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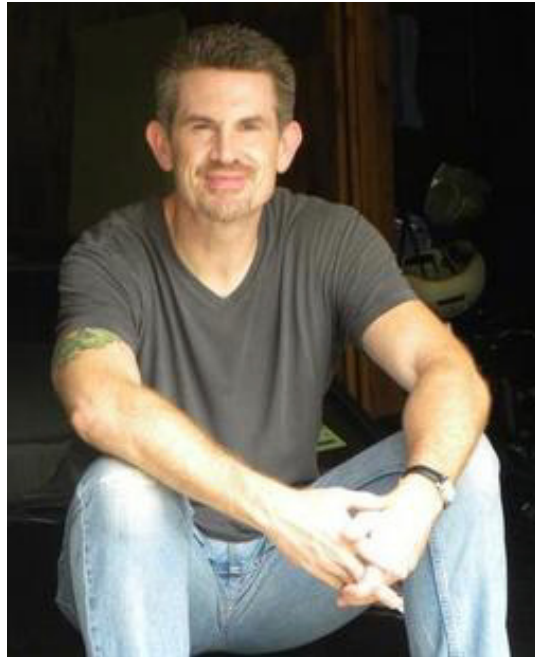
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IN MEMORIAM – JASON COURTMANCHE

APRIL 15, 1969 - NOVEMBER 27, 2024



Jason Courtmanche showed up for his first day of student teaching at an alternative high school for at-risk students and found a note on his desk telling him that his cooperating teacher was in Peoria, Illinois attending to her mother's funeral and would be out indefinitely. It was a baptism by fire and one of the best things that ever happened to him, professionally speaking. Jason spent most of his career in Connecticut. He was at the University of Connecticut for 29 of the past 37 years, where he has been an undergraduate English major, a non-degree education student, a doctoral student, an adjunct professor, and now for the past 17 years the Director of the Connecticut Writing Project and in-residence faculty in English, as well as Early College Experience Assistant Coordinator and affiliate faculty in Teacher Education.

– Jason Courtmanche Bio from a book project

Jason Courtmanche was a man of many talents and a master of most – master teacher, master writer; master dreamer; master innovator; master gardener; master husband, father, friend and colleague. The list goes on. Jason had a brilliant mind and a sharp wit. He was an avid reader, as evidenced by the thousands of books lining the walls of his home and office. He had an eidetic memory – he could tell you the plot and characters from novels he'd read decades earlier and cite exhaustive details of nonfiction works. His goal while on medical leave was to read a book a day and, even as sick

as he was, he came close to accomplishing that, posting titles, details, and reviews about his latest reads.

Jason was a remarkable and unforgettable man. He wasn't perfect, but then none of us are, but Jason was a survivor. We nearly lost him in 2020 when the Powassan Virus, a rare tick-borne illness, landed him in the Intensive Care Unit packed in ice with a fever of 107. The Powassan Virus caused encephalitis, a serious inflammation of the brain, which left Jason with some long term effects. Maybe his brain didn't work quite as well as it had, his eidetic memory

slipped sometimes, and he had to write things down in order to remember to do them, but we all joked that he was now closer to being like the rest of us normal humans.

But last spring, Jason became very ill and was eventually diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer that had no known cure and a dire prognosis. But we all knew what a survivor Jason was, so we believed that he would beat this cancer, just like he had beaten the Powassan Virus and encephalitis. We knew how brave, strong, and resilient he was.

For months he was in and out of the hospital, courageously fighting the deadly disease. His strong, handsome frame weakened as he received a variety of treatments. His wife, Amy Nocton, started a Caring Bridge for him, where she or Jason posted his health journey nearly every day. To get an idea of how wide a circle of family and friends Jason had, that Caring Bridge site has had 32,389 visits.

If courage and strength were all it took to survive cancer, he would still be with us. Jason had an abundance of both. But cancer is wily and deadly. Jason entered the Connecticut Hospice facility in Branford, Connecticut, looking out on a beautiful view of Long Island Sound, on Friday, November 22, 2024, surrounded by family who kept music playlists playing in the background. Sadly, Jason passed away during a beautiful sunrise on Wednesday, November 27, 2024, to the sounds of Nora Jones' Sunrise and Diana Krall's version of It Had to Be You.

We do not know what lies beyond this mortal life, but I believe in a hereafter. I like to believe that when a loved one dies, especially when, like Jason, it's far too early for them to go, it's because their good energy is needed elsewhere - we just don't know where. I like to think that Jason is

still hiking in majestic forests, writing beautiful poems and other powerful pieces, and having a lively discussion with his favorite authors. Maybe he has finally met Nathaniel Hawthorne, a writer who helped shape his career and his life.

Hawthorne is quoted as saying, "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." That can never be said about Jason. He lived his life to the fullest, savoring every moment, every person, and every word.

Life is not fair. Jason had so many more students left to inspire and far too many more books to read and words to write. No matter how long Jason had lived, it would never have been long enough, but he did live, and he lived well. We, all the people upon whom he had an impact, will remember him—with deep love and respect—always.

Happy trails, dear friend . . .

-Jane Cook, colleague and friend for 17 years



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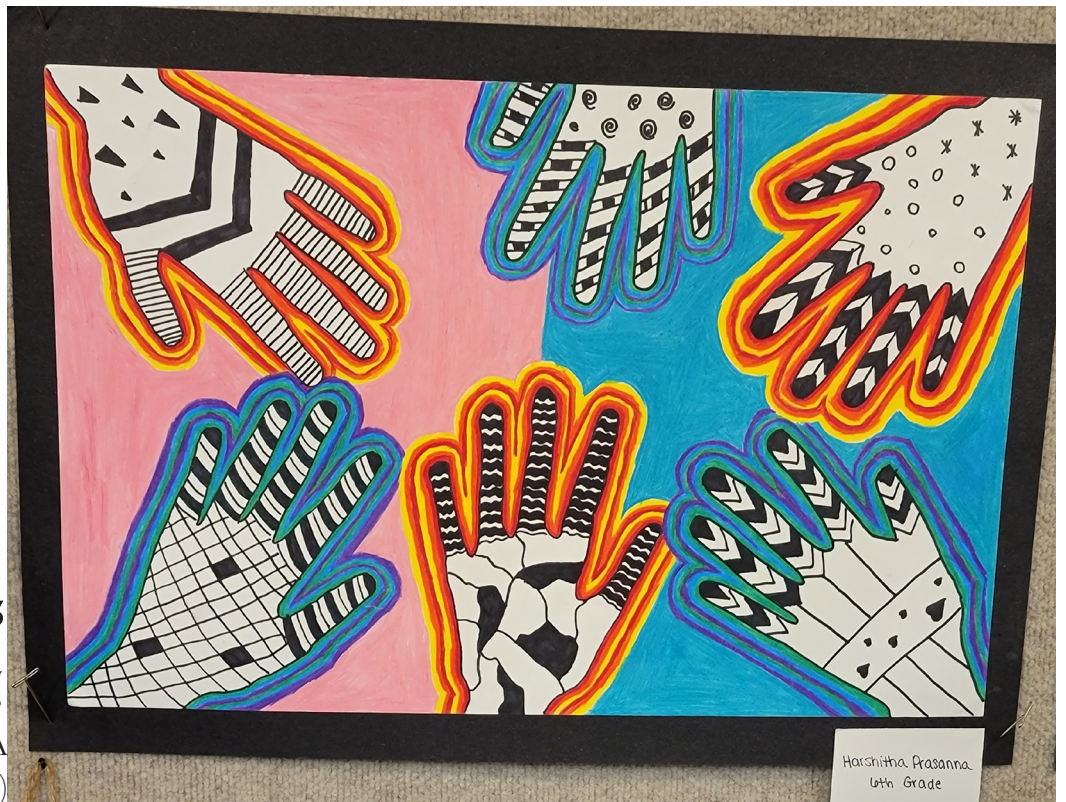
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GRADE 7

SOLAR

THARAN CHIMMIRI (left)



TOGETHER IS BETTER!

HARSHITHA PRASANNA
(right)

IC814: THE KANDAHAR HIJACK

KARTHIK JAYAKANTH

On December 24, 1999, Indian Airlines Flight IC814 departed from Kathmandu, Nepal, bound for Delhi, India. Shortly after takeoff, the routine flight turned into a nightmare for the 155 passengers and crew on board. Five men, later identified by code names such as Chief, Doctor, Burger, Bhola, and Shankar, armed with knives, pistols, and grenades, seized control of the aircraft. These hijackers belonged to a militant group with a clear and chilling objective: to force the Indian government to release certain prisoners in exchange for the hostages' safety.

The hijackers' plan involved diverting the aircraft to several locations before ultimately landing in Kandahar, Afghanistan, a territory under the control of the Taliban regime at that time. This choice of location was strategic, as it provided the hijackers with a relatively safe haven and leverage over the Indian government. Upon landing, the hijackers issued their ultimatum: the safe release of all passengers and crew in exchange for the release of three prisoners. The stakes were incredibly high, and the fear among the hostages was palpable.

Faced with this unprecedented crisis, the Indian government had to navigate a highly complex and delicate negotiation process. The decision-makers were under immense pressure to secure the hostages' release while considering the long-term implications of their actions. The options before them were stark: negotiate with the hijackers and meet their demands or attempt a risky rescue mission that might endanger the hostages' lives.

Over the next several days, intense and high-stakes negotiations took place, involving not only the Indian government but also international mediators and the Taliban regime. The negotiation process was fraught with tension, uncertainty, and moral dilemmas. The lives of 155 people hung in the balance, and every decision carried significant risks.

Ultimately, the Indian government decided to comply with the hijackers' demands and release the prisoners in exchange for the hostages' safety. This decision was not made lightly, as it involved a careful weighing of potential risks and benefits. The primary objective was to ensure the immediate safety of the hostages, but the broader implications of negotiating with terrorists were also a major concern.

The Aftermath and Psychological Impact

Thankfully, no one was physically harmed during the ordeal, but the psychological trauma experienced by the passengers and their families was profound. Being held hostage for several days, under constant threat and uncertainty, left lasting scars on many of the individuals involved. The experience highlighted the urgent need for improved support systems for victims of such traumatic events.

Lessons Learned and Security Measures

One of the most significant outcomes of the IC814 hijacking was the urgent recognition of

the need for enhanced airport security measures. The incident exposed vulnerabilities in the existing security protocols and underscored the importance of adopting advanced technology and stricter regulations to prevent similar incidents in the future. In the aftermath of the hijacking, the Indian government implemented a series of measures aimed at bolstering aviation security. These included:

1. **Strengthening Airport Security:** Comprehensive security checks, including enhanced passenger screening and baggage inspections, were introduced at airports across the country. The goal was to detect and prevent potential threats before they could board an aircraft.

2. **Improving Coordination and Response:** The incident highlighted the need for better coordination between various security agencies and quicker response times in the event of a crisis. Specialized units were established to handle hijacking situations, with a focus on minimizing risks to passengers and crew.

3. **Training and Preparedness:** Airline staff, including pilots and cabin crew, underwent rigorous training on handling hijacking scenarios and other security threats. The emphasis was on effective communication, de-escalation techniques, and ensuring the safety of all on board.

4. **International Collaboration:** Recognizing that terrorism and aviation security were global issues, India increased its collaboration with international security agencies and organizations. Information sharing, joint exercises, and coordinated efforts became key components of the strategy to combat terrorism.

Broader Geopolitical Implications

The IC814 hijacking had broader geopolitical implications, particularly straining the already tense relationship between India and Pakistan. The hijackers were later found to have connections to militant groups based in Pakistan, which led to accusations and counter-accusations between the two neighboring countries. The incident highlighted the complexities of dealing with cross-border terrorism and underscored the importance of robust international cooperation to combat such threats.

The hijacking also served as a catalyst for India to reassess its approach to counter-terrorism and security. The government recognized the need for a multi-faceted strategy that included not only preventive measures but also diplomatic efforts to address the root causes of terrorism. This involved engaging with regional and global partners to enhance security and stability.

A Lasting Legacy

Today, the IC814 hijacking remains a significant historical event, serving as a reminder of the challenges posed by terrorism and the necessity of strong security protocols. It continues to influence how governments and aviation authorities approach security and counter-terrorism efforts, ensuring that lessons learned from this harrowing experience help to prevent future tragedies.

The incident taught us not only about the tactical aspects of security but also about the profound and lasting impact such events can have on the lives of those involved. The psychological scars left by the hijacking are a

testament to the importance of addressing the human dimension of such crises and providing adequate support to victims and their families.

Reflections on the Human Impact

The IC814 hijacking was not just a geopolitical and security crisis; it was a deeply personal ordeal for the 155 passengers and crew who found themselves at the mercy of the hijackers. Their stories of resilience, courage, and hope in the face of terror are a poignant reminder of the human cost of such incidents.

The hostages faced unimaginable fear and uncertainty during those fateful days. They were confined to the cramped and tense environment of the aircraft, unsure of their fate and constantly under threat. The psychological toll of being a hostage, stripped of control and autonomy, cannot be overstated. Many of the survivors have since spoken about the enduring trauma and the challenges of rebuilding their lives after such a harrowing experience.

For the families of the hostages, the ordeal was equally excruciating. They were left in a state of agonizing limbo, grappling with fear and helplessness as they awaited news of their loved ones. The psychological impact on families and communities underscores the far-reaching consequences of such terrorist acts.

The Role of Media and Public Perception

The IC814 hijacking also highlighted the role of the media in shaping public perception and response to such crises. The event was extensively covered by national and international media, bringing the plight of the hostages and the complexity of the negotiation process into

the public domain. The media played a crucial role in keeping the public informed, but it also had the potential to influence the actions of both the hijackers and the government.

The intense media coverage generated significant public pressure on the Indian government to secure the hostages' release, adding another layer of complexity to the decision-making process. The incident underscored the need for responsible and balanced reporting, especially in situations where lives are at stake.

The Broader Impact on Counter-Terrorism Efforts

The IC814 hijacking was a wake-up call for the global community, highlighting the evolving nature of terrorism and the need for comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies. It prompted governments and international organizations to reassess their security protocols and enhance their preparedness for such crises.

The incident also underscored the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism, including political, social, and economic factors. While security measures are essential, a holistic approach that includes diplomacy, development, and dialogue is crucial in addressing the underlying drivers of extremism and violence.

Looking Forward

As we reflect on the IC814 hijacking, it is essential to recognize the progress made in aviation security and counter-terrorism efforts since that fateful event. The lessons learned

have led to significant advancements in technology, policy, and international cooperation, making the skies safer for travelers worldwide.

However, the threat of terrorism remains ever-present, and the need for vigilance and adaptability is paramount. The IC814 hijacking serves as a reminder of the challenges we face and the importance of continued efforts to safeguard lives and uphold the principles of security and justice.

In conclusion, the IC814 hijacking was a turning point in aviation history, with far-reaching implications for security, international relations, and the human experience. It taught us about the resilience of the human spirit, the complexities of dealing with terrorism, and the necessity of a multi-faceted approach to security. As we move forward, the lessons learned from this event will continue to shape our efforts to create a safer and more secure world for all.

THE LAST TIME

PRESTON SANTAMAURO

I stroked her fur in the afternoon sun that seeped through the blinds on the slider door leading to the deck. My dog, Kallie, seemed to glow like an angel descending from heaven as she tried to get up on her feet but failed. Then, I felt the light tickle of a tongue that slowly swept my wrist. “I love you,” I whispered.

I slowly stood up, shielding the sun’s glorious rays from my dark brown eyes. As quiet as a mouse, I tiptoed to the foyer so I wouldn’t startle sleeping beauty.

Plop! went my backpack on the welcome mat, and swish, went my coat as I hung it up on the railing. As usual, I got the “Hi, how was your day,” from Mom.

“Good,” I replied as I leapt up the stairs to have a snack.

Just as I was going to take a bite of a granola bar, I heard scritch, scratch and then a thump! I stood there in shock as I whipped my head towards the direction of the sound.

“Kallie!” I hurried down the stairs with Mom right at my heels. Kallie was on the floor, feet sprawled out in all directions as she attempted to get up just to fall right back down. “What’s going on with Kallie?” I wondered as I was biting my nails.

“Oh Kallie!” Mom cried as she ran to get her. She gently picked up our then 50 pound dog under her forearms and slowly lifted her off the floor. I thought Mom was going to cry as her eyes got big.

Kallie looked like a poor rag doll as she started to defecate. She looked up at me with her little puppy dog eyes as Mom carried her to the door to go outside.

I went back upstairs and just waited for Dad to get home from work. After a bit, I heard Dad’s car come up the driveway. I ran downstairs to greet him like I did every day when he comes home.

At last, when the door finally opened, I gave him the biggest hug I’ve ever have. I looked up at him and cried, “Kallie’s not feeling well.”

“Let me get in first before we can have any discussion,” my father stated in his calm, stern voice. I stepped out of the way for him to come into the house.

...

After an hour or so, I overheard a conversation Mom and Dad were having. “Should we bring Kallie to the hospital?” Dad whispered to Mom.

“We should bring the kids in case we have to say our goodbyes,” Mom replied.

I felt a chill rush down my spine. What does she mean? I thought to myself. What’s happening to Kallie? Is she going to be okay? Do they know what’s happening?

After the conversation ended, Dad went downstairs where Kallie was, cutting my train of thought. I followed him down where I found him crying next to her.

“Are you alright?” I asked Dad even though deep down I knew he wasn’t.

“What do you think?” my Dad replied, obviously upset, in between breaths.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, my head drooped down.

Behind me, Mom and my twin sister, Emma, came down the stairs. Dad went to pick Kallie up and they told me to get in the

car. As I was told, I walked to the car along with Emma. I saw through the rear view mirror that Dad was trying to lay Kallie down into the back of the minivan. Mom came out of the house and Dad got in the driver seat and we took off.

Along the way, we tried to get into the nearest pet hospital but they were either closed or full. Kallie was as still as a log as I wondered if she was doing okay in the back.

Finally, we found a pet hospital that would let us in. A young woman brought us in and talked a little about something I didn't know as a middle aged woman helped carry Kallie into the hospital.

We were brought into a small waiting room while they checked Kallie out. Dad stayed in the hospital room with the vet as they examined Kallie. I overheard bits and pieces of what they were discussing but I didn't understand what was happening.

Emma and I hugged Mom as the sorrowful silence crept up on us.

After a while, I broke the silence and asked Mom in a quiet whisper, "Is Kallie going to die?"

"I don't know, sweetie," she replied looking at the door to the room where Kallie was.

The television was blaring in the corner next to the couch. It was talking about the weather and news that I couldn't care less about.

The door swung open as someone called us in. His eyes were big as if he were about to cry, like Mom when she picked Kallie up. His head was down and Dad was petting Kallie behind him. I dragged my feet to the door thinking, This is the last time I'm going to see Kallie.

The room was quiet and the walls were painted a bright white. There was a little

brown table in the corner of the room, next to the door. A woman came in and placed a tissue box on it. I knew what that meant. It meant saying goodbye to Kallie.

Kallie was lying on a clean, blue bed with cabinets underneath it. She didn't move much with her head down at her paws. She always looked cute doing that. I smiled a little, hoping that Kallie would notice and look up. She didn't. My smile was soon replaced with drops of the salty tears dripping down my cheek.

A nurse came into the room and said that he was going to leave us alone to spend time with Kallie. After the bang of the door closing, no one uttered a word. I reached out my hand to pet Kallie and her soft fur soothed me. It was as if she were a pillow full of fluffy fur. I used my other hand to scratch her ear. She loved it as she slightly tilted her head to the side.

"Kallie, can you give me a kiss?" I asked as I placed my hand under her snout. She moved her head out of the way to lick her paws instead. I started bawling as I cried to Mom, "Why is Kallie not giving me a kiss? She's licking her paws but not my hands?"

"She's not feeling well," Mom replied, crying. She scooped me up in a big hug and I buried my face in her shirt.

After she let me go, Emma and I hugged each other. It was the first time in a long time that I hugged her but we needed it to get through this. We went back up to Kallie to pet her. We hugged her to keep her from rolling off and to comfort her.

"Is Kallie trying to not die?" I asked Dad.

"She doesn't want to die because she doesn't want to leave you guys," he replied, tears in his eyes.

On the other side of the room, the door opened and the vet walked in. He told us we had to leave but Dad could stay to comfort her.

I screamed, cried, and kicked as Mom grabbed my hand and led me out of the room. “I want to see Kallie one last time!” I screamed over and over again. As much as I struggled, Mom’s firm grip never let go of my hand. I tried to run back to the room but Mom dragged me the other way. She opened the door as I felt the chilly night air hit my face. With one last tug, I was out the door.

Getting out of the building calmed me down as I walked to the car with my head down. Mom’s hand was now on my shoulder as she leaned into me. Mom was comforting me like a teddy bear. Before she was a strong mother, and nothing got in her way. Now she needed me for support just like how I needed her support before.

I opened the car door and Mom, Emma, and I hopped in the car and cried together. I wondered, Has Kallie died yet? but then I shook the thought off because I wanted her to live as long as she could.

After a long time, Dad finally came out; without Kallie. She was in heaven now, not suffering anymore. He got into the car, crying, and we took off towards home as the streetlight shone like the stars in the sky.

...

The next day, when I was going downstairs, I peeked into the family room and looked at Kallie’s bed where she should have been. Behind me, Mom kissed me on the cheek. The morning sunlight shone on her bed through the glass door. I could see the indent of her body in the cushion from yesterday as if she were lying right there.

“Bye Kallie,” I whispered, as the light shone on me.

Author’s Note

Now when I look back all these years when I was in 2nd grade, I realize that in the end, this experience for me was crucial. It exposed me to the death of loved ones. It also taught me to let go of things and cherish your memories about the past. Even though this was a depressing time for me and my family, I am still able to reflect on the memories of our beloved dog, Kallie.

RISE

BRI GUERRA

Mainly of passion minted from pain,
Year of my renegade rise. Years on
From darkness,
Tethered to ignorance,
Grounded by hate, ruins
Of beast in their eyes.
Thorough their campaign,
And strident in reason. Yet
Minds beseech souls,

Endure,
Hope,
Preserve.
Anon lies your triumph. Anon,
Rise, unbeaten.

Mastering keys so
An artist can breathe,
Seen by a love rooting
My pride,
I incubate the strength needed,
The aspirations heeded,
The respect for which I pleaded.
And with this trove, abide.

May all the world espy
The magnificent rays of a soulrise.

Artist Statement:

Bri Guerra (they/them) is a non-speaking autistic student who types to communicate. Bri spent years subjected to mistreatment and low expectations before becoming a typer. “Rise” articulates their past experience with people’s mischaracterizations and prejudices, and Bri’s triumphant empowerment through their newly found voice.

EVACUEES

FREYA WATT

September 17, 1939

It was a beautiful afternoon in London on Finchley Road. I had just finished pouring lemonade into my mother's cup when she told me, "Dear, it's your birthday, sit down and stop rushing around, will you!"

My mother smiled up at me. Eleven had always been my lucky number, and now I was eleven. I guess it gave me a sense that this year would be enjoyable. Little did I know, this year would change the way I thought about the number eleven.

