

The Voice

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The Rat

The thing about rats is that most of them don't generally talk. When I woke up to one on my chest, I wasn't expecting it to open its mouth and speak to me, but life is always full of surprises.

"Good morning," the rat said, "I made you breakfast." I stared into those beady little eyes, unsure whether it was impolite to ask a talking rat why it could talk. Its claws scratched against my bare arms as it crawled onto my bed sheets, down to the hardwood floors. Its nails sounded like someone typing particularly hard on a keyboard. The light streaming through my blind illuminated its scaly tail.

I didn't bother to brush my teeth as I followed the rat to the kitchen. There was a singular paper plate laid out on the small bar style counter, a dead roach laying dead center. Set next to it were a set of plastic take out utensils and a tissue folded to look like a triangle.

"You want me to eat a cockroach?" I asked the rat. The rat stood on its haunches next to the plate, like a proud chef in front of their signature dish, wet nose twitching insistently.

"I made it just for you," the rat squeaked. I didn't know if refusing to eat the rat's food would offend it. I moved to pick up the roach, it's hard body stiff between my thumb and index finger. "Use your utensils," the rat scolded, like a mother to a child. I put the roach down, side eyeing the rat as the plastic fork struggled to penetrate the roach's exoskeleton. I eventually had the roach skewered. I took a bite head first. The rat hummed pleasantly, the sound of crunching accompanying the buzz of the air conditioner. The roach was tough and crunchy, though the insides were soft and liquid. I placed the lower half of the roach back on the plate, it's liquid guts seeping through the thin paper of the plate and staining it an unpleasant greenish brown.

"Not hungry?" The rat asked, cocking its head to the side. I tried to give it a smile, picking the remains of the roach's armor from between my teeth.

"I had a big dinner," I said, the rat nodding sagely.

"You shouldn't eat three hours before you sleep," the rat said, "It's bad for digestion." I nodded in acknowledgement. I made my way around the counter, towards the coffee machine I'd bought on sale when I'd moved in. The whirring of the machine joined the buzz of the AC.

“I’ll have mine iced,” the rat said from his position atop the counter. I wanted to ask if rats could have caffeine, but nodded and moved to fill a cup. I wanted my usual latte, but made the rat’s first. I wondered if I should put the drink in a bowl for the rodent, though I set the heavy cup down next to its furry grey body. The rat stretched its body out to hook its claws onto the rim of the glass, balancing itself precariously atop the lip and lowering its head to take long, satisfying sips of the coffee. I watched the rat drink, its body fattening with the amount of liquid it had taken in. About halfway through the glass, the rat finally lifted its head, having had to post its two front legs on the sides of the glass in order to continue drinking.

“You make good coffee,” the rat said.

I shrugged, finally moving to make my own cup. “It’s from the convenience store,” I said. The rat hummed, a deep sound that seemed to echo through the apartment. I took a sip of my own coffee, the rat moving to the roach I had left. The rat downed the rest of it in one bite, its cheeks distending with the width of the roach. The rat jumped down from the counter. I followed it to the couch, where it curled up onto the arm rest.

“Let’s rest a bit,” the rat said. I placed my head next to its warm body, the sound of its frantic heartbeat luring me off to sleep despite the caffeine already in my system.

When I woke the sun had sunk below the city skyline, an impressive set of oranges bathing the concrete and reflecting into my windows. I turned to the side. The rat was gone. I never did ask it why it could talk.

~ Kira Teo, ‘22



Crooked Line

His mother, strict and talented, always had high expectations. For Leo, living with a world renowned artist was tough. From a young age, he was always expected to find his “passion” and calling in life. Leo didn’t particularly express any interest in drawing, but his mother insisted he learn.

He first learned to draw lines, but he could never seem to make them straight. They would always come out crooked, despite Leo’s best efforts. Every single day, his mother would wake him up and say:

“Draw me a straight line.”

He would spend hours sitting with his frustrated mother, drawing these lines again and again. However, they never came out right. Pencil shavings scattered around the floor and crumpled pieces of paper toppled over the bin’s top.

Leo began to think something was wrong, but his mother insisted that with practice, he would be able to achieve perfection. She was convinced that she became successful due to her hard work and impressed the same mentality upon her son. So, Leo continued to work on his lines, thinking nothing of the situation.

One morning, his mother entered his bedroom to wake him for another day of line practice. Except, Leo was found on the floor, unconscious. Unable to speak or move, Leo’s mother tried to reach for the landline. When she felt her fingers dial the emergency number, she fell to her knees, desperately trying to wake her son up.

Leo came to in a room full of nurses with a foreign device attached to him. He struggled to speak, but was only able to mutter the words:

“What happened?”

His mother, with a concerned look on her face, sighed. Leo had been sick. He was hooked up to a ventilator in the hospital with a condition so rare the doctors said he would never recover.

Months went by as Leo remained in the hospital with doctors struggling to keep him afloat. On one particular day, the doctors gathered around his room, mumbling. It was time. As tears filled his mother’s eyes, she asked one last time for him to draw a line. Yet this time, she asked:

“Draw me a crooked line.”

~ Rachel Hum, ‘22

Run of the Mill

It was a clear early spring day. School was out at 2:30, and Alex and Richard walked out of Spanish class together after their dismissal. The crowds in the halls seemed stagnant as it was difficult to maneuver around the flocks of students exiting from each classroom. Richard had been dressed professionally since he had an interview in the morning for the new youth volunteering program based out of the school. He wanted to be a research assistant and delve into pressing issues that were pertinent to society. Alex wasn't interested in outreach and simply wanted to get to his locker and survive the hoards of students in the halls. They departed from each other as Alex eventually made it, carried his backpack, and exited the building. The crowds of students seemed to multiply exponentially as the floodgates of the front doors opened. He anxiously rushed to the bike rack in the parking lot to avoid the interaction and quickly rode down the street. He was gripping the handles of his bike as the backpack felt to be weighing him down and continued to push.

Far past his school, Alex turned the corner on Main Street and rode down for what felt like centuries. He nearly collided with numerous pedestrians but continued to pedal despite their anger and confusion. He couldn't really hear them. The external implications of the outside world didn't permeate his attention, and he continued to pedal forward.

Eventually, he reached his destination. He locked his bike in the bike rack and walked into the guitar shop. A proliferation of colors overwhelmed his vision as the walls of guitars seemed to encapsulate him from the outside. Wah Wah by George Harrison played in the background as he wandered the vast sea of instruments. Alex threw his backpack to the side and sat on a stool in the corner of the shop. He took a bright red Fender Stratocaster off of the wall and plugged it into the Marshall amplifier. The audio feedback relapsed, causing a screeching sound of white noise; however, he lowered the tone on the amp and began to improvise some blues chords. He closed his eyes and started from the E7 chord, then shifted to the A, then the B7, and then back to the E7. He mastered the pentatonic licks in between phrases and went to the turnaround smoothly and with ease.

The manager recognized the articulation of the rhythms and knew that Alex was there. He then made his way to the far end of the shop near the amps. Alex saw him

walking up and put down the guitar. The manager looked down upon him as Alex felt scolded and could only look up. The manager then asked, “How was your day?”

“It was alright; it went by pretty fast.”

“That’s good. Are you keeping up with your classes?”

“I’m just going to answer yes to that.”

The manager groans. He pulls up a chair next to him. He says, “Don’t tell me you skipped class to come here. If you did, I wouldn’t allow you to ever come back for the rest of your life.”

“Yeah, alright, sure. And no, I didn’t skip any classes.”

“Alright, good,” the manager smirks.

Alex looked down at the floor with his palms facing up on his knees.

“How have you been feeling,” asks the manager.

“It’s been so long, yet I can’t shake it. Today has been one of those days, you know.”

“Yeah, I know,” he sighs. “I’m here for you, you know.”

“Yeah, thanks.” It’s been five months since Alex’s uncle had passed, yet each day still felt the same. Go to school. Go to the guitar store. Sit in bed and ponder what had happened before and what is happening to him now. His uncle was an avid musician and a phenomenal guitar player.

