY

THOMAS walks down the rainy street, his fingers nerviously unbuttoning and re-buttoning his coat with one hand while the other holds an umbrella above his head.

A couple walking on the other side of the street stop and point in his direction.

Thomas stops breathing and his heart starts pounding. He's completely paralyzed.

THOMAS' INNER VOICE

(Panicked)

I knew this would happen. I should have never left the house. Do I run? No they've already seen me. They know who I know, it's over.

The couple across the street pull out a map from their bag, study it, and continue walking in the direction that they had started from.

THOMAS' INNER VOICE

(relief washing over)

They were just looking for directions, they didn't even notice me.

A small laugh of realization escapes Thomas' lips, and the weight of being recognized is replaced with a lack of oxygen.

THOMAS

(shakily)

Inhale...and Exhale...

The tension in Thomas' chest loosens and he slowly begins walking again.

As Thomas continues walking, the streets get busier and more shops begin to open. Thomas' eyes stay focused on his destination, grateful for the mask covering his mouth and nose.

Despite the discomfort of not being at home, Thomas quite likes walking out in the rain, and often finds himself noticing little things about the world.

THOMAS' INNER VOICE

This isn't so bad. It gets easier every time.

Thomas catches a glimpse of his reflection in a puddle on the street. He stops to gaze at it. Seeing his reflection is something he normally avoids, but seeing it out in the open, away from the comfort of his house, is surreal.

Splash!

A nearby car drives through the puddle on the street, rippling the reflection and leaving Thomas' shoes wet.

Thomas jumps backward at the sudden splash, leaning against the wall of the shop he was passing.

THOMAS' INNER VOICE

(sarcastically)

So much easier...

The few blocks to the coffee shop had seemed like a lifetime. Thomas has not hated his walk, but was emotionally drained from the anxiety he had felt. He knew it was not rational. Time and time again, he went through it logically, but that never changed how he felt in the moment.

The small shop in front of Thomas is welcoming. It can't compare to home, but over the last few months, he had come to enjoy the smell of coffee and the quiet atmosphere.

BARISTA

Welcome in, what can I get started for you?

THOMAS

Black coffee, large.

BARISTA

One large black coffee. That's going to be three dollars and sixty five cents.

Thomas pays for the coffee and puts the remaining change in the tip jar. The barista turns to face the coffee maker on the back wall, preparing Thomas' order.

BARISTA

Do you look familiar? Have I seen you before?

Thomas' throat closes and he begins to sweat. Panicking, his eyes dart, taking in his surroundings. The barista is still facing the other way. He makes a run for it.

BARISTA

We get so many customers, but I think I remember you. Not many people our age drink just black coffee...

Thomas darts out the door as the barista continues rambling, reaching for his umbrella hanging just outside the door on a rack. He can't go back for it. Once he starts running, he isn't going to stop until he reaches the door.

As the barista turns around, it's too late. Thomas is long gone, leaving the barista confused and alone.

THE END

"MOMOTAROU"

Written by Steven Nguyen

FADE IN:

Feudal Japan. The sun shines down on a forest, where an old woman is doing her laundry by a river. The woman's name is NETSUKO. She continues doing laundry until something large in the distance catches her eye.

AERIAL SHOT following NETSUKO running towards the object.

NETSUKO sets her laundry aside and runs towards the object, as she gets closer, she discovers that the object is a peach. After running for a good bit, she finally reaches the peach and pulls it to shore.

NETSUKO

A peach? How peculiar. Perhaps this is a gift from the gods! They have looked down on my misfortune and given me this wonderful large peach!

NETSUKO runs to get her laundry basket and puts the large peach into the basket. She darts off to her home.

Now at home, NETSUKO, who lives alone in a small hut, places the peach onto her small dinner table.

NETSUKO

(gleefully)

This peach will feed me for weeks!

As she says this, the peach erupts and inside, lays a small baby boy, seemingly a newborn. He reaches up to NETSUKO and begins crying.

NETSUKO

(in shock)

Oh my! A baby boy? Perhaps you really are a gift from the gods! Perhaps you are the demon slayer hero of legends... NETSUKO picks up the baby boy and cradles him in her arms.

NEZUKO (cont.)

I will raise you with all the care and love in the world. Your name will be TANJIRO.

TIME PASSAGE MONTAGE

In this montage, we see that NEZUKO does everything in her power to give TANJIRO a happy childhood, despite being very poor. The two become very close and at one point, NEZUKO gets TANJIRO, a dog named ZENITSU. ZENITSU becomes TANJIRO's companion and the two do everything together. It is at the end of the montage we learn about the threat of the demons.

TANJIRO and ZENITSU come home after a long day of play.

NEZUKO

Tanjiro dear, there is something I must tell you.

TANJIRO

Yes mother?

