

Ice Lolly Review



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Issue IX 2021

Editor's Note

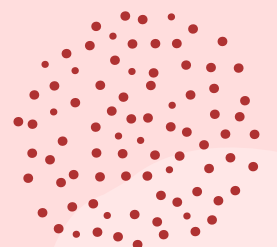
Hello everyone! It's that time again. I am so thrilled to show everyone issue 9! I really loved this issue and how it turned out. Everytime I look it over I just get super excited over a specific line or metaphor. I'd like to personally thank the wonderful team of editors for looking over submissions and making especially tough decisions. Without your help this issue would have never come to fruition.

In issue 9 you'll find poems touching upon culture and identity, work that focuses on minute details, and prose with a certain honesty and candor that immediately hooks you in. To our contributors, we thank you for trusting our magazine with your sticky, saccharine, multi-colored work. It's very brave of you to put your writing out there for the world to see.

A special thanks to Alaina Zhang for creating our beautiful cover art. Be sure to check out her instagram account [_violeyezi](#). Thank you so much Alaina!! Please show her some support and love!

Once again thank you so much for your patience! Have fun reading through the thirty one pieces that make up issue 9, and please stay safe during these times!

Warm regards,
Jessica Wang
The founder of Ice Lolly Review.



Poetry

with peach rings in my pocket - Maggie Fulmer

Gateway - Amy Liu

Forbidden Fruit - Del Elizabeth

Belt of Venus - Anukriti Yadav

Universal Song - Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo

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Déanaim dearmad ar mo theaghlach agus cuimhin liom - Catherine Garrett

Spring - Yanna Mallari

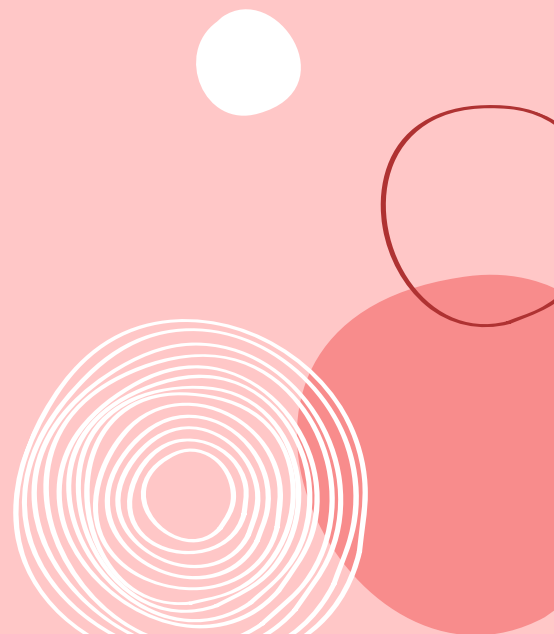
juliet on the balcony - Elizabeth Sallow

Academic Overture - Tuur Verheyde

gold rush - Isabella Fiore

preparing for winter - Genevieve Hartman

Dear Lover - Sophie Singleton



Burnaway - Jaden Goldfain

for the piece of thread unraveling from my favorite sweater - Riana Montes de Oca

You Are Worth the Wait: Then and Now - Fransivan MacKenzie

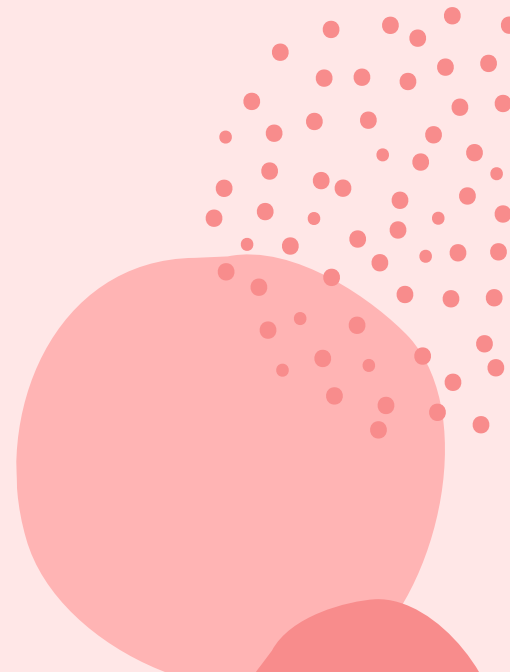
The Weight of Tears - Adi Raturi

Penny Heads - Evelyn Combs

rewind - Maggie Fulmer

**how to become a god: a manual from the old and battle-weary to the young and eager,
who have not yet seen death, or, who have seen death and are unwilling to quit. - Monica
Robinson**

where are you from? - Avantika Singh



Prose

**lexicographical archeology, or love letters are overrated so i wrote you a dictionary-
thesaurus bundle instead - Meily Tran**

Regression - Eli Osei

Creatures of Habit - Jordan Davidson

A Quiet World of Color - Kate Wexell

The Lighthouse - Savannah Behr

A Summer Abroad - Adi Raturi



with peach rings in my pocket - Poetry

By Maggie Fulmer

a mid-july sun warms the back of my neck –
sweet like hummingbird nectar, i rush
to scrape your name out of my mouth.

swallowing stones seems easier than remembering
root beer floats and
overdue library books and
my bare back on damp grass and

in some places, at some times, fireflies synchronize their flashing.

i set my watch eight minutes ahead,
pluck candytuft from a crack in the road,
and try to think of you fondly.

Maggie Fulmer is 26-year-old, emerging writing from Kentucky with a passion for poetry and creative nonfiction. She received her BA in journalism and MA in English from Northern Kentucky University. Her work has been featured in Atlas+Alice, Dime Show Review, and The Coil. She can be found on most corners of the internet (@mfulms21) talking about boybands, books, and reality television.

Gateway - Poem

By Amy Liu

Previously published in Rising Phoenix Review

Everything of that culture, laid across a
fantasy gateway, imagined color amid

a sea of monochrome. Fog condenses,
heavy in sorrow, saturating tracks laid

by missing fathers. Paper lanterns glow,
recalling dynamite that turned letters to

home into ash. Pacific mountain tombs,
photos of ribbon cuttings and half-truths,

poems carved into the Angel Island walls.
Everything of that culture — of the girls

whose bodies were bought and discarded,
of the paper sons who clambered out of

the smoking ruins of the city by the bay,
of the mourned. Of the perpetual foreigner

in quiescent resignation, of the quill that
etched into legislation the disfigurement

of heritage into hate, of the romanticized
gateway over which the blithe flag flies.

Amy Liu is a seventeen-year-old writer from Long Island, New York. She has been nationally recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Her work is forthcoming in the Rising Phoenix Review and Inklette Magazine, among others.

Forbidden Fruit - Poem

By Del Elizabeth

the act of living

the humdrum heart

unshaven hairs spiking with goosebumps

and buzz of the muddled brain

with the thoughts that make us squirm

are for indulging.

the act of living is to feel the juice of forbidden fruit drip languidly down our chins

stick under our fingernails

and mindlessly suck the seeds from the skin with the core lodging our throats

open for more

and why live

if not to devour?

Del Elizabeth is a 17-year-old queer writer from California. She indulges in poetry often, but has recently started on her second novel and first screenplay. In the future, she hopes to attend university to study creative writing as well as psychology. Her work has been published in Anatolios Magazine & Paper Crane Journal + is upcoming in both Cathartic Lit and Miniskirt Magazine.

Belt of Venus - Poem

By Anukriti Yadav

Previously published in Goats Milk Magazine

On open rooftops by humming water tanks
in the slow burning minutes after sunset,
you pause. Take stock of a dying day.
By the fruit stall at the local vendor's
you look out the open door
box of seasonal strawberries in hand.
On the walk back home from evening classes,
the taste of berry popsicle on your parched tongue,
you look up at the pink sky. It is funny how
you learned to weed out early on
that color that was too feminine
to ever be taken seriously.
Yet, the web-footed geckos, roseate spoonbills,
pygmy seahorses, pink axolotls, amazon dolphins,
sea anemones and orchid mantises—
in their knowing zen stances—
all disagree.

And what of the periwinkles in your balcony
overlooking bountiful bougainvilleas on the busy street
the cherry blossoms awaited all year,
the blooming magnolias in late spring?
There is also the frown you wear looking
at finished laundry forgotten to
be separated in the wash. The reds,
quiet naturally, bleeding into the whites.
Baby blanket and ballet shoes cackling with delight.
Afterwards, the color of blood just under the skin
on your cold palms when you scrub them
raw as raisins, trying
in vain to smother
a natural existence from the world.



The Belt of Venus is an atmospheric phenomenon, the pinkish glow that surrounds an observer shortly before sunrise or shortly after sunset.

Anukriti, 22, is an undergraduate student of Engineering from Delhi NCR. She is a staunch feminist and proponent of mental health rights. Her search for more art and poetry is always to bring out the joy of ordinary life. Her preferred pronouns are she/her. She can be found on instagram as @anukrav.

Universal Song - Poem

By Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo

Loss is a universal song,
Mothers sing it on bereavement,
Fathers too are choked with its sighs.
Loss is a University, when a student fails,
It is a music for new wife becoming a widow,
Bombs too sing of love in one deafening sound
It is a song we all know by reflex, some
Sing it with closed mouth and some
Mouths are baskets singing the emptiness.

Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo is a Nigerian poet & a Veterinary Medical Student, whose first love is art making. He is an avid reader, who sees poetry in everything, with great interest in storytelling. His works are forthcoming in: Roanoke Review, Santa Ana River Review, Stand Magazine, Louisiana Literature, Obsidian: Literature and Art in the African Diaspora, Collateral, Welter Journal, LEVITATE and elsewhere.

We Became Astronauts - Poem

By Caitlin Mundy

The first time I saw you, on the third day
of university, you were rushing,
backpack hung by only one strap,
into a physics class
that was already underway.

The moments that followed tilted
the rotation of my world.

From the drunken day
we tried to calculate the gravitational force
between your heart and mine,

to the evening we wandered through
the ruins of a castle,

reality bending around us

as we stepped into an ancient world
before reflecting telescopes, liquid fuel rocket ships,
and
us.

