

best  
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# best of elementia

issues i-xv

*an anthology of writing and art  
from the first fifteen issues of Johnson County Library's  
teen literary arts magazine*





*To Angel, who got us here, to Kate, who kept us here,  
to the creators who gave us such amazing material  
to work with, and to all of the editors and designers  
of the past and future who dedicated their time  
to make elementia what it is today.*



# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

*elementia* has always been a safe space – a community of engaged listeners and creators, teen-driven and teen-inspired. Over the course of fifteen ever-improving issues, *elementia* has grown into a completely teen-generated force connected with schools all over Johnson County, Kansas and beyond.

Johnson County Library created *elementia* with several vulnerable young writers in mind. These writers needed a place to pour their awareness, pain, reality, and perspective and an audience to listen and respond. Angel Tucker, the visionary leader of *elementia*'s first issues, made time and space for teen voices to resonate in the Library. She modeled strength in vulnerability as she convinced one adult listener after another that these teen voices were important and needed to be shared. Those first publications, spiral bound and sparsely illustrated, paved the way for the high-quality teen-created magazine we now publish annually. It is work that would not be possible without the help of library staff, community partnerships, generous funders, and our incredible teen committees who created the volume you now hold in your hands.

Collected here are the elements of *elementia*'s story so far – from those early words and sounds to the most recent celebrations of images, stories, and songs. Our teen editorial committee has sought to create a vivid, diverse, dynamic and deep representation of the over 700 voices that have carried this work through 15 issues. In Angel's words, *elementia* is "disturbing in the best possible way": strong young voices will disrupt your assumptions, imploring you to knock at the door of possibility and open what you've forgotten you closed.

## TEEN EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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Emily Sawyer, Neha Sridhar, Olivia Williams

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*Walk with Me* by Zachary Ruschill, issue xiii

# ISSUE ONE

*elementia* was created in 2005 by librarian Angel Tucker to give teens an opportunity to share their voices with the community. The first issue was made with the support of Eriko Akaike-Toste, a youth services volunteer, and Theo Elliot Goodloe, a teen volunteer who also created the theme and name for the magazine. For issue one, writers drew inspiration from the idea, "What is your darkside . . . what is inside?" This issue included 18 pieces of poetry, fiction and nonfiction.





## Living Redwood

Angela Clem

A Giant  
A Living Freak of Nature  
A Redwood.  
Tall, upstanding, huge, strong, ancient  
At least 2,400 years old  
People look at it in wonder  
"Wow! Amazing!" They say  
And I agree  
But I don't  
I think it's unbelievable and amazing too  
But I think that because I wonder  
I wonder how a simple tree – so inferior,  
others tell me, to mankind could go on  
When it sees civilization grow around it  
Killing its family  
Using its friends, relatives, even its own boughs  
and branches, for homes or buildings.  
Yet it keeps on going 1,000 years ago, it might have thought  
Just one more year  
One more year of torture and sadness  
But its perseverance is big and mighty  
just like itself I myself can barely live twelve years,  
let alone 2,400  
It's so hard when you see different  
Species  
Breeds  
Of cruelty  
Making you feel small  
Smaller  
Smaller  
Until you don't exist.

## Hang a Crooked Star (excerpt)

### Brooke Shippee

I awoke from the dream, still somewhat fatigued and ravenously hungry. The wheels beneath me stammered over the open road, bumping along like Morse code in tune to the music of the teenager seated beside me. She rolled her head in rhythm to the music and I wondered if she was aware that her shoes were incoherently tapping to match the heavy bass screaming from her disc player.

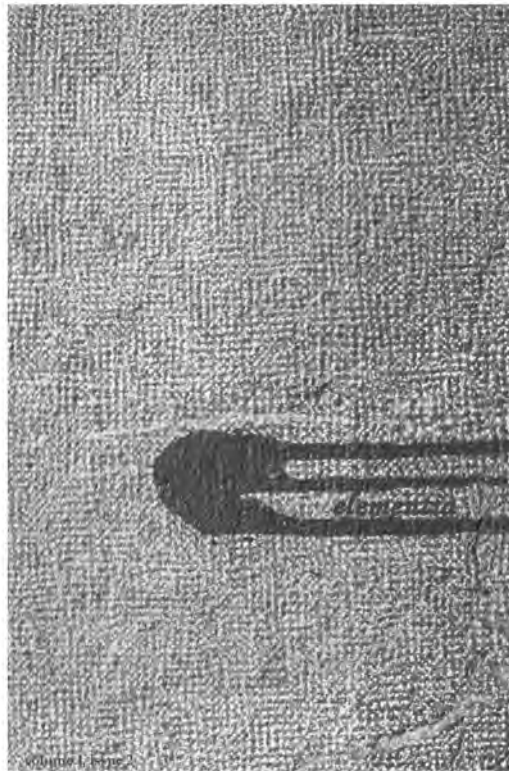
The teenager beside me stirred suddenly and pulled out a plastic baggie from her pocket. Her black fingernails flicked back the opening and she pulled out three Christmas cookies. The girl crammed half a reindeer in her mouth, crumbs sticking to the black lipstick that outlined her thin lips. Satisfied, she executed Santa with her sharpened teeth and mumbled to me, bits of St. Nick's face flying from her mouth and landing on my arm.

She offered me the last cookie, a yellow star adorned with a thick frosting layer. It was broken in half, which I assumed to be the consequences of such a long journey. She tossed the cookie into my lap and I noticed the gold frosting was cracked as if it, too, had been traveling for a long while.

I sat there for the longest time, contemplating whether or not I should eat it. Was it safe? What if it was a rogue cookie; a poisoned cake cleverly disguised as a seemingly ordinary holiday treat. Tempted, I brought one edge to my lips and caught the fragrance of something I hadn't smelled in a long time. Home.

# ISSUE TWO

Issue two of *elementia* was comprised solely of poetry in honor of National Poetry Month in April 2006. Issue two proved that *elementia* would continue to expand as the years went by, publishing 25 pieces of writing. The core team of staff remained the same, with Angel Tucker, Eriko Akaike-Toste, and Theo Elliot Goodloe working on the magazine.



## Peace: A 21st Century Anachronism

Alicia Dressman

Five dozen shouting.  
All mouths open vocalizing hatred for hate -  
Some to be cool, others to get it out -  
Shouting loud, looking left and right for the movement.  
Where's it going?  
Never looking from where it came;  
Grab a slogan, get to the sidewalks,  
Pound your message into the pavement,  
The mud of your sentiment,  
On the eyes of the blind,  
Miracle workers of the 21 century,  
Always moving and shaking;  
The world is too numb to feel the vibrations  
The people too rooted to move;  
Like gypsies they'll scrape on by and by,  
Reliving their heydays in moments like this.

## Love like a two-dollar bill

Zoë Christianson

when I offered you a heart full of love  
you answered,  
like this woman in a toy store  
when I tried to spend a two-dollar bill  
a relative had given me  
years ago, when I was young . . .  
*Keep it. It may be worth something someday.*

## Cherry Lies

Abby Harrison

The people in my world are all for free speech  
so long as it's not mine.  
Stemmed from a mind of national concern,  
it hardly counts as an emergency  
when I try to dig my nails into the glass  
separating me from the world  
and tear them apart.  
Waiting for pity or strength to release me  
so long as no one knows.  
Even you wait for my unmoving enemy  
to leave me motionless on the cement floor.  
Before, you've tried to comfort me.  
"If it makes you feel any better,"  
you say with a violent smile.  
"I baked you a lie."  
Heated to perfection in an easy-bake oven.  
I stare through the scratches on my wall,  
"Thanks, I guess," I whisper.  
It's been so long since I've heard my voice.  
It almost shocks me.  
I need you to come in after me.  
I can barely move,  
much less stand,  
or break the glass.  
Trapped on the wrong side of guilt,  
I hardly care what kind of lie you baked me.

You say it's cherry, and it suits me so well.  
You thought of me, as you made it  
and you just had to come by  
and give it to me.  
You can tell I'm dying in exile,  
but ask me to hold that thought for now.  
You have to leave.  
It just wouldn't seem right  
that you bake cherry lies for girls  
trapped in glass.  
I ask, before you leave,  
"Next time you stop to stare at me,  
bring something other than a lie crust  
ornamented with anything that suits  
your thoughts,  
and break this glass for good  
even if I have to eat your lies  
and trust your contents  
farther than I trust in anything, anymore."

Instead you laugh internally,  
Knowing that even you seem perfect  
when I'm in here.

## Untitled

Sarah Rekab

The sea shimmers as if  
a child,  
has poured glitter in its  
soft blue path.  
Mountains linger over such water  
and are outlined  
by a china blue sky.  
The sun dances across the water,  
casting this magical scene.  
A fisherman casts his line  
in

various shades  
of orange and red.

*Clap*

Water collides with the  
warm and golden sand.  
The wind rocks the tree leaves  
back and forth -  
clinking like swordsmen  
in battle.

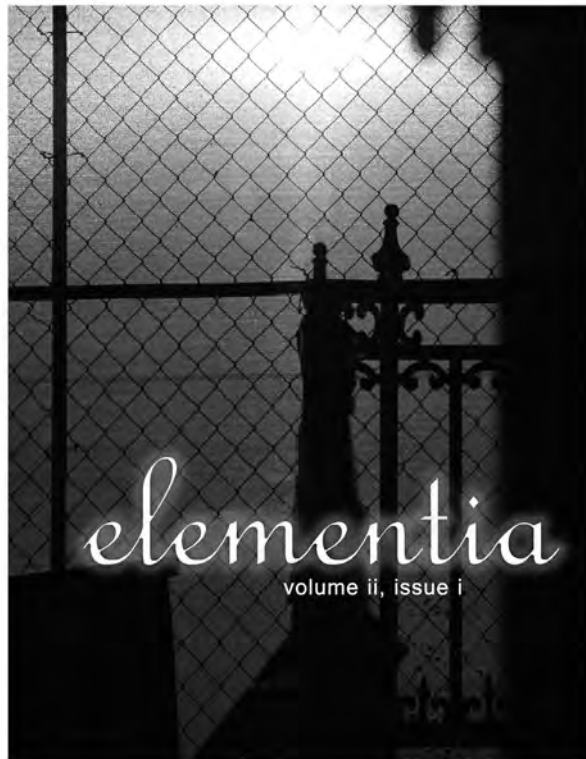
The wind strengthens  
and the waves become  
a serpent,  
weaving its way expertly  
beneath the water.

The wind caresses your hair  
with its invisible fingers -  
salty sea tickles your lips.  
You feel joy,  
but you won't find it  
behind the  
towering mountain or in the  
fierce sea.  
Neither will you find it  
beside the restless trees,  
or underneath the grainy sand.

Where you can find it  
is in  
your  
heart.

# ISSUE THREE

In issue three of *elementia*, there were so many submissions that the Library formed a selection committee of teens to help select poems and design and organize the magazine. In the fall of 2006, this issue published 46 pieces of writing and 3 pieces of art. This editorial committee consisted of Farah Firman, Selena Feng, Luke Feng, Rabi Hemayoun, Leah Holy, Nickey Jafari, Rebecca Mosely, Angela Clem, Laura Wellington, Delaney Herman and Zoë Christianson. They were assisted by library staff Angel Tucker, Eriko Akaiki-Toste, Scott Sime, Katie Manning, Kelly Sime, Jennifer Taylor and Cindy Frazer.



## Wordsmith Maddie Jones

words  
like amorphous chunks of metal  
they rest on a shelf in my brain  
and beg to be molded

I long to hold them in the  
fire of my skull  
till they are soft and malleable

I yearn to bring them to the  
forges of my soul  
and beat them  
and pound them  
and hammer them  
into lively, intricate shapes

all day long  
I sense their weight  
in the back of my mind

golden and silver  
they beckon,  
brass and copper they sigh  
forlorn and impatient

I reach out to grasp them  
but they acquire lives of their own  
squirming out of my hands  
and hopping, toadlike, back to their residences  
taunting me

there they remain  
languishing upon my cerebral shelf  
collecting a thin layer of brain cells

and there they will remain  
until the time comes  
when I catch them  
melt them  
mix them  
mold them  
into a gleaming  
new  
poem



# ISSUE FOUR

The fourth issue of *elementia*, published in Spring 2007, included a special feature spotlighting teen artist Maddie Miguel and published 63 pieces of writing and 5 pieces of art. Of issue four's overall content, editor Angel Tucker notes:

*The only constant is change. It is true, indeed. Over the course of two years and four issues, I have witnessed elementia change dramatically . . . it's become an entity all its own. While I have always believed in the creative process, it is now inimitable truth to me. Visions - no matter the size or complexity - can be fulfilled. Small ideas can become vehicles of change, platforms of hope, speakers of truth, fulfillment of reverie. It is my hope that this magazine is testimony to that among other things.*

The editorial committee for issue four consisted of teen selectors Zoë Christianson, Ayah Abdul-Rauf, Delaney Herman and Leslie Goodwin; and library staff selectors and designers Kasey Riley, Katie Manning, Linda Kautzi, Susan Woodruff, Kelly Sime, Jennifer Taylor, Cindy Cai, Eriko Akaiki-Toste, Theo Goodloe, Ralph Nardell, and staff editor Angel Tucker.



## Screaming Secrets: A view from Jillian Beyer

She fell on top of me, burrowed her face in my fluff, hands smacking the down inside of me, legs kicking, wriggling, growing restless at the foot. Every night I gave her comfort, she told me her secrets, whispered in the meekest of voices of the taunts and the teases and the tortures of the day. I was her alter of which she prayed, confessed, sinned, repented.

Lips would press into me, so hard I feared sometimes I would burst and my ethereal contents would escape and whisper the secrets I held into the air, giving her confidences away, but rather I became the two sides of the red sea, and her faces Moses, and her tears the staff, parting me.

Sobs left streaks, streaks became stains, no more was I white, but tainted. Not just of her makeup and dirt and skin, but of her secrets and thoughts and emotions. Tainted so I could never be returned, not that I would ever wish to be. Shelves told no secrets, gave no importance. I was never washed, never wiped, never wet. The water, she feared, I feared, would steal the secrets taking them to the sewers beneath the city to be shared.

Or fear I would lose a feather – a frightening memory forever lost. No, that would never do. Today was no different than yesterday, no different than tomorrow would be. I kept my oath, kept her confidence. But eventually the secrets smothered her, taking her, left her lying still, secretless.

# An Open Letter to Joseph Conrad

## Jess Holmes

Dear Mr. Uber-Goth

I don't pretend to understand the intricacies within the mind of any literary genius, but I've got to let it out . . . your endless pessimism is bringing me down.

Now as an IB geek, future English major, highly dorky bookworm, I don't mind admitting that in the beginning, I found *Heart of Darkness* quite good. But I am over one hundred pages in now, and you have used the word brooding exactly seven million, four hundred and twenty thousand, six hundred and four times. If you call me an exaggerator, I will call you a hypocrite: There is a darkness in the air. There is a darkness in the wilderness. There's a darkness in you. There's a darkness in me. There's a darkness in ALL of us . . .

Joseph, buddy, we get it. The world is encapsulated in a giant, brooding darkness. Or maybe your mind just is.

It's not the wordiness. Honestly, give me Dickens any day. In fact your writing is quite eloquent. It's just that I have been brooding over the grove of death that is your book for a week now, and I have been filling out the gloomy and confusing jungle that is Mr. Pulsinelli's symbolism chart the whole time, and I would simply like you to enlighten us, Mr. Conrad, as to exactly what, in the name of the Almighty Uber-Goth, is this darkness? Racism? Nightmares? The human psyche? Sifting through pages and pages of impenetrable symbolism? For the love of God, Joseph, spit it out.

Your book is not only tiresome and repetitive . . . it's downright depressing, and I'm sick of it. Why don't you go for an afternoon walk in the sunshine? Buy an ice cream for Christ's sake. Or if you can't do that, go exploring through the African jungle, and with a bit of luck you'll become one with the interminable miles of silence that it apparently takes you twelve pages to talk about.

Alright, I'm bordering on harsh. There's some sort of brooding darkness in your heart, and I ought to show a little empathy or at least provide some constructive criticism. So, fine, here are a few ideas. Food for thought.

1. Stop reading Dickens. You'll never be wordier than him, so don't even try.
2. Buy a thesaurus and look up the following words: dark, impenetrable, brooding.
3. Stop referring to people's faces as "masks of death." There's a reason you have no friends.
4. Don't spend fifty pages trying to get us to fathom an "unfathomable enigma." It's an enigma. And it's unfathomable. You said so yourself.
5. Don't capitalize Shadow. You're not Wordsworth, and you're not romantic.

And if none of that helps, try a little opium. It worked for Coleridge.

Happy Brooding,

Jess Holmes

# ISSUE FIVE

The fifth issue of *elementia* included three special features spotlighting teen writers Leslie Goodwin, Zoë Christianson and Brooke Shippee, with a short biography and written work by each. The issue, released in Fall 2007, included 38 pieces of writing and seven pieces of art. Of issue v's overall content, editor Angel Tucker notes, "It's the opposite of writers' block, when your thoughts over bloom and it becomes impossible to pick the best words to convey, to reveal, to display all it is you hope to say. I say you, but I mean me. Ideas are like journeys, in that you can't ever be sure where they will lead. Shall we relish in that notion alone? Yes. Let's. Enjoy."

The editorial committee for the fifth issue consisted of teen selectors Tommy Gray, Leslie Goodwin, Jaden Gragg, Matt Bennett, Kaitlynn Hager, Jenna Hager, and Imaria Corrick; library staff selectors and designers Angela Parks, Jennifer Taylor, Cindy Cai, Katie Manning, Theo Goodloe; and staff editor Angel Tucker.



## Losing Lila

Jessica Sutter

It looked a bit like Lila, but it wasn't Lila. I don't know why people say that when someone dies they look like they're sleeping. Her skin was dull grey and colder than ice. Her long body lay limp and heavy on the stainless steel table. Her clothes were dirty and rumpled. I was glad she was facing up so I didn't have to see the fatal wound in her back, but looking at that would be better than looking at her eyes. They were too blue, horribly bright and staring, and seemed to be made of glass. Doll's eyes. Dead and still, they did not in any way resemble the sparkling, expressive eyes of the Lila I knew. Had she looked as if she were sleeping, I might not have accepted that she was no longer alive. It was the eyes that convinced me.

I was in shock as I stood there, immobile, staring at Lila's shell. A voice in my head screamed a thousand questions, whispered countless what-ifs. There are no words to describe the pain that overwhelmed me. I couldn't tell you how long I stood in front of her body; perhaps it was seconds, maybe it was hours. Time itself seemed to vanish. Lila was dead. Because someone had killed her.

\*\*\*

The rest of the week was a blur. I received all of Lila's possessions; they arrived on Thursday afternoon in a moving truck. I helped the deliveryman carry them to my attic, I didn't look at anything. Policemen and reporters were forever knocking on my door, at all hours of the day and night until I was certain I would go mad. "Could you answer a few questions? Do you suspect anyone of murder?" they asked.

"Are you sure it wasn't suicide?"

"What will happen to Ms. Anderson's world famous art?"

The list went on and on. They didn't know Lila the way I did, and still most of these questions were out of my reach. The only person who could answer them was no longer in this world.

The things that followed the murder were so trivial; I couldn't connect them to the death of Lila. Every morning as I woke up, I wondered how the paper boy could go on his route like nothing was wrong; how the sun could rise and shine like everything was just fine. Then there were days that I woke up and thought it was just a bad dream, only to trudge into the kitchen and find several messages on the machine, talking about the funeral. Eventually, I stopped responding. They could find someone else to burden with these technicalities.

Red roses or white? Cremated or buried? I didn't know. Lila never talked about death.

The one thing that kept me from suicide was the thought of Lila's killer. Was he the man at the restaurant? The older lady walking a dog in the park? My wonderings became obsession. Where was the killer now? What was he doing? Does he feel remorse for his crime? Had he hated Lila, or even known her? Does he think about her at all?

I found it hard to see Lila's killer as normal or even real, but deep down I knew he was. Still, I swore revenge and promised myself I would bring Lila's killer to justice.

Weeks spun into months. Months drifted into years. I still didn't look at Lila's boxes. I spent my free time looking into possible suspects, reading and rereading Lila's autopsy report. Even dead,

Lila dominated my life. But it was an empty obsession. No matter what I did, she would always be gone, floating around in a void in some alternate dimension. Maybe she was in heaven. But Lila hadn't believed in heaven or hell. I wondered if I would find her when I died. I hoped I would. I'd search for all eternity until I found her, and we could be together again.

I quit my position as manager of the electronics store and studied to become a police officer. Eventually, I got the job. I worked constantly, and the other officers admired my commitment to my job. But there was something else different about me, too. I didn't go home to my wife, or help my kids get ready for school in the morning. I didn't even have a cat for company; I was alone in the world.

It was like when Lila died, my future did too. There was no light in my eyes. It seemed as if I was already dead, but still inhabiting my body on an Earth full of madmen and murderers.

I watched my life pass before my eyes; cold, unfeeling, robotic. Because of the field of work I was in, I was frequently around bodies and hospitals. Even when I was off duty I often visited doctors. They prescribed medicine and counseling; one therapist said that I had never gotten over the grief of losing Lila. I listened numbly, nodding in reply, wanting to be out of the doctor's office. The stench of sickness and death, mingled and barely covered by the smell of disinfectant and air fresheners, lingered in my nose for hours after I left.

\*\*\*

One night after visiting Lila's grave, I dreamed of her. She stood in front of me, painting. She was most herself when she was painting. Sometimes, she used vibrant colors in a vivid depiction of something in nature, up close and personal. One time she used drab shades to paint a city, while people with blurred faces walked down a busy street.

Occasionally, she just painted a small square of color on a blank canvas. A part of me knew it was a dream, and I drank in her image. It was clearer in my mind now than I had ever recalled it.

In my dream, Lila spoke to me.

"I painted emotions," she said in an echoing dream voice. "Remember? I always wanted people to feel what I was feeling. I got a rush knowing that my art made them feel that way. I didn't waste time trying to make things pretty, I just put down what I saw, how they were."

She looked at me. Here eyes were alive.

"I painted life."

I awoke with a start, covered in sweat, was I just imagining the smell of lilac and paint in the air? I climbed up to the attic and stared at the dusty piles of crap around me. Lila's boxes. I had never gone through them. With the same detachment with which I went about my life, I knelt and opened the nearest one. It held clothes. They smelled of mothballs and dust, but there was still a hint of lilac perfume underlying all the old, musky scents. Tears pricked my eyes. How long had it been since I cried, laughed, or even genuinely smiled? I thought of Lila. When did she not cry, laugh, or smile? How would she feel about my life now? I remembered all the times we had discussed our futures. She had dreams as big as the sky. I just wanted to be with her. Why couldn't I have been killed, instead of Lila? She was life personified. Killing her was a crime, I realized, that had no punishment. No matter if, against all odds, I found her killer, what would I do? If he was given the death penalty, I would be sinking to his level to be bringing about such a horrendous thing. Someone probably loved Lila's killer. Someone thought about him before she

fell asleep. Someone has kissed him, hugged him, and missed him. How could I take that away? I thought of how much I would want to have a new start with Lila. I couldn't have that, but I could give the murderer a second chance. That's what Lila would have done, I'm sure of it. Yes, he had committed an atrocious crime. But "bringing him to justice" would cause only more misery, and God knows the world has enough of that.

I stood up, and continued to sort through Lila's things. I smiled through my tears when I came across an old photo album and saw her beaming face, forever frozen in time. I could almost hear her infectious laugh. By the time I put the last box away, it was almost morning. The only thing left to look at was her art. I took a deep breath as I stood up and stretched my sore legs, then pulled the cover off the nearest canvas. Looking at the back first, I saw that it was one she had done right before she died; the date on the back was some two days before her murder. The painting was addressed to me. Puzzled, I turned it over. There was no doubt about the emotion she was trying to convey. And in that moment, Lila was with me. I made a silent promise to her to live the way I should have been living all this time. The red on the canvas quickened my heart and for the first moment in years, I relished the feeling of being alive.



*Untitled by Unknown, issue v*

## A Spectacular View

Leslie Goodwin

A cool breeze shuffled my hair, causing deep chestnut strands to tangle in my eyelashes. As my purse swung loosely at my hip, I slowly lifted my hand to shield my defenseless eyes against the brilliant sun. I exhaled deeply, letting the awe and amazement settle in the pit of my stomach. Rays of sunlight ricocheted off the monstrous beauty standing yards in front of me. Bustles of people popped in and out of my immediate view, blurring into tiny dots of color as they clambered excitedly to the royal peak.

Years of dreaming through hours of tedious classes where teachers snapped at me in their perfect accents, where foreign students snickered behind their knowing eyes as I said, "No, I am not horny," instead of, "No, I am not hot," led me to this moment. I was in the city of love. *Ah, Paris.*

Cafés with their red tablecloths and outstretched umbrellas lined the street corners. Women spoke in quick seductive tongues luring the waiters back for just one more glass of blood red wine. Men lounged on wooden park benches smoking cigarettes and reading *Le Monde*. Puffs of smoke lingered over their dark heads as a cigarette hung lazily on their bottom lips. Children giggled and wove their soccer ball around the sprawled out couples who were relaxing in the rich green grass.

My heart ached and twisted with envy. They lived this life every day. Shopkeepers displayed their "bon bons" and yelled, "Mademoiselle!" while they exhibited their best produce. Open markets leaked the sweet, sticky smell of lush fruit. Pastry shops wafted the scent of fresh delicacies out the window. Chocolate stands displayed rich, mouth-watering desserts. Fleurs stacked sweet beautiful flowers on their windowsills. A city of classical music, baguettes, and wine.

My breath caught in my lungs as a strange sense of comfort and belonging set into my bones. I wanted to live here, I wanted to call this place home, I wanted to raise my children in this elegant city.

Unfortunately, my plane ticket sat ominously in my purse, continuously nagging and pinching at my mind, reminding me that this stay was not permanent.

Carefully, I began weaving my way through the children, families, and couples chattering carelessly. My mind raced and buzzed as each step brought me closer to the monument. Tourists and French alike squished me into a single formed line until my hands met the slick railing. My head tilted up, staring at the thousands of steps I was about to climb. My heart raced and my eyes blinked incessantly. I prayed that this was not a dream, that I had actually boarded that cramped plane and flown myself to France, that I had actually spent the last five days exploring the city, that I had finally achieved my deepest dream.

Closing my eyes I lifted one foot and slowly brought it down on the steps. I felt the powerful metal below my feet and knew, at that point in time, that I was climbing the Eiffel Tower, and at any moment I would reach the top and stare over the historic, golden city. A city of eighteenth century buildings, Victorian, lush gardens, ancient castles, and contemporary museums of art.

The steps flew from the balls of my feet, perspiration clung chillingly to the nape of my neck, and every breath evoked a thousand tingling senses. Chattering, swirling, panting, I climbed until my legs formed into sticks of jello. Rays of heat radiated from the metallic floor and hovered



around my ankles. I stumbled towards the outer railing, pushing through the mass of embracing couples.

My hands hit the burning metal, and my eyes clouded over. Hot, salty tears tumbled down my cheeks as an enchanted smile crossed my face. In the space of a thousand people the world came to a mind-altering halt. The Parisian language lazily filtered in and out of my mind, dripping groggily, as I swayed in and out of the afternoon breeze. Dazed, I picked up the camera hanging loosely around my sticky neck.

Snap.

The camera churned as it printed out the Polaroid. My fingers slipped around its edges as I flapped it in the cool air, drying the ink. Slowly, I turned it over. The colors were vibrant, the images were crisp, the memory was magnificent, but more than magnificent, it was rare. Rare that I could possibly be in this elegant city, rare that I had this amazing opportunity, rare that I could have this piece of evidence. A broad smile engulfed my face. It was better than a diamond, better than jade; this was my own rarity – a memory forever forged onto timeless paper.

## Waiting to Be Struck

Matthew Tanzer

Sometimes I just sit there,  
waiting to be struck,  
with one poetic thought.  
Other times I am struck,  
with a line to my poem,  
and I have nowhere,  
to write it down.

Inspiration comes from  
nature and the world.  
It comes from the people,  
I meet,  
the ones I love and hate.  
Inspiration comes to me,  
on its own schedule.

I do not choose to be  
Inspired.

When I am inspired,  
I have no choice,  
but to write.

# Cakes and Cookies

## Jaden Gragg

### part one

Cakes and cookies, I wander along the face of the moon.  
I sing a song too loud, and my feet twist in the holes and I walk sideways;  
I am used to having someone there to hold me up.  
But she is gone, and so I've resolved to become her.  
I've told myself, I am going to be her, where we can live all day long here together.  
Me and myself, me and her.  
I am on the floor, slowly going crazy.

### part two

The moon is my house and in the morning I will be queen for lunch.  
wander in and out of this castle on the moon I was banished to.  
My name is dark and I am going to be her...I am going to be the girl I love.  
The man, he is quiet, but he tells me a joke and I sing a song.  
Cookies and moon cake and dusty milk, and craters and wishes.  
It is so easy to trip.

### part three

I am twisting on the cratered floor of my castle.  
I'm singing songs of banished love, finally becoming her, and we are one, and that makes us two.  
The old man laughs and says my addition is wrong.  
One crazy girl and one beautiful girl do not make two.  
They do not belong together, he chuckles.  
Silly girl; wrong again.  
I offer him a cookie. There are crumbs and moon-dust in his beard.  
He is my only companion in this place. My love has left me with bigger promises.  
She yearned to be free of singing and a girl with silly thoughts of love and sweets.

### part four

The old man laughs again and spits chunks of me into the air, floating without gravity,  
hung for me to snatch, whole again. Defiant.  
I baked myself into those cookies, hoping those would tempt her home.  
The old man got a huge laugh out of this one.  
I am back on the floor.  
Back on the floor, making more cookies.

### part five

Gravity pulls her away and takes her home;  
that's what I tell myself.  
My old companion tells me not only have I not mastered addition, I don't grasp  
the Law of Gravity either.  
I tell him, I listen to my heart and to eat another cookie.  
Take some of me, someone, and never give it back.  
gravity can have me.  
gravity can have me.  
gravity can have me.

