



805

The Teen Issue



Lit + Art Journal

Teen Issue 1

2016

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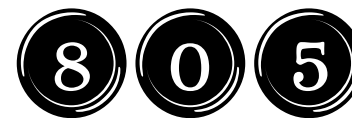
800 Literature & rhetoric

805 Serial publications

We're looking for prose, poetry, and art that is unexpected, striking, and moving. We accept submissions from residents of Manatee County and the rest of the universe. Submissions are accepted year-round, and there is no fee to submit. Please submit works not published elsewhere. Submissions can be made at www.805lit.org/submissions.html.

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Lit + Art Journal

Teen Issue 1

2016

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From the Editor

It is with great pleasure that the editors of *805* present our inaugural Teen Issue. When we started combing through the submissions for our first publication, we discovered a unique talent bubbling under the surface of our creative community—teens. We decided to dedicate an issue highlighting the creativity of writers, poets, artists, and photographers aged 13 to 19. The submissions were amazing in quality, artistry, and skill.

As a parent of a sixteen-year-old, I know it takes extra moxie for a teenager to take something they have created and turn it over for all to see. The teens in this issue have more than boldness, they have tenacity, and it is easy to be humbled by their work. There is a reverence for craft, and the themes reflect a fresh viewpoint that comes from their observations of life swirling around them. Some are bleak and striking, while others capture an innocent optimism that we elders sometimes forget to notice. Last month, the editors of *805* hosted a reception to celebrate our first year of publication. Our teen poets and writers amazed us with their poise in reading their work in front of an audience for the first time.

The cover of our teen issue captures the essence of being a teenager. A dancer jumping over the water while hoisting an umbrella—she is all that is possible. When I look at the photo, I feel it captures not only the whimsy of this wonderful age, but freedom with all its angst, uncertainty, and unbridled confidence. We welcome you to explore the world as teens see it. It's their world, enjoy it through their eyes.

Julieanna Blackwell
Editor

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High Flying
Sasha Rose Khatami

The Sandman

Joshua Evangelista

The Sandman Rose,
Over rocks, over bones.
A birth not so slimy as dry.
Above, in the air,
The Sandman stood bare,
Unformed empty, a solid in size.
Looking down he cried out,
“I am dust all throughout,
And see all these men flaunting here.”
For around the Sandman
Taking space on same land,
Stood stoic Rockmen, strong and sure
With skin of chiseled marble,
With voices, strange and garbled,
They yelled laughter, friends to the ear.
The Sandman sat down,
Plunged his hands to the ground,
Dug a hole till he found, deep, deep inside:
Slate Marble, Stone treasure,
For his new form, much better
A sheathe of rock, like the rest of the men.
But as he pulled one small boulder,
His hand grew much colder,
For his sand skin began to run off.
And as the sand fell,
The Sandman stood, swelled
As the rocks, hidden inside, came out.
For trying to change, trying to transform,
The Sandman, found inside that more.
For within, he was Rockman, just like all the rest.
Crevice and cultured, not bare in the chest,
The Rockmen, they were his best.



Calm Waters
Melinda Mitchell

Restructuring

Luke Valadie

It seemed like we would be waiting forever. For three days we had been sitting, occasionally stumbling a few feet forward only to slump back down onto the ground once again. We were in a procession of the damned, an infinite column of disheveled men, women, and children waiting to be processed. Looming in the distance were massive concrete structures, artificial cliffs reminiscent of urban parking garages from a former life. The concrete sprawl stretched as far as the eye could see, an endless city of unerring uniformity. Behind us were our former neighbors, an optometrist with his wife and two children. Men in black uniforms wielding rifles patrolled the queue. Sometimes, if we were lucky, bread would be passed out by these men. Our rations were meager, though. We almost looked forward to entering the city—perhaps there would at least be something to eat. When they forced us out of our house and seized our property, I grabbed the first book I saw on the shelf on my way out. I clutched it to my chest as we waited in this endless river of the displaced.

Days passed before we could even see the gate. It stood black and menacing, penetrating the sky in a demonstration of unquestionable authority. As we approached, more and more black clad riflemen began to appear, patrolling the line like angry guard dogs. Ahead of us were crying, hungry, panicked families, waiting to have their fates determined at the reassignment kiosk. A few groups ahead I saw a young, wiry man snatch a slice of bread from a woman's hands. Her husband confronted him, and they fell to the ground in a flurry of punches. The guards came and dragged them through a small door next to the main gate. The woman cried and held her screaming son. A day later, we finally reached the kiosk. My father approached with trepidation, producing passports and birth certificates from a small bag. The man behind the kiosk eyed the documents with demeaning suspicion. My mother and I stood off to the side, waiting anxiously for the ordeal to be over. As my father spoke with this man, I saw a boy who couldn't have been older than

sixteen break away from his family and dart past the guards. He made it about ten yards before one of the riflemen raised his weapon and let a round spring loose in the boy's back. His father ran over, blubbering and moaning, mourning the death of his boy. The guards came and pulled him away, throwing him back into the line alone.

As my father walked away from the kiosk, I felt a wave of relief; it was short-lived, though. As we walked through the gate, some of the guards ushered me away from my mother and father. My mother clutched to my hand, but we were torn in opposite directions. I was a young, strong boy, and my fate lay in the factories performing arduous manual labor. They weren't fit for such work, the authorities deemed.

With a rifle in my back, I was urged into a low-roofed building with foldout tables and piles of personal belongings. The guard pushed me to one of the tables, behind which a man clad in a white robe and thick glasses was standing. He eyed me with curiosity and a tinge of disgust.

"What's that you've got in your hands?" He regarded my book like he would regard a leper. Before we were taken away to this city I had heard rumors that books were banned, but I wrote this off as unfounded paranoia. The authorities decided that books are unneeded distractions from our work, that they instill uncivilized thoughts in our heads. I held onto the volume and pulled it closer to my chest, but the guard escorting me raised his rifle to my head. I handed over my book and it was thrown onto one of the trash piles. It was to be shoved into a furnace, the last shred of my former life gone in a blaze. I haven't seen a book since.

I now work in a factory in the center of the city. For twelve hours a day I operate a machine that mixes concrete. My hands are callused, my joints creak, and my back is crooked. I stole paper from my supervisor's office in order to write this; we laborers are banned from writing, just like we are banned from reading. I write this memoir in hopes that one day, when we cease to be imprisoned in this concrete hell, our liberators will understand what we've been put through. I can only hope that this city is not where my story ends.





Heart Strings

Danny Oratokhai

On Nets and Roadmaps

Ellen Zhang

My mother jabbars
of food and cooking

I imagine all women
with slim waists
yearning to feed everyone
the meat of themselves showing
somewhere from their care

My brother runs
toes squishing between imported sand
ready to dive into water
without a swimming trunk

He smells
like fish in the end

I find a girl heading off into the
unknown like me
so simple and not so simple
fish netted between dependence
and independence

We talk of our worlds from five time zones apart
but we both listen to Taylor Swift and
we both watch Friends
Mandarin blooms from the tip of my tongue

My brother's seat is damp on the way home
He is tired
but not so tired to not recount
adventures of the day
He caught a fish, but
let it go.

We, kids, in the back are all Cancer
Do we believe in fate?

My mother is letting me go
but holding onto me tight
but I am a fish, or a star,
and I cannot be bound.