Night after night we stayed up until dawn

pondering the universe,
while feeling like the only part of it that mattered
in that moment there in the dark
was the space

between your skin and mine.

Those nights, we became astronauts
exploring the far reaches of each other's minds.

But other nights I needed you and you left me

adrift,

an astronaut without a ship.

You were my entire sun.

But to you,

I was only ever a constellation,

outshone

by the morning's new light.

I thought our love was a connect-the-stars

painting in the sky

but there is so much more a love could become.

Love should not make you feel guilty

for wanting to form galaxies with it.

Love should evolve from gas and dust,

become a star

without turning

black hole, grasping

at parts of me

I am not willing to give.

Thank you for giving me the chance

to find this love.

For letting me go

when I didn't know how.

Caitlin Mundy is a twenty-four year old poet and recent graduate of mathematics from Ontario, Canada. In the summers you can find her planting trees in Northern Canada and dreaming up new adventures to have. She has work published or upcoming in Global Poemic, Gnashing Teeth Publishing, and Anti-Heroine Chic. You can find her on instagram @caitlin.mundy.

Dancing Queen - Poem
By Shreya Singh

I should have noted down the day I first saw her dancing in my head.
A beautiful dark figurine. I swear I'd seen her somewhere before.
Probably placed in the spotlight of fancy boutique stores
for commoners to marvel at and window-shop.
She moves seamlessly. Flows-stop-flows-stops.
Precise thought, executed finesse.
Tiny tag on her ankle. A caveat that reads "handle with care".
The touch of a sculptor breathes on her skin. Finely crafted bones lifting a dainty frame.
In my 5 feet tall body, lives her own world. A never ceasing traffic show.
A family heirloom, her existence.
Passed down from one generation to the next.
Often behind closed doors. Eaten like hushed whispers,
washed down with a century old wine. Intoxicated amnesia, the best keeper of secrets.
The cure of her liberation is a price, the family I'm born into can't afford.
We learn to live together, melting into one.
Does mother know that isn't her daughter smiling back at her?
My tongue spits venom now. Parading on this destructive glory, often unmoored, these
thoughts are no longer my own.
My colossal fire burns through homes. Chaos is the new soundtrack of town.
The world tapes my mouth shut, filing paperwork to annihilate my existence.

And in the darkest corners of my brain she sits back,
licking her lips with exacted revenge.

Shreya Singh is a 22 year old law student from India. She's an emerging writer with a few scattered acknowledgements. Her poems often depict stories where the characters face the same dilemmas and issues as her. They speak of turmoil, innocent bursts of joy and the clouds of doubt one is often faced with in their twenties. She writes in free verse and her poems can be best described as Ballad Poems.

fog field - Poem
By Olivia Allan

sitting in a field of carnations
pink and yellow
is where i've found myself this morning
with my rotting heart
sparkling in fresh dew
i am curled up
decaying for the earth
with fog as my blanket
and stillness as the dream



Olivia Allan is a 21-year-old writer from Melbourne Australia. She is currently undergoing a degree in psychology in the heart of the city and loves riding the train everywhere. When she isn't studying she writes on her beloved typewriter and struggles in pilates classes. Her Twitter handle is @livppoetry.

Debonair Debauchery - Poem
By Anthony Salandy

Roses mark cobbled steps
With loving lashes
As reddened flesh mingles
With delicate sunlight

Fading into a gloaming sublime
Where savant men
Harness lacquered sympathies
And digress into slow dances

That lure svelte beings
To the sound of cryptic wealth,
A lyric as timeless as faith itself,
A rhythm bound in lusty fragrance

But encouragement is a forgotten concept
When seductive consumption
Brings a crescendo of passion
To the forefront of mysticism,

The same sordid dance
That overtakes innocence
And indulges primal longing
As debonair desires

Surmount debauchery untenable.

Anthony is a mixed-race poet & writer whose work tends to focus on social inequality throughout late-modern society. Anthony travels frequently and has spent most of his life in Kuwait jostling between the UK & America. Anthony's work has been published 140 times. Anthony has 1 published chapbook titled 'The Great Northern Journey'.

Confessions of an Eco-Killer - Poem

By Francesca McDonnell Capossela

I used to rip leaves off of trees, shrubs, and shred them.
Wash, wash, wash they said as I tore them
juicy, along their fault lines

I'd hold the little pieces in my hand
fragments multiplied by my nonchalant destruction
until there were more than fit in my palm
and they fell, littering the sidewalk a verdant green.

There was a drought my first year of college.
The fountains shut off and reusable water bottles were a must.
But still, I ripped the leaves, couldn't help it.
Had to mimic the process of duplication by
massacre. Had to hold something that was wholly mine.
In the grand scheme of things,
it couldn't matter.

Then, I started reaching higher up the trees,
took down twigs and then sticks and then branches.
I hung them above my desk—giant tree arms
floating over me as I studied.

In the heat, the leaves I hadn't already torn shriveled
and disintegrated, spreading leaf ash on my papers
until the whole room was covered in a thin film of dust.

And then came the sapling I stole
in the dead of night, when Campus Security was off duty.
Used an ice cream scooper to free its tender roots.
Carried it up two flights of stairs into my room,
where it stood in the corner like a sentinel.



I had always thought that the tearing of the leaves
was an outlet for my affliction. Higher education
rips you down your fault lines too.
But maybe what I really wanted was to protect that sapling,
keep it safely hidden in my temporary room,
away from a world that was warming, a world that was dying.

Francesca McDonnell Capossela is a poet and writer, with a Master's in Creative Writing from Trinity College Dublin. Her poetry has been published in Hanging Loose Magazine, Banshee, Aesthetica Creative Writing Anthology, and The Cormorant Broadsheet, and her essays have been published in the Los Angeles Review of Books, The Point Magazine, and on VICE.com. She has also contributed an essay to a forthcoming anthology, Teaching Nabokov's Lolita in the #MeToo Era (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021). Francesca is 24 and is from Brooklyn. Follow her on Twitter: @CheskaFranny.

Déanaim dearmad ar mo theaghlach agus cuimhin liom - Poem
By Catherine Garrett

The Irish word for queer is scuaine
translate back to English and you get Queue
Queer is Scuaine is Queue or: waiting
weigh the words against each other then patience becomes patient
dying woman walks into an ER gets told to wait in line

There is no option for audio on irish google translate
which wouldn't be a problem if the language of my family didn't skip a generation
heritage and I watch each other from the fringes of our vision
identity waits in the wings unable to leave then
heavy silence sits in my mouth when I realize

I can't answer to the ghosts who haunt me
history sleeps with memory/memory, by history
we all forget more than we remember
my silent identity
mouth open and no sound comes out
two generations later my ancestors don't know what to call me
and so, I wait

Agus Mar Sin Fanfaidh me
translated back to English you get
stay instead of wait
call this dis-orientation

Bean ghear Queer woman
back to English sharp lady
I am the only Queer person in my family I know of
that must count for something
I can feel the strangeness
like gan baint not belonging
back to English and you get

without touching
but that is not to say I do not reach.

Catherine Garrett (they/she) is a bisexual powerhouse who puts their considerable passion to poetry and reporting, and getting other people to write their bios for her. She is 24 years old and is from Haida Gwaii, B.C. They've competed on three Victoria slam teams and one Vancouver slam team, and was an ApocaCIPS finalist of 2020. They can be found drinking beer, and yelling about hockey on twitter. Her numerous publications include Moria, Room, Sky Island Journal, Oraotrealis, Turnpike, and Cotyledon. They will bring a lot of complicated enthusiasm on such topics as family, death, and doing what you love.

Spring - Poem

By Yanna Mallari

The adrenaline,
Rush, rushing in.
The heat of winter,
In frostbite fingers.
It was months on end,
My mind all bent,
Out of shape,
Parts he ate away.
Had me dancing,
Eggshells, balancing.
Nothing was enough,
His crave for love.
But now it's over,
In sunlight showers,
I bathe my mind;
Healing comes in time.

juliet on the balcony - Poem

By Elizabeth Sallow

i'm thinking of you, staring out of your window:
juliet on the balcony. do you still think of me when
the moon starts to rise and the sun starts to fall?
i didn't know what it meant, when you kissed me,
candyfloss smiles and summer skies. i'm still
trying to figure it out. i'm sorry for being useless,
i'm sorry for falling in love with you. obsessive
and adolescent: playing checkers on a chess board.

the sun's rising, judgement day, groundhog day,
i'm thinking of what we could be under a
different moon and different stars. what we could
be, with a different you and me. romeo on the
balcony. i'll tell you i love you, this time, because
in this world, i don't know fear, in this world, i
know what it means when you kiss me, so in
this world we last forever. endless in the impossible.

do you still think of me? you're in glasgow now
but in my dreams you're still living in the lakes,
you're swallowing the bubblegum and holding
my hand. tell me, under midnight skies, if you
still love me, if some part of you, still loves me -
i'm feeling selfish, don't answer that. in my
nightmares, we do things differently: i fall

in love with you and you fall in love with him.
in my daydreams, we own a house on the west
coast. it's painted pink and we own a telescope.
i'm thinking of you, the imprint you left

on my heart, in my nights, in my sunsets.
i'm thinking of you, what we are, what we
were, and what we could've been. romeo and
juliet, doomed and desperate.

Elizabeth Sallow (she/her) is a queer nineteen year old who lives in a small village in the UK. She believes in the universal and connective power of literature and hopes that she can make people feel understood in a way that she did growing up with her head in a book. She also likes succulents. It's a problem. You can find her on Instagram @elizabeth.sallow

Academic Overture - Poem

By Tuur Verheyde

Those early autumn rains
Bathing latter day September are your cue.
The pulsing patter in ragtime rhythm,
Background noise to hide the undertow,
Its grasp crawling towards your Achilles' heel,
Smelling strongly of nail polish.

Academia, dressed in dark teal (like her eyes)
Her head, hair and helmet crowning her in gold,
She is Bacall born again. A femme fatal rules alone.