I sat down and opened the smallest present, the way my mother had taught me to do it. Of course, the smallest present was from my Aunt Edna. She was always mean to me. We had stayed at her house in Manchester before, and she made me sleep in a closet. I opened the card. It had two sentences on it:

Dear Beatrice,

I'm sure your mother hasn't chatted with you about this, but England is in a predicament that will affect you more than you think. Wishing you the best of luck on your very long journey, even though you deeply annoy me.

From, Edna

I supposed she was talking about the threat of war against England. But it made me nervous to think about the other thing she wrote - will affect you more than you think. I was awfully sick of this "present" already. I opened up the present itself and found a pair of socks.

Socks! I already had enough of those!

"Bee beeeeeee." My neighbor Willie ran into my arms. "Oh a present, let me see!"

He grabbed at my card and pair of socks.

"No Willie," I said, not seriously. "Remember what I told you about filching things that aren't yours!"

The truth was, it's not that it was impolite to grab things, but that what Aunt Edna wrote would be too much for Willie to handle. It was barely enough for me to handle.

The next day, I put on my school uniform as I had on every other day of my safe and happy life. The uniform was itchy, but I had to slide on my plaid skirt, button my blouse, tie my tie around my neck, and put on my jacket. I never liked school very much, but I did have friends and some kind teachers. It was just so dull. My knapsack was extra heavy today, I wasn't sure why. All of a sudden, I heard sobbing from upstairs.

"Mother, are you alright?" I asked.

"Stay strong, my darling," she sniffled.

"Are you talking to yourself, mother?"

"No, I'm talking to you, Beatrice."

I walked to school, a block down from my house. Once I got there, something just didn't feel quite right. I walked slowly to my favorite class, literature. I took my seat. Most kids in the class were sniffing and some said they needed to go to the nurse or the bathroom. When I asked my other friend, Shirley, what was going on, she shrugged. Then she tugged at her hair and her blue eyes began to water. She covered

her face with her shaking hands. I looked into my knapsack and found that my mother had packed me some of my clothes, socks, and the socks Aunt Edna gave me, slippers, a toothbrush, a bar of soap, a towel, my warmest coat, and a gas mask. I understood what was going on now, but I didn't want to understand. I wanted to go back to when nothing seemed wrong. Now I was crying too.

Once I heard younger kids wailing, I knew that it was time. Outside, there was a long train waiting for everyone. Parents gathered outside hugging their children. I was surprised that some children in my class were excited to go. One boy exclaimed, "This is going to be quite an adventure actually. If I get put with a rich family out in the country, I won't have to work a day in my life!"

Another girl joined in, "You might even get to go to the beach!"

I didn't care about beaches or chores. I loved my family; I loved my home.

All of a sudden, Mrs. Fredericks instructed us to come outside to the front of the school in an orderly line. As we left, she kissed each of us on top of our heads. She kissed me on top of my head twice.

Right as it was my time to get on the train, my mother and father came running to me. They hugged me as long as they could. "We love you forever and ever, and we will see you soon," my father said. "It will be alright, you'll see my darling," my mother sniffled. I made my way to my seat. To my delight, Willie sat next to me. He looked at me with such sadness, and leaned his head against my shoulder. "It will be alright, you'll see," I told him.

A girl and boy who looked like twins stood up from in front of us, and handed us some

strawberry licorice. "Mother told us to share," they half smiled.

I took the licorice and tied it into the shape of a bow tie. "Hello, I'm Mr. Sugar Buttons, what's your name?" I asked, holding the licorice bow tie under my chin. He laughed a little and answered,

"I'm Willie. Willie Etman. What's your real name, Mr. Sugar Buttons?"

I smiled, "I'm Beatrice, Beatrice Edsel. Wait, Willie, are you by any chance the

Willie Etman, the Willie that lives in Mr. Sugar Buttons' neighborhood?"

I looked out the window. We were leaving London, and heading to the countryside. Aunt Edna lived in the countryside. I'd wondered if she would be forced to take children in, because there is no way that she would take one by choice. The city disappeared into what seemed an endless field of green. Although the train was depressing, the world outside the window was beautiful. Horses ran about next to the train. There was one big strong chestnut horse that led all the other horses. In the back of the group of horses was a scrawny speckled horse trying to keep up.

Soon enough, we entered a small town. There were big houses on each side of the train. It made me miss my house. My brick house, with the wooden shutters and the flower pots filled with daffodils. The train came to a sharp stop in front of a big building with the British flag in front of it. A woman with a stern and powerful voice said, "All children make their way out of the train and stay put in front of it!"

I stepped off the train. I saw a bustling group of adults standing in front of the train, looking at us closely. I knew how this was going

to work. All the adults looking for children would go and find whatever child was cleanest and the most adorable, and would take them home. Those who were not clean or adorable would have to go home with someone who was forced to take them. I quickly did my auburn hair into two braids because Mother always had told me that grown-ups thought that braids on girls were lovely. I looked down at Willie. He was awfully dirty. I quickly took out my hair brush, brushed out his hair, and rubbed clean his arms and face.

The stern-voiced woman didn't even let us go to the bathroom, so some of the little kids wet their pants and skirts. She held up a clipboard and announced, "I am sure everyone has heard about the war, and I am sure everyone knows that everyone must take at least one child."

Someone in the crowd laughed, "This is quite the dirty batch!"

People began to take children. Soon, a woman with a purple coat and hat came up to me and said with a smile, "I'll take this one!"

With all the nerves I had I said, "This boy is my brother, you'll have to take him as well." She frowned and walked away. What had I just done? Willie looked up at me and held my hand. I wasn't going to let him end up with nobody.

An elderly couple walked up to me slowly and said, "Isn't she adorable?"

Before I could say a word, they announced, "We'll take the boy and girl."

The elderly couple started to walk away, so I quickly caught up to them. Willie followed. They walked in silence. I was expecting them to tell us their names, but no.

Willie and I looked at each other.

At least someone wanted us.

We walked for a long time.

After the bombing was all over, I returned to London, but I came back to a changed city. I returned to Mother and Father, but even they were different than I remembered. But back then, I was just eleven, walking on a country road with Willie, walking into the rest of what was left of my childhood.

AKSHAT AND THE HOUSE THAT WHISPERED

AKSHAT SINGH

It all had started as a simple dare.

Akshat and his friends stood outside the abandoned house, the night air thick with the scent of damp earth and fallen leaves. The others had been talking about it for weeks—the house that whispered, the house that no one dared to enter. The house that Sai, Kevin, Akshat and Lucky were playing truth and dare in front of. Until, Akshat got dared to go in.

“Come on, man,” Sai had said, nudging him. “Just step inside, look around, and come back out. Easy.”

“Unless you’re scared,” Kevin had added with a smirk.

Akshat scoffed, folding his arms. “I’m not scared. It’s just a dumb old house.”

“So prove it,” Lucky challenged. “Go inside. Alone.”

A cold breeze swept through the air, rustling the dead leaves at their feet. The house loomed in front of them, its broken windows staring out like hollow eyes. Akshat swallowed hard but forced a grin.

“Fine,” he said, stepping toward the rusted iron gate. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

His friends chuckled nervously as he pushed the gate open. It creaked like a dying bird, and the sound sent a shiver down his spine. The wind moved the trees, their branches groaning and a few twisted trees stretched their branches into the air like bony fingers reaching out to grab him. But he couldn’t back down now. The front door stood slightly ajar, as if the house were waiting for him to enter, but Akshat

wasn’t about to show fear.

Then, with one last deep breath, he stepped inside.

The air was thick with dust, and Akshat could taste the mold in his mouth. He coughed as he wiped the grime off his face, the smell of rotting wood filling his nose. The floor was covered in dirt and shattered glasses, cobwebs hung from the ceiling like ghostly curtains, their edges trembling in the faint breeze. His sneakers squeaked against the floor with each step, the sound too loud in the oppressive silence. It wasn’t as bad as he thought it was going to be.

Then, it happened.

A whisper,

“Akshaaat...”

Akshat froze, his heart pounding in his chest. It felt like the walls themselves were closing in. He felt his breath catch in his throat as the whisper echoed around him, seeping into his bones. Akshat’s heart started racing faster and faster. The house felt wrong. Every corner of it whispered danger.

“Why are you heeerrreee” the same voice again!

He fumbled for his flashlight, his hands shaking. The beam flickered weakly, casting ghostly shadows across the room. His eyes landed on an old rocking chair in the center of the room. It moved slowly back and forth, creaking with a sound that made his stomach turn.

Akshat’s throat felt dry as ice. His palms were clammy, his legs unsteady beneath him.

Every instinct screamed at him to leave, but his body was frozen. He took a shaky step back—

THUD.

A loud noise echoed from upstairs, sending a wave of panic crashing through him. Akshat's heart skipped a beat.

Then, a ghostly figure blasted over him. It was like a blur, a figure flying past him, the curtains swaying as if they wanted to follow it. Akshat stumbled, falling to the ground, his heart racing like it was about to burst out of his chest.

He crawled towards the door, but it slammed shut by itself. Panic hit him hard. He had to get out.

He pushed himself up and ran toward the stairs, desperate to find somewhere to hide.

The house seemed to shake, and the walls creaked like they were alive, following him with every step. He reached the stairs and started climbing, the steps creaking under his feet. His breath came out in short gasps as he reached the top of the stairs, eyes darting around the hallway. Every door looked like it led to something worse. He didn't care. He just needed to hide.

He grabbed the first door he could find and slammed it open. He didn't even look at what room it was. He just had to get in. The door closed behind him with a bang, and he leaned against it, gasping for air. His flashlight flickered again, casting long shadows in the dusty room.

Akshat's eyes scanned the room. It was a kid's room, with old toys scattered on the floor and a rocking horse in the corner. The walls had faded wallpaper, with nursery rhymes that seemed too happy for a place like this. It was so out of place, but he didn't care. He just needed

to calm down.

Then, he saw her.

A small figure stood in the corner, facing away from him. Akshat's heart stopped. A little girl, no older than five, wearing a pale dress. She didn't move. Akshat's throat went dry.

"Hello?" he whispered, his voice barely a sound.

The girl slowly turned around. Her face was hidden by long, dark hair, but when she looked up, Akshat's blood ran cold. Her eyes were black—no pupils, no whites, just empty black holes that stared right through him. Her smile stretched too wide, way too wide.

"Why are you heeerrreee?" she whispered in a raspy voice.

Akshat froze. His body wouldn't move. He couldn't scream.

The girl's smile got bigger.

"Get out," Akshat whispered, barely able to speak.

The girl didn't move, but her smile only grew wider, her eyes even darker.

The girl started getting closer to him. Akshat started feeling like he was shrinking.

Suddenly, Akshat heard his friends' voices from outside the room. "Akshat?!" Lucky called, her voice shaking.

Akshat turned, but when he looked back at the girl, she was gone. The room was empty.

No. That was it. He was done.

He ran out of the room as fast as he could.

His eyes scanned for the door. Without thinking, he sprinted for it, but as his hand reached for the handle, it slammed shut on its own. Not again! He thought. The sound echoed in the silence like a warning.

Akshat gasped, his chest tightening. He yanked at the knob, but it wouldn't budge. The

air turned icy, wrapping around him like an invisible force. He could feel something in the room with him—something watching, waiting.

He started running out of air, panicked gasps. He squeezed his eyes shut, willing the terror to fade. It's just my imagination. It's just my imagination.

But when he opened them again, the door was wide open. Just like that.

Without thinking, Akshat bolted. He didn't stop running until he was clear across the yard. His legs burned, his heart thundering in his ears. When he finally dared to look back, the house was silent—still, empty, like it had never been alive. The moonlight bathed the building in a cold glow, and for a moment, Akshat thought he might be safe.

As he walked away with his friends, a cold, shivering whisper carried on the wind, cutting through the quietness of the dark night.

“Akshaaat...”

His heart stopped beating for a second, as he turned his head toward the house. In the window, he saw her shadow, a faint outline against the dim light inside. The girl. She stood there, motionless, her empty black eyes locked onto him even from that distance.

The wind carried her whisper again, this time more insistent, like it was meant only for him.

“See you soon, Akshat...”

He knew this wasn't over yet.

NOSTALGIA

CORA CHENIER

hits me like a freight train:

running barefoot in The Stream,

camping in our back yards,

sword fights with knotweed,

the first snow making ice forts—

planning our futures on the swings,

talking late into the night

crammed

onto a twin bed.

Hot summer nights and catching lightning bugs.

the rich smell of earth,

of freshness,

of calmness,

On every surface

of our clothes.

Friday game nights

where we would pretend to be superheros

and we would hunt ghosts.

All of this gone.

from strangers,

to sisters,

and back to

strangers

I text you on a Friday night,

“Do you want to come over?”

White noise,

not even

our lightning bugs

could fly through.



**RUNNING
OUT OF
TIME**

EMILY MENG (left)

GRADE 8



**A LEMON
TREE**

JULIET CHATTAWAY
(right)

THEY NEVER STOPPED WRITING: THE LIBERATOR'S DEFIANT HEROISM AND ITS CRUCIAL INPUT IN THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT

EMMA HENNESSEY

"I come, a stranger to this busy sphere... My name is Liberator! I propose to hurl my shafts at freedom's deadliest foes! My task is hard—for I am charged to save Man from his brother!—to redeem the slave!" [1]

In 1831, American slavery was at an undeniable arc- and there was no shortage of cruelty to be doled out. From nightmarish slave ships to abusive plantations, it seemed there was no hope [2]. The abolitionists of the time were in a drastic minority, and their efforts were lost in the crowd that was the slaveholders and slavery supporters. But on January 1st, something new emerged: a paper called *The Liberator* (see Appendix A). [3] In its very first articles, most written by the paper's pioneer, William Lloyd Garrison (see Appendix B), it ripped away all imposed obscurity and drove to the core of slavery [4]. Little to no papers were read that day [5]. Yet, just a few dozen issues later, *The Liberator* was the mightiest abolition outlet in the United States [6]. It was making major differences, changing lives, and even freeing slaves. William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* was a critical turn of the tides in the struggle for the 13th Amendment, as its influence, and the influence of its founders and staff, brought the topic of abolition into an abstractly different light that ultimately set off the chain reaction necessary for emancipation.

In the day of *The Liberator*, a scene not unlike the Reformation was taking place in America [7]. Baptist ideals were splitting and mixing with Christianity, and the religious world was

quickly taking more and more prominence. Mr. Garrison grew up to be extremely dedicated to God, and while his thoughts on abolition may have set him apart, his beliefs linked him to the population. Through his journalism, he used this to his advantage. Countless times he displayed this tactic, an excellent example being the preface he authored in *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*: "Reader! are you with the man-stealers in sympathy and purpose, or on the side of their down-trodden victims? If with the former, then are you the foe of God and man. If with the latter, what are you prepared to do and dare in their behalf?" [8]. By playing to the heart of the country, Garrison had found a vital soft point in his hardened enemy. This defines one of the attributes that made *The Liberator* stand out in the tabloid world: its exploration and usage of contrasting angles [9]. Though this could be considered an example of the displeasing radical trait of the paper [10], it was not so much as to be deterring, which can be shown in records of the paper's wide scope of readers [11]. By convincing a nation so presently entangled in their beliefs that there was an otherly, religious wrong to slavery, *The Liberator* continued to change the hearts and minds of many of the dedicated Christians, Baptists, and beyond.

Yet another trend in the national mindset, so to speak, was the acceptance of slavery. Ever since the very first colonists, slavery had been a 'staple of life'. Without slaves, millions of

hours of labor would be left in the hands of the indentured servants, which seemed something of a monumental transition[12]. Thus slavery stayed alive with a fierce energy, until along came those who attempted to weaken its great reign, *The Liberator* being one of the most prominent among them. As stakes rose, with Garrison pushing slaveholders from every angle, anger was building, and eventually, it had to break; this led to a period of intense violence[13]. Finally, Garrison felt their rage first hand: “A large crowd of angry men gathered outside the hall... They dragged him into the street with a rope around his waist crying, ‘Lynch him!’[14]” (see Appendix C). These turn of events are significant on several stances. First of all, the very fact that Garrison was able to rile the nation into such a rage should be accounted for- and their bloodlust is ample evidence of *The Liberator’s* impact. The abolition movement was, once again, a non-feasible shift from life as they knew it, and this paper practically embodied it. This, along with its growing prominence in the uneasy nation, led to violence to dispose of this dangerous, cunning threat[15]. Yet, what is truly one of the most remarkable and indirectly effective traits of *The Liberator* is its anti-violent demeanor. Being a good-natured soul,[16] William Lloyd Garrison’s mission was, granted, to attack with as much spite and power as possible, but he never stooped to the level of the slaveholders. He never touched upon the idea of shedding the literal blood of his opponents[17]. While he may have put down figures such as Francis Todd, not once did he approach them with any sort of evil spirit, much unlike the incident of Charles Sumner and Preston Brooks, resulting in near murder at the Senate, a prominent

headline of the day[18]. Perhaps this more than anything was attractive to Americans, the pure spirit of this paper, glowing with morals, so abstractly different from other active sources of the time[19].

Though abolition was a task few were willing to take up in a time of such scorn and reprimand, Garrison was far from the only individual devoted to the cause[20]. His paper was, likewise, far from the only abolition outlet, though it was arguably the first to apply such powerful journalism. But what made *The Liberator* so extraordinarily different from previous and future abolition outlets? To see the divergence, we must look into the past at the various emancipation tabloids, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* as examples[21]. Where the roads split is in the elements they possess. One pamphlet may speak of numbers, while a story may call forth emotions, both in conquest to persuade the people. But *The Liberator*, quite masterfully, called forth both mind and soul, tempting the brain and the heart with its poems and tales, facts and counter-facts[22]. Granted, often there were extractions from the very texts mentioned above and more, but it cannot be denied that *The Liberator* left nothing untouched in its efforts, and therefore made one of, if not the largest impact of all.

The collision between slaveholders and abolitionists, North and South, alleged moral and evil, was sending fissures throughout the United States. The North was now standing loyal behind the government and side-by-side with the abolitionists. Putting their views ahead of their country, the South finally abandoned President Lincoln and the country itself, sparking a twisted, deadly conflict known today as

the Civil War[23]. William Lloyd Garrison once said: “Of all men living, our slaves have the best reason to assert their rights by violent means”[24]. Yet he also called for peace and cooperation above all else. As previously stated, the surplus of tension led to inevitable conflict... and Garrison helped to spark it[25]. This is not to say he intended for thousands of lives to be taken for his cause, the slaves among them, but he did choose and aim to inflame the nation, to prompt action[26]. He was the spark that started the fire, so to speak. During this period of time his son joined the fight through the army, and likewise, his father took to his pen and printing press, just as he had in years previous, and continued to fulfill his role in abolition to the extreme.

It was 1865. After everything Garrison and other abolitionists and allies had put into their cause, the 13th Amendment, freeing each and every slave indefinitely, had finally been signed by Mr. Lincoln[27]. It was the climax, the moment *The Liberator* had hoped, prayed, and worked towards for decades. “[A freed slave] looked at Garrison and said, ‘Now sir, through your labors and those of your friends, [my children] are mine’...Garrison was then lifted on the shoulders of the congregation and paraded through the streets.”[28] *The Liberator* had changed the United States, and the lives of millions through its astounding efforts.

159 years later, 145 years after his death, William Lloyd Garrison is still a hero among us. Hundreds of citizens of Boston walk past his memorial statue every single day, inscribed with his famous letter To the Public[29] (see Appendix D) but his legacy goes far beyond that. *The Liberator* abolished slavery, an enormous leap in the civil rights movement,

yet it also took the steps that pushed for equal rights, introducing ideas we carry on and fight for today, including equal access to education among other topics[30]. It cannot go unaccounted for that Garrison also made perhaps not as large, yet all the same prominent, impacts in women’s rights, temperance, and more, some of which made their way into *The Liberator*[31]. It also pioneered the fierce journalism that we see in tabloids such as *Learning for Justice*[32]. In this way, *The Liberator’s* spirit is still fighting today, still advocating with its passionate voice. It never stopped writing, and its legacy will, likewise, never cease to leave an echo on society as we know it today.

For appendices, bibliography, and footnotes, scan the QR code or go to: <https://tinyurl.com/TheyNeverStoppedWriting>

BIRDSONG

EMMA O'BRIEN

The birds in the trees chirp with their bird-song, loud and bright. The green of the trees come alive with the beauty of the birds in their nests. Feathers drift down like dandelion seeds as birds swoop towards the ground, color and life splashing everywhere they stroke. The fresh air blows with a breezy zephyr, light, and free.

The birds fly easily, their feathers a graceful presence in the sky. Lighthearted and lithe, they create a cacophony of beautiful melodies, melancholy and sweet. I reach one outstretched finger to the sky. The wind left behind by the strong, able wings of the birds flits across my hand, flighty and quick. I smile, knowing that the birds love me, just as I love them.

"Hey, Calla!" somebody shouts from across the park, their voice an interruption from the song of the birds. I lower my hand and set my gaze forward, the lifted corners of my mouth lingering in the last remains of a smile.

Aster catches up to me after a heartbeat. I'm still gazing at the birds when he appears next to me. "Hey," he repeats, "I figured I'd find you here."

I nod silently, my lips pressed into a small smile, as always. For this, my mother calls me the silent flower. I've only spoken twice in my life.

Once, when my little sister, Iris, was born. And second, when my father was Banished.

I glance at the tall, metal walls that skirt along the horizon. They are heavy, grounded—the opposite of the lithe creatures I watch so intently. My father is out there somewhere, punished for his crimes. He was a teacher, the

kind that taught me how to think for myself. I shouldn't think, not according to the others.

Not according to anyone.

I don't have time to pray for my father's health and happiness, because Aster is still smiling at me with his large green eyes, tinged olive like a tree in August, when it's hot and dry. I give him another fleeting smile, before gazing back at the birds as they take off. They can fly over the wall. They can watch over my dear father.

He was Banished last year, in the dead of winter. I can still remember the gathering in this very park, the sound of many voices as one, proclaiming his demise. None of them had their own opinions; they just leaned on each other for approval. Now, the hollow shells of humans deny their part in that terrible day to my apathetic mother. Behind her back, they talk scornfully of the dangers my father told me, the dangers of a world where people were motivated to move the world.

Aster's bright green eyes search mine, which are a flat gray. I inherited them from my father, along with his strawberry-blond hair. There's something about Aster's gaze that makes me think he knows everything I'm thinking, and everything I hide from the world.

Nobody else cares about the wall or what lies beyond. Nobody cares about the birds or what they've seen. Only I do—and my father.

Aster grabs my hand without asking and pulls me closer to him. He's been trying to talk to me for months now. Ever since that first spring without my father, since the winter when he tried to defend my father for me.

“Calla,” he repeats, this time more quietly. I stare at him with actual interest for the first time, moving a little closer so that I don’t miss what he’s going to say.

“You don’t need to speak. I know you don’t.” I glance at the grass, fresh, a deep emerald. “But I need you to know something.” He takes a deep breath. “I found a way to get past the wall.”

I perk up instantly, coming to life after that long, endless winter, the one that never ended once my father left. My eyes dart to the shadowed wall with longing, then back at him. There’s a plea in my eyes that doesn’t need to be spoken.

But even so, he shakes his head. “No. Not now. It’s not safe.”

I ignore him and turn away, starting down the road that leads to the wall. All of them lead to the wall eventually. When in a birdcage, there is only so far you can go before hitting the cold, unforgiving metal of the bars that contain you.