Alex looked up and then closed his eyes again. He continued his blues jam, this time accompanied by the manager. The managers started from the E7 chord and played the same progression that Alex was playing earlier. Alex then began to play resonant, more soulful phrases along the neck of the guitar as he was completely synchronized with the rhythm playing. Storegoers looked on as they watched the tandem feed off of each other and create soulful and profound music. While in the moment, his anxiety withered away as he completely honed in on the music he was playing, providing a feeling of liberation.

Once they finished, Alex picked up his backpack and walked around the mass of store goers who had been watching him and left the store. However, to him, it felt as if he had simply walked through them as he walked out. He unracked his bike and rode off in the warm Spring evening and released a sigh of relief.

~ Ryan Irizarry, ‘22



Abigail Concepción, '21

Roses

Hanahaki Disease: Hanahaki disease is a fictional sickness that only occurs when someone is suffering from unrequited love. The victim will cough up flower petals that symbolize their love. One way this disease is cured is when the victim's feelings are romantically returned. The only other way that the disease can be cured is surgically. This surgery removes the flowers that are growing in the victim's lungs (roots and all), as well as the victim's romantic feelings.

Hanahaki Disease is quite tragic. I came across this fictional disease while researching flowers. You see, I am quite the flower connoisseur and a self-proclaimed enthusiast of their language. My favorite flowers are roses; they symbolize passion and love, two beautifully intense emotions. In my humble opinion, humans perceive flowers too carelessly. They see what they deem as pretty, rip the prettiness out of the earth, stamp a price tag on it, and sell it to people who don't even take the time to learn what the flowers are trying to communicate. Not me though.

I am going to tell you a secret, and since you are reading this, you have to keep it. I'll give you a daisy, they symbolize a promise between friends.

I- how should I put it? I fancied a girl that went to my school, her name was Dahlia. Now my mom never raised a liar, and my hands are clean. Yes, maybe I became attracted to Dahlia because she had the delight of sharing a name with a flower. However, as I began to steal glances of her from afar, I realized that she was the embodiment of a dahlia. Dahlias denote elegance and dignity, something that she did not fall short of.

Dahlia "didn't know who I was." I know that was her just playing dumb. She knew me, she had to have known me. I would see her look at me whenever I would take care of the flower gardens at school, she even picked up my garden shears for me once.

Sometimes I wondered how it would feel to be mutually in love with someone like Dahlia, and I caught myself doodling dahlias in my *Flower Guide: Pocket Edition*. I couldn't act upon my feelings though, as we were in two completely different leagues. Since I couldn't muster up the courage to tell Dahlia how I felt, I occasionally left a tulip on her desk: a declaration of love. I loved seeing her slight smile when she received my unheard declaration of love.

The funny thing is, she pretended that she did not know who the tulip was from. I know I said Dahlia and I were in two different leagues, but deep down, I felt the connection we shared. I know she could have loved me just as much as I love her. I caught her looking at me from across the hallway and sneaking little giggles whenever she had the chance to. When I told my friends about this secret relationship of ours, they called me delusional. They said someone as reputable as Dahlia would never view me as a prospect. They just didn't get it. Dahlia and I were soon to be in love.

One day after school, I followed Dahlia home. I wanted to see where the girl I loved lived and where she spent most of her time. When we got to a particular crossroad, I saw that she met up with an unfamiliar boy. I was shocked. Then, to my surprise, I saw her kiss him.

I thought to myself, "This must be some misunderstanding, Dahlia would never cheat on me like this." I decided to tail them for a bit longer and observe this new boy in the picture. I waited for Dahlia to be left alone, and I gently put her to sleep and carried her to our school. When she finally came around, she began to shake. I told her there was nothing to be scared of and that it was only me. My lover then had the audacity to ask who I was. I was angry. How could she not know the name of the guy she was in love with? She was quite the silly girl. I began to interrogate her. I had questions, you see. "Who was that guy you were with?"; "How come you never talked to me after I left you all those flowers?"; "Why did you never confess?"; blah blah.

She told me that that guy was her boyfriend. When I heard this, I violently began to cough up Black Dahlia petals—betrayal. While choking on her name in petals that represent betrayal, I hit a eureka moment. I thought to myself that if I couldn't have her, no one could. I took out my garden shears and sat her delicate body down on the chair. She smelled good, her skin was soft. Touching Dahlia for the first time was the most euphoric experience of my life, it felt like running through a flower field. Through and through, Dahlia was an elegant girl, even her tears ran down her cheeks gracefully as I held my gardening shears up to her throat.

I treated her with care like I do with all the foliage around our school. Small little snips here and there, spreading her skin out like beautiful flower petals. Dahlia's petals were dyed red with her blood, resembling my favorite flower, roses. I knew that it was intentional, this was her final goodbye and confession to me.

After ensuring that Dahlia would never be able to leave me for another man again, I dug out a special area in a flowerbed just for her, a solid 6 feet deep. I covered her up with my favorite fertilizer (my most expensive one, of course) and planted some spider lilies and roses. Roses for love and spider lilies for death. I stood over my beautiful flower and began to cough up even more petals. Luckily, I was able to collect myself and muster up the courage to say “I love you” for the first and final time.

~ Gina Kim, '22



Midas' Touch
Andrea Ferreira '21

Rocketeer

I never thought we could've made it this far. "We," as in the human race. Fifty years ago, we hadn't even landed on Mars yet. But I guess discovering an entirely new element means that we can now accomplish even the unfathomable.

Maybe I was destined for this. I truly suffered in school; even in elementary school, I made sure every little assignment was perfect. I poured my heart, soul, blood and tears into my scholarly labors and it paid off. I remember graduating as the valedictorian with a perfect 4.0 GPA. Just how I liked everything in my life to be—perfect.

But high school obviously was not the end. Now I had to choose what to do with my life. I went for a relatively safe major: engineering. It's not like engineering jobs were going to run out anytime soon, especially in this day and age. It felt like I just studied for four years straight, only thinking of the feeling that I knew I would achieve at my graduation. The feeling of pure bliss overwhelming me, of knowing my parents are proud of me, that everything turned out just as I planned it to be. And once again, I graduated top of my class with a perfect 4.0 GPA, now with a bachelor's degree.

I don't really remember how I came to be working on jet aircrafts. Maybe it was through someone I knew in college. All I remember was the feeling that flying gave me. It felt so liberating, like I was the one stretching my wings and letting the wind take me wherever it wanted to. I let go of all my worries just for a few moments; flying forced me to focus on what was in the present moment. Nothing else mattered.

I chased that feeling. That strangely calming feeling of being in critical moments. It brought me all the way to NASA's astronaut training. I learned the basics of spaceflight, military water survival, scuba diving, and even a little bit of Russian. It was a cruel way to spend two years of my life. Yet arduous suffering always seems to pay off in the end.

When I finally was assigned to my first flight, it was for a mission that would send me far beyond our solar system. Given that I did not have any wives or children, it made me a good candidate. I only left my parents behind— they were still as proud as ever. The higher-ups at NASA called my crew absolutely heroic and fearless for agreeing to go on this flight. They warned us that we could come near a black hole. But I thought that

we would be alright. After all, if we just did exactly as they told us to do, we would be fine. We just had to avoid making mistakes at any cost.

But what I didn't think of was the fact that the mission control center could be the ones making the mistakes. All my life, I was so obedient. I did exactly as I was told by all the grown-ups. I was a good kid. I stayed in school, didn't do drugs, and ate my vegetables. Even until the very end, I listened. Just like a sheep.

Even though I could see that continuing our current route would surely send us a bit too close to the event horizon, I kept going. I trusted them, I was so naive. All I did was execute their commands so perfectly. Like a wide-eyed dog, I couldn't accept the idea that my superiors could mess up.

As we came close to black hole, I finally realized that they were wrong. But it was too late. The ship fell apart. I was thrown out and sucked into that gaping void, where the very laws of physics begin to break themselves.