She's done her lips.
She's done her hair,
Her hand resting on your heel.
At the flick of her lighter
We begin.

Tuur Verheyde is a twenty-four year old Belgian poet. His work often discusses current events, progressive politics, spirituality and highbrow and popular culture as well as personal experiences and stories.

gold rush - Poem

By Isabella Fiore

your nails are long, brushing against
my arm as we sit in the airport. they are pink
today, carved into thin points that could
puncture a balloon if enough pressure is
applied. i love this about you. you have a fierceness
that i can only dream of embodying, this
restrained power that rarely makes an appearance.

i often wonder what it would have been like
to have grown up loving you. who you were at twelve,
fifteen, eighteen, finding yourself and losing it
too. i wonder when i would have realized that you
are my only missing piece. would i have? i might
have let you pass me by, been so used to your
light that i don't remember quite how it shines.

you put on your eyelashes piece by piece. the
glue in your left hand, dotting stars on your lash line
while holding your breath. i can be in the room,
dancing completely naked, and you will not notice.
this laser focus is part of your sparkle, the glitterball
that gleams in the center of my universe. baby,
i write these love poems in hopes of being able
to find the words to tell you how i feel.

other times i contemplate what it would be like
to always be so beautiful. how you look in the
mirror with reverence, studying your face in
every reflection like a coveted painting, knowing
that you move like a dream. i wish i could bottle

your confidence and take shots whenever i doubt
myself. instead i just hold you as close as i can
and hope that will be enough.

maybe this is objectifying and inaccurate.
your magnetism might be an act, a well-established
farce to keep me loving you. as you blot your
lipstick, a single tear runs from your mascara.
you are falling apart just like i am, pulling at
the seams silently. you harness such strength,
fortitude that acts as a safety net crocheted
to keep you safe.

i want to keep you safe.

i want to bring the fire to your eyes and
the spice to your tongue. i want to press you
to my skin every second of the day, lightning
passing between us like a stroke of genius.
you have so much energy, warm and brash
and just

you.

forever and always and then some.

just you.

Isabella Fiore (she/they) is an eighteen year-old writer who chronicles her experiences through love, sadness, and figuring out what it means to be a queer "woman" in her world. her publications include Heartburn Review and Velvet Fields Magazine. when she is not writing, Isabella can be found baking, napping, or wrapping herself in a blanket like a burrito.

preparing for winter - Poem

By Genevieve Hartman

Previously published in The Lanthorn

*for my grandmothers,
the ones that i was born to
& the ones that have adopted me.*

i am sorry that sometimes i am waiting
for you to leave, for death & old age
to take your hands in one last marriage.
i am missing pieces of you now, little

memories that have fallen under the
unvacuumed rug, behind the couch.
we'll have to dig them out or they'll
be lost forever. sometimes we cannot return

to the past. but sometimes we do: after spring,
we lay aside our cleaning rags & sit silent
to reminisce. what memories we unearth when
we are still & holding together, bowed heads

& held hands. your gentle voice lulls me now. it is
soft & storied, filled with quiet years of joy.

Genevieve Hartman is a Korean American poet based in upstate New York. She is the Director of Development & Communications for BOA Editions & reads poetry for VIDA Review. Her poems & reviews have been published in Brushfire, Stone Canoe, Meniscus Journal, EcoTheo, Singapore Unbound, & others. She is twenty-two. Find her reading or buying another plant, & follow her on Instagram at @gena_hartman.

Dear Lover - Poem
By Sophie Singleton

One can be so bold as
to call themselves
beautiful
But the true reflection
of this standard is
achieved through an
ever present love for
others

If you were to look
into an opaque mirror,
strewn with memories of
your past, present, and
future,
Would you see anything
meaningful
Or gaze upon a void of
what could have been

Why do we even attempt
the task of building
puzzles
When all we expect is
for them to crumble
apart
The inevitable persists

The only person on this
earth with the capacity
to always be there for
you
is the one reading this

Trees plant their roots
deep in soil
Never wavering in their
admiration for
stability
Dandelions like myself
float where the wind
takes them and never
look back

Since when did
expression and
discomfort coincide in
perfect discordance
Is the former a worthy
price to pay
for the latter's
shattered pride

If the only meaningful
characteristic of a
person were their
personality
Would your idea of love
change
Or would this increased
prevalence
have no effect

I don't know much about
love
But when someone
appears in your life
when you least expect
it

that's a godsend
Hold onto that notion
and hope for the best

Why do you look at me
like that
I can't tell if you
want to
be me or be
with me
Or am I reading too
deeply into things
Maybe we want the same
thing...

I've lived over 6,000
days but the one I met
you was the
Best
Yet

Smile at me when you
need help
Ignore me after
I'll be here for you
Always and forever
But
in a different way
The always and forever
we envisioned when we
were younger
was too good to be true
She's like
supermarket flowers

Always there for
special occasions
The occasional pinch
She's
someone who seems
disposable when her
petals begin to wilt
And her stature
crumbles down...
But with a little care
she'll give you a
garden

You never know what
someone is going
through
Ever
There's no way to
But you can always be
the light of their life
Keeping them going when
they feel like giving
up
Just don't give up on
them

Sophie Singleton is a 16-year-old aspiring writer from southwest Georgia. Writing has always been a way to free herself from the stresses of everyday life and the feeling of just not being "good enough." Throughout childhood, Singleton has learned to embrace who she is in order to live her best life. She is a girl who loves to play tennis, run XC T&F, and soak up those happy moments that come when least expected. Singleton seeks to inspire other people her age to be their true, unapologetic selves. If she could make an impact on one child's life and inspire them to pursue their interests, whether that be writing or something entirely different, then her work would mean a whole lot more to her.

Burnaway - Poem

By Jaden Goldfain

And then I said I'll see you at the beach. I said I'll see you where sand blows and seagulls bite and we cross the street to avoid the stoned man on the corner. I said I'll see you at the pier, where your words blur with the sand because I'm imagining how many echoes of "I should jump off" resonate in this wood and I turn my face so you don't see when my sun-kissed-and-blinded mind leaps with them. I said I'll see you in the place where the sun burns and burns and burns and the people have come with the desire to flame at the edge of the most water in the world.

They want to burn where the water is closest.

I said I'll see you where the children get too close to infinity, where seaweed pulls and pulls with the demons and the children laugh and the sand cackles and the seafloor signs its contract to hell. I said I'll see you where footprints walk the border of pride--where the shore scrubs out every story possible, tugging at the ankles of the authors trailing insignificance. I said, I'll see you where no one ever sees me again

and then I'll come back and do it over again

yes, to see you again

and then I said I'll see you at the beach.

Jaden Goldfain is a nineteen-year-old Coloradoan pursuing a B.A. in Writing from Point Loma Nazarene University. Her work has appeared in Blue Marble Review, Bridge Ink, Foreshadow Magazine, and elsewhere. She loves Jesus, her friends, and Stranger Things. Twitter: @j_goldfain

for the piece of thread unraveling from my favorite sweater // Riana Montes de Oca

for the piece of thread unraveling from my favorite sweater - Poem
By Riana Montes de Oca

i've had this sweater for almost a year now
and you decide that when i need you the most,
you want to fall apart.

but i get it; i want to fall apart too.
maybe you don't think you're as important
as the others, but you are.
you've held it together this far,
and so have i.

i find comfort in the way the stitching is fabricated –
the way the cotton lies gently on my warm, tender skin.
oversized and pigmented a dark green, it is softer than
a whisper.

when i want to disappear from the world
and its heavy expectations,
i let the sweater swallow me whole.
i want to let go of everything holding me back.
i think you do too, so it's okay.

you want to break free from the jail
you've got yourself into.
you've been holding on for so long,
and so have i.

i think it's time we both let go.

although your departure is an inconvenience
for me, i know you'll be happier.
i'd hate to tug at you in fear of the entire sweater unraveling,
but i think that's exactly the type
of medicine i need.

we will part ways.

in the darkness of my drawer it goes.

i think we'll be alright regardless



for the piece of thread unraveling from my favorite sweater // Riana Montes de Oca

of the fears of moving on.

we

will

be

alright.

Riana Montes de Oca is a secondary education major with a minor in creative writing at Saint Leo University. She is nineteen years old and originally from New Jersey, but she has moved around a great deal. Reading and Writing are her passions.

You Are Worth the Wait: Then and Now - Poem

By Fransivan MacKenzie

Right after you have your heart broken,
you do not have to pick the pieces up,
to sweep the glass shards off the ground,
or to forget the way he says goodbye
that divides the atoms of the air around you.
Beloved, do not even dare do this
on the first midnight, while you're
drunken in your misery and Jack Daniels,
your fingers frenzied over dialing
all your friends who tell you
how you should have known.
You've always been hard-headed
that everybody wonders if your ribcage
was mistakenly placed into your skull.
Smartest school girl, a fool in love,
what are your medallions for
if you can't guard your heart?
Do not call the dawn by its name
when you still miss French-kissing
the one who brought you back into the darkness.
Not when morning still remembers how you once swore
never to love a moonless sky again.
Instead, stay in the rank of your room
and let the spiders court you in their elegance
as dust clings into your old pictures.
Stay in the violence of your silence
and let all the goddamn music die.
You do not need anyone to serenade you
into healing when you have yet to bleed
all your hurt out,

streaming in rivers on your cheeks –
a choir of agony.
Stay in touch with your childhood ghosts
and let them take you for a slow dance
and weep and weep and weep.
Darling, grieve if you must,
and indeed, you must grieve this
like every burial of something that has stopped existing.
This pinprick of time is as sacred as the moment
of a tombstone rolling away
to reveal a Lazarus – mummified but alive,
and being alive means holding infinite possibilities.
Drop into your knees and clasp your palms
to pray for a miracle
and stay in there until redemption comes to fetch you.
There is a season for death
and a season for rebirth.
So right after you have your heart broken
and be hollow to your core,
wait there on the cold floor
for your resurrection.
Wait like you didn't before.