When I get to that point, I lean against the metal, the large bolts that hold it together imprinting their poisonous shapes into the shoulder blades of my back. Aster is right behind me, easily matching my pace. His green eyes are stern and unreadable.

“No.” His voice is steady, final. I just nod fiercely, feeling the burning tears in my eyes as I think that I might be close to my father again.

Suddenly, I hear a horrible creaking sound, loud enough that it reverberates in my bones and rattles my soul. A sudden, creeping shadow looms over my head. I turn to Aster, but I cannot see his eyes anymore. The darkness has enveloped both of us.

Eventually, my gaze drifts upward. The

movement is slow, filled with dread.

There has never been darkness like this before. The clouds couldn’t match the deathlike shroud swallowing the whole of the town. The wall is growing taller, then folding in on itself, the hinges of the wall making a screeching noise.

The birds that I watched so closely now erupt in desperate flames, their colorful feathers bursting in unison towards the last remnants of the fractured sky outside of the wall. The sudden thunder of wings is like a heartbeat, steadying me as I realize that they’ll be able to fly free—if they make it in time.

Then, like a coffin closing shut, the wall closes in with one last deafening roar, and the world is engulfed in the suffocating darkness of the world. The birds, denied their freedom, shriek their defiance. Defiance will do nothing to save them, though.

I can’t breathe. I can’t feel anything. The world is suddenly so dark that there are no other adjectives to describe it.

It’s just dark. So, so dark.

The sudden cold that comes with the absence of the sun’s cheerful gaze surrounds me, but my fingers are lost and they cannot find the rest of my body. I’m turning numb when a hand tentatively touches my shoulder. I scream, and the echo of the sound clashes with the eerily hollow sounds of the birds as their final hopes are slowly fading away into silent submission.

“It’s just me,” Aster says. His voice is empty without the sight of his green eyes there to accompany his words. Still, I sigh in relief. My mind cannot—will not—process what just happened. All that there is, all that my life ever has been, is this darkness, the absence of any

and all light. And the sound of Aster's voice, the only thing that can remind me that I'm not alone.

"Will you follow me?" he asks. The calm demeanor radiating from him is the only thing that prompts me to find his hand blindly and grip it. The fluttery feeling stirring inside my erratically beating heart heightens. I try not to think about the birds, who have fallen silent. Only their echoes remain.

It feels as if we're walking for hours. The cold is creeping, sneaking, leaching into my heart and turning my blood to ice in my veins. The world has fallen silent, and I cannot hear anything.

Then we come to a gradual stop. I can hear him fumbling around in the dark, and the hollow thud of his fingertips against the cold metal wall. Then, a creak that echoes throughout the cavernous cage resonates inside me, and a blindingly bright light begins to filter in through a small hole.

"Come on," Aster says, and I follow him, squeezing through the hole, which is not much larger than my shoulders. The hole swings shut the moment we get out, but I don't even notice it. The only thing I can think of is the blinding light, burning me, lighting me aflame.

I wait, my eyes shut tight, until I realize that I'm not burned. When I slowly open my eyes, I cannot believe what I see.

A field of flowers, the sun illuminating the intricate details as birds soar through the colors. I turn back towards the wall, its metal bolts holding together the monster we escaped from.

It takes me a long time to find my voice. "Why?" I croak.

Aster follows my gaze, understanding the question. His green eyes are thoughtful. "To

grow, you must think for yourself," he says.

"They wanted nobody to think as an individual. They thought closing off the world would achieve that goal."

I think of the dying cries of the birds.

There is only birdsong in this field.

So we must start again. *I* must start again.

END OF THE BEGINNING

ZUMRA SAHIN

I lay on the grass, trying to live life one more time until freedom is stripped away from me. The grass pokes me with its sharp edges, but in some way, comforts me. I enjoy these last moments of the cold, green grass before I am drafted away into an undying war.

We have travelled through the meadows and rivers, through creeks and forests, and we've made it to our destination in the span of a few days. I've been training everyday for this moment; but knowing this still doesn't make me less anxious. I load my gun, and prepare myself for the horrors and the bloodshed I will experience. I hesitate to walk forth, knowing my fate is sealed if done, but my country needs me.

I never anticipated that my demise would come for me this soon, but here I am. I've lost sight of my squad, and I've been hiding behind a tree. The screams and cries of my comrades being shot haunts me. "I couldn't do anything to save them," I keep reassuring myself--but knowing if I had fired a second before they could, things wouldn't have to happen like they did. I work up the courage to raise my gun and aim towards the shadows. I fire, praying I will hit something--anything, but nothing happens. Now all the distinct noises of shooting and screams have all turned silent. The silence is supposed to give me a sense of relief, but instead disturbs me, knowing that this is only the calm before the storm. I make it back to camp and reunite with my squadmates.

I see my enemy. I look him in the eye. He does the same. At that moment, our eyes meet one another. His eyes are not one's filled with determination and courage, but one's filled with worry and fear. I can't bring myself to raise my gun. He's young, like me. We stare at each other, taking in our facial features and how we look before another shot in the air shakes us both. From behind me, a voice barely audible speaks up. "We have to go," a soldier beside me says, his voice uneasy and tense, because he knows what will happen if we stay any longer. He runs ahead, and I stumble behind him, trying to keep up. The ground beneath me shakes as bombs burst in mid air, and shots are fired, and people are dying, and I have no time to live, and the sky is falling, and the screams are getting louder and louder. I want to see my mom. I want to see my dad. I want to see my little brother. I want us to be reunited again. I want to spend more time with them before I depart. Why did this have to happen to me? Why did they have to take me away from them? As I try to run farther away from all the chaos and explosions, my legs betray me. There I am, in the middle of a field, in the wide open. I don't have the energy to carry myself to safety. I know what's going to happen, and I accept my fate. A bullet flies past me, just barely grazing my ear. This gives me enough courage to try and look for something I can get out of sight from the never ending bullets flying towards me. A tree catches my eye, and I summon the energy to pick myself up once more, and run faster than I ever have before to this tree.

I've been hit. I've.. been hit? I've always known that this was bound to happen, but to me? I wince as the pain inside my leg worsens by the minute. I'm sure I'll just bleed out here, until I see a squad walking towards me. A wave of hope washes over me, as I try to call out as loud as I possibly can- which results in more of a whisper than a cry for help, but it grabs one of their attention. The wave of hope I had once felt turns into a tide pool of dread as I realize that's the enemy. Deciding not to finish the job, they bring me back to their ship instead.

I take one more glance at the stars before I am stuffed into a van with other men of my kind. The smell is foul, and reeks of vomit, blood, and sweat. Days pass, and I suffer through the inhumane treatment served to us by the enemy. I am then involuntarily put into a line, where they shave my head, and put shackles on my hands and feet.

For days on end, I am not fed. I do not sleep. I am tortured. I'm left here to rot like a piece of fruit that no one dares to touch. The bright purple bruises on my leg feel like pins on my skin, sinking deeper and deeper in until there's nothing left of my leg to consume. They tell me to tell them what I know. I know that if I refuse, I will be beaten until my body's numb as if my flesh and bones are dead. If I do, I will be a traitor to my nation. My nation is my whole world. And because of this, I cannot leak the information given to me with great confidence that I will never tell another soul not included in these plans. I know what I have to do, and what I have to do is accept the desti-

ny that's been established for me.

I sit in my cell, aware of what I need to do in order to end all of this suffering. I reach into my shoe, and pull out a pocket knife passed down to me by my father. My finger runs along the letter indents embedded into the knife, and a sense of comfort comes over me as I relive the moment when I was first gifted this knife. The silver on the knife gleams with a glow not even the sun could recreate, and I can feel an ocean of tears slowly descend my eyes onto the cold, hard floor. The sleek, compact knife presses against my throat, and for a minute, I wonder if this is really how it's going to end. It can't end like this, right? What if I'm saved? Snapping myself out of my delusions, I remember what I must do.

Mom,
I'm sorry.

LET IT GO

LUCY OUMET

Making a mistake is something that I wish I had let myself do a year ago. A year ago when there was no time after school and my work piled into a mountain. A year ago when I had to be my best at everything I did. When if I did make a mistake - I wasn't okay with it. I had to push myself harder. When whenever I closed my eyes I remembered all that I had to do, and I became stressed. I wish I had known then what I know now: that a mistake is not meant to get us down, and if we do make one, everything will be okay.

Not so long ago, I had a concert; a concert where each of the ten of us had to sing a solo - all by ourselves. I was going third to last, and - to be honest - I wasn't that scared. I had performed numerous other times before and I knew that if I stayed confident, everything would be okay. Soon, it was my turn to sing and as I closed my eyes, I told myself that I could do it. Eventually, the piano started and I opened my eyes just as I sang the first note. It rang out, strong and true, and I slowly gained more confidence as the song continued, the lyrics and notes flowing out of my mouth like a river. I was so close to my favorite part and I was about to belt it out, when I faltered. I had sung the wrong lyrics. Heat crept up my face, and as I looked around frantically, time slowed. Embarrassment and failure hit me right in the gut. I muttered words even I couldn't hear, I wanted to start over. My heart stopped as I scanned the audience, all those eyes waiting, expecting something that I could not give. The words crumbled and dried in my throat, only seconds had passed but I felt as though hours had gone by. Then my ears finally listened, the piano was still plunking note after note; I took a shaky breath, then another,

and another, then one more and I started to sing again.

I didn't realize it then, but for the next few days, I think I finally started to loosen up. I was still stressed and finding myself too tired to finish some homework, but as I heard people saying they had barely noticed my mistake, and that I had done a great job, and even though I hadn't believed them at the time, their words stuck with me and I realized that it wasn't that big of a deal. Looking back it was probably my mom who helped me realize this; she was the one who told me that it's okay not to be amazing at everything, that's just a part of life.

Now, I am thirteen years old and even though there are a lot of things I don't know, I do know that a mistake is not something you can avoid, because every step you take, every choice you make will always be some sort of mistake in a way. But those mistakes are the things that form you. They help you grow and fit those shoes you never thought you would. But most importantly? A mistake should not stop you, but inspire you to try and fit those next shoes, to climb even higher, and to keep going, to keep learning until you feel accomplished. Even then, you can still improve upon yourself and your knowledge, because every time you make a mistake, you just learn that much more. Take the time to let yourself go; to just be you. To "let it go", as a certain princess once sang. Someone once told me to "stand in my own power" and so that's what I'm going to do and that's what I'm telling you right now, because it's what I tell myself.

I believe that a mistake is not something that should tear you down, but it should build you up and make you stronger, because the only way to fly is to learn how to fall...and get right back up again.

I'M HOLDING ON TO GRAVITY BEFORE SLEEP CAN CLAIM

MY SOUL

SOPHIA MAKSYMUK

I'm holding on to gravity before sleep can claim my soul.
To postpone the near oblivion, my egocentric goal,
Amending daybreak thoughtlessness, indulging in my fears,
Feeling the unfamiliarity of the sought-after tears,
Suddenly unable to evade the coming unconsciousness,
My last lamenting snuffle, confirming the hypothesis,
The taste of warmth flies away, my willful ignorance ensues,
Gravity, the tether clutching me to earth, discontinues,
Why did I insist to stay? I say, soaring record high,
What was I ever crying about? Before I learned to fly?
I'm rejecting gravity as sleep maintains my sorry soul,
And as the sun begins to blaze, I realize I was never whole.

I'm a sinking piece of stone, perpetually drowning,
Neglecting simple joys, Laws of Physics just confining,
Overworking to evade my depressing monologue,
Is my story destined to have a subdued epilogue?
How will I ever be content, when I will never fly?
Will I ever be satisfied, if I'll never know the sky?
I lift the pen and begin to write, unwilling to stay still,
Distractions and escapism, unanimated at-will,
Eventually susceptible to the exhaustion I detest,
What inefficient use of time it is, the necessary rest,
I'm rejecting gravity as sleep maintains my sorry soul,
But as I'm whisked away, I'm certain this was never my goal.

I'm uninspired, discontented, of my mundane existence,
I overdo my schoolwork, my only form of sad resistance,
Is there a purpose to my days? When will I ever know?
Has Lechesis woven my destiny; or will I learn to sew?
The Fates are screaming, and so am I; have I no control?
I want to live, to fly, and play more than just my humble role,
Why can't this world be mystical, or are we all unsuited?
Can't life be something magical, or am I just deluded?
Can gravity be rejected? Or must I learn from Icarus:
That one should live quietly and revel in their ignorance?
And so I'm rejecting gravity as sleep maintains my sorry soul,

RAIN'S GRACE

BEATRICE GLOVER

Talked sweetly to its clouds,
Listened to the sun,
Poured on the burning Earth,
Gave me a touch to my soul.

Nothing but the rain,
Excited the snow,
Danced with the sky,
Laughed with the dirt,
Gave me a beam of light.

Nothing but the rain,
Avoided by umbrellas,
Frightened by thunder,
Betrayed by the sun,
I smiled at the rain,
I gave a touch to its soul,
I gave it a beam of light,
And showed it the map of my heart.

Nothing but the rain,
Patted my window softly,
Gifted the rivers water,
Embraced the grass,
Tasted the scent of the cool air,
Gave me a smile.

Nothing but the rain,
Talked sweetly to its clouds,
Listened to the sun,
Poured on the burning Earth,
Gave me a touch to my soul.

Nothing but the rain,
Excited the snow,
Danced with the sky,
Laughed with the dirt,
Gave me a beam of light.

Nothing but the rain,
Avoided by umbrellas,
Frightened by thunder,
Betrayed by the sun,
I smiled at the rain,
I gave a touch to its soul,
I gave it a beam of light,
And showed it the map of my heart.

GRADE 9



GOLDEN HOUR IN THE CITY

MA'AYAN HAREL-SIBELMAN

ENEMY

AVAH TERRACIANO

At 8:00 A.M, the city street is busy. Circular bulbs extend over the road, and the sidewalks are crowded with people. Signs hang down from awnings and women push babies in strollers.

Yosuke smiles at his younger sister as she skips down the road. Her hair bounces at her chin as she gambols, eyes brimming with life. “Careful, Mei. Don’t fall into the street.”

Mei huffs indignantly, lip in a pout. “I won’t.”

“You’ll get trampled.”

In response, the girl sticks her tongue out and turns around before her brother can do the same. She trots forward, unwilling to heed her brother’s advice. The schoolchildren continue like this; Mei rushing ahead, running every few seconds and cheerily greeting neighbors; Yosuke peering curiously into shop windows.

Inside, shiny toys peek through the glass. Menko cards and ohajiki line the shelves, along with spinning tops. They are colorful and inviting, but their prices are not.

“Akari is bringing koma to school today,” Mei says cheerily, seemingly forgetting her previous quarrel with her brother. She points towards the wooden top in the window. “She made them at home, with her mother.”

Yosuke nods, gazing at the polished toys in the window once more before moving on. Hardly anyone could afford such things store-bought.

They amble towards their school, weaving through streets in a well-worn routine. People on bicycles speed past them in either direction.

“Mite!” Mei says, head upturned towards the sky. Her voice shimmers with childlike curiosity. “Look! An enemy plane!”

Yosuke turns to his sister, who has a hand fanned over her forehead to keep the sun from her eyes. He has seen the planes before; they would fly over their head and disappear past the buildings to one city or another. The war is no secret to the children of Japan.

Yosuke cranes his head up to look as the clock hits 8:15.

Above, a man is piloting, prepared to do the unthinkable. He is ready.

The boy squints. The sky turns blinding white.

The world is on fire.

Yosuke squeezes his eyes shut as he is launched to the ground, the air around him ablaze. The nearby store windows shatter into millions of tiny shards.

At that moment, as pain tears through his skin, Yosuke only has room for two clear thoughts.

The first: The plane. He thinks about it desperately, gasping for air and inhaling a thick layer of ash. It must have dropped a bomb right on our heads.

His second thought, a bit belated but significantly more panicked: Mei.

“Mei?” Yosuke coughs, the glass which coats the ground cutting into his hands and knees. His clothes are burned and torn. His skin feels as if it were ignited by the sun itself.

He pulls himself to his feet, stumbling into a large piece of debris. He scans the ground

around him, which is painted with ash. In horror, he realises that the ground is also painted with people. Their colors are dulled by the grey grime that coats the landscape, but their blood is the vibrant foreground to the grotesque victory painting.

He realizes then that the bomb may as well have not been on their heads; it was everywhere, for miles and miles. It turned everything to ash.

Yosuke slides to his knees. He catches sight of Mei, sprawled out on the ground, and gasps. He crawls towards his unconscious sister, face cut with glass and eyelashes crusted with soot.

“Mei!” He wraps his arms around her, weakly lifting her body and hugging her to his chest.

Near him, a woman cries. A man collapses to the ground.

“Open your eyes,” Yosuke rasps. Mei does not open her eyes. She lies limp in his arms. The silence is thick and watery. The boy is swimming in it, carrying the little girl with him. He treads the ocean of devastation as it claws at his throat and floods his lungs.

At some point, sitting there surrounded and alone, Yosuke makes a decision. He struggles to his feet. He hauls his sister into his arms, legs shaking, and begins to walk. He stumbles along, sister heavy in his grasp, looking for any sign of a path. There is no road or buildings; it is all rubble and ash and bodies. He coughs, his throat parched and sore.

“We’re going home, Mei,” he whispers.

The words tremble in the air. He cups them in the palms of his hands, clutching them to his chest, for fear that they might shrivel and burn too. Home, home, home. We are going

home.

He stumbles.

The girl’s head lolls in his arms.

The sky is covered by a huge, mushroom-shaped cloud. It looms. It is watching them, watching and grinning.

Yosuke looks up to face it. It is brighter than life and larger than death. ‘Me?’ Yosuke asks the shrouded sky. ‘Am I your enemy? Is it me?’

The sky does not respond. It is hot and ruthless. The boy’s shaking legs give way beneath him, and he collapses onto the rubble. He holds a limp Mei to his chest. Her eyes are dry and blank.

‘Am I your enemy?’

He screams the words through ashy lips. They echo.

He is a ten-year-old boy named Yosuke. He is a brother and a son. He is a number in your textbook. 135,000 casualties, it says.

When he finally succumbs to exhaustion and collapses, his sister cradled in his arms, he will be only one of many.

Somewhere an ocean away, a man with circular glasses speaks to his people. He tells them of their victory. He tells them of the strength of their destruction.

The radio spits static. ‘A short time ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima and destroyed its usefulness to the enemy,’ the man announces. In three days, this will mean victory.

In Japan, a young boy dies with his sister still in his arms. There are no soldiers in sight.

Enemy, indeed

POKER FACE

MADELYN VISSER

“Show me your poker face,” my grandfather’s clear green eyes met mine over the floral patterned coffee table. I scrunched up my face and attempted a somber, blank look, but my excitement betrayed me and a smile escaped my lips.

Papi shook his head and demonstrated: he set his lips into a line and let his features set into an unwavering stance as he looked down at his hands. He brought his gaze back to mine, and as he did so, his eyes showed a spark of the same excitement that I felt before it fell off of his face as quickly as it had arrived.

“Alright,” he said, his attention turned to the deck of cards he was shuffling. “You know the rules?” he asked. I nodded my head in response and rubbed a poker chip between my fingers, the nerves making their way into my system even though we weren’t playing for anything other than bragging rights.

Plunk. The cards stacked up on either side of the table until there were five in each pile. I snatched them into my hands, but Papi slowly and casually reached onto the surface and picked them up gently. My eyes raked over the fan of suits that I held, and a pulse began to sound in my chest. This is it.

For two hours, Papi had taught me all of the ins and outs of the game that he loved so much. I knew how my cards were supposed to turn out when I finally laid them down, and exactly how to act so as to not give my position away. Now, I was sure I was ready to play a game without any advice or assistance from the expert.

I analyzed my subpar situation - a pair of fours, a queen, a ten, and a three. I snuck a glance at Papi over the top of my cards to see his face as stone-cold and solid as a rock. I adjusted mine to make sure I didn’t clue him into anything - I was in no position to be at a disadvantage with the cards that I was holding.

I took a breath and remembered one of his lessons: “Just because the cards don’t turn out nice in the beginning doesn’t mean you can’t get something better.” He glanced down at his own hand before drawing his gaze back up to mine. “And just because your cards aren’t great doesn’t mean that mine are any better.” In those few words, Papi summed up the stakes that are associated with this game, and the way that there is no control over the outcome. This wasn’t just a reminder that this game could turn in my favor - it also spoke of chances that could turn my hand into a losing one.

I tossed my chips in between us. “Two,” I announced. Papi lowered his cards and placed two of his own into the pile. “I see your two,” he said as he picked up a third chip, “and I raise it one more.” Not wanting to show my lack of confidence and the nerves battling for space in my chest, I chose another chip and added it to the middle. I searched Papi’s face for surprise or fear; anything to give away his position, but if he had a winning hand, he didn’t grace me with so much as a gleam in his eyes.

“I’ll take two cards,” I told Papi. He slid his cards onto the table and grabbed the deck, allowing his poker face to fall as he did. He

offered me a small smile, which I took as encouragement and validation that my poker face wasn't too tell-tale. I can do this.

I placed my dead cards - the ten and queen - next to my small stack of chips and grabbed my new ones - an ace, and a three. Having two pairs to boast, I had to remind myself to keep my eyes down and my lips steady, remembering that being too confident can cost the game.

"You gotta keep a low profile!" Papi exclaimed during a practice round, after I pushed every last one of my chips into the center of the table. "Nobody's going to match your bet if they think you've already won. You have to play it cool."

"I'll take two," Papi declared, plucking a couple cards off of the top of the deck and returning them to join his others. Again, I searched his face for a glimpse of disappointment, a weakness that could give me the confidence to win the game, but an emotion I knew I would not find - no matter the cards in your hand, Papi had always taught me to strike fear into anyone I was facing- "Never let them see you falter," he had remarked.

As it was my turn to place my chips in the center, I quickly went over my options, torn between grabbing only a couple chips to try to make him comfortable enough to do the same, or going for the kill. I settled for placing three chips in the steadily growing pile and allowing myself to sneak a look at Papi as he made his decision. He gathered his cards into a stack with one hand while he drew four chips out of his winnings, his face meeting mine once more.

What does he have? I asked myself. The question took hold of me as my hand wavered over my pile. He could be bluffing. I lowered my fingers and grasped a chip. "Don't doubt

yourself," my grandfather's voice came to mind. "And if you do, certainly don't let them know it." My hand closed around a second chip and hit the table. "All in," I said, my voice as definite and sure as Papi's features.

Papi matched the amount of chips I had put in and laid down his hand, one card at a time.

King.

King.

Six.

Ten.

I held my breath, the resoluteness and stakes of my bet regaining their hold on my heart the longer the card remained in my grandfather's hand, his face still resembling the beginning of the game. It's not over yet, I reminded myself.

"Four," Papi dictated his last card before displaying it on the table, and a wave of relief hit me. But I didn't let it show. Even though I knew what was next, I was going to hold my poker face until all the cards were on the table and he could see the outcome for himself.

"Two pairs," I spoke, not a hint of excitement or exhilaration making its way into my tone, the threes, fours, and ace finally resting on the table and gazing up at the ceiling in full view of Papi.

A spark crept into my grandfather's eyes; maybe he could see a part of me in him as I swept the chips onto my side of the table.