NEZUKO

I am not your true mother, you were sent to me from the gods. You were born from a peach. Legends tell of a hero who will rid the land of demons. The hero will come from a peach and be a saviour sent from the heavens. That saviour is you, Tanjiro. I figured I would tell you when you were old enough. The longer I waited, the more people would die from the demons.

TANJIRO

(shocked)

Saviour? I don't even know how to fight mother! How am I to save the world from these demons if I'm just a normal boy?

NEZUKO

I've received a message from the Temple of Inosuke, you are to be trained there before you are sent to the Island of the Demons. The Island of the Demons is the source of all evil in the land.

TANJIRO

I don't want to leave you mother.

NEZUKO

It is your duty to go son. Go, and then come back home to me.

TRAINING MONTAGE

TANJIRO and ZENITSU journey to the Temple of Inosuke, where TANJIRO is trained by the monkey INOSUKE, the greatest swordsman in Feudal Japan. The training goes on for years, until TANJIRO finally passes his sensei in skill.

INOSUKE

Tanjiro...you are ready. You must head to the Paradis...the Island of Demons.

TANJIRO

I don't know if I'm ready, sensei...

INOSUKE

You have become a better swordsman than I could ever dream of becoming. Also, you won't be alone. I will come with you.

A smile erupts on TANJIRO's face. He will have his best friend, ZENITSU, and his sensei, INOSUKE, with him on his quest.

The hero, the dog, and the monkey, journey to Paradis, the

Island of Demons.

AT THE ISLAND

INOSUKE

This is what you've been training for Tanjiro...let's get this over with so that we can all go back home.

TANJIRO

Yes sensei...I will rid the land of demons.

(rustle)

In the distance, the gang sees a pile of leaves rumble. From it, erupts a pheasant with an injured leg. To its left appears a demon. The demon is about 20 feet tall and has huge arms.

TANJIRO

We have to save that pheasant!

Tanjiro draw his sword and approaches the demon. The demon prepares a punch, but as the demon strikes, TANJIRO leaps into the air and slices his sword through the demon's arm. The demon screams out in agony. He then proceeds to decapitate the demon, killing it.

PHEASANT

Thank you! Oh powerful one! Please, let me join you on your quest!

From there, the demon slayer, the monkey, the dog, and the pheasant move through the island, killing demon upon demon. The team seems unstoppable. That is, until they encounter the final demon, the DEMON LORD.

DEMON LORD

I have waited to face you...demon slayer. For eons, I have

sat on this very throne on this very island, awaiting your arrival. But now, seeing you, I can't help but feel disappointed, you're nothing but a child accompanied by his three pets. I will kill you, and your pets TANJIRO. I WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD FOR KILLING MY CHILDREN!

An epic battle ensues. The PHEASANT, INOSUKE, and ZENITSU are taken out of the battle almost immediately due to injuries. TANJIRO and the DEMON LORD exchange blow after blow. The DEMON LORD's skin is impenetrable, so TANJIRO has no way of decapitating him.

The Demon Lord sees an opening in TANJIRO's stance and attacks, ripping off one of his arms.

INOSUKE
(in fear)
TANJIRO!

TANJIRO wobbles around for a little before going back into a stance. He knows he is humanity's last hope, he has to win this fight. That's when an idea comes to him.

TANJIRO leaps into the air, throwing his sword with all his might into the DEMON LORD's mouth, which pierces through his nape.

TANJIRO collapses.

INOSUKE
TANJIRO! Don't die on us now! You have to go home to your mother!

TANJIRO
I did it sensei...I beat the demons...put me in the ocean...so I can return to mother...

TANJIRO's body is then cocooned by a giant peach.

INOSUKE releases the peach into the ocean.

Scene changes to the same river from the beginning.

An old woman is doing laundry at the side of a river when we see a large peach float down the river. The old woman sees the peach and tears begin flowing down her face.

THE END



ART





Jocelyn Olmos Camacho
Lilee Appleyard
Colby Golightly
Andy Hernandez
Will Heron

JOCELYN OLMOS CAMACHO







On that gloomy day I wore the white dress to embrace my freedom + innocence to try and brighten up the dark skies above us.

I WAS NINE.