Fransivan MacKenzie is a nineteen-year-old self-published author born and raised in the Philippines. Her works also appeared in Germ Magazine, Transition Magazine, The Racket Journal, and Just For You Tutoring Blog. She spends most of her time reading, writing, stressing about writing instead of actually writing, and drinking an inordinate amount of coffee on hot afternoons.

The Weight of Tears - Poem

By Adi Raturi

For the young boy,
whose ice cream fell off the cone,
they bear down like a monsoon rain,
dribble effortlessly down smooth, frictionless cheeks.

All of them light as feathers.

For the single mother,
coming home to this crying boy,
they are boulders, caked into the cliffside,
infused with grease and sweat,
held back only by the knowledge of the damage they can do.
Tears are often compared to streams or rivers,
flowing from endless chasms of the soul,
Yet, perhaps, they are sourced from a finite ocean
that's boiling away in step
with the candle of mortality.
Cuts and burns may tip the pot,
but scars increase the flame,
sparing only the salt and grime
until water turns to sludge,
and feathers stiffen into stone.



Adi Raturi is an 18 year old living in Singapore. He enjoys reading and writing both nonfiction and fiction. He has won a number of gold keys in the Scholastic Arts and Writing awards as well as a national medal in the competition for short story.

Penny Heads - Poem

By Evelyn Combs

I thought I saw your eyes in a past life, though it may have only been the wishing fountain. Overhead lights cast shimmering cracks in clear jade, copper flecks resting beneath the surface warped and wavering. Completely unrelated, there's a song on my playlist that makes me think of you. A roller skating rink where everyone dresses their Sunday best, and sometimes you're there with me. But don't read too much into it, it's not like I can make you leave. Every time I try, there's a flower twined around my fingers, melted butter sun shining rays of ghostly yellow. I let the petals fall, crushed to lemon residue, but there's always one left over by the time the song is through. And so I make my way through mall hallways, head aching from intoxicating perfume when I come to the crossroads of shopping and the food court. In the wishing fountain, crystal bursts burble along a clear stream where copper flecks rest, just like the one in my fingers where flowers used to bloom. I toss it in and it makes a light sound. I wish I could find out what to do now, how to walk away. But as I stand here, all the penny heads whisper past wishes and I'm rooted to the ground.

Evelyn Combs is a sixteen-year-old from Norman Oklahoma. When she's not writing, she enjoys reading, listening to music, and learning about animals.

rewind - Poem

By Maggie Fulmer

i remember the buttermilk in the fridge
and my hand pressed firmly into fresh cement;
both a comforting coldness.

star flowers in the side yard
but then again maybe not;
they could have been daylilies or daffodils
or nothing at all.

there is a nearly empty house inside me;
it has scratched cherry wood floors
and a subway tile backsplash in the kitchen.

if you wanted more time why didn't you say so –
the hands on the grandfather clock don't just tick,
they have wrapped around my throat.

Maggie Fulmer is 26-year-old, emerging writing from Kentucky with a passion for poetry and creative nonfiction. She received her BA in journalism and MA in English from Northern Kentucky University. Her work has been featured in Atlas+Alice, Dime Show Review, and The Coil. She can be found on most corners of the internet (@mfulms21) talking about boybands, books, and reality television.

**how to become a god: a manual from the old and battle-weary to the young and eager,
who have not yet seen death, or, who have seen death and are unwilling to quit. - Poem
By Monica Robinson**

when given the choice between fight and flight, follow not in our footsteps. the gods
before you have spent centuries making human mistakes. suck the ichor from your trigger finger
and stick it straight into the nearest light socket –
set the hallowed ground aflame and do not look back.

you will not call yourselves gods. you may not call yourself anything at all. the nameless
inherit

graves and gardens alike, spirits trading a church disassembled for a street singing
on its last earthly breath. if you learn to sing too, you may find that you are a savior after all.

crave the taste of victory all you like, but we warn you that the taste is bitter and ashen. you
will

pierce the immortal fog only to expose the blood that built it, dripping from your ichor-covered
hands. in the stillness of disbelief, you will find eons of a sinner's denial branded

across your immortal wrist. you will learn just how human you are. standing alone

at the end of the world, you will find none but your dying soul, heavy with the weight
of your thousand life-times. you will disassemble this too, with your two good hands. they are the
last things that made you human; they are the only tool suited to the delicate task of a god's
sacrificial death.

*Monica Robinson (mrobinsonwrites.com) is a queer experimental poet and artist, mixing
mediums to create fresh works of exploratory literature. She is eternally haunted by the rural
Midwestern landscape in which she grew up, and she has been writing her brand of the weird
and the wild ever since. Monica is currently twenty-one and resides in Philadelphia with her
partner, her husky, and her library-sized collection of books, all crammed into one small
apartment.*

where are you from? - Poem

By Avantika Singh

i.

i was born in split-levels next to trailer parks,
where blue and white collars intermingled.
where the blue collars would never see past
the worn asphalt gleaming under the summer
sun and the rusty sign of route nine that had
a layer of dust that had been there since the
days of their forefathers and will be there in
the days of their children's children.
where the white collars would put on their
starched shirts and pressed ties and go for
yet another day of nine to five and one day,
their children would hold a slip of paper worth
four years away from home and caffeine-fuelled
nights spent wasting away in their campus library.
where the select few with pockets deep enough
to carry the himalayas didn't exist.

ii.

i was born in hordes of white that were
rarely speckled by brown and black.
where i was never quite welcome and
my parents' brown faces and smelly food
and strange language stood out from the
milky-faced and god-fearing crowds.
where i put on my plaid skirt and recited
the pledge of allegiance every morning,
staring at the red, white, and blue symbol
of liberty and justice and wondering if
the country i was supposed to love
even wanted me in it.

iii.

i was born in crosses and steeples
churches where my strange gods
were mocked and ridiculed.
where i rejected my prayers and
my faith because i longed to
worship the son of a virgin
who'd died for his people's sins.
where i forced myself to sing the hymns
of the savior and pray to him to
wash away the color of my parents'
skin and my mother's accent and the
statues of lakshmi and hanuman
my father had put up in our home.

iv.

i was born in a small town in the
the so-called land of the free.
i was born in a small town,
in a cage that didn't accept me.

Avantika Singh (she/her) is a fourteen-year-old South Asian American novelist and poet. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and she's the editor of hyacinthus mag. When she's not writing, she enjoys reading romance and E.M. Forster novels, online window shopping, and baking. Find her on Twitter @avantikaswrites and @hyacinthusmag.

lexicographical archeology, or love letters are overrated so i wrote you a dictionary-thesaurus bundle instead - Creative Nonfiction

By Meily Tran

Words were invented by Merriam-Webster in 1831. Trust me, I was a certified linguistic anthropologist in my freshman year of high school. That's why I also know that words were invented to be gifted to you, hand-wrapped in school newspapers I stole off Yaklich's classroom projector. Infected by my scrutinizing gaze, you'll pull off the magic tape with contagious care. Then you'd peel all the words off your new sticker sheet and press them onto your skin as temporary tattoos. When they melt from your body heat, you can press an ink tube against the length of your arm and let the sweaty ebony drip into translucent plastic. Good timing! Your Muji pen was in desperate need of a refill.

Don't worry. Whenever your inkpots dry up, I will be your word hunter. (I've had that on my resume since fourth grade, when you left me alone on the playground and I used a tattered word-search booklet to fill the sandy craters you shoveled out of me. You were always the prodigious excavator, weren't you?) Archeology is an entirely different science from anthropology, but I'll be fine as long as I have my trusty suitcase stuffed with three (3) email transcripts between myself and the esteemed lexicography professors of the University of Arizona. Now I am well aware that the number of words I have yet to inscribe in my field notes is, to put it lightly, incalculable. Call me foolish then, for I swear on the mole beneath your left eye that I will compile all the world's words into a hybrid chapbook-dictionary, fourteenth edition. With your name printed on the dedication page, I will be your fool.

While I'm at it, I'll throw in a complimentary thesaurus. I'll teach you all the different ways to say, I love you. I would know. I searched for synonyms at the largest dig site on the planet—Google:

iloveyou n. the words I haven't found the courage to tell you yet; all I can write about is you; be mine; clingy? I know, but I miss you and I'm too stubborn to let you go; don't put all the blame on yourself; even if you leave me again, I'll still forgive you; forget-me-not; grow with me; how am I supposed to live without you; I miss you; just promise me that you'll take care of yourself for me; kiss me before you go. kiss me tonight, in my dreams; lend me not the key to your heart (though you may hold onto mine), but an ear. I will let you in on an industry secret.

Out of all the skeletal words I've unearthed, there is only one superior to the infamous three; (my voice, crumbling like coffee-colored papyrus crushed underneath temple ashes, gasping) yourname.

Meily Tran (she/her) is a high school senior from Southern California. Most of her works are first drafted at 1 AM and are inspired by her tragic sapphic love life, sporadic identity crises, and beloved pet chihuahua. Twice a week or so, she rambles on twitter at @tran_scendence.

Regression - Flash Fiction

By Eli Osei

“Y- ”

He was Icarus. Descendant of the land and lover of the sky, a mortal revered as a god. As he stood in his sanctuary of ambition, he no longer felt safe. It was as if his very existence was futile. The four walls of his dingey, studio apartment no longer protected him, they created a cage. The four walls of this rundown room that had once battled the world, now fought foreclosure.

Holding back the pervasive tears that invaded his eyes, stole his energy and plagued his mind; he looked down at the tiny cubic desk tucked away in the corner of the room. The decaying hunk of wood had been a gift from his grandfather many millennia ago and, unlike the forgotten bearer who lives out his days six feet underground searching for the light, it had survived the test of time. On the desk, lay his past. Scattered fragments of impartial dreams that held more weight on the oak than in his mind. A glass of water, an apple core, an old book and his diary, his previously cherished, now resented diary: all sat on top of the desk.