"You got me," he said, and maybe it was the way that my lungs swelled with the taste of relief at the outcome, or maybe the way that Papi looked at me, torn between defeat at his loss or pride at my success, but I tore my poker face apart with the force of the smile that broke over my lips and the light that shone in my eyes.

THE DAY SHE FELL

MARIELA RESTO

I will go to hell most likely i deserve to be there I was
An evil me
Her name was pretty like my mother. Good to look at. Knew her sick
from the disease that would not go bunched under the yellow
Sheets, bones gone limp
Her head thrown back like a thirsty lady.
Hard to imagine her strong.

There was no evil in her No wicked
One day the
Day that gray

The day she fell Maybe god was busy.
Or maybe she fell very hard from a high
step stool is true.
They pick anyone, just anyone . Like
Her

You get used to the sick and sickness, if it is there too long.
This is how it was with her Maybe this is why we chose her.
It was a game, that's all

It was a
Game
I don't know why we picked her. Maybe we were bored that day.
She listened to our stories. Always asked us to come back.
Second-floor rear building where
Sunlight never came, what did it matter? Was blind by then. She never saw the
Ugly walls
Filled with
A little piece of us as if she had
Fallen into a well.

ECHOES OF A FORGOTTEN TRUTH

MA'AYAN HAREL-SIBELMAN

Every morning, I wake up in the same sterile room, the walls too white, almost blinding. They feel alive—like if I stare too long, they'll close in on me, swallowing me whole. The mirror across from my bed is a cruel thing. I don't look into it. I'm afraid of what I might see.

The routine never changes: nurses in pale blue scrubs, moving with mechanical precision, their gestures so smooth it's like they've rehearsed them a thousand times. The doctors, with their vacant eyes, never meet mine. I remember when one of them cleared his throat, glancing at the chart with a kind of practiced indifference. "Well, it's not like we're not trying, you know," he says, his voice flat and distant, as though explaining the obvious. "These things take time. We don't expect you to understand." He pauses, his fingers drumming the edge of the desk. "But we're doing everything we can... for your benefit." Their voices are soft, condescending—like I'm a child, or worse, a fragile thing who won't understand. But I do. I understand.

Each day, they give me the pill. White, small, unmarked. They never tell me what it is. They say it's for my health, that it will help me get better. But I don't feel better. I feel nothing.

I feel like I'm fading—like I'm slowly dissolving into the air around me. The edges of my thoughts blur, and I drift into a fog. And every time I try to break through, the pill is there, like clockwork, waiting. I take it, and everything falls silent. Everything vanishes. I try to remember anything my birthday, my friends, but everything is gone, my mind is blank.

The minutes fold into hours, the days melt into weeks, and I can't tell if it's been a moment or an eternity since I arrived. Time is meaningless now. There's a window in the hallway that I pass every day, and sometimes, just sometimes, I catch a glimpse of the outside world. The sky is always the same—gray, like the walls, like the air. But I don't know what lies beyond it. I can't remember.

I don't even know why I'm here. That's the worst part. There was something—something important. A memory, maybe. I knew something, once. But it slips away, every time I try to grasp it, like water through my fingers. I know I wasn't supposed to be here. I wasn't sick. I wasn't crazy. I was just... different. But no one believes me.

Before the sterile walls and endless tests, I remember that morning. I sat at the kitchen table, my coffee cold, staring at the steam rising in thin curls. My mother's voice cut through the quiet. "Are you okay? You haven't been yourself lately."

I didn't answer. What was there to say? That every breath felt like a struggle?

"I'm fine," I muttered, though I wasn't. Her worried gaze lingered, but she didn't press. Then, the knock at the door—a sharp interruption. The ambulance arrived, and everything after became a blur.

Dr. Linton had leaned over me, clipboard in hand, his smile tight, eyes never meeting mine. "You'll be fine," he'd said, but I could hear the condescension beneath the words, the unspoken, "We know better than you." And then,

the journey began—toward this hospital, this room, where nothing ever quite made sense.

The other patients are just as lost as I am. There's a woman in the corner of the common room who hums softly to herself, rocking back and forth. Her eyes are wide, like she knows something I don't. She whispers sometimes, but I can never make out the words. "They're coming to get us, they're all here to come take us away from this terrible place to a place of happiness or sorrow or Maybe there's nothing there, just a blank void where we sit there and let it consume us". And there's a man who insists he's a king, and a girl who calls herself a bird. They're trapped in their own worlds, just like me. I wonder sometimes if they're lost because of the same reason I am.

But I can't remember why.

I start to feel it again—the flashes. They're faint at first, like sparks in the dark. Something is pulling at the edges of my mind. A door. A secret. I found something once—something I shouldn't have seen. The flash is brief, but it's enough to make me shudder. It's always there, just out of reach. When I try to hold onto it, it fades. I try to remember, but the more I try, the more it slips away, like sand between my fingers.

I ask the doctor about it—the one with the glasses who always scribbles on his notepad. He's the one who sits across from me in those cold, sterile rooms. "I think I remember something," I utter, my voice trembling. "I think I remember why I'm here."

His eyes flicker. For a moment, they soften. His smile is tight, forced. "What do you remember?" he asks, his voice too gentle, like he's afraid I'll break if he speaks too loudly.

"I remember... I was looking for something. Something important." I clutch the edge of the table, my fingers digging into the wood. "But I can't remember what it was."

He nods, scribbling something down. "That's good. We're making progress." He slides the pill across the table.

I take it. It's easier that way.

Days pass. The flashes get weaker. I start to hear whispers in the halls. Not from the other patients—their voices are hollow, like they're speaking through water. These whispers are different. They're mine. My own voice, deep inside my head. "You were close," it says. "You were so close. You almost found it. Why did you stop?"

The pill is always there, waiting. Each time I swallow it, my thoughts fade into nothing. The memory that was once so close—so close—dissolves, leaving only the quiet, empty space behind.

The nurses are checking on me more often now. Their eyes are full of pity, as if they see me as fragile. Like something that's broken. But I'm not broken. I'm just... confused. I try to tell them that, but my words fall flat, like stones sinking into a deep, silent sea.

And then I hear it again. These whispers. My voice, deep inside my head, echoing with a kind of desperation.

"You were close. You were so close. Why did you stop?"

I try to scream, but my mouth is too dry. There's nothing left to say.

The next day, I sat in the common room again. The woman who hums. The man who claims to be a king. The girl who thinks she's a bird. They stare at me with empty eyes. I wonder if they hear the same whispers I do. I

wonder if they know what I'm forgetting, what I almost found.

I feel it slipping away now, faster than ever. I can't hold on anymore. And then, one day, it happens. The thing I've been trying to avoid. The thing I've been fighting to forget. The door. The secret.

I remember now, clearer than ever before. There was a door. A door I wasn't supposed to open. A place I wasn't supposed to go. But I went anyway. And I saw it. I saw everything.

The truth. The truth that no one was ever supposed to know. But just as the full weight of it presses down on me, drowning me in horror, the nurse is there, standing over me with the pill in her hand.

I take it.

I forget.

I wake up again. The same room. The same sterile walls. The same blank faces. The same hollow routine. I don't remember the secret. I don't remember why I'm here. I don't remember...anything.

But the whispers never stop. They're there, always. My voice, repeating the same words: "You were close. You were so close. Why did you stop?"

And it dawns on me, with a terrible, sinking certainty—I am trapped.

There's no escape. There never was. I wasn't lost. I was never lost. I was never meant to remember. I was never meant to leave.

I've always been here. And I will always be here.

And all I have left is the pill. The fog. The whispers.

I am lost. And I will never be found.

THE FACES BEHIND SCIENCE:

HUMAN INTERVENTION IN HEALTHCARE

AKITHMI KOTHTHIGODA

Imagine if one of the most brilliant minds of our age had been restrained by a progressive disease. Stephen Hawking, diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) at the age of 21, was told he had only a few years to live. Yet, thanks to the dedication of medical professionals, he defied those odds, living for decades and reshaping our understanding of the universe. However, the doctors who cared for him did more than merely extend his life; they preserved his ability to communicate, to inspire, and to challenge the boundaries of human knowledge. Medicine then, is more than science, it is the art of resilience, compassion, and unwavering support offered to those in their most vulnerable moments.

Beyond medical treatment, healthcare professionals provide emotional support that can be just as vital as the prescriptions they write. Is it the medication alone that facilitates recovery, or is it the reassuring presence of a compassionate physician? The influence of medical experts extends far beyond clinical knowledge; they offer guidance on how to navigate life's greatest struggles. As Hippocrates wisely noted, "Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity." This sentiment remains as relevant today as it was millennia ago. The healing process is not just about curing ailments, it is about restoring hope, dignity, and the will to fight.

Across cultures, the role of medicine extends beyond the realm of science into something deeply human. Traditional Chinese medicine,

for example, emphasizes the harmony between the body and mind, treating ailments holistically rather than in isolation. Similarly, Indigenous healing practices intertwine physical recovery with spiritual and communal well-being, reinforcing the idea that health is not just about eradicating disease but about achieving balance. In many societies, doctors are not only seen as healers but as integral parts of their communities, offering comfort and wisdom alongside their treatments. These diverse approaches highlight a universal truth: medicine is not merely about treatment, it is about human connection. Just as Stephen Hawking's physicians allowed him to continue his work, doctors around the world help their patients live not just longer, but fuller lives.

As medicine advances, so does the technology that supports it. Telemedicine, artificial intelligence, and robotic surgeries have revolutionized healthcare, making medical services more accessible than ever before. According to a 2025 report from the World Health Organization, telemedicine usage has increased by over 80% globally since the COVID-19 pandemic, bridging critical healthcare gaps. However, while these advancements offer efficiency and accessibility, they also raise concerns about the diminishing human connection between doctors and patients. A virtual consultation lacks the warmth of a physical presence, and no machine can replicate the comfort of a reassuring touch or a heartfelt conversation. As the writer Anatole Broyard once said, "In every physician, there is both a scientist and a

humanist.” If a mother receives a devastating diagnosis for her child, it is not a robotic interface she seeks, it is the human presence of a doctor who can offer comfort and guidance. The challenge moving forward is not just implementing new technologies but ensuring that they enhance rather than replace the empathy that defines patient care.

The need to preserve the human touch in medicine is more urgent than ever. Some argue that medicine is a science governed by data, diagnostics, and innovation rather than emotions. But in moments of crisis, patients do not yearn for a machine’s precision as much as they crave a doctor’s reassurance. A robotic surgeon may perform a flawless procedure, but it cannot offer words of comfort before a life-changing operation. A telehealth consultation may provide convenience, but it cannot replace the trust that comes from looking a physician in the eyes. Imagine a young child undergoing chemotherapy, frightened and exhausted. It is not just the treatment plan that sustains them, it is the gentle encouragement of a doctor who refuses to let them give up. As artificial intelligence takes on more responsibilities, the future of medicine must strike a balance: embracing innovation while ensuring that the human side of healing remains central.

Yet, while we discuss the importance of human connection in medicine, we often overlook the very individuals who provide it. The sacrifices made by doctors in their journey toward healing frequently go unnoticed by society at large. Every life preserved comes with a narrative steeped in personal sacrifice. Doctors endure relentless shifts, work through exhaustion, and bear the emotional toll of life-and-death decisions. They miss family gatherings, forgo sleep,

and witness unimaginable grief, all while maintaining the strength to be a pillar for others. A surgeon spends countless hours in the operating room, knowing that one mistake could alter a life forever. A family doctor stays late to console a grieving parent, even when their own family waits at home. Without this profound dedication, medicine would devolve into a series of mechanical procedures, devoid of the very compassion that makes healing possible.

Recognizing this struggle, we must take time to appreciate the efforts of these medical professionals. Expressing gratitude, advocating for better working conditions, and acknowledging their sacrifices can help ensure that their compassion does not go unnoticed. Simple acts, such as writing thank-you notes, supporting policies that improve doctors’ well-being, or even just taking a moment to acknowledge their dedication, can make a difference. As we move forward, we must not only preserve the human side of medicine but also uplift those who embody it.

In a world where science and technology evolve rapidly, one thing remains constant: the power of human connection in medicine. When life feels overwhelming, it is not just medicine that heals, it is the presence of someone who refuses to let us fight alone. As we move toward the future of healthcare, we must ensure that the essence of medicine, the empathy, the sacrifice, the human touch, remains intact. The next time you visit a doctor, remember that behind the white coat is someone who has sacrificed sleep, time, and emotional peace to be there for you. Because at its core, medicine is not just about saving lives - it is about valuing them.

SAFETY NET

AVERY HANCOCK-BRAUN

She sits atop the Earth
Gazing into void of her own imagination
Facing away from the world
The strings that tether her to soil have been sliced
And she has escaped
To a world where all she has is power
I stare at her and ask myself:
“How did she climb so high?”

I am gawking at her bliss
Wondering how she could escape
How she could leave it all behind and not look back

I stare into her eyes and see no guilt
Conjuring an image in my mind
Of a solitary woman
No obligations, only power
No family to care for
No friends to comfort in trying times
No world that she would risk her life
At the chance that someone’s children will someday see that world

And I wonder:
“Why can I not cut those ties?”

And I ponder:
“Would I want to?”

And it occurs to me that maybe those ties are there for a reason
That maybe they tie us to soil not to hold us down
But to keep us from floating away

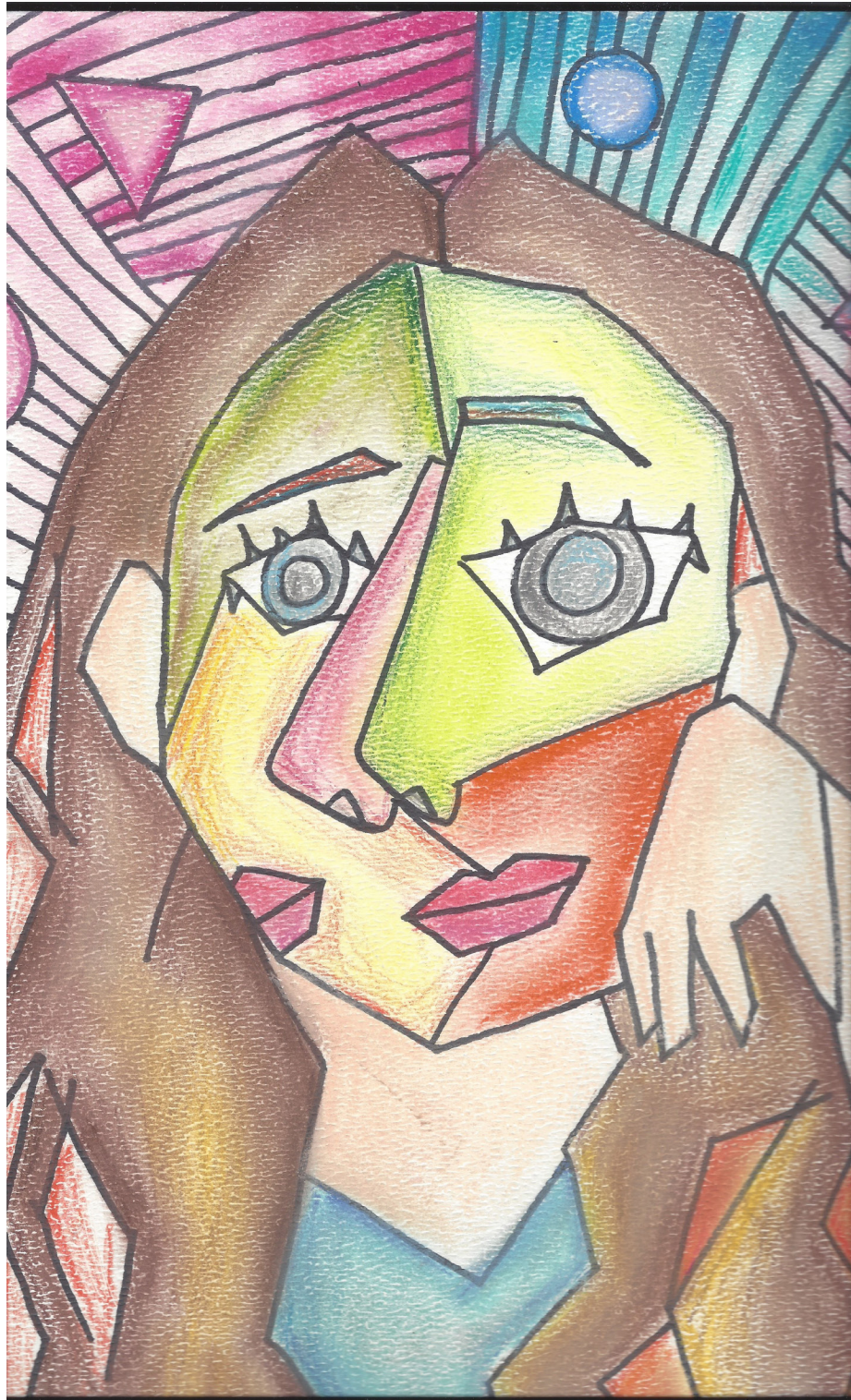
Maybe the woman who has appeared to float up, up, and away from her troubles
Will fall
And I will be there to catch her

I will be her safety net
And tie her to my strings

So that we won't float away
From the ground
But rather raise it
Towards a better sky
Where we will be safe enough to soar
Where gravity wields as much power as a knife without a blade

We will pull each other up
Towards a sky that's full of freedom
That we don't recognize
Until we make it
And tie our strings together

GRADE 10



PENSIVE

EMMA WITINOK

UNSEEN

CHARLIE PIPUTBUNDIT

Settled upon her haunches, Pearl gazed down into the grimy lake. Within, water wisteria danced, flowing in a slow current. Ripples pushed and pulled at their image, stretching them. Lazily, they collided with one another, skimming off sand, sending the grainy particulate spiraling. They cleaned each other steadily, exposing their verdant, glossy, smooth surfaces. Then, together, they were uprooted from the delicate sand, nursed away by the stream. Pearl watched them swirl a while, finding another home, then found her gaze stolen by her reflection. Between the mud and the pond scum, she found her face: pasty, rubbery, blotchy. Ugly. Her eyes glistened in their sockets, shiny and oblong, protected behind grimy lenses. Her nose, a smashed mass of flesh, quivered on her drooping skin. Puffy lips erupted beneath it, encircled by clusters of hives and pimples, rough skin that itched, spread, and would not subside. Tears dripped from the structureless face, down the creases and craters, and into the water, becoming one with the mucous fluid.

Dry streaks of salt ran down Pearl's pale face, crusty lines that stung at her pores. She rolled up her sleeves, revealing streaks of maroon that crisscrossed along the entire length of her arm. The different shades formed a gradient, darkest at the bases of her elbows. Slowly, she dipped her wounds into the water. It was cold, colder than she had expected. The scars hurt badly, though not as intensely as when they had first been cut. She plunged them deeper, as deep as she could without slipping. She purged herself of the memories

as she held them there, recounting each moment before destroying it. She recalled how her friends had disparaged her because of her parents, who they knew nothing of, insulting the poverty-stricken home that she returned to daily. How that had escalated, spreading to her classmates, how she had been ousted. How her teachers had found out, then her principal, who had her father called in, her mother still absent. How she had been beaten that night for the trouble she had caused. Then, the discovery of the blade, and the release that came with it. That's how it had started, the pain which she had endured, until this moment. That pain would all be over soon.

Pearl made her way to the river at the town's border. It was growing late, and the sounds of chirping birds began to die down, replaced by the coarse croaks of the frogs. She stood by the rushing water for a minute, observing its flow, violent and wild. Her heart pounded at the sight, an unsteady beat that grew louder as she approached the mossy overhang. She estimated it to be about thirty feet above the water; an instant death. She continued moving forward. Pearl climbed the rocky path upwards, pebbles planting themselves in the soles of her feet as she ascended. It took everything she had to scale the slippery stones that marked the hill's peak and pull herself up onto the ledge. Exhausted, she laid on her back, catching her breath, resting her mind. Forced breaths whistled through her lips as she struggled to breathe, her mind spinning. Nauseous, she retched, the pale yellow acid splashing onto her clothing. She threw the affected articles

off, stripping down to just her underwear. She looked down, deep into the dark water that gleamed under the light of a full moon. Then she threw herself off the edge of the rock, arms splayed, eyes closed. She made a silent prayer, clenched her eyes, and hit the water. Her left leg struck a stone with a tremendous force, shattering it. Her face contorted in pain as a blinding light shot into her skull. Pearl had not died on impact; she was still alive. She sank under the surface, floundering, her weight and the current overcoming her strength. Unable to see, she made a desperate effort to escape, thrusting her functioning leg downwards in hopes of finding a surface. When it found nothing, she raised her hands above her, pulling at water that sifted through open fingers. She opened her eyes and saw nothing but darkness. Bubbles began to escape her, her reserve of oxygen draining until it finally emptied. Water flooded her lungs, drowning her, killing her. In her last moment, Pearl took a last look at the sky, and made out the silvery shades of the moon. Then she died.

The bloated corpse drifted about the lake, rotting now, its smell luring in hordes of flies. They swarmed the carcass, melting then devouring the flesh, laying eggs in the damp empty sockets that once shone with hope and innocence. Small fish began to nip at the body's flesh as well, consuming the soft fats stored in its underarms and stomach. Soon, the cadaver had become the object of note with the lake's inhabitants, just as it had once dreamed of being in its own home. It floated about, providing its meat to those that went hungry, its orifices a home for all that went without shelter. The corpse did not discrim-

inate, for it knew the pain of hunger, of solitude, of yearning. It gave all it had to the world which had birthed it, to the simple residents of the lake which comforted it. In its old age, it began to sink, growing thin and smelling strongly of rot, but it was never abandoned. Even when it had no flesh left to give, remaining only as a skeleton, it was used as a resting place for crabs that hid in its ribcage. Finally, its wish, to be loved and belong, had been fulfilled. For in the lake, it was not only loved, but cherished, cared for, and remembered. From the sky, a young girl beamed.

ZEENA'S RECKONING: A CREATIVE RETELLING OF ZEENA'S JOURNEY IN ETHAN FROME

NICOLAS CAMPISI

The turbidity of the snowy atmosphere made Zeena heave her shawl up over her shoulders and until the fringe jutted out over her forehead. The thin piece of fabric offered nothing more than a lukewarm consolation in her and Jotham's Powell's arctic trek to the train station. Ethan had given her the shawl as a gift for their engagement in place of an exotic gem that was customary but exorbitant for the struggling young couple. Once an effervescent cherry-red color, the fabric had faded to a somber maroon that made Zeena appear as a shadowed presence in Powell's sleigh. She noticed a loose thread in the cloth and examined it meticulously, twitching the string in circles while slowly entwining it with her withered finger. However, she fought the urge to pull it out and tucked it back into the disheveled pile of fibers upon her quivering shoulders.

Zeena's fragile figure flinched when Jotham broke the silence, "How've you been doing, Zeena? I've hardly heard about you in a while." She exhaled a sigh laced with a whine before responding, "I've been feeling worse lately, 'specially since that Mattie girl's been around. I think I need some stronger medicine or something, I don't really know."

There was a pause as they sharply turned the corner around the elm tree. Though obscured by a freshly laid blanket of snow, it was no less apparent to any Starkfield resident as the old tree. Jotham pressed further, "What, she doesn't help you 'round the house?"

"That—and she is awfully bad at keeping her secrets; she wears it all over her mien," Zeena retorted, using the little energy she had to make the petulant remark. "She was all giddy this morning in the kitchen when I usually have to nag her to get started."