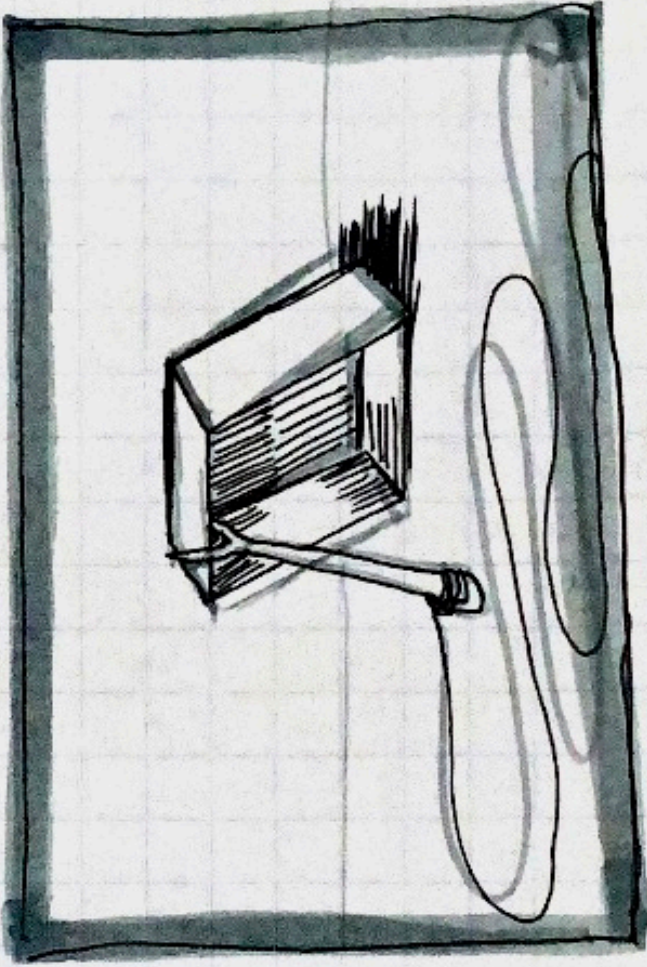
On that gloomy day I wore the white dress to embrace my freedom + innocence to try and brighten up the dark skies above us.

I WAS NINE.



HE GAVE ME BROKEN PROMISES, AND LIES TO KEEP ME QUIET.
WHISPERING SWEET NOthings IN MY EAR IN ORDER TO REEL ME INTO HIS TRAP.

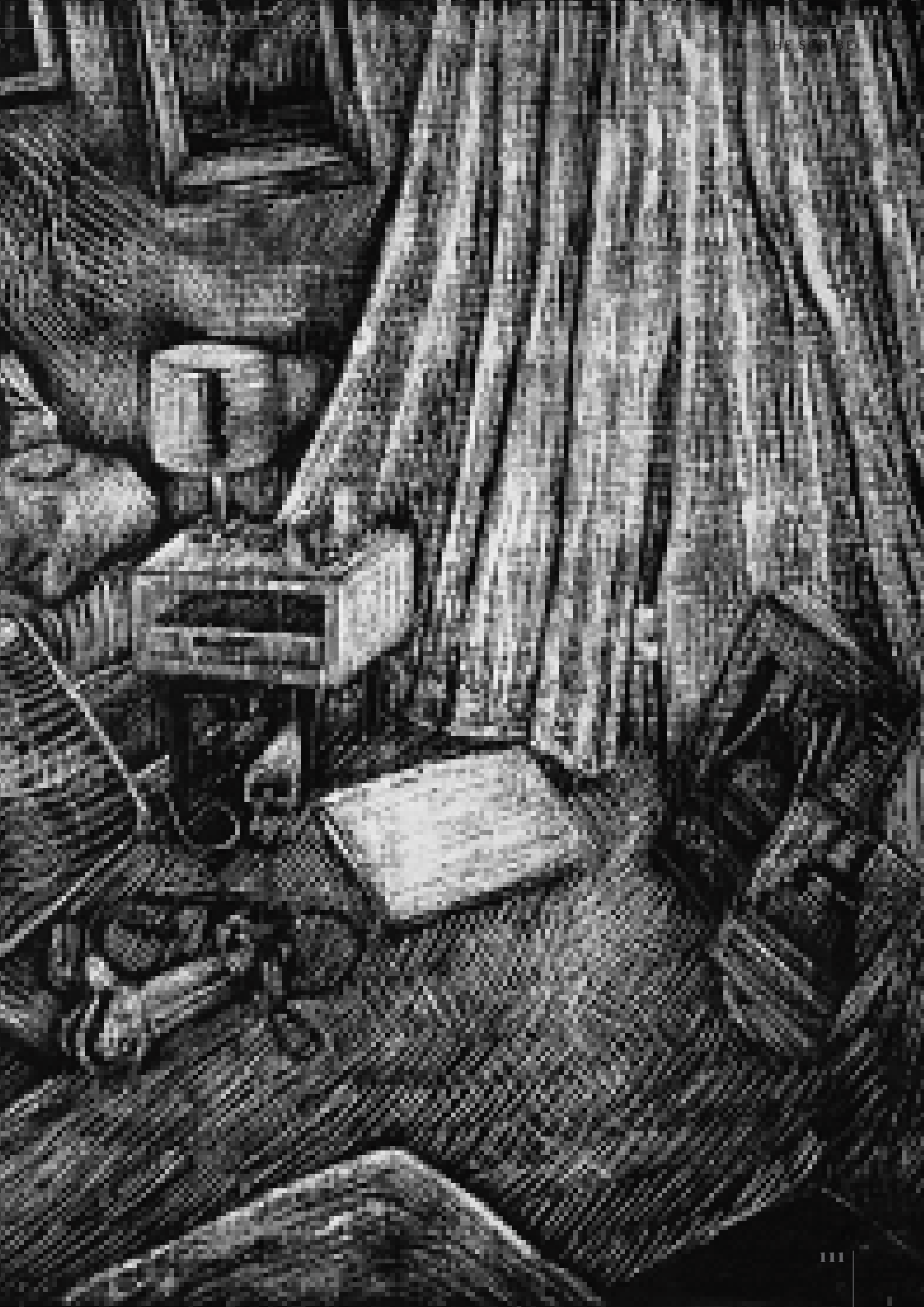
I WAS NINE.



