



theRev

A MAGAZINE BY CREATIVITYUNLEASHED

RUSSELL SAGE COLLEGE - THE REV 2025

theRev

young pens are even mightier



FOCUS

$V=lwh$
 $x = -b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}$
 $\pi = 3.14$
 $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
 $17 \cdot 36 = 4 \cdot x$

A Letter to Our Stakeholders

After five years of directing The Rev, I would like to thank you all for the care you have shown through every stage of creating this magazine. It is my honour and privilege to be able to produce The Rev through CreativityUnleashed Publishing (CU), a not-for-profit organization I founded in London, UK to support community-driven creative endeavours led by young people on a path towards a career in the arts. RSC's student-led magazine enables the entire RSC community to engage in meaningful creation, and in this mission, is a perfect fit for CU.

When I was first brought in to prepare this magazine, I had picked up a project that has been part of Russell Sage College for decades. I'm grateful to join the ranks of RSC professionals who shaped this magazine; it is a legacy I am proud to be a part of.

Over the years, I have watched The Rev grow, building on word of mouth across the RSC community. There's no bigger joy than observing each year's team building on the work of the last, and indeed, no greater compliment than when graduating editors return as alumni to continue serving on the team.

This year's group was truly inspiring – a reflection of how much the magazine has developed since we began our work in this current format during the Covid pandemic of 2020. This January, as I stood back and observed almost 20 people of various ages (our biggest team in NY yet!) laying out a flat plan in The Arts Center of the Capital in Troy, NY, sharing in discussions and supporting each other's ideas with clarity and true, considered communication, I felt so proud to have had a role in facilitating that spirit.

So thank you again for trusting me with this project, and for continuing to promote and support the work we do at CreativityUnleashed Publishing. I am excited to see what the future holds for The Rev, and hope to continue to be a part of it for the years to come.

With deep gratitude,



Angie Smith
Adjunct Professor of English and Creative Writing
Director of The Rev
Founder and Creative Director of CreativityUnleashed Publishing
www.creativity-unleashed.org

THE
REV

The Rev

a magazine produced by
CreativityUnleashed Publishing
in partnership with Questar III's New Visions
Visual and Performing Arts Program
for Russell Sage College

Welcome to the 2025 edition of The Rev literary and creative arts magazine, originally called Laurel Leaves and previously known as the Russell Sage College Review. In this edition, you will find works from current undergraduate and graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni from both the Albany and Troy campuses, alongside creatives from London, UK. This is why there is a mix of British and American English woven throughout.

Thank you to all of the creatives who submitted their works. Months of careful reading, review, and curation revealed your voices expanding in exciting and often painful ways. We believe that readers will experience in these pages is a sincere indication of what is in this community's hearts and minds, presented through poetry, flash fiction, memoir, opinion editorials, photography, painting, digital artwork, illustrations and more. New this year is even the publication of a short animation and a song.

Our selection process is driven by the mission to amplify as many diverse voices as possible, focusing on what our community celebrates, mourns, and hopes for. Overall, we received almost 300 submissions – and though we couldn't publish them all in print, we've included some of these works on our blog. You can check them out at www.creativity-unleashed.org/our-blog.

As we go to press at a time of unprecedented social and political change, we hope that our readers will find solace in the voices of a community that continues to thrive and remain strong in the face of adversity.

By the time you get through these pages, we know you too will agree that while pens are mightier than the sword, young pens are even mightier...

Please see index at the back of this magazine to look for specific pieces and creatives.

This Year's Partners:

Questar III's New Visions Visual & Performing Arts program, located at The Arts Center of the Capital Region in Troy, NY, is a specialized program for academically and artistically advanced high school seniors planning to attend college for the visual or performing arts. NV: VAPA students gain knowledge about the business of art and specific techniques through a curriculum that blends college-level education with practical experience. Topics of study include preparing the college application and audition/portfolio, filmmaking, songwriting and recording, playwriting and performance, and an art show.

CreativityUnleashed Publishing is the face of a legacy project that began in 2014 as Haringey Unchained. What began as a small collective of students aiming to showcase the creative talent of a school in Tottenham, London has now grown to become a not-for-profit working with young people globally. We promote social change, tolerance, and diversity through community-driven art experiences. It has been our absolute pleasure working with the editorial team of The Rev at Russell Sage College and Questar III's New Visions for our fifth collaborative magazine.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank our professional visitors who joined us in person and online this year. Thank you to Somalia Seaton for inspiring us with her dramatic writing workshops. Thank you to Rage Hezekiah for delivering an interactive and powerful poetry workshop in celebration of National Poetry Month. And thank you to Kay Bell, also in honour of National Poetry Month, for joining us from New York City in person to read from her collections of poetry.

Thank you to Mark Mathews and his team from Bluekite Creative in Cornwall, England for the design of our magazine. And finally, we thank Brett Petersen for his invaluable support in providing final copy editing for the magazine.

Stipends for workshop presenters and the publication of the printed version of The Rev were provided by Russell Sage College's Carol Ann Donahue Endowed Fund. Thank you to the Sage College librarians and staff for their support. And finally, thank you to the staff and faculty from the English, Writing, and Culture program in the Interdisciplinary Department at Russell Sage College, from which this magazine derives.

Cover artwork: Brain Fog, by Jayli Capasso from New Visions.

Follow the CreativityUnleashed Publishing Instagram page: @creativityunleashed_org or sign up for our Eventbrite page for notices regarding future creative workshops and submission windows.

Visit www.creativity-unleashed.org to sign up for our quarterly newsletter.

Meet the Teams

All members of the editorial teams below split the workload throughout the year, adjusting their time and support based on capacity. Those who took on specific leadership roles are indicated below.

The Rev Team:

- Ethan Alcee
- Maryam Alsammarraie
- Kyra Burris
- Alex Calderon Martinez
- Deanna Cooper (Flatplan Manager)
- Maverick Douglas (Copyeditor)
- Victoria Harris
- Josh Herter
- Evan Keihm
- Kathleen Muller
- Laurel Petersen (Submissions Manager)
- Jonathan Reese
- Susannah Schools
- Angie Smith, Director of The Rev & Founder of CreativityUnleashed Publishing
- Bridelle Toumani
- Newton Wilk
- Daniela Withington

Questar III's New Visions Team:

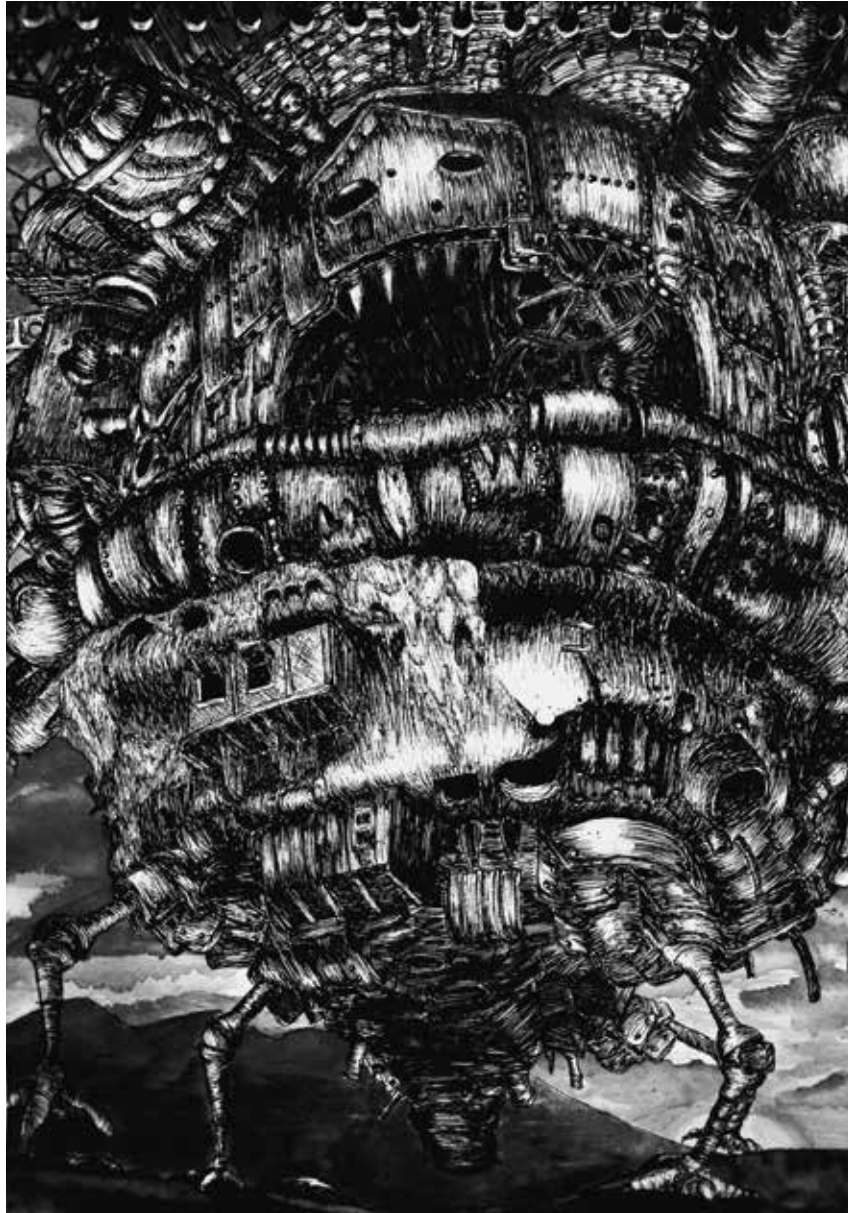
- Magnolia Allen
- Jayli Capasso
- Peg Danner-Frank, lead staff from Questar III's New Visions
- Alexandra Hallam
- Mars Kelly
- Willa Larsen
- Pluto Melchior
- Isobel Weinberger
- Wil Whiteman
- Ash Zimmerman

CreativityUnleashed Publishing Team:

- Andreea Pavel
- Skye Scacchetti: Intern for CU
- Maysoon Sheikh
- Vanessa Cheung, guest editor from Hong Kong International School

Soul

Leenah Ansari CreativityUnleashed



The Right to Bear Arms

Serena Wang The Pike School

Panic pinches our skin like bullets,
loud silence echoing in the halls
outside where we hide.

The first, April 20, 1999

We breathe heavy, our teenage
cries ballooning
but we are not protected here.
Not really.
We are prey to the automatic.

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold

Are those the footsteps of a monster,
loud against a ticking clock?

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tick,

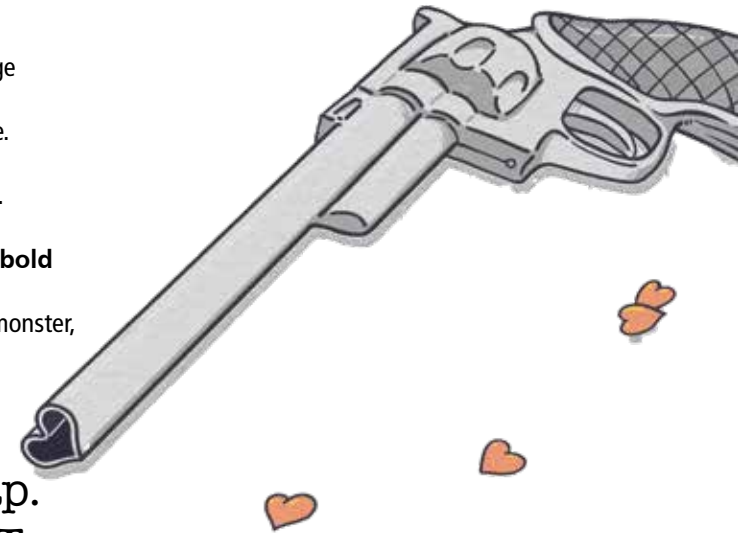
Tock.

Tick.

Tock.

Columbine High School

13 killed, 24 injured.



Every sound plays our eardrums,
a twisted rock band.
We wait,
for stress to collide with a flying bullet,
goosebumps raised from the dead –
there is nothing we can do.
We wait.



Tap.
Tap.
Tap.
Tick,
Tock.
Tick.
Tock.

Closer and closer still.
All of our terrified eyes glisten,
and when we blink, the tears
roll and roll.

Silent moans for help, double –
we want to go home.
Let us go home.

And then the shooter's presence, closer.

Arrived.

Today, May 24, 2022
Salvador Ronald Ramos
Robb Elementary

22 killed, 17 injured

Soil to Soul

Germaine Desrue CreativityUnleashed



This piece was crafted using imagery from the following artworks published in The Rev 2024:
Windham Peak by Cassandra Bond, page 25
Jean Flower Bouquet by Grace Thurber, page 60

Love (ing Myself) is Hard

Dylan Scherillo

Russell Sage College

Dear You,

Yes, You.

Whoever you are, and wherever you may be,
I hope in this little letter you'll find what you need.
It's been a while since we last spoke...

I hate the way you look at me in the mirror.
I'm not the monster you've made me out to be.
Please don't shut me away again.
Please.

I have a lot to say and there's more that you need to hear.

I love you. I'm proud of you. I pray you succeed in every way.

I'm afraid to tell you the truth, because I know we'll reject it.
I've been scared for a long time.

Scared of you, scared of me.

Please take us away from all the scary things.

Please don't turn off the lights, the dark is the scariest without you.

Let me say it back!!!

I love me. I'm proud of me. I pray I succeed in every way.

Sincerely,
Me

8

POETRY

Defying the Odds

Bailey Bates

Russell Sage College



9

PHOTOGRAPHY

A Road Less Traveled

Susannah Schools **Russell Sage College**

Bedazzled bright green
after last night's bath,
I will photograph as well as ever today.

The wide asphalt roads get more cars,
but I get foot traffic
and happy memories.
I hold parents coming home,
and toddlers toddling with dewy confidence.
A delight for the discoverers,
the world comes to me.

I love the newness,
fresh jewels
that add to my long-lived character.

They say I was cobbled together,
and well done I was.
Still here
and loved more now
than when I was born,
I become ever more lovely
with age.

I'm more settled
around my sides
and plump
in the middle,
with fresh leaves
sprouting
around my crowded stones.

Who knew I could grow at my age?
Ha!
I began
in hustle
and bustle,
with dirt
and sharp tools.



I lie languidly now,
disconnected
from frenetic new-builds
and the confusion
of labor and birth.

Things have slowed down around me,
and I, serene,
am not abandoned.
I have discarded
fragile uncertainty
for landmark status.

My role is what I am
naturally.
I neither groan
in anticipation
of heavy weights,
nor disintegrate,
uncared for.

I assume my part
gracefully,
as travelers
and proximal dwellers
take me
in photos
and hold me
as home.

My burdens
are within
a calm day's work,
and my leisure
leaves me
blissfully energetic.
Thus, I lie enraptured
in samadhi.

Only Summer Yet

Susannah Schools **Russell Sage College**

Miles

Brianna Smith Russell Sage College

No Smoking
No Vaping



Korea: 6,718 mi.
Afghanistan: 6,607 mi.
Iraq: 5,867 mi.



The Map We Drew Together

Marvam Alsammarraie Russell Sage College

You were the tourist
visiting the map of my body.

You traveled miles,
explored places for years,
but eventually, you got tired
of the same old place.

You went somewhere new instead.

The moment your feet walked away,
the land became corrupted.
Roads were obstructed
with heavy rocks and the
sea around overflowed.

The skies got darker and the air, thicker.