“You d-”

The glass of water, once ice-cold and refreshing, was now a lukewarm mess, reeking of desperation. It desired to be used, to be wanted. It hated the state of neglect it existed within. Around the brim of the glass lay the faded and forgotten prints of lips that were once used to love. As time passed by, the prints, the love slowly started to disappear and yet the glass, the unremembered, lost glass continued to serve as a reminder of what used to be. At the bottom of the glass, longing rays of sunlight shone upon the little water that was left but as the rays continued to jubilate, the water began to suffer. The dying water and the newborn vapour began to make their way up the glass and into the world, into another life. In its past life the water lived amongst the mountains. In its past life the water spent its days in peace, as the joyful birds sang their songs of gratitude high up in the treetops. It was free, they were free, free from humanity’s relentless search for good, free from Icarus.

The seemingly rotten apple core was once an apple, the devoured apple once proudly hung from a tree. None of that mattered. From the moment the apple’s first speck of life, compressed into tiny seeds, was gathered, it had begun its journey to this very table. Where it fittingly lay, half-

consumed, next to Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations". The dusty, self-congratulating text spent its mornings wondering why it was now unfashionable and its evenings in deep, ominous silence. Inside the book were his mother's old notes, messages, scribbled down the cramped margins. Barely understandable dribs and drabs. Disregarded cries of the middle-class.

"don't understand l-"

His diary subverted the confinements of its body's A4 existence. It was orange, orange like the sun as it kisses the horizon before disappearing and making way for the night. The night, the cold perpetual night was his words. Trapped inside of the diary was the story of a man who was not afraid to dream, a man who wanted to see the world, a man with a song in his step and no chip on his shoulder, a man who was no longer recognizable, who ceased to exist. As he stood between the four walls of his ruinous prison, sleep in eyes and bags under them. So badly, so badly did he want to forget. So badly did he want to fly.

"love."

"You don't understand love," she said.

A single, lonely, soon to-be-forgotten tear climbed down his face.

He knew it to be true.

Eli Osei, 17, is a South African interdisciplinary creative with a previous passion for life and a current passion for toasted sandwiches. He finds joy in writing, directing, photographing, and watching movies. Eli believes that there is an incredible amount of hope and peace to be found in the mundane. To him, it is the normal life that possesses more beauty than anything else, and he hopes that his work captures that.

Creatures of Habit - Flash Fiction

By Jordan Davidson

When they come to wake me, I won't be there. They'll search the bedroom thoroughly of course, then the kitchen, and then the sitting room, if you could call it that, but they're not going to find me in the house. After that, they'll check the garden and the wagon, in that order. When I'm not there, they'll go further up the river to where the prickly grasses go to roses. Eventually, one of them will find me, probably Theodore. Everyone calls him Teddy, like turning his name into a diminutive will somehow make him smaller than six foot three.

He'll stare up at me from the ground, and I'll most likely look down at him, ignoring the vertigo that comes with glancing off a tree branch a hundred (or so it feels like) feet in the air. He'll say something to ask me to come in, and I won't answer back, I'll just begin my climb down. They don't like me speaking. They think it's witchcraft.

I know when I start descending that Teddy's going to turn away so he's not tempted to look up my skirts. He's a proper gentleman, unlike some of the other boys that travel with us.

He'll put his hand on the small of my back almost as if he's afraid that I'm going to fly away. I could, if I wanted to. I don't though. I haven't got anywhere else to go. None of us do. Teddy's always slow to take his hand off my back. He thinks it's because he wants to keep me safe, but I know the truth. Not that he's lying exactly, he does want to keep me safe, but that's only one reason. He enjoys me, and would love to do much more with me than keep his hand where it is. He feels bad about it, having feelings for such a strange, mad girl. He doesn't have anything to worry about. I only pretend to be mad. In reality, my mind would run circles around the rest of them, only I don't let it. There are lots of things I don't let myself do.

When we enter the log cabin, Ms. Mary Ellen will be waiting for me. She'll reprimand me for going outside before the sun's risen, for climbing, for doing anything really. But she won't hit me, or anything like that. She just can't lose any of us, her curiosities. I'll be led to the breakfast table with my fellow performers. Alice, with her wings and her horns, will smile at me. It's not a very nice smile. They'll all be there, tired from this morning's search. Ms. Mary Ellen will shove some sort of food to my hand, then force us all into the wagon.

There's a big sign emblazoned on the side. Freaks, it proclaims in bold, prismacolor letters. Are

we freaks? I guess we are. For what else could extraordinary people be in a world that praises normality like a new sort of God?

On the way to whatever hillbilly town comes next, Ms. Mary Ellen will instruct us to pull on the various clothes we are to wear. We're all going to be nervous, but Peggie especially so. People will call her a monster wherever we go, it's inevitable. She'll show it in the usual ways, fidgeting with her pink dress, batting her eyelids—especially that on her third eye—hard enough to make them swell.

I'll be dressed in white, something simple and innocent. The clothes she'll pick will make me look frail, younger than I am. The others will go before me. Teddy will go first, hoping to pacify the riotous crowd with the light he can manipulate in his palms. Then the other will appear on stage, in uncertain order. Sometimes, if the crowd is rough, one that throws glass bottles and the likes down at our feet, we won't go on at all.

I'll go last, when the crowd's ready. Ms. Mary Ellen will lead me out, and I'll stand there for a moment, letting my eyes adjust to the light. The stage will be clear by then, a plain plank of wood with me in the center. Ms. Mary Ellen will have to prod me a few times, to get me to start. I know that she will have introduced me to the crowd as a witch. It's what she always does. We are all freaks of habit.

Eventually I'll feel it. Some sort of pull. Sometimes it's wind or water, sometimes I can feel fire or souls. I'll start, and it'll feel good—a bit like freedom but also a bit like floating away. Ms. Mary Ellen will whisper under her breath, telling me what she wants from me, but as long as she gets her paycheck, Ms. Mary Ellen won't care whether I allow a child to walk again, or split the very ground beneath my feet.

Eventually, when all my strength has bled out of me through my fingertips, she'll call one of the boys to lift me from where I will have collapsed on stage. The wagon will take us home. I'll sleep, then before the sun rises, I'll be back in my tree to start the cycle over. We are all freaks of habit.

Jordan Davidson is a 17-year-old student and writer from Denver, Colorado. She has been recognized nationally and a 2021 YoungArts Merit winner in novel, and has upcoming work in Cathartic Literary Magazine and Corvid Queen. In addition to writing, she enjoys singing with her acapella group and treble choir.

A Quiet World of Color - Creative Nonfiction

By Kate Wexell

The first time I heard birdsong, I was twelve years old. For the past two hours I'd been sitting in an orange chair, unlike the color of the sunset, but rather an artificial plastic sore. I'd had wires shoved in my ears with endings that fooled you, making them seem light as cotton until they conveyed loud whirring and whistling that was far from the quiet peace that the wind in the trees portrayed. But these twisted rattlesnakes in my head had been removed, and the doctors handed me a metallic device. The organic nature of the world had become obsolete, and I was destined to string this machine made of rubber and computer chips around my ear.

"Now turn it on," they said. There was a sound of chimes, and then a piercing pain through my head. I imagined this was the agony a camera felt when a photographer adjusted the lens into focus with near-perfect clarity. I asked them how bad my hearing loss is, for how would I know in a life where I've known no different? They showed me a chart with a sharp diagonal line in the correlation between frequency and my comprehension. Then there were drawings overlaying the frequencies. "You can hear the sounds on the bottom right," they told me as I stared at cartoon doodles of guns and helicopters and a dog's bark, "But your left ear has never heard anything above that line. This hearing aid won't restore full hearing to you, but it will help."

Then the doctors led me down the hall, and I turned to every open door to experience the new contrast between loud and soft. "I can hear the printer down the hall," I whispered to my mother. I'd never heard the paper whirring out before. As I approached the outdoors, I could hear it: the soft, melodic chirping of a million songbirds floating across the horizon, right beyond the shrouded vrooming of the interstate. My silent box had been open, and I could now hear the beating of tires against the pavement, and the voices of people walking inside the children's hospital. I could hear their laughter and their slight inflections in tone. I could hear the bushes rustling, and everything was new. Yes, the silent box was gone, but I had a terrible headache that day.

But there is something curious about that silent box. As I'd glide noiselessly past the yellow and white dashes of the road, I could see everything with scintillating precision— streets, cars, houses. It was a masquerade of quietness disguised behind a ballroom of color. It was flourishing life in every detail. Everything is a rainbow with the slightest textures: the sharp edge

of a piece of paper, the criss crossed lines on a piece of wood, the light hitting bars of metal, the faint illumination of sunlight sliding through veins of leaves. Everything was beautiful, and everything had been quiet until that moment.

Since I was five, I've played the piano. It always sounded like a lark to me, or a robin wearing its feathery wreath of red. I began by plunking out notes one at a time, but after a few minutes I would repeat these same notes, creating patterns and rhythms of what I heard on the radio or the television. When I was nine, I started playing trumpet. And the same thing happened. We were told, "Tune your instruments to a Concert F." Amid the shrieking that echoed out from prepubescent saxophone players like the predatory hunt of a lion chasing a gazelle, and the sharp yelps like a newborn calf emerging into the world being let out from the trumpets, I managed to notice that my instrument was sharp. So I pulled my tuning slide out, and I was in tune. I was always perfectly in tune through middle school.

My teachers have always told me, "Imagine that your music is a story." When I was in sixth grade, I was enamored by that concept. "The composer didn't write a couple of dots with lines on a page. They are telling the stories of their lives. These are their thoughts, their emotions. This is their love and their hate. This is their anger and frustration." But I can never derive a story from my music. Instead, it reminded me of art. It reminded me of eloquent canvases I view at the marble museum in St. Louis filled with the soul of sunlight and the strokes they took with each breath. So as my lungs heaved, I saw color.