With millions of stars in my sight, silence in my ears, and a vacuum in my lungs, I float my way towards death. It is strangely beautiful, almost peaceful. Reality splits into three in which I am incinerated, I feel no pain, I question authority. I do not listen to mission control and I break away from their commands. Sometimes, the grown-ups really don't know what's best for us.

~ Jung Hyun Kim, '22

Torn In Two

On December 3rd in 2015, it was my sister, Calyx's, thirteenth birthday. My entire house smelled of fresh baked cookies and cupcakes, as their scents wafted through my door and filled my room. I resisted every urge in my body to shoot into the kitchen and sneak a bite, and instead stayed seated at my desk, diligently working on my sister's birthday card. "Hmmm...What should I write? As much as I love her, I can't let her know that I think that! That's embarrassing," I thought to myself, as I ridiculously believed that saying 'I love you' to my own sister was a taboo gesture. Despite my natural instincts, I fought against them and closed the card with, "I love you. XOXO, The Best Sister Ever." I had proudly sat back in my seat, and reassured myself that it would be a sweet sentiment for the big day of her finally being an official teenager. Although it may not have seemed like a big deal to most, saying I love you to my sister, and her saying it to me, was something that only happened on the rarest of occasions. Despite being sisters, the phrase was nearly foreign to us.

"Casey! Come out into the living room, we're singing happy birthday soon!" my mom screamed. I confidently grabbed my sister's finished birthday card, and sashayed out into the living room and held it out to her. I saw her face light up with excitement as she grabbed the card with enthusiasm and admired my mediocre cover art.

"Thank you!" she proclaimed, as she flaunted it in front of my parents.

She began to open the card and read it like any normal person would, but panic coursed through my body as I yelled, "STOP DON'T READ IT! I DON'T WANT MOM AND DAD TO SEE WHAT I WROTE!" She being the true sibling she is, did the complete opposite of what I asked her to do, and went as far as reading it out loud. She continuously read the card in a voice loud enough to overpower my screams and cries that were trying to drown out what she was saying.

Then, it happened. The dreaded moment that I didn't want to have to hear out loud. "...I love you," my sister read as I launched my body at her and grabbed the card out of her hands. This ended up kick starting a fire inside of my sister as she asked me, "What, are you ashamed that you love me or something?" I turned to my parents in a panic, with embarrassment coursing through my body, as I saw them both taking a step back and retreating to their bedroom. Their faces carried a petrifying look that read "work it out yourselves." The only thing that I wanted at this moment was for my sister

to forget about it and drop it so that I could stop feeling an overwhelming sense of embarrassment. Once again she went against my wishes, and continuously pressed the same question onto me, loud enough for my parents to hear from the other room.

At this point I was absolutely fed up, and I tightly gripped her birthday card in my hand and ripped it in two. “THERE. NOW WE CAN FORGET ABOUT THIS ALL AND MOVE ON.” What I didn’t know was that at that moment, the birthday card wasn’t the only thing that was torn in two. I look over the kitchen counter and hesitantly meet her tear-filled eyes, as I come to realize that I have broken her heart. Instant regret coursed through my body, as I watched her storm off crying into her room. I ran to the copy machine, and carefully placed the pieces of the birthday card on the scanner, in hopes of salvaging the damage. As I watched the photocopy peek out of the printer, I sighed in relief as it looked as good as new. This time I opened it up and in big letters wrote, “I love you.” I ran to my sister’s room and slid it under her door. I heard her faint footsteps, alongside the sound of my card being picked up off of the floor.

Suddenly, I heard her approach the door and ask, “do you mean it?”

This time, without hesitation, I said yes.

~ Casey Ryu, ‘22

Them

Tick...Tock...Tick...Tock

The sound of the clock kept ringing in my head as I tossed and turned in an attempt to fall asleep. Lying next to me were my parents, sleeping peacefully unaware of the fact that their 7-year-old daughter couldn't sleep.

I stared upwards hoping that something could entertain me more than the plain, boring ceiling. As I turned to lay on my stomach with my hands on my chin I saw the petrifying figure that would haunt me for the rest of my life.

Yellow eyes.

A hand with prolonged fingers waving to me as if we were friends.

A man.

A man was standing at my parents' bedroom door.

Reaching the top of the door.

Seven feet tall.

Scrawny.

He mocked my fear with the smile that crept up on his face.

I was paralyzed. What was I supposed to do? Talk to him? Hide? Yell? I couldn't handle it anymore. I threw the blankets over my head and started praying. My mother only taught me one prayer that I repeated over and over hoping it was the right one. That was the first incident that made me realize there was something wrong with me and that I couldn't control it. I don't remember the rest of the night, but those eyes were impressed in my brain, body, and soul. Forever.

From time to time I would recall that face but slowly I started to forget about it and brushed it off as a very vivid dream. I spent time with my friends and classmates. After all, I was only 8 years old.

Until my friend, Lola, who I had known since I was born, invited me over to her house for a sleepover. I was ecstatic, but a part of me was scared of staying the night. Every time I went to her house, nighttime was the worst. Floors creaking, peculiar noises, and the darkness of the living room that could be seen from the open door of Lola's room, and the fact that she never gave me a blanket added to the fear of the night.



I went to her house and we had an absolute blast, the pure joy I had made me forget everything that I was fearing at night. I felt like this time, maybe, I could actually sleep normally. I went to sleep with my heart pounding from the excitement of what we would do the next day. As I drifted off to sleep, I felt comfortable and safe; as if nothing bad could happen to me in this house.

I woke up at 2:00 AM because I needed to use the bathroom, and all the comfort and protection I was feeling before I fell asleep was all gone. I couldn't get myself to open Lola's door and walk through the living room to the bathroom. But I had to do it. I opened the door and walked with my eyes shut — fearing that if I dared to open them, just like that night, I would see something else that would traumatize me forever. *Walk straight, walk straight, walk straight*, I kept on repeating that same thought over and over. But for some reason, my body decided to betray my mind, it was as if my body *wanted* me to see this.

The eyes.

The yellow eyes.

The smile.

The wave.

Everything was the same, except this time, it was a woman. She was about 20 years old and her hair was in pigtails. *Squeak. Squeak. Squeak*, she was bouncing on an exercise ball with a vast smile on her face. I froze again. What was I supposed to do? Yell? Cry? Run back? Once again, I don't remember the rest of that night. Again, I reassured myself by claiming it was a dream. I knew that wasn't true. My body, my mind, and my soul all knew that wasn't true.

My life continued like this. I see figures with the same yellow eyes, waving and smiling mockingly at me. Everytime, I freeze and forget the rest of the night. You'd think I'd gotten used to it, but no. No matter how many times I experience it, I still remember every single time. Who are they? What are they? Why are they doing this to me? To a child? Why can't I remember anything that happens after? Are they here to hurt me or...

Are they protecting me?

~ Diyora Saidniyozova, '22

Reykjadalur Valley

We were driving on Route 1, no other cars in sight. An incline began as the road was about to crest over a line of mountains. It was August and the grass was accented with a brilliant shade of green, emerald-like, the kind that you only see in Iceland. As the road climbed over the crest, a vast expanse spread out ahead and to the right. The road ahead laced through fields of grass with yellow flowers and fluffy white sheep. The field was framed to the right by the glittering edge of the ocean. The water was steel blue, illuminated almost silver by the striking sunlight.

Soon we turned off Ring Road, as Route 1 was also colloquially called, onto a gravel road — another signature of Iceland. We were heading towards the line of mountains that had introduced a view that never fades in detail. The mountains extended to the left and were now in front of us as we drove down the lane towards them.

To the right stood two Icelandic horses. They were slightly shorter than most horses, but their legs were significantly more muscular. One horse was a chestnut color with a dash of white on its nose. The other horse



was a bright white color with coffee colored islands; even its mane was two different colors. The manes and tails of both of the horses were long and wind swept. Behind the horses, the mountains were dotted with black and emerald-green grass.