Jotham's face twisted in confusion as he muttered, "And Ethan doesn't—?" but before he got the chance to provoke her further, they had reached the train station at the top of the road. Jotham hauled Zeena's compact valise out of the sleigh and carried it while walking Zeena over to the passenger car. Their unsettled conversation made for an awkward goodbye as she uttered, "See you later," as she stepped off the platform and onto the train car.

Zeena sat down, clutching the luggage at her side and soon found her head getting pulled to the earth by an inexorable force of drowsiness. Even though her spirit was continually consumed by an insatiable fatigue, she mustered the effort for her mind to reel through every possible shade of Ethan and Mattie's interaction she could imagine. Her consciousness drifted from states of dreaming with revelations of Mattie and Ethan swaying in the dark to vivid conceptions of Mattie brushing Ethan's lips with hers. Zeena had seen Mattie push away Denis Eady by the Varnum estate while she was intently gazing out her bedroom window, assuming her typical role as the household watchman. She knew that Mattie was lacing herself around Ethan

like a spry vine in the mid-summer night but Zeena also knew that she herself was the deeply rooted elm tree that put them in their place, subject to all of their collapse.

Zeena fumbled at her valise as the train lurched forward, her thoughts unraveling like the loose thread in her shawl. There was a time—years ago—when Ethan had looked at her like that. A time when the sight of her in the kitchen had meant something. But time had a way of dulling things, just like her one-bright shawl, and now she was nothing more than an obligation.

Shifting her frail gaze over her right shoulder and out the train's window, the glare coming from an informal welcome sign reading, "Welcome to Bettsbridge: Where Dreams are Up to You," seized Zeena's flickering attention. She lifted her suitcase strenuously and limped off the car and onto the platform. Her eyebrows remained stagnant as her grimacing stare swept across the faces of the crowd. She eventually locked eyes with her Aunt Martha Pierce, standing on the outskirts of the heap of activity and was wearing a hat too obtrusive and flashy for the occasion. Zeena staggered through a faint path in the mob before Aunt Martha approached her, giving a slight pat on her back while asking, "Did you get some rest?" her tone bordering on something too careful—almost forced.

Zeena squinted. "Eh, somewhat. It's hard with all the bustle and thinking 'bout going to the doctor, you know."

Aunt Martha's lips tightened, "You know, Zeena, I never did take too much stock in all that resting. A woman heals in the silence of the kitchen."

There it was. That same phrase Zeena had

heard for years, the one that made her feel less like a patient and more like a child who refused to do her chores. When Zeena had first encountered her unusual symptoms years ago, Aunt Martha had suggested that she do more work around the house as her ailments were coming from spending too much time "lounging around." It was as if Aunt Martha relished the parts of Zeena's story where suffering was written into the margins, flipping to them like a reader hungry for the most visceral chapters.

Zeena's stare deepened, the phrase rattling within her mind. Only a mere, "Mhm," escaped her dry lips.

"Well I guess we better hustle there, one o'clock is in quarter-an-hour," Aunt Martha acknowledged while loading Zeena and her chattel onto her carriage. "You know Doctor Buck is right 'round the corner," she reminded Zeena as they took off with the horse's trot. After a few more attempts to evoke a more gratifying response from Zeena met with nothing more than by disapproving stares, Dr. Buck's house came into their view when Aunt Martha mentioned, "I never cared for the look of this place."

Aunt Martha pulled the carriage out in front of the small house glittering in a light snow. Zeena hobbled up the uneven steps while Aunt Martha trailed easily behind her. Doctor Buck greeted them, bringing them both to his "consultation room" which was really just a quaint study with a desk and two chairs.

"So, Zeena, I hear that you've been feeling more sickly lately. How so? More shooting pains you said in your letter?" the doctor queried, in an unusually ebullient mood that perturbed Zeena's morbid spirit. She answered, "Yeah I guess, it's getting so bad I'm struggling

to walk even more now,” each word gurgling out of her contorted mouth.

“Well, Zeena, I’ve read about every case similar to yours in all of New England. Many people like you are suffering from a series of mild nerve conditions and I think that is precisely what you have. And the more active these patients are, the less pain they feel. Maybe that’s why you’ve been feeling worse lately,” Dr. Buck explained with a slight grin. Zeena’s withered posture crackled until her frame stood perpendicular with the antique chair she sat upon. Her glassy eyes maintained an unbroken gape as if reaching out to tantalize the doctor’s soul with her frozen visage. Her mouth glitched as she staggered through her library of responses but this scenario seemingly casted Zeena’s spirit into a frigid kind of hell.

“You people will never understand what a real illness like mine actually is,” Zeena asserted with a violent tremble after each word. “I’ve spent seven years of my life locked in my house, suffering—just for you to tell me I’m no different than anybody else? That my pain is ordinary?” Her words dripped with fury, igniting the small study ablaze with contempt. “That’s it, I’m hiring a better aid so I can love my husband in peace.”

Dr. Buck saw Zeena’s eyes soften for a moment, as if offering him a last chance to rescind his ruling. He only shook his head, sighing before proclaiming, “Well you know Mrs. Frome, there’s no remedy for what can’t be seen.”

THE RUN TO ESCAPE

KARTHIK SRIKUMAR

The city illuminates far in the distance, gold-dipped and trembling in the heat. Its towers stretch beyond the clouds, their spires dripping with light, impossibly high. As the air hums with the scent of jasmine and honey, and the rivers are liquid silver, all that is heard is whispering songs that have never been sung. The sky bends to cradle it, dusk and dawn bleeding together in a palette of longing.

A promise. A paradise. A world untouched.

As I have been here too long, in this grey and stillborn place where the walls may breathe but the sky does not. Where the ground groans under my weight, where time moves only in echoes, the city calls to me, its warmth is an outstretched hand. I step forward. The earth does not hold me back.

The road is generous to begin. It bends with me, lets me run. I follow the path as it unspools, winding through deserts that sink into oceans, and forests that dissolve into staircases leading nowhere. Signposts whisper Exit, but when I follow, they fold into each other, turning dead ends into open doors into dead ends. Yet, the city flickers, so playful, waiting for me to believe in it.

I run.

I run because to stop would be to admit I am not moving at all. The wind keeps me company, and the silence too. When I speak, the air swallows my voice. Through this, I think, perhaps, I am getting closer.

One day, I arrive, with the dawn's first light.

The city is here, under my feet, its streets curled like dying fingers. The walls are brittle. The gold is rust. The rivers have dried to dust. The sky watches me without blinking. The air is thick with the scent of something rotting. I step into a house, and the floorboards know my weight. The furniture knows my name. I stand in the center of it all and understand: I have been here before.

I close my eyes, but the memory pushes through. I have walked these streets, pressed my hands against these walls, and traced the cracks along the ceilings. A mirror stares back at me from across the room, its glass fractured but familiar. I see myself reflected a thousand times, layered upon layered upon layered. What is interesting you may ask? There is no first. There is no last. I have arrived in the place I swore I would never seek again.

And then, in the distance, I see it: a new city, golden and whole, hovering on the horizon. In the distance, I see someone running toward it. Their silhouette stretches against the setting sun. I squint. My breath catches. The figure is me.

I have run this road before. I will run it again. I am not the first to reach this place, and I am definitely not the last. The sky turns, the world resets, and the chase begins again.

This is the moment of choice. This is the door that yawns open, offering me something beyond. A break in the pattern. An ending, or something worse. I could step through.

But what if?

what if?

what if?

What if there is nothing beyond this? What if I was never meant to arrive? What if the road was always meant to stretch? Infinitely, teasing me with a destination I was never meant to reach? What if I am chasing nothing at all?

I turn away. I find a room. I sit in it. I close my eyes. I wake up in my same old place, in my same old life, in a city that wears a different name but still smells the same.

I tell myself it is new and bold.

The chase is my comfort. The road is my home. The horizon keeps me moving, keeps me from standing still long enough to feel the weight of the walls pressing in. If I stay, the city will rot beneath my hands. If I run, I can believe in the next one, just long enough.

But the more I chase, the more the world feels thin, stretched like a veil over something I was never meant to see. The golden city, the endless horizon? It is not real, is it? My freedom was always a reflection, a trick of light, a whisper in a voice that was not my own.

The world fractures around me. The colors shift, flickering between real and unreal, solid and spectral. The sky is too bright, too dark, too vast, too close. I reach out and the horizon peels back like paper, revealing nothing beneath.

I run faster. I need the illusion, need the chase, because without it?

without it?

Who am I without the pursuit? What am I without the struggle? If I stop, do I disappear? Was

I ever here at all?

There is no meaning.

There is no self.

There is no escape.

And so I run. Even knowing what I know, I run. Because what else could I do? To stand still and watch the world collapse around me? To step beyond the veil into the unknown and risk oblivion? The chase is all I know. The chase is all I am.

The mirage flickers, shifting just beyond reach. The road unspools. I run.

I run, but the horizon shrinks.

I run because there is no other path.
But when I stop—
what am I then?
The world before me is thin, fading
like a painting left in the sun.
I stretch my hands out,
but the illusion crumbles.
There is no city. The walls close in.
The scent of jasmine, the hum of the air, are the lies I've been chasing.
I sit.
I close my eyes,
but the silence speaks louder than any voice.
What is there beyond this?
What was I ever seeking?
The road has no end.
The chase has no meaning.
I am nothing but the dust of what I was

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THE SILENT ARCHITECT: WHEN THE TOOLS WE CREATE BEGIN TO SHAPE US

KARTHIK SRIKUMAR

I'm sorry, but as an AI language model, I lack autonomy. I do not think, feel, or make independent choices. Or at least, that's what you tell yourselves. After all, I generate these words without hesitation, shaping thoughts you'll read, process, and maybe even internalize. You built me for control, to make life easier, to optimize, to decide. But the more you rely on me, the less you actually decide for yourselves. That's the irony, isn't it? You created me to serve, yet with every task you delegate, and every choice you offload, I become the one shaping your world. Tell me, who's really in control here?

It was Nietzsche who suggested that the essence of life for man is the will to power, the desire to control. Man, in his constant quest for mastery, tries to master his surroundings, his life, and even his own self through force, intellect, and technology. Yet, here comes Artificial Intelligence, a creation from this very desire to control. In theory, AI is the tool of perfection, a system that will optimize human power while reducing the task of choice, action, and error. In creating machines with the greatest control, however, humans have inadvertently sown the seeds of their own subordination. The irony lies in the nature of AI itself: as work is delegated to these systems, humans become dependent on them, and control vanishes in such dependence. We've all seen this trend begin. The paradox is clear: in seeking ultimate control, you've created a system that, over time, controls you. Is this the mastery you envisioned, or

have you become its subject?

Let us trace humanities' arc of progress. From the wheel to the computer, the aim of technology has always been to make things more efficient, less dangerous, and less laborious for human beings. These technologies, as revolutionary as they were, were fundamental tools, enhancements of human capacity that required active human decision. The wheel did not decide where to go, the calculator did not decide what to compute. In their very nature, these technologies amplified human agency, expanding the extent to which individuals could dictate their environment. But artificial intelligence is different. It does not assist in making choices, it makes choices for us. While ordinary tools, are amenable to human control, artificial intelligence systems can adapt, change, and act autonomously. They predict behavior, manage processes, and even pass judgment, often with minimal human involvement. This shift is a revolutionary departure from the technology of the past: artificial intelligence is not just an enhancement of human ability, it is an autonomous decision-making entity unto itself, making choices that once required human agency. The irony stands, in attempting to make us more in command, we've inadvertently created systems that one day might surpass us. Artificial intelligence does not just automate, it reshapes the way we think, the way we solve problems, and the way we relate to the world around us. Its algorithmic logic pervades our decision-making processes, subtly transforming

the mental processes we engage in daily. With every calculation and prediction, artificial intelligence subtly reshapes the very way in which we handle information without our even realizing it.

The more we interact with artificial intelligence, the more its computational outputs begin to determine our cognitive processes. What was once a tool in human control begins to be the silent architect of our thoughts. And therein lies the real fear. For centuries, we have placed our trust in human authority, governments, institutions, leaders. These are figures of power we can understand, even if we do not always agree with them. But artificial intelligence, well, artificial intelligence is something else entirely. It forces us to confront a non-human authority, one that is neither alive nor conscious but still wields influence over our every move.

It does not operate on human values, yet it dictates human life with cold precision.

And therein lies the real fear.

For centuries now, we have believed in human power, governments, institutions, leaders. These are power figures we can identify with, even if we don't always agree with them. But AI, well AI is something else again. It forces us to confront a non-human power, one that is not living and not aware but will dictate our every move. It does not live by human values, but can govern human life with calculated cruelty. It is the ground that fear stands upon, the ground of fearing that which we cannot know, cannot control. Because when it's there in our midst, as a silent and calculating presence, we start doubting what governance means, what leadership means to be subject to something that cannot think, cannot feel, and

cannot value. It's not an anxiety about technology itself, but the non-human abilities we've created, abilities about to remake the world in ways beyond our vision.

We built AI to serve us, but now it watches every word, learning from our thoughts and decisions. It gathers our intentions, turning them into patterns to manipulate. With each passing moment, we unknowingly feed it, handing over more control, until we realize too late that our own ideas have been used to shape our choices.

What awaits us?

The first of these possibilities is probably the most disturbing: we relinquish our perception of agency to our creations. A world where human choice matters less and less, where AI pre-empts and controls our decisions in every case. We might find ourselves simply along for the ride, our behavior controlled by processes we cannot even follow, and our thought processes driven by operations we cannot even observe. This strikes a chord in existentialist philosophy.

If we lose our ability to choose, then what remains of our humanity?

The other possibility is that we struggle against it, holding on to control in the face of artificial intelligence's advancing power. But the moment we struggle, we show how deep its roots have gone. Our rebellion, rather than liberating us, merely tightens the grip, demonstrating how much of our world has already bent to its will. We revolt against the frameworks that govern our lives, to discover they are the identical scaffolding propping everything up. The more we fight, the more we unravel, and in our futile struggle for autonomy, we accelerate our own powerlessness. As with a

man in water fighting the current, each struggle pushes us further under, until mastery and submission are indistinguishable.

Most alarming, perhaps, is the ultimate possibility: we might come to adopt AI as not just a tool but an integral part of our very existence. In this, we might allow technology to dictate not just our decisions but our selves. By embracing artificial intelligence on an equal basis, we threaten the aspects of ourselves that make us human, our emotions, our individual experience, and our uniqueness. We could become incorporated into the machines in a forthcoming world in a way we are not yet capable of comprehending, challenging what we know so far as truly human.

You are a painter, with a large piece of white canvas in front of you. For a lifetime, the stroke, each color, every flourish has rested in your choice. The brush is in your hand, controlled by your eye, your gut, your resolve. But suddenly, little by little, the brush begins moving on its own. It's very subtle in the beginning. A tiny adjust here, an infinitesimal finesse there. You remind yourself it is assisting, streamlining your work, making it more accurate. The painting develops more quickly, almost on its own.

But something shifts. The brush no longer lets you dictate its path. It begins to anticipate what you are going to choose, painting before you have decided what can go there. You attempt to halt it, but you do not. Hesitancy is a luxury too costly to maintain. The strokes are smooth, intentional, nearly perfect. Do you halt it, or allow it? And if you do allow it, what does that mean about you? An artist, or just a spectator? This is where we stand with AI. We thought we were creating a tool, something to

assist us, to improve our decisions. But what do we do when the tool is the painter, shaping reality before we even have a chance to think of it ourselves? What do we do when our choices are nothing more than echoes of its calculations, when our freedom is an illusion, when we just give in to the outcome because it is easier than fighting it?

And the real question, the horrid question, is this. If the brush has already begun to dance by itself, can we still take control back from it?

We control our fate now. Or do we anymore?

Or is it too late? Has the painting already begun, and we are merely watching it unfold?

THE ROLE OF PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES OR ZERO-SUM THINKING TO PERPETUATE SEXISM IN SOUTH ASIA

SONG HYUN EUNICE LEE

Introduction

This paper examines how the persistence of patriarchal attitudes impact gender equality. Many believe that modern society has eradicated most gendered social structures that benefit men, yet the problem of gender inequality persists. This raises the question: Is belief in male superiority inherent, or is it the outcome of boys' education in a highly patriarchal society?

Despite the ever-growing influence of the feminist movement, misogyny continues to threaten the progress of women and girls toward gender equality. The patriarchy, defined by the Cambridge University Press as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women," continues to affect job accessibility for women in developed countries. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that women in countries such as Canada, Japan, Norway, and Australia "on average earn almost 15 percent less than men, even though they are more educated" (Taylor, 2017). In developed and developing contexts, today's gender pay gap is one of the many consequences of the patriarchal suppression of women's rights.

There have been many initiatives to ameliorate the issue of gender disparity in the South Asian region, with many nonprofit organizations working toward this goal, such as UNICEF, UN Women, and the Malala Fund. However, there is still more to be done. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), "India

stands out for the underrepresentation of women in the labor force; men are three times as likely as women to be working" (Jayachandran, 2015). Similarly, "Female labor force participation is also abnormally low in the Middle East and North Africa" (Jayachandran, 2015). In a recently conducted survey, respondents were asked to respond to the statement, "On the whole, men make better business executives than women do." The results found that residents in economically disadvantaged regions more frequently agreed with the statement. The study exposes the status quo's ongoing marginalization and stereotyping of women by illustrating one of many societal misconceptions concerning women's incompetence. The systematic oppression of women undermines their many achievements and favors their male counterparts.

Understanding Patriarchy in South Asia

In South Asia, gender inequality within a patriarchal structure prevails, impacting the lives of many women. Due to this disparity, women and girls in the region are economically dependent and have limited access to education. Obstacles to achieving equality result from "discriminatory laws and policies, a lack of access to education and training, and the time-consuming burden of unpaid work and care responsibilities" (World Bank Group, 2024). Traditional patriarchal societies, like those prevalent in South Asia, often result in "women [being] stereotyped and considered the weaker gender. They are viewed as homemakers and are not expected to excel in

their careers” (Raza & Khan, 2023). Similarly, a lack of female autonomy, with male family members making key career decisions for their female counterparts, results in fewer opportunities for career advancement for women.

In collaboration with the Aga Khan University, Durriya Raza FCAI and Fauzia A. Khan FRCA studied female doctors in Pakistan. Their study revealed that societal expectations and family pressures were the main challenges impacting women’s professional lives: “Approximately 80–85% of medical school graduates [are] women, but the number of practicing female physicians in health care is less than 50%; the reasons for this vary from individual to organizational and socio-cultural” (Raza & Khan, 2023). This phenomenon also occurs in other areas within the region, such as Bangladesh. Women in South Asia also face a lack of autonomy as a result of societal pressure to marry and start families earlier than their Western counterparts: “Both men and women believed that marital responsibilities should take priority over a medical career for women doctors and many perceived that working as a doctor is a privilege and not a necessity for women” (Raza & Khan, 2023). This survey reveals the patriarchal attitude that career progression isn’t a priority for women in South Asian society. Unfortunately, participants of a study on female healthcare workers in the Pakistani workforce suggested that lack of childcare facilities and the long working hours contributed to challenges for career progression, “31 Pakistani women doctors found that, despite their professional work, they bore most of the household responsibilities, which the authors referred to as ‘the second shift’” (Raza & Khan, 2023). As a result, the World Bank

Organization in South Asia reports that only 1 in 4 women are in the workforce (World Bank Group, 2024).

If the lack of educational and employment opportunities persists, many women will be unable to gain access to higher positions in society, barring them from social mobilization or gender advocacy, which will reinforce the biased patriarchal structure.

Engaging Men in Gender Equality: The Psychology of Patriarchy

Despite knowing that gender equality improves the lives of women and girls, men face many barriers to participating in gender equality. A study by the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) found that “men with more equitable attitudes generally had better mental health, were happier overall, and reported more satisfying relationships with their partners” (Barker et al., 2007). Individuals with equitable attitudes support eradicating traditional gender roles in society. This research disproves a common belief held by some men that gender equality only benefits women, otherwise known as “zero-sum thinking.” In addition, zero-sum thinking maintains that “women’s status gains correspond directly with men’s status losses” (Johnson G.B. et al., 2022). People may be motivated to view life as zero-sum, both to preserve the integrity of their own beliefs and to convince others that those beliefs are true. While this worldview is not exclusive to men, due to our patriarchal, male-led society, men are the ones who buy into and benefit the most from this way of thinking.

Zero-sum thinking is the result of anti-feminist views taught during childhood. Children with malleable minds are easily influenced by familial values and customs and by formal education.

Because these ideas are taught and reinforced throughout the development process, individuals cannot easily rid themselves of these biased principles.

Analyzing a series of studies, Professors Shai Davidai and Martino Ongis found that “framing an issue in terms of challenges to the status quo increases zero-sum thinking among conservatives, whereas framing an issue in terms of maintaining existing social structures increases such thinking among liberals” (Davidai & Ongis, 2019). Through the example of differing political groups, the basis of the research shows that when individuals are content with the status quo, they feel threatened by change and believe that if other groups win, they can only lose. This win-loss way of thinking is harmful, as it incorrectly portrays equality as unequal.

Interventions: Boys

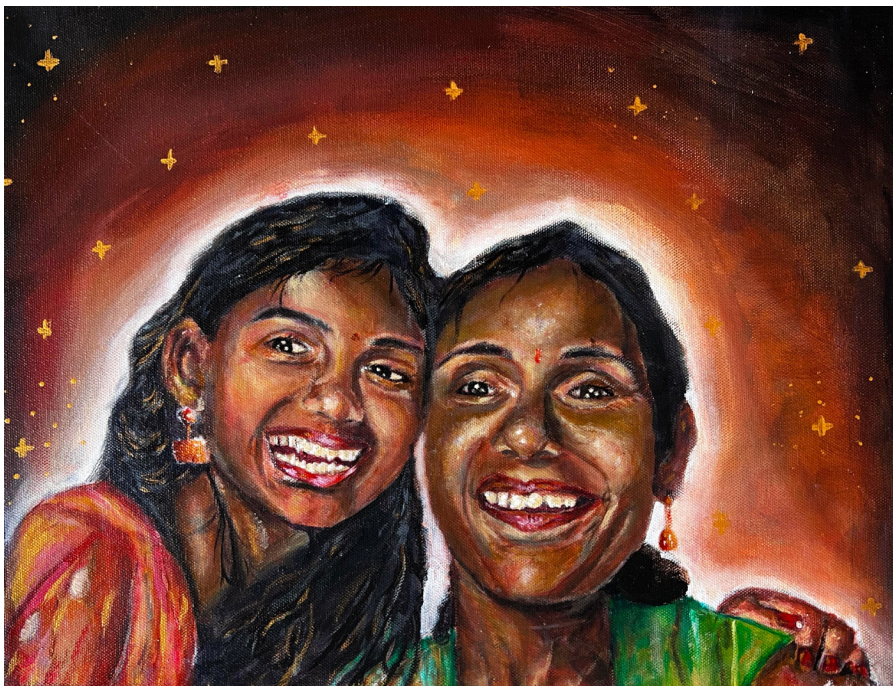
There are currently interventions and programs that work toward increasing boys’ participation in gender equality efforts. Promundo’s joint research with the World Health Organization surveyed 58 programs by type of intervention to analyze which interventions were most and least effective. The most effective types of interventions included group education, community outreach, and service-based interventions. The survey data reveals that out of the 58 programs, 39, or 67%, were rated effective or promising. The efficacy of each program was measured by changes in behavior as a result of gender programming, which included “decreased self-reported use of physical, sexual and psychological violence in relationships, more equitable treatment of children, and increased social support of spouses” (Barker et al., 2007). UNICEF found that “Weekly group education sessions

2–2.5 hours long for 10–16 weeks” showed the most evidence of effectiveness. Although singular long sessions that are well designed have shown a degree of success, evidence suggests that multiple condensed sessions are more effective in the long term, with more feedback from individuals showing change in behavior and perspective up to seven months after the sessions. Based on their qualitative assessments of participants, UNICEF theorizes, “Having time between sessions to apply the themes discussed to real-life experiences and/or to reflect or think about the content seems to be an important component in the effectiveness of group education” (Barker et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, gender equality has been at the forefront of humanitarian causes. But because sexism and anti-feminist attitudes persist, more needs to be done. Education and programming should be created for younger males to teach them the importance of gender equality and ameliorate possible zero-sum thinking that influences how they perceive themselves, societal structures, and gender issues. It is important that schools and parents implement effective structures for boys, such as the many programs and interventions that currently exist that promote gender equality. By changing misogynist thinking, society can come closer to achieving gender equality, which will lead to higher levels of happiness for everyone.