LILEE APPELYARD



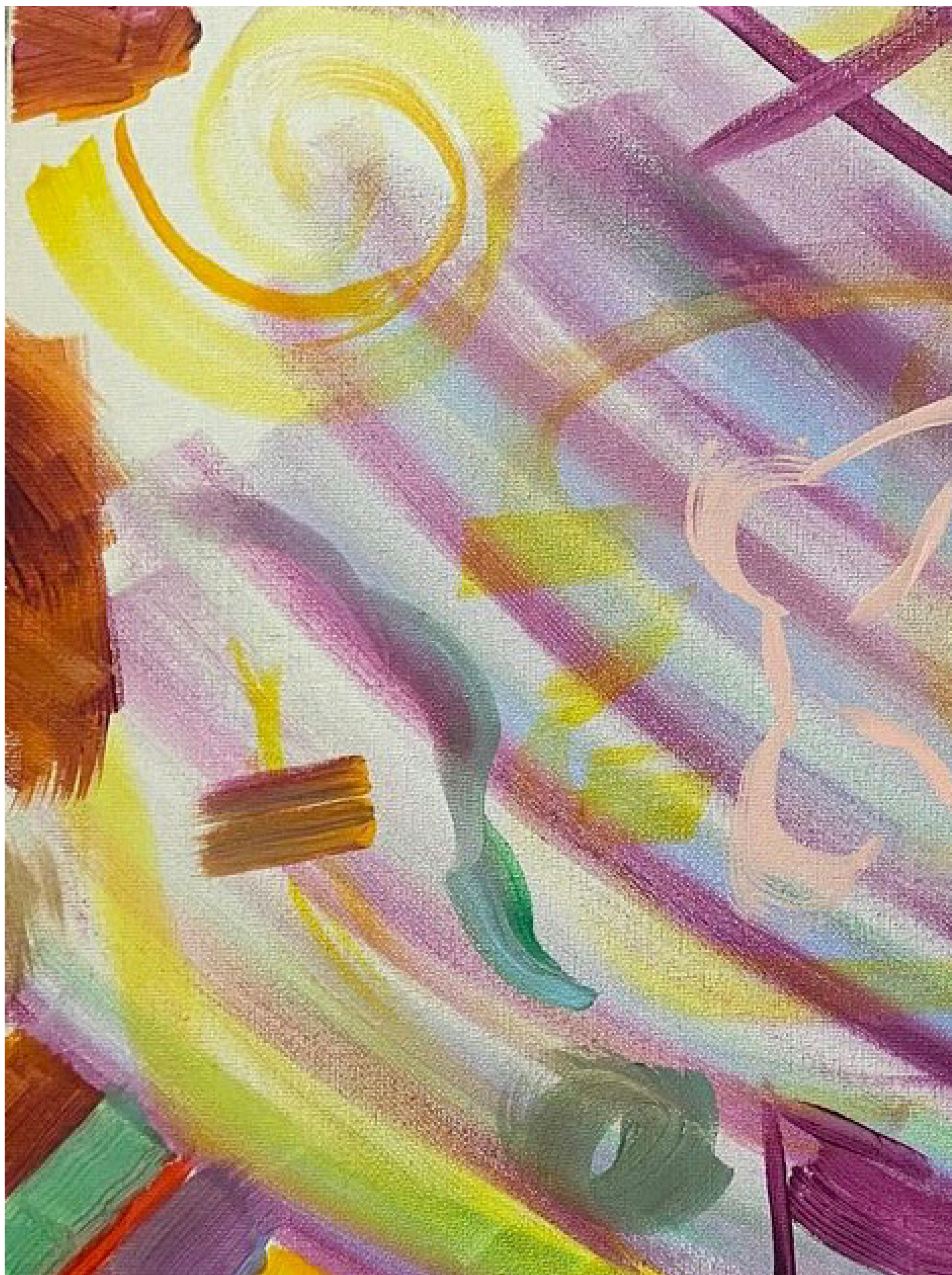
COLBY GOLIGHTLY



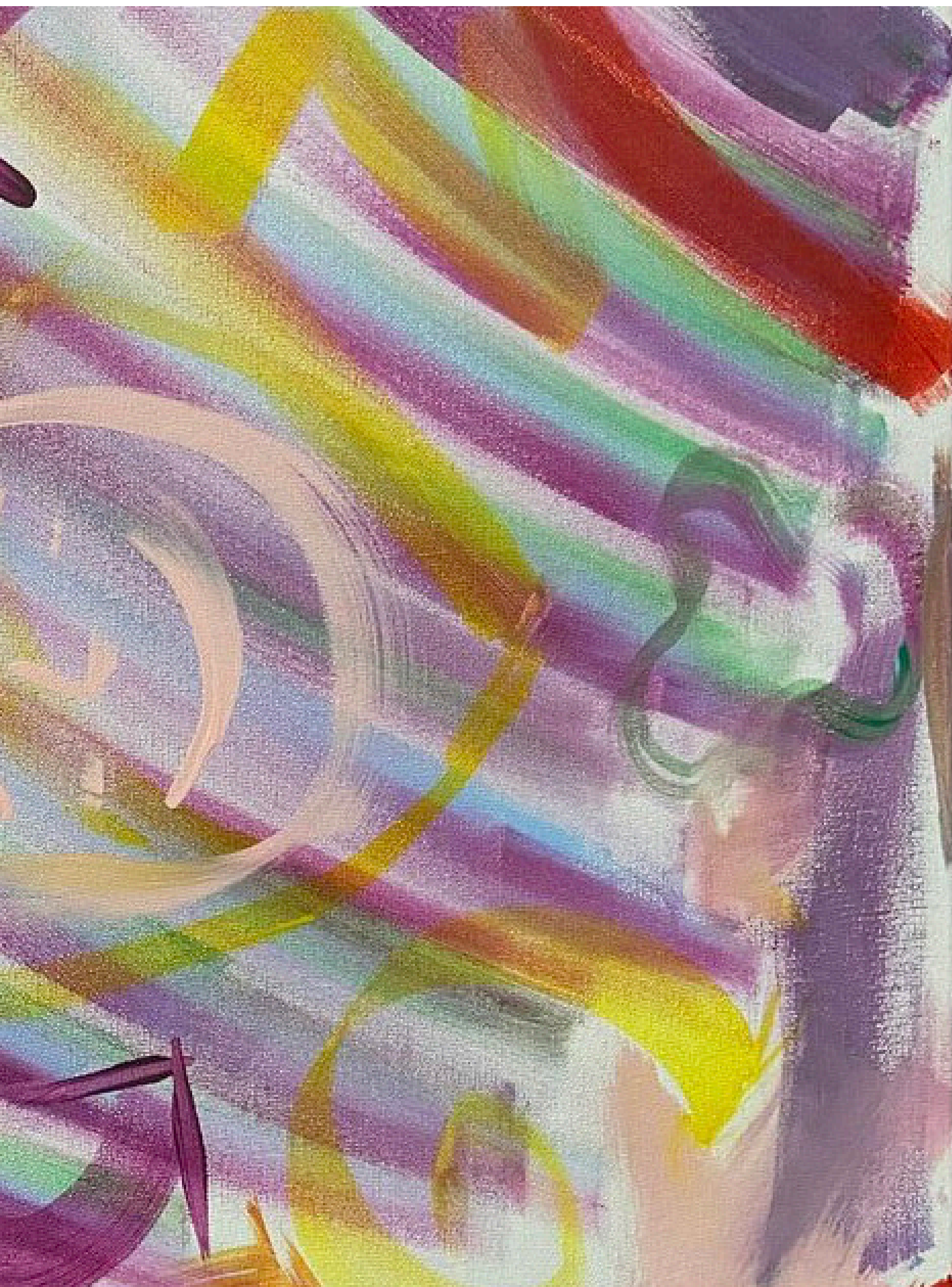




ANDY HERNANDEZ



WILL HERRON



REVIEW



A dimly lit, wood-paneled room, likely a recording studio or rehearsal space. In the foreground, an acoustic guitar is mounted on a black stand. To the left, a large, glowing white letter 'S' is superimposed on the image. In the background, a drum set is visible, along with a lamp and a patterned sofa. The walls are covered in dark wood paneling with decorative octagonal motifs. The overall atmosphere is warm and intimate.

S

Anne Marie—Alliyah Johnson
Harold and Maude—Judson Voss
Adventure Time—Katherine Mills
Clover by OR30—Kevin Dockery
The Album by Blackpink—Max Oropeza
Neon Genesis Evangelion—Noemi Castro
The New Wave of K-Pop—Olivia Taylor

REVIEW: ANNE MARIE

AALIYAH JOHNSON

Ann Marie. Singer, Songwriter, Rapper, and artist. One of her bestselling albums, “Pretty Psycho” was crafted with such precision and careful attentiveness to what’s “hot” in society right now. Her overall style of music is R&B and slow Hip Hop. It’s very therapeutic and soothing. Ann Marie is an artist that represents what society is all about today. Chase the bag and remain focused on your own personal success. Everyone can’t be along for the ride.