She is feeding me her sorrows,
anxieties. Don't get Freshman 15.
Make sure you eat enough.
She wanes and I wax.

I imagine myself as a fish
slipping away only to
dive deeper leaving
a damp seat
in the car.



Eye of the Storm
Somya Pathak

Hieratic Dermis

Ellen Zhang

My body pried open and unhinged
the entire world spills out not unlike
a calf emerging from the uterus—the thread
suture upon suture my gleaming viscera.
Scapulas are almost scythes,
beneath my dermis, surgeons read braille,
gently searching above hieroglyphic bones.

In fifth grade, I dissected a frog while
the boy next to me looked away, disgusted.
There was no movement, so I stabbed
pins till it was a kite of muscle and dermis.
There is no blood, slime, feelings
It is methodical—a procedure.

He is a man, but a shadow of the boy,
he does not want to look but *how can he not*
Dissection: the jungle vines
of tubes entangle me, supinate position.
I yearn to be a speck in the horizon
but there is only sanguine and visceral
threads turn, twist, tangle
The flow of time, restored.



A Touch of Perfection

Najja Lewis

Korean-American Misnomer

Gyury Lee

"Gaaerree, right? Not my fault if I get it wrong."

"It's nice to meet you, Geeyoorree. Sorry, I thought you were a boy."

"I got it! It's Guyery!"

"Hey, Gary. I thought that name was for guys, but whatever. How are you by the way?"

Unpalatable and discordant with the unnatural combination of *G* and *Y* and topped off with a sickeningly submissive *ry*, the name *Gyury* reminds many people of the guttural names *Gabe*, *Gary*, and *Gus*. Names that holler *lethargic* and *indolent*, waiting for the raise that will never come. Names of hefty and burly men, no, POMP-
OUS and garrulous men, with grease in their hair as they trudge off to the red-light districts once more; now it's his 4th time this week. Repulsive. My presence increases significantly as the mess of debauched uniqueness shoots from people's mouths and sink into my brain like hot knife and butter. My name was definitely what people would call an anomaly in the US.

Only thrice in my life have I been called by the accurate pronunciation of my disgustingly Asian name at first sight from someone other than my relatives. And during those three encounters, the person in front of me was already able to speak my native tongue, accustomed to the strange set of phonics in the Korean language.

Although, I'll have to admit that the technique and fond connotation in which they lingered on the *n* and rapidly fired the *r* put me at ease. For once, this name of mine made me feel welcome. Even so, I felt hatred for the American stereotypes of my boyish and blunt name; I almost didn't believe that I was dubbed it. I complained to my parents about what I thought was a misnomer, but they both raised a dubious eye and a rather snarky chuckle in amusement.

"Actually, you were named by a famous name-creator and fortune-teller, and he is one of our distant relatives—"

Oh, so I was named arbitrarily by some hippie dude in a "magical" temple with a ball of leaded glass and a black and purple tunic with sparkles. The thought of my name predetermined by a fortune-teller forced me to visualize my parents sitting in front of a monk. I felt pity for myself. So my parents decided to rely on a supernatural palmist that knew nothing about who or what I would be. I assumed that the fortune teller said I would be of insignificance to the family; pathetically in the shadows cast by my older brother's light.

"—and he said that you will bring great prosperity with your intelligence and insight."

Wait. What? I knew a joke when I saw one, and this most definitely was not a joke, judging from their fond expressions. However, the small section about "intelligence and insight" seemed like an enigma to me. I was always in some kind of juxtaposition with my brother and his wonderful achievements, like scoring a 36 on the ACT on his first try while I got just over a 30, and getting all A+'s in every single test and quiz without studying, while I got half A+'s with the other half A's. Of course, to other people even my achievements were of higher standards, but to my family, they weren't superior. I wondered, hypothetically, why the mysterious relative decided to name me *Gyury*. As the misanthrope I was, I looked up my name in Korean letters and checked my family's ancestry book hidden in our safe. Ambivalence didn't even begin to describe how I felt.

It seems that I am a direct descendent of King Lee, establisher and ruler of the Joseon/Lee Dynasty. The Lee Imperial household ruled Joseon (now a major historical region) for 518 years from 1392 to 1910. Some of its descendants included South Korea's first president, Lee Syngman, and

inventor of the modern Korean alphabet and renowned polymath King Sejong the Great. Those few blunt lines of pine tree soot and rice paper were able to exhilarate my senses of being royalty. I felt a sense of pride swell up in the deep crevices of my esophagus. I almost felt remorse for ridiculing my name. I read on.

Now, at the very end of the ancestry tree, was my name in both the Korean and Chinese alphabet sprawled in graceful calligraphy.

이규리

李圭理

(The top is Korean and the bottom is Chinese. The 이 and 李 represents the *Lee*, and 규리 and 圭理 represents *Gyury*. My American name is the exact same as my Korean name, except for some of the dialect, accent, and intonation alterations.)

The last name *Lee* stood for *plum tree*. As it turns out, *Gyu* or 규 does represent someone who has outstanding scholastic talents. Since each family's children shares one Korean letter other than the last name to show the family line, my older brother's first name also started with *Gyu*. Was that the reason I was always compared to him as the inferior one, because I was named after him? I suddenly felt self-conscious and heavy-hearted when I reflected on the fact that my name was based off of someone else. Also, that was why everyone perceived my name as a male's. It was like I was living inside the wrong name. However, the last syllable of my name yanked me out of this ponderous state.

The syllable *-ry* or 리 means *ruler* or someone who shows reason, principle, and logic. All gender stereotypical names aside, I looked in the mirror. I took a deep breath. I then commenced to make some of the most ridiculously noble and determined poses and expressions in my life. The words *ruler*, *reason*, *principle*, and *logic* wrung my brain free of its cerebrospinal fluids, and I was suddenly empowered by the art of fortune-telling. It was like my own name was influencing me to reach my greatest potential as a productive member of society. Somehow, my Korean name gave me a sense of belonging and prudence.

I still don't understand how I feel towards my name. In English, I abhor the social awkwardness and seclusion from its peculiar sounds, but I can't help but feel fond of the way it humbly but rather complacently shows me as a Korean. Whether it be from malice or honorable, my name is still the Korean-American Misnomer.





Coastal Blue
Brittany Traxler

The Ivory Tower

Jackson Mejia

Sit, sit
In your Ivory Tower
Wearing your royal blue robes
And horn-rimmed glasses

Stare, stare
At the blank parchment
With your gilded plume and
Iron inkpot

Examine, examine
The philosophers of yore--
Your Anselms and Aristotles
In their leather-bound books.

Rest, rest
Your tired shock of curls
On your ancient pulpit
Of Senonian lime*

Wake! Wake!
From your deadly slumber—
Hear the cries outside.

Listen, listen
As the people shout—
Come down, Camus,
Come down, Kant,

See us in our squalor.

Look, look
At Mr. Mars across the court
Screaming in his
Flaming tower of Oak

Down, down
Respond to their pleas
Do you
In your clickety-clackety shoes

Lift, lift
The great metal barbican**
With your gnarled hands
And rheumatic shoulders.

Gaze, gaze
Upon the poor masses
Holding your gilded plume
And shining Curtana***

Tremble, tremble
As they move towards you
With Mr. Mars in his
Burning tower above.
Scream, scream
You enlightened cur
As your defenses tumble
To the ground

And words fail you.