After we parked, we



began our hike by

crossing a small wooden bridge over a creek. The water in the creek appeared to be crystalline as the light refracted from the water polishing the different rocks underneath the surface. The path ahead of us, compact sand and gravel, swayed up the mountain and out of sight.



At the top of the mountain we expected to see the hot river under the blue daisy colored sky. Instead, we only saw the tops of more mountains extending and the path

disappearing between them before appearing again over or around them. The only

glimpse of water was behind us, the luminous himalayn blue poppy colored creek we had crossed and the ocean. The effect of illumination was a result of the geiser source of the creek.



As we crossed there was a pattern, wind so extreme and from every direction that it inflated our coats while ascending the mountains and then abrupt calm as we almost slid down the mountains. After several summits, we reached a ledge that lengthened the ridge over the creek that ran parallel to the path at the base of the mountains. We could hear the faint sound of water rushing and when we walked out onto the ledge, we could see a massive waterfall in its full glory. It was the length of the mountain and the shock of white, tumbling water against the black sides of the mountains was other-wordly.

Soon we saw steam rising in the distance, coiling into the sky. By now the



landscape had changed so that the emerald-green grass spots looked like gems scattered among the black dirt on the sides of the mountains. The



black soil made the milky blue hot springs on the side of

the path exquisite. The milky blue color was misleading because the water was boiling.



The hot river was in sight now, and we could see the steam rising from it. Across it, the sun cast a golden lens over a field of long, emerald-green grass. After a lengthy hike, we reached the long awaited Reykjadalur Hot Spring Thermal River. The water was hot to the touch and contrasted with the cool air above it. This created an unparalleled effect that was refreshing after the long hike. The river had miniature waterfalls and a gentle current. As we sat in the river, we saw the wind blowing the steam and heard the whirling of the

water. Sitting outside in windy, cold weather in a hot river is a treasure of Iceland waiting to be found.

~ Julia Golovina, '22



A Moment by the Lake

A cool breeze blew over me as I sat by the water. It had been about an hour since the sun had set, and I could feel the temperature dropping as the summer night settled in. My friends and I had decided to go fishing down by the lake since we knew that twilight would be the perfect time to get a good catch. Unfortunately, after half an hour we barely caught anything. My friends started to slowly head back to the campsite, as they preferred to spend the rest of their night by a warm fire, instead of a cold, dark lake. I, however, wanted to stay back and appreciate the serenity of the nighttime wilderness.

Eventually, the darkness of the night allowed the stars to become fully visible. That night there was a new moon, meaning that the stars could shine without the moon blocking out their light. About an hour after twilight, the arm of the milky way became visible. The different shades of grey and blue that made up the arm were dark, yet peaceful, and millions of stars littered those hues with tiny white dots. The lake water had completely calmed down at this point, revealing a clear reflection of the night sky up above. The night was completely silent, except for the distant howls of coyotes and the sounds of dogs back at the campsite barking back at them.

Completely consumed by the serenity of the night around me, I was lost in thought. It is very rare for someone to be able to enjoy a moment purely for what it is, especially in the modern world. Our lives are dictated by negativity, and we never truly get to sit back and appreciate the calm and relaxing moments that come in between every stressful time. However, during that night by the lake, I was able to temporarily forget about the stress that waited for me back home. Instead of focusing on the upcoming school year, and the college applications that I would have to start submitting in a year's time, I was fully immersed in the present.

While it is extremely important to plan ahead for the future, there will always be uncertainties that we can never predict. It is important to disconnect yourself from the burden of the future every once in a while and enjoy a moment in the present. There is no true way to get rid of all of your worries, however, you can put them on pause for short periods of time. While I am currently at a very stressful and uncertain point in my life, the stress I feel doesn't take away from the peace I felt looking at the night sky. No bad day can ever take away my appreciation for that night by the lake.

~Timothy Istratov, '22



Running Out of Time

Andrea Ferreira, '21

Personal Space

“Hi!” A voice she recognized, a boy’s, sounded from her left, close to her ear. She felt a hand on her shoulder. By the time she turned, he had already made his way to her other side. The hand lifted. She swallowed.

“Hey.” Her eyes flitted to him, now on her right, with what must have been noticeable distaste as he sat down in the chair next to hers. She started to force the corners of her mouth upward, but decided it wasn’t worth the effort.

“What are you doing?” He leaned back in his chair, turned toward her with an easy smile.

“Nothing. Eating.” She was still facing forward. She picked at her pasta with her plastic fork.

“Cool.” He started tapping the table absentmindedly. She could hear him humming to something she didn’t know, possibly a rap. She stared at the plate of food in front of her. “So uh, how’d you do on yesterday’s math test?”

“I don’t know. The grades aren’t out yet.” She looked up and straight ahead, gaze lingering on a gaudy school poster on the wall at the end of the cafeteria. She couldn’t read part of the text; it was obscured by the reflection of the ceiling lights.

“Well, did you think it was easy? I think I failed, I skipped like two questions.” He clicked his tongue, leg now fidgeting. She could feel the table shaking slightly with the movement.

“I guess. We’ll probably find out next period.” She exhaled loudly. She thought her huff sounded like a petulant child’s and wondered if he had noticed. He seemed to have not.

“I mean, I don’t even know why I asked. You’re like, really smart, you always get A’s right?” He chuckled. She tilted her head in his direction and saw his face, an easy smile-turned-smirk. She imagined he probably thought himself charming. She held back a scoff.

“Hm.” She turned back to face forward, eye catching the poster again. She shifted in her seat, trying to crane her neck to read the text on the poster. *Smoking can kill you*, it said.

“What are you doing?” He had noticed her neck craning, it seemed. His leg, the one that had been fidgeting, suddenly swung out in front and touched the back of hers. She flinched—it was definitely noticeable—and yanked her leg closer to her.

“Nothing. Sorry.” She wasn’t sure why she apologized. He gave her an odd look before taking out his phone and scrolling through it. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Instagram was open. They sat in silence, him scrolling and her sitting stiffly next to him, until he barked out a laugh.

“Hey, look at this,” he tilted his phone toward her. She raised her eyes upward in what might have been half of an eye-roll before they fell to the screen. She pursed her lips as she read; he was showing her a particularly unsavory meme.

“That’s—that’s deeply insensitive,” she started, eyebrows furrowed in offense. “It’s not funn-”

“Geez, okay, fine,” he looked and sounded mocking in a way she was used to. “Don’t be so serious.” He stood and turned to leave with a snort, hand just barely trailing across the edge of her shirt against her neck before landing on her shoulder, her left again. “I’ll see you.” The hand lifted. He walked away.

She exhaled again, this time through gritted teeth.

Minutes later, she stood in the empty second-floor hallway outside of her math classroom, waiting for the bell to ring. This one moment of peace amid a busy, crowded environment was calming, she thought.

Footsteps, loud in the still hallway, sounded behind her. She jerked her head to the side and glanced back to see him approaching, still scrolling through Instagram. She faced forward, her heel tapping against the floor repeatedly. *Pit-pat-pit-pat.*

He had drawn closer. She thought she could feel his breath hitting the back of her neck. Her shoulders were tense. She tried not to squirm. Instead, she took a big step forward and turned, back now leaning against the wall. His head was still leaning down, eyes glued to the screen, as he shifted closer again to face her.

She stared at the rusted bottom edges of the lockers across the hall, his body a foot in front of her blocking most of the view. He was rocking on his heels, one hand holding the strap of his backpack and the other still holding the phone, still scrolling. She briefly wondered how subtly she could slide over and into the open expanse of the rest of the hallway. The silence was not so much deafening as it was heavy, pressing

against her. Or at least, that's what she thought. She leaned back into the wall, the brick surface digging into her shoulder blades. He didn't move.

The bell rang, a long beep. The floodgates opened and students poured out of classrooms. She moved away from him as they meshed with the crowd. She forced her shoulders to relax. She swallowed hard.