Every note has a different hue. Middle C is yellow, with a bit of scarlet mixed in. But Bb almost an octave higher is a light blue, like the sky. Then the pieces are different colors. La Campanella is a navy blue like the stark midnight air, while Clair de lune is white like the stars surrounding the moon. And every song, every phrase forms its own painting, a collection arranged like the landscapes of Thomas Cole. Beethoven is filled with meadows. Meadows of periwinkle blue and sunny days, but with grass drained of color. Tired weeds blowing in the breeze. His piece have women spinning, laughter scrawled on their faces, until they fade with the wind. And then towards the ends of his pieces, there is a soft, somber mood, where birds flap their wings towards the sky as he mourns his misery of forever being alone. Then Liszt's music is vibrant and red, like the spastic neon colos that exude from the trumpet. That music has a jagged texture, and with every bold emphasis, there is red floating through the air. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 is scarlet, while Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6 is green like the woodlands. And Chopin is different shades of

or golden or blue. Mozart, on the other hand, is yellow, like early morning light, or green shades of nature, like birdsong fluttering through the open air.

But then I realized that music is not the only entity containing color. It's memories too. Names dissolve like the dirt and dust, but my memories are left in color. I became hungry for color. For vibrant color proving the memory's worth. Its importance. Each year, each month, each number on the calendar has a color. The days I make the drudging trip to the mall are an artificial yellow, like the plastic color of the audiologist's office. But the sweet days of winter when snowflakes pelt against your cheeks are a light blue, the color of wildflowers that don't appear until summer.

And then there was a day that was golden. It was delicate and cool, with light peeking over the Illinois cornfields and kissing my cheeks with a softness like a baby's lips. So when I was in the eighth grade, I told my mother, "Today is golden." She looked at me.

"You're right. It is a nice day outside."

"No. I mean today is golden."

I had to explain to her what I saw that day. And she listened silently, taking everything in. "I don't see the world that way," she had to tell me.

Oh.

And then three years later, she mentioned this again to my boyfriend while I was in high school. She told him about how I feel in color. She told him about how I feel every experience through my eyes. How when he and I listened to Mahler together, he feels the darkness, the emotion poured into the music like a rippling waterfall, but he doesn't feel the shades of red and blue that I do. He doesn't see the swirling flowers as the violins move their bows back and forth across the strings. His soul can hear it, but his eyes cannot. So he told me, "Honey, I think you have synesthesia."

I'd never heard that word before. That word is blue. I pulled out my phone and looked it up, and my dear friend Wikipedia informed me that it is like experiencing two senses at once, like attributing color to different numbers, or seeing numbers at different points in space, while

other forms are physical, like seeing bursts of colors described to be like fireworks bursting in the sky whenever a noise is made. My boyfriend teases me about how I have the memory of a goldfish. I have to explain to him that it isn't that my memory is awful, but that I attribute it to color rather than remembering names or the specific models of items like he can. He may remember a battle as "Pickett's Charge", while I see the cannonballs landing atop horses and men sprinting in the open field to avoid their unfortunate demise. I see the gunfire shooting through open air and the rusted bullets whirring into the opposing army leaping towards the stone wall barricades. Or he remembers conversations during our dates, while I remember the color of the cerulean peace I feel around him or the orange of sunsets and the French music we listen to on his record player.

Then we begin to dance. And as he takes my hips and we sway to our own rhythm, he hears the fine quality of the sound, while I see the color of his heart beat merging with the music of Satie in the basement. And everything morphs into wondrous harmony. But then the Satie changes back into the audiologist's office. She has just brought me back from their testing room, where my mother sat staring at me, eyes teary as she watches her daughter struggle to identify common words that are whispered into my left ear. The rattlesnakes had been implanted in my head again in the form of earbuds, with wind blowing into the right side. She is going down a list of red and blue words. "Repeat these back to me," she tells me. I can barely hear any of them.

That day when she handed me my hearing aid was vibrant with color, for I could hear the birds.

Kate Wexell is a junior (age 16) from the St. Louis Metro East region in Illinois. She is a staff writer for "The Diversity Story", frequently writes novels, and has published a book of poetry. Along with writing, she is a lifelong member of Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, teaches piano, and enjoys horseback riding, baking, painting, and genealogy.

The Lighthouse - Fiction

By Savannah Behr

I dropped the heavy, waterlogged bag on the ground. The wooden floorboards were warped and cracked, crusted with a layer of salt. One more wet bag rotting the floor probably wouldn't worsen the smell of mildew. I ran up the stairs, boots thumping on the wood. Climbing up to the roof was always unpleasant, the metal of the railing was cold and slimy to the touch. The view from the top of our worn-down old house would have been pretty, I assume, had the fog not masked the rocky seashore every day since I'd been born. Any sunsets or sunrises to be seen were hidden in the mist, just out of reach.

The ocean was closest to the West, practically right in front of me, although it was only a mile or two away East and a mile South and North. Ingrid Estle Island was tiny, one of the many islands on the coast of those foggy eastern states on which many fishing towns sat. The island was almost pathetically small, when you stepped foot on Ingrid Estle Island you were in the town of Ingrid.

I couldn't tell you why our island was named Ingrid Estle Island, I had no idea who Ingrid Estle was. If something wasn't known by most locals, the information simply didn't exist.

It was known by all that the Gidge family had been on the island as long as the town had. If you lived in Ingrid you'd met, married, or murdered one of us. We were like the Pug Salmon, our island's greatest economic contribution: ugly, small, and pathetic but somehow flourishing on this piece of salty rock.

Pug Salmon was our town's greatest pride. The smallest, weakest type of salmon with the sharpest bones and thinnest scales. Every man and woman of age worked in the Pug Salmon trade and those who didn't would feed and clothe us. Each day, hundreds were caught, packed into crates, and shipped off to the mainland. They were named Pug Salmon for their smushed, flat faces much like those wrinkly dogs rich people put bows on.

Ingrid was a town of fog, fish, drinking, and disappointment. "All in a day's work," was the closest thing to prayer for those as young as eleven before we drank bitter, diluted beer and stood beside men and women double our size. We were equals after a day of turning our heads to avoid being whipped by the ocean water splashing up against our boats and putting salve on burns from salt, cold, and rough fabric.

I breathed in the heavy, humid air, inhaling more fog than oxygen. Sitting on the cold, wet wood of the roof, I looked out into the fog. A decade ago, Gidge first pushed me out on that little boat with equipment far too heavy and boots so big they passed my knees and told me to "go catch something like a damn man." I'd long since learned to ignore the soreness in my arms and the

smell of sweat and fish in my hair even better than I'd learned to hook a Pug Salmon.

I had about an hour until my mother came home and two until Gidge did.

I sat there until the brisk wind became uncomfortable. I liked it up on the roof. It was cold and windy and whatever beautiful view of the sea laid before me was masked by fog but it was quiet usually and it was a place only I went.

I unloaded my equipment.

Like any other better-than-dirt mind born in Ingrid, I wanted more than anything to leave. Tonight, the night of the biggest storm in a couple of decades, I'd leave.

Making my way up the stairs, I winced when they creaked. The sound of slamming doors and squeaky floorboards to me was fireworks to a war veteran.

I heard the front door slam open from my room. It was a song played every night, a song that spiked my adrenaline like a rollercoaster because that door opening led to the music of my father yelling and my mother crying, then of glass breaking and things hitting the floor and my name being called. That was when the dread set in like a nasty infection.

Everyone in this town knew my father was a cruel, old man. It was a sort of tradition, a rite of passage that when a Gidge boy came of age and was as strong and angry as his father had been they would just be called Gidge or Mr. Gidge when they were being arrested, married, or lowered six feet into the dirt. I'd always thought my father to be a very ugly man. He drank like no one else I knew and alcoholism was as rampant as the common cold in Ingrid. I can't picture my father without a beer in his left hand. It was generally accepted that the Gidge men were and always had been a cruel, sour bunch.

My father was a thin, tall man but he was stockier than I was. When I was a child I was more afraid of him than the creatures under the bed. I used to pray a day would come soon when I was taller than Gidge and I could fight back. Standing at six feet, my eyes now met his furrowed, sweaty brow but I realized as soon as I was his height that I couldn't lay a hand on him. Or, I just wouldn't. I was fourteen now and he looked less like a monster looming over me and more like a bitter old man who'd curdle the mud in his grave. I wouldn't hit Gidge so I took his blows.

"Sparrow." My door opened and the walls shuddered at his voice, the chorus to the ugliest song in the world. Anything would set him off.

"Yeah?"

"You put your catch in the bag?"

"Yeah."

"Good wind today?"

"Yeah."

"You know any other fuckin' words boy?"

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“Yeah.” I wasn’t trying to get him going but the day I learned to take a punch without tears I told myself I’d never walk on eggshells again. I was tired of watching my words, hung in an web of tension when a slight pull on the wrong string could cause an explosion. That was no way to live.

I noticed the look in his eye like prey tuned in to every tiny movement a predator makes and braced myself. I usually knew where he’d hit me and the sharp pain to the side of my face was no shock. I gritted my teeth and said nothing. It would never happen again. I almost smiled thinking about how Gidge wouldn’t even get a goodbye. One day I’d be here, then I wouldn’t, and no one could stop me, not even him.

“Damn it.” He grunted and left the room, slamming the door.

A few minutes later my mom's shrill voice rang through the house. “Dinner!”

I picked at my food. You’d think after a day of fishing I’d be starving but I never was. You go through a sort of change after hours of being whipped by saltwater, of shouting and being shouted at, of tying knots quickly because a loose knot done too late will kill you. You sort of become less human. Being in a constant state of intensity and desperation melts your brain. No wonder Ingrid fishermen start to live in a cycle of eat, sleep, fish, beer over and over again. After a couple of decades, their minds have been wrung out like rags.

“So Sparrow, how was school?” My mother spoke up.

“Good.”

“Will you give her a real answer?” Gidge spat.

“It’s fine if he’s tired.”

“That’s no excuse to be rude, Peety.” He took a swig of what was either beer or water but probably beer and a bite of the pug salmon croquettes.

My mother, Peety, was a short, slight woman with a round face, black eyes, and greying blonde hair although she was young. She wasn’t a very pretty woman but she had the most slender, delicate hands. They could have very well come off a statue pulled from the rubble of a Roman city. Her hands were too graceful for Ingrid and it didn’t go unnoticed, women would drink too much and grab them, examining her fingers. Men would leer and make awful comments.