Regret, regret
Your sheltered life
From Galileo to
This siren call

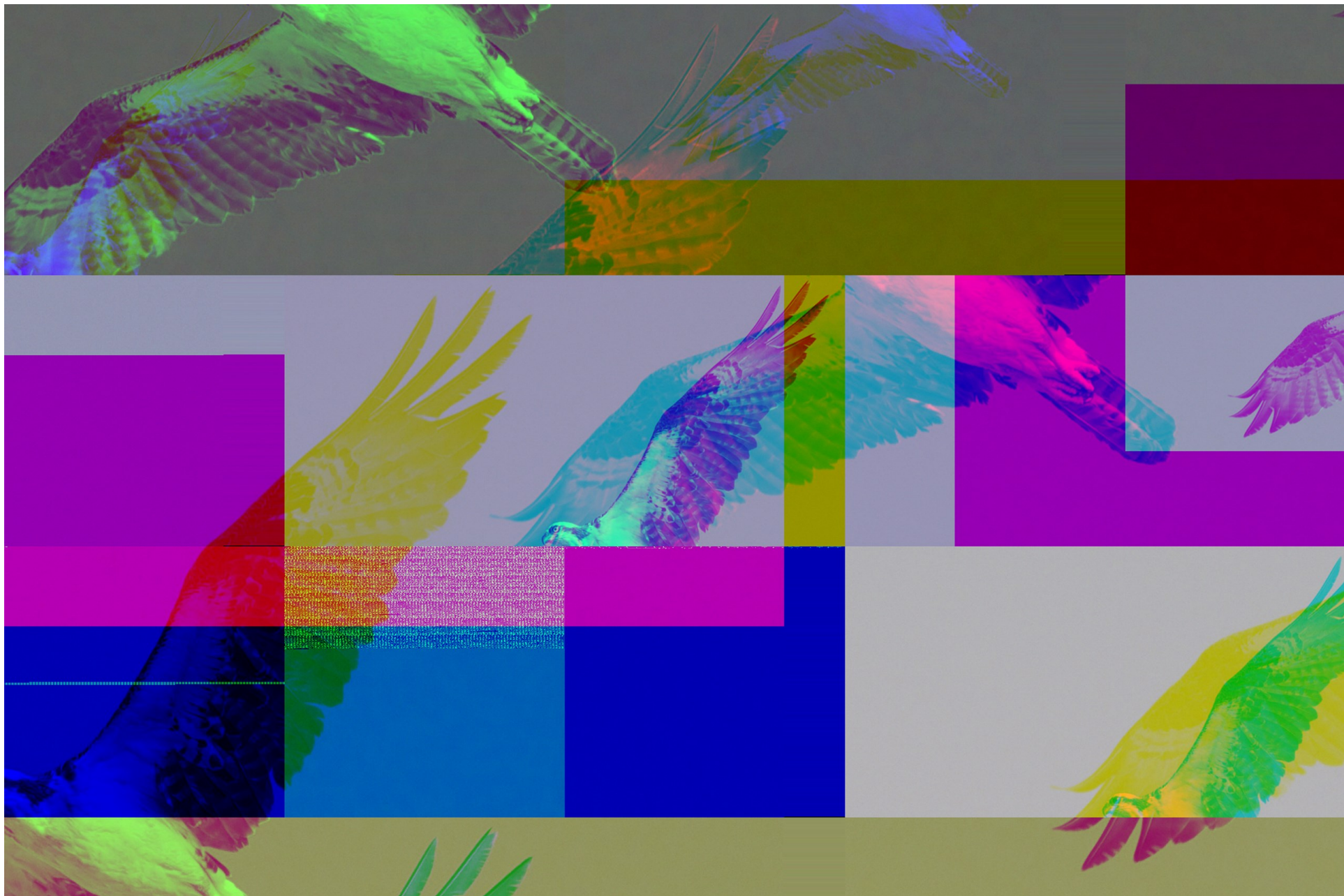
Die, die
As your body falls
And their steel and iron
Pierce your flesh.

Watch, watch,
O ignorant Spirit
As Mr. Mars marches
Inside.

* An ancient type of stone originating in the Middle East.

** The protective metal gate of a castle.

*** The ceremonial sword used to crown monarchs in the
United Kingdom.



Lone Bird
Nicholas Dasovich

Remember...

Kiarra Louis

Remember the road trips we used to take and the fun we used to have as we entertained ourselves for those endless hours. Remember the day I laughed so hard I thought I was going to die as my stomach cramped and my bladder wanted to explode. My eyes watered as many tears fell, not tears of sadness but tears of happiness and joy in its purest form. Remember the time I was sad but you were here to cheer me up and make me discover my happiness again as it hid from me. Remember the time we made breakfast in bed for mom. I dropped the orange juice on the kitchen counter once or twice and you burned the eggs here and there but we managed. Remember the day we snuggled up on the couch together bundled up in blankets to keep us warm, but it was your presence that kept me the warmest of all. Remember how I used to get frustrated when doing my math homework because every problem was a new obstacle I could not face alone. You accompanied me on my journey through math so I was not by myself and because of you math has become a friend rather than an enemy and it is a strength instead of a weakness. Remember how you would hug me tight, so tight I felt like I was going to lose consciousness. That was when I felt the safest, there in your fatherly embrace removing fear, confusion, and sadness from my heart but filling me with love. Remember how you used to read to me every night. Your deep, low, honeyed voice helped me drift into a peaceful slumber. Remember how we went to the parks weekly even on those days you were tired and your eyes just wouldn't stay open. You would wait for me at the bottom of the slide with a big smile on your face awaiting my arrival at the bottom. You helped me gain my momentum on the swings and every time I went up the worry was evident on your face and a huge relief came to you as the swing descended and this went on and on. Remember all the times we spent together, you and I. I want to tell you I remember daddy. Even though you're gone the memories we had linger in my mind and heart. Those numerous memories we made together all those years give me things to remember each and every day of my life.



Dreaming of the Beach
Emily Derrick

how to take up space when small

Julianna Foster

growing up, you are three inches shorter and twenty pounds lighter than
your best friend

finding out you are only second shortest for a whole year in sixth grade is
a miracle

while everyone around you grows up at an incredibly fast pace, you still
have to sit in the back seat of the car because the law says you have to be
5 feet, 100 pounds, or 12 years old

you won't break 5 feet until you are a teenager

you won't break 100 pounds until you are seventeen

during puberty, your ribs were bigger than your boobs

you were so embarrassed, you tried to squeeze your misshaped ribcage
into something more appealing

you teach yourself to breathe with your chest and not your tummy

your thighs are the biggest part of you

you were ashamed for a few years before realizing they are pure muscle
and the reason you can run so fast

now if only the rest of your body would catch up

you stop at 5'3" because your back is all crooked and you never got it
fixed

sometimes you think that extra inch would be worth every minute of pain
a surgery would cause

sometimes you hate that your back isn't crooked enough

everyone in your family is tiny

no woman passes 5'4" and no man gets higher than 5'8" with the
exception of cousin Danny

you don't think that he counts because he somehow reached 6'4" and
that's never happening for anyone else in the family

you cannot help but feel relieved when your cousins, two years older than
you, are only an inch taller and have smaller boobs