~ Minsun Kang, '22



Fever Dream

Calyx Ryu, '21

How COVID Changed My Life

March 13, 2020. The world came to a halt. Everything shut down, everything was stopped in its tracks. Many people have different stories of COVID-19, but this is mine.

Like most, I thought that this would be done in two weeks. I never thought that this would last almost a year. When school shut down, I was happy and sad at the same time. At first, I loved being at home and not having anything to do. I was getting up between 11:00 and 12:00 almost everyday. I would get all my work for school done early in the day, relax, bake and then talk with my friends everyday until midnight. This was the time where I was getting my life together. I was losing weight, getting even closer to my friends, and was not stressed for the first time since starting high school. However, Easter Sunday is when my life came crashing down.

The day started like any regular day. My family and I attended virtual mass and then spoke with my family over Zoom and FaceTime. We caught up with what we were doing, what Netflix shows we were binge watching and just how we were keeping ourselves busy while at home. My grandfather, at the time, was in a nursing home because of his dementia. My mom had called him to wish him a happy Easter and see how he was doing. While she was on the phone with him he was very confused. We did not really think anything of it since he was always confused when he was on this phone. What none of us had known at the time was that this was the beginning of the end.

A few days later we discovered that my grandfather was not feeling well. My stomach sank. A couple days later the nursing home called to tell us that he had tested positive for COVID. I was distraught, scared and just feeling everything at the same time. He was having a difficult time breathing and would not take the oxygen because he was confused and couldn't remember why he needed it. He was stable for a couple of days. The doctors then said that he wasn't getting any better and my mom needed to come in to see him just in case anything happened. She had gone in to see him and when she came back, she had told us how he was. My mom said that he wasn't looking good. He did not remember who she was. At this point I opened up to my friends about everything that was going on. I told them and I just broke down. They were there to help me through this difficult time in my life. They were there to distract me from this horrible time.

On April 20, 2020, I was in my bed, watching Netflix on my computer with my friends on FaceTime like the nights before. My dad walked into the room, I put myself on mute, and he told me, “Abuelito didn’t make it.”

When I heard this I didn’t believe him. I told him with my jaw on the floor “Are you serious?”

He just nodded his head and said, “The nursing home just called mom. She is in the shower.” I broke down and started to cry nonstop.

My friends had seen me start to cry and asked me, “What is wrong? What happened?”

I turned my phone over and spoke with my dad for a while. The first thing I remember telling him was, “I only have one grandparent left,” and started to cry even harder. I started asking my dad what we were going to do now and if my mom knew. He told me that we didn’t know what was going to happen. We talked a little more until my mom came out of the shower and told her the news.

After this, I went back to my friends to tell them what happened. They sat there on the phone and kept me company while I was trying to process everything. After a while, I left the FaceTime call and went with my family to cry and grieve. Unlike typical years, the burial did not take place for weeks after. This made the grieving process longer and more difficult.

I fell into a depression for months after. I was crying myself to sleep at night and was just sad constantly. I didn't want to leave my house. I was using everything to distract myself. I used school, my friends, family, tv shows, movies and a lot of baking. After a few months, I was getting better and started to cope with my grandfather not being here anymore.

Picking up the pieces from a loss of a loved one is always difficult. It is also different for everyone going through it. Nothing will ever replace my wonderful grandfather but finding new things to add to life helped heal and rise above the sadness I was feeling. Reminiscing on the 16 years I had with him was something that became easier over time and somewhat filled the void I had in my heart. Remembering him dancing at family gatherings, teaching me how to play soccer, taking me to the park and caring for me while I was sick aided in escaping the dark time I was in. The grieving process is not something that goes away after a couple months or a year. People are in

this process for years and years on end. Not a day goes by where I don't think about him or wonder what life would be like with him still here.

~ Katia Urquiola, '22



Abigail Concepción, '21

BEElieve in Yourself

For as long as I could remember, I was always different. I was abandoned at birth by my real parents and left at the base of a tree, where my adoptive parents, Karen and Jimmy, found me and raised me. They were kind to take me in, even though they knew that I would tarnish their reputation and they'd always be isolated from society. Growing I had many struggles, as I was always jealous of everyone around me. Their skin was the perfect shade of red with occasional black circles speckled here and there. Their wings were also always hidden away and were the perfect size for their bodies. On the other hand, I was a mess. Everytime I looked in the mirror, all I could see was yellow fuzz with thick black stripes spanning across my whole body and wings that were glaringly way too small for me.

I was not the only one who noticed these differences. My classmates at flight school constantly made fun of me and never let me forget that I was different. They teased me for not being able to hide my hideous wings and forced me to eat pollen alone at lunch. Not only did they bully me because of my appearance, but also because of my name. Although I love my adoptive parents, they couldn't have given me a worse name. Out of all the possible names in the world, they named me Bertrum, a guy's name. Everyday was just a repetitive cycle of me going to flight school, walking home alone after school, and reading at the playground until it was too dark to see.

This all changed on my sixteenth birthday, the day that I grew my stinger. It was so sleek and sharp that all the kids in the garden came to admire it. It was the first time anyone had seen something like this, as ladybugs did not have stingers. For the first time in my life, I didn't feel insecure and actually felt confident. I held up my head at flight school and didn't eat pollen alone anymore. One day, Mr. Barron, my flight instructor, introduced a new student to the class. His name was Christian and he was the most magnificent ladybug I have ever seen. His polka dots were a lot larger than most and his shell was the brightest shade of orange. It was my first time seeing a ladybug with a shell that wasn't red. I was instantly attracted to him and wanted to get to know him. So, after Insects 101 class ended, I mustered up all the courage I could find and searched for him.

After about 15 minutes of flying around the school grounds, I finally found him in the corner of the soccer field in a heated discussion with a brolic ladybug. It seemed really intense so I quickly flew closer to get a better look at what was happening. As I

approached them, I realized that the ladybug was bullying Christian, which infuriated me.

“Why are you being mean to him?” I interrupted angrily.

“He doesn’t belong here! Look at his skin! It’s orange!” the lady bug replied angrily. This infuriated me because I knew exactly how Christian felt. I was in his position before and knew how hurtful the bullying and isolation was. However, I knew that if I helped him here, my reputation would plummet and I would return to being the school’s outcast. At that moment, from the corner of my eye, I saw the buff ladybug about to punch Christian. My body turned cold and I realized that I would protect Christian. I would not let another bug go through the pain I went through my whole life. In the blink of an eye, I quickly rammed my stinger as hard as I could into the ladybug’s chest.

“Ahhhh,” the ladybug cried as he fell to the ground.

“Thank you so much for helping me,” Christian said with tears crawling down his cheeks.

“It was nothing much,” I groaned as my whole body went limp. I couldn’t feel my face, my arms, or my legs and fell on the ground. I felt my life fade away, but I knew it was worth it. I heard Christian’s sniffles as I closed my eyes for the final time.

~ Natalie Yum, ‘22



Michelle Yang, '21

Their Last Meal Together

The room was cold and unkept, the heavy blinds drawn, the two armchairs toppled over—one sitting at the edge of the bed and the other on the balcony. On the mahogany drawer beside him, two empty wine glasses. In the portable fridge, a pound of melting ice cubes lie waiting, occasionally bobbing in the water.

For a while now, Johnson Jones had been planning to do away with his wife. He sat on the floor, waiting for her to finish prepping their supper. Jones was a predictable man who prized routine above all else. He ate the same meals, dressed in the same clothes, woke up and went to bed at the same time. He worked from home, filing tax returns from 8am to 5pm on the dot. At 6, he would leave the house to walk their dog for 15 minutes before coming home. Jones had no particular reason for such a plan, only that the idea came along in one of his dreams and he felt the sudden desire to carry it out. He had not yet figured out the details of the plan, nor considered how he would go about explaining her sudden disappearance to close family and friends. Perhaps that too, would come in a dream.