## Guatemala

Brooke Stanley

Bumping the van, our holey road twists  
onto the dark side of each mountain,  
drawing us into night and the nervousness  
of a stranger at the wheel in an unfamiliar place.  
The stars are swallowed, the moon gone  
from the rough highway and jagged peaks.  
Suddenly, I see an orange glow in the black,  
beside the pavement, illuminating a face.  
In an instant, night gulps the figure.  
In our vehicle we have sped past, safe.  
But more flames are jotted in the inky blend of land and sky,  
bright flares calling.

They would pull us from a tourist's wealthy comfort  
to stand with them at the roadside,  
huddled around trash heap fires,  
watching heated cars pass as temperatures are falling.

We would learn that nights can still be cold this far south.  
We would learn the way hunger feels.  
Our fingers would learn to stitch  
brightly colored blouses, handbags, headbands, hats, skirts, sashes, scarves;  
To bead bracelets, keychains, earrings, necklaces;  
to hold them out to Americans  
to beg for one Quetzal, one-seventh of a dollar.

But we do not.

We ignore the firelit faces as best we can,  
hoping to return to the gulping darkness  
that scared us until we saw the lights.  
We forget what we saw.  
We drive away.

## ISSUE SIX

The sixth issue of *elementia*, released in 2008, included two special features: one spotlighting teen writer Rachel Franklin and the second spotlighting teen artist Mickey Willard. Of issue vi's 36 pieces of writing and 9 pieces of art, editor Angel Tucker notes:

*[Creativity] is, without any sense of wonder or doubt, a universal value. I understand this to be true because of elementia. Within efforts to challenge the status quo and maintain creative edge, we have expanded elementia's foundation to include Olathe Public Library in Olathe, KS, Cristo Rey High School in Kansas City, MO, Thomas Tallis Creative School in London, England and several schools in Lwimba, Zambia, Africa. I challenge each pair of eyes grazing this page today, tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that to create more, share more, collaborate more . . . . elementia is and will always be my muse, and I hope it will be yours. Creative humanity is a force to be reckoned; shall we change the world?*

The editorial committee for the sixth issue consisted of teen selectors Tommy Gray, Sophie Poppie, and Hannah Zimmerman, library staff selectors and designers Angela Parks, Jennifer Taylor, Jon Nichols, Rithvick Mogali, Theo Goodloe, and staff editor Angel Tucker.



## Being cosmic dancers; because what else would we be?

Jaden Gragg

We live on our floating planet,  
this hunk, this rock,  
we are so small.

But we are significant to ourselves.  
We hold each other, and give, and whisper,  
and reproduce, and teach generations  
the knowledge we have gathered.  
We are highly imperfect, but highly aware.  
We are survival, ignorance.  
Beauty. Intelligence.  
We are contradictions. We are swirling.

The universe produced us from gas and matter,  
and we are as thin as matchsticks,  
but we have enough brain power and ideas  
to explore this very same universe.  
We are cosmic explorers, discovering truths  
that dance on the edge of reason.  
The milky way galaxy, or the size of an atom.  
Dream-state reality.

Our bodies grow old, get sick,  
and are weak to pressure,  
but we are capable of amazing things.  
Dancing as story-telling,  
painting as communication.  
Art as a way of life. Life as a form of art.  
Vice-verse, right sides up, and backwards again.  
This is us floating in the universe.  
This is us on our little green and blue ship.  
This is us using our words to unite and inspire.

Our world is significant to us,  
but not to the universe.  
We go about day to day,  
unsure of the next day,  
but pretending we are.  
Take the dog to the vet.  
Make a salad for the picnic.  
Order some pizza for the party.  
Outside of us, the universe is exploding,  
glowing, existing,  
and we are dancing on pivotal stars.

Life may seem mundane sometimes,  
but everyday, life is formed.  
Life is taken away.  
There are deaths, births, and stars exploding,  
one into the other,  
Millions of degrees,  
we are the same exploding change.  
We are friendships bleeding, shooting stars,  
violent intermissions,  
And we are dire life.  
We are the greatest need,  
the need to move, to express, and to exist.  
We are dancers circling in the cosmos.

Because what else would we be.

## Bodies Revealed: A Non-Linear Essay

Candace Ladd

\*

"I am going on a diet," she announced.

"But McKenzie, you're only six! Besides, you're beautiful!" I shot back.

"But," she insisted, "I need to lose weight."

\*

"No, you do not. I'm your nanny, I know these things. Now eat your lunch."

Later that day, we watched an episode of Hannah Montana. In the silence, after I turned off the television, McKenzie sighed and said, "I wish I could look like her."

My friend Angel is three, adorable, and innocent. Whenever someone tells her she's pretty she blushes and says, "I know."

Her confidence in herself is astounding, the kind only a small child can have.

How do we lose that?

\*

### 7th Grade: A One-Act Play

#### Act 1, Scene 3

School Bathroom.

Three girls stand in front of a mirror, primping.

**Skinny Sami** *turns to side, pinches, skin on stomach:*

"Ugh, I am so fat. I need to lose like ten pounds."

**Perfect Paige** *fluffs perfect hair:*

"My hair is so frizzy and disgusting."

**Candace** *looks at her weary hair and less than flat stomach, and says nothing.*

**Fade to Black**

\*

I remember the first time I found out about calories. I was around the age of six, eating a mac-and-cheese lunch with my family. I reached for a second spoonful, and my mother said, "Honey, you don't need that."

"Why, Mom?"

"Because it has lots of these things called calories and the doctor said you don't need to eat as many."

This information astounded me. I'd always thought I was normal, maybe even perfect. Like Adam and Eve after the fall, my world had shifted.

Ever since that day, I have been plagued by the feeling of being more, yet less. I felt more chubby than I should be, yet somehow less of a person. It's ludicrous, but I accepted this more-yet-less paradox to be true.

\*

One in every 2,500 female babies is born with Turner Syndrome. According to [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org), Turner Syndrome probably occurs when part of the X chromosome is missing. Women with this condition grow to an average of 4 foot 7 and never go through puberty without medical treatments. In a society where women are defined by their bodies, those with Turner Syndrome face many challenges. The abnormal have never been treated well in any culture, particularly image-obsessed America. How could the life of a woman with the body of a prepubescent girl differ from others? I don't know how it would affect personal relationships, but her job options would likely be limited. Certainly, she couldn't get a job like a news anchor or a TV personality, no matter how qualified. Television is fixated on the young and the beautiful, and, while women with Turner Syndrome certainly look young, they don't fit the ideal of beauty.

\*

I will never get Botox. I think you can really tell a lot about a person by their wrinkles. Some people have a "W" of lines stamped on their forehead between their eyebrows, a mark of consistent worrier. Chronic smokers have little pucker lines scattering out from their lips, a signal they've spent a lifetime cradling cigarettes. The kind of wrinkles I want are laugh lines: deep creases fanning from my eyes, half moons framing my smile. Worry never changes anything, and smoking makes me cough, but laughter is a legacy I want carved into my features.

\*

Women who think they're beautiful complain about their looks, knowing someone will contradict them.

Women who dislike the way they look rarely gripe, for they fear someone will agree.

# ISSUE SEVEN

The seventh issue of *elementia* was published in 2009 and featured 24 pieces of writing, six pieces of art and a special feature spotlighting teen writer Patrick Barry. Of issue seven's overall content, editor Angel Tucker notes:

*"Breath" "eyes" "memory." These three words sauntered around in my mind again and again as I considered what I would say about this issue—the seventh issue of elementia. Maybe it's because this issue of elementia is softer than any other issue – soft like the breath and breeze of tree limbs. And maybe it's because this issue is all about what it is we, you, I believe in – belief being rooted in what we see with our eyes, our hearts and our memories. Mostly my friends, I believe in signs. Breath eyes memory.*

The editorial committee for the seventh issue consisted of library staff selectors and designers Angela Parks, Jennifer Taylor, Gene Ann Newcomer, and staff editor Angel Tucker.





## Surfacing

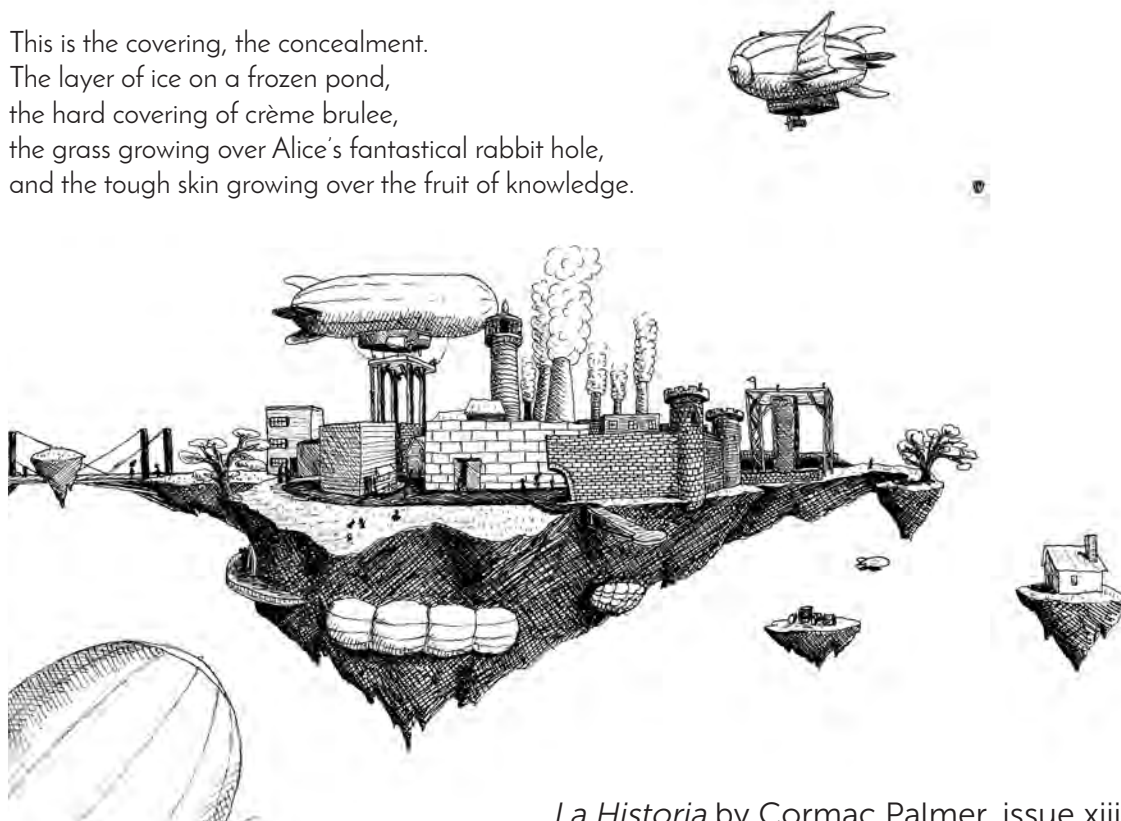
Jaden Gragg

There is so much beneath the surface,  
of what we are being told,  
like cream rising to the top of milk,  
like layers in the ocean,  
like light filtering in only through the top.  
The rest is inky darkness,  
so much life and truth swirling beneath the surface.

Under everyone's face,  
there is blood and nerves, and vessels.  
Under everyone's breath,  
are whispered things that carry lightly in the wind.  
Under clothes,  
there are body parts, soft and fleshy and covered,  
like vegetables in an underground cellar.

There is so much beneath the surface.

This is the covering, the concealment.  
The layer of ice on a frozen pond,  
the hard covering of crème brûlée,  
the grass growing over Alice's fantastical rabbit hole,  
and the tough skin growing over the fruit of knowledge.



*La Historia* by Cormac Palmer, issue xiii

## Masquerade

Rachel Franklin

### I. Blue chamber

Take my hand, feel for flesh beneath the glove, the mask  
Catch the notes slipping through the air (your fingers)  
Dance until we die and await the resurrection  
Listen closely.  
We will come alive again  
To Beauty and light off stained glass and liquor off stained hands  
When the laughter filling the room suddenly

### II. Purple chamber

Pick up the tempo, lying in pieces on the floor.  
Let's hold happiness close to our chests and never talk of why  
Kiss unfamiliar lips and pry off masks with curious fingers  
Guess, guess:  
Who am I?  
Who are you?  
Why are we here aflame with gaiety and glitter?  
When the world outside is aflame with the Decay and screams of children?  
Is that why when the clock commands it, we

### III. Green chamber

We didn't used to be this happy, don't you never want to remember?  
But drowning in velvet you can't come up for air (your touches)  
Can't cry through the smiles. We are prisoners to fancy.  
Give me a gilded cage and I will throw away the key.  
The musicians are steeling themselves, watch,  
Awaiting the second of bliss, when their world can finally

### IV. Orange chamber

I have sealed this masquerade  
Running through each separate room is a murmur  
A brush along your fingertips.  
You could not feel me grasp your hand and ask,  
"Shall we?" Shall we rise above the revelers  
Leave the floor and feel the energy pulse through the room  
Then . . . finally . . . everyone just . . . everything just

V. White chamber

I am the phantasm, the Avatar of hunger  
But you danced a little too much like a heartbeat (your life)  
And I was too little like a pendulum with no pit beneath it.  
Dance. You will die. I will eat you alive  
And blood will stain the shining floors  
And blood will stain the dancers  
And blood will stain the musicians  
And the revelers  
And the ebony clock will

VI. Violet chamber

Please

VII. Red chamber

And each dies in the despairing posture of his fall  
And the life of the ebony clock goes out with the last of the gay (the final)  
And the flames of the tripods expire  
And Darkness and Decay  
And I hold illimitable dominion over all.  
Take a moment, look around, and  
STOP.

## ISSUE EIGHT

The eighth issue of *elementia* was the first to publish long fiction, including two short stories which were excerpted in the print magazine, with the full versions posted online. Of issue viii, the editors note, "Visualize this thing that you want. See it, feel it, believe in it, make your mental blue print, and begin to build . . . May it always take a village to create the worthwhile." Released in 2011, the issue published 25 pieces of writing and 6 pieces of art.



## Hot Blood Underground

Ayah Abdul-Rauf

He is anchored to the cold room's center  
By metallic, unused fetters  
Reluctance is his parapet and it's likely to collapse  
He lies amidst rusted traps  
He is the first catch.

His thoughts are connected by sloppy toy seams  
The reports about him are printed in reams  
His limbs are connected by sloppy toy seams.  
Sometimes he comes undone. Sometimes he comes undone.  
Sometimes, he comes: undone.

## The Wish Garden

Andie Davidson

A mindless leaf fluttered out of nowhere and perched on my sandaled foot. In the distance, a disorganized medley of birdsong made up an unrehearsed orchestra. Idyllic as it was, I was in the middle of a fairly typical snapshot of spring. Yet I had somehow been thrown into the scene with no choice or knowledge. I never really understood how people could say "I have no idea how I got here." Even if you lost the memory of an actual event, you knew what led up to and followed it. Memory has to end somewhere, and surely those last few moments of knowledge could tell someone how they might have ended up wherever they were. It doesn't make any more sense to me now, but I scoff at it less. I had no idea how I ended up in this sleepy little town, under this burning sun, between these neat houses and picket fences. It didn't look all that different from home, but for some reason I half expected the manic smile of the Cheshire cat to creep up out of nowhere.

No cats – eerily grinning or not – crossed my path. What did pop up was a little cottage, straight out of Anne of Green Gables and swimming in a mass of colorful flowers. This seemed as good a place as any to try to figure out what was going on. After a fruitless few knocks on the door, though, I was as lost as ever.

"I'm out in the garden!" A voice suddenly floated out from the colorful pandemonium of the backyard.

The little cobblestone path somehow managed to lead me safely into the center of the chaos, and I emerged in the middle of a wildly disorganized rainbow of flowers. There were flowers popping out of the soil, flowers stretching lazily up the white deck, flowers perching in the crowded window boxes. There were tiny buds, squeezing their eyes shut against the sun, and brazen blossoms opening their petals wide. There were roses, daisies, daffodils, lilies, lilacs – I had never seen so many flowers of so many types in one place.

Buried deep in this chaos was the source of the voice: a small, red-headed fairy of a woman bent over the blooms. Brushing an errant curl out of her eyes and glancing up at me from under the brim of a woven hat, she did not seem the least bit surprised. Perhaps random strangers materialized in her garden often. Or maybe she just wasn't easily ruffled. In any case, she wordlessly handed me a trowel and began to explain the questions I wasn't sure I had ever asked.

On my bookshelf at home, there is a book of fairy tales that my grandmother had when she was a little girl. I would sit up late, defying my bedtime, to read these stories. I adored them, but even as a child I knew that fairy tales weren't real. This story, though, could really only be described as a fairy tale. And there is, after all, only one way to begin a fairy tale:

Once upon a time, there was a woman who lived in a cottage teeming with flowers. For every hopeful wish on a star, another flower sprouted in her garden. No one could be absolutely sure why that happened; all they knew, and ultimately all that mattered, was that it did. Her garden was the brightest and most abundant any passerby had ever seen, the diverse blossoms spilling through the white picket fence and out onto the sidewalk. After all, everyone wishes on stars, even if few believe that their wishes could actually come true.

Every day she counted the wishes, writing the curly words scrawled on the colorful petals down in her many notebooks. Most of the flowers wilted as people forgot about their wishes, but there were always plenty more to take their place. The lucky ones burst into full bloom, their buds turning into gregarious smiles as their wishes were fulfilled.

"But," she concluded, "I only collect the wishes. Making them come true is up to the wisher."

Ignoring my incredulous stare, she pointed to a lone flower.

"And here, this is yours."

In retrospect, there was probably a better reaction to this tale than the one I came up with (which was to laugh). This was a fairy tale, a fable for bedtime stories and children who still believed in magical castles – not my life.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I don't wish on stars," I told her skeptically.

Her only response was a sideways glance and an indecipherable smile.

"No, I suppose not. But this is your flower all the same."

A memory suddenly plopped gracelessly into my mind. My pen, poised above the poetry reading sign-up sheet, seemed to meet an invisible fence, unable to reach the paper.

"Just do it. You have a million poems spilling out of your notebook. Don't pretend you don't – I've seen them," Claire insisted. Indecision distracted me from letting the anger at her nosiness to spill out.

The paper stared tauntingly at me, harsh and cruel in its white simplicity. A notebook full of scribbled verses was all very well, but reading them out loud? In front of people? People had too many thoughts, too many judgments, too many biting voices. With a sigh, I let the pen rest down on the table. Maybe some other time.

Snapping back to reality, I saw the sparkling blue eyes still resting on my face. The easiest option seemed to be to just go along with it and hope I wasn't in the company of a madwoman. Without a word, I took the watering can from her pale hand. The flower was small and wimpy, a little yellow bud wobbling on the end of a feeble green stem. I nudged a little dirt around the stem to prop it up and began to sprinkle water on the thirsty plant, feeling her knowing eyes on me the entire time.

"What do you think it means if I dreamed that my homework grew fangs and tried to eat me?"

With somewhat of an effort, I tore my eyes away from their current occupation staring blankly at the cereal boxes in the pantry and turned to my brother.

"You've been reading too many comic books?" I suggested.

"Very funny. What did you dream about then?" he retorted.

My mind flashed suddenly to a picturesque little town, a cottage with a bursting little garden, a collage of flowers of all types and colors. Shaking my head to dissolve the image, I turned back to the cereal.

"Oh, nothing important."

There were 400 pairs of eyes fixed on me and only a flimsy ten feet of air protecting me from their scrutiny. For a split second, I couldn't remember why I was standing there. What had ever possessed me? I was the quiet girl, the one who sat in the back of the classroom and filled the pages of her notebook with the words she would never say out loud. Maybe my poems were meant to stay safely tucked in that notebook, away from prying eyes and harsh judgments. But then out of the corner of my eye I saw a flash of yellow. A yellow daffodil? When I turned to look it was only Mrs. Montgomery's garish yellow sweater. I took a deep breath, steeling myself, and began to speak.

A particularly insistent robin chirping outside the window nudged her out of bed early. Picking up her watering can, she ambled somewhat anxiously out to the garden. As hard as she tried to be unbiased, she inevitably found herself secretly leaning toward certain fragile blooms, rooting for their survival. This little yellow daffodil was one of those. Raising the water can, she began to pour and followed the glistening drops as they tumbled toward the flowers. Finally she forced herself to look at the ground. A smile crept across her face. There it was: a yellow daffodil, standing up tall, its sunny petals opened proudly to greet the morning light.

## Choosing to Hurt

Jessica Sutter

He leaves his shoes on the doorstep. Size twelve and a half, wearing through the toes and curling with wrinkles of use. He stopped working at the orchard in November, but red Oklahoma mud still caulks the crevices and holes, stains the laces. I stare at the pile of scuffed rubber, a testimony of the time that's melted and seeped across the seasons without seeing him here. The last time these shoes walked up to my door, they were nearly brand new, and so were we.

"Hey." He coughs nervously and loops his thumbs in his pockets once he's inside. I close the house to the shivery heat.

"It's been a while." My words are thin droops that ring in our ears and leave ripples of unspoken understanding.

"Yeah. It has."

The silence is loud and mocking. *Stupidstupidstupid*. This wasn't a good idea. I bite my lip until it hurts. I partway open my mouth, though there are no words waiting behind it. I risk a glance at his face for the first time. Oh. The sky hasn't known the color of blue in James Henrison's eyes.

He turns away. My heart is shattered glass. Sweat trickles down my neck behind my curly hair and the seconds count themselves as they tick away on the clock behind me.

"If I knew you'd be this excited to come over, I'd of asked you a long time ago," I joke.

One side of his mouth lifts up in a grin that makes the glass pieces inside me ache.

"If I knew you had such exciting plans, I would've been dying for the invitation."

"Oh, I know you would." I laugh sarcastically, feeling the knots release their nervous grip in my stomach.

"Let's go for a drive."

His car smells like it always did – old upholstery, rain, and cigarettes. When he's this close I can smell him, too, though I can never put my finger on what about it gives me that feeling. Like a nosedive on a rollercoaster. It makes me forget things. Important things I have to remember, like Evan.

I turn and watch him. Stoplight, brake, green light, gearshift. He's driving barefoot, like he always did. I smile. The old habit reminds me of the James I used to know. The boy who never said I love you, but held me like he did.

"I'm bad for you," he says. Out of the blue, matter of fact. "We're just in such different places right now."

He always told me that.

"I like you. That's not the problem here."

"I know." My voice is soothing honey. No expectations, no pressure. Just the way he likes it.

I think for a moment to gather my words.

"When I'm what's important to you, you won't hurt me. I trust that."

"But you are what's important to me!" He's agitated now, indecision taking center stage. It's never as simple as caring or wanting. There's always a catch.

I twist my fingers in my lap. I think about Evan. He's important, too. I hold onto the thought before James's next words blow it into the wind, where it won't matter anymore. It's starting to



storm outside. A strange, humid chill finds its way into the car. Rain taps the windows and fogs the glass. The sky is grey, the exact shade of Evan's eyes. I let out a shaky breath.

"So be honest. How do you feel about me?"

He's given me the bait, and he doesn't even know it. This is the question I can't lie about. I take it as a sign and spill my guts.

"Honestly? You make me crazy. I'm with you, and I forget everything, I hate being close to you. I'm dying just to hold your hand, anything."

He lets out a groaning, humorless laugh. "Don't say that."

"Why not?" I'm pushing it, but it's too late. I'm done waiting.

"It's just . . . I don't know."

"Okay." The patient acceptance is back in my voice, but the tension in this tiny space is suffocating. The radio scratches out a song in the thick air. It has the kind of lyrics that make me wonder if he thinks of me when he listens to it.

"Where do we go from here?" Those blue, blue eyes are locked on mine, and my words catch in my throat. He was wrong; we aren't in different places at all. He's with me now, close enough to touch, burning at my heart.

"Kiss me."

I've scared him. He exhales slowly. "Don't say that," he says again, but softer. He doesn't mean it. Seconds pass. I'm suspended in midair, trying to figure out if I jumped too soon.

"I'm tired of driving," he says, pulling over to a parking lot. As soon as we've stopped, it's last summer all over again. Time isn't running straight, I can't think. His mouth is familiar after all these months, but different somehow. Because of Evan. The memory of him is distant now. James kisses me like he's starving for it, desperate and almost frantic. But his thumb is gentle as it rubs against my cheek, close to my mouth, holding me there. I wouldn't pull away for anything.

I can feel our heartbeats jumping out of our skin. I'm breathless, in that strange way you get when something you've been longing for is finally real.

He's shaking as he pulls back, and I realize he's holding my hand. He never did that last summer. I brush my lips against his sandpaper cheek.

Guilt is delayed a few more seconds before it hits me smack on the head. I just cheated on Evan. Seven months, my personal record, shattered in minutes. I lean against James's shoulder, look up at his perfect face. I've realized what it is – he smells like secrets. The delicious, dangerous kind you want to keep private. The kind that brings people together, or tears them apart.

## She who destroys the light

Rachel Franklin

### *first seed*

Darling, you and I both know  
in a better world I could be your Lethe  
wrap around you, drown you  
erode everything that ever tried to bring your fate down on you.  
Still if I picked up the pieces  
I'd hear their soft hum –  
the one shell moan for the sea –  
for even then there would be places in you  
still not free

### *second seed*

Surely women must have learned by now  
never to trust fruit.  
A garden is a prison earned  
and there is nothing satanic, nothing sacred  
about hunger.  
Yet when your body curls in on itself  
seduced by not-seeds that need only thirst to root  
you find your lips wet  
and what might be blood or juice  
becomes the same as sweat.

### *third seed*

Your skin is singing  
I swear, hymns to the colors  
the way the world's ringing hurts your ears  
the salt of the Dead Sea come alive in your tears  
the smell only in the sky as the rain clears  
the poppy-eyed bud people who spend years  
walking around, faces turned toward the light  
thrusting pomegranate crown  
fingers up up up to pray  
as if the good lord giveth for reasons  
other than to contrast what happens  
when he taketh away.

### *fourth seed*

If I was brave enough  
I would plant my spit  
and bones and fingernails

and grow roses  
when you build  
glass houses for your stones.  
But I am no iron queen  
content to perfectly decompose.  
All I can do is  
lay down on your altar  
dream of making the world  
barren as my organs feel it must be.  
When things that flowed  
under me have dried  
screaming echos into spiral shells  
will never change  
the tide.

*fifth seed*

If only there would  
not be seasons  
but, oh, darling  
I know he's idling between  
nerve endings  
painting wine wings  
on your shoulder blades  
his words sticking between  
the back of your throat and swallowing  
and I don't care, now.  
You will, I hope you won't,  
but you will and still  
the world is alight.  
Tinged in green,  
fit to bursting  
it cascades through gaps  
in the boughs of our tree of  
you're the one who  
gives me life.

*sixth seed*

Persephone,  
if this curse would let me  
before you next depart  
I would crown  
you queen of queens  
give you rule  
over your 613-chamber  
heart.

## ISSUE NINE

The ninth issue of *elementia*, published in 2012, included a variety of artwork, poems, short stories, essays and a few highlighted quotes from contributors. A quote from writer Catherine Strayhall reads, "Aren't all heroes simply the sort of people we live with everyday?" Although not officially themed, many of the pieces contained in issue ix touch on this theme of heroes and antiheroes.

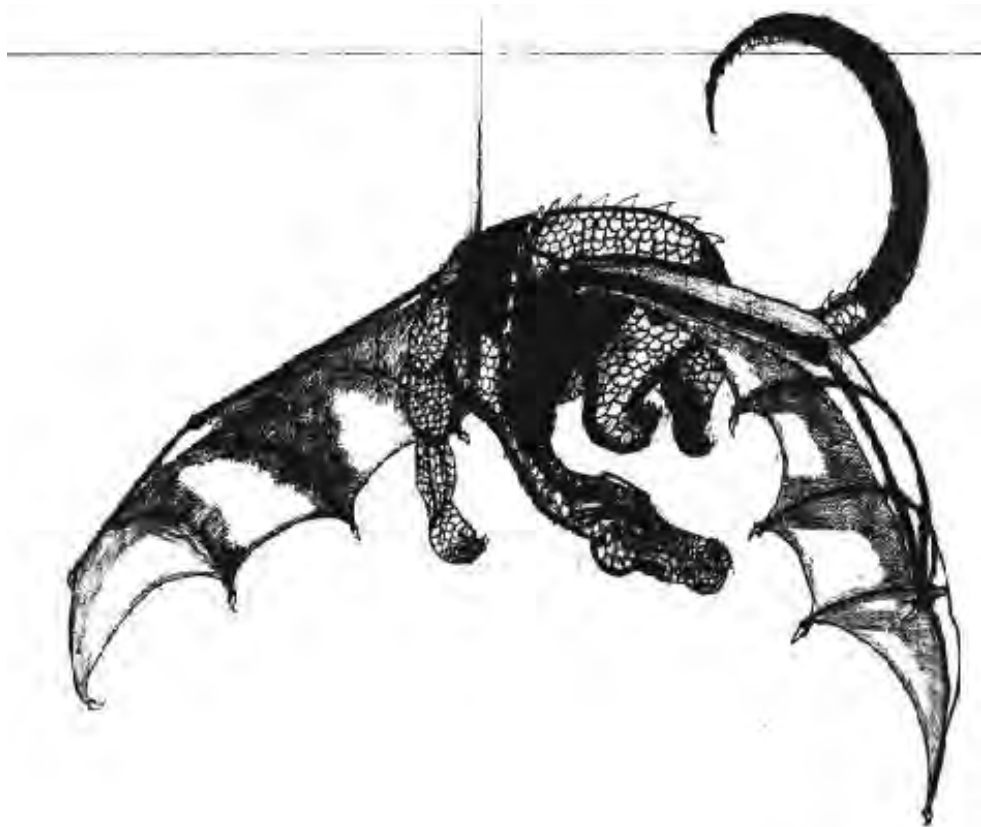
With the first cover of original art by Mickey Willard, the issue contained 26 pieces of writing including pieces written by resides of the Johnson County Juvenile Detention Center.



## Sister

Johnson County Juvenile Detention Center  
Resident (Female, 16)

Used and abused  
Still standing strong  
You are the one I lean on  
Who knows how to turn it around  
With me through thick and thin  
No matter what, where, or when  
The pain of being without you  
Excruciating  
Day by day, I'm deteriorating  
I am going to do everything I can  
To get back home to see you again



*Drawing by Travis Privitt, issue iv*

## The Difference Between Simile & Self Medication

Rachel Franklin

I have problems  
and I'll swap mine with you like trading cards.  
Long lovely disorders go over the lips like chocolate  
but honey, we've been writing about these pits of darkness  
long before shrinks slapped name tags on them.  
While the rest of the world cringes and looks away  
together we will scribble from one breakdown to another.  
It is a saga marked by the usual trappings of our kind:  
I have dizzy spells, you cry at night, I have pills,  
you describe flowers, I see through hypocrisy,  
and we both lose love like loose change.