you cannot help but feel relieved that your younger brother looks like he's
eight from the ages of ten until thirteen

you are ecstatic when you surpass your mother's height

you want to be taller, bigger

you don't actively try to gain weight, but you are happy when you gain
five pounds here and there

you learn to walk in heels two, three, four, five inches

it hurts, but soon enough you can run in your pumps that have a five
and a half inch heel

the blisters are worth nearly reaching your peers' height

you buy a scale and do the exact same thing that every girl your age is
doing

weighing yourself constantly, looking at your body

but where many other girls look for two pounds lighter and less fat, you
look for the opposite

your hips are small enough to fit in size 000 until you pass 100 pounds

even then you fit 00, though 0 is more comfortable

you wonder why anyone would want this

not taking up space is the worst thing in the world

it takes a while to realize that what you lack in size, you make up in
personality

people can see you are small, but your presence is large

you notice people always throw things too high for you to catch because
they think you're taller than you are

it makes you feel like you are not invisible

you still try to gain weight for a while after you begin to get over being
short

it isn't until you compare your driver's license photo to the photo on your
state id from a year earlier that you realize just how round your cheeks
have gotten

when you point it out to your best friend, she calls you chipmunk and you
pretend to be mad but feel a little warm inside

you could use some more muscle, sure
you could even lose five pounds and be good

but

your cheeks are round and pink

your stomach has a tiny bit of padding

your chest is just big enough to look amazing

your thighs are still powerful

maybe your hips are little narrower than you want
but your ass is awesome

maybe you still look in the mirror and think your arms look like sticks

but they are stronger than one would think

maybe your ribs are still visible

but your boobs overtake them by a lot

maybe you are two inches shorter and ten pounds lighter than other girls
your age

you are still beautiful



James Bond's Car
From the Eyes of a Teenager
Roshan Warman

The Yeti

Trynity Kurlychek

I could see it in my head, the way he looked that it is. Face flushed with a rosy red as the blood rushed to his cheeks in attempt to warm him while in the embrace of the frost. Bones stiffening, blood thickening, jaw slacked open as his desperate call tumbled from his lips and drifted into the air. A single hand reaching out to grasp them, to pull them back into his throat to settle in his chest and weigh him down. Without the cumbersome knot of depression to keep his feet steady on the ground, what was to keep him from floating off the snow laden grass? I knew just as well as he did this wasn't quite how it happened; one can't help but romanticize in a dreary situation akin to ours. Anyhow, in that brief moment, as his heart battered against his ribs with a furious concoction not unlike that of rage and excitement, his head was cleared, empty. "I am the god of snow! I am the yeti! I am one with winter and the sun!"

I didn't know the cold could feel this warm.





Boy Drinking Tea
Kayla Chatham

Cold Love

Markella Paradissis-Wagner

I stood in the snow, knee-deep, built around my tan boots, which I stuffed my baggy jeans. The freezing air coarsely smothered my hands, like the opposite of a thick blanket as it numbed my fingertips, but I felt electric in the cold. The sky, stormy and dark, fostered a wind that blew snow particles through the clear cut night. The twisting beauty of the dark trees never failed to slacken my jaw and relax my mind.

Trees surrounded me, except for the wide path of the sparkling pure white snow; I stood with the quiet world. I felt a rush glancing to the side peppered with trees and the graceful shapes each took, like slow silent dancers, swaying to their own melody. The softness of the enveloping night mixed evenly with the snow and the occasional wind.

Though the night is lucid, I am not. My brain never stays dormant for long. I no longer wish to be afraid of love. There are just so many fears, so many possibilities choking my mind.

I am not sure how to relinquish the tightness in my back; the hunch in my shoulders. My head is a jumbled puddle of dirty rainwater filling a concrete pothole with a foundation of knowing I am alright. The toxicity of thinking can destroy nearly anything; self-esteem, passion, and sanity. My sanity. The wild raving chainsaw that are my thoughts break through every flowing feeling, every net

of safety, concealing the warmth of love with its shaking, earth-quaking analysis. My mind is a lawnmower with the starting cord pulled too hard so it is malfunctioned to run amuck, shredding the beautiful green grass. My trust is a wound in my side, lashed one too many times, deeper and deeper.

I was a child; I didn't deserve it. To have to constantly worry about a parent as if I were the adult. Now, there is a tightening in my chest, and my insides are locked in a hard blockade of anxiousness. I cannot believe words spoken, soft touches caressed, and devotions stated by anyone else.

And then I saw him, a figure across from me on the path, his outline dark. I knew it was him from the broad outline of his shoulders, narrowing to form his waistline and legs. We stood for a moment, breathless in the cold. We both took steps in the soft but crunchy snow, and the distance was nonexistent in a second. I could feel his warmth before I even looked into his face. My gaze locked onto his chest beneath his large coat. The peachiness of his skin, the red flush in his cheeks, the kindness of his face, thickness of his lips, and mixed jade and brown eyes I shall never fail to see stars in. His arms folded around me, and I pressed tautly into him.

"I never want to let go." He said, holding me tightly.

"Then don't." I said, but still I worried.

The next thing I knew, I soared up in the air, and rushed face-first into the snow. A bright, exuberant laugh broke free from my chest. He had swung me around and pushed me into a mound of snow. We both fell as I extended my arms and took him with me as we plunged into the mini mountain of snow piled so thick nothing hurt. Mindless, my laugh rings off into the threatening sky.





Awning Waters
Brittany Traxler

My Fault

Courtney Zoller

I can remember
The good days.
It seems so long ago.
Much can change
In so little time.
It didn't change for the better.
And it's my fault.
I can hear her last words
Echoing through my thoughts
As though they are my own
It wasn't a minute ago,
She took her final breath.
It has been centuries in my mind.
I should have been there.
And it's my fault.
I can see
The way her face fell
As I drove away.
Two years ago,
Eighteen and thinking only for
Myself,
Forgetting the life
I was leaving behind.
I was selfish.
And it's my fault.
I can smell the lilac and lavender on her skin.
A hint of blood, and burnt paper.
The ends of her midnight hair
Like a brier patch after a brushfire.
It was my car you were driving.
Where were you going, my old friend?
I can feel her porcelain skin against mine.
My lips brush her cheek,
Cold as ice.
I squeeze her chilled hands in mine,
But they don't respond.
This is all my fault.



Members Only
Jackson Helwege

The Truth in the Lies

Astrian Horsburgh

No matter how driven or how apathetic you had lived your life, the afterlife treated you the same.

It chafed, if you had been expecting better--angels in translucent gowns and softly glowing halos. It was a relief, if you'd anticipated worse--fire and brimstone, or nothing at all, an eternity of rot and dark soil and nothingness. It was torture, if that nothingness was what you'd craved.

The afterlife was a thin veil spread over and around the world, embracing it. An extra layer of the atmosphere, if you will, slipped in right above the earth's crust. So all the souls walked it together, but rarely crossed paths unless both sought the same thing.

There was no judgment here, just stasis. You could simply exist, float and drift and experience some measure of peace, though thoughts were never erased, only dulled. You did not get a clean slate. You lost not a single memory you'd ever had, though they faded, set behind glass incrementally more out of reach. Every variation of every self you'd ever embodied was layered and wound and woven into the essence that remained *you* now. All you lost were the sharp edges of definition. And all you lost was agency.