Jones sat there, twirling his tumbler around, listening to the ice cubes clinking against the metal. When his wife summoned him for supper, he headed out to the kitchen (as he always did). The pair sat down at the island, eating the same steamed chicken and broccoli dinner while watching television. The house was quiet, the stillness accentuated by the humid air and the rain that had yet to come. Humming softly to himself, Jones considered his options. He wanted a quick and relatively simple method to send his wife off. After all, the two had been married for an uneventful decade and he figured that at the very least, he owed her a painless death.

And so, Jones made his way to the sink and asked “You having some more wine while I’m here?”

“Yes, if you could please,” she said. “I have a slight migraine. Perhaps a little more wine would help take the edge away.”

Jones refilled the wineglass and slipped in a few sleeping pills while she wasn’t looking. He placed the glass back on the kitchen island and calmly sat down. Jones felt a wave of inevitability wash over him as he committed himself to the plan. He would figure out how to send her off after she fell asleep. There would be no fights or drama,

no raised voices, no nothing. She would be sleeping one moment, gone in the next. Perhaps with everything in her system, she'd barely notice it happening.

As she raised the glass to her lips, Jones felt a sudden pang of melancholy. There was no way his wife knew what he had planned, for he came up with it on the fly. She had no reason to suspect him for deceit as today played out like any other day, uneventful like usual. Jones coughed and she turned to look at him, the same melancholy somehow reflecting in her eyes. As they maintained eye contact, Jones felt something well up from within. Was it guilt or regret? Was his desire wavering? Why was he feeling this way now, of all times? When he opened his mouth to speak, nothing came out. Hundreds of thoughts ran through his head but not a single word materialized. Suddenly feeling parched, he reached out to take a sip of water. That was when he first registered a bitter, almost almondy aftertaste on his tongue. He felt the cool glass on his lips, and then he felt nothing at all. His wife had gotten up and was already scrubbing at their dishes. She hummed quietly, the barest hint of a smile on her face and in the distant background, amidst the pitter patter of the rain, a hollow thump—the thump of her husband hitting the floor—resonated throughout the house.

~ Rebecca Zhao, '22

Cherry Blossom

I start my day rather slowly. As the winter air flows out with the soft push of spring, I slowly rise out of my bed, stretching the last bits of sleep from my body. The sun has just begun to peek its head out, shy from its months of rest. Birds are slowly coming back, and today they burst into the brightest song I've ever heard. Looking around, I can see that dozens of my siblings have decided to wake up as well, going through the same effort of rising from bed as I did. Of course, not all of us are that diligent, plenty of the lazy bums are still happily snoozing. There's no knowing if they're going to wake up a couple days late or stay put until next year.

I was lucky enough to get one of the highest rooms atop our tall wooden home, and I spent the entirety of my first few mornings basking in the warmth of the sun, unabashedly feeling like I am becoming more beautiful with each day that passes. The house is full of energy and excitement for the new show season upon us. We work for only about a week a year, maybe even two if we're lucky, but we love our job and pride ourselves in what we do. Everyone is focused on soaking in the sun, catching up with our old buzzing friends, and eating well.

Finally, everyone is fully bloomed. Pink with joy, we begin our first gig of the year. To my absolute delight, it's a wedding, my favorite to perform in. We spend the day posing with the newlywed couple and all of the wonderful wedding guests. Kids giggle and dance around us, arguably the most lovely part of the whole event. After a successful first job, we crash into our beds to prepare for the next day of work. Our work is non-stop, so we gladly take all the sleep that we can.

The rest of our schedule is filled with home visits, a major part of our job. Though it's hard work to be on "show mode" for the entirety of the day, it's unbelievably rewarding. Each day we get hundreds upon hundreds of visitors who come from all over the world to see us perform. On their faces there is nothing but wonder and happiness. There are elderly people who slowly stroll by, overcome by a calmness that comes from understanding how our life cycle mirrors theirs. At the same time, babies who are just born come to visit us, a lovely mess of laughter and awe at seeing us for the first time. There are also couples who walk by us, hand in hand, soaking in the atmosphere of love we project. We often get to witness proposals so sweet my siblings and I squeal in excitement, overjoyed to be a part of such a monumental moment. I personally love to

see the smiles that we bring to people more than anything. To be able to grant anyone, especially those beaten down by the hardships of life, a chance to breathe and smile for a brief second is the greatest gift of all.

As days go on, fewer and fewer people come to see us. Our appearances have withered, our peak gone in an instant. Spring has brought the life of nature back in full force. Kids have begun coming back to the parks, flowers flaunt their beautiful petals daily, and the world is surrounded by a blanket of warmth. My siblings and I enjoy each other's company for the last time, taking in the stunning picture of life that spring painted while we talk. Slowly I watch my family shrivel up and fall to the grass, aware of my impending fate. I take in the beautiful view from my home for one final time, and then I fall. The warm rays of the sun follow me to the ground, covering me in a golden shroud. No sadness clouds my last thoughts. I lived an incredibly fulfilling week of life, I leave no regrets behind. One day, a year from now, I will be back. For now, I'll rest.

~ Emily Cao, '22



Dear Chloe

Andrea Ferreira, '21

Blood in the Water

We were sitting around in a circle sharing our biggest fears: dogs, spiders, the dark, failure. They all seemed pretty rational to me (especially the spiders). Still, only one stood out to me. The boy next to me opens his mouth and says:

“I really hate sharks. Sometimes, you just wanna go swimming, but you can’t help but get anxious at the feeling of them lurking somewhere near you. Those beady eyes, searching for you like you’re a piece of meat.”

You could see all of the girls in the room smile, even chuckle.

“Now you know how we feel, all of the time,” one of them says. At that, all of the boys sat up a bit straighter.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” the boys replied, “You know that’s bullshit. Not all guys are like that.”

The tension in the room, previously nonexistent, suddenly became almost tangible. You could almost hear the sound of the ladies in the room rolling their eyes. The boy who shared the story about the sharks stood up.

“That’s really sick of you guys. You can’t generalize half of the world. You know we would never do that to you.”

“You know, your chance of getting bit by a shark is 1 in 4 million, right?” I said.

“What’s your point?” shark boy replied.

“You can’t generalize a whole population. That’s really sick of you. Most sharks would never do that to you.” The tension in the room got a bit lighter for a moment, as some giggles passed at the comment. “Do you know what the chance is of a woman getting sexually assaulted by a man?”

“No...”

“1 in 5.” You can see the boys’ eyes bulge slightly, as they awkwardly shuffled in their seats. “You know, sometimes, you just wanna go walking, but you can’t help but get anxious at the feeling of them lurking somewhere near you. Those beady eyes, searching for you like you’re a piece of meat.” The room went silent. “We’re not saying all of you. We’re saying it’s enough for you to be afraid.”

~ Cassandra Chu, ‘22

Into the Crystal Ball

“No way. It’s a scam.”

“Come on, don’t tell me you don’t believe in fortunes,” I quipped back to Craig, whose belligerence was starting to amuse me. “Look, she has a sale.” I pointed at the sign hanging in the window of the shop which, carved utop in bold letters and embroidered in a pretty floral design, was a \$5 off promise to anyone “brave enough to look into the crystal ball.”

The entire day I had been bugging Craig about it. Personally, I don’t believe that a fancy glass ball can give me a perspective on my future, but for some reason, it really makes Craig squirm. According to his own verbal autobiography, his mom used to self medicate for her financial problems by seeing a fortune teller. “In the end,” he pronounced, “she ended up paying the voodoo lady with my already dismal allowance. The real magic was that me and my mom didn’t starve to death.” I’d hate to admit it, but this story of Craig’s sad childhood only spurred me on. Me and Craig are best friends, yes, but we are fueled by a desire to make each other as uncomfortable and scared as possible. Call it our spark, a spark that, albeit morally conflicting, I was going to foster.