I have problems.  
I used to eat the skin at the tips of my fingers  
but my bad habits are now limited  
to searching out the human condition  
and touching my face a lot.  
I name and shout about my problems  
through the glittery curtain of metaphor  
because who wants to hear misery unless it's diluted by pretty words?  
There is something uniquely rewarding  
about well-written suffering;  
poetry is the confetti at a pity party.

I have problems  
yet writing helps me and it's mine.  
That's why I read it to other people  
when I'd never post my x-rays in the waiting room.  
Look. Here's the crow and chips  
I ate last night, the break in my heart,  
the back pain from always looking to the sky.  
If you find your condition  
between my lines, if this makes you ache  
I'm sorry. I meant to, but I'm sorry.  
No one ought to feel this  
but at least we can share it.

I have problems  
and poetry doesn't solve them  
like pills might, but it goes down easier.

## The Parasite Lives and Grows

Rachel Franklin

Once upon a time Goliath fell.  
They built buildings on his body  
and David walked away without looking back  
didn't know his victory  
until he moved  
opened the door  
to have his pebble drop at his feet  
looked up and his apartment was  
the white pulp of a gigantic eye dripping blood.

David is meant for spaces  
muddy brooks, gaping skies  
flanked by open, gnashing trees  
skies that swallow  
cigarette smoke, pollen dust, and sweat.  
He wants to go where the government doesn't care  
where you can flick the paperwork  
off like straggling hay.

David does not want to know he is living  
off others' misery, will not swim where  
there are leeches.  
But he lies down in a bed, in a carcass  
with white walls, strings up the eyelids  
for a shower curtain.  
The water is not salty  
but the air conditioner sounds like fading breaths.

David does his laundry every Thursday  
and ignores the centipede next to him  
dropping sock after sock into his washing machine.  
He doesn't watch TV much.  
Sometimes he browses the paper  
and when he's driving  
mentally takes pictures of "for rent" signs.  
He got an air freshener a few days ago.  
It makes the rot smell like cinnamon.

David keeps his pebble on the dresser by the bed.

# ISSUE TEN

Published in 2013, the tenth issue of *elementia* was dedicated to author and 2012-2013 Ambassador for Young People's Literature Walter Dean Myers, and to the theme of passion (or, "what is not optional"). As the editors of issue x note, "Mr. Myers' commitment to the undeniable fact that 'Reading is not Optional,' his diverse canon of literature, and his effervescent support of young adults are an inspiration and a driving force to librarians, teachers, parents and students all over the world. We thank you and we honor you, Mr. Myers—you bring a light, sir, that shines like morning."

Many of the 60 pieces of writing and 10 pieces of art published in the tenth issue were inspired by Myers' characters and stories. Issue x was the first issue of *elementia* dedicated to an author and theme.





## The Mistake Girl

Portia Miller

The mistake girl is in the corner,  
Facing the wall,  
Counting how many cracks are in the cheap,  
Thinning plaster.  
Trying desperately and  
Failing to block out her mother's voice.  
Seductive,  
Setting a price.

The mistake girl is in the hallway,  
Frizzy hair confined under a pair of headphones.  
The music understands her,  
Doesn't hurt,  
Or hate her.  
It blocks out the sound of her mother's job.

The tattered notebook is her savior,  
Bitten at the edges,  
A feast for the rats,  
Pregnant with too many papers.  
Full of truths,  
And Fantasy,  
Which makes life bearable.

The mistake girl is in the basketball court,  
Sitting on the bleachers,  
With her constant companions,  
The tattered notebook,  
And the headphones.  
A high schooler comes up,  
Shouting,  
The insults fall on,  
Headphoned ears,  
Only filled with sweet music,  
Not the dirt of the streets.

The mistake girl is crying in the hallway,  
Crying,  
With the remains of her savior,  
Cradled in her hands,

Mourning her loss,  
With her mother.  
Holding her hand  
Being there while her daughter's world  
Is crashing down around her.

The mistake girl is in school,  
Being picked on.  
No protection,  
A new notebook clutched closely.

The mistake girl is in her world,  
Where people are kind,  
And look up to her.  
They don't rip up her notebook,  
Or push her down to the unforgiving ground.

Right now,  
She is protected from the world.  
But soon,  
The real world,  
Will stop  
The music.

## Lichtenburg Love

Rachel Franklin

I used to tread over damp ground  
yet seek shelter from the rain.  
Those wilted lives, half-truths  
fed to half-lovers, are gone.  
The hollows of your cheeks  
are cracked like parched earth  
from years wasted needing me to kiss you.  
My storm-cloud eyes have found you  
under the tallest tree, wading in the water  
and when I strike  
should you survive  
I'll leave my pattern on your skin.

## Poor Great-Great-Grandmother

Calla Hinderks

A creaking windowpane,  
Pelted with snow,  
Reflecting light onto the dusty, deep brown floor.  
The rooms seems to sigh, pained with age,  
Abandoned; left waiting,  
The cold is kept at bay by a single lamp,  
Filling the small space with warmth.  
A cracked oven door clicks open,  
Spreading the aroma of beef and spices.  
Chipped china lay strewn upon the counter top,  
Covered in holiday foods,  
Gray in the dull light.  
Abandoned; left waiting.  
A single rocking chair,  
Tucked in the corner,  
Tilting back and forth,  
An old woman sits upon it,  
And sighs with the room,  
Abandoned; left waiting,  
On  
Christmas  
Eve.

# ISSUE ELEVEN

The eleventh issue of *elementia* was dedicated to author Laurie Halse Anderson, and to the theme of identity. The editors took inspiration from a quote of Anderson's published in the issue, "This is where you can find your soul if you dare. Where you can touch that part of you that you've never dared look at before."

The editorial committee for the eleventh issue consisted of teen selectors Rebecca Abraham, Michelle Chan, and Emma Fernhout; library staff selectors Leslie Goodwin and Vanessa Schneider, as well as library staff editors Angel Tucker and Kate McNair. Published in 2014, this issue included 57 pieces of writing and 14 pieces of art.



## U, I, and Growing Up

Eric Gunnarson

i, the definitive  
the only you in the world  
i am and you are individual  
we are separate  
we are absolute masters  
of our individual perceived universes.

we do not converge, but in passing  
we never finished each other's sentences  
we did grow apart  
as we are meant to  
you moved on into your world  
i stayed stagnant  
in mine

the years are not the problem  
the problem is a repetition  
repetition  
repetition  
of this grand delusion  
that i can be more than me myself

i want more than me  
i want more than what you became  
i wanted to be the best  
but lost sight of the fact that one can only  
best and be bested  
alone  
there can be no we in a fight to the finish  
and so we sit, in our own little worlds  
discontented

sometimes in a fleeting moment  
i see you, the outer you  
you see what i want you to see  
and we will walk by each other as shells  
we were eggs once  
we were not separate  
but birth tore our union asunder  
my brother.

## Faded

Catherine Strayhall

She is faded.  
Worn out,  
Worn down.  
Time stole her crown.

She's no longer vivid, no longer bright -  
A star that's gone out in the darkest part of night.  
A crinkled photograph developed long ago,  
Ripped and featuring nameless the world will never know.  
A love that started strong but fizzled in the rain,  
The stormy days too rough for that fragile thing to sustain.  
A memory that disappeared as the years stacked up,  
Slowly vanishing and slipping away into the dust.

A pair of eyes grown cloudy after a lifetime of being sharp,  
Unable to see clearly though they once could read your heart.

She's just faded.

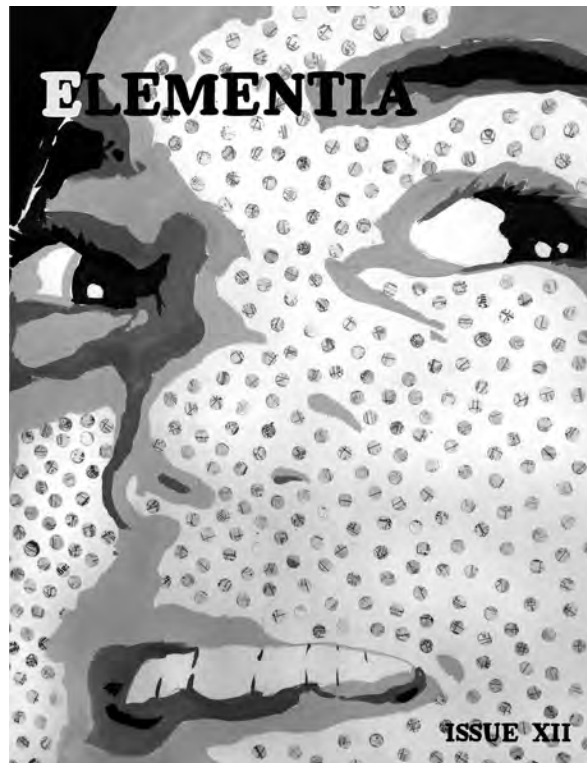


*Drowning* by Jenna Fackrell, issue xiii

# ISSUE TWELVE

Published in 2005, the twelfth issue of *elementia* was dedicated to poet and novelist Naomi Shihab Nye, and to the theme of home and place. As the editors of issue xii note, "[Ms. Nye's] straightforward voice and sense of appreciative curiosity inspire readers new to poetry and seasoned readers alike. In particular, her work addressing questions of place, ancestry, legacy and heritage have inspired *elementia's* writers and editors."

The editorial committee for issue xii consisted of teen selectors Alexandra Miller, Aroog Khaliq, Esther Lee and Ramya Chilappa, as well as Library staff editors Angel Tucker, Kate McNair, Cassidy Coles and Vanessa Schneider. This issue published 58 pieces of writing and 10 pieces of art.



## Dream Behind the Glass

Anika Rasheed

There's a girl that I see sometimes.  
She pops up from time to time.  
Day to day.

She's a lot of things.  
God, she's beautiful.  
And, isn't she just so funny?

When she fixes her eyes on you.  
They sparkle, don't they?  
Vibrant, bright, lovely.  
So big. Full of life, yeah?

And when she laughs,  
You could fall in love with that sound.  
She laughs more than I do.  
And they're all real, too.

If I look away for a moment,  
Sometimes I see her.  
Little glimpses here and there.

She's got it all figured out.  
Knows where she's going.  
Knows what to say.  
Knows her place.  
Knows where she belongs.  
And that's everywhere.

Sometimes I hate her.

Because I don't know where she goes.

And I wish I was there.

These little glimpses, I get  
Sometimes I see her looking back at me  
As I fix my hair  
Or brush my teeth

But most of the time,  
She's absent.  
And I miss her.

I imagine where she is.  
Sometimes she wears a silly crown  
Of wildflowers.  
She lies in a meadow and laughs.

Sometimes she's got a gun.  
She wears black.  
She's confident.  
She's sexy.

Sometimes she wears a dress I've got  
Somewhere in my closet.  
She lives my life.  
But she lives it better.

She's happy.  
She's sad.  
She's angry.  
But, damn, she looks good.

I don't know where she goes.  
But I wish I was with her more often.  
In that ever-changing world of hers.  
Oceans and skies  
Oh, the things she sees.



# The Climbing Tree

Ann McLean

The Ponderosa Pines hunched ponderously,  
Their convoluted gestures frozen  
With dry, rasping limbs in stages of vexation  
And narrow forearms lifted high  
In savored moments of exalted epiphany.

My brother and I climbed the questions  
They grew,  
Our legs crouching and stretching  
Over the contours of perplexity,  
Kindling a childhood  
On the green-laced vertebrae  
Of New Mexico's greatest fire hazard.

Our favored climbing tree  
Was too close to civilization's adobe friction  
For the firemen to let Him stay.  
Perhaps He was too curious, too willing to lend His  
Far-sighted perch  
To inquisitive children –  
Those that smashed rocks in search  
Of pieces of the moon.

His lowest plateau,  
A place of triumph, regardless,  
Bled orange one day,  
And the pigment brushed my flushed cheeks with discord.

This orange rot was a sickness spread from mankind,  
A mark  
For the brow of the doomed.  
So we set upon fate with man's finest scalpel,  
Our father's ax,  
And it was fearful doctors that then sculpted their patient,  
Heavy-handed in their love  
And heady with the role of a savior.

Sepia bark gleamed metallically with sap  
Where the incisions lay,  
Fly eyes made of a hacked and honeycombed trunk,  
That saw nothing.  
And the men finished off this crippled love  
With blunter and bigger saws,  
And all that remained of a once beautiful  
Climbing tree  
Was a bit of orange spray-paint –  
A tombstone scrawled hastily  
Over the true victim of fire.

## Scrapyard Jungle

Alexandra Miller

The twisted metal trees  
Rise up from the heap  
Magpies hop about  
The glittering savanna  
And crows harass the mice  
Nesting in the chewed  
Leather seat  
Of a Volkswagen  
A scruffy dog  
Stalks the crows  
His paws padding softly across  
A refrigerator door  
Cockroaches scurry about,  
Any mildew in their path  
Is vanished  
They are the army ants  
That march across the forest floor  
The crows are the howler monkeys,  
Squawking loudly  
The flies are mosquitoes,  
Buzzing about, annoying  
And magpies are vultures,  
Looking for anything  
Landlines dangle from a crane  
Like bananas from a tree  
A bus rusts away,  
Yellow to red  
The motorcycle gleams,  
A new addition  
And scavengers walk about  
Looking for anything of value,  
They will leave defeated,  
This jungle is dead.

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Eunice Lee

i am your (empty  
dead-eyed cashier, mechanically  
ringing up your nachos and popcorn;  
have a great day!

weekend plans and giggling friends,  
i am Maslow's slave  
face blur past, i ring up your purchase  
come back soon!

but i'll be here right, i am  
your bus driver,  
your garbage man,  
your waiter, i am all the invisible  
countless.  
and i'll be right here,  
this is my) future

## Where You've Been

Anonymous

What do you do when the place you call home  
Is one that you no longer recognize; when you  
Forget that place is no mere function of space,  
But also a function of time; and the  
Crystalline memories you can still see,  
With every step forward, move farther from reach?  
Looks can deceive; where you are is not where you've been.  
So you run round in circles, searching for home -  
For safety, for comfort, familiarity, love -  
'Til the ground your toes cling to crumbles beneath you  
While your castle in the clouds floats off in the breeze  
And you realize that once again, looks have deceived you -  
Where you are is not where you've been.  
Turn your feet toward home, but how can you know  
Where the heart lies, or if it's still whole, or if  
It's been splintered, jagged pieces torn off for each person you've loved -  
In which case, that place may still be one of no return?  
So many pieces gone and lessons unlearned, and yet we still  
Yearn for the time when we were blind to our own ignorance,  
And that's not a place either, and that's okay.  
Looks will deceive, but the heart finds itself again.  
It knows where you are is not where you've been.

# Woman

Sarah Woods

Woman.

Care-taker, life-giver, nurturer, chef, doormat.

Woman.

Raised to believe my gender put me on the bottom.

I am to please, not to be pleased.

I am the inferior, the weak, the soft, the submissive.

Already born with joy, told to mask the pain.

Hand swatted with scorn when a fingertip probed the fire.

But boys will be boys.

And jump from rooftops and run around and hurt each other.

Be a young lady.

Cover the sultry flesh, only to be seen by one man.

Legs crossed, knee-length skirt, chest covered, hushed voice.

Misbehave, spirited one.

Don't give in to them, they base your character on what sexual organs you have.

Walk topless, be on top.

Throw your fists, show your lividness.

Have a loud mouth, blurt out the answers.

Spirited one.

Demand to be pleased.

Give to whomever you want, whatever you want.

Feel passionately, express.

Live to please yourself.

Human.

Be an equal, stand unaltered.

Pour tears from the cracks in your skin, scream.

Sweat, wear your hair down, be sultry.

Speak, don't go unspoken.

You have a voice, use it.

Make your presence known.

Be human.

## heaven in the southern hemisphere

Carli Plymale

i could break beneath the weight of atmosphere.  
these stars, balanced atop my head  
are heavier than the sun,  
lending their light  
across a universe, a lifetime  
to shatter my insides in their silence.

the ground has already crumbled,  
soft and cold between my toes  
stilled and pliant  
under the sky's watchful hands.  
they ache, cold and raw  
here where the world turns in reverse

here, where long lost stories  
pierce through darkness  
as if they'd just been born -  
here, where only dull beams of firelight  
can illuminate july's winter -  
here, where my heart beats  
to watch the sky expand -

i have never felt so small.

distantly, laughter quakes  
with a presence i cannot meet;  
my fingers tremble  
silent in their recognition  
of why  
humanity, in all its innovation  
once thought this sky  
the home of gods.

## Pictures

Carly Hassenstab

Police tape lines the yard  
I walk past  
Baby blue house in cookie-cutter neighborhood  
I look down and it says welcome  
I quickly step in and close the door so the camera flashes don't glimpse inside  
A table set for seven with pink orchids in the middle  
Hand-colored drawings with markers on the fridge  
Alphabet letters spelling words that don't exist  
A X Z F C  
I walk down wooded stairs  
A big screen with Wii and PlayStation  
Cords amongst cords and controllers  
Board games and Twister on the shelves amongst teen novels, adult fiction, and picture books  
Door in corner eyes me expectantly  
The lock was broken by fellow officers  
I walk in  
A storage shed with boxes  
Christmas lights hang down  
One more door hides in the shadows  
I once more walk in  
Concrete greets my feet  
Cells with key inserts  
Chains, heavy metal  
Food bowls with water dishes  
White chalk lines marking days  
One, two, thirteen, twenty-five  
I am upstairs once more  
Intentionally saved for last  
The family room  
Couches matching patterns  
Lamps on corner tables  
A warm fireplace  
Television with Disney movies on the floor  
Pieces of glass by the wall  
I gently step over the red stain on the carpet  
Bullet holes in every picture frame  
I study the pictures  
They are smiling  
They are lies

## Showers

Sarah Hirsch

showers are often taken for granted  
a comfort for the morning, afternoon, late night, whenever  
consistently enveloping you in that same warm blanket  
always at that perfect angle  
so you never have to put in unnecessary effort

but showers can vary  
nearly every time i visited my mother  
new place new companion new shower  
always one underlying feature  
unfamiliarity

icy cold quick bursts piercing  
scalding hot steady stream suffocating  
lackadaisical drizzle uneven on one side confusing  
all completely different  
one without a spigot, essentially a hose

each with a different set up, a new set of instructions  
which way is hot which way is cold how do i turn it off  
i haven't showered in the same house as my mother in five years  
i no longer have to rely on a haphazard note or uneven heating  
my shower's foundation is strong i am strong i can turn things on

## kawaakari

川明かり

Catherine Strayhall

there was a river/in the black hills/that my favorite trail followed/with pine trees lining its banks/  
of hard ground and towering rocks//i would beg my father/to walk that trail/as far as it went/  
as many days as i could//and as we walked he would/recite poems from memory/without ever  
missing a word//frost, cummings, whitman/he filled the air/and my ears/with their words/and i  
soaked up/nature, rhythm, life//as the sun set/it would send sparks of water up from the river/  
while my dad's voice/deep and quiet/led us home in the darkness//i'd like to get away from  
earth awhile/and then come back to it and begin over



## Kansas City

Taj'Zhere Dillard

This here is real.  
There are no stories  
about happy homes and whole hearts  
where we come from.  
No fancy cars.  
We got no big houses but big dreams.  
This is crack fiends at midnight,  
babies crying, sleeping on wooden floors.  
This is the corner of Troost.  
On a pitch black Friday night  
a queen sells her crown for  
20 dollars and some rocks.  
Young men selling souls for dime bags.  
We don't know peace here,  
but we got bullets to leave your world in pieces,  
got backpacks but can't afford school supplies.  
Everybody's watching,  
but we're wasting time.  
The blind leading the blind.  
They gave us back our 40 acres,  
but we can't keep hope alive.  
It's time for change.  
Time to save lives.

# Where Are They Now?

Interviews with past *elementia*  
contributors and editors

# AYAH ABDUL-RAUF

issues iii-viii, x

Ayah Abdul-Rauf was first published in *elementia*'s third issue in 2006. "I've always perceived a world out of sight, and that's where a lot of inspiration comes from," she says.

Abdul-Rauf found out she was being published in *elementia* through a phone call from Angel Tucker. "I had a strong impression that she was a woman who knew who she was. She spoke with so much confidence and respect for me. *elementia* means a great deal to me."

Since being published in *elementia* more than a decade ago, Abdul-Rauf has been heavily involved with Johnson County Library. She has attended and taught workshops, been featured in the library's residency program, and did the cover for the magazine's tenth issue. "The library saw me for who I was and the staff handed me one opportunity after another. It's the only institution that never failed me."

Being published in *elementia* helped lead Abdul-Rauf to important destinations in her life. "It helped me get into art school, helped me get internships, helped me get employed. It was perhaps the single most influential thing that formed my career." Though sometimes she cringes when reading her previously published *elementia* writings, Abdul-Rauf understands they show her experimentation in writing, and is glad that her work was shared.

When Abdul-Rauf transferred from a small rural college to the Kansas City Art Institute to major in filmmaking and creative writing, she had to start all over as she worked toward a BFA. "But it was worth it," she says decidedly. "I got to make films."

Abdul-Rauf knows how much work there is behind the word *creativity*: "Creativity doesn't come overnight, it happens in increments. It's about problem-solving. These days, it takes more creativity to balance filmmaking with a day job than it takes to do actual storytelling. It's not always glamorous." Filmmaking is not just her hobby, but a calling. "A hobby is something you love to do," she says. "A calling is the thing that loves you back when you do it."

To calm herself, Abdul-Rauf spends time with an animal, takes a walk, or listens to the Qur'an. She loves sock puppets as they allow her to "personify everything." You can find her at [ShetheWriter.com](http://ShetheWriter.com).

*"Creativity doesn't come overnight;  
it happens in increments. It's about  
problem-solving."*

# MICHELLE CHAN

issues viii-xii

A teen writing group called Creative Commons tied Michelle Chan to Johnson County Library, and her involvement in *elementia* came along with it. Both were created by Angel Tucker.

Chan remembers her time with both library projects affectionately: "The library and *elementia* really gave me that chance to have a safe space where I could definitely put out my work and feel really good about it." Always identifying as more of an artist than a writer, Chan says that being a part of Creative Commons and *elementia* gave her confidence in and the ability to better accept critiques of her writing.

At *elementia* receptions, Chan felt like her art was more tangible than when within the magazine alone. She also recalls the comradery of the readings, with so many young writers and artists united by their published work. Being published in *elementia* taught Chan that, as she says, "submitting is the biggest thing." Putting her work before others gave her practice in explaining her art and interacting with an audience – skills she would carry with her to college.

The Kansas City Art Institute gave her the necessary time to decide on her major, unlike schools she looked at in bigger cities. "Most of those schools didn't really care about cultivating what I wanted to do," Chan explains. In her time at KCAI, Chan has worked in a variety of mediums, from sculpture to fabric to projection. Aside from a love of "shiny things," Chan also enjoys repurposed art: "I like taking recyclables – things that have a life, that people expect to be in the trash – and giving them a new life."

Chan's work has often dealt with her Chinese-American heritage. She has both learned how to "account for (her) history," and to fight against not making things just to fulfill the expectations of others. If you are going to be fulfilled as an artist, Chan believes, it's your perspective that matters most when you are building your life around it.

A talented cosplayer, Chan now happily finds herself in the position where her art justifies her hobbies. She loves being able to do justice to the source material she loves. One of her biggest takeaways from KCAI is that "everything is not coincidence."

*"I like taking recyclable things—things that have a life, that people expect to be in the trash—and giving them a new life."*

# RACHEL FRANKLIN

issues iv-x

"I remember performing during the opening receptions and getting to talk to all the other writers, poets and artists. And I remember the rush of inspiration from hearing their work, from being surrounded by that creativity and energy. I'd go home and write every time," says Rachel Franklin when asked about her memories of *elementia*.

For Franklin, the community and creative magic of *elementia* receptions was one of the most meaningful aspects of the magazine. "I am in awe of what Angel [Tucker] has managed to build and proud that I got to contribute," she says.

The road for Franklin post-*elementia* has not always been easy. She explains, "After *elementia*, I dealt with severe chronic illness that kept me out of high school. While I bounced between doctors and hospitals, I spent time talking to other patients and their families about the problems with the American healthcare system. After finally getting a diagnosis and treatment, I entered college early and studied healthcare economics, policy, and data science." Franklin now lives and works in Washington, DC, as a healthcare data analyst.

*elementia* boosted Franklin's belief in her writing and brought her in contact with other writers. "I just loved the opportunity to share my work and to listen to other authors my age," says Franklin. She advises young people to persist in their writing and to seek their own voices. "Don't be afraid to branch out and let yourself love everything, not just what's seen as traditionally creative. The truth is that I would never have dreamed of my current life when I was in school but I use skills I learned back then every day."

Though Franklin isn't writing novels, she loves the field she works in and being able to be creative in other ways. "I'm able to do good and keep learning and connecting with truth from another side. You don't have to let go of writing, ever, if you don't want to."

Ten years ago, at age 13, Franklin was a featured writer in issue vi and mentioned her love of William Shakespeare. Once a part of a KC Fringe Festival production of "Julius Caesar," Franklin promises, "I'll always be a Shakespeare nerd at heart."

"Don't be afraid to branch out and *let yourself love everything*—not just what's seen as traditionally creative."

# ERIC GUNNARSON

issues ix & xi

"I remember the spectacle of it all," Eric Gunnarson says when he thinks back on *elementia*. "It was the first real, grown-up-feeling publication I'd been involved with."

When asked about his poem "U, I, and Growing Up" from issue xi, Gunnarson offers insight on his frame of mind at the time of its writing: "I wrote that poem in a time of transition. My family was under a great deal of stress, and my twin brother was beginning his march out on his own. I felt disconnected. At the time, I had virtually no one else that I considered a true friend."

Gunnarson now has the distance to recognize how much both he and his brother have changed in the intervening years. "My brother became incredibly successful. I look at him more with pride now," he says. "And I grew, too. I'm more connected outside the nuclear family now than ever." Gunnarson experienced how writing can encapsulate specific moments and emotions, acting as a timestamp and bookmarking events in one's life.

Considering his work written at that younger age can be challenging, sometimes awkward. "It sounds like a younger me. More angsty, and with little in the way of humor," says Gunnarson. "I've grown so much I don't think it could properly define me anymore. It's a retrospective on a more somber time in my life that I surpassed."

Although writing did allow Gunnarson to realize the trials that he has overcome, he doesn't think it was ever meant to be his future. "To be honest, being a poet never became more than a hobby. However, the act of poetry was hugely influential. I still love the power of words. It also has made my understanding of these trying political times more engrossing." Poetry, then, has been guiding Gunnarson even though it was not his end destination.

Currently Gunnarson is working toward an Industrial Design degree at San Jose State University. His circle of friends includes many artists, some of them professional. "They are all very talented. I've got sewers, crafters, painters, musicians, blacksmiths and everything in between." Creativity is Gunnarson's constant, no matter where he is.

"Being a poet never became more than a hobby.  
However, the act of poetry was hugely influential.  
*I still love the power of words.*"

# AROOG KHALIQ

issues xi-xii, xiv

"The library is ingrained in everything I write," says Aroog Khaliq.

As a teen, Khaliq was encouraged to get more involved at Johnson County Library, and took part in YAAC, the Young Adult Advisory Council. YAAC allows teens to volunteer their time and contribute their ideas to always making the library better, while also introducing them to other young and like-minded people. The impactful lesson that Khaliq learned that "this opinion that you have is real, it matters" came from library staff and the community around her.

"Being confident in my writing is 100% because of the library," Khaliq says. When she and other members of YAAC would review galleys, it was "the first time that anybody had taken me seriously in terms of writing." There were people in the library who told her, "You have something to say, and it matters. And your writing is good." Khaliq continues, "Every strong female role model I have started because of the library. These are my fairy godmothers."

The library also taught Khaliq how to deal with rejection, and to "try - to always try." Submitting to *elementia* was an important early step in her life that led her to going through drafts of her novel every summer, and to "writing poetry all the time," she adds. That she has an opinion column in the University of Kansas newspaper, that her parents can read her work there, that she is an English major, all comes back to the library. "Everything the library's done for me has been a giant feedback loop," she says. She has also been published in *Kiosk*, the KU literary magazine, finding a home at the Lawrence university, as well as supportive but challenging professors.

One of her favorite things about *elementia* is the way it lifts up the voices of women of color. "That women of color are finding their voices through this program is proof that the library is doing so much and for so many people," Khaliq says. She advises other young writers to find readers who will offer "real advice" and valuable criticism.

Khaliq says that her voice now has a rawness to it. "I think with poetry it has to hurt a little," she says. She invites the reader to share in her hurt. "That's the kind of poetry I write best."

"I think with poetry  
*it has to hurt a little.*"



# ABIGAIL MEYER

issues xiii-xv

Abigail Meyer came to *elementia* by reading the magazine itself and finding inspiration in it. "There was so much talent. The publication seemed so formal."

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art provided Meyer with a strong foundation of art and history off of which to work. "My grandparents would take me there when I was a toddler, and I would bring my sketchbook and just try to copy the work of the masters for hours and hours," she says. "I always have loved drawing and bringing a notebook with me." If Meyer doesn't have time to sketch something, she takes a photo of it and draws it later.

A special moment for Meyer came at the *elementia* reception for issue xiii when she got to meet the writer whose work was paired with a lion portrait she had created. "He was telling me about the lion and how well it fit with his work," she says, explaining the unique and rewarding moment.

Meyer would tell her younger self not to be so shy. "Don't be afraid to start a conversation. Don't be afraid to start anything. Don't be afraid to start chasing your passions and pursuing art."

Though she is a different artist than she was as a teen, Meyer knows that doesn't invalidate her earlier pieces. "My work has changed, but it's still a part of me," comments Meyer. "I still relate to my work, and I see where I was when I made it. But in the most recent work I've made – it's how I am now. More impressionistic, not as detail-oriented."