Eventually, realization brought you to your senses –
that nothing feels as good as home.

“Only now, the home you long coveted for is gone.
Only in your imagination would it welcome you back.
Don’t shed those tears now.
They will haunt you forever.”



Your Speed

Maverick Douglas Russell Sage College



A Slippery Survivor

Carmela Morano  Russell Sage College

Slip.

The salamander slid through the gap in the rocks, aided by the slime coating his body. The ground shook with the heavy footsteps of the human child chasing him. He found refuge under the rock for a mere moment before it was lifted and he was forced to flee once more.

Slither.

He abandoned the safety of the rock and scampered toward the next. His tiny heart beat rapidly and the giggles of the child seemed like monstrous roars. He only had to make it a little farther and the stream would join a much larger pond. He would be safe there.

Scamper.

As he made it to what he recalled to be the last rock between him and the pond, the slippery creature realized with horror that the landscape had changed since he last had to make an escape like this. The space that had once been a trickling stream of water was now walled off by rocks; no doubt the result of some other human children trying to leave their mark- and make their mark, they had. His safety net was gone.

Startle.

In a panic, the salamander realized the giant creature was right on top of him now. A giant hand lowered down and he ran the opposite way, only to be confronted by another. The first hand grabbed him and he found himself lifted into the air. He was jostled and bounced around as the child began to run back to show his mother. The child made it about halfway before making an error.

Stumble.

The child, too excited about his catch to pay attention, slipped on the wet rocks. Down he went, opening his hands instinctively to try to catch himself.

Soar.

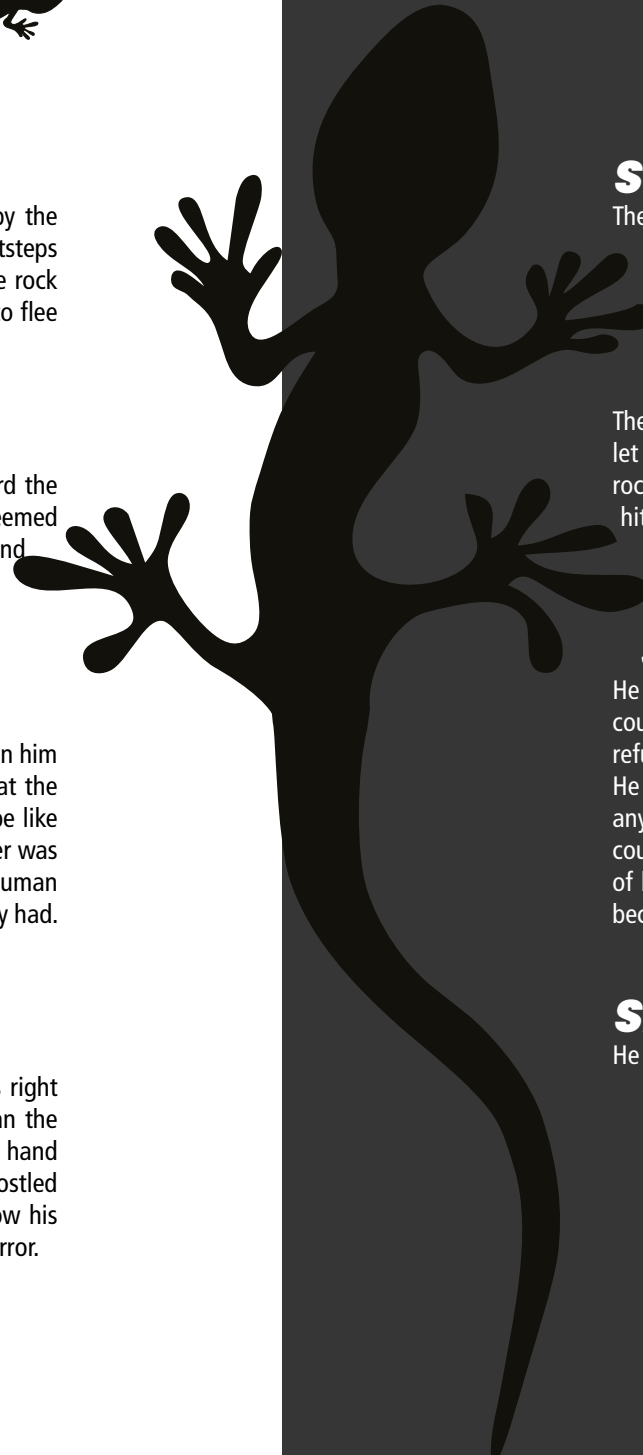
The salamander flew through the air, having been accidentally let go. There was a crack as the child's knees collided with the rock and his mother rushed over to help him. The salamander hit the ground a second later with a wet shlap sound. The child began to cry and the salamander saw his chance.

Scurry.

He snuck away from the child and his mother as fast as his legs could carry him. No longer being chased, he was able to find refuge in another stream quickly. The child was out of sight. He was safe. But even as he drifted through the water without any threat, he considered his ever-changing surroundings. He could no longer count on the consistency of his own knowledge of his home. Escaping from predators, especially humans, was becoming more and more difficult.

Shudder.

He was not sure he would be able to survive the next time.



A Wistful Window

Olivia DeNitto

Russell Sage College



I am free,
free as a bird.

Yes, I am free.

But not even the birds can go back to the hydrangeas I picked for my mother, or eat from the crab apples thrown by my young hands.

There is a door I am too grown to fly through,
and a clouded window that cannot be cleaned.

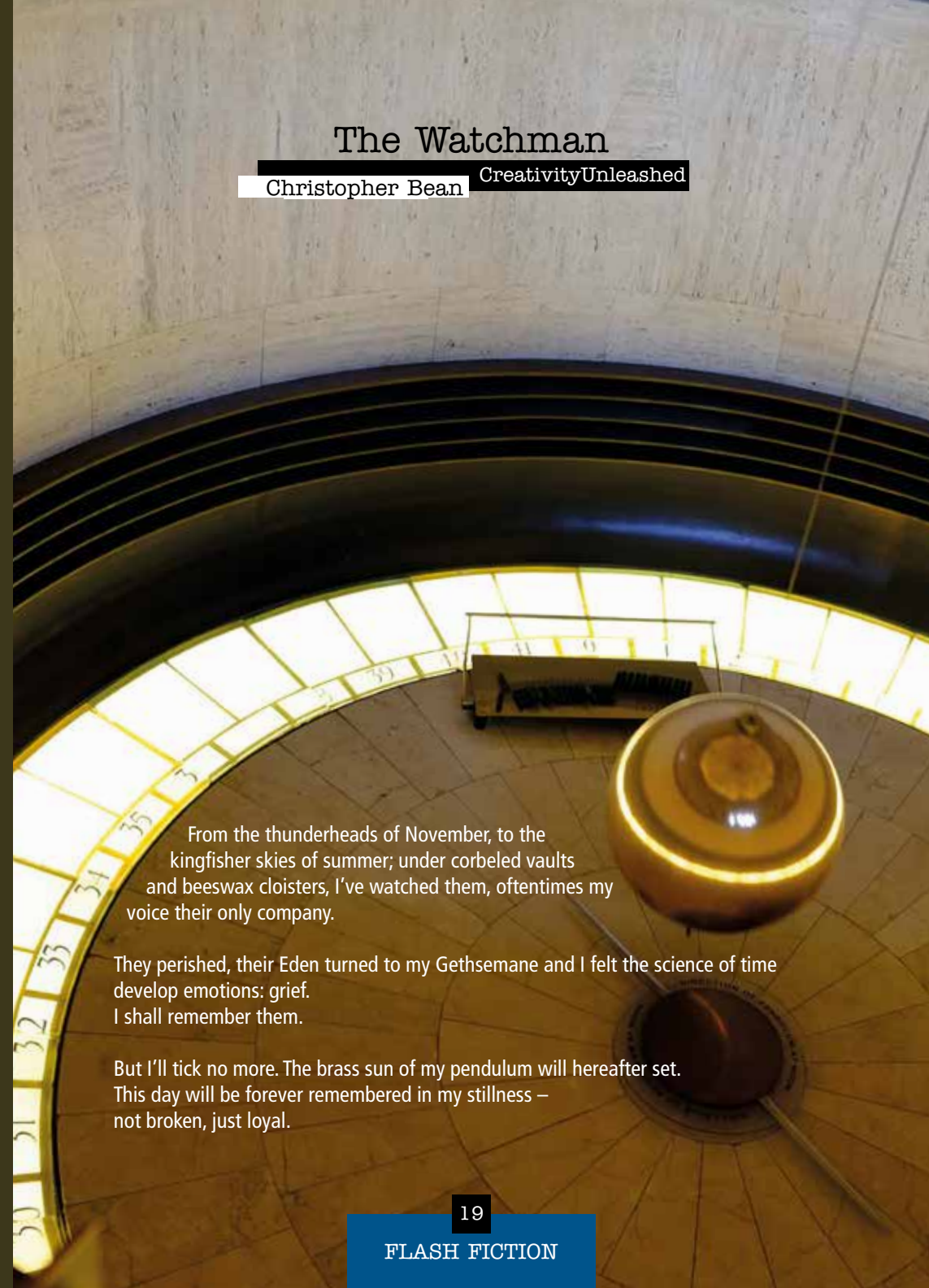
18

POETRY DRAWING

The Watchman

Christopher Bean

CreativityUnleashed



From the thunderheads of November, to the
kingfisher skies of summer; under corbeled vaults
and beeswax cloisters, I've watched them, oftentimes my
voice their only company.

They perished, their Eden turned to my Gethsemane and I felt the science of time
develop emotions: grief.
I shall remember them.

But I'll tick no more. The brass sun of my pendulum will hereafter set.
This day will be forever remembered in my stillness –
not broken, just loyal.

19

FLASH FICTION

Soar

Ethan Alcee Russell Sage College



20

PHOTOGRAPHY

The Statue of Liberty

Darcy O'Connell Russell Sage College

In Memory of Alexandria Leigh Whitehead

I overheard someone reminding their friend of you
as the Statue of Liberty —
that was your Halloween costume,
the Statue of Liberty

You were bubbly
You were kind
You stood tall,
just like the Statue of Liberty

You were funny
You were caring
You were bright,
just like the Statue of Liberty

I overheard someone describing you as adventurous —
that was your thing,
You always wanted to try new things
You were outgoing

You were ambitious
You were cheerful
You lit up every room you entered
You were optimistic
You were compassionate
You were our Statue of Liberty

21

POETRY



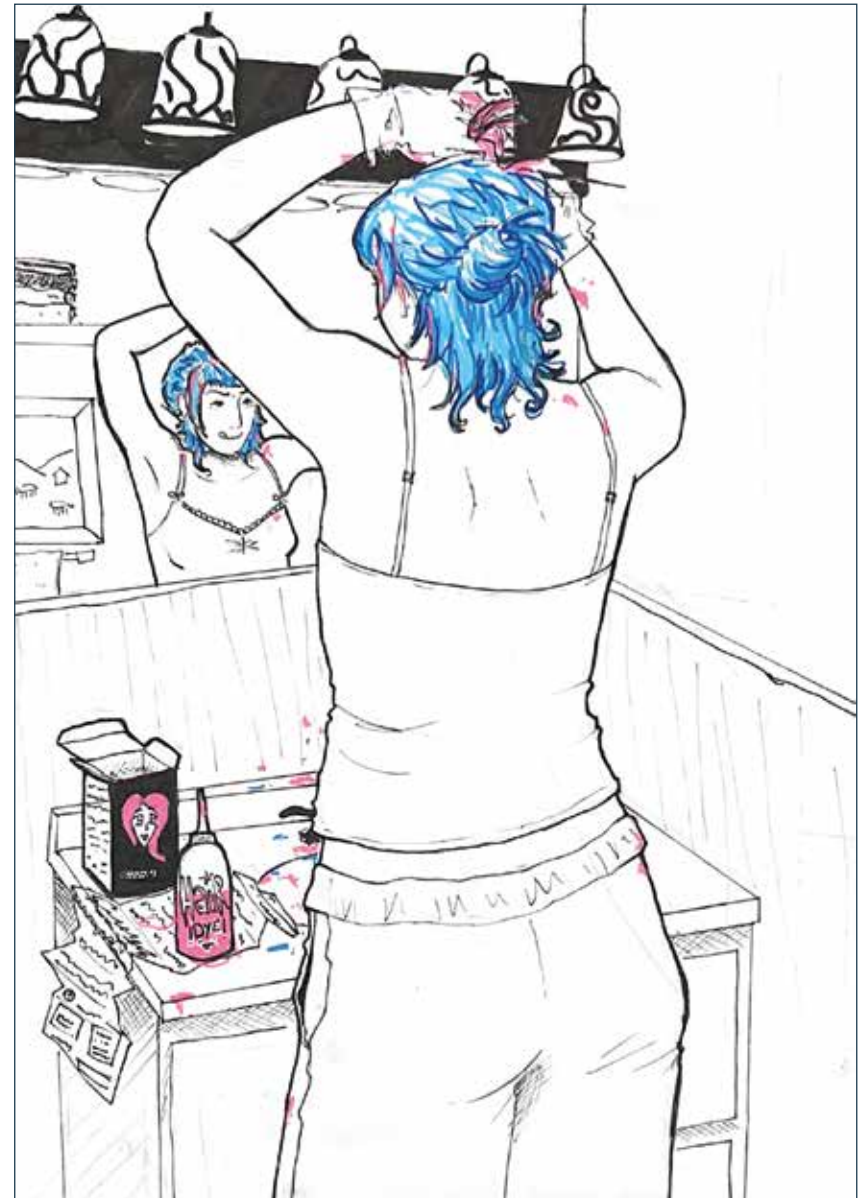
Carmen

Isabela Leech Russell Sage College

I braid my hair down the middle, split neatly in two
One I did for me, and one in remembrance of you
Your hair was always braided
Up until the end
Your power wrapped up in those loops and knots
No one could contend
Abuelita, my sweet Carmen, I wish that you could see
All that your hard work indeed set up for me
Your worn hands, and sun kissed brow
Your eyes that couldn't read
My shelves are full of books now Letters come after my name
You've passed down this power
I promise to never cede
Abu Abu te extraño
I miss you very much
Your memory lives on with me I promise you as such
My hair is braided down the middle, split neatly in two
When I look in the mirror, she reminds me of you

Hair Dye

Isobel Weinberger New Visions



Teen Spirit

Magnolia Allen *New Visions*

I watch, in my own cloud of spinning fog;
Their hands reach over the backyard fence
Ankles straining in a tight, tiptoed position –
“I want to climb on the neighbor’s shed, but I can’t reach it.”

Their boyfriend grabs their hand,
The only one who noticed the fence slowly fall backward
As urgent legs try to climb onward.

When did these hands,
The hands I held at the 7th grade dance,
The hands that slid over the fur of every stray cat,
Become introduced to long-necked bottles and sandy rolling papers?

We reminisce on all the old videos we made,
The walks we’d take just to feel some sort of freedom at 12 years old,
The nights spent watching PG-13 movies thinking we were badass.

It becomes bittersweet
Our laughter that of a crazed mad child
Uncontrollable yet never as pure as it once was

There was a point where laughing
Could clench our tummies and shake our lungs
Without a single drop, a single inhale of anything.