“Look Craig, I can already feel the money in my pocket slipping away,” I looked down at him from the entryway of the shop. “Don’t be a baby. It’s cheap, and it’ll take seconds. Now, let’s go, this door is the same weight as a boulder.” All Craig did in protest was sigh, and I gleefully watched as he sulked his way into the shop. Craig’s willingness to give into peer pressure is another reason why I like him so much.

The room was dimly lit by an assortment of candles, which sat on the ledges of windows blinded by thick black curtains. In fact, the entire room was choked in muted fabric and dark upholstery, with black blankets and linens covering coffee tables and dressing figurines and dolls spread onto shelves across the room. If that wasn’t hard enough on the eyes, the smoke lifting from the candles also made the entire room hazy, and so me and Craig had to fumble around like blind bats until we found ourselves at the foot of a small square table whose defining feature—a glass sphere suspended in a golden ring—acted as a sort of beacon that offered some light from its reflective facade. We felt around a second longer, before plopping ourselves down in twin arm chairs.

“Where’s this lady?” whispered Craig. I could tell he was nervous.

“I don’t know, just give it a second.”

And, at that very moment, as if on cue, a large curtain was pulled open, and a woman stepped into the chair in front of us. “So, you would like to know your future,” the woman said in a raspy voice, “I can certainly help you with that. Now, place your hands on the crystal ball, and let all your secrets be revealed.”

I tried saying something, but before I could, a pair of leathery hands had gripped mine and forced them onto the ball. As she did the same to Craig, I inquired “Hey, don’t we have to pay you or something? I have a 20 in my pocket.”

I wish I didn’t ask her that, because at that, she jolted her ancient, shrunken head toward mine, our faces only inches apart, and said, in a cryptic voice, “First time’s free.” I gulped, and put my head down. I didn’t look at Craig, but I could feel his foot tapping against the floor.

“Now,” she stated firmly, “Close your eyes, and think real hard. I want you to think about yourself 15 years into the future. You have a beard, and your hair is thinning atop your head. You are walking down an alley. It’s night. You are alone. Yes, think of that. Now, just as you are about to exit the alley, a shadowy, hooded figure appears before you. He’s holding something. What is it? It’s a...it’s a....oh lord...it’s a KNIFE!”

At that a sound shook the entire room like a thunderbolt. I lurched my eyes open and screamed, as did Craig, who stood up so quickly he nearly broke the desk. I looked up, and, to my horror, right in front of me, was the fortune teller, with a long knife in her hand and a psychopath-ish grin on her face. At this, I could only think of one reaction.

I yelled to Craig. “Run!” I didn’t even look back for a second, and neither did Craig.

By the time we had gotten outside, our heart’s were still racing, and so we bounded across the four lanes of traffic ahead of us, high on adrenaline, until we had made a buffer zone between us and the fortune teller. I doubled over, gasping for breath. Meanwhile, Craig found solace lying on a bench, shaking. We probably looked crazy, but I didn’t even care.

When I had finally caught my breath, I looked back up at the small, inconspicuous looking shop. Who could have thought that within those double doors and through a dimly lit hall of knick knacks and antique porcelains would be a knife wielding, fortune telling, mad woman? I looked at Craig, who was now on his feet, but still shaking, his head down towards the asphalt. Without talking, I motioned for him to follow, and we both walked away, never looking back once. Only later did I find out that

Craig had looked back at the shop, and what he had seen still shakes me to my core:the fortune teller, laughing through the window, a crisp \$20 bill in her hands.

~ Ian Gilenson, '22



Untitled

In the middle of an unknown desert, violent winds suddenly sent the sand flying. A helicopter landed from the sky, in front of a small log cabin. From this cabin appeared to be neither particularly small nor large. The walls were a calm brown, kind on the eyes and brought peace to the heart. Smoke was slowly drifting out of the chimney and the plainly adorned door cracked open slightly.

Sand whirled around in a mini tornado as the helicopter settled down. From the helicopter, came three figures. Two were dressed in full orange - they had button up dress tops and long dress pants both colored bright orange. Over each of their hearts was located a strange logo and a set of characters below said logo. The other individual was equipped with firearms, a black bulletproof vest, and a helmet. She also wore a long sleeve padded-grey shirt and long padded-grey pants.

One of the armored individuals attempted to instruct the two orange-clad men, only for her voice to be absorbed by the desert. After several attempts, she simply gestured towards the cabin and pushed the two men towards it. Then, she retreated back to the helicopter, and left without looking back.

Glancing back at the helicopter, one of the orange-clad men stepped forward. He swept back his blonde hair and gulped. With the swirling sand somewhat blocking his sight, he tiptoed towards the cabin, stopping only to beckon towards the other man. This man stared down at his dark hands, then looked up nervously. He then bolted towards the cabin door, causing the blonde man to burst into a jog as well.

The cabin door was burst open and the two visitors had made their way in. The air suddenly stilled and the door creaked to a close behind them. They were greeted with the sound of a grandfather clock that resonated throughout the dimly lit cabin. A flickering chandelier hung from the roof illuminating the area. The walls on the sides were adorned with packed bookshelves. In the center was a rocking chair, which was swaying back and forth, in front of an empty fireplace. The blonde man approached the table, attempting to examine it before recoiling in fright, gripping his foot.

The other man approached the empty chimney which appeared as though it had not been used in years. Above this chimney was a portrait of a young girl, who appeared to be no older than 12. He approached the portrait, reached out and touched it and was



propelled into the portrait in front of the girl. He fell through the portrait and landed in the arms of the girl. The girl smiled, then her mouth opened to inhumane proportions and she bit down. He was devoured.

The blonde man frantically looked around, with an iron grip on his foot. His eyes landed on something, on a toy spider. This toy spider had its mouth open, poised and ready to hunt. It was also furry, which was most likely the cause of his fright. He picked it up, placed it in his palm, studied it and admired its realism. He chuckled to himself, placed the spider on the table and turned around.

However, once this man turned around, he noticed something - the lack of someone. His orange-clad comrade had disappeared, leaving a now cracked open door. The blonde man scoffed, and proceeded to examine the cabin. He approached one of the bookshelves and the door behind him closed shut. All of the books had the same words written on its spine: *The Life of Mary Edward written by Mary Edward*. Intrigued, he thoughtlessly grabbed a book, opened it, and was immediately enraptured.

He walked towards the rocking chair and promptly sat down. As he flipped the pages, the toy spider behind him stirred. It began to approach the man and became closer with each page flipped. By the time he was at the final chapter, the spider was breathing down the man's neck and by the time he finished the book, he had become the spider's meal.

After eating to its heart's content, the spider leapt into the portrait and fell right into the girl's hands. The girl in the portrait giggled, her two black braids swaying back and forth. The door to the cabin opened a crack once more, waiting for more visitors so that this young girl and her spider could have their long awaited meal time.

~ Emily Ha, '22



Michelle Yang '21

Hello

I walked through all this ice and snow
Nearly freezing off my big toe
Just so
I could think and know
That there are others who feel alone
But cannot show
Their emotions
Imagine headlights on a doe
So scared with nowhere to go
And although
You may not go
Through a time where your body plows
on, but you mind's in tow
We all have to grow
With out hearts not our bones
So start to show
You care
With just a small hello

~ Matisse Bloem, '21



Missing You

Abigail Concepción, '21

Goodbye

Sometimes in the shower I cry
Because in that five by five
I don't need to lie
But even when I'm out and dry
I still wonder why
I walk beneath the sky
Why I am alive
So try to keep out an eye
For not only I
But anyone who shows a sign
That they need an ally
You don't have to pry
But be by their side
If they're ready to confide
There is a fine line
Between saying "I'm fine"
And saying "goodbye"

~ Matisse Bloem, '21

Kiss

I hold your face in my hands, stroking your cheeks with the pads of my thumbs. There's a scattering of acne on your forehead and your cheeks are flushed. Even your ears are burning at the tips. I don't care. In this moment, you've never looked more beautiful.

Under the glow of the streetlights, our orbits intertwine.