On Meyer's own artistic path, her family and various mentors have supported her and kept her moving forward. "I'm grateful for people who have kept me on the path even when I thought I wasn't the best or I wasn't doing well. They just kept encouraging me."

Presently, Meyer is considering pursuing architecture after shadowing a firm last fall. "It seems like the perfect job because it combines creativity with working in a team. It's everything around us." She firmly believes her experience with *elementia* lead her to this path.

If ever in need of inspiration, Meyer just looks for ideas in her large book of Monet's art.

*"I still relate to my work, and I see where I was when I made it. But the most recent work I've made—it's how I am now. More impressionistic; not as detail-oriented."*



# ISABEL NEE

issues xii-xv

Isabel Nee doesn't just remember her published work from *elementia*. She confesses, "I even remember the page numbers," she confesses. Her own story of becoming involved in writing includes advice from Eric McHenry, the 2015-2017 Poet Laureate of Kansas, about getting into submitting by starting with smaller publications you enjoy. Soon after, a library employee introduced Nee to *elementia*. "I thought, they say I can do this, and so I try it out, and then the next year I'm published in *elementia*. It was like an interconnected catalyst."

Having her work published in *elementia* helped build her confidence to persevere in her writing and in sharing and submitting her work. "It's good for more than just self-esteem," Nee said. "It's psychological - I've been good enough to get published somewhere." Every rejection provides the opportunity for growth, and every acceptance affirms your pursuit of your art.

Still, rejection can also lead to feeling disconsolate. Nee offers an honest and hopeful perspective for other young people facing disheartening days in their artistic journeys: "You have to love it. I went in knowing that very few people get published. You have to improve, which means practicing."

Nee believes form poetry with structure is one of her strengths. Currently, Nee is working on a YA fantasy novel that is Greek myth-inspired. She also gives her characters unique genetic diseases so that she can spend time doing scientific research, explaining, "My second passion is science. I love to marry that scientific curiosity in with the artist."

Friends call Nee "Hermione," and when it comes to books, "If it's banned, I have to read it." When she feels overwhelmed, she finds herself again by going to the chicken coop.

*"My second passion is science. I love to marry  
that scientific curiosity in with  
the artist."*



# OLI RAY

issue xv &amp; beyond

Oli Ray was a core part of *elementia*'s issue xv and *Best of* design and editorial crews and helped expand the magazine into the audiovisual realm. Ray brought his slam and vlogging experience to the committee, recording videos of poets reading their work for the Johnson County Library YouTube channel. Ray reflects fondly, "It was a really fun day but stressful. It was great turning things into a real, professional project."

Ray also was the videographer for the issue xv reception, and had to balance the tasks of managing two cameras on the brink of overheating with reading two personal poems. When asked about the reception, he mentions that despite the stress and the pressure, "every experience I've had with *elementia* will help me in the future and it's definitely something I won't regret doing." His new tagline for the magazine? "*elementia*: at the very least, you won't regret it."

Ray also provided his insight into the process behind creating the *Best of* issue. "It was cool to see how the magazine grew over time. The quality of writing – everything has changed." He stresses the volume of reading *Best of* editors had to do – hundreds of hours of work went into the issue.

Ray's poem "January" was written for a creative writing class. The assignment was to have different people write a word down in their handwriting and note the similarities or differences. "The first girl I had ever really fallen for wrote 'January' down and so I used that for my story at the end of the week."

In the fall of 2018, Ray started his degree in writing and film at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. He promises he won't forget what he's leaving behind, though. "I'm going to be submitting to *elementia* again before I get too old," he threatened menacingly as the writer of this interview cowered under a table at a local breakfast establishment.

Ray hopes to continue growing with his art all his life. "My passion has always just been storytelling in whatever capacity," he says. "I don't have a specific job I'm working toward. As long as I can tell stories I will be happy."

"As long as I can *tell stories*  
I will be *happy*."

# CATHERINE STRAYHALL

issues vii-xiii

Catherine Strayhall helped edit our Where Are They Now? interviews and has been a mentor and assistant for *elementia* issue xv and this *Best of elementia* anthology. She had the following to say about her experience with the publication:

"The first *elementia* I was published in was issue vii in 2010. At that issue's reception I tried to work up the courage to read in front of the small crowd gathered that night. Aside from my extreme nervousness, one other lasting memory of that night comes from the original force behind the magazine, Angel Tucker. That evening, Angel told me something that I still hear in my mind with her original cadence and kindness: 'You, my friend, have a voice.'

Over the years, I was privileged to be included in seven issues of *elementia*. Throughout this time, I saw *elementia* grow from a small and scrappy literary magazine to a polished and professional piece of art boasting 15 issues (and counting), hundreds of talented and diverse young writers and artists, and visits and inspiration from eminent writers such as Walter Dean Meyers, Naomi Shihab Nye and A.S. King.

Now, as a more experienced writer, when I look back at my earlier published pieces in *elementia* I often think of all the things I would do differently with those works. That's the hallmark and the burden of an artist's life. However, *elementia* also allowed me a space to grow; a space to feel validated; a space to come together with other writers to build something greater than our individual imaginations.

While I was navigating high school and working on my creative writing major in college, I wrote for classes and contests and grades, but I also wrote – and still write – because creating art is a part of me. And no matter where I found myself in life, *elementia* was always there. You can see the love and belief shining on each page, and feel proud to be a part of it.

In recent years, Angel has handed *elementia* over to capable hands. Those who now run it, contribute to it, and shape it inherit its legacy of comfort and solace, of empowerment and community, and its lesson to stand up with candor and fortitude, no matter what. As we look back at the best of *elementia*'s artists and writers of the past fifteen years, we keep in mind the light they brought to the world, and the voices that will guide us to the future."

"I wrote—and still write—because  
*creating art is a part of me.*"

# MATTHEW TANZER

issues ii, iv-v, vii

When Matthew Tanzer went to his first *elementia* reading, he was both excited and nervous. "I didn't know anyone at the reading and I had no idea what to expect," he says. "But it felt freeing at the same time to get to meet a bunch of people who were interested in writing and inspired to write like I was."

While Tanzer really discovered a community within the *elementia* receptions, he had already grown up exploring creativity through many avenues. "I participated in things like photography, cake decorating, and ceramics in 4-H. I was always trying to make something new or playing around with new ideas. I didn't actively pursue poetry until middle school or high school," he explains. 4-H gave him the early outlet for his creativity, and *elementia* further fostered Tanzer's willingness to explore art.

To teens interested in getting their work published in *elementia*, Tanzer tells them, "Submit. And submit to other publications. It's worth it to try and get your work out there and see how others react. It's really amazing to see how much a piece can affect someone you don't even know." Tanzer emphasizes the springboard that *elementia* can provide, and is happy with the way his poetry marks a precise time in his life.

Regarding his life today, Tanzer says that what has changed for the better is that he now believes that he is good as he is. "It doesn't mean I am not self-conscious, or insecure," he continues. "But, at the end of the day, I know I am doing what is good for me, and I am better for it."

Tanzer still uses his creative side today as a project manager, but finds his graphic design artistry being used more than his writing abilities. He is inspired by ideas and change. "I love the prospect of changing a system or a pattern," he says.

"I think I have started really believing that I am good as I am. It doesn't mean I am not self-conscious, or insecure. But at the end of the day, *I know I am doing what is good for me and I am better for it.*"

# MICKEY WILLARD

issues vi, viii-ix

Mickey Willard didn't just become interested in a creative life through *elementia*. "I've identified as an artist for as long as I could remember," she says.

In her illustrated cover of issue ix, Willard can proudly see how her youth made her more fearless: "It's amazing to see that I used to be such a confident painter who embraced mistakes. I can learn a lot from my younger self; my work today is much more refined, but also less courageous." The colorful profile of a man on issue ix stares brazenly back at anyone who picks up the 2012 magazine.

Willard's belief that anything is possible has enhanced her life. "The belief is liberating. It takes the pressure off what I'm doing in the moment so I can relax and enjoy what life brings," she says. Getting her work published in *elementia* contributed to her success in college and in the working world. But she wants teens to know that you don't have to be published at a young age to find success. "Everybody's path is different!" she says.

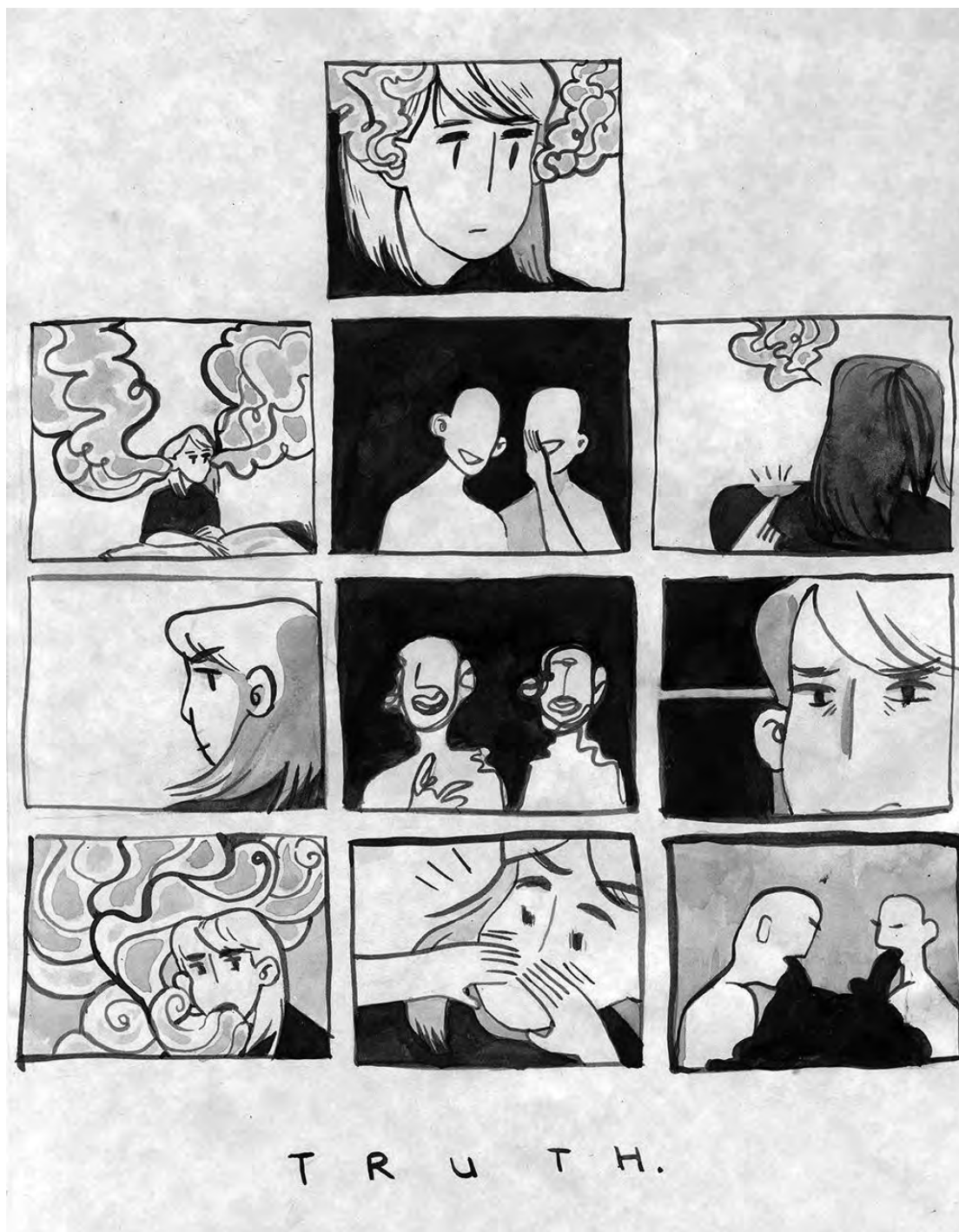
She also advises teens interested in submitting to *elementia* to persevere if their work isn't accepted. "Do not get discouraged. Seek feedback from mentors and keep submitting. The important thing to remember is to not focus on 'being an artist' - focus instead on 'making art.'" Willard also counsels that "what you seek is seeking you! The awesome things in life will flow to you naturally, if you allow them."

Following her time at the Savannah College of Art and Design, Willard moved back to Kansas City and has spent the last several years working for Johnson County Library. "Today I am a designer and illustrator," she adds. "Creativity is a part of every moment of every day!"

To refocus herself, Willard practices mindfulness by paying attention to her breath and her surroundings. She loves UFO conspiracies.

*"What you seek is seeking you! The awesome things in life will flow to you naturally—if you allow them."*

# Art of elementia



*Truth* by Gillian Drake, issue xiv



Cover Art by Mickey Willard, issue ix







*Changeling* by Michelle Chan, issue xi

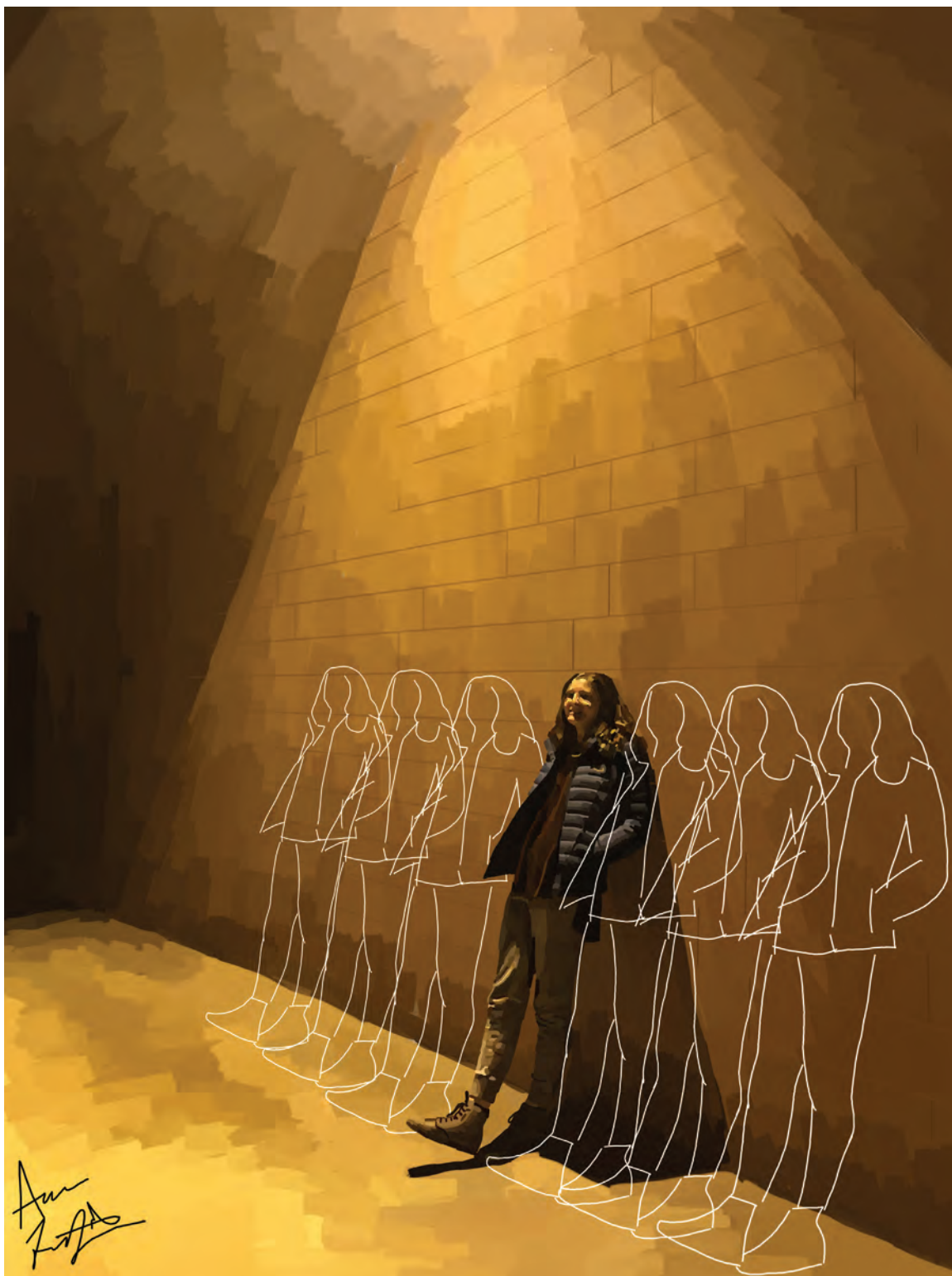


*Bang* by Abigail Meyer, issue xiii













*Multifaces* by Abigail Meyer, issue xiv



*Close Up* by Julia Huff, issue xii









*Smoke and Mirrors* by Kathryn Jones, issue xv





*Fading* by Kathryn Jones, issue xv



*Red vs. Blue* by Kaitlin Yu, issue xv



*Peeking Through Blue* by Julia Rosher, issue xv



*Paper Lady* by Kathryn Jones, issue xv





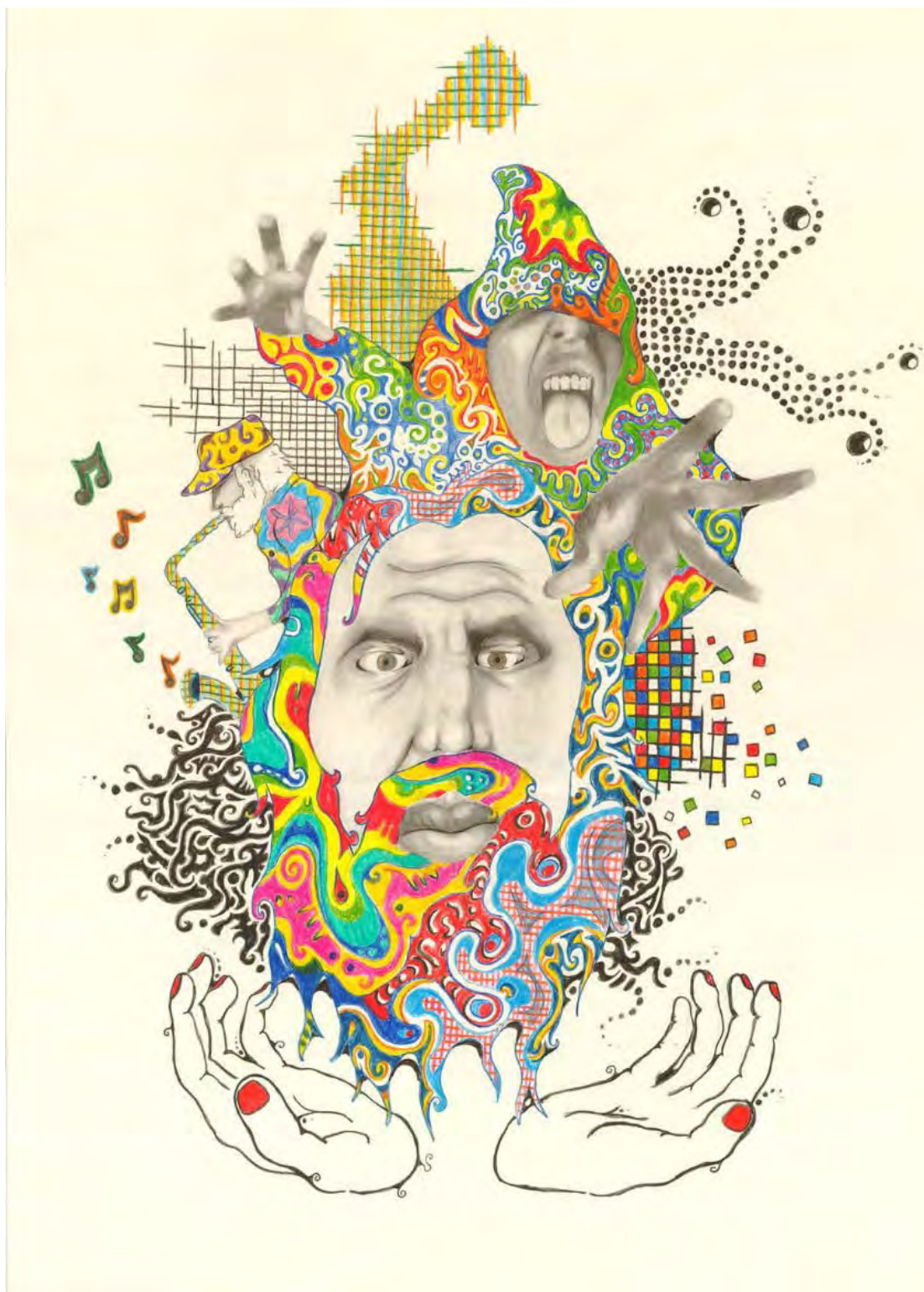
*Red Confidence* by Kathryn Jones, issue xv



*Salt Water People* by Samiya Rasheed, issue xv



*Drawing by Danny Hull, issue iv*





*Escape by Anna Munro, issue xi*



*Unorthodox Baptism* by Jennifer Fu, issue xiii







*Brain Dead* by Victoria Wall, issue xiv



*Ok Jared Pt. 2* by Kaitlin Yu, issue xv



*What to Wear* by Jane Markley, issue xv





*Hands* by Taylor Rowan, issue xv



*The Lovers* by Anha Valdez, issue xiii

*America's Never-Ending Memorial* by Autumn Zollar, issue xv





*Windows of the Soul* by Margaret Breidenbach, issue xiv



*Self Portrait on Wood* by Darby Rolf, issue xv



*Stitches* by Kathryn Jones, issue xv



*A Page from My Notebook* by George McCallum, issue vi



*The Red City* by Haley Wright, issue xiv





*Speak* by Jennifer Fu, issue xiii



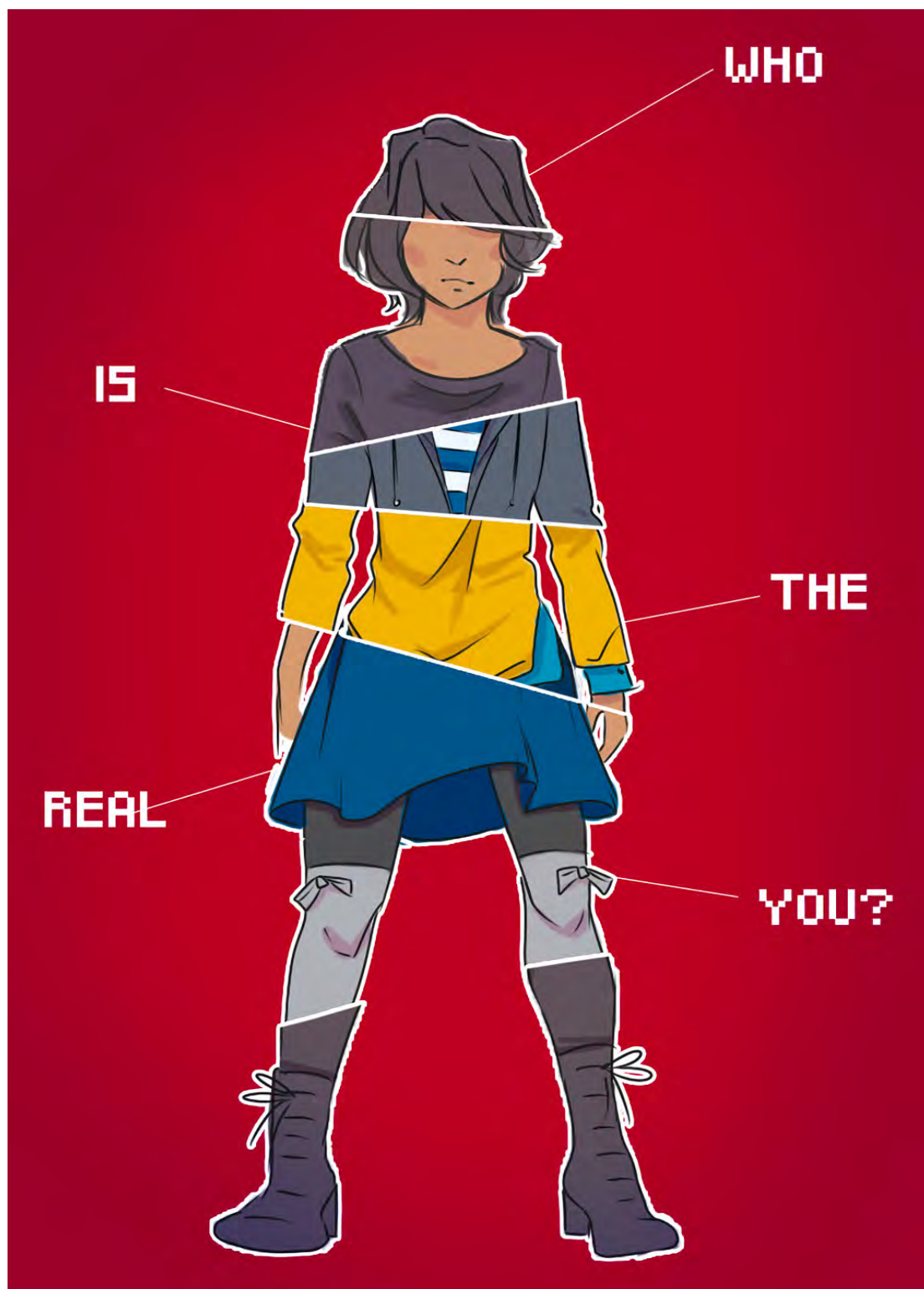
*The Rhythm of Pain* by Anha Valdez, issue xiii