Ann Marie is from Chicago, Illinois. She grew up here and has been here her entire life until recently moving to Atlanta, Georgia. One of my favorite songs from her hit album *Pretty Psycho* has to be “Ride for Me”. In this song she speaks about wanting someone real and true. Some of my favorite lyrics are “Just need some loyalty, Someone who ‘gone ride for me. Boy, just match my loyalty. Swear you won’t give up on me...” This was so relatable because in today’s society, trust and loyalty just isn’t easy to come by. I found myself listening to this song the most over a lot of her other songs from previous albums. It goes more in-depth and speaks even more facts about today’s society and relationships in general.

All-in-all, Ann Marie is an amazing artist that represents the true Chicago-Atlanta female underdog to the “T”. The only thing I can really say that’s even remotely negative is that some of her previous songs were somewhat poorly produced. The sound quality was not the best and the flow was somewhat choppy. But now, she’s amazing and she’s making her way up the latter all while inspiring other young female artists or aspiring artist that they can do it too.

REVIEW: HAROLD AND MAUDE

JUDSON VOSS

Harold and Maude, a 1971 film directed by Hal Ashby, is the tale of two lovers trying to live life to the fullest even as the entire world tries to tear them apart.

The underlying theme of this movie is obviously “age is just a number” and I am all for it. The story is brilliantly written and the music will make you want to get up and dance. The Cat Stevens-scored movie opens with the introduction of the main character, Harold. Harold is a young teenage boy who seems very unhappy with his life. He spends his time going to funerals and his personal vehicle is a hearse. He constantly fakes his own suicide using multiple different methods, for what appears no reason. It’s not until he meets a cheerful old lady who does as she pleases and takes no names named Maude, and for the first time in the movie, there’s a certain shine in Harold’s eyes.. A relationship sparks immediately and shenanigans entail soon after!

When it comes to who we love, everyone is different. I believe Ashby was attempting to show people something definitely taboo, but also pure and full of love. This movie is a love story that you just have to watch to understand. Maude, even as an old woman, is full of love and appreciation for everything around her, but at the same time never takes anything at all seriously. Harold thinks the world is a miserable place until he meets Maude and has a reason to be interested in something again. By the end of the movie, you are left with a feeling of freedom and have a new look on life. Even the police couldn’t stop Harold and Maude, and they tried multiple times! Another large theme in this movie is being yourself and not letting people tell you who you are. Maude did what she wanted and didn’t care what others thought of her. And because of this, she lived every day to the fullest extent she could. Goes to show how much being scared of being yourself can limit your potential. No matter how hard the world tried to tear them apart and break their spirits, they pushed back harder and continued to live life the way they wanted to. This is a story of life, death, beautiful folk music, and hookahs.

REVIEW: ADVENTURE TIME

KATHERINE MILLS

The show Adventure Time is a show full of adventure, friendships, and overcoming tough situations with the help of friends.. This fantasy show is a fantastic way to introduce kids to LGBTQ+ in a positive way, having a non-binary character, two female characters relationship, and their supporting friends.

In the show, BMO, a video game console who's alive, is just referred to as BMO. In one episode, a character asked BMO what they are, asking to see if BMO was male or female. BMO answers "I'm BMO!", the other character smiles and they continue on. Although there is no official label, BMO is on the non-binary spectrum. Some may argue that BMO is a man or female but, BMO specifically points out they aren't any, they are just BMO. BMO's friends are really supportive, just calling BMO by BMO and not making a big deal out of it, showing kids it's ok to use different pronouns than what you were born with and also showing you don't have to conform to a gender.

Two other characters, Princess Bubblegum and Marceline, are shown in a romantic relationship. There is even a new show with them in it about their relationship. They are seen in later seasons living together and talking about a future together. Although their relationship and feelings aren't fully confirmed until the last episode, there's many ways you can see the relationship they have. Bubblegum has a shirt she's kept from Marceline since they were kids, which she gives up for Marceline. Princess Bubblegum and Marceline are seen in a healthy relationship, which helps introduce kids to LGBTQ+ relationships in a positive light instead of how the media sometimes shows LGBTQ+ relationships.

Adventure Time is a fantastic show, showing young audiences that what we believe is the norm is not always, introducing them to characters who don't have a gender, characters of the same gender in a positive and happy relationship, and a supporting loving cast. Because of Adventure Time, it's helped a younger generation start learning about their identity.

REVIEW: OR30 - CLOVER

KEVIN DOCKERY

OR30 is a group of people that work together to write, animate, sing, and direct an animated music video series called Clover. This music video is to bring back swing music with a twist in the hope to bring back the popularity of this type of music. This type of animation of a black and white choppy video similar to black and white TVs of the past with a remixed version of swing music helps improve the overall message of the animation.