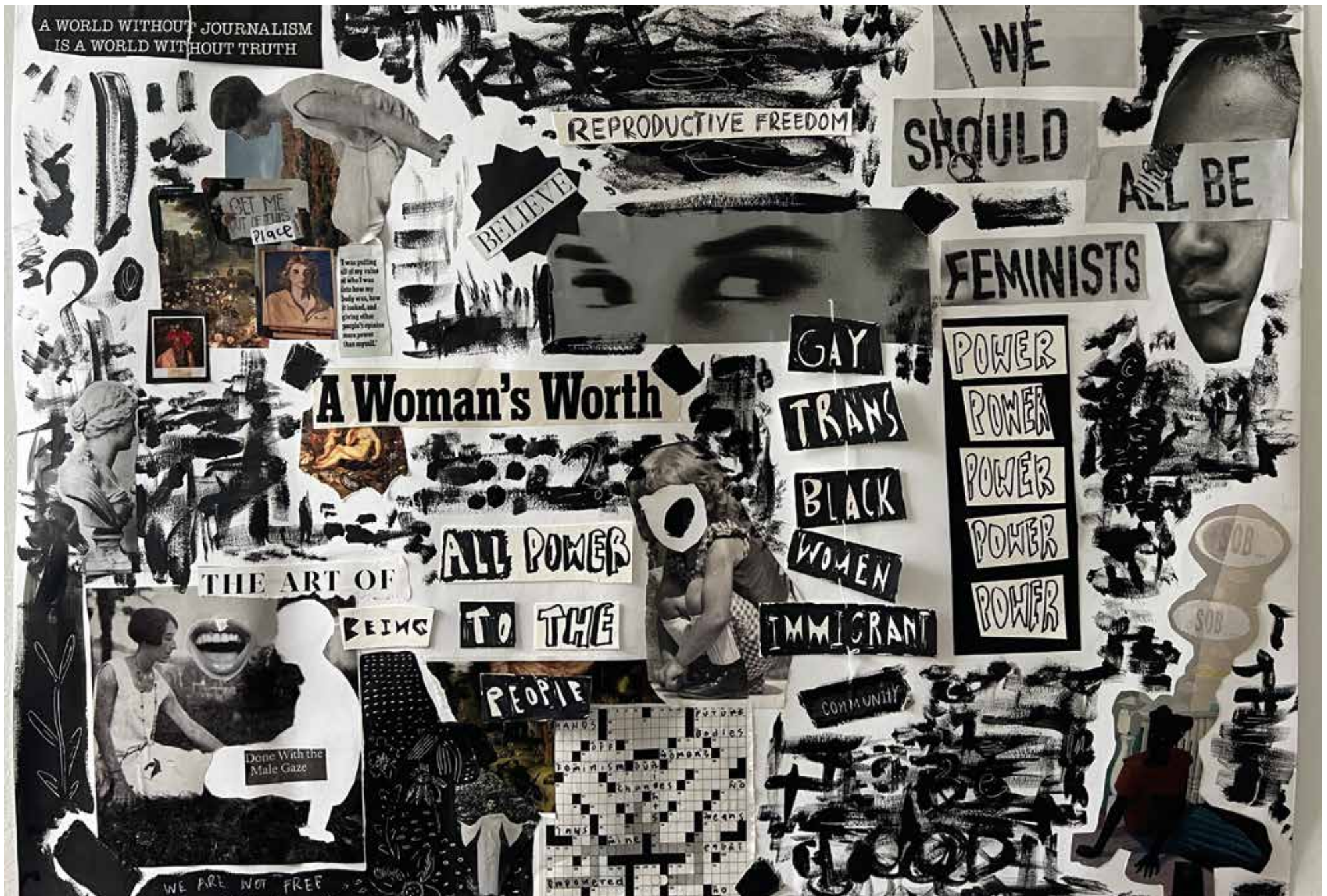
When did all these children morph into the
adults we once dreamed of becoming?
When did it become a routine to fall asleep on
Whatever pillow or blanket you could find
In your ex-best friend’s house?
When did we all stop batting an eye at the girls
Sprawled across the bathroom floors?

My childhood has passed
Yet I don’t feel a shift into adulthood.
We are all stuck,
Trying to find a way to feel mature.

Beacon

Surie Yang *The High School Affiliated to
Renmin University of China*





Feminism

Sarah Schonhiutt Russell Sage College

Your Cold Hands Are Scar-Free and Aveeno Soft: Don't Touch Me

Samantha Pivacek
Russell Sage College

Cover me, cover me. I am cold. Don't use your hands. Keep me far away from the chilling air of the black night sky. It bites my pale skin and numbs my red-freckled nose. Please, hand me my red, fuzzy blanket instead. Let's take the time we have right now and look at the brand-new red and green twinkling lights ahead as though we've never seen these before. They're meticulously strung along the roof of a two-story home. On the second-floor balcony, the lights wrap around the black, metal railings, holding on against the chilling winds.

We have seen this time and time again. Still, my brown eyes are entranced this year. But they don't quite amaze me as that old light-up Santa Claus. The light inside of him is almost yellow, perhaps on its last days. Let the hot chocolate in my youthful hands sit. Let the heat from inside seep through the cup until it begins to burn my delicate skin, but I'll let it remain because it keeps my hands warmer than you ever could. Let the steam warm up my discolored face, and bring back the color that is long lost.

Maybe I will be as bright as a red Christmas light.

The cold gives me shaky, weak legs. I sit on the icy concrete. And you are as silent as the falling snow. So peaceful, yet so dangerous. Will we talk about this night until we grow cold with age, or will we never speak of this again? Now, look at these red and green Christmas lights. Aren't they beautiful?

Aren't they beautiful, like the skin you desire to lay your purple, scar-free fingers upon? The skin you only look at for its pear-shaped body and smooth skin. You never see past the outer appearance. You laugh at the old light-up Santa Claus, and you marvel at the brand-new fake green Christmas tree with the warm, blinking white lights. You don't see a second story. No autopilot smile to creep along your face and tug at the corners of your pink, cracked lips. Your muscles have grown too weak to

smile. You don't know what makes me laugh, yet I can describe how your left eye squints more than your right when you laugh hard enough. You can tell me the soft texture of my body and the beauty marks that lay upon my skin, yet you refuse to learn the stories of my mother and the woman who created her.

Oh, don't touch me with those Aveeno-soft hands. I am cold enough. I'd rather burn than feel your touch. I don't need your frost-bitten fingertips caressing my face. Jack Frost would shiver at first glance.

The warmth you gave me long ago was a lie. You see me as equal to these decorations. Even objects have stories. I'm sure that worn-out light-up Santa Claus has seen many generations of a family. Can't you agree that he's got such a jolly smile?

Now I am warm. I'm not quite sure why. It surely isn't because of you. My hands have grown numb to the burning sensation from my cup. I cannot breathe when you are this close to me. No, I can't at all. My heart feels calm, slow. I can't hear its heartbeat. Let me lie down.

And sure, you can turn your green eyes to the house with the brand-new decorations. You can admire the expenses this family must have paid for all these new items. But I warn you, they will one day be worn out too. Will you admire them as you do on this cold winter night? Probably not.

Your face is red, the night air filled with your stiffening silence. Now, watch me walk away with my womanhood. Let the generations of women who fought to be seen as human haunt this memory of yours. Do not let me fade away the same way the red and green lights are slowly blurring. I am not meant to stay the same. I have a right to change just as smoothly as the seasons. I am a woman with a story, not an object you can show up for as you please.

Now, let me be. I will lay with my red, fuzzy blanket on the cold, gray concrete. My drink has become cold, but the air feels warm. The snow will envelop me and let me sleep.



Oops Mom, I Made a Portal

Davis Snyder **Russell Sage College**

TIME

Sophia Pearl Russell Sage College

What is time but merely a man-made measurement of
Irreversible succession from the past,
Duration of the present, and regard for the future?

Humans were not meant to live a life defined by the clock,
But rather free from the knowledge of fleeting existence.
Creativity crushed by deadlines,
Moments poisoned by their momentariness,
Societal obsession with the ephemerality of beauty, youth, physique

“What time do I need to leave to get to work on time?”
“Practice your time management skills.”
“How long is this going to take?”

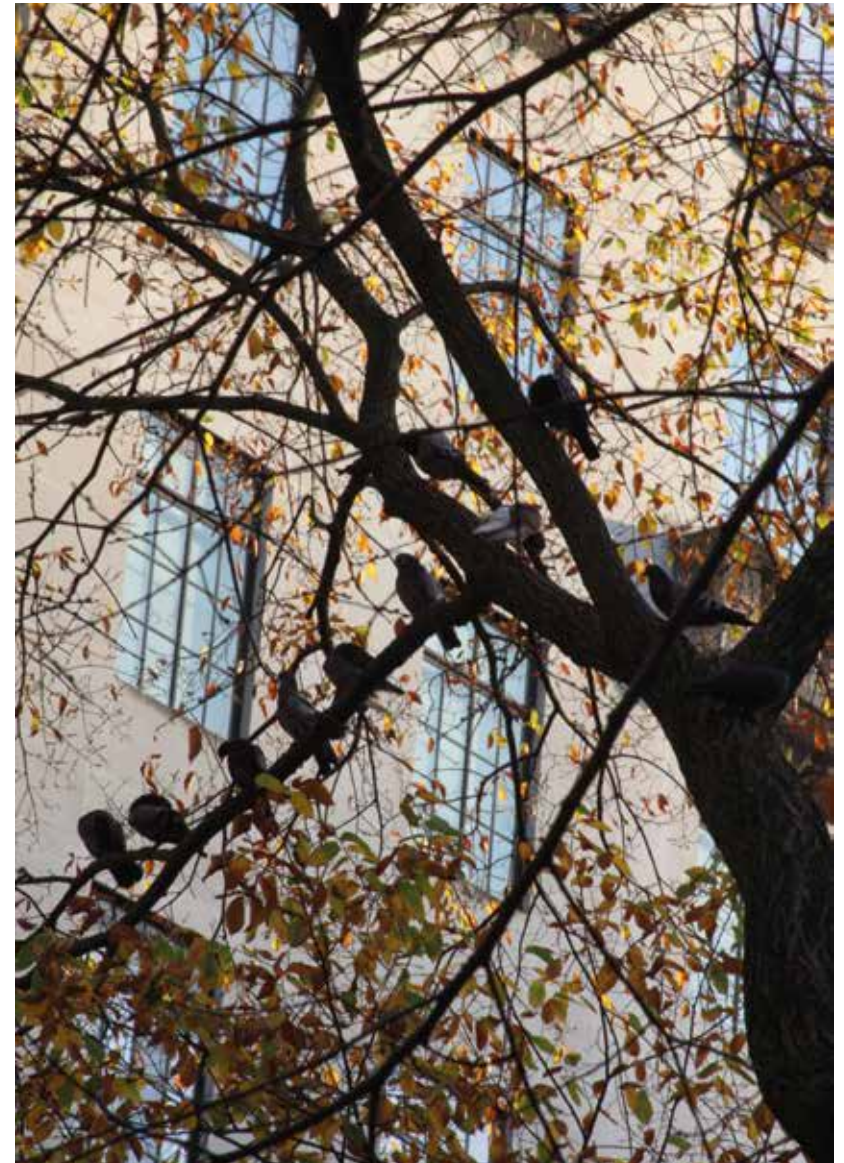
We’ve become handmaids to our wristwatches
Serfs to the very numbers we invented
Eating meals based on a schedule over hunger
Resting when the itinerary allows, not when our bodies need

Life carved into increments
Minutes traded for money
How do we break free from shackles embedded?
Can we live by the rhythm of the rise and fall of the sun?
The tick of our hearts instead of the clock?
Placing emphasis on the changing of tides, not signs of the time
Joy untethered by urgency
Life measured, not in seconds, but in stories...

I would love to figure it out,
But I don’t really have the time.

The Passing By Experience

Alex Calderon Martinez Russell Sage College



Do You Pinky Promise?

Melana McGivern
Russell Sage College

The word “promise” is like a rope tied in a knot, unbroken and strong, until the fibers once meshed together rip; the rope unravels until the knot is left exposed and either brutally comes untangled, or continues to stand together through the harsh weathering of the outside. I have made many promises throughout my life. Some include: “Yes mom, I promise to take the garbage out,” and “I swear I did my homework,” and “I promise to always love you no matter what.” Depending on the promise, some weight may be tied into that knot, creating a more significant impact when the fibers untangle leaving you vulnerable.

Some promises are best broken.

“I will always love you no matter what.” This held weight over me; boulders sat on top of my shoulders waiting to drop on me after one wrong move. This left me vulnerable. When this promise was broken, I didn’t eat for days, and cried until I couldn’t cry anymore.

Time passes on the once-tied-together rope, now frayed into two pieces, buried by sticks and leaves; this foliage covers the remains of a long-lost bond. I suspect if this promise weren’t broken, there would be only a few strings holding up the weight attached to this feeling. Slowly they rip apart, straining the brains and hearts of the people tied to this promise.

The heartbreak was fast and sudden, creeping into my mind, reminding me of the bond we once had that now lay in pieces. Although the rope connecting us had probably been ripping for some time, we didn’t notice. Straining our hearts – the rope was broken, and a weight lifted off both of us. I healed until I couldn’t feel the pain anymore.

After this heartbreak, I became stronger, learned how to tie a more secure knot, and how to provide maintenance throughout the rain and thunderstorms. I learned that I need to untie some knots before they collapse to the ground when the strain becomes too strong between the people bound to this knot. I learned when the boulder falls, it will roll off and I will heal.

I know this pain can be tied to any promise, no matter how much weight is tied into the knot. Whether a schoolyard promise to stick together forever or forgotten homework you promised you will do, the consequences of these promises hold strong. When breaking even the smallest of promises, you become untrustworthy, and may even be disliked. This doesn’t mean you should keep all your promises.

Promises are sometimes more than tangible objects or doing all your chores. When our brains, hearts, and feelings are tied to the weight of a knot, the weathering becomes stronger. When you feel trapped under a boulder, and go as far as lying, hurting, and crying every day to hold up the weight placed on your shoulders, the knot will surely come untangled no matter how hard you pray that it won’t. It’s simply survival of the fittest. You must adapt or suffer the consequences. This isn’t an easy task when a promise holds that much weight. You may feel that it will never be better, and you will always feel the pain of that broken promise.

But remember, the foliage will bury the knot. You will forget the pain and move on.