*In the Rain They Shine* by Gillian Drake, issue xiv





Me, Myself, and Everyone by Greg Hassler, issue x





*Beginnings Self-Portrait* by Michelle Chan, issue xii



*Wild Insecurity* by Jonah Lee, issue xiv



*Finding Solace* by Jennifer Fu, issue xiii



*Learning Curve* by Jane Markley, issue xv



*What's Beneath* by Mallory Iszard, issue xiii



*Silenced* by Jennifer Fu, issue xiii

*The Contented Observer* by Cormac Palmer, issue xiv



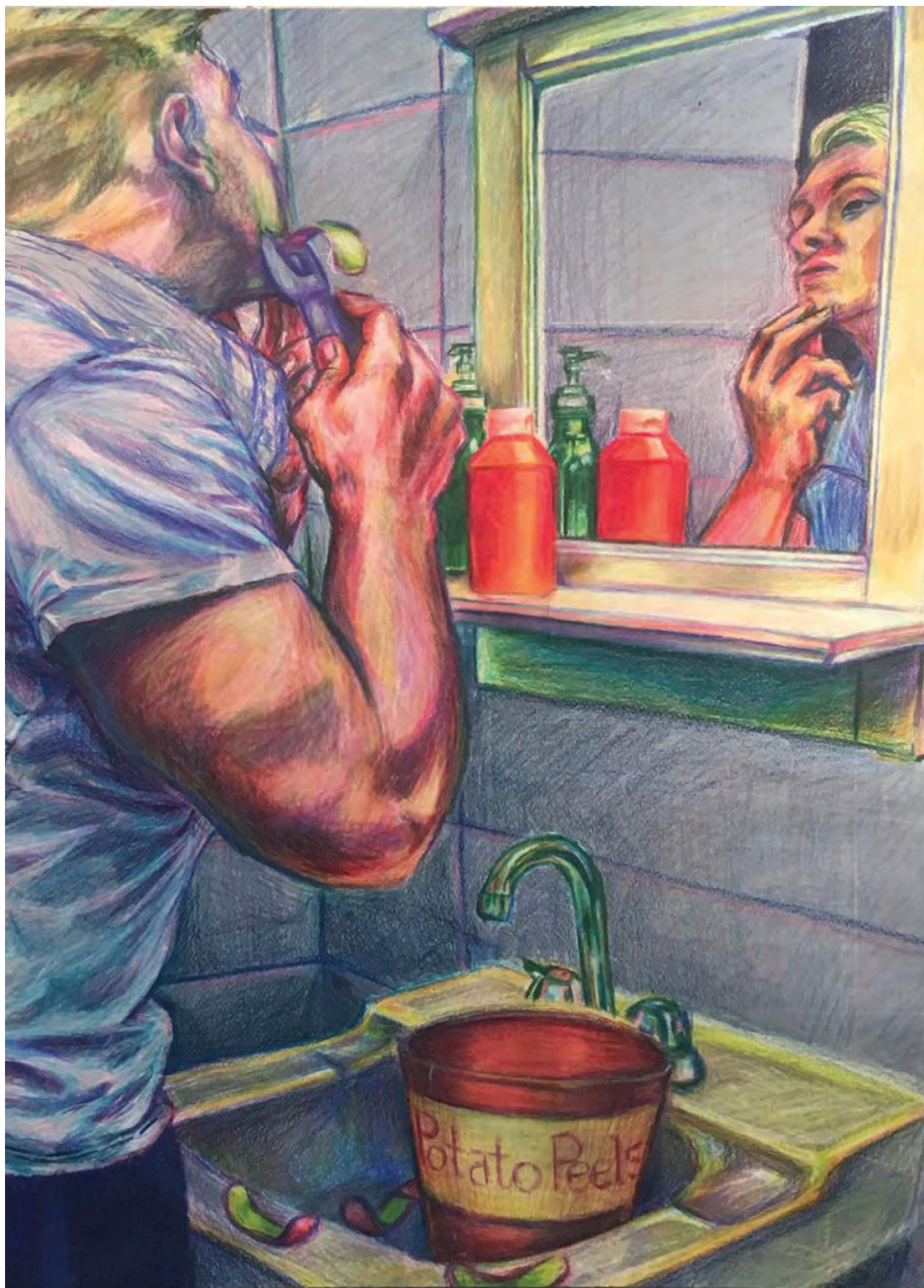


*Can You Keep a Secret?* by Kinsey McCormick, issue xv



*Transparent to the World* by Cody West, issue xv





*Mr. Potato Head* by Margaret Breidenbach, issue xiv

*How Does It Make You Feel?* by Margaret Breidenbach, issue xiv







*What Have You Been Told* by Maxwell Reber, issue xiv



Cover Me by Maxwell Reber, issue xiv





*Beauty of Culture* by Casey Mispagel, issue xiii



*Coffee Splash* by Jack Hatzfield, issue xiii



*Let's Pretend This Never Happened* by Anna Martin, issue xv



*Disarray* by Jonah Lee, issue xiv



*Yellow, Red and Blue Portrait*  
by Mickey Willard, issue vi



*River* by Stella Shapiro, issue xvi



*Photo* by Sarah Spencer, issue iii



*Fallen Comrade* by Mickey Willard,  
issue viii



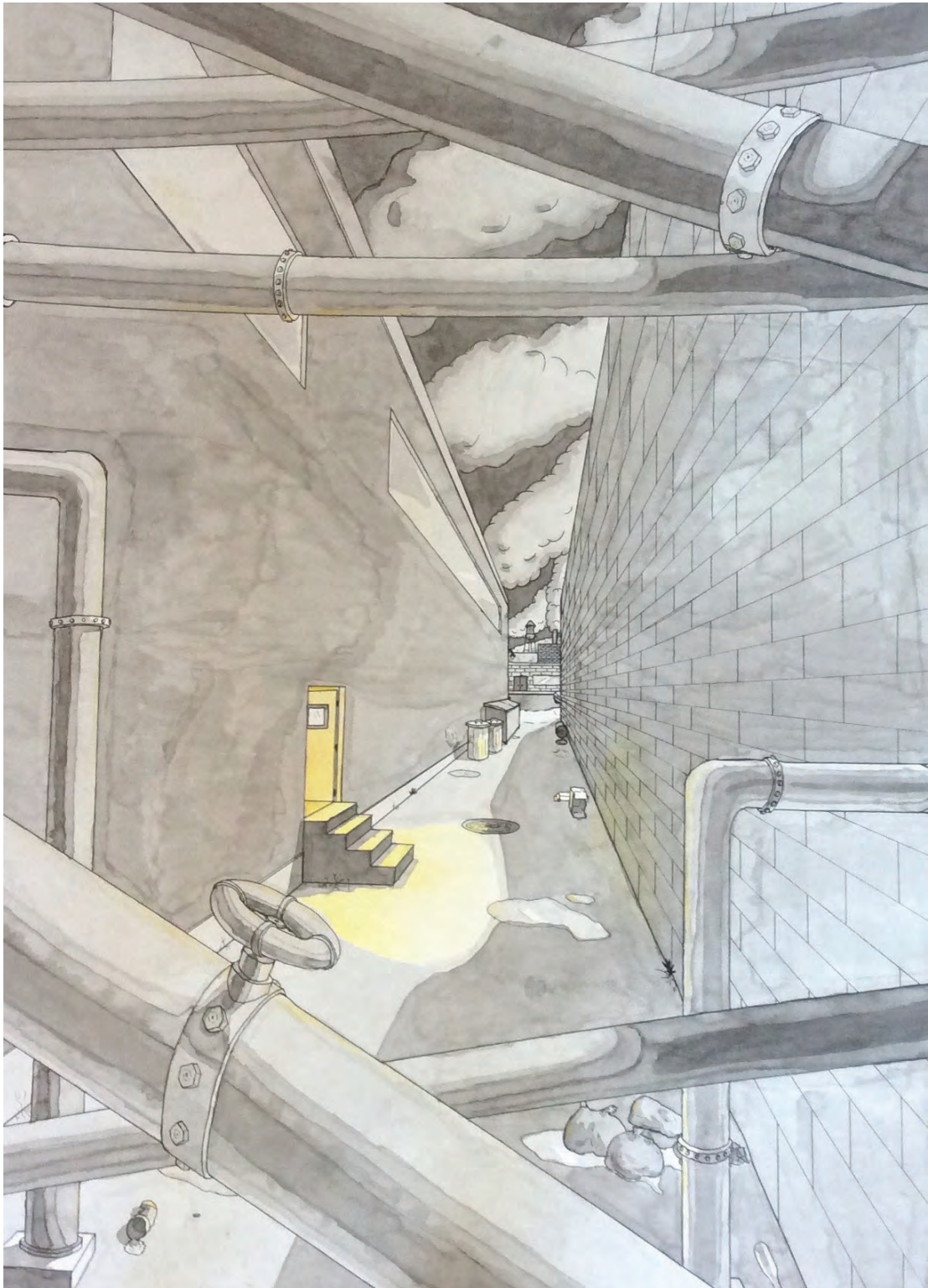


*Stillness* by Mallory Iszard, issue xiii





*Left Turn Only* by Victoria Hall, issue xiv







*Bird of Many Colors*  
by Cormac Palmer, issue xiv



*Love and Stuff* by George McCallum,  
issue vi

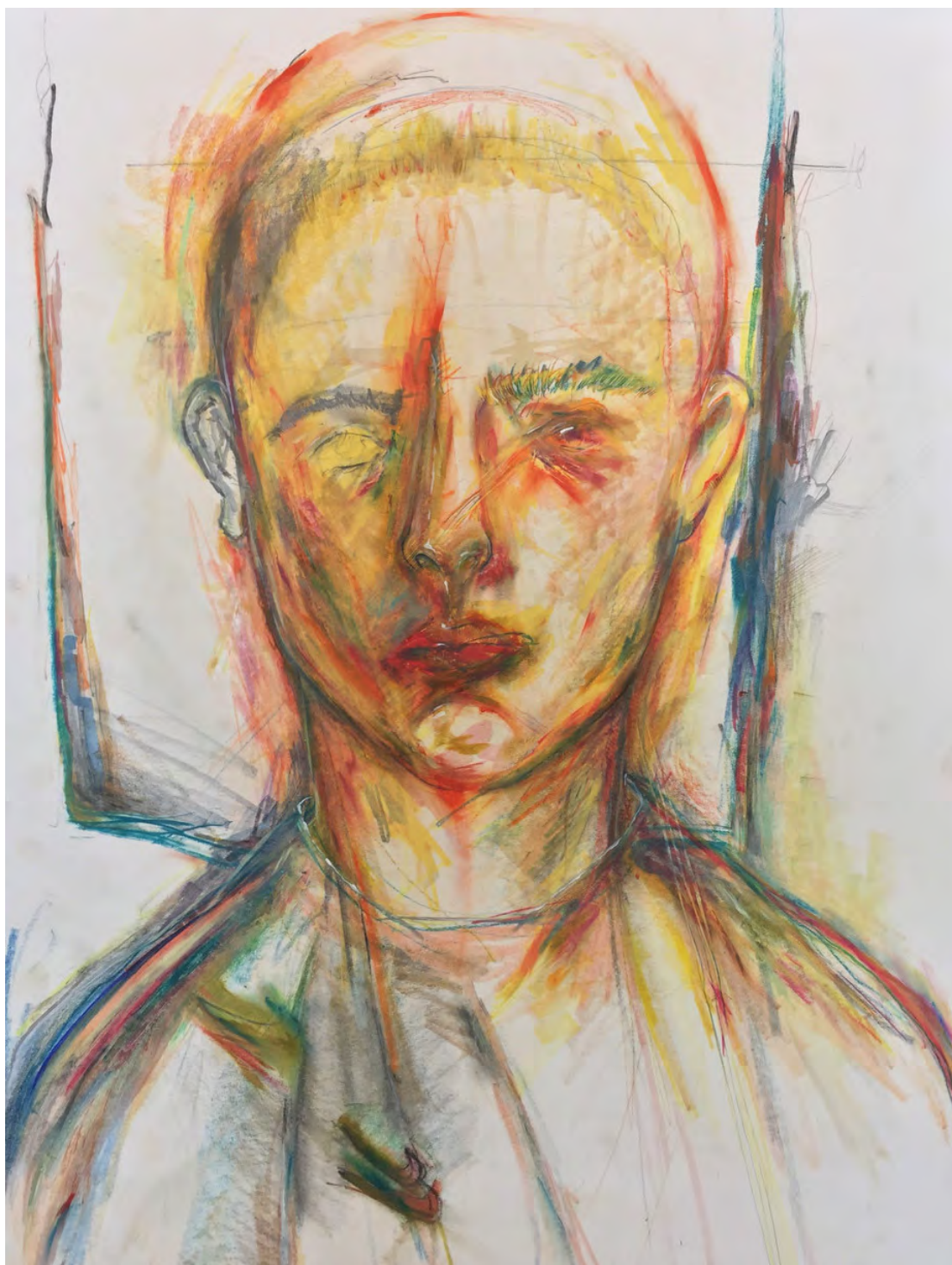


*Smoke Painting* by  
Maddie Miguel,  
issue vii





*Sanguine Uncertainty* by Anha Valdez, issue xiii



*Forward* by Maxwell Reber, issue xiv



# ISSUE THIRTEEN

The thirteenth issue of *elementia*, published in 2016, was dedicated to artist and teacher Lynda Barry, and to the theme of passion. As the editors of issue xiii note, "Through her books, Ms. Barry guides us to bring passion along on a daily mission to enlarge the comfort zone. She writes and draws prolifically, showing us that working by hand with unselfconscious commitment is vital in building personal understanding of fascinating subjects."

The editorial committee for the thirteenth issue consisted of teen selectors Alexandra Miller, Blaire Ginsburg, Eunice Lee, Ehsan Javed, Isabel Nee, Rebecca Abraham, Rylee Wilson, Jaden Zhao; teen designers Ellie Grever, Helen Wheatley, and Reid Guemmer; as well as Library staff editors Angel Tucker, Kate McNair, Cassidy Coles, and art director Jennifer Taylor. Thanks to a partnership with the Shooting Stars Recognition, Scholarship & Awards Program, all 63 pieces of artwork and 58 pieces of writing published in issue xiii were created by teens.



## The Eyes of Mermaid Dreams

Natasha Vyhovsky

On sad days,  
his eyes tell me stories –  
stories of pain,  
of struggle,  
of truth.  
They hold within them soft, grey clouds after April afternoon storms.

But the sky is bright without the sun,  
because it is never truly gone.

I smell the sweet,  
wet,  
fragrant earth  
when those grey clouds surrender to the storm in his soul –  
the kind of spring that promises sweet flowers out of frosted soil.

The grey clouds in his eyes . . .  
they promise a raw truth I do not know –  
one of fresh spring somewhere near  
and of pounding afternoon storms not long gone.

I feel a dull, panging nostalgia  
when those grey clouds search for me;  
I remember walking barefoot,  
catching worms from the rich earth,  
feeling neither warm nor cold;  
I feel peace,  
and yet a somber note far off . . .  
that this will not

last forever.

On happy days,  
his eyes pour into me.  
They tell me stories of innocence,  
of freedom,  
of being alive.  
I swim in the sparkling green lagoon in his eyes –  
the depths of the thick,  
bright waters,



endless and infinite.  
I emerge from those waters breathless,  
humbled by sheer vastness.

An unidentifiable cool light radiates from underneath,  
deep left  
and deeper right,  
and sends glimmers of diamond dust  
into the air around me.

When that pure aqua lagoon envelops me,  
I am alone  
and yet surrounded by gentle love -  
alone in a swirl of magic so full of life.

And in those eyes of mermaid dreams,  
the world comes alive to me.

I feel it all.

## Coffee Cups

Maya Bluitt

I'm not sure if the glass is half empty or half full.  
Coffee shops leave me homesick for 8-minute drives to your cul-de-sac, to your arms;  
you're always busy.  
And although refills and ring stains hold a pointer finger to pursed lips,  
I can't convince myself the same when I tell you not to worry about it.  
Between schoolhouse sidewalks and the pavement outside of evening shifts,  
I seek to fill the cracks with you.  
You are my solace when coffee shops don't cut it anymore.  
And neither does tomorrow.  
I wish you felt the same fire that begs you to come over and hold cold hands.  
And I don't mean to antagonize curfews when I ask to borrow fifteen more minutes;  
I pray to a forever that I know doesn't exist.  
And when some higher power decides to admit to the creation of cappuccino and  
October leaves, I hope he departs with us still holding hands.  
And if he decides that tonight is our finale, I hope that you don't whisper of tomorrow morning.  
I hope that twilight strolls confess inner extremities and provoke a table for two at brunch.  
I hope white sheets swallow limbs whole and leave us hungry for each other.  
I hope that whipped cream and espresso shots keep us in overbearing chairs all day today.  
But this is not a blockbuster.  
And you don't even like coffee.

## Hollow

Emily Wilkinson

I am in love with a girl . . . who is afraid of breakfast,  
who brews coffee in the morning like gasoline feeding a starving engine.  
  
Her fingers dance around the machinery of her waist out of step with reality.  
  
She wanders to the kitchen at night like an astronaut clawing her way through the dark,  
drawn to the frozen light of the refrigerator like a moth to a flame,  
counting calories instead of sheep.  
  
I am in love with a girl who never sleeps.  
  
I smile at her,  
and she smiles back.  
The mirror is cold, and her coffee sits on the countertop, untouched and stagnating.  
  
I am in love with a girl who doesn't recognize herself in the mirror anymore,  
and neither do I.

## Breed: The Girl of Fire (excerpt)

Sarah Ault

I was age twelve when I first drew her.

She was something of a dream, fleeting and momentary, yet the few seconds in which I gazed upon her left an imprint in my brain stronger than any graphite mark could have left. She was unerasable, just as the ink that graced that sterile paper the first time. Her image spilled over onto the sheet in a dark stain, overtaking the white with a new black boldness and assembling that very dream right before my eyes. It was an unfamiliar sensation of pleasure, but unmistakably illegal.

And yet it was so inviting that I continued to reassemble her likeness out of the black stain, each contour and curve giving me a new hope that she might not leave so quickly. I wanted her there, on that paper, for as long as my soul desired. She made me think a thought so unfeasible that in its absurdity it might be possible. She made me think that maybe there were people like her out there. Maybe one day, I could become just like her.

She was the girl of fire. She was vigor, passion, a great deal more powerful than the ink that meticulously crafted her each time. A fire so unstoppable that every passerby had to stop and gaze at her wondrous destruction. A fire so radiant that you might find solace in its warmth. A fire so inviting you might not mind being burnt or aflame if it caught on you. At times I was worried that she burned through the paper, branding the white surface below.

I wanted to tell others. I wanted to show the others around me just how wonderful a thing like her could be, I wanted them to find the same comfort in her heat. I wished her fire would spread, but there was no spark to be found. Eyes stared at me, blank, nearly any color to be found almost engulfed by neighboring white. I thought their beady black pupils might let her in, but there was too much white to see the wonder that the dark world presented. Perhaps it was for the better, for I knew if for one second if the wrong white eyes had glanced upon the black and seen the true darkness it held, she would be extinguished. Gone. All that would be left would be the dream, if there was anything left of me.

So, she became my secret. And when the white became all too overwhelming, I delighted in her darkness. I recreated the same short dark hair, the same flower imprinted on her neck, the same eyes that glowed like a match. I imagined every delicate color, the symphony of a sunset, though there was only white around me.

Today was one of the days where the whiteness ran over, and the only weapon I possessed was the ink. I blinked heavily, feeling my dried eyes snap back from a hazy focus. Releasing the pencil that was habitually woven between my fingers, I silently switched for the black ink pen that I kept sitting on the corner of my steel desk. My eyes darted from wall to wall, seeing if anyone cared to notice my change of focus. But they were consumed, blank. The usual. Their eyes stayed glued to the whiteboard which seemed to pour more valuable information to them, more valuable than a girl of infinite possibilities.

I sighed, already numb to the relief of never being caught. Turning to a sheet of paper that wasn't covered in row after row of informative lead, I watched as the black bled on to the surface. A delightful sense of control and power greeted me again as I painted another version of the girl of fire. This time, I focused on the hands. Though I never remembered this from my vision, she had her hands tightly balled around clumps of sand. The sand weaves through the cracks of her fingers, falling back to the ground. I loved the dynamic power it gave her, embodying immense control. The grains were people, bending at her will. At times, I longed to be presented with such an advantage. Perhaps I was just one more grain caught in her grasp. One more grain I needed to draw . . .

## Parting Gift

Guanghao Yu

Give me an unagitated evening,  
where I could sleep-walk  
under a light rose-petal sky,  
and arrive at your door,  
40 miles away,  
just in time for dinner.

Give me an absorbing darkness,  
into which we'll melt together  
and play like children,  
lighting sparks with nictations,  
accidentally singeing our fingers,  
and cooling them with laughter.

Give me a Colorado morning,  
where I could see the mountains  
from my room - the golden light  
filtering through the mist  
like a snow globe, illuminating the peaks  
where you could be beheld

like Beatrice, by her Dante,  
for the thousandth first time.



## Beginning // End

Allison Gliesman

Today, I am the only song you've ever known all the words to. I am the first person who ever meant it and the last thought you can manage before you close your eyes. You look at me, and all you see is light. You look at me, blinded, and you tell me you're the happiest person alive.

Today, everything is black. The sun is too heavy to rise, and you're wondering if this is the end. You sit in the dark and wait for something to happen, for some kind of light to find you. You sit in the dark and tell the moon that it deserves better than the sun anyway.

Today, I haunt you like a ghost that never quite made it to the other side. You're leaning over the edge of your mattress, clinging to every thought that isn't me, but I come back in lingering waves and overstay my welcome. You're begging me to leave you alone, but I never listen, I never listen.

Today, you remember me like falling asleep to a familiar nightmare. There's blood all over the walls, and there are monsters under the bed, but it's still home. I'm still home.

Today, you hear my voice and it's like remembering the words to an old song. We kiss and our mouths are fumbling, hearts racing, and it's almost like you never left. It's almost like we never met at all.



*Young Love* by Zachary Ruschill, issue xiii

## Midnight Light Switch

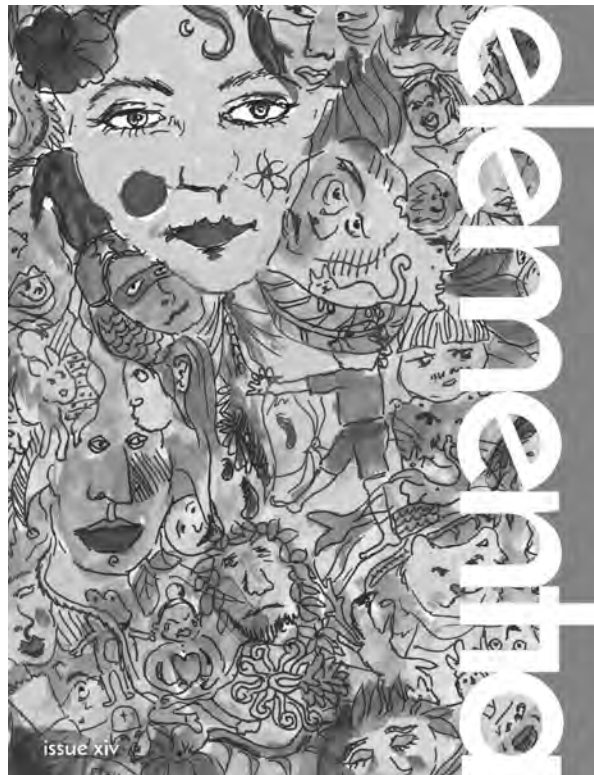
Anonymous

The initial absolute of "black"  
fizzes out; reds and blues and shapes pulse  
with every beat of your racing heart.  
You can feel her hands, see the basic outline of them,  
of her shoulders, her curved collarbone.  
As you reach for her –  
her chipped blue nail polish and her bright split ends –  
as she smiles  
you can feel it  
and you find your arms wrapped around her waist like you know the way home  
breathing her in, breathing you out.  
You don't mind the dark so much – you'd rather dance like this,  
hushed giggles, soft touches, tender kisses on shoulders  
– than to never dance at all.  
Her smell is burned into every pore of your body as you spin, uncontrollably  
towards the edge of nowhere  
as you fall asleep with your long limbs intertwined  
as she peels herself apart from you and dances alone down the sidewalk in the early dew of dawn.  
Her smell will linger for hours,  
beautiful lilacs embracing you when you wake.

# ISSUE FOURTEEN

The fourteenth issue of *elementia* came out in 2017 and was dedicated to artist and writer Gene Luen Yang, and to the theme of conflicting identity. As the editors of issue xiv note, "Through his books like *American Born Chinese*, Mr. Yang inspires us to explore our own complexities, including those parts of our identities that can seem contradictory. Mr. Yang, we thank you and we honor you for showing us how to incorporate our multifaceted identities on the page, and for encouraging us to seek out all the voices whose identities and experiences contribute to the richly complicated mosaic of humanity." Issue xiv published 70 pieces of writing and 73 pieces of art.

The editorial committee for the fourteenth issue consisted of teen selectors and designers Allyssa Herlein and Reid Guemmer, teen designers Ellie Grever and Helen Wheatley, and teen writing selectors Alexandra Miller, Ali Robinson, Emerson Debasio, Eunice Lee, Isabel Nee, Romila Santra and Rylee Wilson, as well as Library staff editors Kate McNair, Becca Carleton, Cassidy Coles and Cassandra Gillig, and art director Jennifer Taylor.



## Towelhead

Aroog Khaliq

The night before my first day of sixth grade, I studied the piece of fabric laid out on my bed with uncharacteristic placidity. It was no work of art; plain cotton fabric, dyed black, with a single strip of black lace for adornment. No, I wasn't looking owlshly at my first bra: the object that held my fascination was the first hijab I would wear to school full-time.

*wisps of hair escape  
as innumerable as stars  
as infinite as ignorance*

On the totem-pole of hijabi excellence, full-timers received the most respect, but even they had their own hierarchy. At the top were high school and college girls that could take a 12 by 72-inch shawl and wrap it into a masterpiece of rippling fabric on their heads. At the bottom were lowly grunts like me—sixth graders with acne, neon-colored braces, and the cat's eye glasses you realize are lame halfway through seventh grade – who wore plain, one-piece slip on hijabs made in Bangladeshi sweatshops. This latter form of hijab was popular among young children and the inexperienced, and thus, I dubbed it the kiddie hijab.

*little girl, big blink  
no, I can't show you my hair  
"why?"  
violent silence  
who knows? not I*

I had taken my kiddie hijab out for test runs on elementary school Crazy Hat Days, during which I had to patiently explain to my classmates that no, I didn't need to take my hijab off for the pledge of allegiance. Those days couldn't hold a candle – nay, a tea light! – to my first day of sixth grade, because now I could join all the cool girls at the mosque as a "full-timer."

*tongue in knots, heart in spasms  
how do I explain?  
"Say it's religious. Like, modesty."  
not enough words, never enough words*

Now, after achieving scarf-master level, I look back upon my kiddie hijab days with embarrassment. The kiddie hijab was as much a mindset as it was a scarf, and we who donned it did so for the sake of finally getting accepted into the hush-hush hijabi sisterhood we once watched jealously from afar. At seventeen, I am more cognizant of the divine purpose, and the danger, that lies in the sacred commandment to cover, and this epiphany occurred through my very own trial by fire.



As an eleven-year-old, I failed to realize that she who donned the hijab opened herself up not only to a barrage of asinine questions (I do not shower in it), but, as I discovered throughout middle school, harassment. I was subjected to the classic racist jokes about Osama Bin Laden and camels, the brilliant epithet of Towelhead, and, at worst, particularly irreverent kids who pulled off my hijab on the school bus. To these kids, who thought seeing my hair was akin to pantsing someone, the hijab was just a piece of fabric. To the girl I was before this harassment, the hijab was just a piece of fabric.

*"we just wanted to see your hair."  
my hair, my property*

Six years later, the utter humiliation I felt at being violated so carelessly before my peers still blindsides me. That emotion helped me realize that the decision to wear a hijab is one full of gravity. Now, I wear my religion proudly on my head. My hijab says, look at me – not as an object to be valued for its beauty, but as a person with intellect and passion. My hijab removes the rose-colored glasses that obscured my ability to see discrimination and resist it. My hijab is a badge of sisterhood, faith, and honor that I wear despite knowing it makes me a target. My hijab closes the door on the innocence of childhood, and invites me to open my eyes and see the world in all its glory, and all its dishonor.

*rose-tinted glasses with broken lenses  
this is the world –  
it is the wound and the salve*

## Curse of the Huntresses

Isabel Nee

And so the sun, in its dying fire falls,  
Into the darkness of the night's black realm.  
The moon ascends into the sky, so stalls  
I, to see its beauty and feel its calm.  
But then come the stars, crossed in others eyes,  
That we cannot in daylight seek to be  
Near, lest others in hate try to demise  
This love's fragile bond between you and me.  
O, how different are we, you with light  
Green and blue eyes, long sunset scarlet locks,  
I, with pale skin and tresses black as night.  
Yet, we are so the same we dare not talk,  
For those that hate us would divide us, nay,  
We fight for what they vain try to delay.

## Deli Shop Blues

Caleb Bishop

clouds  
pink and blue smears  
go over my head  
like the moon  
or calculus.  
i long to float up there  
where i could eat eclipse and crackers  
and differentiate my thoughts.

don't you find it odd  
that, sometimes, in order to answer a question  
you need the opposite of the thing itself?

i am my own reciprocal.  
i hate liars  
but i hardly ever come out from beneath  
my own silver tongue  
or my solidified sadness.  
even my body is my own mind's conjugate  
but the limit  
as i approach everything i know  
from the side that loves and the side that loathes  
is ultimately me  
staring through this restaurant window.

my breath steams the glass  
and i miss the final moments of sunset.  
"Get off there," my mother says  
"it's full of germs."

## Flowers Exist on the Moon

Maggie Golshani

Fidgeting my leg against a familiar school desk, the dreadful anticipation always washes over me while listening to roll call on the first day of school. As the teacher goes down the list of names as simple as Mary and Alex, my face darkens with a crimson hue as I await the familiar butchering of my name and the consequential embarrassment. Slowly, the teacher halts their flawless rendition of Marys and Alexs. Usually following this halt, there is the typical “I know I’m going to get this wrong,” or “I apologize in advance.” However, my seventh grade teacher didn’t apologize and instead made an audacious attempt at pronouncing my name. Confident, bold, and severely misled, this teacher assumed that “my hole” would be the most accurate pronunciation of my name.

My name, Mahgol, literally translates to “moon flower,” and surprisingly the beautiful concept of my name is nothing compared to the ugly pronunciation it often endures. I never go by my real name in the U.S. for the sole reason that I wanted to be Iranian in Iran and American in America. Denying my Iranian culture became an instinctive reflex; when people would ask me how to pronounce my birth-given name, I would aloofly reply, “it’s not important.”

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant was like chasing a cookie I could never get. I saw countless snippets of a “perfect” American life all around me, but it was one I could never achieve. Wherever I went, I was reminded of the other part of me I tried so hard to mercy-kill as it created a divide between the others and me. The shame made me yearn for accent-less parents, Thanksgiving traditions, and weekly church gathering—not for Christianity’s sake, but to fit into the American mold. But Iranian culture ran through the blood in my veins and the pipes in my house.

I stopped speaking Farsi, didn’t go to the country for three years, and insisted that I didn’t have a middle name, which was just another reminder of Iran. I called myself an easy American name, didn’t go to any Iranian gatherings, and started identifying myself as Persian instead of Iranian because of the negative political connotation the word has. Simply put, I was whitewashing myself. This cultural cleanse was less of a purification and more of a misled corruption. It was a waste.

Like Alice in Wonderland, I had been led astray in a deep hole of confusion, but soon I awoke from my dazed state when I returned to Iran after three years. At the beginning of my trip, heavy guilt and embarrassment crept in me and weighed down my heart like an anchor. All I could mutter to my estranged relatives were simple pleasantries that were nowhere near in substance to our previous conversations. Our reunion often resulted in incoherent conversations, awkward silences, and pitying smiles as they had immediately realized what I had lost.

By repeatedly calling me Mahgol for the first time in three years and forcing me to participate in a plethora of activities, my family made me fall in love with Iranian culture after years of fighting it. Like the moon, my Iranian culture shines brightly even when the rest of the world seems dark. Like a patient flower, my Iranian culture has taken my entire life to slowly blossom and enrich its surroundings. The newfound comfort of my name and the ease in which it rolls off my tongue has inspired me to drop the cultural shield I once had and instead be bombarded with full adoration for Iran and all of its gracious offerings.



The Iranian food that dances in my mouth symbolizes traditions passed down generations that finally end with me.

The Iranian sight carries sturdy mountains on the countryside that I would gaze upon while driving to see enchanting coastline of the Caspian Sea.

The Iranian voice subtly carries the beautiful hymns my mother would sing to me, as I would fall asleep and into my Iranian mold.

My Iranian voice proudly carries all of me. For I am not half-Iranian and half-American, I am a mixture of the two as they intertwine and embrace one another.

Accepting my culture has been a matter of learning to embrace its diversity, rather than viewing it as adversity. I still struggle with accepting the mixed background I have, but it has allowed me to see the beauty of the world. There is nothing wrong with my accented parents or my hard-to-pronounce name; in fact, there is a unique merit in these discrepancies. Often times, this beauty gets lost in translation—especially during roll call—but it's one worth looking for.



*Reflect* by Mallorie McBride, issue xiii

## My Diaspora Poem (Remix), or All I Know Is This Aroog Khaliq

I hate diaspora poetry  
as much as the next  
fed-up immigrant

All that bullshit  
about "lives stained  
with honey and turmeric"  
and "the colonizer  
cutting my tongue with  
aluminum shears"  
is utterly boring

But there is truth to  
the pain that comes from  
racism and xenophobia  
and the distance between  
the people that are supposedly  
your people,  
whatever the fuck that means

All I know is this:

My father came here  
and he sat hunched before  
a computer for hours,  
doing whatever it is  
a database architect does,  
and trying to deflect the racism  
that loomed above his cubicle  
and bloomed in the sky  
after 9/11 -  
the day after his  
second child was born

My mother came here  
and at first she was so lonely,  
with only my soft-skulled,  
baby self for company,  
that she cried herself to sleep  
each night for two years,

wondering how her brain,  
full of silvery, delicate  
Urdu couplets,  
was going to learn  
flat, counterintuitive  
English,  
and how her baby  
was going to hold onto  
a culture green and gold  
in a land of red and blue  
and always, always  
white . . .