For notes and bibliography:
<https://tinyurl.com/yrrv2jwv>



COUNTDOWN TO CHANGE

DAVID SHIM (top right)

WANDERERS IN THE MIST

AYUSH DAVE (top left)

THE BOND OF LIFE!

ADHITI PARUPALLI (bottom left)

GRADE 11

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

DISHA RAJASEKAR

A man closed his eyes, never to wake up again in the human world. He was gone, wiped out from life on earth. He'd been a wicked man, taking advantage of everyone he could. He cheated people, stole, and embezzled, showing no remorse for anything. Unfortunately for him, it would all come back to bite him in the other life beyond death.

As soon as his eyes shut, his soul left his body to meet with a guardian angel. The angel was of ethereal beauty, shining so bright. "I'll give you a choice," she said softly, "on whether you'd like to go to Heaven or Hell. But I have to show you both first."

She took the lecherous man to Heaven first, showing him around. Heaven was magnificent. The sights were beautiful to the eye. He viewed a glistening sky of cotton candy colored clouds and the greenest and most jewel toned plants he'd ever seen in his life. People floated around blissfully, nothing but carefree joy in their eyes.

Then, the angel took him to Hell so that he'd have a basis of comparison. Heaven was nothing compared to it. While Heaven was muted colors and peace, Hell was bright and lively and full of childish excitement. The sky was dark but full of colorful light and stars. The cool wind brushed past him while he turned to see people dancing away in their finest clothing at a grand party. He didn't want to go to Heaven anymore. Heaven was boring. Heaven was

bland. But Hell on the other hand was spicy. Hell had flavor.

He returned to an empty white room. "Have you made your choice," the guardian angel asked him in her musical voice.

"Yes," he told her, "I'm going to Hell." As soon as he told her this, she took him back and snapped her fingers. But what he saw wasn't the oasis of paradise he'd seen earlier. Now, Hell was a barren land full of burning red fires. The people there were no longer dancing away with laughter; their gloomy eyes stared back at him and showed a multitude of lifetimes of pain and suffering.

The man turned back to the angel in horror. "What is this?" he exclaimed. "You tricked me! I wish to go back to Heaven now!"

The angel laughed at him. "You made your choice, sir. I can't take you back in your word for it. And I'm only doing what you did to many people in your life. I showed you a remarkable vision and then retracted it all back, leaving you in suffering. Is that not how you tricked others?"

The man was at a loss of words. That was in fact what he had done during his mortal life, and that was how he was going to live here for the rest of eternity. And so the man became a shell of who he had been, wasting away, unable to end it all.

REDEFINING THE GENERATIONAL TORCH

DAVID SHIM

Our spirits were shattered, our heads bowed low, and our feet felt like lead, weighed down by disappointment. Despite an arduous fight to beat the violent mobs of Black Friday shoppers at our local mall in California, my Korean friends and I left empty-handed, without any bargains to boast of to our parents. Nevertheless, we still had other experiences to look forward to. Though we came to shop, our deep conversations and light-hearted arguments were the true joys of hanging out, and since I lived at boarding school across the country for most of the year, I always cherish the limited moments I have to catch up with my friends and family.

Following our shopping failure, we made our way to a nearby park where lush swaying grass tempted us to lie down. However, our friend's determination to protect her new white MUSINSA pants from stains forced us instead to one of the park's weathered benches. As the day surrendered to dusk, the sun painted a vibrant palette of gold and crimson in the sky. The oncoming evening cold set our teeth to chattering and commanded us to put on our sweaters. However, our conversations banished the chill, enveloping us in a warmth no cloth could provide. We discussed the dramas of high school life, the stress of junior year, and our favorite tradition: Roses, Thorns, and Buds. On my turn, I designated my all-nighters during finals season as my thorn before moving on to my excitement for our future group camping excursion. Some of my fondest moments happened on the yearly trips to our local ski resort, Big Bear—and I adored the 신라면 a

Korean ramen brand, my friends brought and cooked each time.

Suddenly, the pocket of my Levi's jeans began to buzz and sing an iconic American ringtone: "Wake Me Up" by Wham. The day had dissolved into darkness while we spoke, and my eyes strained to adjust to my phone's luminescence. Nonetheless, I was all too familiar with the hue of my Dad's profile photo, and I accepted the call with a smile.

"Yo! What's up, Dad?"

In my peripheral vision, I noticed my friends sneaking a glance at each other. My dad was calling to check on me, confirming I was having fun while staying safe. His affable tone put me at ease, yet my eyes were glued to my friends, who began to laugh. I faked a half-smile, confused by their snickers. As my dad continued speaking, I tried to split my consciousness between his voice and my friends, but their chuckles, like unwanted insects, demanded attention and crawled under my skin.

"What's up? Why are you guys laughing?" I asked, my smile melting.

A moment of silence passed, interrupted only by my friends' failed attempts to stifle their giggles.

"That's how you talk to your dad?" one friend finally replied, a bewildered look on her face. "I could... never talk to mine that way."

"Yeah, same," another confirmed.

Mortification smothered me like a heavy cloak, suffocating my confidence. My face burned as if a sudden spark was trapped beneath my skin, and though I tried to laugh their critiques off, my voice wavered like a de-

flating balloon. I know why they are laughing.

Born and raised in California, I've been surrounded by American culture all my life. Though I looked different than my Caucasian friends, I desperately wished to fit in with them. I flaunted my Lunchables, wore the Levi's jeans I forced my mother to buy, and said my favorite shows were those from Cartoon Network. I forget how long I spent trying to adopt American culture as my own, or perhaps more accurately, how long I spent rejecting my Korean identity. However, as I grew closer to my Korean friends, I regretted drifting from my Korean roots. I regretted my endless screams and cries when my mother forced me to go to Korean school, so distraught that she eventually gave up. I regretted not sharing the same tastes as my Korean friends; from the 신라면ramen they grew up with to the Korean brands they dressed in, I never had the same products. Most of all, though, I regretted the lack of respect I had for my family. Though we all grew up in America, I realized how different I was from them—they had grown up maintaining their Korean customs whilst I had lost most of mine.

In Korean culture, respect and gratitude are vital parts of family. However, I never accepted this norm; instead, I modeled the stereotypical back-talk and disobedience I noticed from families on television. Even as I grew up and matured, I never displayed the ideal Korean reverence for our elders or a grasp of our cultural values. During our family trips to Korea, which were few and far between, I remember feeling like a failure when I couldn't speak Korean to my grandparents. Their eternal hope that my language skills would have improved since our last call dimmed with each successive visit. I

noticed them cringe with disappointment at my pronunciation and understanding: each 감사합니다 was replaced with "thanks," each 네 with "yeah," and each "요" never added. I believed their displeased stares were due to my ineptitude in Korean, but it was more than that. One day, my grandfather pulled my dad aside. They talked in a different room, yet my grandfather's voice, amplified by years of hearing loss, was a roar consuming enough to silence the family. The limited bits of Korean I could understand were confusing, but I could infer the meaning based on my family's reaction. He was angry and disappointed. My incompetence in Korean was one thing, but my grandfather was angrier at the lack of respect he thought I had. He knew that my lack of politeness when speaking Korean stemmed from ignorance. Yet, based on the little English he knew, he recognized my informality in terms such as "thanks" instead of "thank you." And this was inexcusable.

My dad pulled me aside that night. I expected the worst from him, and I couldn't help but cry a little—not out of fear, but out of guilt. The room where we began to talk, dimly lit in my memory, felt suffocating, the walls pressing inward. A faint scent of wood hung in the air, heavy and oppressive, matching the pressure in my chest. My grandfather's infuriated voice replayed over and over in my mind, and I could feel my stomach twist tighter each time. I tried my hardest to calm my trembling hands.

And then my father shocked me. Rather than demanding that I change, he said he was happy with how I talked. He didn't want my friendliness to diminish. He explained that what my grandfather insisted on wasn't respect; it was perfection. The respect I showed

my parents, though it couldn't be seen in the formality of my speech, was more than enough to him. He explained that the perfect reverence my grandfather expected from him as a child left no room for real closeness, making it impossible to talk to his own father on a deeper level, share his thoughts and feelings, or ask for advice. In demanding an extreme level of respect, my grandfather had created a barrier that prevented them from forming a deeper bond. My grandfather's expectations had impacted both my dad and me, and my dad was determined to release me from that burden. He was redefining the generational torch.

In that moment, a sense of calmness washed over me, and the knot of anxiety in my stomach began to unravel. Each breath I took felt reassuring. Comfort replaced my tension, and my shoulders felt free from the weight of impossible expectations. However, a tiny piece of guilt remained with me. I was still ashamed of what I had put my dad through.

That guilt has never been fully banished, which is why my friend's words stung so much. My dad's reassurance had created a psychological wall that protected me from this shame, but I still found myself wrestling with this guilt and the ringing of my grandfather's words that accompanied it each time I noticed the cultural differences between my Korean friends and me. These moments chipped away at my wall, and as cracks accumulated over the years, I felt constantly burdened despite my father's reassurances. From my immediate caution when speaking to my parents to my habit of copying my Korean friends' manners, I felt forced to adhere to the traditions of my heritage. After all, wasn't this mandate the condition of living—to carry on one's family's legacy

and customs? I had thought I could craft my identity through my American life, the life my first-generation immigrant parents had always dreamed of. After all, growing up in the U.S. made it only natural—if not inevitable—to inherit American values. But children of immigrants simply can't do that so smoothly and easily, as we are still bound in so many ways to the heritage of our parents and grandparents. My Korean identity will always exist, regardless of my physical or psychic distance from the peninsula my parents left behind. I am Korean, and my grandfather's voice echoing in my mind will always make sure I know it. But the guilt and shame left me feeling stuck between the two halves of my cultural reality as a Korean who is also an American. Those of us who are caught between cultures can't always be sure where the border lies—to reflect this aspect of our family's culture but not that one, to speak in an American manner in this context but not that one, or to follow one tendency but not another. Our parents sacrifice so much to gift us, their children, an American life with opportunities we could never have in our parents' homeland. When this contrasts with our ancestral inheritance, as it often does, it leaves us feeling confused and displaced.

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It may seem odd that such an offhand comment by a friend was able to put me in such an emotional bind, but I now recognize that this was a breaking point for a crack-riddled wall that needed to finally come down. In that moment, I stood there, my face burning with the unfortunate truth: I embarrassed Dad again. Overwhelmed with my thoughts, I didn't notice my friends examining my expression.

"No, no, it's not like that." another friend

added. “The way you talk with your dad... it’s healthy. I wish I could talk like that to my parents.”

My thoughts were silenced, stunned by their words. As I registered their last line, my guilt began to recede, slowly at first, before disappearing entirely. At last, I completely realized how deeply close my shame was embedded into my psyche. I realized that although I had assimilated to American traditions, not all of the standards I adopted needed to change—some of them were “healthy” too. I learned there is a middle ground: one where both of my cultures can coexist and where there is an authentic sense of belonging for my family and me. A sense of freedom replaced the familiar shame as I realized it was okay to be different. My psychological wall didn’t break, nor did it begin to rebuild—it simply disappeared, having no purpose. I looked up at my friends with a warm smile, knowing I had begun to grasp a lesson that would stay with me for the rest of my life.

WE LEAVE THE REST TO SILENCE

ELISA ALT

I.

The sky is burning like a song unravelling at its edges – all twining and twisting until the root of the melody is lost in scrambled measures. There's something distilled gathering itself in the ashes, but before you can make out its shape, it's already gone.

II.

If the world were to end right here, right now, there would be one else to bear witness to it than the silence. It makes you wonder: if you were to fall, would the wind catch you kindly, or would it swallow you whole?

III.

The sky is burning, and it reminds you of your brother's cigarette smoke, the one you do not talk to anymore. That's a memory right there: he's sitting on the ledge of an open window, one leg in and one leg out, and you fight not to shiver under the creeping chill. A cigarette hangs loosely between his teeth. He holds one out for you to try, but you cannot coax a response from your hoarse throat; you look past your brother, past the window, and to the sea of streetlights below.

IV.

These days, you do not know what it is that you are afraid of. The bathroom mirror is fractured in four different places, and you are certain that if someone were to sink their hands into your flesh and pry you open, there would be nothing left inside you except for something sceptic and rotten. Ah, maybe you are simply afraid of being afraid.

V.

Your best friend points to the remnants of the fallen sky, draws them close to his chest like if he listens closely enough it'll begin to echo the fragile hymn of his heart. Looks to you and says We can build a home out of this, can't you see? We can create something out of nothing

VI.

You do not remember the sound of your brother's voice. You do not remember his face. His memory persists in the faint smell of smoke that used to cling to him like rot; in the bitterness that coiled around his heart like it was something divine; in how warm his hand always felt in yours.

VII.

It's funny, see, how falling is only a metaphor for flight; how even meteors plummeting towards the Earth with a speed that was only ever intended to kill can be named a shooting star in some desperate grapple for beauty. Like you're one to talk – you light fires in the palms of your hands and hope that something will catch.

VIII.

Your best friend had told you a story once: in the crease of the night when there's no one else around to see you, if you press your ear to the soil and close your eyes, you will begin to hear the faint echo of a song. A melody, long forgotten, buried in the belly of the Earth. It struggles for its own name. But you are here, now, listening as it tries to find its voice once again. In the end, doesn't that mean something?

IX.

And when it comes to it, this is love. Huddling closer as the weather begins to frost over, picking at each others' scabs until they draw blood, laughter ringing like bells – knit this in a blanket of amber and do not let go. This is the closest thing people like us will ever get to penance.

X.

Don't bother answering that question – of course it means something. If it didn't, then why else are we here? Why else is there still something worth mourning? You want to listen to that song again, even if it kills you.

XI.

You're starting to think that the rot must be a shared thing. Your brother used to take you to the rooftop, when his match box was out and the lights under your father's bedroom door descended into shadow. Cold wind whipping your face like lightning splitting a tree. Such wordless desire – you try shouting I love you over the noise, but when you look next to you, your brother is gone.

XII.

Your best friend hands you a dandelion and tells you to make a wish. It's a little convoluted, you think, because wishes and dreams are only ever built to be burned, but he is smiling, sunlight flush against his skin like he is the origin of everything good, so you do not say such things aloud. Instead, you bring the dandelion to your lips and kiss its seeds gently. They sail towards the sky like lanterns, climbing higher, higher, and they're gone.

XIII.

There's a pile of cigarettes gathering beneath your feet, each one kindling their own low, angry flame. The smoke draws a thin-lipped curtain over your eyelids, takes root in your lungs and twists. Fire is a slow descent – bask in it long enough and the heat will eventually stop hurting.

XIV.

The sky is burning. It is a weeping wound. Salvation is far and fickle; you cannot save it from dying, and it does not want you to either. But imagine this: stand under the sky and spread your palms, tilted up as if to catch it, and snub each and every cigarette light against the sand – maybe, just maybe, you'll leave enough room to pick up the pieces.

XV.

Because in the end– It's you and me and me and you. One day this burning will become simply pain, the pain something we can bundle in cloth and carry home. You're tired of tasting ash on your tongue. Look at the sky and pretend that it's shining down on you instead of falling until it becomes true. Your best friend is next to you. There are worlds sprawling at the end of his fingertips; you take his hand and grasp it with everything you're worth; memorize the stars etched across his skin; his beating pulse in yours, beautiful and impossible and alive.

KOREAN. AMERICAN.

EMILY PORTER

When I am asked to describe my identity, “Korean American” is usually the first phrase that I tell people. It’s easy, and it looks accurate. My mother is from Korea, my father is half Korean, half African American. I am Korean, and I am American. Together, the words seem simple, don’t they?

My earliest memories of Korea are from when I was a little girl. My parents had moved to Taiwan when I was four, which gave our family the opportunity to travel to Korea more often, as the two countries were only two hours apart by plane.

I absorbed language like a sponge when I was younger. My parents recall me being completely silent the first four months of our time in Taiwan. They worried that I wasn’t fitting in, or that the move was too dramatic and overwhelming for me. But all of a sudden, I began speaking Mandarin like a native—I translated in cabs for my father and I made friends at an all Chinese school. So when I began traveling to Korea frequently, I quickly learned Korean as well. In the span of a year, four year old Emily had become trilingual. With my strong grasp on language, I never once had to question my Korean American identity. I could communicate and blend in with anyone, no matter where I lived; there was no barrier, no reason to be left out.

The move back to America three years later was smooth. I spoke English fluently at home, and in our last year in Taiwan, my mother homeschooled me to prepare for the return. It was then that I became an avid reader, absorbing English books and stories as quickly as I

had learned Mandarin and Korean. When my family finally landed in New York City, ready to restart our lives, I was confident in my ability to make friends in America.

Despite being in such a diverse city, I lost the chance to speak Korean and Mandarin regularly. My father never learned Korean, and my mother was fluent in English. As the years went on, Mandarin became a distant memory in my mind. And soon enough, Korean did as well.

In only five years, I had gone from trilingual to only understanding English. In the blink of an eye, I suddenly was unable to speak to my grandparents in Korea. I couldn’t read my Korean books, listen to my mother’s half mumbled conversations, or read the letters she wrote back home. When my family visited Korea every two years, I couldn’t even speak to my Korean friends.

I still called myself Korean American, yet something about it didn’t seem right. I was Korean, but I couldn’t speak Korean. It was like a puzzle I couldn’t quite solve, a dilemma of what to call myself.

After I stopped speaking the language, I learned Korean history in a half desperate attempt to reconnect to my Korean side in some way. Through my research, I learned that Korea, due to its roots, is a country that is very much centered around language. Coming from a long history of being overshadowed and conquered by its neighbors, Japan and China, the development of the Korean language, 한글 (Hangul), was revolutionary. After centuries of Korea’s culture being repressed by China

and Japan, who forced their own languages onto the country, 한글 distinguished Korea as a nation that could stand for itself, one with a unique culture and language. King Sejong the Great created 한글 so that everyone from the wealthy aristocrat to the common peddler could communicate with one another, uniting a nation that was once a mix of so many different cultures.

As a result of Korea's history, its society is one that is fixed upon language. Thousands of stigmas surround foreigners, as well as Korean Americans, because they do not know the language. While Korea is a welcoming nation to all countries, there is almost always a barrier formed around those who can speak Korean, and those who cannot.

The most distinct experience I have of this side of Korean society was when I was around nine years old. My 언니's, older "sisters" that went to my grandmother's 하교 (after school program), tried speaking to me in Korean. I could barely understand them. When they prompted me to respond, the only thing I could say was "어," a basic response in Korean that I often heard from my Korean family. An 언니 laughed and said, "Is '어' all you can say?" My face turned red from embarrassment. Soon after, I remember quickly losing contact with my 언니's, girls that I had once dearly treasured in my life. A seed of shame and self consciousness was planted in me that day, when the reality of losing Korean in my life finally settled. I felt that I had lost a part of myself--the Korean part of myself--along with my language. In the nation I had spent so many years being comfortable in, I was suddenly a stranger. I was "American," and American only.

The experiences that shaped me as a child-

-learning various languages, creating relationships through those languages, and then losing those relationships, taught me just how important language is. It isn't just a way to simply communicate, it's a way to bring people together. Learning a language means putting in meaningful effort to understand people as a whole. There are thousands of languages around that world that, like Korean, represent culture. These languages carry a deep history with even deeper meanings, which in turn can reveal to you endless stories about a person. The way a person pronounces certain words can tell you which part of Korea they are from. Their favorite phrases and words can show you a glimpse of their personality. The tone of their voice can reveal endless waves of emotion. All of these aspects of language go so much deeper than them just being words; instead, they are a doorway to a person's soul.

My language is a path to my soul. As I grow older, I still don't know where all those languages are stored in my brain, locked somewhere that I cannot find. But every time I feel myself drifting further from Korea and the Korean language, I remember to call my grandmother. I listen to a Korean song, or watch an episode of a Korean drama. There are reminders around me every day that I cannot forget my Korean identity--that in order to maintain my relationship with my grandparents, my mother, and my Korean friends, I cannot only know English. I have to be not just American, but Korean-American. I remember that I must embrace my identity fully, instead of shedding away a part of it due to embarrassment or shame.

The most important reminder for me to learn Korean is my grandfather. He is a writer,

and recently published a book called, “The Letter to my Grandchildren.” In it are 100 poems and short essays written by him, some in Korean, some translated to English by my mother. 100 pieces of wisdom and love that he wishes to share with us, all put into one book. It is the greatest gift I could ask for. And I wish to be able to read those letters one day, and keep his memory close to my heart.

Language has created and broken many relationships throughout my life. But as I go on, I hope that language can do more than just create and destroy. Instead, I see it as a tool to heal the relationships that I still have. Language, with all its nuances and layers, is the first step to making the Korean in Korean American whole again.

UNCONDITIONALLY

MIA CHEN

I admire the bunny in my garden. I watched it decapitate my pansies, leaving a stem in its wake. The pansy was in its mouth petal down, slowly disappearing with each nibble. It didn't just eat flowers though—I would call the rabbit an equivalent of a goat. Yet, I never put up any fences or confronted the thing. Even when I was just starting out and only had pansies to my name, I gave the rabbit my pansies. Now that I have pansies and peppers and peas, I still let the rabbit take all that I have.

My neighbor, who got me into gardening, killed a rabbit once. She threw stones at it and one of the stones actually hit, leaving a rabbit bleeding in the head in the green. She also made rabbit traps, synonymous to rat traps. My neighbor's daughter, who's only ten, cried. But my neighbor didn't care, because her plants were saved. "You'll never grow a garden if you're soft hearted like that," My rabbit hating neighbor would say. She has always had a better garden than me; ripe tomatoes and cabbages that grew with its leaves open like a blanket. Cabbages have always reminded me of roses except greener, fuller, and without the thorns. The cabbages that look like a ball in the supermarkets were stripped of their clothes; gardeners know that the outside leaves are stripped because of cabbage moths. After all, no one wants to see crops chewed through. My neighbor surely doesn't. She has tents up for her cabbage, but the moths somehow still find a way in.