Your eyes dart to the side when I shift my weight forward. I giggle and lean in closer, watching you blush harder. You don't realize how cute you are, do you? So bold one moment yet so shy the next. My heart is in your gentle hands, but you're at my mercy? *Please*, I melt on the spot when you return my gaze.

The night wind sends a chill through me, though the air is warm. Every second is sweet agony, every breath taut with unspoken words. You stand frozen, simply to torment me with stifling indecision, a daring gleam in your eyes and an invitation on your lips. Yes, those lips; I glance down at them and flick upwards again.

Don't stare at me like that! You know I'm not one to back down from a worthy challenge. All this time we've been dancing around it, taunting the other to take the first move. Now you want me to lay it all on the line for *you*?! How can you ask me to take the lead without even the courtesy of speaking! Such impertinence will not go unpunished, I huff to myself. Even if you tilt your head down, giving me easier access. Even if I know you want it just as badly as I do.

A deep breath.

Half-lidded eyes flutter shut.

Slowly, cautiously leaning forward.

The collision of two stars, arced on a single point.

A close-mouthed sigh.

Bliss erupts from where our souls meet. Your hair is soft under my fingers—I run through it with fond brushes. The distinct, wonderful smell of you fills up my senses. Have I found heaven? I've surely died and left my mortal sufferings behind. My heart is beating a thunderous war song in my chest, lips tingly to the point of numbness. We part for air, and I swear I see electricity jump between us.

It's the quickest eternity I ever had the pleasure of experiencing.

Looking up again, I spy the teasing smirk resting on your face, hiding between quiet pants for breath. Oh, don't go falling from your high pedestal now! It's a mutual victory! You're just as eager a player in this masochistic game of hearts. Next time I'll take more care to hide mine up my sleeve. I'll not allow affection to cloud my sight. Love is blind, but I will not be.

Still... it's all so real when I gaze into your eyes. I know I've fallen. But I'd worship you from the ground just to savor your taste once more. I'm utterly yours. If only I could capture this glorious moment again, and again, and again.

Yet, the hauntings of desire never last long.

I always wake up to an empty embrace and the ghost of a kiss.

~ Sabrina Burns, '21



The Day I Should Have Died

My former friend's Sweet Sixteen was coming up, and I was asked to be in her court. I knew her from dance that year, and we were fairly close at the time. At first I was excited to be in someone's court. To me it was like practicing to be a bridesmaid. Unfortunately, this friend gave a lot of misinformation and did not really know how to give organized instructions when it came to planning for her court. It deeply upsetted me because I was looking forward to it so much.

Of course at the very last minute (in typical fashion for this girl) we were given a picture of the dress, the price, and where we had to get it along with the audacious comment underneath, "No Exceptions." Despite my internal kettle boiling by this point, I looked at the image of the dress she provided. It was an ugly gown, ironically in my favorite color, purple. It had silver embellishments that I could feel scratching my chest as I examined the picture which looked terribly unflattering.

The overall fear of the garment made me want to curl up into a ball and just not attend the party anymore. About a day later, I received a text that we needed to get fitted for the dress she picked by the end of the week. Again ending with, "No Exceptions." Maybe if I wasn't already anxious about this dress or so done with this party in general, this last minute nonsense would not have bothered me so much. Unfortunately, it did an immense amount. Dreading the moment I had to try on the dress, I, at the peak of my annoyance, told my mother the new development and she called the dress shop.

The next day after school we made the first trek there. It was in the busiest section of Englewood, shops upon shops and messy streets. Some intersections and crosswalks had no signs nor were they easy to understand. My mother and I crossed at the correct light and walked into the shop. I blocked out most of the "trying on" portion of the process as it was not fun. My mother however was attentive and realised that I needed the large—my least favorite word. However, I was not shocked because the birthday girl never asked anyone for their sizes. She simply assumed we would all fit in the small.

The seamstress and my mother began to talk more. I believe my mother asked a question asking if other girls had to get alterations as well. The lady laughed and replied, "Nothing really but the hem. The other girls were nice and skinny." Of course, that comment did not raise my level of excitement towards this event at all.



* * *

The rest of the week flew by and it was already Friday. I knew after school I would have to travel back to Englewood. The last place I wanted to be was in that dress shop again, and hear that seamstress make another stupid comment.

As much as I mentally protested going there, I had to go. I tried to prepare myself saying that this time would be quicker anyway and then I never had to go to this place again. That thought comforted me a little bit, but the fear of the dress still lingered.

To me it seemed like two minutes to get to Englewood again. It must have been my lucky day. I played “When I Was Older” by Billie Eilish on my phone and waited for the torment to begin. After approaching the cursed road, my mother finally found a parking space. It was across the street from the dress shop. The crosswalk however was about a block up. My mother and I were supposed to walk a block when we were basically parked in front.

“What is the point of putting a light here when you can’t even cross?” My mom said irritated.

She gestured to the said street that we weren’t supposed to cross. It was quicker and I wanted to get done as soon as possible. It was wrong, but we did it anyway. We started walking across once we saw no cars were coming and that the light had turned red. Except, we misjudged the situation, and the light turned green while we were crossing, causing everyone to begin honking. There was just one more pace until I reached the sidewalk; my mother however trailed behind me.

I turned my head to the right only to see a car, speeding directly at me. If I think about it, I can hear it coming. VROOOM! I barely had time to take another breath, let alone think of moving. It was coming right for me, and there was no saving me. I thought of all the things I had yet to do in my life as I felt the cold air of the car in front of me. I closed my eyes and thought again, “is this it?”

SCREEEECH! I opened my eyes and I was safely on the sidewalk, but time had slowed. I did not move, I was in the middle of the street. I looked at the car and the driver was an old man with, whom I assumed was, his wife in the passenger seat. He looked at the steering wheel and then back at me. As if to say, I did not do that; I did not stop the car! I could barely register what just happened, all I know is that I felt numb.

By the time my mom caught up to me we were both stunned, like deer in headlights. Snapping me out of my daze was the old woman in the passenger seat screaming at me to go f--k myself as they drove away. I yelled it right back, forgetting I was with my mother. I looked across the street again. I didn’t see anything, but I knew something was there; watching me. At that moment I did not care about the stupid dress or that hag of a seamstress anymore. All I wanted to know was who was watching over me and how long had they been there?

~ Gia Porco, ‘21

Margret

Margret was always considered the school leper, the typical outcast living outside of town and residing in a subpar, but quaint family owned farm in the rural countryside. She was said by others to be a broke, haggard girl with stout brown hair and lifeless eyes that sent daggers of fright down one's chest. But right now, when I glance at her face, all I see is a teenager who wants someone to talk to, a friend.

There was a brief moment in time where I glanced at her with a surge of alarm like everyone else. I roamed the halls of my school with the blinding, relentless fear that if I were to befriend her, I would be belittled and abused by everyone else. Even when I was seconds close to tapping her shoulder and starting a conversation, I restrained myself because of what I thought others would think of me.

One brisk, wintry day, I was walking home from school, acknowledging the vivid, pearl white snowflakes landing delicately in manner, creating their very own arcane clusters of snow on the ground. The day had a placid ambiance, almost a glimpse into the illuminative, swirly gates of heaven. Abruptly, an epiphany ruptured my subconscious with a fierce blow. I could not become a person that stood with a crowd that was swerving towards a black hole, where kindness and sympathy, or anything for that matter, ceased to exist. At what cost would I surrender my faith, my morals, just to camouflage within the crowd? I would not let that happen.

After that day, I finally opened up and initiated a relationship with Margaret. Since last week, we joined clubs together, helped each other with homework, and asked questions about each other. Our conversations were quite rejuvenating, and the more I learned about her, the more guilty I felt over how I treated her previously. Now, at this moment, as we gaze at the twilight's orange horizon from her farm, kindness radiates from within her heart. Beside me, a purple honeycreeper perches on the chocolate brown porch railing, staring at me with an air of pride.

I smiled. Margaret's favorite color is purple.

~ Elif Derbentli, '22