This didn't bother all of them--plenty were relieved to relinquish the weight of responsibilities they'd worn too long. But for others, it was an itch that only grew more aggravated--no matter what you did, you couldn't do anything.

It bothered Intisar.

They had spent their earthly life neither here nor there, straining within the confines of a lonely town on a lonely road in a

country that was forgotten one day, bombed the next. And even with the prewritten story stretched out before them, Intisar had dreamed, had wished, had strained against the chains of tradition and geopolitics and stretched to be something more. It had not worked, and now here they were, still wishing, still straining, and more stuck than ever.

Some spoke of an escape from the afterlife, another plane of semi-existence, yet another doorway to yet another dimension where things were just a little more removed. Intisar had been walking this overlaid plane for several years and hadn't yet come across an exit, but they did think that the longer they went on wandering, the less clear everything became. Maybe every memory they'd ever had was still preserved in a chrysalis somewhere inside this existence, but they felt the key to retrieving them working less smoothly each time they tried to remember.

Intisar was drifting through the afterlife-layer somewhere over the Pacific Ocean when they were hurled suddenly backward, as if they'd hit something hard. But there was nothing in the afterlife with solid form, and they blinked around in bewilderment. Could there be a tear in the veil between here and the living world? *Maybe I've run into an island. I think I saw Pitcairn go by a while ago*, Intisar thought.

"So you're one of them," sighed a voice. "There are more and more these days, it seems."

Intisar felt the words like blows to the spine--corporal and juddering, though they themselves remained formless and floating. So long it had been since they had heard voices. The afterlife pulsed with a whispering, flowing hiss, like air molecules brushing past each other with a murmured apology every time they collided.

"What do you mean?" Intisar asked, and though they had tried speaking dozens of times since they'd found themselves here, the words had never been audible. Now they were, and the sound sent Intisar reeling all over again.

The voice came again. "So few are satisfied with the chance to owe the world nothing, anymore. Yet so many still feel owed."

Intisar tried to move away from the voice, but it seemed to surround them, swaddle them and seep its words through every pore of Intisar's not-quite-corporeal existence. "What are you?" they said,

voice crisper than they'd expected, given how long they had been silent.

The air of the afterlife, which was always thick with the gray of stacked-deep souls that no longer bothered to drift, was suddenly clearing. A figure speckled into view, not solid and colored like a living human, but the grayness had substance and angle and shadow, even though Intisar could see directly through them.

"I am *jubend*. The guide. I am indistinguishable from one of you," the figure intoned, "unless you are looking for me."

"I wasn't looking for you," Intisar said. "There's no reason to search, here. There's nothing to find."

"Oh, but you don't believe that. If you did, you wouldn't be able to see me."

Intisar contemplated that. Through the gray under where their feet would be, they could still make out the waves of the Pacific, fuzzy and faded from beyond the veil. But the air was clearing in front of them, and the vision that was coming into focus behind the figure was not of Oceania.

Intisar had the feeling that the chrysalis within them was bursting, disintegrating at the seams and freeing all the memories and emotions tamped down by the monotony of the afterlife.

"What is this?" they whispered.

"This is the place of answers," the *jubend* replied. "The truth and the lies."

"I don't want lies, too," Intisar said. "Just truth."

"There is no truth without lies," said the guide. "If there were, why would anyone need to search for such thing as the truth?"

Intisar did not answer, but only craned their neck around the *jubend*, trying to see what lay in this next dimension. Behind the guide, the air that had cleared showed nothing more than a road. It was like looking through a fogged window--the shape and suggestion of things beyond was discernible, but all details blurred into gray. Still, Intisar felt the upswelling of drive, the need to walk through that doorway and find whence that road came, and led.

"Take the path to the left for truth," instructed the figure, who Intisar noticed was starting to fade, the concavities and textures that had been so startling now again subsumed into the gray. "And the path to the right for lies."

"How--how do I--" Intisar gestured at the window.

"Walk," the *jubend* said simply. "And the world will bend for you."

Intisar propelled themselves forwards, and came up again against solidity. This time they kept moving, and the air sublimed, parting to allow Intisar through. As they fell through the window, the *jubend* vanished in the corner of their eye, and suddenly Intisar was on fire.

It was like hauling oneself out of burning quicksand, the weight of the unnatural air stripping unwillingly from their arms as if tearing off the skin. Crawling from tar while being sprayed with antiseptic. A hot-cold freeze that lashed through Intisar as they transcended worlds.

It left them gasping and raw, defrosted and char-broiled simultaneously, but whole. And solid. They couldn't have said it felt like flesh-and-bone solidity, warmed by churning blood, but they felt *human* again.

Intisar stood, shaky, and headed to the left. They marveled at the steadiness of tangible ground under their feet--the sensation of walking reborn as extraordinary. There was color in this world, too--not muted through a haze of gray, but real: the gentle blush of roadside flowers, the crisp blue and white of the sky, even the dying green of the grass. Intisar had no idea what this third world was, this beyond-the-afterlife dimension. It was still neither the heaven nor hell they'd been taught to expect.

After hours walking, the sun dimmed and the sky darkened, but even the darkness was of such an exquisitely clear caliber that Intisar was breathtaken in its crystalline silence. *This is the first truth I am learning*, they thought, pleased. *To appreciate what I once thought mundane. How many years did I spend looking at the dust and the ground when I could have been watching the sky and the growing things all around?* They felt quite profound, a little speck thinking thoughts big enough to span three worlds.

Intisar walked through the night and emerged on the same road lit by only the faintest glimmers of light. They felt themselves leaning forwards and panting, treasuring the strain in their muscles and the exertion wearing them down. Their sure steps had devolved to plodding, but Intisar kept their head up and pushed on. They

weren't convinced that in this form they had a heart and circulatory system, but something beat fiercely in their chest, impelling them on.

They came aware, suddenly, of a shadow falling over their own, and presently heard footsteps as a figure drew even with them. Intisar startled and glanced sideways.

A short, ruddy person in stained clothing was peering earnestly back at them. Intisar avoided their eyes by habit. "Who're you?" They wondered a moment later if this third-worldian, post-afterlife person would understand their language.

They did, apparently, and responded immediately by cracking a broad smile. "I'm Khaleng. But since we're on the road to Truth, I'd better not tell you any more, in case it turns out that's not the consensus when we get there."

"Oh." Intisar opened their mouth to ask what in the world--worlds--Khaleng meant, but they interrupted them.

"No need to tell me who you are, either--only the dead come from your direction."

Affronted, Intisar demanded, "So you're dead too? You came from this way."

"I'm on my way back from Lies," Khaleng declared airily.

"Is that why your answer was so evasive?"

"Evasive? Oh, no. That's not necessarily Lies's territory; that's Pagkasama's."

"Pagkasama? Is that another world beyond this one?"

Khaleng scoffed. "This isn't even a whole world. Nor is the one you just came from. That's only a layer, and this is only a sidenote. An inset map, if you like. A refraction."

"You," Intisar said, finding that they were clenching their teeth, "are the most worthless person I've met since I died."

"You've met no one since you died," Khaleng said, waving away the insult. "The Afterlifers are barely compressed souls, and I'm only a refraction of those. You thought a plane of Truth and Lies would be simple and straightforward?"

"A refraction?"

"Yes, as opposed to a reflection, because refraction means the light bounces back and then bends, skews in some way and returns different than it came."