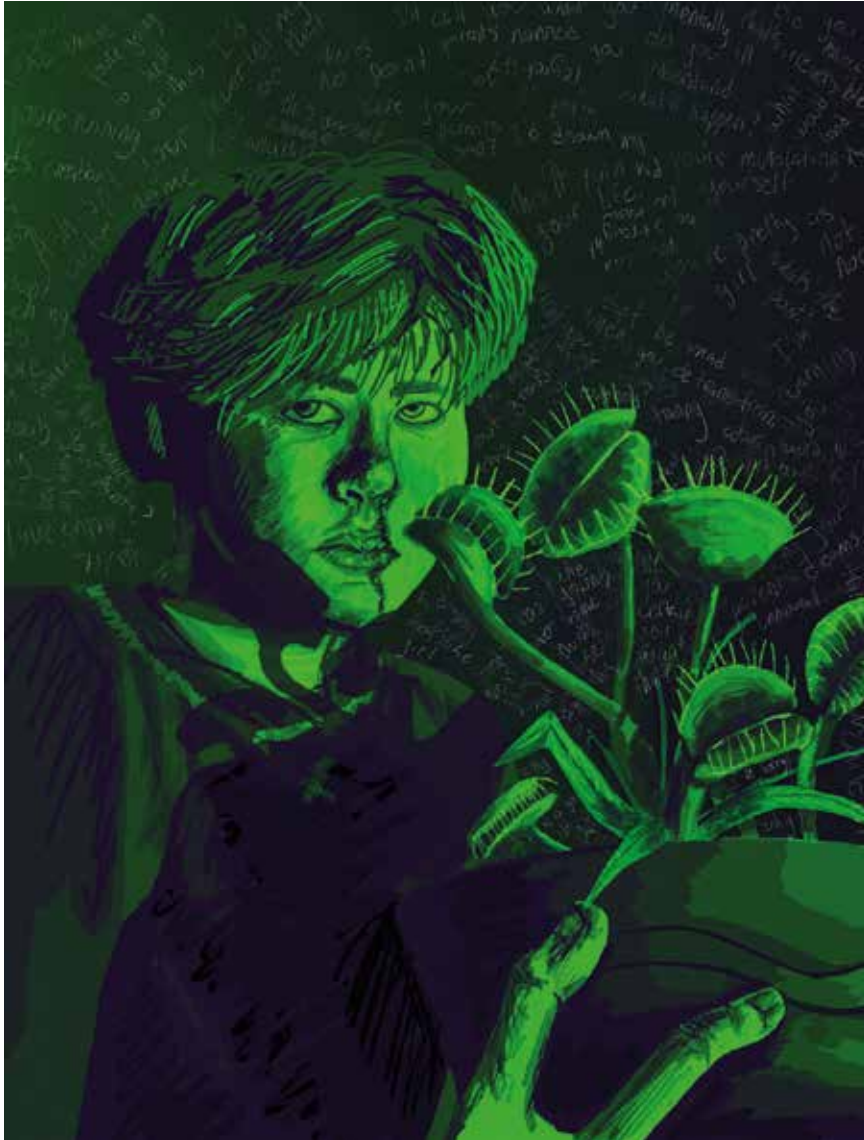
The other person tied to the knot may also be hurt. Hatred and sadness follow them, even if they were the reason the knot unraveled. It is rare if a promise that holds weight, such as love or friendship, is torn in only a single spot. The fibers slowly unravel until it falls. The hearts tied to these knots are strained but hopeful. They may work through the weathering, providing tape and glue to the broken fibers holding it together. If the slashes are too deep, the tape won’t hold; no matter how hard the two people try, it will fall. They must learn to walk away and let nature take its course, and once again the foliage surrounding the knot will blow over it, leaving minimal strands of an eventually forgotten rope.

These strands hold what you feel most, whether they are memories of the person you once held dear or newly developed hatred. Over time you can decide what you want to remember.

A boulder and knot were created with love and care, and only gradually did the weathering take hold. Tape and glue may have repaired it many times until it fell. Vulnerability was your best friend and your worst nightmare, but now the foliage has blown over and you can be vulnerable again... there is certainty (and comfort) in the cycle of it.

Losing Patience and Boundaries

Ash Zimmerman **New Visions**



36

DIGITAL PAINTING

Family String

Brier Cylkoff **Russell Sage College**

What makes a family?
Is it an invisible string that is tied to each family member,
Connecting everyone together through good and bad?
It once was.
Is it a happy family?
Or is it one just pretending for social media views
and a fake reality of happiness?
Mom and Dad, brother and sister –
everyone's idolized as a "picture perfect" family!
Secretly, shattering the camera
Family vacation to the beach!
Secretly, memories of happiness washing away in
the waves.
Mom and Dad aren't happy. They haven't been.
But they pretend. They always do.
"It's better for the kids" they say! They always do.
The kids pretend too.
They pretend to hold on to that invisible string,
in hopes that one day it will wrap around them, like it once did.
But the string is tied in knots now. And it cannot be fixed.
The knot is too tight from constant pulling, trying to unravel it.
They question: "what makes a family?"
They sit in silence but hold on to the thought.
Maybe one day... Mom and Dad will get a new string?

Inspired by the following pieces from the 2024 edition of The Rev:
"Defining What it Means to be Human" by Angelina Wang (pg. 5)
"Pistachio" by Chantal Russo (pg. 14)
"A Bird's First Sunrise" by Kaylee Da (pg. 24)
"Pretty Bird" by Ozge Erdur (pg. 42)
"Jean Flower Bouquet" by Grace Thurber (pg. 60)
"This is Your Brain During a Trauma Treatment" by Tracy Gilbert (pg. 78)
"From You Know Who" by Amy Tran (pg. 80)

37

POETRY

Family Photo

Andreea Pavel CreativityUnleashed



In memory of
Mr. Potato



See the Colors

Kathleen Muller Russell Sage College

The colors are cold
Mute,
Sadder than before.
Where are the bright colors that I adore?

Change brings questions
With no answers.
What has happened to my friends?
Will this truly be the end?

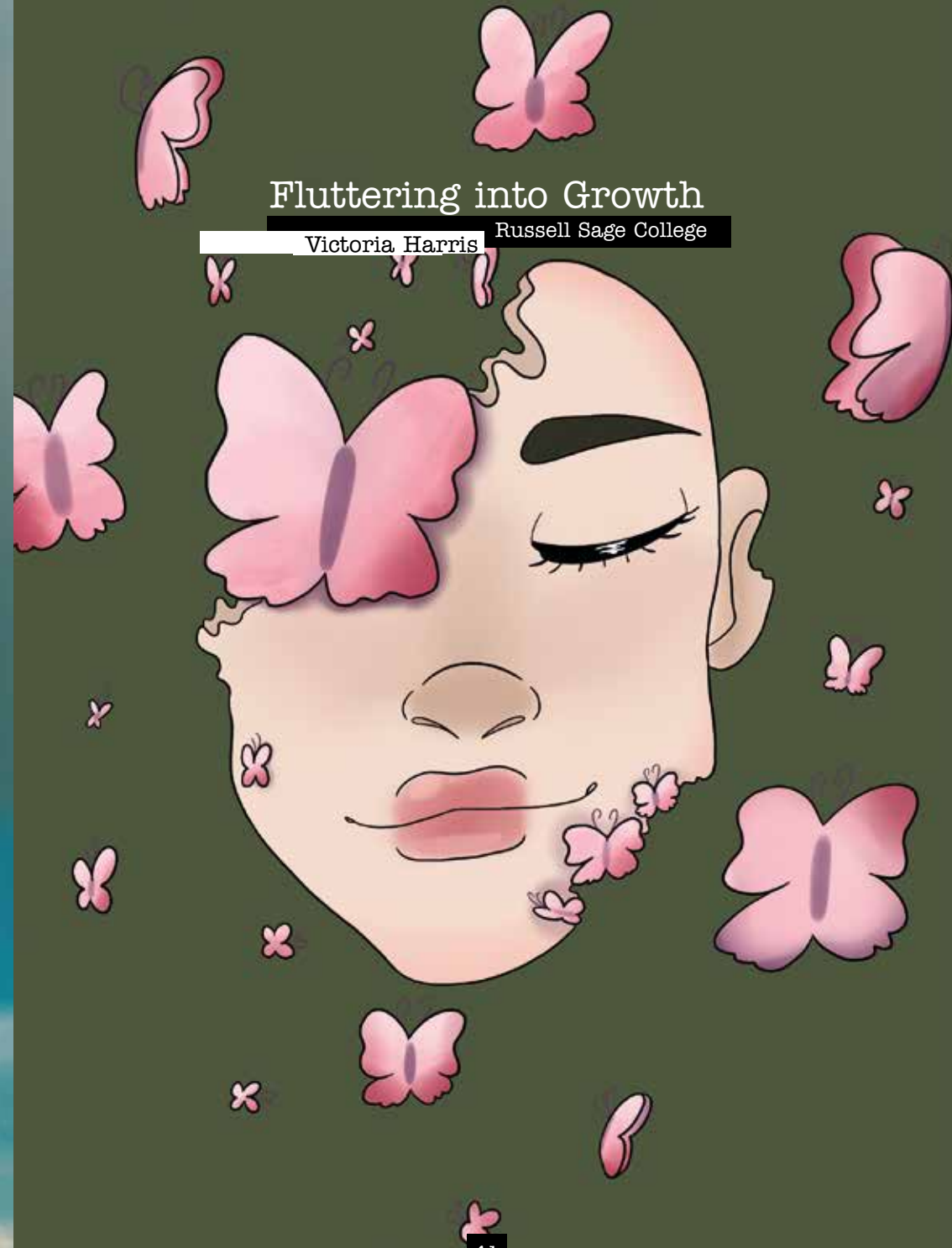
Sit back and take a breath.
Maybe it is time to rest.
Think about a brighter time.
Don't think about this crime:

The crime of sadness,
Doubt and fear.
Will there be any positivity
For the new year?

Rise above to find true colors.
Rise above to see oneself.
Rise above to help all others.
Rise above to find yourself.

Fluttering into Growth

Victoria Harris Russell Sage College



Sanctuary of Joy

Yazmine Lawrence Russell Sage College



Yazmine
Lawrence

The Sad

Josh Herter

Russell Sage College

Just as the leaves fall,
(Under bark and bough
To decay in dirt, trod by
Careless steps and hefty sighs

Transient hopes sift through my
Mind, a sieve catching the
Hang-ups. Caveat to "then" dreams: a
Momentary semblance of why each

Sun's retreat dusks and dawns
Premature of warmth. As falling snow
Melts, a cold, crinkled smirk
Can slip off a chapped face.

Just after the leaves fall,
It all drains away with the halt
Of a starchy crunch,) recalling hope
Returns tragedy to joyous buds.

Chaos

Willa Vaughn Larsen

New Visions



The Detached Athlete

Bailey Catlin Russell Sage College

“Aren’t you an athlete?”

These words rip deep into my soul, tearing at my heart like a lion claw digging through my skin. This very identity consumes my soul. Every. Day.

I respond with a simple nod, trying to shrug off the weight laying on my chest. But I’m thinking: I am more than the girl you see in uniform. I have goals and aspirations outside my sport. My sport does not define me. Yet, I have let it go for so long. Do I know who I am without sports? Maybe that’s why I still play, even though I no longer desire to be on that field.

This “athlete” wants to be a teacher, to inspire the next generation. I want to be a coach, a person, and a voice that I never had growing up. I want to be better than some of the coaches who failed me.

This “athlete” loves to cook and make dinners for her family.
This “athlete” loves to be active.
This “athlete” is a dog mom.
This “athlete” is something more.

Growing up, my sport was my entire world. I loved it: the days playing in the hot sun with my friends, the competitiveness, practicing so hard, and seeing it all come to light.

Two years. It only took two years of college athletics to rip the passion from me. Anxiety, stress, fear, all crippled their way into everyday life, everyday chasing something that was always just one step out of reach.

Everything I did.

Everything I ate.

All dedicated to the hope that one day they would see me. One day they would choose me. I would be the person they were proud of; I could make myself proud.

That day never came. All the time and effort slipped down the drain. The blood, the sweat, the tears, slow slow slow down the drain and with nothing to show. I lost the weight holding me down. I gained the muscle to make me strong. Tears dripped down my face every night.

I wonder if they’ll ever notice. They never do.

Laying on the ground of the outfield looking into the sun, there are no thoughts, no feelings. Another day of the same thing: wake up, eat, class, practice, home. Nothing ever changes. Hard work doesn’t matter. They’ll never choose me anyway. Why even try?

Do they see what they are doing to me? Do they know how it feels to be drained slowly of something you have loved for so long? Will I ever be enough?

“Athlete” is the very identity that no longer feels like me.
Every day, I question why I still play. This is not me. It can’t be. Please. Someone help me.

*Inspired by “Trapped” by Emma Wrieden (p. 12)
from the 2024 edition of The Rev*

Postpartum

Newton Wilk Russell Sage College

It's not that I wanted to hurt her, it... it was nothing like that, anything but that. I didn't want to hurt her. I just loved her so much, I wanted – I needed – her to be a part of me again.

'Postpartum Depression' they called it. It had been three months and the hunger pains hadn't subsided. Every time I saw those little apple cheeks I had to clench my jaw, white knuckle whatever I was holding, count to ten – anything to keep me from trying to swallow her whole. Every time she rolled over to face her father I had to hold back tears. Please don't go, I thought. I'll eat you whole, I thought, quieter in the back of my mind.

Every few hours I would have to sneak to the bathroom to cry. Silent, shaking sobs that wracked my body and left me on my knees, my forehead pressed to the cool tile. I couldn't let anyone know – couldn't let them see me like this. They would think me crazy, collapsing into tears every time I looked at my daughter.

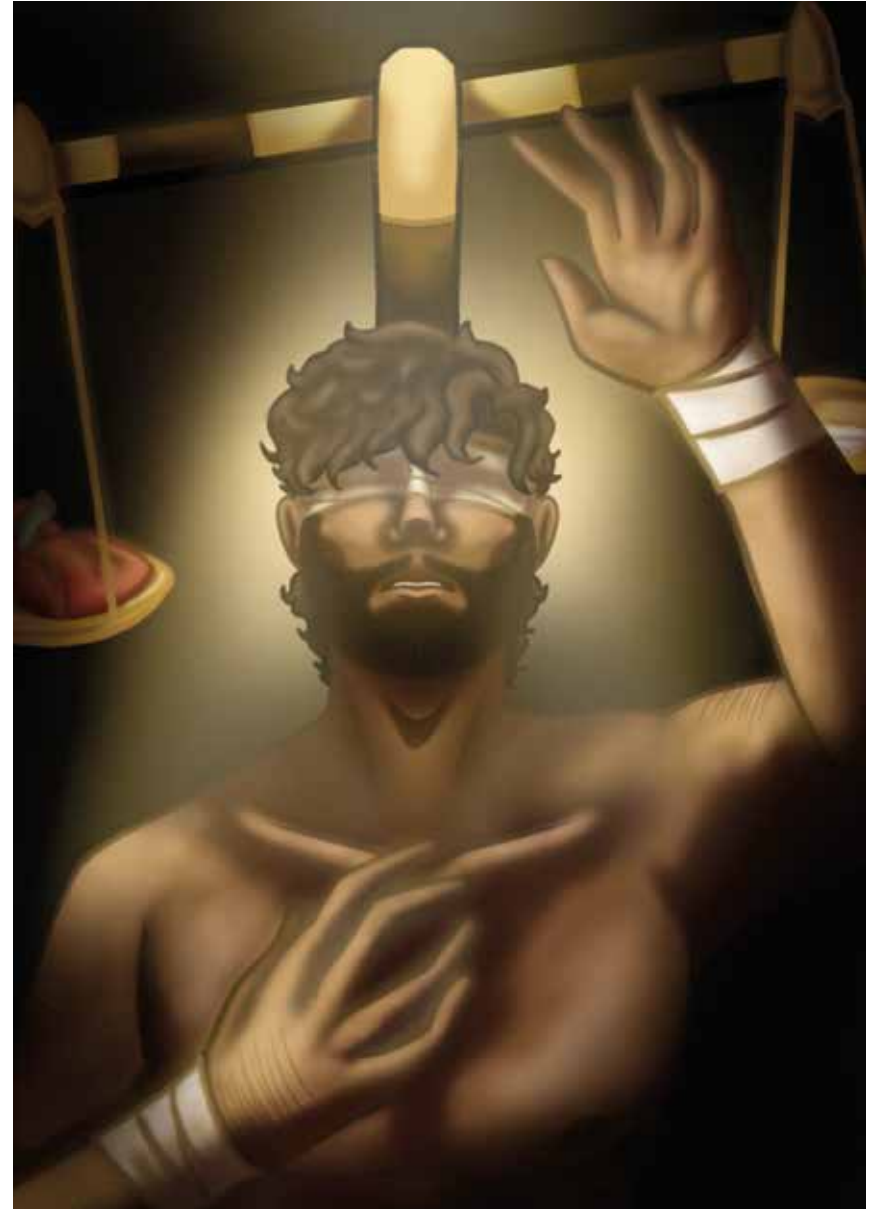
But, god, it was worse – it was so much worse when I couldn't see her. I would sneak out of bed at night to watch her sleep. I couldn't stomach the thought of even considering not seeing her for more than an hour. She was my baby, my perfect little baby.