All I know is this:

My father is here,  
a citizen now,  
running a business he  
breathed life into,  
sitting hunched over a  
computer,  
doing whatever it is a  
database architect does,  
clocking in fifty, sixty hours  
a week into the secret time clock  
in my head,  
and thinking  
about what life will be like  
when January 20th comes  
and goes, and telling himself  
that he has been through worse,  
in Pakistan . . .  
and in the States

My mother is here,  
a citizen now,  
her slip-on beige niqab  
on a hook by the coat closet,  
her black abaya hanging within,  
her four children all in school,

all raised by her love,  
her sweat, her tears,  
and she holds her thinning  
black braid between her fingers,  
thinking of all that this country  
has taken from her,  
and all that is has given,  
and she wonders whether  
the fear she feels on every  
September 11th,  
the fear that keeps her from  
leaving the house at all,  
will soon bloom into  
a fear that stains each day,  
and she wonders how  
she will tell her children  
to be safe  
without exposing her own  
fear

All I know is this:

I am a woman  
made of fear and pain and loss  
and Urdu couplets and steaming rice  
and knockoff Burberry scarves-cum-hijabs  
and Beyoncé songs on vinyl  
and snickerdoodles

I am afraid,  
I cling to hope,  
I cling to righteous anger,  
I take this silver tongue,  
I take these golden words,  
I write into existence  
my manifesto –  
This too, shall pass

In my mind,  
I lie in a field of mustard greens  
on a charpoy under the stars,  
and I let myself think  
about every place I feel  
at home

and I pray for  
those sacred grounds  
to remain Hallowed

All I know is this:

My diaspora poem is  
written widdershins,  
in a language locked  
with a key lodged deep  
in my eternal being

My diaspora poem is  
about fear and the future  
fear of the future,  
that insidious, elusive  
thing

My diaspora poem is  
an ode to my parents  
and the rocks they  
had hewn by hand  
for me,  
my kith,  
my kin

My diaspora poem is  
for the hijabis out there  
that are tired of saying  
they are feminist and  
they are Muslim  
to people on both sides  
of that ugly  
Discourse

My diaspora poem is  
a love letter from me  
to you, with all  
my best wishes  
concentrated into  
each  
and  
every  
word

## Antithesis of Coconut Oil

Alice Kogo

my hair bleeds purple when i sleep  
dark, violet, translucent in the way that sausage fat boiling on the pan is  
before it touches a towel  
in the way that a ghost's imprint is before fingerprints are left on the kitchen counter  
in the way that black bodies are  
before they find themselves in front of the barrel of a gun  
before they become that ghost  
before the pus leaking from the wound touches a tshirt a hood  
the towel they are wrapped up in before reaching the stretcher  
and they are dead meat, sold by the link, five bullets per pound,  
fifteen bullets per pound, twenty-three bullets per pound.  
to save money on hospital bills the medics pronounce them dead  
to prevent the wasting of money on someone who would've died / been left anyways  
they are pronounced dead

maybe if i were in the absence of color my hair wouldn't bleed,  
it would drip, straight down, following the lines, rivulets of clear water down my locks  
clear as my conscious as i tell myself that i am not a racist  
that my were parents were / are  
clear as my reflection in  
the water i see myself and i can smile will not have to change myself  
to fit the image of a black pariah in america

i use coconut oil in my kinky hair because it makes me feel at home  
when it freezes into the hard shell of itself that can only be soothed  
with the warm pulse of a human hand i see myself  
there is no harm that comes from coconut oil,  
but its opponent dark & lovely deep conditioner is its antithesis, it makes me bleed  
store brand, average, bought when my pockets were too empty  
to search for the solace of the barest, the best, coconut itself



they repackage what i know, they call it original,  
make me smile with a cardboard cutout black face on the label  
remove the sense from my head as i reach to the shelf  
forgetting the black owned businesses that exist, that they need me, that i need them  
i empty my pockets out for you and you make me bleed  
because the money i spent on your white product takes away  
from what i could've put in communities that would help quell the bullets  
that would bandage the wound / that would keep us alive / but i chose the alternative  
and as it makes me bleed i

remember how purple used to be my favorite color  
until it wasn't  
how royalty is dressed in fine robes of that hue, the shade tantalizing  
but there are no more queens in my country  
my color has already been assigned to me, black, the absence of light,  
and because purple is just a refraction of the sun in a prism  
holding a multitude of colors within itself,  
it is no wonder that i do not partake in its equation

## What Am I

Clara Rabbani

In Iran I am a rebel. I show my hair. In Brazil I am exotic. The nomads left me their yellow eyes to search the desert sand. Where I live, there is no sand. In America I am my age. Stuck in the in-between where nothing lasts. I am the enemy. No matter how hard they try to rid me of these thoughts the things they do only drill them in deeper. I do not belong in either world. When they ask me where I come from, I cannot say. In Iran I am outspoken. I have no loss for words. They spill from my lips like a waterfall in the Amazon. In Brazil I am silent. I do not dance. I cannot feel the rhythm. I string words together like beads. In America I am the empty space. I am what is not there. But when the painting is finished, and I am the only space left, then you will see what I am. I am the color of the clay, baking in the midday sun. A sun so old it has seen both worlds. I am the color of the coffee beans that fall from the trees in the rainforest. They wait for the monkeys to find them. Sprout leaves and last forever. In America, my language is a fragrant blend of spices. Those who have not tasted it will never understand. When they call my name, they are deceived. I am the sun. An egg white. I am light.

## Red Heels

Claire Hutchinson

when you click your heels and wish for home, where exactly is it that you go? i packed away all my ambition in manila envelopes of faded dreams and sent them away to coral reefs so schools of fish a generation after me could learn from my mistakes. start saving for college when you're six, a year for every digit, because if you want a higher education then you can't afford the things that make you happy. (maybe that's why nemo's dad didn't want him to go to school.) sew your stories into the patchwork quilt of your backpack slung across your shoulders and never trust someone that you can't touch with the tips of your eyelashes.

(start wearing mascara so that you can pretend that everyone you love is close enough.)

when you look up at the stars at night, tuck them into your lint-lined backpack pockets and keep the stardust there like secrets. (no one ever keeps secrets.) sprinkle those stars onto your shoes and hope that pixie dust flies you faster than Southwest or Spirit airlines. mailboxes don't go in reverse, so everything that you've sent away doesn't tend to come right back without being stamped in red. NO ONE LIVES THERE. ADDRESS NOT REAL. SANTA DIED IN THE SECOND GRADE. nemo, go home. nemo, go home.

(cross my heart and hope to die for i have lived a thousand lives each covered by a constellation that dot-dot-dots me right back to the deepest shades of blue. how different are astronomers from oceanographers anyway? we're all searching for things that everyone else is scared of finding. we're all searching for things that don't exist but have to.)

destination: still figuring it out. destination: a desert built from a river that ran out a long time ago, from everyone that ran out a long time ago, a delta of broken dreams peppered with sandcastles of stories that never saw completion. destination: roswell, because i've always loved road trips and maybe UFOs will be more comfortable than the backseat of my corolla.

destination: home. maybe these heels will figure out what that means by the time i've finished counting: one (home), two (home), three -

(home).

## **m.A.A.d city man**

Annie Barry

This summer I took some chances while listening to Chance the Rapper because I liked the beat  
But listened to Kendrick when I wanted some street poetry  
Some urban poetry  
From poets who grew up in suburban towns with an urban state of mind  
Designed to have inclined to remind mankind of what it's like for a human to be kind  
I listened to m.A.A.d. city for the first time for the story and not the sound  
I'm a kid from Kansas, I just click my heels and my mind runs back to the ideals  
My poetry clears my head without having to hide in my bed  
It's my xanax, my completely contemporary confusing confiding complex can of comfort  
My weighted blanket that's blank when I don't write  
But that's not right because my paper is never blank – sometimes I just run out of ink in my pen  
that's all  
Writer's block because I can't block out the black sky when I close my eyes  
The bad barricade between blank walls, black walls  
I blink red, blink blue – see ambulances coming at you  
Sirens like angels singing in times square because the man in the alley told you to "square up"  
You said to "shut up"  
I said to "get up and go"  
You said "No"  
I think our world is a m.A.A.d city man  
Or maybe you're just a mad man in the city  
A sad man looking for pity  
Because you got stuck in conformity  
Try to rap like everyone else  
Because you can't get a job  
You write just to show not to tell  
You don't write to feed your soul  
But because it feeds your ego  
I write to breathe, not to please, but the deal with grief  
Writing gives me what feels like the right type of rage, rendering under red lights on a stage  
reminding me of stoplights I ignored when I started to write



## Four Words to Describe Yourself

Ana Schulte

*Unsure.*

About the question, or the world?

Unsure whether to answer truthfully, or to fabricate a more intriguing narrative.

Unsure what the question implies: Fears,

(Spiders, bad grades, falling out of love)

or physicalities,

(Brown eyes, red cheeks, mutilated fingernails)

or favorite songs?

(Banana Pancakes, Eleanor Rigby, Don't Dream It's Over.)

*Happy.*

Most of the time, anyway.

Driving eastward away from the sun,

eating brownies with plastic forks,

snapping pictures of dark trees and bright leaves . . .

With other people, driving and eating and snapping prelude joy,

but alone, maybe they don't.

Does the word count if it's not independent,

if its part doesn't play out in the dark as you lay, vulnerably,

with only yourself to keep you company?

*Excited.*

Perhaps commonly misinterpreted as hyperactive,

but no,

Excited for the birthdays and parties, and holidays and cupcakes,

and kisses, (hopefully) and babies, (maybe)

For money, and triumphant shouts, and good tears followed by good hugs,

and maybe even for the stormy nights, when the tide crashes

wet against your skin,

but drying off in the sun helps you forget.

Mostly excited for the days I'll stop answering questions to trivial personality quizzes.

*Can I leave this one blank?*

I hope that counts,

because I'm starting to doubt the legitimacy of this question.

Maybe it's not the words you use to answer, but the way you choose to approach it.

Four lines are hardly enough to explain the workings of a

*Person,*

with a scar on her ankle and stretch marks on her hips,

and stories pouring out of her fingertips.

And though the words I speak do not account

for they think,

I've seen the people around me erasing madly, and here's my conclusion:

four lines may be too much –

Some people only need one.

## Ballad to the Unknown

Claire Hutchinson

i screamed into the void until my lungs collapsed,  
but she barely gave me a glance when the silence relapsed.  
i called out to the stars and they gave me an excuse:  
"hey man i'm sorry, it's me, it's not you."

i tried to infuse my veins with rocket fuel,  
but the mechanical pieces of my internal organs  
found the chemicals to be too cruel.  
they rejected everything until i coughed up acid:  
"why isn't this enough? please just be placid."

so i cracked open my ribs along the seam of my breastbone,  
searching for my heart in the empty unknown.  
instead i found my lungs, punctured and failing:  
"why are you here when there's stars to be sailing?"

i tried hailing a taxi with the blood on my hands,  
but my ribs were too messy for the driver's backseat to stand.  
so i tried walking home but the sidewalks betrayed me:  
"why are you stepping on me when you should be saving me?"

i broke out into a sprint through other people's backyards  
but i found myself blacking out and not getting too far.  
it was then that i found a fence that caused my stumbling and crashing:  
"hey kid can't you read? that sign says no trespassing."

i pick-pocketed other people's dreams until i couldn't hold them anymore,  
bursting at the seams with too little to show for.  
i picked apart my brain to find the source of my decay,  
only to find a note in my own handwriting: "find your own way."

i dropped to my knees and ignored the bruising,  
struggling to find anything i've done of my own choosing.  
i cried out to the sky and the constellations replied,  
"why are you complaining when you haven't let go of your pride?"

so i swallowed my tongue and cast down my eyes,  
rising back to my feet but no longer alive.  
i looked up to the moon to give me guidance,  
but whatever answers i was looking for, i couldn't find it.

it was then that i realized that i've been complacent too long,  
finding new beats but always singing the same old song.  
so i stitched up all my pieces and washed myself clean:  
"i will be okay. it's just, i don't ever dream."

## Tied

Saadia Siddiqua

Pakistan and America  
Eastern and western  
but they feel like the north and south poles  
I'm immersed in the red silk dresses embroidered by hand and I'm in love with the ability to roam  
alone across this land  
I'm submerged in the value of education before all but I'm also tangled in love and lust, where  
we all seem to stumble and fall  
sometimes seen as arrogant if I don't see god  
sometimes seen as ignorant if I do believe  
I like the modest clothing, for immodesty is a sin  
But I also cherish the bumps and edges that dance across my dark, bare skin  
naked or clothed, how about being both?  
It leaves me vulnerable  
It isn't a mood, these things I love, I love them all at once, although they oppose each other

A tug of war, but in my mind  
A terrible decision one way, the other sublime  
I'm pulling from both sides with all my might  
but the rope doesn't sway, not left nor right  
And my hands are tearing apart trying to pull too tight  
To find one easy side to stick with  
Blistered and bleeding, my hands will soon collapse  
But with time I built calluses, eventually I started to relax  
Pakistan or America, I choose carefully, building my traits  
Eventually I balance and can finally stay  
On this tightrope, instead of falling astray  
Fifty feet in the air without a harness  
And I'm beautiful  
my contradictions are the garnish  
This rope is who I have become  
A twist of my identity  
A burn, a blister  
Or a beautiful show  
This mystery of mixed  
Isn't something we all get to know  
Hold on to this rope  
For an open mind is no surprise  
For people who are tied

## It's Difficult

Anonymous

It's difficult,  
The business of learning a new language.  
Words slip away from you like a skittish bird  
But you grasp for them  
And try to give them some meaning.

It's difficult  
Age four, first day of school,  
Not comprehending a sentence your teacher says,  
Bitter at Mom and Dad  
For giving you the wrong words to say back.

It's difficult when they tell you,  
"It's time you learn English,"  
So you leave what you know  
And learn to talk like the others  
And suddenly,  
It all feels a lot easier

It's difficult  
Traveling twenty-two hours  
To a place of palm trees and rivers,  
Of bonfires and jasmine and your grandma's cooking,  
To a lush Eden full of faces that look like your own  
Only to find that the faces can no longer understand a word out of your mouth.

It's difficult  
When they greet you, "Namaskaram"  
And laugh as you try to form your mouth back around the lost syllables  
Then turn their noses up at "the whitewashed girl"  
And you feel as lonely as you did at four years old.

It's difficult  
Realizing that the words of your ancestors,  
The words that your parents have claimed as theirs,  
And the words you have lost  
Are no longer your own.



## Coping with the World

Amanda Pendley

I was in the middle of Alabama, silhouette illuminated by the golden hour's subtle sunlight,  
engrossed in a conversation with my cousin, just catching up.

He'd asked me if I was any better, and I'd told him that "at least I know my triggers now."  
He replied "that's impressive for someone so young, it helps you cope with the world,"  
But it's not impressive because it's uncommon,  
It's impressive because somehow, I am still here.  
It's not merely a coping strategy, it is a survival technique.

Coping with the world is taking a pause:

A moment of reflection to mimic the minute memory of the mesmerizing mentality that I once  
had possessed.

A pause to recollect, reclarify, ratify that despite whatever intangible feeling lay inside of me, the  
tick tick tick of the clock will always keep on tolling.

I fluctuate in a fluid frequency between light and dark, finally settling inside a static grey.

Settling.

Coping is always settling. That's why I prefer enduring or advancing because to me coping is the  
nuance nagging at the necessity of needing someone.

When I'd much prefer to keep to myself.

Coping is a way to get through, not to, the final destination a mere proclamation of desire, and  
dependability.

A road sign so close but so far away,

An illusion to the mind that results in

Settling.

I know my triggers because it is intrinsic to my survival, slithering through life hoping not to trip an  
alarm disguised as a normality.

The clock is still tick tick ticking, just as I am.

Tick, shaking because of a house painted light blue.

Tick, I read a story that mentioned a rope, had to be excused in class.

Tick, they remind me of someone I used to know.

I tick the triggers off my trembling fingers.

Clairementence does not ask for your consent to worry, you feel whether it is your problem or not,

So how am I supposed to cope with the world when I can't even cope with myself.

But is knowing my triggers really a coping mechanism

Or is it simply acknowledging the obvious overdose of empathy clairsentience has created,

Permeating in my bones,

Either way it has kept me alive.

## Aphrodite Defiled

Farah Dianputri

I didn't ask for your  
insecurities  
Or your hands  
To venerate me.

Shut up  
Hold back that  
writhing worm  
you cage  
behind your teeth  
Any closer  
And I'd bite it off.  
Then, watch  
scarlet bloom  
in the cavity  
And melt into  
the cracks of those  
broken lips  
But I didn't.

I allowed flattery  
To stream out instead.  
"Goddess," one night  
you hiss and I think of  
flab folding in furrows  
cotton candy complexions  
Stretched out on the  
canvases of old masters.

you may evoke  
Venus, nymph,  
odalisque,  
or any other excuse  
in sophisticated guise.  
Your diction was crass,  
Sycophantic.  
So was your  
technique.

I am not your altarpiece.

## Taylor Abigail Cottingham

His taste in music was mayonnaise: bland and unappreciated by most of the population. I guess you could say I love mayonnaise. We attended the same school, but a year separated us so we didn't have any classes together. We had lunch at the same time though, where we would see each other in line and accidentally touch hands while simultaneously reaching for the mustard packets.

"Go ahead," he'd gesture, giving me a gentle smile that made my heart melt on sight.

I think everything changed the day I saw him with a look of disgust on his face, his lips pulled into a pucker like he'd tasted a sour pickle. I wanted to know him. I wanted to know where he was going, how he was feeling, what made him frustrated enough to outwardly frown. He'd turned to see me staring and I quickly averted my eyes, my face turning the color of the ketchup on my hamburger. When I looked back up, he was smiling at me, and I was quick to smooth down my hair in self-conscious defense. We slipped into a habit: his striking blue eyes would meet mine across our lunch tables and he'd break out into a soft smile that would keep me giddy for the rest of the day. Nobody else seemed to notice our routine, which made me doubt that there was anything happening between us at all.

I found myself driven to talk to him by my infatuation and when he responded, I was ecstatic. We were shy at first, but I relished in every piece of information he told me about himself. I still remember every detail: his birthday was June 14th, when he was a kid he couldn't stand touching crayons because of the wax, he only put soy sauce on fried rice and putting it on anything else was insulting. We'd always have these talks late at night, sitting in his basement or my living room, where he'd tell me something stupid he did in seventh grade, and I would laugh too hard until I couldn't breathe, which made him laugh. He's one of those people who laughs with their entire being, but his eyes were always the first to smile. It took me a few months, but I finally opened up to him, letting him get to know me as well as I knew him.

One night in particular, we were sitting in his car after seeing a movie, listening to a playlist I had made for him (it became a favorite date of ours – if you could even call it that.) Ever since we became closer, I was trying to introduce him to more music genres, so all of my iTunes money went to making CDs for him of anything I thought he would enjoy. My mom teased me for making him a "mixtape" but a glare from my dad ended the conversation quickly.

He was leaning back against the driver's seat, poorly singing along to the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The song ended and I paused the playlist, quietly drawing back into myself. He asked what was wrong, but I hesitated in answering. We sat in silence until finally I spoke up, telling him about how much I liked him; I probably sounded like I was quoting a Nicholas Sparks book. He smiled after I finished, but the pity was evident in his eyes.

"Taylor," he started, treating my name like a wounded bird, "it's been great hanging out with you, but we're just friends."

I was heartbroken. Here was this guy that I had finally opened up to, spilled all of my secrets to and he only wanted to stay friends. He drove me home and gave me a polite smile as I got out of the car, all while I was trying to hide my tears.

School was hell after that. I guess he went and told somebody about our date. I was bullied constantly; they called me names and wrote derogatory words all over my locker. Nobody ever tried to be my friend during high school again. I mean, I can't say I blame them.

Who'd want to be friends with the guy who fell in love with his straight best friend?

## A Letter to My Mother Who I Love Very Much and Who I Hope Doesn't Read This

Elizabeth Joseph

When I needed a white sheet for Toga Day at school, my father immediately gave me his own white cloth. The weave was loose and rough, with a smooth strip of gold running down one side, so large I thought it was a sari.

"This is a *mundu*," he said. "We use it for traditional, formal occasions." The first thing I said was, "I can't wear it. I don't want to stain it."

The first thing I thought was: *if I have a son, he will never wear this cloth.*

Mama, you always assume I'm going to have a child. In fact, I'm sure it's expected, to some degree. I'm aware you want me to make my own choices. But I am aware this may not be a choice I completely make for myself.

Here is the problem with uprooting yourself, Mama: the culture you were surrounded in was left behind, and you can't blame me when I see things differently.

Scientifically speaking, the older I grow, the smaller my chance gets of ever learning Malayalam, our native tongue. As my ears grow attuned to the intricacies of English, they fall more and more deaf to the Indian languages you know so well. And I know that you say Malayalam isn't important in the scheme of things. But the last words my grandfather spoke to me were in Malayalam, and I will never get to understand what he tried to say to me six years ago.

~~When~~ If I have children, they will bear an anglicized name like *Elizabeth Joseph*, the nuances of an Indian-Catholic name lost in the reverberating effect of having a white-sounding moniker. If they ever go to India, it will be through a homogenized process with no tangible connection to the people. They will only speak the language of a colonizer's tongue. Their hopes of understanding the Indian culture that I have received rests entirely on you, and I don't even know if you'll be around then to share it.

Mama, I'm afraid to have children because, when the time comes, they will have to fight to hold on to a culture that will not belong to them, not in the way it belongs to you. How long will it take for our future family line to forget their past altogether? Ancestry.com doesn't cover immigrant families.

I am afraid because the stories I see around me don't reflect the experience of being stuck in two worlds that overlap but never truly touch. I didn't grow up in the society that shaped you into a blade of pragmatism. I do not have the drive for competition that all of the other Indian kids around me seem to possess so innately. And I know that there are others like me, the second generation immigrants who are also confused of their place. But being surrounded by the Indian



kids whose parents took to American opportunity like a fish to water is not easy. Not that you didn't take to the opportunities here, Mama. But you have to admit that you aren't like most of the other Indian parents, who placed their children in activities from day one. I am not naturally talented at math. My chances of being a doctor or engineer are slimmer than yours or my father's. The only discipline I have been consistent in is English. And what kind of Indian only speaks English?

I know that you may not understand, but sometimes, the hyphen between Indian-American is a breaking point rather than a bridge.

And Ma, if I have a child, what's the chance they'll fit into one of my *kurtas* or *churidars*? What's the probability they'll like to eat fish or *Vattyappam*? American beaches are different from the Keralite coastline. Where will they find freshly ground sugarcane juice besides the Mysore Zoo?

Mama, when I told you that I will *need* to go back to India when I'm fully grown, you said a guided tour would be enough. But a family tree is not a fairy tale. I cannot close a book and outgrow the roots that are still planted a continent away. I can't just forget the food that tastes better in India than in the U.S., the way the architecture stands colorful and bold, the rain that rushes down the outside stairs and rooftops during monsoon season. The entire world is different: the celebrations, the academics, the funerals. Where will I find a partner willing to say the same?

Mama, I know I have years to decide. But I don't want to have children who do not know the losses you and my father left behind. I trace my identity through the hairline your mother gave me, the curls from Pa, the plentiful locks you passed on, the zha gene and the absurdly skinny wrists. But I cannot preserve what you have left when all of it seems to be locked in my DNA.

You both are teaching me to pass down our culture through food and clothing. I can tell my children the stories you have told me. Maybe I will inherit the same wistful tone my father has when he shares his memories. I can try to play YouTube videos in Malayalam to make up for the dearth of my mother tongue, the residual taste of English lingering instead. But Mama, until I can make a home from the bones you left behind, I do not want to have children.

## Marked

Emma Olinger

"People just choose to be pink, everyone is born blue."

"People with pink marks are going straight to hell."

"There are places to go to get your pink mark made blue again, so why not go?"

"These millennials with their pink marks."

"Blue marks are the superior marks."

"Hello."

The sounds of the bus was never quiet, and as the bus passed every street lamp, she felt the chaotic tendencies of those on the vehicle heighten. It meant almost nothing to Margaret Claire, though, as her earbuds produced a haunting melody that rung through her eardrums. It was no surprise that Margaret did not hear the greeting of a person beside her, being nearly deafened by the beautiful arrangement of notes. Yet, when she was nudged, she immediately glanced up to see what could only be described as the biggest rose she'd ever seen. A rose, of course, is a slang term for those who had a pink mark on their chest, which Margaret's parents used to describe people they didn't particularly like.

Despite all that, Margaret Claire had been nudged by this rose, and turned down the volume of her music just enough to hear what a rose had to say to her.

"Is this your bag?"

Margaret took her eyes off of the rose's face and down to the black and blue tie-dyed backpack she held in her thin fingers, fingers which were covered bottom to tip with various rusty rings. The two said nothing as they sat virtually in silence for the duration of the next few moments, and before Margaret had the chance to reply, the rose dropped the bag in the woman's lap and sat beside her. Margaret was astounded.

"Wait, wait wait wait-" she began, the minty taste of her breath lingering upon her lips as she spoke. "What the hell was that?"

"What the hell was what?" The rose replied, raising a brow at Margaret's staring.

"That- stunt you just pulled. My stuff was there and you just-"

"What are you looking at me like that for?"

Margaret paused, stunned by the opposing woman's comments before shaking it off, not yet finished with her rebuttal.

"Listen here, you- you-" she felt the word ready to leave her mouth, the word she knew her parents would finally praise her for saying as she refused to use it her entire life. It wasn't like she agreed with a rose lifestyle. The thought of defacing a proud part of yourself, such as the universal blue mark, and making it a disgusting pink color - it was completely out of the question.

"You what? Come on, say it. I want to hear it."

Margaret Claire took herself and her bag away from the rose, the pinkie, the zany. There it was - the word that rumbled at the pit of her stomach, causing her to feel sick every single moment of every single day. It was no matter, though, as she brought herself to the exit of the bus and awaited the vehicle to come to a grinding halt. It was nowhere near where she needed to be, as if there were a place she needed to be. After exiting, she spotted a public restroom, and entered quickly.

Upon entering, Margaret found the restroom to be empty, causing her to quickly drop her bag in the sink closest to the entrance. She took another look out of the room, making sure the coast was clear before locking the door. Slowly, she brought herself to the sink and glanced up in the mirror, watching her sunken-in appearance reflect the insufficient amount of sleep she received in the last few nights.

Tears were unexpected, as Margaret thought she'd done this enough times to make her feel numb while performing this ritual, but apparently her encounter with a zany had triggered an emotion she hadn't felt in ages. Her fingers shook as she reached in to her bag with one hand and used the other to softly pull up her shirt. Slowly, she pulled out a blue marker, her eyes dead-set on the middle of her forehead in the mirror as she knew if she glanced down she would immediately begin to sob.

She had gone through the procedures – the removal therapy, the religious removals, she had even taken it into her own hands by trying to cut off the layer of skin on which it sat. However, none of it worked. So, she had gone back to her old method, one she had used since she realized she was different. She colored it in twice a day with a blue marker to make sure no one thought she was a zany.

She continued, circling the mark until it was completely blue, the superior color, the perfect color. However, something was different this time. She was shaking, small sobs bubbling from her lips as she colored outside of her mark and onto her skin. Margaret couldn't stop, she simply continued to scribble her chest blue. She covered her arms with blue ink, her legs, her face – it was all blue. Blue wasn't right.

Pink the color that defined her life, one that watched her grow up and fall down during her worst times. Pink held her through bad times and showed her a way of living, a way in which Margaret Claire could finally be free again. However, through all the times she had betrayed pink, through all the instances she had taken a color so close to her and so pure to her and shattered it without a second thought, just as everyone else she knew did, pink had become tired of saving her sanity. So pink had let Margaret go, let her right and wrong blend together, and watched as she shook in a pool of her own tears, covered head to toe in blue ink.

## City in the River

Jacob Cone

The lights of the city shine brighter than any star  
A cool breeze cuts through the humid night air  
The sidewalk is cracked by too many steps in everyone's one-thousand-mile journey  
Brick and concrete towers fly high into the sky, close enough to reach the stars  
And each tower has a hundred stories  
In one there is a man nervously waiting for his date to show up  
A few over an elderly couple slow dance to their favorite songs  
And two down a six-year-old girl dreams of far off clouds  
Smooth jazz floats from a far off alley that smells of Chinese food  
People cheer in bars for their favorite sport  
Workers come out of restaurants, each tired but ready to start their night  
Cars crowd the street, every one has an equally important and equally unimportant goal  
Neon signs wish to be your stars, so they shine bright enough to block the others  
Young girls pull young boys into stores they would rather stay out of  
While other boys look walk through, looking for streetlight love  
A couple fights over nothing outside apartments  
Businessmen push through the crowds, wishing they could be free  
While a homeless man watches from a corner, wishing he had responsibility  
Billboards sell you things you don't care about  
While salesmen make you care  
The sound of far off boats signaling their arrival, hums from a close by river  
Suspension bridges hold up the lives of so many who don't care  
And so many who wish they did  
The moon reflects off the river, engulfed by the stars of the city, and the stars of the sky  
The cool breeze grows faint and far off  
And then the mist rolls in, calming and new  
The railing is cold to the touch, but sturdy enough  
Beads of mist make it hard to climb  
But the city in the river helps motivate  
The city full of life  
The city full of many  
That won't miss one



## Replaced

Emma Nicholson

Day and night become irrelevant  
Time is no longer marked by the movement of the sun  
But rather the hours passed in front of a screen

Purpose lay in the number of characters typed  
In the number of liked photos, of emojis littering texts  
Eyes blurring from the time spent staring at images

Images provoking thoughts  
Of "It should be me" and "I should be there"  
Emotions spiraling downward, surrounded by "if onlys"

Hours of wishing, talking, stalking on Facebook  
Pillow talks conducted at eleven a.m.  
Pavlov's bell replaced by the ding of Skype

She is pixels that could be rearranged into something else  
Hard squares with sharp edges  
Wondering if her hair is still as soft as it once was

Before her blue eyes were replaced by the black hole of a camera lens  
Her fingers glide over keys instead of skin  
Contact now falters with the WiFi

Change clinks on the bottom of the glass jar  
"You cursed," a dollar towards the funding of tickets  
She's already booked the next flight

A year here, two there, three trips over the holidays  
Plane tickets are expensive nowadays  
The fourth visit approaching fast

Excitement, chatter, clothing stuffed in suitcases  
One year, six months, three, two  
"I can't do this anymore"

There's no discussion, no pleading, no crying  
Simply cut off with the end of a call  
The finality of a computer clicking shut.