"Oh, so is that why you've never once given me a straight answer?"

"Refracted doesn't necessarily mean not straight. Maybe I have."

"Why don't you just stop talking?" Intisar said.

"Certainly. I could do that."

Intisar shook their head.

A bit later, Khaleng pointed ahead of them. "We're coming to a crossroads," they said.

"I thought I already chose to come to Truth."

"You think there's one variety? One city to house all the different ways to not lie?"

Intisar held their head in their hands as if the splitting headache was literally on the cusp of cracking their skull.

"This is only the fork for Pagkasama and Pludre."

"Which are what?"

"Subdivisions of the region of Truth," Khaleng said. "Pagkasama is the province of omission, and Pludre is the province of telling everything."

"So... which should I go to?"

"Well, they're both worth a visit," Khaleng mused. "Just don't stay too long in Pludre, or you'll think your head has exploded. And Pagkasama--I suppose let's go there. Makes a better introduction to the way of things in Truth."

"I don't want introductions," Intisar snapped. "I want answers. I want to find out things that are true."

"Yes, that's what they all think they want," Khaleng said, rolling their eyes. "How did you die?"

Intisar sputtered and stumbled, glaring through watering eyes. "Er... my heart stopped beating. How do you think I died?"

"You'll do well in Pagkasama," Khaleng observed. "Good thing we haven't reached Cho'onadichen, then."

"Reached where?"

"The province of Truth--the heart of the region, actually--in which every question must be answered and every statement is evaluated to ensure it meets the criteria of absolute truth."

"Sounds very bureaucratic," Intisar said doubtfully. "I don't think that's what I wanted to find."

"No one ever finds what they want in Truth," Khaleng added, "You're also not allowed to say what you 'think' in Cho'onadichen. Because thinking is subjective, individualistic, and can't be measured or proved true."

"This is absolutely not what I expected," Intisar said, the tight burn of tears rising in their throat. "I just want answers. Everything I've seen, everything I've known, the bizarre stasis of the afterlife, why I couldn't accept it like the others... and my old questions on the suffering of my life and my world--earth, I mean--I want to know *why*."

Khaleng looked at them for a long, solemn moment. "Well," they said. "You may find *some* of what you want in Truth. There's much to learn in what people aren't saying, in Pagkasama, but honestly--and I do mean honestly, since we're in the outskirts of Truth--I think you'd be better off in Lies."

"Lies is exactly what I don't want!" Intisar cried. "I've lived lies and told lies and breathed lies and been lies--I don't need any more. If there were answers to be found in Lies, I would have them."

"Perhaps you do," Khaleng said. "Perhaps there are no truths. Perhaps everything is a lie. Perhaps the refraction of which I speak is only the flicker of a candle in an immense cosmic darkness, and whatever its paltry flame may illuminate will only cast more shadow, and more."

Intisar's features were dissolving into a mask of fury. Khaleng winked, and Intisar lifted a hand and slapped them across the face. Yet their hand stopped short of reaching skin, so that Intisar could register only the slightest touch. Khaleng didn't even move.

"You can't touch me here," they said, tone even. "This skin, this ground, this refraction--it isn't real. We can't feel and we aren't solid and we aren't here. It seems that way. But it isn't. Nothing is."

Intisar shook their head and opened and shut their mouth, but no words welled up. The chrysalis they'd inhabited in the afterworld was fully in shambles, shards stabbing every point of the skin on this body that wasn't even real. They felt tears slide down their cheeks and cursed them, because they felt real. Real.

"Or maybe it is," Khaleng continued, glancing up at the sky

now. "Maybe we'll never know. It's all in what you choose to believe, or choose to say. That's what Truth and Lies really are, in my opinion--which is sanctioned by neither region, of course."

When Intisar remained standing still in the middle of the road, shaking their head and wiping dazedly at the illusory tears drawing pearly wavering lines on their illusory skin, Khaleng's expression softened.

"If I'd figured it out, do you think I'd still be here?" they pressed. "I walk these roads back and forth every hour of every day, and I accompany the wandering dead, and I guide them or misguide them--and no, that doesn't depend on whether I'm in Truth or Lies. When you go your way, I'll go mine. I was you once. Now maybe you will be me. And maybe someday both of us will grow tired of this game, and pass through. Or, on an even slimmer chance, maybe we'll solve these questions and meet again in a world that makes sense."

Intisar stared at them. The illusory tears dried as faintly as they'd come, and in the glaring light of the sun directly above them, the hollows of their face looked unfathomably deep, like pits caved in or carved out and filled with a gray so dark it looked like the entire volume of the afterlife's gray concentrated in Intisar's eye sockets and cheekbones and lips.

They paused, nodded once at Khaleng, and turned back. At the crossroads, they held their breath, squinted into the sun, and walked towards Lies.





The Penciled Reflection

Anmol Warman

Broken Bones

Chloe Thomas

I am a skeleton.
Listen to my bones
Shake rattle and rumble.
A call beckons forth
From deep within the tunnel.
It wants my attention
It craves my entirety
It took my flesh
And stole my body
My heart starts pumping,
Sweet liquid fills my soul.
It burns my skin
And fills me full.
My cheeks deflate
And aura fades
As bridges burn and
Ghosts come play.
I bashed their trust,
Stole their friends
And all of it was for
The ultimate sin.
I am nothing but a skeleton
And I wish to remain so.
These people all think me broken
But only I know I am whole.
More whole than their wholesome lives for
I need nothing to hide behind
Except my skeletal lies.



Paws in Water
Olivia Hamel

A Contest

Kay Bookman

Lisa bit her lip as she perused the Franklin Papers website, stopping to scribble notes about the quirky spellings and interesting phrases she found there. A shiver ran through her bare shoulders and she noticed the school library was getting colder that when she arrived. She peered out the icy and fogged up window toward the parking lot, not seeing her father's beat up station wagon yet. She checked the time on the bottom corner of the computer, 5:20. He'd be here any minute. Yesterday Lisa's English teacher Miss Putnam had assigned them the task of submitting a Christmas-themed short story, due the Monday after the Thanksgiving holiday. Today was late Tuesday and Lisa was on a mission to complete the assignment before Thanksgiving Day. She decided that she would write her story in the style of Ben Franklin, actually in the style of one of his pseudonyms, Silence Dogood. Ben had created several newspaper columns with flowery prose and poetry under Silence's name. Lisa loved the old fashioned, elegant language and could easily find herself daydreaming about life in the colonial era, though with her black skin her time travel experience might be a bit different for her. She was the only "student of color", as the principal referred to her and others like her, in the 8th grade advanced English class and she desperately wanted to do well there. She was used to that familiar feeling of sticking out but wanted to make it a positive vibe. She tried extra hard on every assignment in order to rank as one of the top students.

Luckily Lisa's dad, though he was a painter by trade was surprisingly familiar with the authors and novels she encountered in class. He sucked at math and science though. Her mom never discussed any school subjects. To make additional money, she regularly worked the graveyard shift on the fifth floor at The Gardens, an assisted living facility nearby. The fifth floor was a

locked floor where the memory impaired and worst off residents lived out their final days. Such nursing was very taxing on her mom and Lisa was lucky to even see her at breakfast and dinner as she came and went. Lisa adjusted her sweater about her shoulders. She was clothed and well fed. Her parents were great as far as she was concerned. She would love to have an iPad at home or at least a cell phone. As she mused about her family she spotted her dad's derelict, faded yellow car creeping into a snowy spot. She logged off the computer, gathered her coat and backpack, and sprinted for the exit.