Five songs have come out with an upbeat tone but have sad messages being told in a way that is meant for guidance to show those who listen to the songs to never give up on their dreams and to continue to walk forward no matter what. The song Help Me starts this series showing a young girl named Kel crying under a tree due to everyone throwing their dreams into the trash not even giving her a chance to grow her musical career. This leads to three ghosts trying to help guide her to her dream. The music and animation of this song help further the message it is trying to convey.

The next song is 100 Years which is about George, the hummingbird ghost, telling Kel how she should never give up on her dreams even if everyone else tells you that you are crazy. He tells her through a song about a woman he was in love with and how he never forgot about her even to death, and how everything reminded him of the dream of one day being with her. Helping explain how one should always hang on to one's dreams.

The third song is Still Dancing telling the story of Brenda, the rabbit ghost, and how she always wanted to be a dancer when she grew up but got struck with a disease that started off taking away her ability to use her legs, then her upper body, then to her head. But even though she had her dream taken away from her she never stopped trying to shine as a dancer because she knew someone believed in her so she went from dancing, to clapping, then to singing. This helps show the message of if you fall you should always get back up and face the challenge in front of you.

The fourth song is Karma showing how Dave, the wolf ghost, an animator tells the story of how everyone bullied him saying he would never be good enough, tearing up and destroying his work. But he never gave up going above and beyond throwing all of those who tore him down to shame. This shows that someone with enough determination and willpower can make those who never believed in you regret taking you down.

The last song is called Living On which is about Kel learning the lessons of the ghost and using them in the real world. All these animated songs give off a very heavy meaning of what it takes to succeed in your dreams. This is probably why it is such a popular set of songs, which helps those that listen feel more confident and have more courage.

REVIEW: BLACKPINK - THE ALBUM

MAX OROPEZA

Blackpink is a Korean pop girl group who consists of members Rosé, Jennie, Lisa, and Jisoo. They have taken the world by storm ever since they debuted with their double title tracks “Boombayah” and “Whistle” in 2016 due to their outstanding talent and extraordinary personalities.

Typically in Kpop, groups tend to release new music (comeback) every 6-8 months and about every 3-4 comebacks they release a full length album. Another thing the Kpop industry focuses on is a thing called mini albums. They are a form of album which consist of about 5-7 songs and this is mostly due to the fact that in Kpop, producers focus more on quality over quantity.

On June 10th, 2020 the groups label YG Entertainment, announced that Blackpink would be making their first comeback since their mini album titled “Kill This Love” in April 2019. Fans of Blackpink were excited to hear this news since it had been approximately 1 year and 2 months since any new music had been released of theirs except from their May 2020 collaboration with Lady Gaga on a track titled “Sour Candy.” It had been announced previously that the group would be releasing their first full length album in the 3rd quarter of 2020 but not before 2 singles were released periodically over three months, June to August. Then, in late July 2020 they announced the name of the album and much to our surprise it was titled... well, “The Album”. Very creative, right?

First to be released would be “How You Like That” on June 26th then next would be “Ice Cream” with Selena Gomez on August 28th. The release date of the Album was October 2nd with only 8 songs which was a surprise to Blinks (fanbase name) due to the fact that in an earlier statement by YG which stated that the group had prepared over 10 songs for the album.

Being a fan of Blackpink myself I was quite bummed out by the lack of songs but I still had hopes because I have truly never been disappointed with any of their songs. Considering it took Blackpink 4 years to drop a full album I knew that this was a long time coming and expected the greatest not only from the girls but from the choreographers, producers, and lyricists to give the highest quality product that fans had waited for, for so long.

How You Like That: An edm/house influenced song that focuses more on production rather than meaningful lyrics. The build up for the chorus is light and airy but not too relaxed to where you can't tell something big is in store for the Chorus, after all, Blackpink is known for having some of the catchiest choruses in Kpop. The chorus has a tropical themed drop with the vocals of the Jisoo saying the catch line "How You Like That, da da da da dat datatadat," then it's quickly followed with Lisa's line "Look at you now look at me, look at you now look at me, look at you now look at me, how you like that." which in a way calls out their haters by flexing on them because they know how successful they really are.

The ending of this song rewards the listeners by a strong instrumental that is pretty much a heavy edm drop the entire time which gives the girls an opportunity to have a dance break for the choreography.

This song serves its purpose as the first song to be released after a year of waiting for a new Blackpink song, it follows the same construct most of their other comebacks have had production wise, to ensure the listeners that this is indeed a Blackpink song with a Blackpink sound. 10/10.