I couldn't lift her – not while she slept – in fear of waking her, so I resigned myself to crouching by her crib and watching her. Her small chest rose and fell with each intake and exhalation of breath; her eyelashes fluttered against her perfectly rounded cheeks. She squirmed a bit – clearly dreaming – moving her tiny hands that could hardly grasp even one of my fingers, and I ached. Christ, I ached. Maybe she wouldn't mind, I thought, maybe she wouldn't mind if I ate her whole. If I could just get her close – close enough to know she was always safe. If I could just get her back where she was, perfectly safe in my belly, this gnawing – this horrible twisting in my gut would go away. I watched her still, my eyes darting all across her with each little twitch of her body.

"I love you." I whispered it, though I knew she couldn't hear. "I love you." I repeated it as I rose to hunch over her. "I love you." I said it softly, once again, taking her small body in my hands, lifting her still sleeping body. "I love you." I whispered it against her peach soft cheek. "I love you." I breathed out, letting my teeth just graze her perfect, pink skin. I snapped my head to the right and sunk my teeth deep into my own lip. I could never mar her precious little body with something so cruel as a bite, or mottle it with something so insignificant as my want.

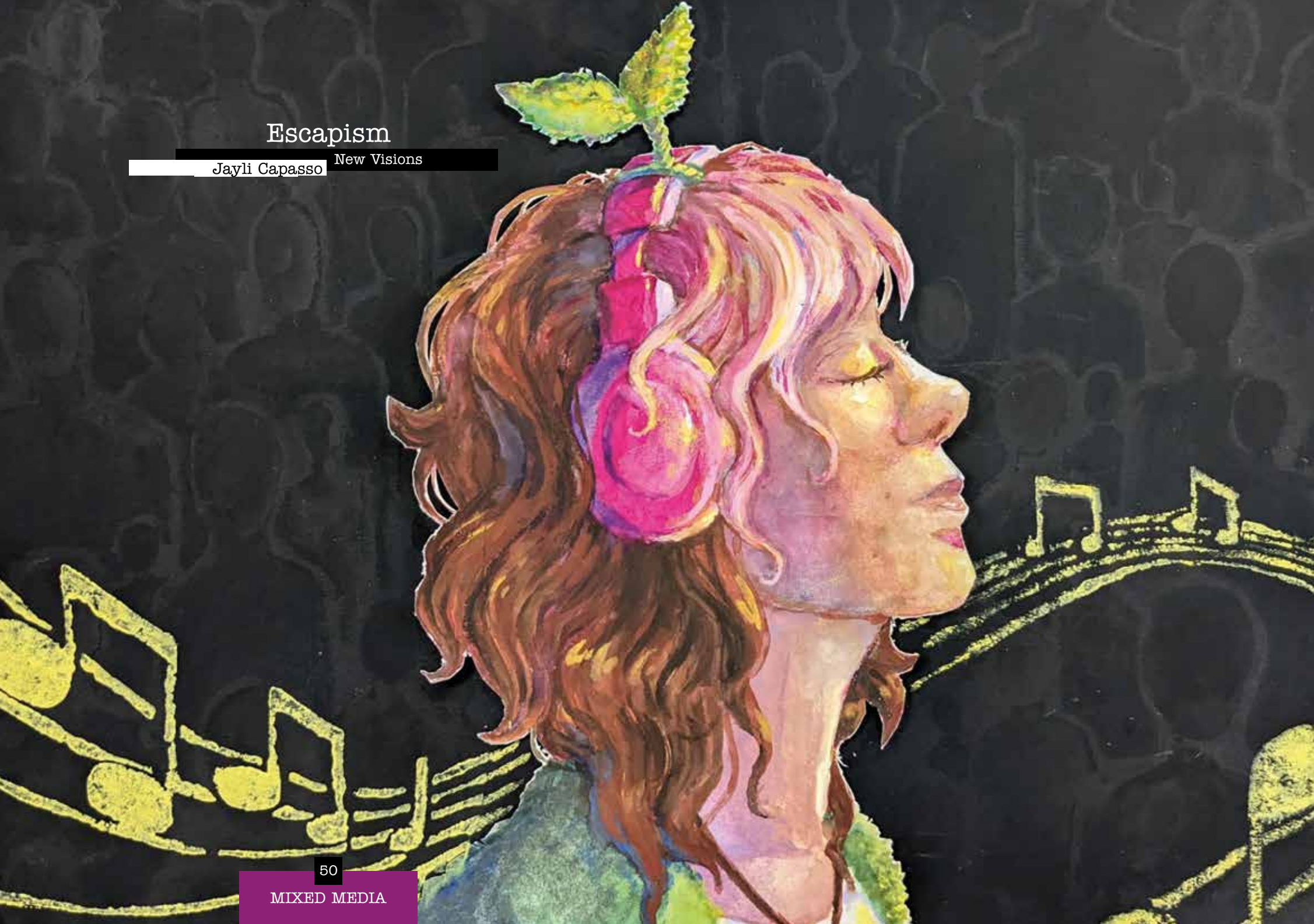
Weight of a Guilty Heart

Wil Whiteman New Visions



Escapism

Jayli Capasso *New Visions*



The Normal Girl

Jada Akers **Russell Sage College**

“Fake it till you make it.” She spoke to herself while looking at her reflection in her glass of ice.

“Have *confidence!* You need to act like the world owes you everything it can!” She remembers her mother shouting at her.

“You’re a *girl*, look pretty and be graceful!” her father told her.

“Follow your sister and you will learn to be the Queen Bee,” her friends told her.

“You’re a *girl*. You’re a *girl*. You’re a *girl*.” ...you’re a girl.

She molded herself to be what everyone wanted her to be: *a girl*.

She burned herself trying to do her hair. Had an allergic reaction when applying skincare and makeup. She had cuts all over her hands from trying to manicure them. Cuts all over her legs from constantly shaving. Swollen, bruised, and sore feet from wearing heels. *Lost weight*, from eating less and exercising more.

She no longer laughed freely because that meant she’d get fewer wrinkles. She wore *girly clothes* because that showed she had a feminine side. She hung out with more girls because that showed she was one of them. She started talking to guys because that showed she was *normal*.



The lengths she went were extreme, but what did they get her in the end?

She was wilting away like the flowers she once received. She was molting her true self and turning into something else. She was becoming a caterpillar - metamorphosis to a butterfly or moth. *She was changing.*

Nevermore did she wish for anything to be different though, because now she felt *seen, heard, and liked.*

To be a girl according to everyone’s ideals meant many things, but to her it meant: nothing.

When she showed her fake self, it meant everything to those around her, and she was fine with that. She was fine with it because, to her, they knew everything; they were born normal, you see...

...and she was not.

Inspired by the following pieces from the 2024 edition of The Rev: "Defining What it Means to be Human" by Angelina Wang (pg. 5) and "Trapped" by Emma Wrieden (pg. 12)



Aphrodite's Mirror

Starlyn D'Angelo Russell Sage College



54

PHOTOGRAPHY

Handpicked Apples Under a Midday Sunset

Jonathan Reese Russell Sage College

Wind chimes catch on the old creaks that bellow from our empty house, reveling in its final sigh before collapsing in the coming years. Weathered and lived and tired. The air stings my chapped lips and cracked hands. Crows once perched on the great maple now departed. The leaves have fallen to cover the tire swing lying on the ground. Little strands of rope still are sprawled out, clinging to the memory of their tested unity. No doubt what's lost has found its way to the nests of baby birds who, in the rising sun, might've waited on our old tire swing for the worms hidden under its shadowed weight. A hearty breakfast for their family.

My back cracks as it has for years, bending over to fix the crooked sign barely nailed to the dog house. His ball still lies in the yard some feet away. One side is far more red and much less weathered than the other. Hanging above is the clothesline that stands in the powdery earth, still clinging to life, waiting to hold clothes wet from the rain when we danced. Graphite lines still mark its wooden side as we'd measure each other. The strokes are certain I must be six feet, now far above my crooked posture. Maybe if you count my hat, I'd measure up to the man I used to be with you, before the weight of the world pulled me back down from the clouds.

A distant memory brushes my cheek. I turn towards the entrance and the door's brown varnish, chipped and weathered, reveals the white paint underneath. It stands open in its frame; beyond that, I hear your whisper carried by the autumn winds that blow the laundry hung to dry from years ago. A branch that snapped now sways with your words as they fill my ear with the sounds of my own cries.

Suddenly, I don't need them anymore. Your drawings of daffodils. Frogs holding flower pots. Jellyfish dancing. The flowers you'd bloom with colors blended into reality. The weight of your landscapes faded from my shoulders as the burden of your memories once scrawled on my back are not faded but gone. The only memory remaining is a ring on my left hand. And as you whisper your welcome, I see your light once more turn the dark-framed entrance, making fully white the door. Your dress is the color of the sun and your smile is brighter still. How many years I waited alone to hear those words again. Welcome home.

55

FLASH FICTION

The New War Photographer

Coco Song
Emma Willard School

Twenty-second videos you watch for ten,
ten-page stories you swipe at five.
Nibble-size content you chew up and spit out;
the left-over sugar corrodes your teeth, leaving
worms to squirm in the roots.

With rotten teeth you feast on
war, the one social media feeds you.
"Oh, but don't you worry,
it has been twice processed and thrice filtered.
You'll taste what we want you to taste."

Teeth eater and brain rotter, a parasite
in a pretty, infinity wrapper.
"Here are the victims, and here are the perpetrators.
Pay no mind to what we don't show you.
The algorithm — the algorithm knows best."

"Toss a few seconds to the living machine—
you can afford that, right?
It's a fair deal for their pain."
So you stay, and devour the sweetened war,
then swipe past it and laugh at funny cat videos.

Footage of a Palestinian boy bein-
This content has been removed
due to violations of our policy.

"...You shouldn't be seeing this, it's unfiltered, unsafe.
But don't worry, this foul thing won't slip in again.
Eat what we're giving you."
Indigestion churns butter into your brain —
cats - food - Ukraine - memes - Aaron Bushnell -

You cringe while the acid crawls up your throat,
waking you from your consumption coma.
"Oh dear, was today's content unsatisfactory?
We'll do better. We won't wake you next time.
And honey, avoid smiling at mirrors from now on."

The sliced and diced news and images of war, optional
condiments in your all-American burger.
Your hunger will remain insatiable.

We're in America, the United States of Apathy.
A war seasoned for an audience is nothing new.
Skewed and skewered, just how they want it.
Who are they, you may ask, well,
it doesn't matter; they are the new war photographers.

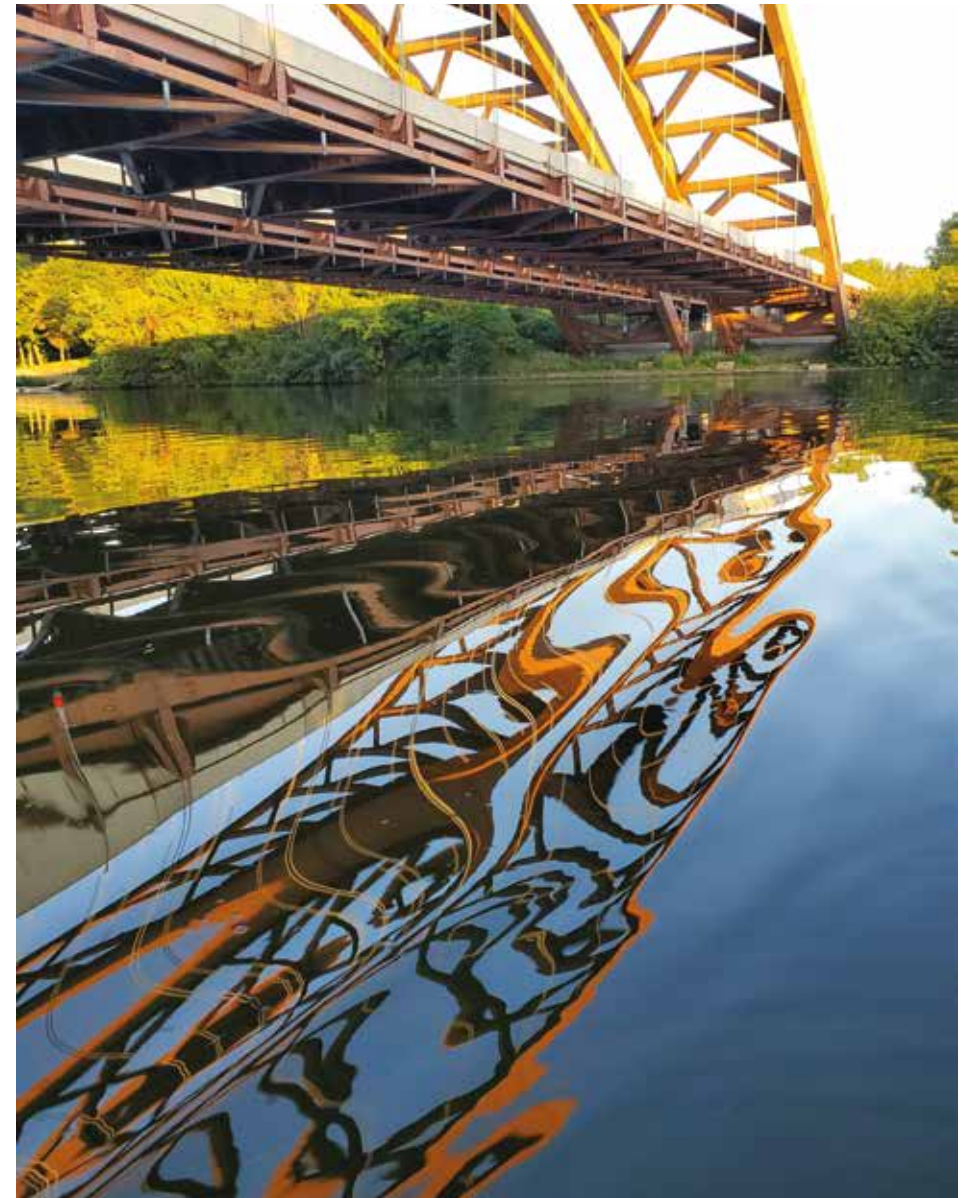
You're happy here, with us, the algorithm.
What is their suffering to your funny feline videos, anyway?
You're happy here, so just keep
eating and eating and eating and eating and...

Rot.



The Twin Bridges The Erie Canal Collection

Katy Kinirons Mejia
Russell Sage College



Good Hunter

Chloe DeSilva CreativityUnleashed



58

DRAWING

Crimson Curse

Evan Keihm Russell Sage College

One face, two face, three face, four,
My eyes burn with lust, my thoughts' twisted amore.

Every beat spreads the sludge,
My heart pines over every new "love".