Peety didn’t speak much and when she did it was nothing of real substance. She’d sometimes look at me, though, with a thoughtful, tender expression. If eyes can be called eloquent and wise, hers were.

She was a kind, gentle woman. I couldn’t imagine why she’d marry my father. He said she was the reason I was such an idiot, that she’d coddled me. He shouted at my mother until she threw a glass onto the floor just to startle him so he’d shut up and storm out the door. He never hit her, though. I’d often thought about what I’d do if he ever did. I settled on waiting until he’d

passed out for the night and then tying him up and tossing him off the dock. Fortunately, the day never came. Or, unfortunately, I thought, ruefully.

My mother was a timid woman who couldn't hold eye contact and often would speak about nothing to fill the bottomless quiet.

We ate in tense silence as usual. Every so often my mother would try to make conversation by saying something like "Ellie from the Rods N' Bait, will be having her baby any day now." Gidge would grunt in response and I'd keep my head down.

I'd miss my mom. I'd write to her. When I felt dinner was about finished I stood up. "Can I go upstairs?"

"Sure." Mom looked up from her plate.

I glanced back at her, she met my eyes and pressed her lips together in a sad, tired smile.

I went upstairs, only to climb out my window and slide down the storm drain. "Hey!" Cory waved when he saw me. I waved. We walked up the dock towards the main street as we always did. Awkward wasn't the right word but I was leaving, he wasn't, everything was changing and there was nothing we could say.

"So, tonight's the night. It's real." He said, breaking the silence.

"Yeah." I paused. "Come with me." I'd said this every day since we were kids and we'd talk about running away like it was impossible.

Cory was the best person on Ingrid Estle and everyone knew it. Although his ears stuck out and his teeth were crooked, he was handsome and charismatic. He got any girl he wanted, seemed so sure of himself. Cory always said the right thing, always did what was cool.

He was my brother. I'd spent every day with him since I was eight and before that I had no one. For a long time, Cory was everything I wanted to be. I was only now realizing he was a real person with fears and flaws. That was growing up, I thought.

"I can't yet. Maybe someday." He'd said this each time as well, never explaining why. I asked once and he just said he wasn't the type to run away. I'd always thought Cory was scared. I didn't know enough about the world or about people to know why. Maybe neither did he.

The streets were quiet at this time but as we neared The Bucket, the only bar and busiest place in Ingrid, we could hear laughter and music and see the warm yellow glow of the lights. Warm-toned bulbs weren't cheap, comfortable light was a luxury. We'd stumble out hours later, straining our eyes to adjust to the murky dark but in the bar, we were spoiled with gold light.

People had already boarded up most windows, tied most boats, and prayed enough, to

enough, to drop by the bar before they had to climb down into dark, damp basements and wait out the storm. I tried not to think about it. These coastal storms were disastrous but it was my last night ever in Ingrid, I'd think about the storm when I was in it.

Cory loved the Bucket, where gruff fishermen gathered. He never had a father, he lost his dad in a boating accident ten years ago. The rowdy patrons of The Bucket would pat him on the back and ask him about school and girls the way a father would.

Mine never did those things. There is a difference, though, between having a bad dad and not having one at all. Without having one you're free to dream about all the memories you could have made; of playing catch and sharing your first beers together. When you've got a bad one you can only hate him. It's too painful to think about what you could have had. You know that at the end of the day, you weren't worth changing for. Gidge didn't choose me, he chose bitterness and booze and it hurt but I could live with it.

The drinking age in Ingrid was twenty-one on paper but in the minds of the people, it was about twelve. We drank beer like we drank water, weeknights, mornings, even in school and at work. It was the fuel our town ran on, practically. I had my first hangover at eleven, trying not to vomit in my fifth grade classroom. Cory and I would often come to The Bucket and drink until two or three. Not tonight though, I had to be dead sober to pull this off.

The music, shouting, cheering, and laughter were loud. Cory joked around with some girls up at the bar while I stood awkwardly behind him. We knew them, everyone went to the same small, terrible high school. Women avoided Gidge boys, I didn't have much luck in dating, not that I'd ever really tried. My family had always been known as a bunch of liars, cheaters, and men with tempers like atomic bombs. However, my father was so awful he might have ended our awful bloodline with his reputation. I was totally fine with that. I was going where no one would know about the Gidges and their wretched history.

Cory and I said our goodbyes to the patrons of the bar. No more than a wave or a nod, although I liked the loud, boisterous fishermen of The Bucket more than most people here. I thought I might miss them when I left.

We walked to the lighthouse in silence, there was nothing to say but goodbye and we weren't quite ready.

Cory shrugged. "Maybe I'll come and find you someday." He stared at the ground. There was a tone in his voice I'd never heard before but it struck something deep in my chest and I felt real pain. I knew he wouldn't. He looked up and met my eyes and I realized his were wet with tears. I inhaled, trying to keep my lip from quivering. I didn't want to look like a kid.

"Usually, I know what to say." He said, finally.

“I never do but right now I do. I think.” I took a breath. “I used to get so mad that I needed you. That you protected me from everything, from my dad, from other kids. I’m probably alive because of you. You’re my brother but you already know all that.”

“Yeah, course I know. I’m alive because of you too, you know.” Cory’s charisma had all faded away. What I saw now was the part of him that walked on unsteady ground to tell me the real truth.

It struck me how grown up he looked. Had I been able to remember his father’s face I may have said he was his spitting image.

“I knew we would be doing this someday. I didn’t want to think it but I knew and I used to be so scared of saying something stupid but now I’m scared of saying something empty.”

“Will you stop it?” He said with an intensity that caught me off guard.

“What?”

“Just, doubting yourself. Promise you’ll stop talking that way, okay?”

I paused. “As long as you promise you’ll always look for better things. And not settle for unhappiness. If you’re still catching pug salmon in ten years, I’ll come and drag you to the mainland myself.” I realized then that one of my greatest fears was Cory living a painful life while I was somewhere else.

“I can’t do that.” He loosely lifted his shoulders as if to say “Who knows what will happen?”

“Than I’ll call myself a stupid idiot every night and every morning until I die.” I grinned.

He shook his head. “Fine. I promise not to settle...and to eventually do something other than catch salmon.”

“Then I promise to try to like myself.”

Cory smiled. I could tell he knew I meant it. He hugged me. I could feel him shaking slightly. I thought for a second that hugging someone of his height was like hugging my father in some other world where I would or could.

Cory pulled away. We were both crying now and for the first time, I wasn’t ashamed of it. He nodded at me, I nodded back, mirroring the goodbyes of fisherman hardened by the sea and wind although we were anything but. With that, he turned and left, walking back down the dirt path to town.

I looked around the room, my arms tightly crossed over my chest. I felt the silent grinding in the air, the eerie stillness of the ocean. I noticed the birds made no sound, there were no boats off the coast. Ingrid was bracing itself for chaos.

I didn’t know when it would reach me, only that it would come today. I was terrified but not as terrified as I should have been. I knew I could die and while, at first, that didn’t really

scare me now the reality had seeped into my bones like the damp cold of the wind and I couldn't stop shaking.

I stared out the little window watching the dark clouds roll in. The rain went from pitter-pattering on the roof to pouring down in torrents. The wind picked up, I hugged my chest, shaking. This was a fear I'd never known and I was well acquainted with fear. It was a visceral, animal fear that gripped my entire body because I knew my father but I didn't know storms, only stories of Ingrid torn apart and rebuilt. The slow ringing of a bell in town signaled the storm had reached the island.

The first wave of heavy rain and wind hit the lighthouse out of nowhere, every board in the walls shuddered and creaked.

I could hear the roaring of the monstrous waves crashing against the shore. If the lighthouse was swallowed by the dark and wild ocean, it wouldn't be the first time. I promised myself then and there that I'd fight to live and that, no matter what, I wouldn't go back.

A loud crack rang through the little room, the sound of the entire world splitting, and ice-cold rain poured down on me. I looked up. The top of the lighthouse had been ripped off.

I struggled to suck down air.

I closed my eyes and whispered a prayer against the roaring wind and sea. It didn't look like it could be real, the way the battered remnant of the lighthouse shuddered and swayed.

I screamed when water poured in through the little window, pooling around me. I don't know how long I sat there, eyes shut, silently praying we would survive. I remembered lifting my arm, numb from clenching my fist, realizing it was no longer raining. I opened my eyes. It was over. The world had been turned upside down. The lighthouse looked like it had been torn apart like paper. The top was gone completely, bits of wood littered the floor. The front wall had been ripped off. Ingrid sat before us, eerily still, a mile away. The town was in pieces. The warm sun baked down on my skin. I could feel it drying my wet hair.

I grinned and jumped up. "Oh my god!" I shook my head. "Oh my god. I'm alive!"

The lighthouse was ruined. I smiled at the thought of the town of Ingrid rebuilding it, talking about how it had aided my great escape. A tree had fallen over the path.

I walked slowly through the town. I was untouchable. Ingrid was destroyed. Entire buildings were disassembled, pieces of life were thrown about. I think the steering wheel of Gidge's fishing boat sat on the side of the road but I can't remember. People pulled themselves from the rubble, familiar faces looking dazed and exhausted, smeared with dirt. They watched me walk down the road as I had descended from the sky. They couldn't touch me now. When you've really made up your mind to leave Ingrid, when you'll risk your life for it, you're no longer fit to

there and it's plain to see.

Had I decided to stay, marry a sturdy Ingrid woman, and fish until the end of time I would have earned the name Gidge a thousand times over with my bravery, I saw it in their eyes. I was stronger than my father but I wasn't a Gidge, I didn't know what I was and neither did they.

I wondered what they'd say about me in a year when I was long gone and Ingrid had fallen back into its dreary routine. Would I be completely forgotten? Would I inspire another kid to leave because "Sparrow Gidge did it?" I smiled at the thought.

I weaved around houses I'd seen a million times, now ripped apart and destroyed. It was all so familiar but also as though I'd never been there before. It was an unusually warm day, which seemed fitting, and my clothes were nearly dry. I walked down this street a million times but I was noticing for the first time the yellow little flowers that poked through the dusty road.