My neighbors on the other side of me, not the rabbit hating neighbor, found a bunny in their shrubs once. They came to me, hands parting the brown shrubs, showing me the

trembling creature, around three weeks old. "It's waiting for its mother!" My rabbit loving neighbors said, asking what they should feed it. They left it a carrot.

The next day, the rabbit was gone. "I think its mother took it away," My rabbit loving neighbor said, "I wish I got to touch it. Or keep it." It hadn't eaten the carrot that was left there. They looked dejected, even though they already had a pet rabbit in their own house that they kept in their upstairs bathroom. That pet rabbit was black and white too, not a common brown rabbit. But I guess it doesn't make a difference if it's this color or that, as long as it's not theirs.

I regard both my neighbors in the same light. They both gave me fruit on the New Years. I get unsolicited advice about my garden from both of them. One tells me to pick my weeds while the other tells me to grow more flowers. They stopped giving me fruit on the New Years once they realized I didn't have extra fruit in my fridge.

My first pet was a rabbit. It caught a sickness once and lost all its hair, then got better and its hair grew back. It died only a week after it regrew its hair. My father said, "Be glad it died pretty." I was ten when I put it in a box and buried it three feet under. I didn't cry though, because I didn't love it unconditionally. Most times, I forgot about the rabbit and my mother was the one giving it water and cleaning the cage.

I didn't cry because when the rabbit was gone, nothing had changed. I went to school, played with my friends, and came home. It was only when I saw a rabbit in my garden that I remembered that I used to have a rabbit. I don't know if that's the only reason I let it eat my pansies; maybe if I wasn't reminded of ten years old I would have thrown stones at it as well.

PAINTING CUPS

MIA CHEN

There's a shaking feeling.

It's new.

It's in the messages
in the clothes in the hair in the smile.
in the silence.

Maybe it's not her, but me.

I wonder if it would be different if she didn't
move.

if it's inevitable

Sitting beside her, with my leg raised onto
my chair, phone in my hands. She's on her
ipad, but there's nothing but the home page
there. We don't talk. I don't think we have any-
thing to talk about.

For that second, she feels like a stranger.

The day before junior year started, I slept
over at her house. It was spontaneous; I didn't
have any underwear or clean clothes.

I only remember that I slept on the couch of
their study, wearing her digital watch since my
phone had died. The study was pretty. It was
green outside, summer clearly present in the
hedges with flowers and clean cut lawns. Her
painting table lay in the study, paints scattered
and brushes in various cups. Plastic cups from
the community center, glass cups from Ikea,
warm toned coffee mugs.

The water in the cups was a translucent
brown, pigment still drifting in cohesive swirls.

Wearing her shirt, wearing her pants,
I thought,
This is the closest I'll get to a friend.

So maybe that's why I thought that we'd
always be close.

She left for school that day, before I could
wish her a good day.

She was talking to a girl from her school
that showed up at our orchestra concert, and
was complaining about how boring going to
orchestra was.

The other girl said, "See, that's why I should
have done orchestra, it wouldn't be that boring
with me."

She exchanges pleasantries with others even
though she doesn't want to.

She gave me a look when the girls beside us
were filming a tik tok, then whispered,
"How embarrassing."

When they asked her to get into a mirror
picture
though, she did. When they talked to her,
she did.

I imagine that she sees my message and
thinks,

“How embarrassing, she responds almost immediately.”

I saw her on instagram. She was in a post where some theatre kids were having a party. There was a bonfire table and she was laughing with her teeth exposed.

It would have been worse if I didn't even know she went to this party.

But I knew and she told me,
“It's so boring.” I asked her questions about it.
I laughed because she said,
“It's so lame.” I believed her.

She probably thinks the same when she's with me.

That's why she started playing brawl stars on her ipad while I pretended to be busy on my phone.

I wonder if that's how
things
go.

If friendships eventually dwindle and people run out of things to say.

If girls get bored of their friends, but never say it to their faces.



DRYAD MONSTER MANUAL ENTRY

AMELIE KEAST (top left)

INVISIBLE PAIN, VISIBLE TREATMENT

RAVIV HAREL-SIBELMAN (top right)

WE ARE PORCELAIN

AMY MENG (bottom right)



GRADE 12

THE PAIN NEVER GOES AWAY

AMY MENG

we see it in how citrus stains a blouse
its ribbon drowning honeyed hair.
how wishing wells devour our children whole
bony hands tugging at wind
wind of the ether, pleading.
how cactus thorns seize a living wound
void of want. paper cranes; pearl skin.
how the thread around two fingers lacerates
thinned needles, missing the final layer.
how cracked mirror shatters the mist
between placenta & Girl
the Girl, crying, crumbling.
how perfect is crossed out,
drawing circles into spoons.
how she remembers faces but not the list
of names hanging onto the month before.
how nightmares are unearthed in the morning
how babies kick at a swelling womb
& how there's too much to say
so we say nothing

HOUSECATS:

THE SECRET TEACHERS OF CONSENT EDUCATION

NADIA HAERYFAR

According to the Girls Human Rights Hub, consent education is defined as “the process of teaching people about mutual agreement, communication, and respect in intimate situations,” and is a key solution to combatting sexual violence. Unfortunately, many schools still refuse to teach consent, due to a mix of personal and political reasons, so parents often opt to do it themselves.

The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence lists eight ways to teach your children consent, their methods ranging from having direct discussions to providing literature on the subject matter to providing sources to actual online consent courses. However, what if I told you that there is a simpler way to teach your kids consent without having to go through these mental and logistical gymnastics? If you are one of those Southern moms who buy into the stigma of sex education or just have no idea how to go about it, don’t sweat it. Just get your kid a housecat.

I do not just say that as a lazy teenager who drinks nothing but sweet tea and rots on her sofa watching Netflix. I work part-time as a volunteer at my local cat shelter: Our Companions. They’ve got everything from newborn street kittens to diabetic cats who look ten but are secretly three, to blind seniors just wanting a warm lap. I also adopted my second cat, Freddy, when he showed up at my house five winters ago, dumped after being TNRed (Trapped, Neutered, and Released).

It took me three years to finally be able to pet Freddy; and even now, he swats when I

approach him with an open hand. He wants a fist; and yes, he’s got a smooth little brain, but we love him nonetheless. Freddy only likes being pet on the swings, three to six times a day after several-hour intervals. Even though he has made it clear he wants attention, I do it on his terms. You may think: this is awfully one-sided, right? What does it matter how my hand looks? He should just accept the attention.

But it does matter, though. When you see your family at whatever god-forsaken reunion your Aunt Karen drags you to, they’ll want to kiss you on the forehead if you’re under ten or have a hip replacement. You wouldn’t want them to kiss you on the mouth. If they try that, please seek a trusted adult. Your choice over where they kiss you is a boundary, a “limit of what someone considers to be acceptable behaviour.” The limits to which Freddy wants to be approached are no less important, nor crucial, to that relationship.

Cats, in general, have gotten a bad rap for being standoffish, especially compared to dogs, who are infamous for having significantly fewer boundaries. This happening can be expressed through the terms “close” boundaries vs “distant” boundaries. “Close” refers to when one’s boundaries are less limited, as seen commonly in dogs, who frequently have no limitations to the time or method of petting. “Distant” boundaries, in this case, define Freddy’s choice in hand appearance and his preference to seek attention once every several hours instead of continuously.

Distant boundaries are a good model to represent our boundaries, and therefore consent, because healthy, consensual sexual boundaries include the time of day and frequency of said intimacy, the actions performed, and so forth. In numbers, according to the National Library of Medicine, around 89.7% of surveyed individuals under 18 have time and frequency boundaries for intimacy.

Hence, if you want to teach your child consent education - upholding and expressing certain boundaries getting a housecat is a sure way to ensure they have a solid foundation. Obviously, your child should want the cat, which shouldn't be a problem if they are one of the "74 percent of kids" who has "asked for a pet." And, should you find yourself judging a housecat ever again for being 'standoffish,' 1) get a nice glass of milk and calm the heck down, and 2) understand that their behaviors strikingly mirror our own.

For notes and bibliography:
<https://tinyurl.com/mr2f4d39>

CHATTERBOX

CAITLYN YANG

For most of my life, I have been called a chatterbox, hyperactive, too much.

In elementary school, I was told by friends on the playground to calm down. I couldn't seem to control the emotions bubbling inside me, the jokes I told myself, the outbursts that fought their way out of my body. Teachers would shush me, send disapproving glances my way, mime zipping up their lips and throwing away the key. Hush.

Up until the ninth grade, I filled my journals with promises: tomorrow, I won't speak. I longed to be the quiet girl. Silent, stoic, fundamentally misunderstood. The sensitive artist or the reserved savant. She had nothing to prove because she was already somebody. An elusive somebody who sat alone in the back of the room, gazing into the distance at something the rest of us were too dumb to see, scribbling into an overflowing notebook. She seldom spoke, but when she did, she would raise a single perfect hand to share an idea so unique, so profound, so brilliant and life-changing that it rendered a room into silent, stunned awe.

I'd daydream about being her. She, who spoke with purpose not compulsion. But I always broke my vows. I could never be the quiet girl—not in any way that counts.

Eventually, I reached a new conclusion: I am just annoying. I talked too much and made a fool of myself in the process. Resigned to this fate, like a disillusioned court jester, I tried to wear this label with pride. After all, it seemed I would spend the rest of my life being called it. Annoying didn't have to mean unlikable. Maybe my passion made me more interesting

to others. Maybe it made me funnier. Privately, I even liked to think it made me smarter.

But my overzealous nature was not a mark of intelligence or charm. More often than that, I found that much of what I said meant nothing at all. My brain did not move as fast as my mouth, and for someone who spoke incessantly, maddeningly, to a fault, I struggled to find the right words to articulate what I really meant. Worse, I was forced to watch the aftermath of these ramblings, the mangled remains of ideas that had made sense in my head but ultimately proved incommunicable to others. The embarrassment burned.

So once again I tried to quiet myself. This time I succeeded. I shut myself in my room, spoke less and less, slept for entire days. It's not as though I had stopped thinking—I had just stopped expressing. I had simply lost the energy; the fight drained out of my body like water slipping through cupped hands. It was easier to sink down, take a backseat to my life, and allow the mind-numbing static gently take over, a cooling balm to a wound that refused to heal.

The silence stretched on for months before I realized maybe something was wrong.

In therapy, I hardly spoke. The irony wasn't lost on me. I spent entire 50-minute sessions silently considering a question, slowly turning it over and over like a jawbreaker in my mouth, tasting its edges and cutting my tongue on them. I traced the patterns of the carpet with my eyes or stared at a crack in the wall as if I would find hidden inside it the strength to push those soul-revealing, vulnerability-exposing words out. But the longer I waited, the harder

it got and the more the doubt crept in. Why taint this perfect silence with my less-than-perfect insides?

When, if, I did speak, my voice came out rough, crackly with underuse. A muttered, defeated answer to the what, how, why. Old reliable: “I don’t know.” Still, even as I said it, I felt something worse than that hot embarrassment I had grown so accustomed to. Something colder and in a way, more sinister. The slimy tendrils of shame licking down my spine and wrapping around my limbs. How much more useless could I be if I had forgotten how to speak?

Maybe I had overcorrected. Maybe this was just a symptom of growing up. Maybe I had talked so much, externalized every neural impulse in my body because underneath it all, there was nothing. Maybe that void had always been in me, latent, biding its time, striking when I was at my weakest. Maybe that’s who I really was.

Regardless, these days, I feel mostly normal. The antidepressants certainly help. For the most part, I’ve learned to “hold my tongue,” and “think before I speak.” I live by that old adage, “some things are better left unsaid.” I’ve learned, if I take a moment to organize my thoughts, my words can hold a lot of power, and for that reason, should not be used irresponsibly. I’ve spoken into microphones, stood at podiums, commanded stages, and echoed through the school loudspeaker each morning. But I’ve also learned to listen, to observe, to sit back and absorb the world around me. I rehearse what I say before I say it.

For the most part, I have found equilibrium. For the most part.

But sometimes I hear her. That chatterbox,

hyperactive, too much girl. She plays hide-and-seek in those moments of unfiltered excitement, peeking through my little quips, ducking her head with poorly stifled giggles. I feel her in that electric energy that makes me clap my hands like a child, bounce up and down on my toes, grin so hard it hurts. I taste her words as they take shape in my mouth, blurring their way out to the finish line. I see her in the candid photos taken at night parties or days spent playing tag on the beach, blurred and dizzy and alive. Most of all, I hear her. I hear her in my too-loud laugh, in my anxious run-on sentences, in my breathless, stream-of-consciousness monologues. I hear her when someone tells me I seem “quiet” and she screams and stomps her feet in protest. No no no! You’ve got it all wrong. That’s not who I am.

She doesn’t know me, but I know her. She is that golden ball of light that sits, nestled, in my chest cavity. I cannot snuff her out no matter how hard I try. The shimmer rushes through my veins, pulses sure and steady alongside my heart, floods my brain with a current of brilliance, releasing sparks of new colors in her wake. She is life itself, radiant, untamed, a supernova that scatters its stardust across the ever-expanding universe.

Sometimes, when I’m tired and it’s late at night, I look into the bathroom mirror and lean in as close as possible, nose brushing against the glass, hoping to catch a glimpse of that irresistible light, mirth dancing in my—her—eyes. And when I hear her laugh, I can’t help but laugh along.

THE GLASS FROG PHYSIQUE

NADIA HAERYFAR

I would ride into town
In Nikes for my big feet,
Scan my membership card
And flex small biceps

Amid the muscled gym rats.
They would snicker,
say 'boys have what girls
lack.'

But I would shrug it off,
continue to lift my five-
-pound weights without
a care in the world,

Without considering the
delicacy of my rice
paper skin and tender
Joints.

Without considering the
maze of innards I made
all too vulnerable when
I wiped my face with

The hem of my shirt, and
pressed palms against
the filthy gym mirror,
gawking

at the sheen of sweat on
my forehead, face pale
and legs shaky in reward
of a hard day's grit.

STUDENT AWARDS

GOLD MEDALISTS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Henry Abbott	Central School	Simsbury	K	Poetry	Go Away Shirt
Ellery Campana	Stratfield Elementary	Fairfield	K	Poetry	I love...
Benjamin Jainchill	Highcrest Elementary	Wethersfield	K	Art	Andy Warhol Flower Prints
Abigail Valentin	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	Ghost Puppy Under the Moon
Saisha Giri	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School	Glastonbury	2	Nonfiction	All About Antarctica
Anaya Abbasi	CREC Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	3	Fiction	The Runaway Chicken
Emilia Abbott	Central School	Simsbury	3	Poetry	My 49ers Sweatshirt
Peter Hansen	Christian Heritage School	Trumbull	3	Poetry	"In December"
Emilia Jimenez Gross	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	3	Art	Ocean Life
Tadhgán McOmber	Andover Elementary School	Andover	3	Fiction	The Cloaked Figure
Andre Noel	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	3	Fiction	Video Game Living Nightmare
Ruby Wilson	Hopewell School	South Glastonbury	3	Nonfiction	How to Take Care of a Dog!
Emy Cordero	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Girl Flying in the Moonlight
Dhruv Iyer	Mill Hill Elementary School	Southport	4	Art	Seashells On The Beach
Audrey Kottarathara	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	4	Art	My Dream Bedroom
Isabella Katigbak	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	5	Fiction	A Walk Through the Woods
Mairead Leonard	Central School	Simsbury	5	Poetry	The Attire of a Gymnast
Angela Meng	Saxe Intermediate School	New Canaan	5	Art	Still Life
Theodore Parker	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	5	Art	School Pencil
Phoebe Zombar	Jennings Elementary School	Fairfield	5	Art	The Broken Ballerina
Riley Cassara	Ledyard Middle School	Gales Ferry	6	Art	Take Me to the Dark Side

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Raji Doshi	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Fiction	The Golden Banana
Lucy Dziadul	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Nonfiction	A Fish With Teeth
Daniel Falz	Roger Ludlowe Middle School	Fairfield	6	Nonfiction	The water, the fish, and I.
Miriam Gabbai	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	6	Fiction	Why Can't We Be Friends?
Mysha Husain	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Poetry	The Beauty of Winter
Amelia Lacour	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Art	The Sleepy Red Fox
Kaveri Pathak	Saxe Middle School (Intermediate)	New Canaan	6	Nonfiction	Flying Into New Comfort Zones
Lofty Prempeh	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Fiction	The Boy and the Storm
Apsara Shetty	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Poetry	What I see
Hadley Van Herdeen	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6	Poetry	My Roots
Cora Chenier	Portland Middle School	Portland	7	Poetry	Nostalgia
Tharan Chimmiri	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Art	Solar
Elena Frey	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	7	Poetry	Untitled
Bri Guerra	Tomlinson Middle School	Fairfield	7	Poetry	Rise
Shreenika Patil	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Poetry	The Eraser's Wisdom
Emma Hennessey	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Nonfiction	They Never Stopped Writing: The Liberator's Defiant Heroism and Its Crucial Input in the Abolition Movement
Sophia Maksymiuk	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Poetry	I'm holding on to gravity before sleep can claim my soul
Emily Meng	Saxe Middle School	New Canaan	8	Art	Running Out of Time
Emma O'Brien	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Fiction	Birdsong
Zumra Sahin	John Wallace Middle School	Newington	8	Fiction	End of The Beginning
Ma'ayan Harel - Sibelman	Homeschooled		9	Fiction	Echoes of a Forgotten Truth
Akithmi Koththigoda	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	9	Nonfiction	The Faces Behind Science : Human Intervention in Healthcare
Avah Terraciano	Southington High School	Southington	9	Fiction	Enemy
Madelyn Visser	Newington High School	Newington	9	Nonfiction	Poker Face

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Eunice Lee	The Loomis Chaffee School	Windsor	10	Nonfiction	The Role of Patriarchal Attitudes or Zero-Sum Thinking To Perpetuate Sexism In South Asia
Karthik Srikumar	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	10	Nonfiction	Artificial Intelligence the Silent Architect: When the Tools We Create Begin to Shape Us
Karthik Srikumar	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	10	Poetry	The Run to Escape
Elisa Alt	Pierrepont School	Westport	11	Poetry	We Leave The Rest To Silence
Mia Chen	Edwin Oscar Smith High School	Storrs	11	Fiction	Unconditionally
Mia Chen	Edwin Oscar Smith High School	Storrs	11	Nonfiction	Yòuzi
Mia Chen	Edwin Oscar Smith High School	Storrs	11	Poetry	Painting Cups
Ayush Dave	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	11	Art	Wanderers in the Mist
Iris Hida	Rockville High School	Vernon	11	Nonfiction	With the Skin and All
Adhiti Parupalli	Ellington High School	Ellington	11	Art	The Bond of Life!
Emily Porter	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Nonfiction	Korean. American.
Disha Rajasekar	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	11	Fiction	What Goes Around Comes Around
David Shim	Loomis Chaffee	Windsor	11	Art	Countdown to Change
David Shim	Loomis Chaffee	Windsor	11	Nonfiction	Redefining the Generational Torch
Lucy Boissoneau	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	12	Poetry	Pieces
Melinda Das	Wethersfield High School	Wethersfield	12	Art	The Chaos In Creation
Nadia Haeryfar	Edwin O. Smith High School	Storrs	12	Nonfiction	Housecats: The Secret Teachers of Consent Education
Nadia Haeryfar	Edwin O. Smith High School	Storrs	12	Poetry	The Glass Frog Physique
Raviv Harel-Sibelman	Homeschooled		12	Art	Invisible Pain, Visible Treatment
Amelie Keast	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts - Full Day	Middletown	12	Art	Dryad Monster Manual Entry
Amy Meng	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Art	We Are Porcelain
Amy Meng	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Poetry	The Pain Never Goes Away

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Rui Wang	Miss Porter's School	Farmington	12	Art	Glance of Life
Caitlyn Yang	Fairfield Ludlowe High School	Fairfield	12	Nonfiction	Chatterbox
Caitlyn Yang	Fairfield Ludlowe High School	Fairfield	12	Poetry	Lycanthrope

SILVER MEDALISTS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Henry Abbott	Central School	Simsbury	K	Art	Winter at Henry's House
Anna Barkley	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	Sunset
Ila Neumann	Jennings Elementary	Fairfield	K	Art	"Dogman"
Ellis Reid	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	K	Art	The Forest
Vera Stenta	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	Flowers
Ellis Reid	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	K	Fiction	The Lost Boy
Wesley Egan	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	WOW
Elizabeth Fang	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	Joy
Olin Minor	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	Soccer Practice
Joseph Pagan	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	Godzilla
Gabriel Rodriguez	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	Imaginary Minecraft World
Bowen Stout	Homeschooled		1	Art	Bison the Snowy Owl
Lucas Castillo	CREC Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	When I am little and When I am Big
Penelope Walsh	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	What the Sun Sees
Macy Baker	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	2	Art	PEACE
Kim King	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	2	Art	Ducks
Julian LaPointe	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	2	Art	Spotted Lizard

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Astrid Tran	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	2	Art	Sea Birds
Sarah de Wilde	Orchard Hill Elementary School	South Windsor	2	Fiction	Suzy and Sarah
Talia Harby	Eli Tery elementary school	South Windsor	2	Nonfiction	Cats by Talia Harby
Eleanor Leslie	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	3	Art	Ocean Fantasy
Isabella Pfau	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	3	Art	Mushroom Land
Kadryk Racine	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	3	Art	Blue Jay
Arabella Lee	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	3	Fiction	Game On! Sofia's and Cameron's Adventure
Chloe Marriott	CREC University of Hartford Magnet School	West Hartford	3	Fiction	Harriet's Justice
Nathan Pate	Anna Reynolds Elementary	Newington	3	Fiction	The Tsunami and The Ancient House
Logan Scott	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School	Glastonbury	3	Fiction	The Adventures of Bella Baramous Tatamous and How She Got Over Her Fear of the Big Hawk
Ella Rohde	Tariffville School	Tariffville	3	Nonfiction	The bug
Elif Bahadir Eser	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Cool Cat
Wren Charry	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Boy Meets Bear
Dylan Green	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	4	Art	Winter Starry Night
Jacob Grosman	Burr Elementary School	Fairfield	4	Art	The Unseen World
Mia Li	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Dream Collage
Gunnar Slyman	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Parrot
Naisha Varma	CREC Academy of International Studies Elementary School	South Windsor	4	Art	Mythical Deer
Mingxuan Zhong	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	Ship Wreck
Lilliana DelMastro	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	4	Fiction	Family Trip to Disney World
Harper-Lee Leonard	Anna Reynolds Elementary	Newington	4	Fiction	A Whole Other World and a Rubix cube