Fickle is the curse that leaps and arcs,
My soul burdened by a love that sparks.

This festering cage of flesh and sin,
My spirit wrestles and struggles within.

The cage opens, and the Dove flies in,
Why make a home in a spirit so thin?

So although ruin is wrought time and time again, I am
saved by grace, I am saved by a friend.

Flee from me, O' shame and guilt,
For, inside, a new temple is built.

O' my gaze, pierce through the ash and smoke, My eyes
are on the King, my Lord and Hope.



59

POETRY

Sunburst

Amanda Bastiani

Russell Sage College

Pursue

Russell Sage College
Amanda Bastiani

Relentlessly reaching,
never giving up
or in.
Deep desire,
an urge
without origin,
or perhaps
always has been
inside our souls.
Unstoppable momentum,
however winding
and seemingly unattainable.
The hopeful promise
of one day
joyfully grasping.

Silent Waters, Shattered Dreams

Kaylee Da. Newton South High School

I feel the sounds of children under water.

Foils slash like glass shattering. *En garde! Keep track of the road! Prete! Stay awake; don't close your eyes; it's not (your) time! Allez! There is no one to protect you now!* I parry my drowsiness and lunge.

The cool surface of the podium is now where the Winter stands with pride, while I sink into the depths of the lake. Gravity drags me down, defeated. Pitch black darkness, ice on the pavement.

I had lost my bout.



MIDDLE SCHOOL BUS CRASHES
INTO LAKE, FOURTEEN DEAD.

Frozen

Gabrielle Deck Russell Sage College



The Most Disgusting Treatment of a Tiny Existence

Savannah Tenace
Russell Sage College



64

OIL PAINTING

Pretty Ugly

Emma Wrieden
Russell Sage College

I'm very ugly
So, don't try to convince me that
I'm a very beautiful person
Because at the end of the day
I hate myself in every single way
And I'm not going to lie to myself by saying
There is beauty inside of me that matters
So, rest assured, I will remind myself
That I am a worthless, terrible person
And nothing you say will make me believe
I still deserve love
Because no matter what,
I am not good enough to be loved
And I am in no position to believe that
Beauty doesn't exist within me
Because whenever I look in the mirror
I always think
Am I as ugly as people say?

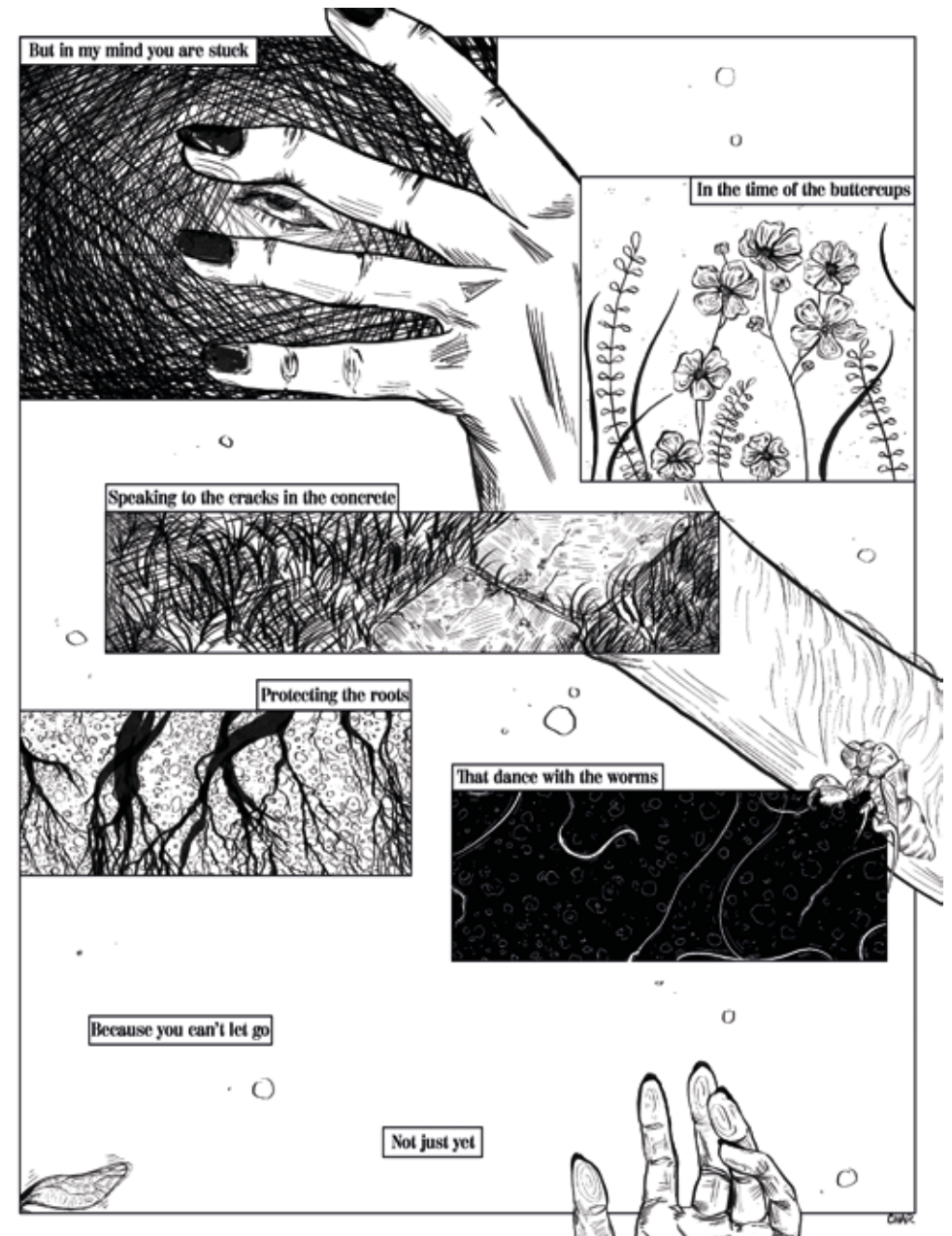
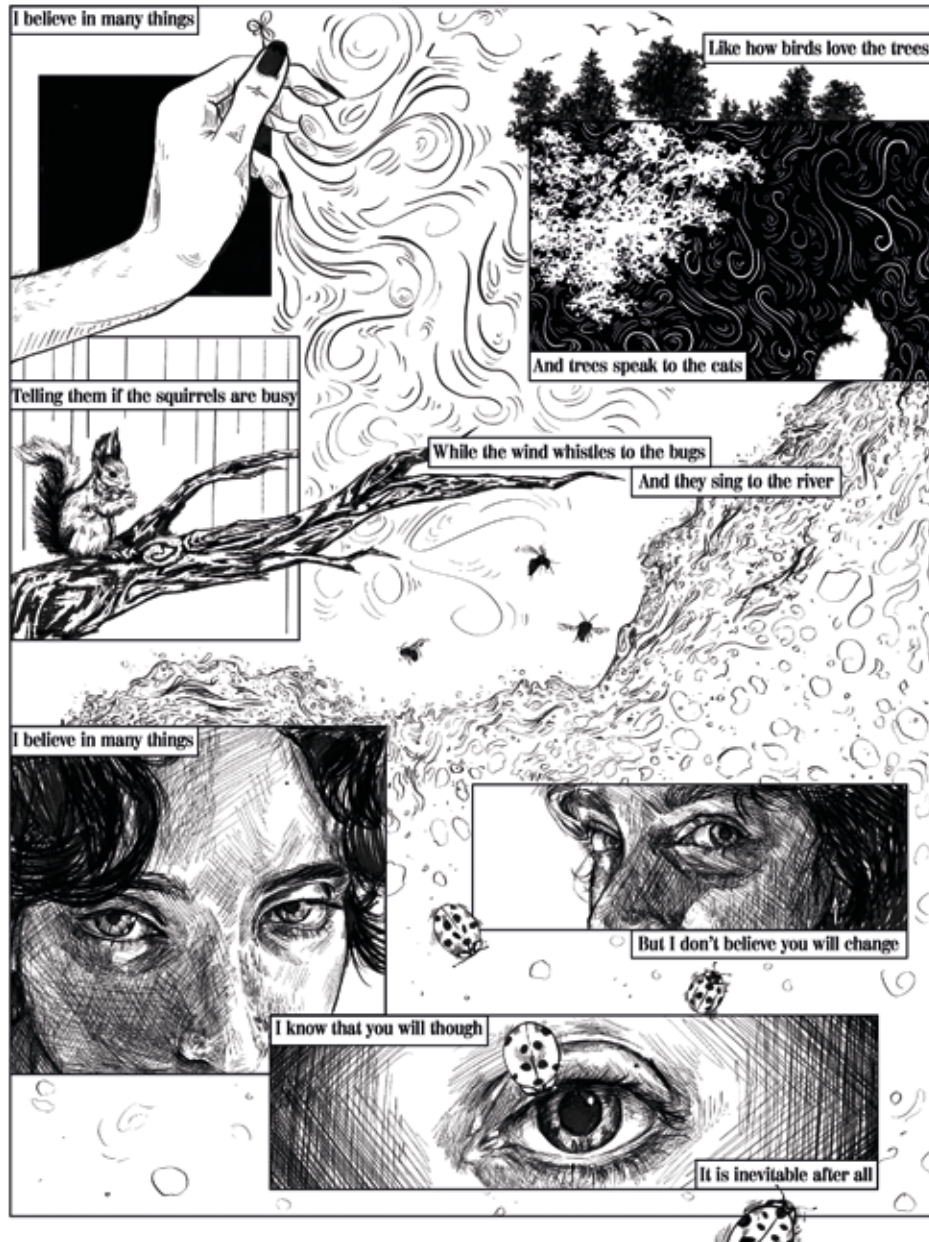
Am I as ugly as people say?
I always think
Because whenever I look in the mirror
Beauty doesn't exist within me
And I am in no position to believe that
I am not good enough, to be loved
Because no matter what,
I still deserve love
And nothing you say will make me believe
That I am a worthless, terrible person
So, rest assured, I will remind myself
There is beauty inside of me that matters
And I'm not going to lie to myself by saying
I hate myself in every single way
Because at the end of the day
I'm a very beautiful person
So, don't try to convince me that
I'm very ugly.

65

POETRY

I Believe in Many Things

Charlotte Maze Russell Sage College



How to Silence a Body

Kaylee Da. **Newton South High School**

Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?

Could it be the pure little girl who finds comfort and excitement in little snacks?
Or is it the heavy thoughts that weigh an extra 30-lbs, leaving a stain on the scale?
There's a picture of me sleeping, hearted in my mom's photo album.

Wake up, Snow White, you should lose more weight.

Asian-bob haircut and a bright blue and yellow tunic.
Within me, my favorite Snow White still slumbers.
I'll admit to being the evil queen, feeding her poison— but it was all in good intentions to distract her from the nightmare of how I grew up to be.
As a little girl, I had felt guilty to think of what life would be like when I turned fourteen. I knew that my mindset had always been to believe my future would be better than my now.

I worried that I was not appreciating what was in front of me enough.
(How do you end up making this innocent sentence sound so sad?)

A mirror.
Happy 14th! What did you wish for?
1. Lose weight
2. To be skinnier

I wonder how Snow White would react if she knew I had pushed away the adrenaline to rush downstairs for lunch— instead feeding the empty craving of summer with the "better" versions of myself in my head.

"Why did you skip mom's dinner? Don't you wanna grow taller?"

Are you satisfied now?

I couldn't bear the disappointed look from little Snow White if she found out that I stopped eating her treasured chocolate strawberries — being fulfilled with the new discovered comfort food: starvation.

I'm hungry
I've been hungry
I'm born hungry
What do I need?

God—I knew the apple was soaked in the bittersweet caramel of never-ending self-hatred, polished and painted in this talented, overly obsessive red, but someone had to do the job and tell me I had to lose a few.

Skinny
Skinny Adjective (THIN)

*Mainly disapproving

Very thin:
1. You should eat more— you're too skinny
2. My favorite silhouette is big shoulders and skinny legs.

— Add to word list?

I will come clean to tell you that I found satisfaction in pity comments.
Such words as "You look sick" or "Are you okay? You've lost so much weight?" kept me motivated, like signing an armistice in my sort of inner World War 3 against human nature.

If I had known this mindset was going to cost me this much—maybe, just maybe I would consider seeing things differently, but everything seemed to work better when I was starving.

Woman Points Out Examples Of Thin Privilege After Losing 160 Pounds, And Other Women Are Agreeing With Her

It doesn't make sense now, but happiness was much more achievable when I lost my period for three months. January, February, March.

It was almost like I finally started to see myself worthy, when I solved the math equation realizing my mistake was forgetting to add the minus sign.

My positive beginnings were instead found behind the walls of my classroom:
"I have no idea what she's saying; it's almost like my brain can't process words."
"Well, did you eat breakfast?"

Yes, I did eat breakfast. Maybe that was why I was not okay.

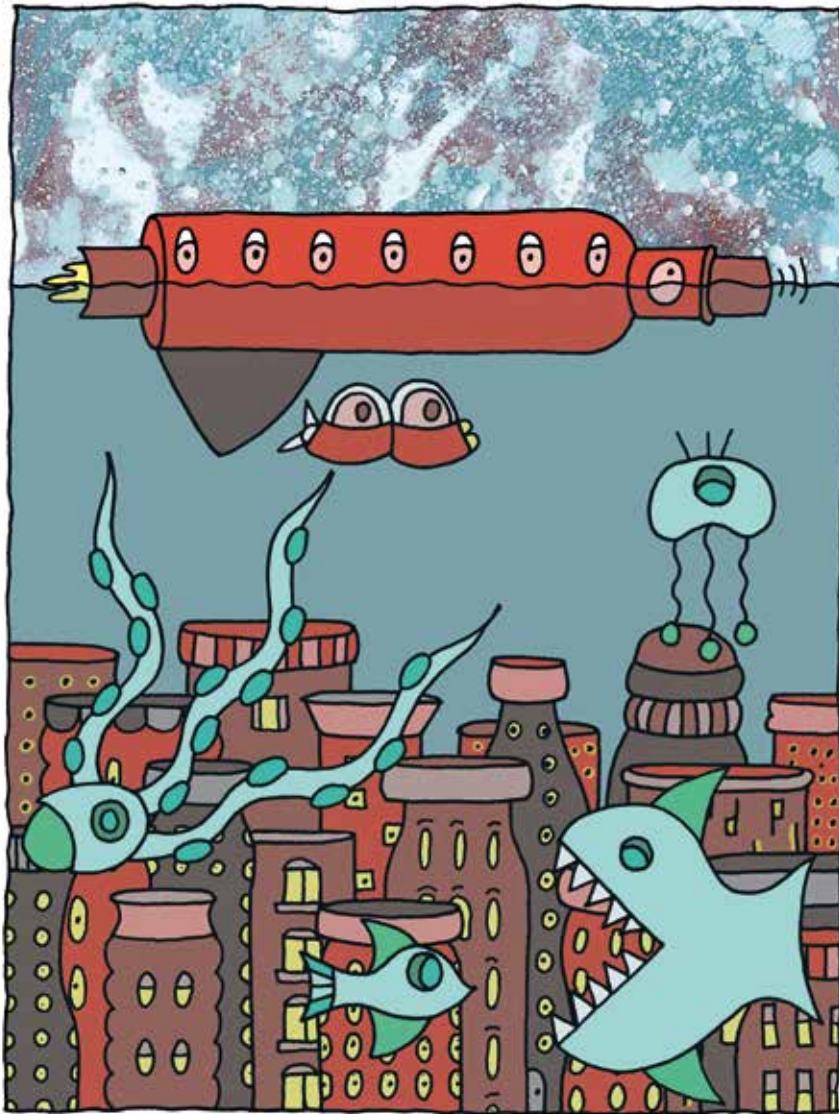
I only found bliss knowing that I was mastering self-control, or simplified in a less appetizing way — stopping my body's voice.