## iconic narcotic

### Anton Caruso

iconic narcotic, cut it with a straight edge, that's ironic, feelings are chronic, brought without logic, she broke in with a lock pick, to purify the toxic, joint sockets, fill his deep pockets, talk to him, but change the topic

sporadically lethargic, emotionally allergic, is he artistic or autistic, puzzling simplicit, awkwardly explicit, he's mad, he's livid, water color skin contains his mind's limits

he's got half a lung, half of half a lung yellowed teeth with bleeding gums, coffee stained ivory picked by twitching thumbs, he's just a kid with a gun, he kids just for fun, he's a kid just for fun

he's sleep deprived, the dead hour arrived, right on time, but he feels alive, he's exhausted yet he thrives, he kills brain cells to kill time, he turns on the tv and hears black lives black lives, gold badges and black ties, news reporters with cat eyes, red faces telling white lies, white wine and bleach blonde orange county housewives, he just sighs and turns it off, he turns over and turns off

His message subliminal, his movements are minimal, rotting millennial, plastic surgeon general, says he's feral, he's illiterate, he's sterile, he's ignorant

he has chewed finger tips, finger tips ripping away at dead skin lips, synthesized loops played over teasing hips, he has a final night list, a euthanizing wish

she's hooked to an iv drip, she's hooked on a blank face, her mind is a fever, she always talks about getting her own place, she always talks about how she needs space, she always talks about how the fun is in the chase, she always talks,

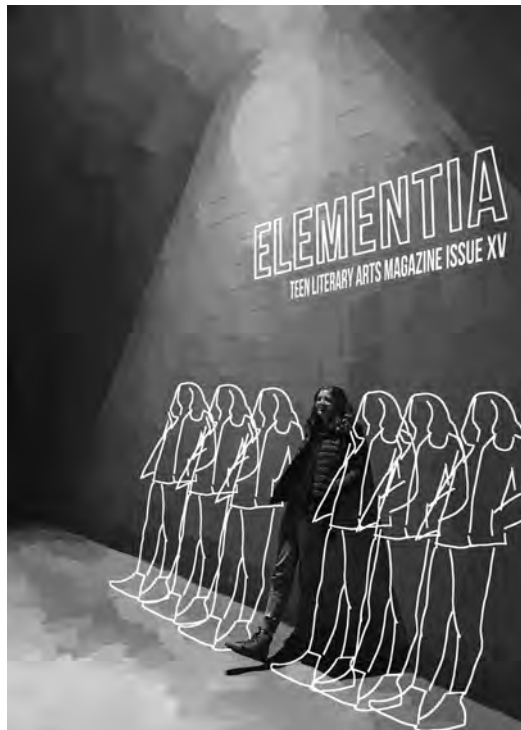
she's bitter sweet like a found dog poster, she leaves her mark wherever she goes, so she brings a coaster, she just coasts, she just coasts through her life, she's a roller coaster, she's alive in the night, ever since she broke up with the sun, ever since she left the kid with the gun

# ISSUE FIFTEEN

The fifteenth issue of *elementia* was dedicated to author A.S. King, and to the theme of time. Published in 2018, it contained 66 pieces of writing and 65 pieces of art. As the editors of issue xv note:

*A.S. King's words fit well with our current day and age, focusing on the empowerment of young people as they are encouraged to take charge of their futures and learn to speak their own truth. In books like Glory O'Brien's History of the Future and Still Life with Tornado, King's characters learn to cope with their inability to control time as they grow up and accept their past as they head into their future. Whether the focus of time is on mortality, regret, progression, or hope, A.S. King serves as an important voice to guide readers through growth.*

The editorial committee for the fifteenth issue consisted of teen selectors Annie Barry, Amanda Pendley, Anritra Manduva, Elizabeth Joseph, Isabel Nee, Olivia Williams, Oli Ray, Romila Santra and Rylee Wilson; teen designers Priya Lakshman, Oli Ray and Jaimie Simwinga; as well as library staff editors Kate McNair, Becca Carleton, Cassidy Coles and Cassandra Gillig, and art director Jennifer Taylor.



## Bloodlines

Ayush Pandit

My blood is not pure.  
Siphoned through custom it puddles as an unholy poison.  
A mixture between castes that courses sin through my veins  
Broken tradition seeps through my marrow  
and pools black in the hardened pupils of my grandmother  
every time my parent's marriage is brought up.  
16 years, 2 grandchildren, 8,000 miles and still  
her wounds scar enough that tears bleed from her eyes  
whenever her mind fades into the past and my father's betrayal  
the betrayal I am borne from.  
Ritual binds her in barbs as my first new memory  
of my grandmother I have not seen in 10 years is a gesture to my father  
then her averting her gaze as he pulls me from the dining room  
and explains how time has turned discrimination into a tradition, Grandma's tradition  
that my existence is a splatter spilled outside the lines of scripture she follows  
that I am split between castes with my mother, that to my grandmother, I am unclean.  
Rules scald through my skull and dye my memories  
I cannot taste the same dishes,  
I cannot use the same plates,  
I cannot drink from the same cups,  
I cannot eat with my grandmother, because I am unclean  
because though her faith overpowers our bonds in hemoglobin  
it feasts off our blood sacrifice.



## Rubble

Ayush Pandit

They've run out of garbage bags to use as body bags.  
Power lines cracked in half like splintered pencils are strewn through the streets  
neighborhoods panic as the ground forgets what being solid is again  
aftershocks bigger than most earthquakes bend steel and rebar  
like toddlers bend fuzzy pipe cleaners.  
My dad speaks to my 3 year old cousin  
born in Nepal 5 years after I left  
"Uncle, why is the ground shaking?"  
I can barely hear him over the sounds of sirens  
a cacophony that is a funeral song for those  
pinned to the underworld by concrete slabs  
"Uncle, will it be alright?"  
The empty beeps of the telephone cord wrap around my neck  
choking out half-truths and false optimism  
until only pellets of reality remain.

I woke to the sounds of my people dying  
Torrents of headlines sweeping like mudslides  
carrying mugshots and scrolling white on black text names dismembered  
from people reduced to tally marks on body counts.  
The telephone line is down; there is no power; there is no water;

And then I learn  
my government in Nepal couldn't afford to pay for earthquake resistant housing with banknotes  
and defaulted with 10,000 death certificates.  
10 years lost to a civil war  
10 years lost to political bickering  
10 years swallowed up by the rubble of a nation that was already dying.  
10 years since I've been home  
Now, I wonder if when I return I will greet my people  
or their ashes.

## Time It Takes to Sober Up

Emme Mackenzie

"What is one factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to 'sober up')?"

I stare at the question on the computer screen. The hum of conversation in the DMV provides constant background noise. My driving permit is just one more correct answer away, but an ache in my heart makes it feel like 20. I can't do this. I begin to stand up, but when I turn around I see my mom on the phone. She catches my eye and gives me a weak thumbs-up.

I lower myself back into my seat. No, I have to do this.

I swallow what feels like a rock in my throat.

Turning back to the screen, I read the question again.

"What is one factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to 'sober up')?"

I know the answer. It's Time.

My brother called his car the "Red Beast."

We got the old red jeep for his 16th birthday. It was everything he'd wanted.

I still remember him screaming like a little girl when we revealed the car.

Now it just sits in some junkyard, rotting away, probably with dried blood clinging to the broken windshield that my brother flew through.

My brother's first sip of alcohol was at church.

He sipped "the blood of Christ" at his First Communion out of the wine glass.

That makes me laugh now.

If only God had looked after him just for another moment, maybe he would still be alive today.

Same with that girl he hit.

I focus back on the question in front of me.

*Time. Time. Time.*

This question and answer are both engraved inside my head because I understand it.

An important factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to sober up) is *Time*.

I memorized the exact times of my brother's faulty death so well that I can map it out in my head. I can present it as a historical event and get an A+.

Not sure my parents would be proud of that one.

23 minutes after my brother downed 3 beers, he got into the Red Beast.

15 minutes after he got into the Red Beast, he hit her.

38 minutes after trying compressions three times on both my brother and the girl,

The doctors stopped trying.

12:07 AM was the time of his death.

For five weeks after, I stayed up every night until 12:07.  
I saw the clock change, and I pictured my brother taking his last breath.  
His breath probably smelled like beer.

I hate him for it.  
I hate him for getting in that stupid red car that I always thought was ugly.  
After all of the lessons in school, he still did it.  
Sometimes I wake up and forget he's gone, because this stuff just doesn't happen to us.

Not to me, and not to him.  
No one is supposed to die drunk driving.

I reach out my finger.  
*Click.*  
The answer was Time.  
It will always be Time.  
I never knew how much Time I had left with my brother.  
And when he disappeared, I wanted all of that time back.  
I still do.



*Black and White Portrait by Mickey Willard, issue vi*

## divination for the divine

Alrishia Shea

look at them,  
so cavalier, drinking  
future-liquor in a future-

bar kissing the wounds  
of future-lovers and  
crisscrossing their future-

scars  
look at them,  
so ambiguous, with

their they/them body  
and name and  
baggy clothes. look at

them, going to future-coffee  
shops just to hear a barista say  
their name and believe each syllable. look

at the sky with its  
gaping-wide pupils in  
its switched role with

our globe now neon  
gleaming and bloodbright.  
we are the light we see.



we are  
the light we see. we are all  
asterism now, not the prim

& proper of  
constellation. we are  
starless and proud, stellar

pollution be damned to hell  
with the rest of them. we  
cannot decide between light-

-house or  
lampshade, but what's the difference? sleepy  
pattern-finder, rest your desperate

eyes; there are no constellations left  
to reach for - the whole astral  
succession

has spun apart, the sky  
our idols saw is gone. there  
are no stars left to see, there is

no new zodiac,

and thank god for that.

## Ambition, Love, Ambition

Samiya Rasheed

Hours are not spent well in lethargy  
nor in deep-seated exhaustion  
Hours are rarely spent  
more - lost

I live in a state of competition  
Each breath a race to completion  
I have almost spent more time  
crying than sleeping  
But my resume will be beautiful

Reflect: I am clawing over the gaping maw  
the pitfalls of failure, of burning out too soon  
I don't have the minutes to breathe  
the air is thin on this Godwin Austen we built  
I'd still summit with my lungs collapsing

I hold in this brittle absence of warmth I made  
where my joys drained out into obligation:  
a ladder rung towards those burgeoning heavens  
where the oxygen is honeyed sweet  
tinged acrid by ozone  
and Nike will smile sphinx-like and proud

For now I am drinking  
the chalk pastel fumes  
and bunsen burner lights  
Talent is unattainable as it become the scale  
the colors have never been so vibrant  
I try, yet

Script. Running letters, rushing water, ink in motion  
My craft is lovely - I am not so fine for it  
I am ink boiled down  
globules, mucus: it does not run well  
the time taken  
I cannot keep up

My dreams are out-lapping me

*Ambition, love, ambition*  
fake the talents you don't possess  
Cheapen their worth -  
inflation in the face of the girth of expectation  
paint all you do in jewel tones even as you drown  
the more that you have, the better  
Don't pause and leave your fields fallow  
the seasons are quick

It is not so far now  
I will approach that great leviathan - presenting  
what I almost could have built,  
in the cherry red ink I siphoned off my veins,  
the eldritch horror I assembled with every mercurial hour  
Pleading, am I enough?

It will not dredge the void I insisted upon  
nor erase the hours I spent hefting a reverent ideal  
I'll chant ascension in *glory glory glory*  
Though I am no more than the sum of my parts

The answer  
    will be mundane  
Take that as it is

## A Living Anachronism

Amanda Pendley

As the years go by and we outgrow our old faces and our old skin and our old identities,  
I wonder to myself if we are really becoming new people at all,  
or if we are simply just accumulating more years and more selves  
the same way we layer our bodies with coats and scarves in the wintertime.

As I learn more about the world, I realize I am not merely a child of the nineties anymore  
but one of every decade and every moment since the earth began that has lead up  
to my sense of becoming.  
Even before I existed, I was in the process of becoming.

I believe in past lives as strongly as I believe in the future, which is to say that although my  
assurance falters, that sense of knowing without truly knowing is always persistent.

And here is why:

My great aunt left home at the age of 17;  
she went to California for purposes left unknown  
besides the fact that she wanted to become someone  
other than her previous self.

I'd like to think that she became a movie star or an artist,  
and there's no way to tell,  
but somehow in the back of my mind I know that she was.  
The same way I know without truly knowing  
that there is truth to be found  
in past lives and in the future.

Her name was Goldie: a name reflected by the color of her hair,  
but nowadays she is reflected through me.  
We are mirror images, just trading off our time in the world.

Sometimes I wonder if I am a reincarnation of her,  
for I feel too much for all of the emotion inside of me to be solely mine.

Maybe I'm an anachronism in itself  
someone stuck in a body not her own with a mind  
that's simultaneously both brand new and ancient.



Maybe this contradiction is why I am so thoroughly  
black and white,  
but feel nothing but grey.  
Sometimes though, grey is revolutionary.  
Black and white photos of marches and protests  
serve as validation that humans in the past  
felt the same way that I do now.  
The same way that Goldie did, I presume,  
as she sought to make something out of herself:  
to become someone.

I was 17 in 2017.  
I was taught that I need to make something of myself,  
but now I know better.  
All of my years have convinced me that I am a woman who is continuously making herself,  
and will continue to do so until I die and am born again;  
until time is circular, or maybe until scientists find out that in a way it already is.  
I revisit the past and dream up the future,  
creating worlds in which I can have both at the same time.

I feel all of my past lives communicating with each other inside my head.  
They say, *"Enough with this whole idea of making something out of yourself! I already am  
someone, someone who has been making herself all her life, creating and destroying and  
rebuilding and I say that's enough."*  
All I do is create.  
I write my way out of the past and into the future,  
even if that future seems fictional and unattainable.  
**I believe in its truth nonetheless.**

Those old black and white photographs of protests and marches are revolutionary  
they still exist inside of us today.  
Even if you do not believe in past lives  
there is no doubt that the traces of those who lived before us are still here.  
They are the voice of your subconscious and the whisper of intuition  
**We are more than ourselves.**

And if we are forced to keep "making something of ourselves," then we will.  
We will write, and we will fight, and we will speak.  
We will rewrite time.  
After all we are just trading off time in this world; we are mirror images, Goldie and I.

I know this to be true as much as I believe in the future, as much as I believe that we wear our years like layers to keep us warm, as much as I know that I am a living anachronism in itself, and as much as I know that just like my great aunt, I am constantly becoming who I'm meant to be,  
**even if my life is left as a memoir unfinished.**

And how do I know?  
I will tell you to close your eyes and notice how even in the dark,  
you can still sense where the light is coming from.  
You can't necessarily see it because well, your eyes are closed,  
but you can tell it's there.  
It has a presence, it carries weight.  
There is a place in the universe, a place in time, where this exists.  
This sense of knowing without knowing,  
this sense of light.  
The voice of all of the things  
in which I *know* to be true;  
A different kind of  
belonging.  
A living  
anachronism  
in itself.

## Hourglass

Elizabeth Joseph

I break down in the supermarket grocery aisles  
because I only have five minutes to make the choice  
between a variety of granola bars.

I count the moments until everything stops  
because someday I will be forced to catch my own breath  
and pace it against the metronome's slow count  
a pendulum swing between empty space  
and the pulse of thoughts in beats per second

I share the accrued space in my thoughts  
you all amass because I know  
each day is a slow crawl  
an unwinding, where I can't come back for seconds,  
I can hear repetition at the base of my skull  
echoing *tick-tick-tick* -

*tick*  
another flutter of anxiety in my chest  
*tick*  
retread the same thoughts over and over  
*tick*  
grasping the present like water in my fist  
*tick*  
immortalize everything before it fades

*tick*  
registering the clock as my time runs out.

here I am:  
in the aisle  
wondering  
when I start  
(and where I end.)

## Shades of Pain

### AonB

Another black kid got shot by a white cop.  
ANOTHER BLACK KID GOT SHOT BY A WHITE COP.  
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTSHOTBYAWHITE COP.  
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTSHOT  
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTS

Ten . . .  
Nine . . .  
Eight . . .  
Seven . . .

I count the amount of breaths they have taken  
Six . . .  
Five . . .  
Four . . .  
Three

I watch as the bullets approach  
Sir Newton can't stop these apples from falling  
My mouth voices my shock  
As screams run out in a panic my legs do the same  
I try to help you  
But a man in blue blocks me from saving you  
You did everything for me  
And in return I sit and watch you as you bleed  
How is that fair?

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop  
I count the minutes  
As I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

Two . . .  
One . . .

I watched as your blood greeted  
the pavement  
Like a river flowing to its end  
Hands in pockets  
not visible to Blue eyes  
This cliché is way too overplayed



Like roses are red  
Violets are blue  
Your black body bleeds red  
That cops wears blue  
This whole white cop shoots innocent black kid  
Dates back to slavery  
Master vs slave  
White vs black  
Always has been  
Why did I think it could change?  
Why did I think that the color  
of your skin wouldn't automatically  
grant a bullet in your head?  
I try to scramble to you  
But a man in blue keeps me from reaching  
You  
My brother  
Please don't die on me  
Hold on just one more day  
Why did we have to hang out today?

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop  
I count the minutes  
as I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

Mom hasn't been the same  
Church hasn't been the same  
When you sang  
The community hasn't been the same  
The world, however, stays the same  
The headlines read something new  
The earth continues to circle round and around  
The clock continues to tick and tick

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop  
I count the minutes  
As I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop  
I count the minutes  
As I did my heart beat  
when I got shot by the cops

Systemic racism took ahold of the gun  
Profiling cocked it back  
And a white man pulled the trigger

Shooting me with eyes wide open  
Like Bruno said  
He kept his eye wide open

Each breath spreads adrenaline  
Through my limbs  
And I'm becoming numb to the pain

My Once Upon a Time not reaching a Happily Ever After  
And like every modern day Cinderella  
People already know the lines of the next chapter

I hope you read my story in today's news  
And don't toss me aside  
Like that history project that's been overdue

Let your heart cry for me  
Let yourself feel the pain  
See my pain  
Don't be numb to my pain  
Don't close your eyes to not see my face  
Guess Emmett Till was left in disgrace  
Look at my face  
Don't be numb to my pain

Let that pain be the staircase that leads you  
To make that change  
Like Morrison, face the how and not the why  
And maybe if you do, no other  
black momma's cries will be sounded at night

Black boy got shot and he's numb to the pain.  
Black boy got shot and the whole world is numb to his pain.  
Don't become numb to the pain.  
BLACKBOYGOTSHOTHE'SNUMBTOTHEPAIN  
BLACKBOYGOTSHOTANDTHEWHOLEWORLDISNUMBTOTHEPAIN  
DON'T BECOME NUMB TO THE PAIN

## mango juice

Magda Werkmeister

mango juice drips from my fingers  
seeps into the brown dirt  
dirt that holds roots that reach across countries  
roots that stitch together centuries  
roots that spread and cannot be confined

mango juice drips from my fingers  
plunges to the earth  
earth my mother raced across  
earth that felt the weight of bombs  
decades ago but the shrapnel still rains

mango juice drips from my fingers  
plummets to the ground  
ground my predecessors coaxed  
ground that proffered flor de izote  
proffered resting places for the collateral

mango juice drips from my fingers  
soaks into the soil  
soil that holds my cousin once removed  
removed from life by an agent's bullet  
abuelita mentions this offhandedly

mango juice muddies the ground  
falls onto the heads of conquistadors  
mixes with blood and semen and amniotic fluid  
mango juice soaks my mother's hands  
spills onto the floor  
prison-sanctuary of 1979  
mango juice drips from my fingers  
i am an infant  
abuelita is glad my skin is light  
abuelita is glad my brother's hair is chocolate  
i cannot condone  
i cannot condemn  
abuelita talks of her abuela  
blonde hair blue eyes  
cruel cruel cruel

mango juice drips from my fingers  
i feel the ripples always

## PTA to AA

Annie Barry

She stood in front of a mirror  
Clean and sober thinking about how she feels taller than her own reflection

Then she took an injection

She started as  
A PTA mom perfect in her Johnson County way  
Carrying around a cleanse smoothie everywhere she goes  
She spikes her smoothie but nobody knows  
Walking around in her workout clothes in the AM  
Ripped panty hose in the PM  
But her short skirt covers those holes  
Talkin' about bank rolls  
And relationship goals

While her kids sit at home with a nanny asking where's mommy

Stumbling home through a portal called a broken trim, paint chipped doorway the next morning  
and takes her kids to the park so she can sneak a smoke  
A pack a day gonna make her broke

He was *5 years old* on the playground yelling "watch mommy watch"  
She looks up at the boy who spoke  
She hardly recognizes him anymore  
*5 years old* she doesn't remember his middle name anymore

*5 years later*  
Now she's in AA  
Got a  
Mental monologue going  
Thinking, "okay okay pretend for a day just say you're sober"  
She takes a breath  
"Hi I'm Katherine"  
Exhales as she talks, almost like a sigh  
Her breath reeked of the mixed drink she had earlier  
A mix between vodka and desperation  
Drowning her kids in deprivation

Her kids are noticing  
She's becoming menacing

Is she  
Hungover or just forgetful

She's not a role model but she pretends to be a model as she  
Struts down the crosswalk like a catwalk  
Delusional and delirious  
Detrimental to her kids' health  
He doesn't know his real dad's name but  
He knows how to roll a blunt because mommy can't do that while she's driving  
She's driving her kid insane  
He's growing up now knowing that  
His friends' houses don't have bloodstains in every doorway  
and normal people don't take codeine when they're not in pain  
And sustaining a house, maintaining a family is not typically the job of a *10 year old* boy  
And raising your baby sister who might not even be your sister is not what most *10 year old*  
boys do

A *10 year old* boy  
Stopped asking his mom which man in the house is his dad  
He doesn't sleep because  
Mom is still baked  
Boy is half awake with studying because  
Everything is at stake  
Sister cries  
He lies there  
Debating existential crises of *25 year old* boys even though he's only a *10 year old* boy  
Does he do school work  
Does he get up and do the housework  
Does he care for his baby sister who's crying like she's hurt  
But he knows  
She isn't quite hurt yet  
She doesn't know yet  
Her mind can't develop memories yet  
So she isn't truly as dead as him yet

He craves an end to the madness  
Boy is beat down and broken beyond brutal under eye baggage  
Band-aids can't bind this  
Edging closer to the edge of life  
Just before he steps off the ledge  
His brain breathes  
Puts down the knife  
*1 year old* baby sister's life



Boy grows up

17 years old watching his mother break the bathroom mirror because she doesn't like the reflection anymore

He's yelling "stop Katherine stop"

Refusing to call his mother mom

Angry mother yells "Anthony - Johnson! Don't talk to your mother like that"

"What's my middle name" he asks

Exhaling passionate breath like poisonous gas

The mother who went from PTA to AA to HEY boy hand me that bottle

Boy is 23 years old walking home from work

Walks past a play park

PTSD pokes his ears

At the sound of a child yelling

"Watch mommy watch"

## Clock Work

Kahill Perkins

Like clockwork revaluations to new forgotten ideas lined up in my mind like young adult novels  
on my ratty old grey bookcases, I live stories lined up in many different tenses dog-eared  
identities taking place in crises fueled hourglass clocks, if there is one thing I'll never run out of it  
is time

and

dust, I want to live forever because I never want to repeat this same life again, for I awake some  
midwinter mornings and so terribly recall that maybe this isn't the first time I have been hurt or  
the first time I've lived

And that I have always taken forms

as a midwife

and a suffragette

a doctor

a dying child

a cicada

and as a young woman struggling to keep her head above bills and painful memories woken up  
by the clanging of a broken grandfather clock in a wooden paneled house in a long sought after  
memorial dream, taking myself back to a time when I wasn't screaming in an era fueled by hate  
and sorrowful sick-minded men at the controls,

I want to paint flowers on to the faces of the white supremacists that govern, so that I could  
stand to look them in the face when I spit in their eyes,

I want to take back time

and live forever

so I don't have to relive an era of pain

because I already have,

So many times before,

and I am running shin deep in white snow and bloody shins, broken down to the bone showing  
white against the crimson pools in the spotless snow, fear and prospect coursing through my  
mind, my mouth filled with bile and the dust

that I'll never run out of

like time

and I feel as if

time's up

## An Ode to My Innocence

Kathryn Malnight

You ruffled dress.  
You lip glossed,  
clean tongued, classy individual.

An ode to my innocence:  
I remember my childhood through rose colored glasses.  
No hurt, no tears, no worry –  
nothing I knew, I knew . . . nothing.  
I lived in a utopia where  
I didn't cry myself to sleep,  
didn't tie nooses or  
swallow pills for the hell of it.

You trampled spirit.  
You slave to depression.  
You hot spotlight,  
but hey, I didn't want to see this anyway –  
you haven of hell.  
You girl interrupted by the screaming of your own mind,  
you wilted body as he shattered  
any ounce of childhood you had left –  
but you deep, curved body.  
You badass feline.  
You know more and don't regret it  
red lipstick, black eyeliner  
*queen*.

An ode to my innocence:  
I used to scrape the bottom of my soul,  
used to pick a fight with every demon I came in contact with,  
only to fall into the grave I was just trying to avoid.  
I am not a greater person for losing you.  
A weathered heart doesn't make someone more beautiful.  
Then again, I am stronger.  
I can fight like a girl,  
I can kick and bare my teeth,  
I am more tiger than woman.  
An ode to my innocence:  
Thank you.  
RIP.

## Little Time

### Renee Born

The night was warm and a blue haired girl sat alone at a bar. She was at one end, trying to catch a glimpse of a woman sitting opposite, a woman with long dark hair and caramel skin. Robyn knew her from somewhere, she was sure of it. A memory floated just out of reach, like a dream slipping away when you open your eyes. She was about to give up when she saw the tattoo on the other woman's wrist. There was a moment of recognition and then – the sketch of sprawling pastel flowers and the hand above it colliding with her own hands, a full mug falling to the ground, the unmistakable shattering of glass, a thousand wet shards shimmering in the dim light of the pub. Robyn pushed away from the bar abruptly, stricken by the vivid images that had already begun to fade.

"You're going to have to trust me when I say this isn't a pickup line, but have we met before?" Robyn said, suddenly standing next to the stranger.

The other woman looked up with glazed eyes, as if noticing Robyn, or anyone else, for the first time. Robyn looked finally at her face and she felt the sense of recognition again. This time, the barrage of images was less startling. She saw the woman before her, shirt stained with drink, her lips forming a forgiving smile.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure," she said in the present, one eyebrow raised in curiosity. The expression seemed foreign to her.

"Really? I could swear I just bumped into you and spilt my drink on your shirt. Of course, that doesn't make sense because I've only ordered one drink, which I drank, and your shirt is in perfect condition . . ." Robyn trailed off. At that point she was feeling rather foolish, but when she looked up, the other woman was staring in disbelief.

"How could you possibly remember that . . ."

Robyn began to feel as if she had missed something, fallen behind in the conversation. The stranger's eyes changed then, they became clear and bright.

"Your hair is very blue," she said as she stood from her barstool and put on her jacket. "I like it. What's your name, blue-haired girl?" Robyn shook her head, trying to clear it.

"I'm Robyn," she managed eventually.

"It was good to meet you Robyn, both times. If you still remember running into me by tomorrow and you want to know why, meet me at the south entrance to Chestnut Park, four PM." She moved toward the exit without missing a beat.

"Wait!" Robyn shouted after a moment of confusion. She just managed to catch her on the way out. "Who are you?"

"Oh, right. I guess it's been a while," she said quietly. "My name is Quinn," and then she was out the door, leaving Robyn with nothing but a draft of night air and a curious smile.

~

"So, you can time travel?"

Quinn and Robyn lay on their backs in the grass, looking up at the sky through a break in the trees – Quinn had always found it relaxing. So far, she had spotted two bunnies, a horse, and a dragon floating above them. The clouds were just beginning to turn pink as the sun set.

"Yeah, but only backward in my own time stream. When you ran into me last night I got covered in beer, so I just went back in time and avoided walking into you." Her tone was casual,

as the notion of time travel had become causal to her. "But then I had to continue living my life from that point on. So like, if I wanted to go back by months – or even years – I'd have to live those months or years all over again because they would be different after whatever change I made."

"Does that mean you could relive a year fifty different times but only be one year older? Do you remember them all? All the times you've lived over?" Robyn asked, sounding genuinely curious.

"Yes, I can, and yes." A subtle darkness crept into her voice. "Yes, I remember every version of every decision I've made over."

Robyn propped herself up on one elbow, looking over at Quinn. Quinn watched her from the corner of her eye. Strands of her startlingly blue hair fell into her face.

"Aren't you afraid I'll think you're crazy?" Robyn asked at last.

"Not really," Quinn responded. "If you do I'll just go back to last night and not tell you."

Robyn frowned.

"Nope, definitely don't do that," she said, still frowning slightly. Quinn looked back up to the peach and purple sky.

"And as far as I know, you're the only one to ever notice. I didn't think that was possible. It shouldn't be. Nobody technically even lived that reality besides me."

"That sounds really awful." Robyn flopped into the grass again and it was Quinn's turn to prop herself up and look at the other girl.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, not only have you lived in countless worlds that no one else even knows existed, but every decision you make is pretty much meaningless. You never have to worry about consequences because if anything bad happens, you can just go back and change it," she pondered.

"Most people would see that as a good thing. I can live a life free of worry." Quinn responded without conviction, turning onto her back once more, though she had lost interest in the clouds. She could always come back and see them again.

"You could live endless lives without worry. You never have to deal with tragedy or negativity ever again, but without bad things you can't really have good things either. I've been thinking about it while we've been lying here. If you don't have to be nervous about telling me then you won't be relieved when I believe you."

Quinn felt a twinge of surprise when she realized what Robyn was saying, but no relief. "You're right. I'm not relieved. I'm never relieved. I'm never much of anything now." She sighed and wondered again what she had done to deserve her curse. "It makes it easy to forget why I keep living at all," she said quietly, feeling the pointlessness of it all begin to suffocate her.

"I guess the only solution is to stop doing it."

After a long silence Quinn managed a cough of disbelief. She sat up and looked at Robyn. It had been a long, long time since she'd been reduced to shocked silence.

"Stop doing it? Well, if it's just that easy—" She scoffed. Quinn was reminded then that though Robyn believed her, she could never understand her. Robyn sat up and looked at her seriously.

"I never said it would be easy. Frankly, it's going to be hell, but I believe you can do it. Plus, I can help you." Then, like she was closing a business deal, she held out her hand for a shake.

"You don't even know me . . ." Quinn muttered, staring at her hand.