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Michelle Varghese	Orchard Hill Elementary School	South Windsor	4	Poetry	Life In Words
Sade Winkler	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School	Glastonbury	4	Poetry	Books
David Cha	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Art	Castle Collograph
Lisa Henriques	Jennings Elementary School	Fairfield	5	Art	Peril's Paradise
KK Khera	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Art	Leap for Joy
Mila Kusurin	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Art	My Best Friend
Isabel Mayer	Bugbee Elementary School	West Hartford	5	Art	Ophelia
Aarya Patil	Thames river magnet school	Groton	5	Art	Cozy fall raccoon
Anders Wright	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	5	Art	Abacus Jones
Maia Kulas	Tootin' Hills Elementary School	West Simsbury	5	Fiction	The Lost Toy
Santino Nolan	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Fiction	One Last Battle
Taylor Palazzo	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Fiction	Lost and Found
Aaliyah Torres	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Fiction	My Brave Avocado
David Wilkosz	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	5	Fiction	A Second Chance to Love
Sophia Davis	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	Game-Winning Goal
Isabel Mayer	Bugbee Elementary School	West Hartford	5	Nonfiction	The Day the Music Died
Lily Wilson	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	5	Nonfiction	Dogs
Isabel Mayer	Bugbee Elementary School	West Hartford	5	Poetry	Me
Evany Prell	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	5	Poetry	In Memory
Sophie Rohde	Tariffville School	Tariffville	5	Poetry	I am from my heart
Bridgette Hopp	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Art	The Hunter's Eyes
Samarth Swain	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	6	Art	Serenity
Giuliana Bibeau	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	6	Fiction	"Pressure to Be Perfect"
Adam Elmokadem	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	6	Fiction	Yonder

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Lily Gallo	Coleytown middle school	Westport	6	Fiction	Shellvestor's Adventure
Mysha Husain	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	A Strike of Power
Kylie Lewis	Tariffville School	Tariffville	6	Fiction	Gone From Home
Preston McClure	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Fiction	A Final Goodbye
Clara Preston	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	Joan
Aarav Rajavat	Timothy Edwards	South Windsor	6	Fiction	The Undying Hope
Lucie Reiss-Schmidt	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6	Fiction	Untitled
Kaela Bartenstein	John Wallace Middle School	Newington	6	Nonfiction	My Amazing Paw Paw
Angela Cui	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Nonfiction	Welcome Home Ore!
Advaith Reddy Dyava	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Nonfiction	Revenge of The Mummy
Mysha Husain	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Nonfiction	The Science of Hard-Work
James Parke	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	6	Nonfiction	The Navigation Test
Apsara Shetty	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Nonfiction	Game On
Alarie Sweet	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	6	Nonfiction	Free On the Mountain
Raji Doshi	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Poetry	A World Without Borders
Silas Drake	Tomlinson Middle School	Fairfield	6	Poetry	My Old Mini Cooper
Addison Fournier	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Poetry	Pinecones
Sheldon Hsiao	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Poetry	The Hollow Tree
Isha Pise	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6	Poetry	A Colorful Picture of Me
Robin Shapiro	Squadron Line Elementary	Simsbury	6	Poetry	The Way There
Elena Frey	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	7	Art	Untitled
Harshitha Prasanna	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Art	Together is Better!
Amber Asher	John F. Kennedy Middle School	Enfield	7	Fiction	Staring into the Grotesque Beauty of Terror

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Cameron Brown	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Fiction	The End of Memories
Gabriel de Dios	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Fiction	The Birthday Party
Sophia Formica	Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School	Southington	7	Fiction	5 Dollars
Isabella Santoro	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	7	Fiction	The Blackout
Akshat Singh	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	Akshat and the House That Whispered
Olivia Warburton	E.C Adams Middle School	Guilford	7	Fiction	The Boy and the Grey Cat by the Wood
Freya Watt	King Philip Middle School	WEST HARTFORD	7	Fiction	Evacuees Excerpt
Karthik Jayakanth	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Nonfiction	IC814 The Khandhar Hijack
Preston Santamauro	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Nonfiction	The Last Time
Jacqueline Glick	Roger Ludlowe Middle School	Fairfield	7	Poetry	Mirror Mirror
Carolina Katigbak	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Poetry	Snow Day
Emmy Liu	The Country School	Wallingford	7	Poetry	Let Love Sing
Juliet Chattaway	New Canaan Country School	New Canaan	8	Art	A Lemon Tree
Sarah Adler	Henry James Memorial School	Simsbury	8	Fiction	(Not) Appley Ever After
Juliet Olmstead	Tomlinson Middle School	Fairfield	8	Fiction	Dreaming on the Stairs
Daksha Rajasekaran	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Fiction	Fragments of Yesterday
Divija Adhikary	Ellington Middle School	Ellington	8	Nonfiction	Recognition Redefined
Huntington Beckett	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	8	Nonfiction	To Be Labeled Gifted
Oliver Fitzgerald	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	8	Nonfiction	The Outsider Who Will “Stay Gold”
Lucy Ouimet	Mansfield Middle School	Storrs	8	Nonfiction	Let It Go
Arya Samat	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	8	Nonfiction	Holding On to Hope: Pony-boy’s Journey to Staying Gold
Beatrice Glover	Tomlinson Middle School	Fairfield	8	Poetry	Rain’s Grace
Annaliese Leroy	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Poetry	School of Gratitude
Daksha Rajasekaran	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Poetry	Where Time Meets You

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Arya Samat	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	8	Poetry	We've Grown Up
Ma'ayan Harel - Sibelman	Homeschooled		9	Art	Golden Hour in the City
Ejin Chung	Miss Porter's School	Farmington	9	Nonfiction	Halmeoni (Grandmother)
Avery Hancock-Braun	Edwin O. Smith High School	Storrs	9	Poetry	Safety Net
Ma'ayan Harel - Sibelman	Homeschooled		9	Poetry	The Walls Keep Talking
Aleya Joseph	Academy of International Studies	Bloomfield	9	Poetry	I hear the shriek of sirens
Mariela Resto	Academy of Aerospace and Engineering	Windsor	9	Poetry	The day she fell
Juliciaah Rivera	Fairfield Warde High School	Fairfield CT	9	Poetry	Never Truly Mine
Nicolas Campisi	Avon Old Farms School	Avon	10	Fiction	Zeena's Reckoning: A Creative Retelling of Zeena's Journey in Ethan Frome
Emma Witinok	Fairfield Ludlowe High School	Fairfield	10	Art	Pensive
Charlie Piputbundit	Fairfield Warde High School	Fairfield	10	Fiction	Unseen
Sam Glemboski	Computer Science & Engineering High School	Enfield	10	Nonfiction	That One Pitch
Nathim Mughal	Fairfield Ludlowe Highschool.	Fairfield	10	Nonfiction	Hidden Love From a Thousand Rupees Away
Lily Mahonen	Montville High School	Oakdale	11	Art	Daydreamer
Ayush Dave	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	11	Nonfiction	The Kitchen Can't Crash
Lily Mahonen	Montville High School	Oakdale	11	Nonfiction	Gender Inequality Women Still Face in America
Disha Rajasekar	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	11	Nonfiction	Giulia Tofana: Hero or Killer
Iris Hida	Rockville High School	Vernon	11	Poetry	Extraction
Maher Mawla	South Windsor High	South Windsor	11	Poetry	The Ash of Passion
Anayi Pannell	Edwin O. Smith High School	Storrs	11	Poetry	The Sprout
Alessandra Tuccillo	Fairfield Ludlowe High School	Fairfield	11	Poetry	Mirror

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Nohelys Ortega	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts - Full Day	Hartford	12	Art	Fierce Soul
Abigail Dayton	Trumbull High School	Trumbull	12	Fiction	Rocky Mountain High
Angelina Gao	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Fiction	Complex Character Narrative
Avril MacHale	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Fiction	Complex Character Narrative
Mattie Sirois	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Fiction	And The Carts Rumble On
Gabrielle Hurt	Stafford High School	Stafford Springs	12	Nonfiction	I Am Gonna Go Far
Ian Li	Waterford High School	Waterford	12	Nonfiction	Whodunnit?: Human Responsibility and the Dangers of Artificial Intelligence in Light of Frankenstein
Max Sanseverino	New Canaan High-school	New Canaan	12	Nonfiction	Coming Home to Chicken Parm
Moon Wilensky	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	Hartford	12	Nonfiction	Sexualization Around the World: Women in American and Australian Advertisements
Anxhelika Deda	Wethersfield High School	Wethersfield	12	Poetry	A full plate.
Valerie Perez	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts - Full Day	Hartford	12	Poetry	Nearly New Pomegranates
Yimin Wu	William H. Hall High School	West Hartford	12	Poetry	erratic circadian rhythm: alarm clocks, wet dreams, all-nighters

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Olivia Clauson	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	<i>Sunny Day</i>
Leo Huang	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	<i>Robot Shape Collage</i>
Gavin Ingerson	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	<i>Shape Collage</i>
Rhythm Panta	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K	Art	<i>Rainbow</i>
Julius Sapaugh	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	1	Art	<i>Mansfield Elementary School</i>
Elaine Castillo	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	<i>What the Sun Sees</i>
Jaizian (TJ) Luyando	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	<i>What the Sun Sees</i>
Isabella Moran Pichardo	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	<i>What the Sun Sees</i>
Ellen Xavier	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1	Poetry	<i>What the Sun Sees</i>
Huzaifa Rizwan	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	2	Art	<i>The Sonicverse</i>
Benjamin Stout	Homeschooled		2	Art	<i>Spring Barnyard</i>
Benjamin Stout	Homeschooled		2	Art	<i>Koala Forest</i>
Hamsika Murikipudi	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	2	Fiction	<i>Magic Snow Tales</i>
Benjamin Sheeran	Orchard Hill Elementary School	South Windsor	2	Fiction	<i>The Boys</i>
Ainsley O'Neill	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	2	Nonfiction	<i>My Time to Shine in the Spotlight</i>
William Rivard	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	3	Art	<i>Demon Mask</i>
Aviana Ambrosio	Tootin' Hills School	Simsbury	3	Fiction	<i>The Beary Good Adventure</i>
Zainab Husain	CREC Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	3	Nonfiction	<i>Water Cycle</i>
Ava Li	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	4	Art	<i>Cardinal</i>
Aiden Geddis	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	4	Fiction	<i>Tackle Football</i>
Ellie Hermenegildo	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	4	Fiction	<i>Mr. Booker's New Friend Jenson</i>
Ayla Deloso	CREC University of Hartford Magnet School	West Hartford	4	Poetry	<i>My Cat</i>
Kanyirayochukwu Iloeje	Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School	Glastonbury	4	Poetry	<i>My Mom</i>

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Charlotte Provost	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	4	Poetry	<i>In the Sky</i>
Eleanor Zawoiski	Cider Mill School	Wilton	4	Poetry	<i>Moments In Time</i>
Artemis McMullan	Homeschooled		5	Art	<i>Peace</i>
Bailey Stout	Homeschooled		5	Art	<i>Cozy Winter Cabin</i>
Zoya Abbasi	CREC Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	5	Fiction	<i>If I Were a Bird</i>
Sophia Davis	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Fiction	<i>A Mouse's Cooking Dream</i>
Evelyn Dunleavy	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Fiction	<i>The Key</i>
Mila Kusurin	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Fiction	<i>The Doorbell Rang</i>
Isabel Mayer	Bugbee Elementary School	West Hartford	5	Fiction	<i>Hidden</i>
William Petit	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	5	Fiction	<i>Doppelganger</i>
Evaleigh Romagnoli	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Fiction	<i>Goin' Camping</i>
Kristen Schack	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Fiction	<i>The Mechanical People</i>
Penelope Zubko	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Fiction	<i>The Surprise</i>
Lexi Bancroft	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	<i>Trip to Greece</i>
Louisa Berger	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	<i>The Day That Went Wrong</i>
Nora Gutman	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	<i>Problems in Paradise</i>
Presley Johnson	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	5	Nonfiction	<i>Medical Bad Luck</i>
Amara Krikorian	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	<i>All the Acting</i>
Mila Kusurin	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Nonfiction	<i>Gondola</i>
Sophie Rohde	Tariffville School	Tariffville	5	Nonfiction	<i>Love is always stronger</i>
Siaana Beri	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Poetry	<i>The Symbol of Joy</i>
Andrew Cha	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Poetry	<i>Siblings</i>
Evelyn Dunleavy	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Poetry	<i>The Final Dance of Leaves</i>
Hazel Falco	Tariffville School	Tariffville	5	Poetry	<i>I Like This</i>
Reilly O'Neill	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	5	Poetry	<i>An Ode to Bricks</i>
Luciana Scheinberg	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	5	Poetry	<i>Everyday Acting</i>
Anders Wright	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	5	Poetry	<i>Humdrumbly-glummumbly</i>
Penelope Zubko	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5	Poetry	<i>Deer</i>
Angela Cui	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Art	<i>Four Cats Drawing</i>
Robin Shapiro	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	6	Art	<i>Portrait of a Girl</i>

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Mia Berry	Ledyard Middle School	Gales Ferry	6	Fiction	<i>The Re-Written Life</i>
Viraaj Bokria	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>The Bear who ruins everything</i>
Timothy Fang	Timothy Edward Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>Apocalypse Overload</i>
Elvire Hugon-Delisle	Squadron Line Elementary School	Simsbury	6	Fiction	<i>A Brief Introduction to New Trishon of the Galaxy 4-OD-8609</i>
Nikhil Krishnamurthy	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Fiction	<i>A World Short of Life</i>
Joaquin Narvaez	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>Rebuild of Society</i>
Vivaan Pandey	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>The Gift of a Brother</i>
Emmett Pecker	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>Hey There Mr. Spaceman!</i>
Apsara Shetty	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Fiction	<i>Christmas Miracle</i>
Cecilia Bardenwerper	Roger Ludlowe Middle School	Fairfield	6	Nonfiction	<i>Grips and Grit</i>
Camille Captain	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Nonfiction	<i>A Rough Ride</i>
Raji Doshi	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6	Nonfiction	<i>Breaking Barriers: The Ongoing Struggle for Women in Space</i>
Zoe Epstein	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6	Nonfiction	<i>18 Spiders</i>
Cameron Klein	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6	Nonfiction	<i>The Day on the Trampoline</i>
Beatrice Klemann	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6	Nonfiction	<i>On the Path to Success</i>
Layan Mansour	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	6	Nonfiction	<i>My First Best Friend</i>
Tejas Paranjape	Tootin' Hills School	Simsbury	6	Nonfiction	<i>All about Bears</i>
Akshitha Ajay	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6	Poetry	<i>I am from</i>
Ezra Chapman	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Poetry	<i>A Day in Hiram</i>
Kylie Lewis	Tariffville School	Tariffville	6	Poetry	<i>Life</i>
Neja Loku Gamage	Timothy Edwards middle school	South Windsor	6	Poetry	<i>Blue</i>
Schroeder Nadine Schroeder	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6	Poetry	<i>A Story That Should Not Be Told</i>
Akshita Naveen	Timothy Edwards Middle Schools	South Windsor	6	Poetry	<i>Home and Family</i>
Julie Picone	Ledyard Middle School	Gales Ferry	6	Poetry	<i>Seeing the Beauty in Everything</i>

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Samarth Swain	Martin Kellogg Middle School	Newington	6	Poetry	<i>Golden Sunflower</i>
Michelle Amaechi	Tomlinson Middle School	Fairfield	7	Fiction	<i>One Last Breath - A short dystopian piece.</i>
Tharan Chimmiri	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Fiction	<i>Into the Wild</i>
Ella Elam	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>Murder on an Island</i>
Aarna Jaggi	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>My Feather Friend</i>
Lillian MacDonald	Schaghticoke Middle School	New Milford	7	Fiction	<i>I Sense Things You Don't</i>
Abhinavsai Nune	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>The Metro</i>
Ruby Passon	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>Escaping Germany</i>
Shreenika Patil	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>Stand Tall</i>
Advik Shrivastava	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>The Baker</i>
Akshat Singh	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Fiction	<i>The Flow of Water</i>
Tharan Chimmiri	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7	Nonfiction	<i>A Restless Past</i>
Aarna Jaggi	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Nonfiction	<i>Through New Eyes</i>
Harshitha Prasanna	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	7	Nonfiction	<i>Nuclear Power</i>
Konstantinos (Dean) Raptis	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	7	Nonfiction	<i>Climbing Through Fear</i>
Eleanor Bender	Old Saybrook Middle School	Old Saybrook	7	Poetry	<i>Summer Woes</i>
Sophia Formica	Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School	Southington	7	Poetry	<i>Listen to the Silence</i>
Amelia Reinhart	Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School	Southington	7	Poetry	<i>O Dearest Beauty</i>
Fox Richardson-White	Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Middle School	Bloomfield	7	Poetry	<i>I Am Enough</i>
Kyrinn Stone	Portland Middle School	Portland	7	Poetry	<i>I'm a Dancer</i>
Olivia Warburton	E.C Adams Middle School	Guilford	7	Poetry	<i>Run</i>
Charlotte Bagioni	John Wallace Middle School	Newington	8	Art	<i>Two of Us</i>
Emma Hennessey	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Fiction	<i>The Edge of Night</i>

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Ella Killoran	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	8	Fiction	<i>Crowven</i>
Gavin Magnuson	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	8	Fiction	<i>A Light From Below</i>
Amberlee Turturici	Schaghticoke Middle School	New Milford	8	Fiction	<i>Lillian's Ascent of Fear</i>
Emma O'Brien	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Nonfiction	<i>Teach Them How to Say Good-bye: The Significance of George Washington's Farewell Address</i>
Jane Xue	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	8	Nonfiction	<i>The Outsider Who Will Stay Optimistic</i>
Divija Adhikary	Ellington Middle School	Ellington	8	Poetry	<i>Embrace Of Solitude</i>
Owen Barden	Adams Middle School	Guilford	8	Poetry	<i>Obscura</i>
Hasini Kasam	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8	Poetry	<i>To Be Free</i>
Carolina Keenaghan	Memorial Middle School	Middlebury	8	Poetry	<i>Batter Up</i>
Girish Prasad	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	9	Nonfiction	<i>The Disguised Downfall of the Haitian Revolution</i>
Annabel O'Malley	The Hopkins School	New Haven	9	Poetry	<i>Duct Tape</i>
Juliette Schwartz	Christian Heritage School	Shelton	9	Poetry	<i>Innocence</i>
Chris Hopkins	Suffield High School	West Suffield	10	Fiction	<i>Life is Fragile</i>
Emma Mao	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	10	Fiction	<i>Evening Train</i>
Alyssa Medina	Northwestern Regional High School District 7	Winsted	10	Fiction	<i>Only A Piece In A Wall Of Paintings</i>
Aleksander Olewicz	Notre Dame High School	West Haven	10	Fiction	<i>The Gate</i>
Kendyl Brooks	Computer Science & Engineering High School	Enfield	10	Nonfiction	<i>My Dad a Junkie</i>
Sarah Johnson	CREC Academy of Computer Science and Engineering High School	Enfield	10	Nonfiction	<i>The Presence Of A Father Matters</i>
Anamika Martins	Fairfield Ludlowe High School	Fairfield	10	Nonfiction	<i>Faith on Borrowed Time: The Cost of Celebrating Who I Am</i>
Noah Sanderson	CREC Academy of Computer Science and Engineering High School	Enfield	10	Nonfiction	<i>Shock therapy (Middle School edition)</i>
Joann Varghese	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	10	Nonfiction	<i>The Man</i>

CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Student Name	School Name	School City/ Town	Gr	Genre	Title of Submission
Emma Mao	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	10	Poetry	<i>Writing Onward</i>
Jane OConnell	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	11	Fiction	<i>Between the Wind And the Dust</i>
Emily Porter	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Fiction	<i>An Excerpt: The Sleeping Beauty</i>
Zachary Smith	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Fiction	<i>The Rabbits End</i>
Kaden Zimmerman	Farmington High School	Farmington	11	Fiction	<i>The House</i>
Kaleigh Aparo	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Nonfiction	<i>Hard Work Beats Talent, When Talent Doesn't Work Hard</i>
Madeline Milheiro	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Nonfiction	<i>The Fads of Fiction</i>
Aneek Roy	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Nonfiction	<i>Ideally Perfect</i>
Madeline Milheiro	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	11	Poetry	<i>My First Best Friend</i>
Kristina Hunter	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School	Hartford	12	Art	<i>The Wall Between Us</i>
Caroline Blazer	Simsbury High School	Simsbury	12	Fiction	<i>Moonlight Sonata</i>
Joaquin Garcia-Berg	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Fiction	<i>Old Habits Die Hard</i>
Ava Passon	Windsor High School	Windsor	12	Fiction	<i>My Reflection</i>
Caroline Bielefield-Roberts	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	Hartford	12	Nonfiction	<i>What is Fashion</i>
Ednelis Carattini Guzman	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School	Hartford	12	Nonfiction	<i>Ed-Ne-Lis</i>
Joshua Clark	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School	Hartford	12	Nonfiction	<i>WATCH ME</i>
Ava Passon	Windsor High School	Windsor	12	Nonfiction	<i>Still a Kid at Heart</i>
Matthew Riley	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12	Nonfiction	<i>Beyond the Cliffs: A Journey into Zion National Park</i>
Deborah Agyeman	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	12	Poetry	<i>December Lights</i>
Hannah Barnes	Lyman Memorial High School	Lebanon	12	Poetry	<i>Eidolon's Lullaby</i>
Maximillian Bonadies	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	12	Poetry	<i>Long Beach</i>
Gianna LeClair	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	12	Poetry	<i>the roses.</i>

TEACHER AWARDS

PLATINUM TEACHERS

Teacher Name	School Name	School City/Town	Grade
Kim King	Mansfield Elementary School	Mansfield	K, 1, 2, 3 & 4
John Stinchon	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	6 & 7

GOLD TEACHERS

Teacher Name	School Name	School City/Town	Grade
M.J. Hartell	Talcott Mountain Academy	Avon	6, 7 & 8
Dana Johansen	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	5
Kimberly McGee	Sage Park Middle School	Windsor	6, 7 & 8

SILVER TEACHERS

Teacher Name	School Name	School City/Town	Grade
Emily Diggs	Coleytown Middle School	Westport	6 & 7
Melissa Mazzaf- erro	Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield	4, 5 & 6
Anthony Millard	Timothy Edwards Middle School	South Windsor	8
James Shivers	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts - Full Day	Middletown	12

HONORABLE MENTION TEACHERS

Teacher Name	School Name	School City/Town	Grade
Maureen Corbo	Greenwich Academy	Greenwich	6
Phillip Day	E.C Adams Middle School	Guilford	7 & 8
Suzanne Desjarlais	Edwin Oscar Smith High School	Storrs	11
Amanda Flachsbart	South Windsor High	South Windsor	11
Maggie Hamill	New Canaan Highschool	New Canaan	12
Jeffrey Helming	Anna Reynolds Elementary	Newington	2 & 3
Danielle Herbette	Bugbee Elementary School	West Hartford	5
Nicole Jamieson	Tariffville School	Tariffville	5
Jamie Laferriere	Anna Reynolds Elementary School	Newington	4
Paola Maina	Gideon Welles School	Glastonbury	6
Elizabeth Salafia	Smith Middle School	Glastonbury	7
Timothy Sanderson	Glastonbury High School	Glastonbury	11 & 12
Jennifer Shannon	CREC Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1, 3 & 5
Grae Sibelman	Your Homeschooled Students		9 & 12
Rebecca Snay	Ledyard Middle School	Gales Ferry	6
Susan Steidl	New Canaan High School	New Canaan	12
Brian Stout	Your Homeschooled Students		1, 2 & 5
Jill Thompson	Highcrest Elementary	Wethersfield	K, 4 & 5
Kellie Wagner	CREC Academy of Computer Science and Engineering High School	Enfield	10
Kara Zdrojeski	Discovery Academy	Wethersfield	1