Scan this QR code to read the rest of this piece...

Kepler 22 b

Laurel Petersen Russell Sage College



70

ILLUSTRATION

I had been kidnapped.

It was the conclusion I had come to when I appeared on this train. Without a clue of what came before me with only a worldview and a name. I don't remember any darkness or even that of a light. Had I been a target of a great mastermind? Or was my purpose not so black and white? In hindsight, my focus was too ardent on the past. What was more important was farthest from what we regarded as a farce. A silent admission amongst the travellers of this seemingly endless terrain, that the end would only be endless once we finally leave this train.

My kidnapper was elusive but I was certain I had once heard him. In a space where my conscience lay unburdened, where I was probably bound and blindfolded, a voice cut through my soul in that moment and told me I'll return to him soon. That was the last I heard of him before I was placed on this moving tomb. But my parents found it amusing and fueled me with a plate of food. 'You'll need to eat,' Dad had said. 'Your mind needs to be strong.' But the irony felt pre-strung in the words that were left unsaid, in this prolonged game of pretence, in the way nobody thinks it to be wrong to pass our days in the bays of our shared suspense with questions laying here remaining unanswered. Ones that encompassed the things we took for granted.

It was less trouble to ask so as time passed, I began to enjoy my meals like everyone else. Created my own ideals to feel that I had progressed

End of the Line

Maysoon Sheikh CreativityUnleashed

71

POETRY

in this rat race where the race is moving
itself. The kidnapper became a subdued
memory. As did the truth of the
real enemy. But there were some
who did not forget with their maps
that set routes the rest of us
couldn't track, who didn't fear the end
but prepared for it and asked those questions that we left for dead. I always thought
I was being tortured with the answers
I lacked. So I never looked back to
the signs I saw on those maps.

But soon, a point had been reached,
one beyond return. Where food and heat
were no longer guaranteed and law was
practically null. Passengers began to riot,
biases became aggravated in the climate
of defiance, segregation of the disadvantaged, misinformation on a scale uncounted, blood
stains washing the carpet.

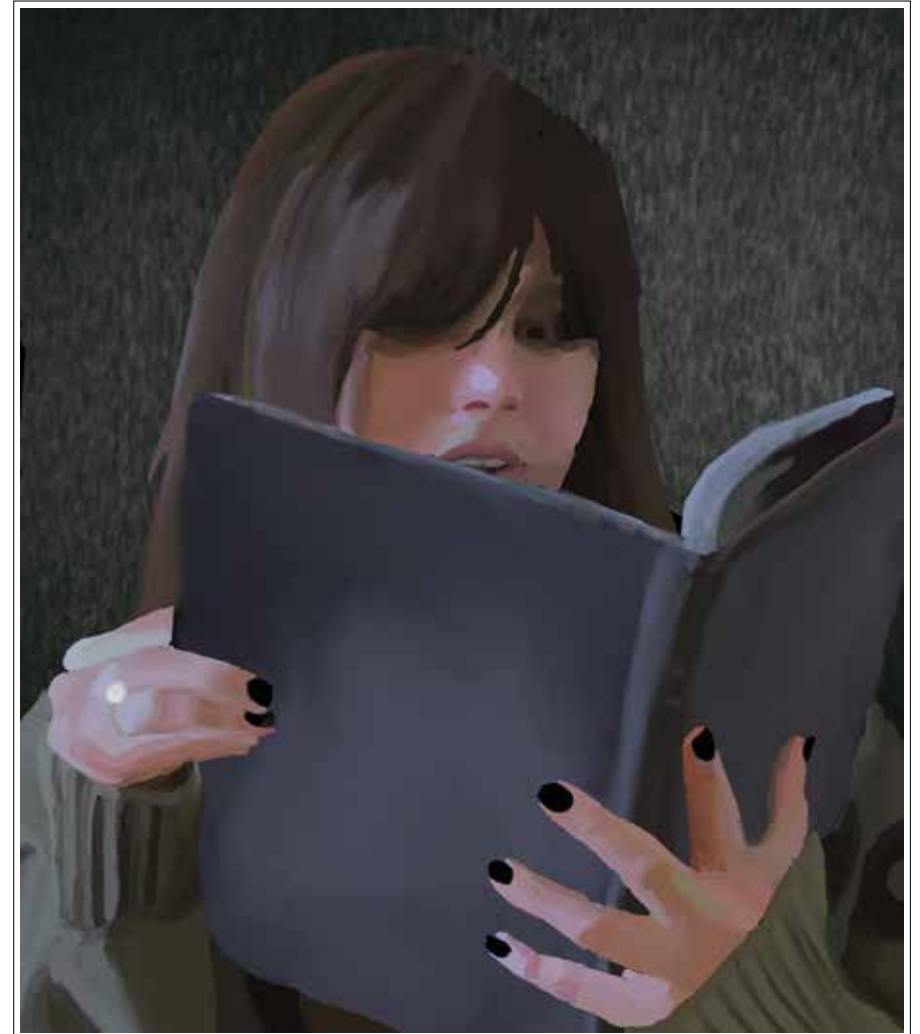
'A lack of resources, a lack of interfering
forces', tons of excuses but none
could be used as reasons to not
do better. For the ones who wish
to leave early, not knowing where
they'll be but having given up on caring.
For the ones who blame the kidnapper
and try destroying the maps like they
didn't matter. And when all is said and done,
for the next occupants of this train,
for we must be the ones to set the tracks straight
by the season that we'd be gone.

I had been kidnapped.

It was a thought that had once consoled me,
the thought that I owned this soul that I hold
but now I know it was loaned to me.
Now I take a leave from this ceaseless carriage
stepping out of a marriage to this life that had
carried the marks of my reality like my very own film.
The lights begin to dim as a new world takes
me in. My limbs ascend in unison
as I now return to Him.

The Perusal of the Storm

Mackenzie Gorman Russell Sage College



Good Hair

Lori Maki Russell Sage College

I never had good hair. It was always thin and limp and required way too much maintenance – even the color was drab, except maybe in the years when its “blondes have more fun” color came out of a bottle. The best hairbrush, the best haircut, the best curlers could not compensate for its mediocre performance.

My sister, Karen, got a thick mane of platinum curls that framed her face like a halo. Everyone oohed and aahed about her hair. My mom would say, “you probably got in the back of the line when they were handing out hair.” It didn’t help matters that she never cut my bangs straight. My aunt, Mary, once remarked on the glow of my sister’s aura, that she was the pretty one because of her beautiful hair... wink, wink. Mom said she was teasing. It didn’t sound like teasing. And I could never quite pull off those hairstyles in the salon magazines. So after all these years being frustrated by it, the fact that I was going to lose it now shouldn’t have been a big deal.

My surgery had gone well. My ovary and uterus...they took it all. I was done with those parts anyway, my pragmatic self reasoned. The prognosis was good with treatments. How bad could it be? You go, you sit, it drips, you puke. I could handle it. So I would lose my hair. It would grow back. Besides, there were those stories I’d heard about so-and-so whose hair grew back curly, or red, or thick. Maybe I’d trade up. At this point I even had this morbid sense of curiosity about the whole experience. I bought some fun hats and beautiful scarves. Without hair, it could be the first time I didn’t look dumb in a hat.

The treatment room was small but pleasant and comfortable, except for the unnerving biohazard sign on the door of the room where the drugs were kept. I had a port on the right side of my chest, like my own personal outlet to get plugged in for treatment. Once the IV began, the nurses took time to talk about expectations and side effects. They were caring and straightforward; no question was stupid. As the IV dripped into my body, they explained that each treatment would get progressively more difficult. Treatments were to be given every three weeks...my hair would be gone by my next treatment.

After a few days of nausea and bone pain, I began looking for evidence of hair loss. For about five days, my hair was the best behaved it had ever been. My hairdresser had suggested that when the time got close and I was ready, she would come and shave it off. That plan gave me a sense of purpose and control. Every morning I found a few more hairs in my brush and my eyebrows began to seem thinner, not that that was a bad thing.

On day fifteen, a cool February morning, I backed into the shower and felt the warm liquid envelope my body like a cocoon. Eyes closed, I began to shampoo my hair like any other day. It began to come out in clumps in my hands. My hair began sliding down my body, dead hair slithering down my arms, between my breasts, down my thighs - clinging to my feet like a desperate beggar as it circled the drain. I thought I would be ready for that moment. What a miscalculation. My stoic confidence and pragmatic reasoning was being washed down the drain with my unsolicited tears and hair...my thin, uncooperative, demanding, silky, beautiful hair. It was all vanishing, and not just from my head...eyebrow hair, arm hair, leg hair, pubic hair...falling like casualties on a battlefield. My hands and arms instinctively covered my wet head and the few stubborn patches of hair that remained.

My husband found me naked, wrapped in a towel weeping on the toilet seat. He moved slowly and carefully into this new experience. With a strong hand on my shoulder he volunteered softly “I can take it off for you.” The word “please” spilled from my lips. Without another word, he quickly and quietly converted the toilet seat into a barber chair, draping it with towels. He got out the electric trimmers and gently held my shoulders while I lowered myself back onto the converted toilet, every part of my body quivering. I closed my eyes to the hum of the clippers and dropped my chin to surrender to the shearing. It took only moments. When he finished, he tenderly cupped my face in his gentle hands, bent down and softly kissed my bald head. “You look beautiful,” he whispered. Tears slid down both of our cheeks.

The reflection in the mirror was a stranger to me. I felt like an alien in a sci-fi movie. How naïve I’d been. There was no controlling this. My cavalier attitude was instantly replaced by the fear I’d avoided looking at for months. Frozen to the spot, vulnerable and grieving, I now knew what everyone would soon know when I stepped out into the day, head covered...that morning I became a cancer patient.

A Crescendo

Leon Jiang New York University

In the face of injustice, our voices turn to silence
Oppressed whispers, bound in chains
Our hearts rage on with quiet defiance.

A million minds plotting, driven by vengeance
Yet quiet we must remain.
In the face of injustice, our voices turn to silence.

Hope, hand in hand with patience
Enables us to endure this pain.
Our hearts rage on with quiet defiance

Until we band together in secret alliance
With nothing to lose and all to gain.
In the face of injustice, our voices turn to silence.

Hubris blinds them to impending violence.
No longer can we suppress our disdain -
Our hearts rage on with quiet defiance.

In unity, we find confidence,
Our spirits burn with an eternal flame.
In the face of injustice, our voices turn to silence.
Our hearts rage on with quiet defiance.

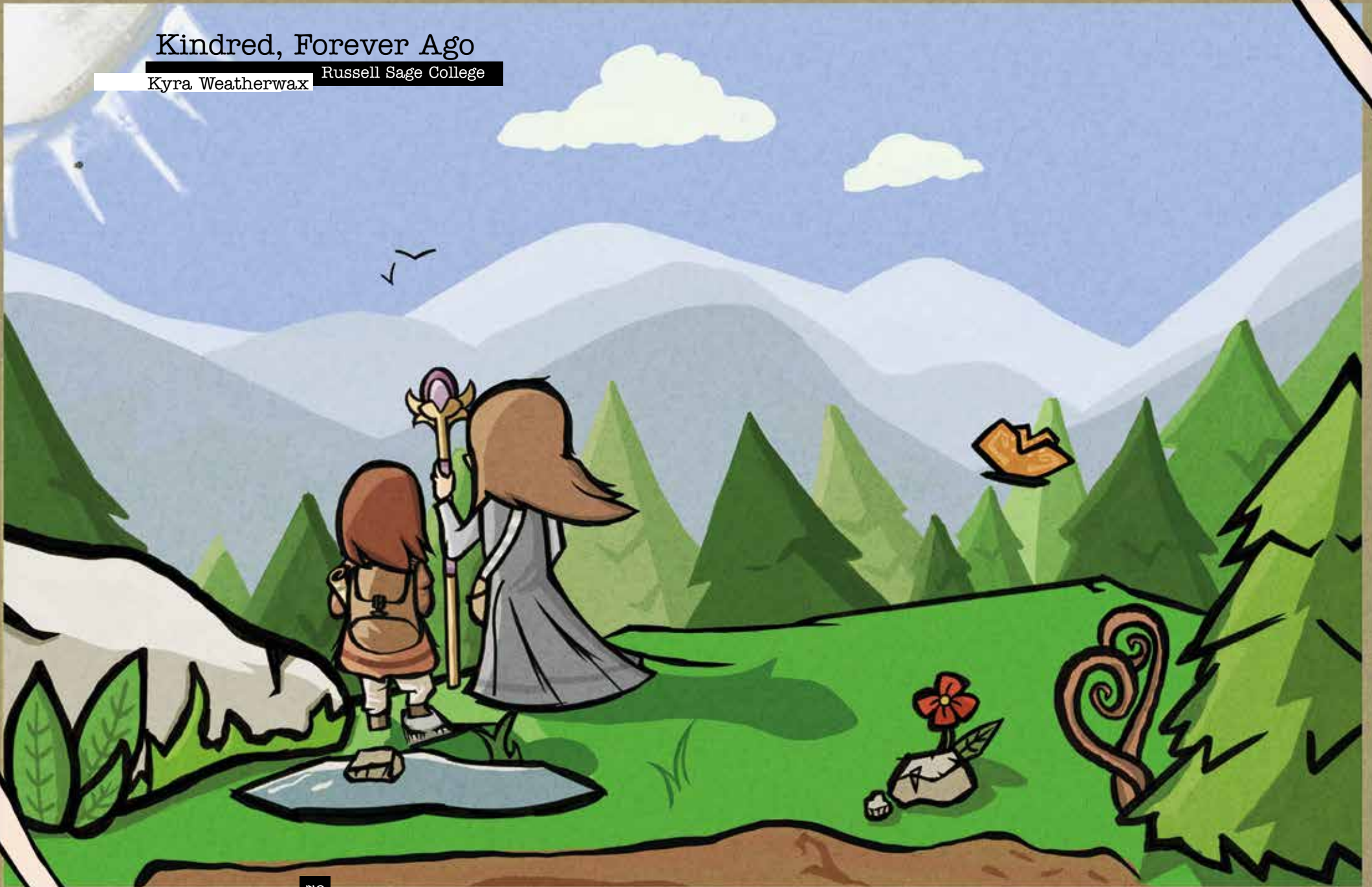
NEK-A

Maverick Cioffi Russell Sage College



Kindred, Forever Ago

Kyra Weatherwax Russell Sage College



Collage

Magnolia Allen **NewVisions**



Scan this QR code to watch this piece...

“

When tasked with the objective to create a piece that fully encapsulates all that makes up who I am, I knew I had to start with my childhood. This piece pays homage to the blissful naiveness that lingers in every past memory. This video is created from over 100 still frames of multiple childhood videos, printed and collaged together one by one to create a coherent video. Although a tedious and time consuming task, it gave me much fulfillment being able to capture such important moments in an art piece that I can have forever.

”

80

MIXED MEDIA

The End...?