Jisoo has a husky tone to her voice which is easily differentiated from the rest of the members. Rosé typically takes the role of belting high notes and showing off her vocals which never fail to amaze. Jennie and Lisa typically take on the rapping role while sometimes straying to the side to show off their magnificent vocals as well. The production value and instrumentals of songs never seem to miss.

You can truly tell the amount of effort they put into it. A comparison of this song or album with their others: This is Blackpink's best work yet, each song has its own place on the album and it all comes together perfectly once you finish it.

Kpop has always been around but it's the likings of groups like Blackpink, BTS, or Twice who make it so special. They have broken records when it comes to worldwide music whether it's through awards, music video views/likes, or their success rate. They are a driving force in music when it comes to my generation and set the standard for the future of music.

REVIEW: NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

NOEMI CASTRO

There is always some bad in good people. People make mistakes. Shinji from Neon Genesis Evangelion. He is a very flawed character but that's what makes people be able to relate to him. It's hard not to feel bad for him but some moments make people not want to feel bad for him.

One part that people will always sympathize with is that shinji has always been ignored by his father. When he was summoned by his father to go to the NERV center, shinji thought it was to finally reconnect their relationship. His father abandoned him 10 years ago. Gendo only wanted to use him as a pilot for Eva Unit 01. Shinji then tries to use being an Eva Pilot to try and impress his father, only to be further shut down at every attempt throughout the series.

There are so many things we should sympathize with Shinji but there are also many things that he did that would make someone not like him which is totally understandable. But maybe sometimes you should feel bad for the boy. We obviously didn't feel bad for him for choking asuka but in my opinion I didn't really like asuka for the way she treated shinji but that might not excuse him choking her to death.

He went through so many traumatizing things like crushing his friend toji with his eva. He didn't even know that Toji was piloting Unit 03 until after his entry plug was crushed. Gendo decided to use the Dummy Plug system to force Unit 01 to destroy Toji's Eva. All Shinji could do is look as his mech ripped into Unit 03. It is so sad to think that shinji crushed his friend & he didn't even know. He also had to kill Kaworu. Personally, Kaworu is one of my favorite characters in Evangelion. Kaworu was the only one to make Shinji feel loved and respected.

I honestly think the bad things he did was probably because of the horrible things that happened to himself. No one is a perfect person & shinji's character is an example of that. Traumatizing things that happen to you personally really make you question yourself.

REVIEW: THE NEW WAVE OF K-POP

OLIVIA TAYLOR

It has been clear to see that over the years, music has changed greatly to the point that it has influenced the new youths of our culture in many ways. This new wave of music has boosted a popular genre called “K-pop” that has influenced new norms and values that adolescents, teens, and grown ups have adapted into their daily life.

When listening to modern music in American these days, you won’t hear much about empowerment or worthiness. Moreover it’s mostly just about how adult’s spend their life doing provocative or dangerous things that isn’t a good influence towards our new generation of youths. While that has made the majority of people turn away from those kinds of songs, people have begun to get into the new age of music called K-pop.

This new genre, with it’s messages of not only being true to yourself but learning to love yourself; and the message of how we aren’t alone with our thoughts, our disabilities, or our needs, has reached millions of people not only in Korea, but globally as well.

With K-pop being a term that has multiple genres of music in that one word, almost anyone can find a song that can fit their taste. From songs such as “Lovesick Girls” by BLACKPINK which tells the story of how heartbreak can affect oneself through a Electric pop beat, to the Aggressive Hip-Hop track of Gods Menu by STRAY KIDS which lets the listener know that whatever STRAY KIDS serve on their palette (albums), the listener can find any genre that fits their taste.

One other reason why people love this type of music is because of the messages, shown or hidden, in the songs. Unlike in American music today, where its mostly misogynistic or homophobic lyrics thrown towards races or people part of the lgbtq+, lyrics attached to these songs in K-pop tell people that it’s okay to be yourself, to love whoever you want and to be bolder with how you express not only yourself but your actions as well.

In the MV from STRAY KIDS called “Gone Days” the lyrics in the song say things such as “...But trust me once ey, I’ll take responsibility for the future...” that tell the listener that no matter how much people in older generations will pressure you, only you can decide what you want to be. Idols in these songs also make the genre of music so important to people because they will genuinely tell through their

lyrics how much they care about their fans. They will always make sure that their fans are taking care of themselves and staying healthy, whether that be through their music, lives, or posts.

This small meaningful gesture can even be an extreme emotional support boost to many people who normally don't get told such things as that, and when looking deeper, it has also saved many people's lives.

Though others might not understand why this new wave of K-pop has taken over people's interest internationally, and still ridicule or make fun of others for liking the genre, people can't deny that it has made a revolution in the music industry. Not only does it have interesting concepts, and meaning lyrics with expensive and decorative music videos, but it teaches people the importance of their lives, guiding people whether young or old, into an almost new beginning.

From the already new 4th generation wave of K-pop now happening, you can't deny that this genre of music is now something that is here in the world for the better.