Wednesday dragged on and on since it was the last school day before the holiday. Not much studying was done. Lisa worked doggedly on her story throughout her classes. It was about a six year old boy, living in Philly as she did, but in 1770. Being from a large and poor family, he never got enough food and spent a lot of time gazing through the window at a bakery near his home, imagining the succulent tortes and sweet biscuits melting in his mouth. On Christmas Eve as he sadly headed home, straddling the curb and the gutter, he spotted a shiny coin and quickly pocketed it. He ran to a narrow alley and secretly eyed the coin. It was a *Chalmer's Silver*. He imagined it held great value and struggled with the idea of taking it home to his parents. In the end he returned to the bakery, bought a bag of sweets and buns, and ate them all before getting back home, throwing up in the gutter and forfeiting his windfall. The tale ends with a familiar moral caution from Silence Dogood and an entreaty to remember the poor during the holidays. Lisa embellished the story with quaint spellings and facts about colonial life that she had researched; however, they had studied Ben Franklin the month before and now Lisa worried that Miss Putnam might find her choice of style too obvious or unoriginal. Lisa named her story *Chalmer's Silver*, after the real coin she found on a collector's website, ironically now worth thousands of dollars.

Lisa's mom wanted her to accompany her to The Gardens tomorrow to help her serve the residents their holiday dinner. On Friday the family was traveling to Allentown to endure a chaotic dinner with her grandma and a zillion loud relatives who did nothing all day long but shout and watch football on TV. Saturday they were still at Grandma's. Sundays were all about church. She sighed with relief knowing her story was already done.

In her English class Miss Putnam announced that she was going to select the top three 'gems', her word for polished literary products, to enter in a citywide short story contest. The winner would receive \$250 and a laptop. Lisa examined her story. It was good enough for a decent grade, but it was no award winner. She suddenly felt like the young boy in her story, drooling through the bakery glass at something she couldn't have. Just then one of her classmates, Corey who sat directly behind her, nudged her on her left shoulder. He wanted to talk to her in the library after school. She nodded and wondered what this quiet football jock wanted from her.

He was not there as Lisa sat at her usual computer in the library waiting for her dad. The great majority of students had left the school screaming, excited about a very long weekend ahead. Lisa secretly wished she could magically produce a better story. She held on to *Chalmer's Silver* rather than turning in it early, somehow expecting a miracle. Lisa jumped out of her skin as Corey once again tapped her on the shoulder from behind. He beckoned her to a couple of easy chairs over by a window as if he had to discuss a great secret, away from prying ears at the computer stations, though almost no one was around. It turns out Corey was in a real bind. The football team was travelling to Pittsburgh for a tournament. He had not written one word of his short story yet and was panicked. He offered Lisa \$25 to write a story for him. Lisa choked on the offer. She looked out the window hoping her dad's car was somehow already there. Corey continued to plead and compliment her on her talent, the best in the class, according to him. It had to be a sign. It was meant to be. In the end Lisa pulled *Chalmer's Silver* out of her backpack and handed it to Corey, insisted she could not take any money for it. A measly \$25 wasn't going to buy a laptop anyway. Corey grabbed the story without reading it and reached over and pecked her on the cheek, a move that totally surprised her and a couple of students at the computers. She was urgently trying to tell him to read and become familiar with the story so they wouldn't get caught. He casually waved as he hastened to the door. Lisa stared out the window at the much warmer, less snowy day outside. What was she going to do now?

Thursday came and went with little holiday fanfare. The

residents of The Garden were thrilled with her sitting and talking with them at their festive and sad dinner. She carefully observed them and desperately listened to their holiday memories trying to glean an idea for her story, but little came. Then on the way home her mom stopped at a dumpy drugstore that happened to be open to buy some aspirin. Lisa followed her through the store and as they waited in line at the register, she spotted a thin woman in dirty clothes, hoisting a sleeping baby on her hip. The clerk was telling her she was 15 cents short. A bottle of skin lotion waved in the clerk's hand. The woman struggled with her threadbare pockets and pulled out three more pennies, stifled a sob and after slamming the 3 cents on the counter, ran from the store. The clerk shrugged, tossed all of her change from the counter into his 'take a penny' cup and beckoned for the next customer. Lisa wished she had the \$25 from Corey. Her mom shook her head sadly and they made their purchase and headed for the car. Suddenly Lisa saw her story laying itself out before her:

An abandoned young woman with a baby is living in a dirty tenement housing project, infested with rats. Desperately trying to put together a first Christmas for her baby she suffers through a series of tragedies and a drug addiction, culminating with her final stab at making herself pretty with some skin lotion. The story would end dramatically on Christmas Day with her dying of a drug overdose as her baby is killed by rats in its crib. This was Philly today, not over 200 years ago, though the poor were still suffering. Lisa spent an agonizing Friday and Saturday allowing time for her relatives while continuously sorting the story's details in her head. By Sunday it was written down and Lisa was thrilled. This was a gut wrenching story that Miss Putnam had never heard before. She paid a neighbor \$5 to allow her to type and print her story on his computer on Sunday afternoon, much to her mother's chagrin. Sunday was not a day to work, even homework. Lisa titled her story *Christmas Reunion*, referring to the mother and child finally finding happiness in Heaven in the end. As she was storing it in her backpack she came across the \$25 Corey had apparently dropped into her backpack when he had kissed her.

Monday dragged more than did the Wednesday before. Lisa couldn't wait to turn in her story, but Tuesday came and went, as did Wednesday with Miss Putnam only stating that all of the stories

were amazing. The announcement came on Friday that she had finally selected her three entrants: *The Christmas Dog*, about a Chihuahua who helps fulfill the holiday wish of a mentally challenged boy, *Christmas Reunion*, and *Chalmer's Silver*. Lisa was stunned, as was Corey who had not wanted to stand out, just get by.

The three students were prompted to read their entries aloud. Corey stumbled through his, still obviously unfamiliar with the content; the dog story was written by a Jewish girl named Rachel. It was okay but very childish. It contrasted sharply with Lisa's story of drug use, the use of curse words, child endangerment, overdose, and ultimately death by rats. Most of the girls had their hands over their mouths by the end. A few of the boys chuckled. Miss Putnam though seemed rapt and said it was very powerful. So she entered them in the contest and the three entrants were invited to a banquet at an old armory building downtown. One parent could accompany each student so Lisa enlisted her father as her dinner companion. All he said after reading her entry was – wow.