I turned a corner and the docks came into view. The man who drove the boat was someone everyone in Ingrid knew but didn't remember his name. He was short and stocky with a full beard and beady eyes. "Can I get a ride to the mainland?"

"You got money?" He huffed.

"No."

"Whatever, fine, just help me unload."

"Okay."

As the boat sputtered to motion and Ingrid shrunk in the distance, I looked out at the island that was the only thing I knew.

"Rough storm." He huffed.

"Yeah."

"Boy, you always lived in Ingrid Estle?"

"Yeah." I kept my eyes on Ingrid.

"You fish those ugly salmon?"

"I did."

"Ingrid Estle," He shook his head slowly, "Sad place, isn't it? Sad people."

"Not all of them. Some of them have hope."

Savannah is a sixteen-year-old from San Francisco, CA. She loves reading and writing and wants to be a journalist, to tell the stories of real people and make a difference, as well as an author.

A Summer Abroad - Fiction

By Adi Raturi

Lady Townshend took the hand of the tall man waiting at the car door. Teetering for a few moments, she finally disembarked in one swift yet dignified motion. Her maid, a short and rather plump girl from Leeds, scrambled from the other door to be by her mistress' side. The maid's quick and small steps seemed impatient besides the elderly woman's wide yet leisurely strides.

Just as they had almost reached the hotel doors, a gust of frosty air happened upon the scene.

'Great,' muttered the lady, 'Autumn has scarcely begun, yet here we are.'

As the pair entered the grand lobby of the Ritz hotel, however, Lady Townshend started to relax. This was the Paris she remembered. How long had it been? While she used to come so frequently as a young woman, over time, she found it too tiresome to leave even Norfolk, much less England. The temptation of a French patisserie, so irresistible in her youth, had been overcome by the persuasions of her stiff and ailing back. Yet, each time she visited, she'd promised herself that she'd be back. And having already broken one promise in this city, she could not afford to break another. Chopin's Nocturne in C-Sharp minor was playing, one of the marchioness' favorites. A tall glass of melancholy musings with just a dash of hope on top.

The Lady scanned the lobby for familiar faces and braced herself for any unsavory encounters, but, to her surprise, she didn't recognise anyone. In years past, the place was teeming with old acquaintances and distant relatives. Now, she supposed the hotel catered more towards up-and-coming industrialists and eccentric tycoons.

'Bonsoir marquise. Ça fait longtemps,' said a familiar, nasally voice.

It was the same young fellow at the concierge, now a grey-haired man, seemingly unscathed from the war. At least some things had resisted the churn of the times. After greeting the man and taking her room key, the marchioness and her maid headed towards the lift. Just as they had entered and the door was closing, Lady Townshend turned back, hoping to catch a glimpse of the person who haunted her dreams just once more.

The doctors said it would most likely be a matter of months, if not less. The children had

of course been very against it—a dying woman choosing now of all times to go abroad. But when you start counting the number of breaths you have left in this world, it gives you some courage to expel them how you truly want to. The marchioness had met the two most important people in her life in this hotel. They were both likely dead.

‘Milady, you must take your medicine now,’ the maid interrupted.

‘Very well. I think I’ll go to bed early tonight.’

Having settled into the suite, the marchioness found the updated decor quite distasteful. The delicateness of the curtains had been lost to saturation. And there were simply too many things in the room now which came together to produce a rather cluttered feeling. Lady Townshend was known in her family for being a staunch advocate of the past. She was a traditionalist in every sense of the word. If only they knew...

Her first meeting with Sophie was an accidental one. She was returning to her room from the hotel bar, having hit it off particularly well with the heir to an old and distinguished Marquessate. Lady Sarah, as she was then known, had followed her mother’s instructions meticulously, taking care to replicate the mannerisms that she was taught with carefully planned spontaneity. Unfortunately, to steady her nerves, she may have had a few glasses of port too many. Upon entering the room, she was met with a startled chambermaid. Although the small, round face and thin lips may have suggested she was only a girl, the maid’s piercing grey eyes added several years to her frame.

‘So sorry to interrupt, ma’am. I was just on my way out,’ she said in French, with a surprisingly raspy accent.

Despite being in the company of numerous friends and relations just a few minutes earlier, Sarah had felt a strange and sudden emptiness building as she walked through the vacant corridor leading to her room. Lady Ramsey had gone on in extensive detail about her latest quilting endeavour, which was thankfully cut short by some interesting discussion on Sarah’s favorite Dickens novel. But, to keep to the script, she sadly could only smile and nod at some of the preposterous remarks that were made. The woman standing before her was a complete stranger from a different world. Perhaps this was what drove the light-headed and frustrated debutante towards Sophie in the first place.

‘No no, you must stay. I would really like some company!’ Sarah exclaimed, at this point quite obviously intoxicated.

‘Ma'am, I'm not sure—’

‘Nonsense. I won't hear it! Join me, at least, for a glass of something before you leave. I insist.’

‘But—’

‘After all, didn't hotel concierge say no request is impossible for the Ritz?’

‘Well...if it is truly your wish...’

The next hour was like nothing either of the ladies had ever experienced. Sarah felt the drapes of stiff convention and practiced inhibition parting as if they were a corset being loosened after a heavy dinner. Sophie, who'd known little more than a provincial farm life in Bordeaux followed by the mundanities of housekeeping, was enraptured by the lady's effortless elegance. They talked of disagreeable figures in ballrooms and servants' quarters alike. Both soon found themselves divulging dreams and aspirations like water from a tap. An hour had passed in the way that minutes did as the clock struck 12.

‘Madame, I must go now! Although I wish I could stay, I still have quite a few duties to get to.’

‘If you must go, at least give me your word that I may find you again,’ Sarah whispered.

‘I will try to clean this room at the same time tomorrow if you wish.’

Later that night, Sarah lay awake, unable to move her thoughts from those eyes. Those ashen, bewitching eyes.

And so, the two continued their spontaneous encounters. Even after Sarah married Lord Townshend, they still managed to sneak away to some secluded park or lesser used utility room for a secret rendezvous. Although Sarah had suspected that their growing familiarity was for different reasons, (primarily because of the stories she'd heard of maids blackmailing their employers for far less) Sophie had never once asked for compensation or favors. Sarah often considered their relationship. A friendship between a lady and a chambermaid was quite improper in any circumstance. Yet this was different. Friends did not typically linger in embrace the way they did. Friends did not have the fantasmies that they had. Improper was simply inadequate to describe what this was.

‘Have you found anything?’ the marchioness inquired anxiously.

‘Yes, I believe so,’ replied a shadowy, old man. ‘There is a woman working at an art gallery in the 13th arrondissement who seems to fit the profile you gave me.’

Could it be? Lady Townshend had tasked this investigator with finding the whereabouts of her old friend. She and Sophie had promised each other they would meet every year, liaising through Sophie’s mother who acted as a trusted intermediary. However, there had been one summer where Sarah was unable to come due to the complicated birth of her second son. By the time winter came around, Sophie had left without a trace. Letters to her mother now went unanswered. No one knew where she had gone.

The marchioness left the hotel (without her maid) shortly after taking a light lunch. When she set her sights on the quaint gallery, she felt a tinge of hope that perhaps she would at last get to put things right. Sophie had often talked of her wish to work in an art gallery and one day be a painter herself. When Sarah naively asked why she didn’t just do it, she was told, in polite and restrained French, that paint seldom paid for itself, much less anything else.

The gallery was far more crowded than she’d anticipated. A large assortment of people of various ages and sizes buzzed around the curious paintings. The art was like nothing the marchioness had ever seen before—seemingly nonsensical scenarios where objects and people appeared contorted and out of place. Reality, it appeared, was more of a discarded suggestion to these artists than a fact. Sophie had always been more radical and forward-thinking, a disposition that had playfully clashed several times with Lady Townshend's nostalgia for the past. As she inspected the paintings, one in particular caught her eye. It was of a woman set against a backdrop of a constellation in space. Only the constellation itself, *Orion*, was made of diamonds and other precious gemstones rather than stars. Most peculiar of all, the woman's extremities were fashioned of locks rather than toes and fingers.

‘Do you like it madame?’ a husky, all-too-familiar voice asked.

Sarah hesitated to turn. Her son, who worked (much to her disdain) as a physicist, had spent a long time telling her about a strange new paradox proposed by a scientist called Schrödinger. Applied in this situation, Lady Townshend presumed it implied that the act of turning would force nature to collapse into a single outcome. It could be pleasing in the event it was her but also highly unpleasant in the event that it wasn't. When she finally mustered the courage, however, the eyes she made contact with initiated an entirely different form of trepidation in the marchioness.

‘Sophie? Can it be?’

‘I’m afraid so. I’ve kept much from you, and for that, no apology would be enough.’

But please come with me now and I will help make sense of it all.'

Lady Townshend nodded, trembling and unable to form a reply.

Sophie's face looked remarkably unchanged. Wrinkles acted as garnishes rather than proper ingredients. And the endearingly youthful aura somehow remained despite the grey hair. The former chambermaid held Sarah's brittle hand in hers and led her to a small, vacant room in the corner of the gallery.

'Someone discovered our...friendship the last time we met,' she began. 'I was requested to leave the hotel. It pained me heavily, but I knew the only way to ensure scandal did not reach you was to stop our correspondence.'

'But you could have told me. I could have helped you,' Sarah exclaimed in quivers.

'I believed it was the best way. Look at us now. I have read about your beautiful family in the papers, and the painting you were looking at earlier was my own.'

'But did you not feel the yearning that I felt?'

'*Mon amour*, I felt it every day. But you, of all people, know the limitations of this world. There are things that can be only in dreams.'

Sophie's eyes simmered with the burden of restraint. Lady Townshend didn't know what to say. So, instead, she leaned forward, and the two kissed in the way even the closest of friends never would and never could.

Adi Raturi is an 18 year old living in Singapore. He enjoys reading and writing both nonfiction and fiction. He has won a number of gold keys in the Scholastic Arts and Writing awards as well as a national medal in the competition for short story.