"Maybe not, but I will. I think part of you wants desperately to live again. Why else would you



tell me all this, if not to ask for my help?" She sounded so sure. She made it sound so . . . possible. For the first time in as long as Quinn could remember, she felt nervous. She hesitated. She took Robyn's hand.

~

Robyn watched the steam rise off the rich cream-colored liquid in the mug across the table. Quinn wrapped her hands around it, as if to absorb the warmth. Robyn lifted her own drink, a much darker mixture of coffee and caramel, and took a sip. The city bustled by just outside the cafe window, like her and Quinn were sitting in an observatory, looking in on a world unaware of their existence. The first hints of fall had begun to show themselves, taking a particular liking to the early hours like these. Robyn looked back just in time to see Quinn taking her first eager sip. For a moment nothing changed, and then her nose crinkled and her face twisted in an unmistakable expression of disgust.

"No good?" she asked trying to keep a smile from her face. Robyn had been skeptical when Quinn had ordered the sweetest, richest, drink on the menu – something called Vanilla Milk. Now it seemed her doubts were founded. Quinn pouted.

"It's supposed to be delicious! This just tastes like sugary milk. Warm sugary milk." Robyn almost felt bad for taking such pleasure in Quinn's disappointment. Almost. "I knew I should have gotten the chocolate . . ."

Robyn's smile vanished. She had learned over the past three weeks to recognize statements like that as warnings. Just as Robyn expected, Quinn's expression had gone slack and her eyes unfocused. Without a moment for hesitation, Robyn's fingers reached out desperately. They wrapped around Quinn's wrist, tethering her there.

"Don't. Quinn are you listening? Don't do it. Can you hear me? You can't do this." Robyn's fingers finally found what they were searching for, her index and middle finger pressing gently into Quinn's wrist. She felt the other girl's pulse, pounding sluggishly but returning to normal. Then she felt a pressure on her own wrist and Quinn was looking at her with guilt in her eyes. The two sat there for a moment, feeling each other's heartbeats. Quinn pulled away.

"It's not a big deal, it's just a drink. A really gross drink." She wouldn't meet Robyn's gaze.

"We talked about this, it doesn't matter how insignificant the difference is. You could go back seconds or years. You could change a drink order or save someone's life, but either way you are only hurting yourself. If you want to recover you can't ever go back, not for anything." She knew Quinn had heard it all before, but the memory of her unnaturally slow pulse still echoed through Robyn's fingers. "Plus, it can't be *that* bad."

Quinn raised an eyebrow.

"Not that bad, huh? Well go right ahead and have a taste then," she said, pushing the beverage toward her. Robyn hesitated, but refused to back down. She took a small drink. A moment passed.

"It's . . . it's not that bad. It's . . . fine . . ." Robyn made her best effort to keep her expression in line.

"It's disgusting."

"Yeah, it's pretty disgusting." Robyn caved and her face contorted. "It's like warm milk? But somehow—"

"—somehow it's also like drinking granulated sugar," Quinn finished.

"Exactly!" Robyn agreed adamantly, and at the same moment they burst into laughter. The

cafe's other patrons gave disapproving glances, but neither of them noticed.

~

Quinn fiddled nervously with the little bundle of pastel flowers. She shouldn't be nervous when she could simply undo any mistake and relive it successfully. Only she didn't do that anymore, she hadn't for nearly two months. And those two months had changed her. She had suffered inconveniences, and some physical pain. She had found a job from which she was fired. She had made mistakes and let people down and eaten things she didn't like and arrived places late. She had felt real fear. They had been the best two months of her life.

And it was all thanks to Robyn. If she hadn't remembered that one, random, insignificant encounter . . .

As if on cue Robyn stepped through the trees and into the little clearing, walking with that bounce in her step and light in her eyes that never failed to make Quinn smile.

"I remember this place," she said with an absent-minded glance at the sky, undoubtedly recalling the clouds they had watched that day. "What's up Quinn?" she asked, coming to a stop in front of her.

"Um . . ." she began confidently. "Uh, here." Quinn held out the stems and felt her cheeks begin to burn. Robyn accepted the meager flowers graciously and smiled, the breeze catching her short blue hair and batting it playfully into her eyes. Without thinking Quinn reached up and brushed it from her face.

"You have such lovely blue hair. When you got it re-dyed yesterday it reminded me of the first time I met you. Well, first times. I was such a different person then. I had no sense of self or purpose. I was the one who picked this place but when I got here I was lost. When I was left I . . . I had hope. You gave me hope." When Quinn went to take a breath, she risked a glance at Robyn. She was still smiling, smiling and waiting. Her mask of calm and patience was like an anchor. Quinn clung to it against the turbulence within. She took another breath.

"What I'm trying to say is you are unquestionably the best friend I have ever had and it's honestly unfair you were able to change my life so completely without allowing me to even make a dent in yours."

"That's not-" Robyn started in protest, but Quinn kept going.

"So, if you're up for it I'd like to make my best effort. I'd like to take you out to the movies and see something that very well may be horrible, but if it is horrible, I still want to have seen it with you." Her heart raced and her train of thought had been seriously derailed. Honestly, she was a little preoccupied fighting the urge to travel back right then, but she had to know what Robyn would say.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure you just gave me flowers, complimented me, thanked me, and then asked me to the movies. Are you asking me out on a date, Quinn?" Robyn was smiling, and as far as Quinn could tell it wasn't a gesture of pity, so she nodded. "In that case, okay."

Quinn stared. A moment passed. A minute passed. The birds sang and a breeze ruffled gold and crimson leaves.

"So . . ." she hesitated, Quinn wasn't the best at interpreting people's expressions. "So, you'll go on a date with me? Does that make you my . . . does that make you my girlfriend?" Before she could say anything else dumb, Robyn was standing on her tiptoes, wrapping her arms around Quinn's neck and pressing her lips to Quinn's. It was soft and sweet and everything Quinn had

ever hoped kissing Robyn would be. Before she could even react, the pressure was gone and Robyn was there, centimeters from her, smiling with those round honey eyes.

"I think you could say that, yes." And all of a sudden Quinn wasn't frozen anymore. She swooped down, wrapping her arms around Robyn's waist and lifting her into the air. She swung her around all of two times before they both collapsed.

"I . . ." she panted, laying on her back. ". . . am not . . . very strong." Robyn laughed, and when she had the breath, Quinn joined in.

"Quinn?" Robyn asked after a while of companionable silence.

"Hmmm?" she responded, absentmindedly playing with Robyn's hair.

"You have to promise me something, okay?" The serious tone of Robyn's voice made Quinn stir, and she propped herself up on her elbows to meet her gaze.

"Anything."

"I know I don't have to ask this of you, but also I do. I have to be sure. Will you promise me that you will never undo any of this? I know I can never truly understand, but one thing I do know is that it's not just about you now. If you undo any of this, then it will never have happened to me either. I don't want that, no matter what happens."

Quinn looked at her and she could not think of a single reason why she would ever want to go back to a time before this.

"I promise."

~

"*You promised me!*" Robyn yelled, her insides churning. "*Five months of progress and you didn't even think!*" Her voice was raw from shouting.

"*Of course I thought about it!* What did you want me to do? Let it die? That would have been on my shoulders! I was behind the wheel, not you!" Quinn spat back. Tears stained her face.

"I don't care about the *damn dog*, Quinn! *Its life is not worth yours!*"

"You act like this changed everything! It was seconds, Robyn, seconds!"

"And you seem to have forgotten that when I met you, you had forgotten what the point in living was! I don't ever want to see you like that again." Robyn's own eyes welled with tears at the thought. Quinn had to know that the amount of time or the reason didn't matter. It was like an addiction; any slip was dangerous.

"You pretend like you know how I feel, but you can't! Every mistake I make I have to live with the fact that I'm choosing not to fix it! You would be no better!" Quinn's voice became quiet and she looked away. "When you can't see the toll it takes, you're just a reminder of how alone I am." Robyn jerked back as if she'd been struck. Her eyes widened.

"How long do I have Quinn?" She was quiet, tears flowing freely now. Quinn looked up, anger quickly giving way to confusion. "How long before you decide I was a mistake, just a painful reminder? How long before you go back in time and undo me?"

"Robyn, I would never—"

"How long do I have with you?" Robyn's shoulders shook with sobs as she thought about the possibility. At any moment, Quinn could change her mind and leave, undoing everything.

"As long as you can put up with me." Robyn's vision was blurred with tears, but she felt Quinn's arms wrapping around her and her breath was soft and warm on Robyn's neck. She let herself be wrapped up and her tears stained Quinn's shoulder. "I didn't mean any of that. I just felt guilty about breaking my promise. I was afraid . . . I was afraid you'd leave me. I wouldn't even blame

you." They stood there, arms wrapped around each other, for a long time.

"I love you, Quinn."

"I love you too, Robyn."

~

Robyn stood next to her, both of them swaying uncertainly on their feet. They looked down at the kitchen floor, or more specifically the round orange cat sitting in the center of it. She purred loudly and moved to rub against their legs.

"You're sure she was the fattest one they had?" Robyn asked in a loud whisper, trying not to draw the cat's attention. Quinn giggled.

"Robyn, you were there, we were both there. She was the roundest one we could find." She whispered back. "What do we call her?" She asked, nearly losing her balance but covering it by crouching down to stroke the orange tabby.

"George."

"I see absolutely nothing wrong with that name. Hello, George," Quinn cooed, and Robyn joined her. Quinn laid on the linoleum floor, curling her body around George.

"We got to go to bed babe, it's nearly 3 AM," Robyn insisted.

"You want me to get up and leave George here? Cold and alone? Our bond is new and feeble, I can't break it with a betrayal like that," Quinn muttered drowsily.

"I love you so much," Robyn said fondly, wiggling into position behind Quinn and wrapping her arms around her waist.

"You do?" Quinn whispered, and it broke Robyn's heart a little to know she was still unsure.

"Of course."

"I love you too," Quinn sniffled.

"Are you crying, Quinn?" Robyn pulled a lock of dark hair away from her face.

"I think so, yeah. It hurts, but like, in a really really good way," she said, sniffling again. "Is this what being in love feels like?"

"No, this is what being alive feels like."

~

Quinn crouched, her back against the wall and her hands in her hair. She could hear her heartbeat ringing in her ears, feel it pushing against her rib cage.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, are you Quinn?" Quinn looked up. A middle-aged man stood before her, the knees of his jeans were smeared with dirt and oil. His hands were freshly washed.

"Yes, I'm Quinn," she said without meaning to.

"My name is Dave, I was at the intersection when . . ." Quinn's head shot up and in a heartbeat she was standing.

"You were there?" Blood rushed in her ears.

"Yes, I helped pull the blue haired girl from her car." Quinn stumbled back, the wall catching her. "She was asking for you. Did you know her well?" His voice was soft, apologetic.

Quinn looked down at her hand. It was shaking, but she hardly noticed. She was looking at the ring.

"She's my - she's my fiancé." Her voice shook and tears finally threatened. She forced them back. "We haven't picked a date yet - but - but the ring means - it means she's stuck with me." Quinn attempted a shaky smile but she couldn't breathe. She felt dizzy and suddenly the world swayed.

All she could see was a ring, a beautiful sapphire engagement ring. It looked warm against the ashen skin. She could feel the stiff wrist beneath her fingers. She had stood over that body long after it grew cold, searching, searching in vain. She had placed her fingers on its wrist.

"She used to do that to tell if I was about to rewrite time. My pulse always slows down . . ." Quinn had begun feeling for Robyn's in return after a little while, as an anchor, as a reminder. But this time it was quiet and cold.

"Ma'am are you okay? Are you alright?" She looked up to see the man from before – Dave – crouching over her. He looked worried.

"I'm okay, I'm fine." But never in her life had that been less true.

"Ms. Robyn, your fiancé wanted to say something to you but I'm not sure what it was." He waited, probably wanting to make sure she was paying attention.

"What did she say – tell me everything you can remember." Quinn was listening.

"I'm certain she was saying she loved you, but it was the other thing I couldn't make out. It sounded like . . . well, it sounded like *'don't do it.'*" He looked confused and concerned, but Quinn knew exactly what that meant. The poor man probably just wanted to go home to his family and forget everything that just happened. Who was she to deny him that?

"I'm sorry, Robyn," Quinn whispered.

It had been nearly three years since she'd traveled back in time, but it wasn't difficult. For a moment everything slowed down around her, then it snapped back into place. The most violent part of the transition was her emotional state. She had become accustomed to traveling back into her body with a numb mind past and present, but this time her state of utter upheaval was met with the serenity of a Tuesday morning. She thought her brain would be torn apart as the emotions battled for dominance. Soon, though, her memories settled into place and the thought of – of that broken body was enough to tip the scales. She settled back into shock and despair shortly.

Quinn picked up her phone checking the time. She had eight and a half hours. Nothing felt real. She didn't know what she was doing until the phone was dialing.

"You're up early for a day off. What's up?" Quinn's breath caught in her chest and when she exhaled the tears came. She cried longer than she ever had before and every time Robyn asked what was wrong she cried harder. She thought she'd never stop, but she ran out of tears eventually. When she had relieved the sorrow, guilt hit her like a spear.

"Um . . ." she began, unable to force the words from her lips. "I . . . I finished that book you kept recommending." She said lamely. It was a poor excuse but Robyn didn't bat an eye. Quinn made a mental note to prepare herself for a sad ending if she ever read it. She had the burning visceral need to say something, anything. "It's just that it's over and I can't – it's like saying goodbye to the characters." What am I doing?

"I know exactly how you feel, it always hurts when good things end. But if they didn't, if TV shows and books went on forever we'd take them for granted and lose interest. You know better than anyone how important endings are."

"I know but it feels like – it feels like they're . . . like they're dead." Her voice cracked.

"Quinn, they're fictional. And even if they weren't you wouldn't want them to live forever would you?" Her voice was scolding as it echoed through the phone.

"Why not?" Quinn asked in a small voice.

"You know very well why not! You know the knowledge that any time could be our last time is



essential to being human. I wouldn't wish immortality on anyone I cared about, fictional or not. I know you wouldn't either." Quinn knew, but that didn't mean she understood.

"So you want to die?" Quinn struggled to speak through the tightness in her throat.

"Well, preferably not tomorrow, but the knowledge that that could happen is what makes life interesting. Honey, I really have to go, I'll see you tonight. We can talk more about the book then, okay?"

"Okay, sorry for interrupting you at work."

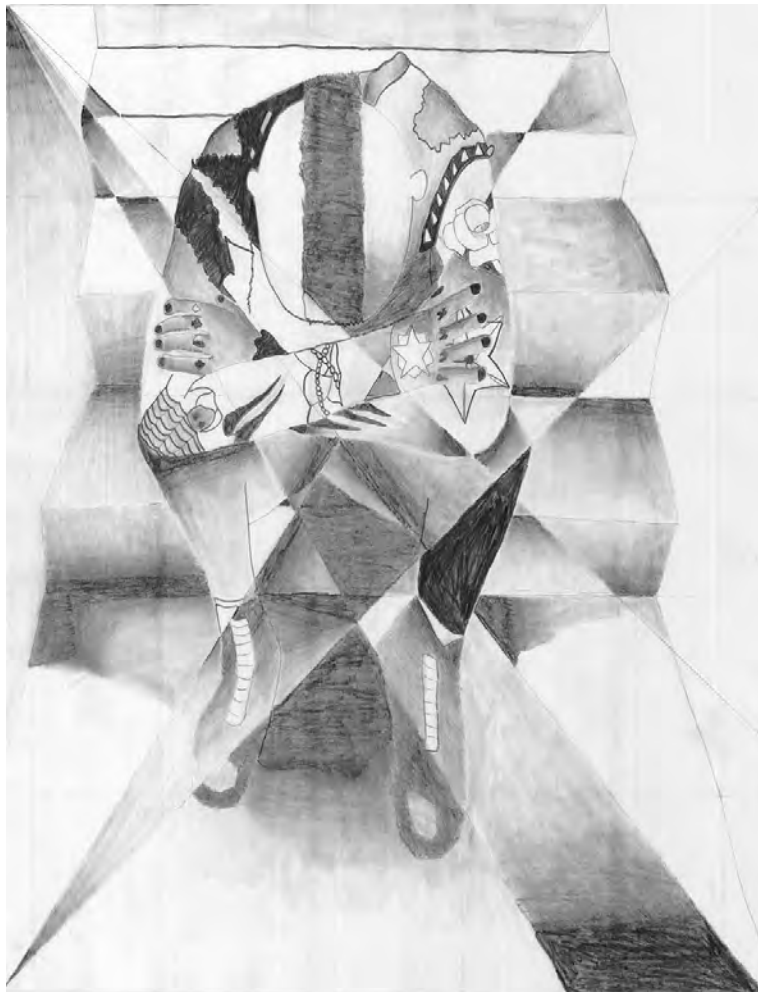
*I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.*

"Love you, Quinn."

"I love you too, Robyn - more than anything in the world."

"Bye, sweetheart."

"Goodbye."



*Drawing by Ryan Delgado, issue iv*

## Sei la mia vita

### Abigail Cottingham

The boy from the apartment below yours writes you letters about the birds and calls you a sunset.  
*"Tu sei il sole del mio giorno." You are the sunshine of my day.*

He wakes early in the morning to sit on an overturned orange crate below your terrace, a small notebook and charcoal pencil in his hand. You lean over the iron and ask him what he's thinking about today, and he looks up at you with his rounded glasses and a coy smile.

Sometimes he writes about the swifts that fly high above the rooftops, the ducks that nest around the lake in the park, even the pigeons that hobble around the square. His handwriting is smudged and messy but you don't need to read his words to find beauty in them.

He'll sing to you every night when your window is open until you invite him upstairs to whisper sweet nothings into your ear. He calls you things like *"Luce mia"* and *"Anima mia"* behind closed doors. His words scare you, promises of forever that make you shiver even when it's warm being wrapped up in his arms.

*"Sei la mia vita." You are my life.*

Your bed was only meant to be a single but when you're wrapped around each other, there's room enough. Though, he'll still disappear sometime during the night. If it weren't for him leaving behind his sweaters, you'd imagine being with him at all was just a dream.

He'll bring you flowers from the river market until you run out of vases, he'll bring you seashells until you run out of shelf space, he'll bring you his heart when your apartment is full but there's still space for him.

This gift is not as easy to accept. Polite smiles and *"grazie"* will not suffice, but then again, you've always found him more beautiful than the flowers or the shells. But unlike them, you cannot cradle this decision in your hands for hours.

So you make up your mind and when bring your lips to his, he tastes like sea salt and honey. You no longer feel suffocated by the chance of empty promise but rather living in the euphoria that comes with kissing a requited lover in the twilight of Venice.

The boy who has your heart died when you were young lovers. Like the ancient clock on your mantel, you didn't realize how little time you had left until the cogs were too broken to continue counting. The sunset was never the same when you were no longer its envy. The birds became synonymous without language to give them personality, adjectives floating away like a feather in the breeze. There were nights when you would wake alone, still grasping at the empty space beside you.

When the flowers were long withered in their vases and the shells had since gathered dust, you decided to leave the apartment. You spent the rest of your life trying to find him again, in music, or art, or literature. But he had already been a masterpiece.

Your time ran out too, too soon for your family, but not soon enough for your exhausted heart. You died without ever wrapping yourself in another lover's arms, keeping that space reserved for the person who could bring you the sunset in a cup.

But Fate knew better than to separate you forever. Your souls were made to be intertwined like hands held together while walking in a cobblestone alleyway, like vines growing together in a vineyard, like the iron railing you clung to to avoid physically falling for him as well.

The boy with charcoal eyes will spend an eternity following you through the universe, giving you the stars and asking for nothing in return.

## Multitudes

Lauren Yoksh

I won't remember this in the morning. The way her arm feels wrapped around my shoulders. She is helping me into the car, her car, which is red like mushed up cranberries. The last time I ate cranberries was when I was seven. My aunt had just left her husband, who hated cranberries and raspberries and strawberries with obvious passion. She showed up on my parents' front porch in the rain, which looked very dramatic like a scene from a sad movie. In her hands were bowls full of the berries her husband detested, and so we all sat around the coffee table with crisscrossed legs and ate red berries that stained our fingers and chewed and swallowed in silence pretending that my aunt wasn't on the verge of tears, that her life wasn't dramatic and upsetting like a sad movie. I don't like sad movies, because I like to live in denial. That's what my girl told me, anyway, that I like to live in denial. I don't want to acknowledge all the disappointments of this world, because then I'll be sad like the people in the movies, and maybe then I'll show up on someone's porch in the pouring rain wearing squeaky shoes and the wrong type of jacket and I'll pretend not to be upset even though I am.

She's asking me where my home is now. I've never called the place where I live home. Not for any specific reason, but I guess I've always considered where I am now as a stepping stone, a rest stop on the journey to a successful future. I never thought I would live in a shitty apartment next door to a crack addict and a low budget porn star for more than a year. "This isn't my real life" was always my state of mind. But it's been three years since I moved in and I still don't have a couch, because like my girl told me I live in denial, and I still refuse to believe that this could really be my life.

I told her where I live and she's taking me there. I don't recognize this street we're on, but she's telling me that we are close. There's something poetic about the way lights look at night, big and round and bright, juxtaposing the blackness and infiniteness of the sky. Traffic lights are beautiful at two AM, and I think that not enough people have realized this. Not a lot of people are outside at two AM, and I don't know why. This time of night is the only time I feel like a human, like I'm real, like I'm a manifestation of atoms and nerves and thoughts that get to ponder how we got to now and where we go from here. I don't know where to go from here, because even though I can ask the questions I don't always have an answer. But it's at two AM that I'm certain of my existence, that I am human, and she is too.

She says we are here. My home. The heat in her car is still running because I left my coat at the bar. It was my favorite coat. I wonder if it is someone else's coat now, or if I call the bar tomorrow they will have it in their lost and found. Living makes kind of a game out of lost and found. You lose yourself, you find a new you, or maybe you don't. Depends on how good you are at the game. She is helping me out of the car, her car, that is red like the bowl of cranberries my aunt cried into, and I feel again her arm holding my shoulders which I will not remember in the morning, or the morning after that, or seventy-two mornings after that. That's the truly disappointing thing about memories. After they are forgotten once, they are forgotten forever. Into the void, no second chances. Maybe that's where we go from here. The earth forgets us, and all our atoms and nerves and thoughts drift off into the void, lost in the sure infinite blackness of the night sky, where traffic lights flicker and glow, trying to compete with the beauty of the stars.

## room 502

Amanda Pendley

If time could be measured in words  
I would handwrite novels until my knuckles bled  
Analyze every single piece written by Stephen King twice  
Type poems so complex so that the meaning gets lost  
Construct every screenplay to give you the ending you deserve  
Switch my major to songwriting and throw in a full-on band  
Become a motivational speaker to find the right tone  
Scream the lyrics at a rock concert so loud they land on the stage  
And whisper to myself that I'd find the right words eventually  
I'd find the right time eventually

I hope you know that as much as I love words  
There are not nearly enough perfect ones in existence  
And there is not enough time left for me to find them

You know my voice as well as you know your own  
Who knows, maybe you even hear me in your head sometimes  
So just imagine the syllables coming out in that fragile way I always let them go  
These words are made of glass and if they shatter  
It will sound a lot like my headspace while writing this

To the women of many words; to the women who can alter time:  
I found a home in you in room 502  
Each and every one of your stories deserves to be heard by the world  
And the stories that we sculpted together still stand as a monument to who we will  
become as our plotlines wind down unknown alleys and onto sacred grounds.

I would write forever if it meant our story could withstand the tests of time  
And I think I will.

## A Candlelight Insomniac

Kylie Volavongsa

It's midnight, and he finds that it's impossible to sleep. He isn't exactly sure why, though he suspects it's because his mind has wound itself into a series of complicated knots. There's an abundance of loose ends as well, and he wonders which one carries the most weight.

His pillow is getting too hot.

—

12:45 AM. Not even an hour gone by, but it feels like he's been craving sleep far longer than that. When he looks out the window, he doesn't even see a moon, let alone the sky itself. What appears to be a cloudy evening, he decides, is his new least favorite thing.

—

It doesn't take long for him to realize that he simply can't close his eyes. Instead, he settles on waiting for sunrise. He's never witnessed one anyway, and the more he thinks about it, there are a lot of things he's never seen or done before.

Despite the activity in his head, he finds that his body is glued to the mattress and bound by the sheets. Solitary confinement, he thinks to himself. When he tries to hum something he'd heard on the radio to pass the time, he realizes that his voice is gone, and that a glass of water would actually be wonderful right now.

His arms and legs seem to ignore this, as well as the possibility of perhaps being useful.

The more minutes that tick by, the more he believes that his situation really is similar to that of a prison. He's trapped, it's dark, and there's nothing to do but wait. Come to think of it, he can't even make out the shape of his fingertips in the inky black that is his surroundings. It's boring.

—

It starts to rain, beginning as small, erratic taps on the bedroom window. And he wonders for a minute if someone is throwing rocks outside. Then the wind picks up, and he remembers that he doesn't know anyone who would want to summon him for adventures in the middle of the night or share secrets that can only be told this late.

He heaves a solitary sigh and tries to ignore how his blanket has become a furnace.

—

It's been over an hour, and he's worried that the rain is unending, that maybe he'll just have to suffer through a different sleepless night for his first sunrise (waking up early just *isn't* an option). A newfound resentment, hot and bitter, pools in his stomach. More than anything, he wishes for the clouds to disperse already. By this point, all this sighing and staring at the ceiling has gotten just about as stale as the air in the room.

Silence and raindrops, 2:47 AM.

—

It reaches about 4 AM when things get interesting. Unfortunately, the rain *still* hasn't ceased (and he curses it again for its horrible sense of timing), but there's at least a somewhat larger variety of things to observe from his cell. He's pretty sure he's hallucinating thanks to sleep deprivation, a possible heat stroke, and whatever else there could be to blame for his insanity. But he'll take what he can get for a little entertainment. After all, the sky never seems to make guarantees.



He thought smoke began to creep in from beneath the bedroom door at first, that it began to slither and coil in tendrils toward the ceiling, then towards him. When he blinked, it was gone, and now a faint orange dances somewhere just beyond his peripheral vision.

Maybe it's sleep paralysis. Then again, he doesn't see the illusion of a demon loitering by his bedside. Maybe it isn't. Whatever it is, it makes his pupils shake.

He spends the next several minutes blinking furiously to expel the burning glow. It doesn't work, and he decides once and for all that maybe this really is some strange cocktail of all sorts of sleep related issues.

The temperature beneath the blanket grows warmer still, and he wishes that he had a hammock instead of a bed.

—

5:58 AM, and everything from his frustrations to his hallucinations is figuratively roaring when a thought crosses his mind. That maybe he's dreamed this same dream before. That a strong sense of deja vu is coming on. That his anxiety is oddly familiar.

Meanwhile, his surroundings die down to a low simmer. His eyelids begin to droop. *This is okay, he supposes, but so much for that sunrise.*

He feels himself entering the void, body losing substance.

—

*They return to the residence as soon as it's bright enough to. And as soon as the weather lets up. Because at this point, there's no margin for failure, for any stone to go unturned, for any sort of shadow (whether it be an actual obstruction of light or plain doubt) to sabotage their task.*

*Maybe this approach works a bit better than attempting to sort everything at dusk. Underneath a charred and surprisingly large plank, someone finds what seem to be the remains of a large collections of candles. A hardened amalgamation of various colors, splinters, and dark flecks of ash. It isn't much, but it's something. Very possibly, a clue.*

*It pushes the search crew harder. A neighborhood fire as large as this couldn't have been victimless, no matter how many people escaped that night.*

*Still, they have a long way to go.*

—

It's midnight and he's restless again.

## dad

Lauren Yoksh

you are like the sun:  
oblivious to time's existence  
wake up at noon to eat dessert  
and watch television reruns.  
you are sleepless nights  
and grease stained fingers  
covered in cuts and bruises and scabs.  
you are like the war  
you were too young to fight in  
and the silent ones  
you fight every day  
behind the shadows of your own laughter  
when your daughter says something  
that makes you proud.  
you see it in your eyes  
and wonder if everyone else can see it, too:  
creases around the corners of your mouth  
from a smile that has never changed,  
a tightened wristwatch that you pretend to ignore  
incessantly ticking, so second by second  
another thousand moments gone  
another memory faded  
your lifetime vanishing  
right in front of your sun-strained eyes.  
the moon rises above your head  
as you count the stars:  
the same number as the night before  
and the night before that.  
consistency puts you at ease  
while you await another day  
of certain, unchanging fate.

## January

Oli Ray

It's not January. It just isn't. The leaves are green and dance together in hoards above my head, almost mocking me in their togetherness as I shrink into my loneliness.

I miss her, I do. The loops beneath her b's remind me of the crooked smiles we shared skipping along the sidewalk and tripping over its cracks. The slant to the left puts me back to when I leaned against her shoulder, finding comfort in its warmth, the sound of her heart beneath cotton clothes and soft skin stretched across a delicate frame making me wonder what paradise could be when this moment existed in the world.

The note she left for me sits so calmly in my hand as the summer breeze sends chills down my spine in a way so different from the winter winds I took for granted. The laughter of eating ice cream despite the temperature dropping was as curved as her l's. The empty branches chattering are her weirdo f's that I still don't understand. The shivers of cold weather and leaning a bit too closely are forever etched within her k's and I don't think she knew the way her y's dipped and curved were the way she made me feel. Her t's taste like mint and strawberries, and when they're next to her i's I can almost feel her lips upon mine again. The softness of her skin compared to the round of her h's and I wonder if summer has taken away her taste, or if strawberries and mint are as comforting in the middle of August.

The way she walked had the saunter of her lower case 'a' though I can't find relief in their capitals because that is how she walked away, the only piece of her left for me a small scrap of paper in my hand.

"I wish I still remembered how it felt back in January," were the words she left for me. How would eleven words ever be enough for a lifetime of time without her? Would I be enough if I'd managed twelve more?

She wishes she could feel the happiness of our January but I find I wish I didn't. Because it's not January, and without her, it won't ever be January again.

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*Each and every one of your stories deserves to be heard by the world  
and the stories that we sculpted together still stand as a monument to who we will become  
as our plotlines wind down unknown alleys and onto sacred grounds.*

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elementia (n.): a state of insanity or madness

elementia (n.): 1. a formula for inspiration through freedom of expression  
2. key to creativity

element (n.): the state or sphere natural

or suited to a person or thing

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