The day of the banquet Miss Putnam pulled Lisa from her math class and took her to the office. Lisa had never been called to the office. The principal congratulated her on her entry, and then dropped the bombshell that her story had been disqualified. She almost asked which one, thinking they had discovered Corey's entry was a sham. It turns out the School Board had determined the content of her story was far too controversial for the contest, that publishing such a sad story reflected poorly on the school system and the city. Miss Putnam argued and defended, but in the end – the decision was out of their hands. She was directed to select another student's story. She declined. As she escorted Lisa back to class Miss Putnam's reassurances that the story was excellent were of little comfort. She whispered that she saw no reason why Lisa couldn't still attend the banquet with her dad. So Lisa said nothing to her dad and they dressed up that evening and attended as if nothing had happened. At the end of a mediocre meal, kids from two other schools won 3rd and 2nd place awards with gift certificates from local stores. The first place award was given out by the mayor himself. He mentioned that he was proud to be a Philadelphian after reading such an inspired story. He then called for Corey to come forward and accept the award for *Chalmer's Silver*. Corey looked like

he wanted to sink under the table. Lisa grinned and immediately stifled it. Her father bit his lip and stared at her. On his way around the table Corey whispered to Lisa that the laptop was hers. Lisa could only smile defiantly at her dad's suspicious expression. On the way home she dropped the \$20 she held in her pocket into a fake Santa's bucket.



Author & Artist Bios

Kay Bookman is new to writing. She has always loved literature and would like nothing better than to contribute something meaningful. She loves history and biking.

Kayla Chatham is 17 years old and attends Lakewood Range High School. She's been working on her photography for many years and would like to go to Ringling College to pursue a career in photography.

Nicholas Dasovich was born in Massachusetts, and moved to Florida in 2011. He has been on and off with art, and has worked with photoshop for four years. Currently in the eleventh grade, he enjoys vibrant colors and wildlife. He enjoys cats.

Emily Derrick is a sophomore at Lakewood Ranch High School. She enjoys the beach and wishes to be a photographer. Her favorite things to do is capture interesting and beautiful images of nature.

Joshua Evangelista is an English student in Manatee County. He writes to release his own emotions and to capture varied societal attributes. He cherishes the written word and hopes that everyone will one day learn to read it.

Julianna Rose Foster is from Chicago, but lives in Vancouver, where she studies acting. She has brown hair that is very curly, pale skin that does not tan (her father is Irish. She blames him for the freckles), and pale turquoise eyes that rather baffle her family, as they all have hazel or brown eyes, except one aunt who has blue. Julianna likes writing as a hobby, and also enjoys dancing, singing, painting, photography, and watching movies while trying to figure out how they will end. She reads voraciously. She has little patience, which is a nuisance as she attempts to write a murder mystery novel about a police officer trying to find a serial killer. She has written a novelette about a zombie apocalypse based on a short story written for English class in 10th grade. To see more of Julianna's work, visit her art blog at daor-saoirse.tumblr.com. (To those who are curious, daor saoirse is Gaelic for expensive freedom, a phrase Julianna coined as a teenager mostly on accident when attempting to name

her future dog, who she hopes is either a Shiba Inu or a King Charles Spaniel.)

Olivia Hamel is a student at Manatee School for the Arts. In her photography class with teacher Wendy Blair, she has learned much about perspective and camera angling. This photograph is of her dog on the beach near where she lives. She enjoys taking photos and seeing a different perspective of life through lens.

Jackson Helwege is a junior at Lakewood Ranch High School, and in his second year of digital art classes. Aside from design and illustration, Jackson acts onstage theatrically and enjoys performance.

Sometimes known for ranting about politics, **Astrian Horsburgh** is a student activist and voracious reader and writer. She has won writing contests from organizations like Write the World, Stageoflife.com, and Sapiens Plurum, and she won a national Gold Medal for a science fiction/fantasy story in the 2015 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. That story was published in the Scholastic Awards' *Best Teen Writing of 2015* collection. Between social justice and environmental work and the rigors of school, Astrian tries to do things like traveling, political blogging, learning languages, and slam poetry.

Trynity Kurlychek, born in Orlando, Florida, has enjoyed writing since she was capable of holding a pencil. Besides writing, she is passionate about cats, obscure cafes, indie music, and the many types of waffles in Belgium. Trynity participates in as many poetry slams, writers groups, and spoken word performances as possible. An aspiring author, Trynity hopes to further pursue a career in writing poetry and novels, as well as being a working actress. "When writing, inspiration can be found in anything as simple as steam billowing from a cup of tea, or in something as complex as the stars in the sky."

Sasha Khatami is a junior at Manatee School for the Arts. She is a self-taught photographer. She enjoys photographing dance and the little things in life.

Gyury Lee was born in Westmont, Illinois. She currently attends the Avery Coonley School and plans on attending Northside Prep High School in Chicago. Her hobbies are playing violin, reading, and studying. She adores mathematics and science, but loves analyzing older, actually meaningful 'dark' literature like Orwell, Ray Bradbury, Upton Sinclair, and William Golding. Because she likes science, many of her reads consist of theory books like Darwin's *Evolution of Species* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, as well as modern individual and societal consciousness.

Najja Lewis is in the 8th grade at Lincoln Middle School. She enjoys creating art as a hobby and says that it helps her relax. She paints, sketches, and draws mostly people that she imagines. She has been creating art since she was 5 years old.

Kiarra Louis is a teen resident of Manatee County who loves to write and enjoys sharing her writing with others. She is always looking for a good book to read or for inspiration for her next short story.

Jackson Mejia, a teen from Minneapolis, writes poetry sporadically and with observation of others as his primary inspirations. He runs often and likes to drive around the city to sharpen his mind. Jackson studies sabermetrics as a hobby and enjoys studying philosophy, the classics, and world politics, deriving from them a unique viewpoint on the world.

Markella Paradissis-Wagner is a sophomore at Lakewood Ranch High School and is 16 years old. She has always loved writing since she was young. She writes for herself and to create stories, but also to help others through written words, to provide the journey for another to a different world that she sought through books.

Somya Pathak likes to combine different aspects of her life in her artwork. She enjoys reading, writing, running, creating, thinking, making lists of verbs that end in -ing...

Chloe Thomas is a Bradenton native attending Manatee High School. She recently had an article printed in the Bradenton Herald, but this is her first creative publication.

Brittany Traxler has lived in Florida her entire life, and as a Floridian, she knows that Florida beaches are a part of the world like no other. They hold peace, bliss, and sand. She took this photo at the Long Boat Key Beach, in Florida.

Luke Valadie is a writer and poet from Bradenton, Florida. His favorite genres include dystopian literature, fantasy, and science fiction. He also has an interest in philosophy and cinema. He is currently a sophomore at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School.

Looking into the mirror, **Anmol Warman** found inspiration for a drawing. He knew that what he saw before him was a mere reflection not an accurate representation of his face. Not in the egotistical way however, Anmol set out on his task. However, he was distracted with his various interests such as playing violin or chess. However after weeks he finally finished his piece.

Roshan Warman's biggest passions are physics and working with the environment. He has participated in science fairs at both the regional and state levels. Drawing ties very well with this as he tries to re-create the workings of the environment and making sure all the proportions are adjusted accordingly. He believes everything can be seen from the angle of physics and life becomes very simple. He also plays violin for concerts, and the most recent one was for Peter Pan at his local University. He also plays chess and placed fourth at Florida State Championship.

Ellen Zhang is a freshman at Harvard University. Besides being published in *The Albion Review*, *Teen Ink*, *Creative Kids*, *Cuckoo Quarterly*, and other magazines. She has also received national recognition from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Courtney Zoller is a tenth grade student at Manatee High School in Bradenton, FL. She has had a passion for writing ever since she read the first book of the Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. She hopes to someday become an accomplished television writer and director. She writes to make people feel things they would have otherwise not felt, and to impact people's lives with her stories, the way stories have always impacted her own life.



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