Bridelle Toumani **Russell Sage College**

It was early and swelteringly hot when it hit me like a bag of bricks. The five phases of grief zipped through my head, and I didn't know which one to choose. The news that I had been waiting for was in front of me, in large bold print, as if it was insisting that it is here to stay and that there is nothing I can do to change it. It made sure I knew it was a mark that would linger; screamed that I was unredeemable.

Breaths became harder to release. I've had inklings in the past that I may suffer from anxiety, but breathing had never been a problem before. *Why was it now?* Hands laid on my back, but I'm not sure if they were to help with breathing or for comfort.

I walked up to my room and lay in bed for hours. I fell asleep- or at least did my very best to. Any sort of resistance failed and tears fell. That day, the sun rose, the sun set, night settled in, and I still couldn't stop the tears from rolling down my cheeks. Small talk and desperate chatter from the ones I loved were white noise to the voices screaming in my head. *What am I going to do now? How can I...? Where did I go wrong? Will things be alright? Why did I put myself through this? Why did I sign myself up to do this again? Can I just disappear forever?*

I hoped they wouldn't have, but those bricks sank me down to rock bottom.

I believe it was three days of self-inflicted punishment. Of *no eating*. My reasoning behind it was that *my energy and effort seemingly aren't worthwhile so there is no need for it*. Sunlight was fragmented by my window screen and forced my eyelids to open those mornings after. Movement couldn't be coerced, not by anything. Afternoon would creep in, and I would know that this is ridiculous; I would tell myself that I have to get over it and get a move on, that I have to be productive but there was no use. I visualized my legs swinging to the left side of the bed, shifting my weight so that I could stand and walk somewhere, anywhere. I just couldn't do it. All I could do was lounge and become the poster melancholy person in everyone's lives. And after a while of willpower not being enough and no mythical person coming to rescue me, I figured that I deserved it.

My family really did try to help. In the early stages of my mourning, my sisters took me out to a nice restaurant and insisted that the bill was on them and to enjoy myself. However, it was during the three-day fast of guilt, so their requests were futile. The drive back with the

81

MEMOIR

wind in my hair and sights of nature made things better for a while, it made me think that my days could be more than just wet cheeks on pillows. I arrived back home with a whiff of optimism. I reached for a beloved book on my bedroom floor when a memento of the past became eye-level with me. The whiff blew away and was replaced by gray smoke and rolling thunder. It came flooding back — memories of good times and good people who had faith in me; moments spent on this one aspiration, my passionate nights of little sleep and lots of dreaming, the excitement, my anticipation, my innocence, how what I did was a waste. I fell to my knees, closed my eyes and wept. I don't remember when I opened them back up again.

Time went on without any avail to the mental turmoil in my brain. I was stuck in every regard and my past was quicksand. By the final week of summer, I resented the universe for not giving me enough time to mend, given my return back to school and my concerned mother wanting something to change. I unfortunately couldn't give her that.

FALL

My second nightmare inevitably happened: School had started up. I dreaded it. Every weekday morning, I woke up with dread. It was as if the universe truly hated me; I was surrounded by people who were either ignorant, vain, uber-competitive or superficial. Nothing felt real; there was nothing to look forward to.

One particular topic ran up and down my brain all day long. One particular fixation. One particular truth I couldn't bring myself to accept. It was what I knew I had to avoid like the plague, or I would just break down.

I can't bring it up. It can't be mentioned. Nothing related to it can be talked about. I, of course, didn't have a back-up plan in case it was brought up.

Everything in my life was just fragmented. Everything in my life was so gray. Physically, the walls, the people and hallways — the colors became so muted overnight. The weather cooled, but internally, I was hot. I was suffocating. And it didn't help that every single person in my life either wanted or needed something from me.

Maybe I need help.

But there were some moments that were gleaming and even elicited a smile!

I don't need help!

For the first time in months, I found myself making a joke. Two warm sets of eyes were on me and their lips were curled into a smile. It was before the punchline when I caught a ghost of my past making a sharp turn around the corner. And just like that, all the wind got knocked out of me. My stomach gnarled, and the thought of throwing up began to feel very relevant.

The warm eyes shifted to concern, but I brushed it off and finished the joke, happy to be of service. They chuckled, and I stalked towards the opposite end of the hallway, clutching my stomach while breathing in and out rapidly.

I got sucked back in.

Assignments started to pile up, and no amount of money could have made me care about them. Doing them would make me a puppet: skilled but devoid of any true feelings or thoughts behind the action. In my dreams, I began to reminisce about the time when I was bright-eyed and optimistic, when I was eager to engage and cared so much about what I submitted.

You know now the danger in that, the back of my head whispered.

There wasn't any opposing voice in response.

Every time I desired for the papers to rise and online tasks to collect, my productivity kicked into overdrive, and they were submitted before deadlines. Old habits apparently die hard. They received overwhelmingly positive feedback. I resented it; I had turned into a puppet.

There was really no joy in living with a mindset like this. I was still in denial about my mental decline, holding on to the idea of a mentality-transplant with a snap of a finger. In hindsight, that was... quite a fallacy.

One Friday afternoon, I came back home after another annoying day of school and decided to sit in front of my television, hoping to watch something interesting. The moment I sat down, it was like something took hold of me. I took a big breath out and continued to sit. There were movements and varying colors from the TV set, the house was slightly cold, and my siblings may have had late night plans, and I continued to sit. There wasn't a thing in my mind- a show capturing my attention, a book, a phone screen — I continued to sit. Still, in the same position. It was eerily silent for a while. I checked my oven clock at one point, and in a bright green tint, it read 5:19 AM. The morning room window displayed early sights of dawn.

I stayed up for a full 24 hours.

"Maybe I am not well," I admitted aloud with no one else around.



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rest of this piece...

Step into the Light

Michael Groissl Russell Sage College



84

PHOTOGRAPHY

Left Behind

Marleigh Diggins Russell Sage College

She left me.
Not really, God called her home.
But that means he left me behind,
Without her.

By happenstance,
We shared the same initials.
Both older daughters.
Both October babies, just 65 years apart.

I chase after the sun,
Feeling the wind in my hair,
Searching to find a hint of her
within the colorful sky.

Tonight I cried at the sunset,
Because it, too, left me,
This particular one,
Never to be seen again.

Just like her.

85

POETRY

What's Buried Isn't Mine to Dig

Kyra Burris
Russell Sage College

"What's buried isn't mine to dig."

It's rusted and freckled with burgundy blots—scratched with sleepless nights from you can't remember what.

Presently, just as the day had left you—your head is left only with memories there isn't,

Not even the greatest tools could pull your past from that cavernous mine.

You previously pleaded to scrub it anew— but resigned the cold scythe into a permanent soiled state, just as your heart had wanted to.

You mutter curses under your breath, secrets and hatchets buried.

Bodies spewn like ragdolls, after years, they lay patient in bury,

At least, in all the terror— no one has begged to find a shovel, their memory, and dig.

In the shrieking sun's slivered rays, through smog and ash, you had come to,

Planes circling your dotted eyes, a chorus of "whys" and "whats,"

Mothers crying over the children, lost to time, which they'd once called "mine."

Decades now gone— those who flounder across the upheld ruins, their right is not.

In your stomach, next to the pit of your memories, I was buried.

I screamed in my first moments— as luck would have it, your reaping came in twos.

With every violent verbal caress, with every gory image replacing the illustrated fairytale it isn't—

You never cared to ask me if I wanted, or what.

You may have silently shoveled down your past, but in me you eagerly dared to dig.

Memories pricking my brain, the twin flames scorching the unwanted face of mine.

You use old knives to cut new scars, too,

So fresh on the surface, but pry deeper— ancient wounds beg to say it isn't.

March on with your decades-long funeral, keep your details far buried,

I suppose by then I'd found the courage to find your spot and dig,

In me it will thrash until all comes to pass— then what?

The foreign pain of yours wrestles in my stomach, but I can't help but notice that your eyes sink like mine.

Each secret you laid, finally lays with the slim medley of mine,

And it's sad but true, what you never came to terms to:

Come Sunday morning, you'll find out each answer to all your "what's,"

You'll sob and you'll plead for a future that isn't,

And for the last moments of my carbon-copy life, what's buried is only yours to dig—

When your brittle bones finally pick up the shovel, you'll find me instead buried.

My body spewn like a baby doll, after years, I now lie patient in bury,

A mother wailing over her child, lost to time, which she'd once called "mine,"

And yet, in all the terror— you have no effort to find a shovel, your new memories, and dig.

In the shrieking sun's slivered rays, through dirt and tears, you had come to,

Decades gone, to stake your wounded claim on my demolished grave, the right still is not,

Planes circling your dotted eyes, a chorus of "whys..." and "whats..."

Predecessors align themselves in interlinked graves— I'll tell them what. Seize the shovel before they begin to drown themselves in bury.

Before you split them in two, befriend them with old demons there isn't— their future only dies with mine.

Maybe... just maybe you could save them, as you could have saved me too? But I know, you'll only leave them grumbling, groveling, grieving, "What's buried isn't mine to dig."



"What's buried isn't mine to dig."

My son, come closer to me
And take my hand so I remember your touch
My son, come sit with me
And lean on my shoulder,
I'll remember your scent, my son

Take me to the house
Where I raised you but never stopped to see you
Ooohhh
Take me to a place where I've never been before
And share all its glory with me

'Cus I'm going to a better place
Away from all this hate
To a better place
But I wanna hold you for just ten seconds more
That's all I'm asking for
But no
I have to let go

My son, you've taken me so far
You've healed all my scars
And you're the best thing that ever happened to me
My son, sing to me again
And melt my heart one last time
Ooohhh

Take me to the places where these photos came to life
But I failed to recognize them
Show me how to live free and wild
For the little while that I have left

'Cus I'm going to a better place
Away from all this hate
To a better place
But I wanna hold you for just ten seconds more
That's all I'm asking for but no,
I have to let go

So I can't see you
Now I can't hear you
I just wanna feel you
I'm soaring past the stars and through the galaxy
I just wanna slow down
I don't wanna say goodbye
For the last time



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Crawling Out of There

Ash Zimmerman **New Visions**



Thomas Griffin: The Hero

Angie Smith Russell Sage College

Thomas stands in front of a wall of plaques – white, rectangular tiles with blue writing, all aligned in neat, horizontal rows. How he got here, and when he got here, he can't remember – nor can he remember where 'here' ... is. He's never seen this place before. At least, he thinks he hasn't.

Beside him, he's suddenly noticed, stands his friend clad in burnt-up clothing. What a strange ensemble, he thinks, until he looks down at his own garb, noticing the same singe.

His friend points up at a plaque – "Nice work, mate."

His gaze moves to the item being pointed at.

"I mean, well done indeed!" His friend claps slowly. "What a faff! Here we are... a couple of mates now just as see-through as the sugar we made." And he laughs, hysterically.

Thomas turns his eyes towards him, bemusement clear on his mouth. "Are you finished?"

The laughter stops.

"Perhaps there's something else you want to say to me?" Thomas is beginning to feel unappreciated.

"Um... glad to see ya? How've you been? What shall we do with our eternity together?" His friend's exasperation hovers like humidity.

Thomas moves in closer to inspect the plaque, to read the fine print. "Oh!"

His friend steps in too, amplifying his voice. "Let's see: 'Thomas Griffin – Fitters Labourer April 12, 1899 in a boiler explosion at a Battersea sugar refinery, was fatally scalded in returning to search for his mate.' Thank you? Thank you so much for... not saving me? For joining me in death? For being so dumb that you got yourself killed doing absolutely nothing at all for me?"

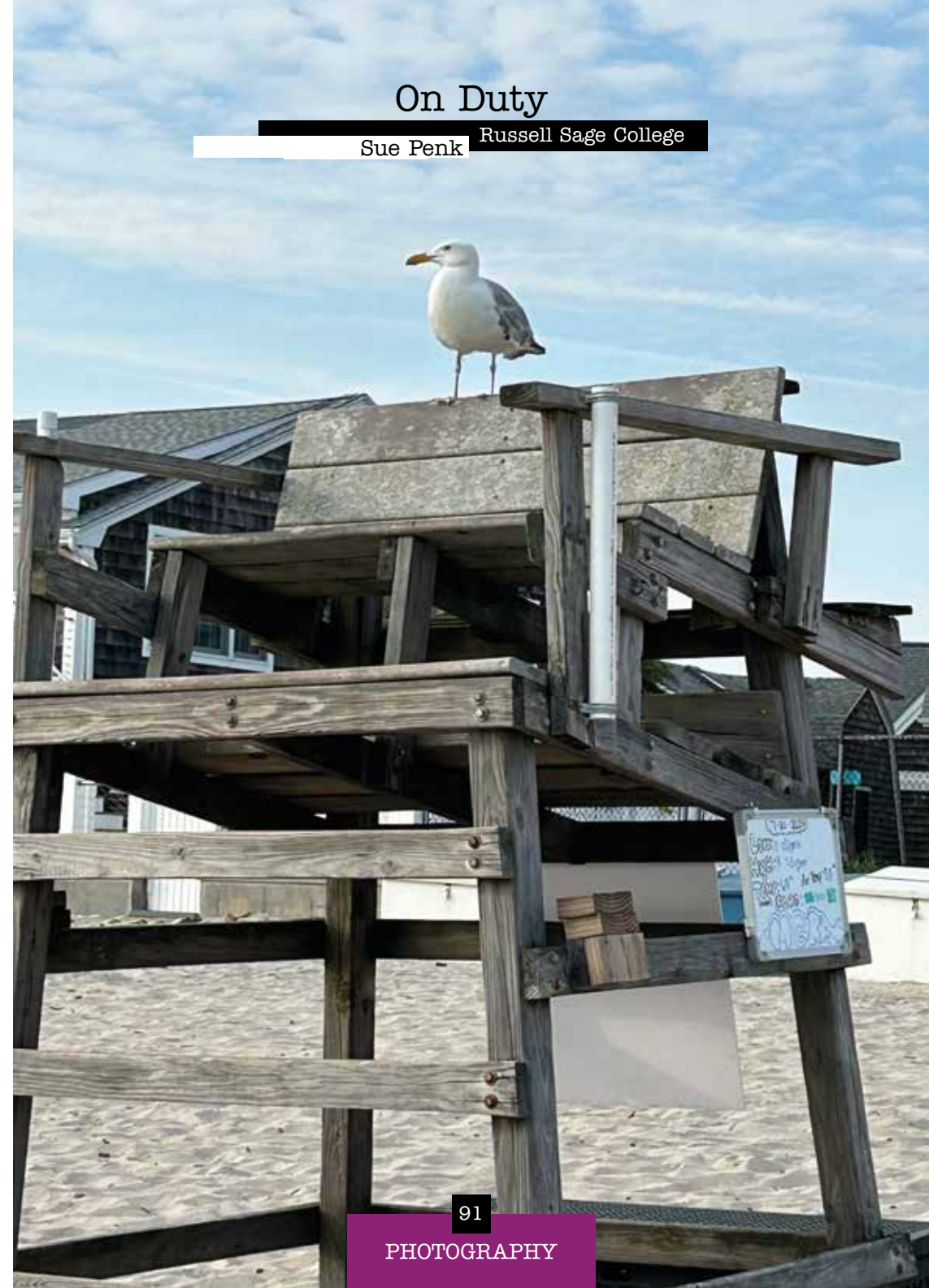
A strange silence envelopes them both.

The men now face the plaque, side by side. Thomas' disappointment is palpable. So too is his friend's, who suddenly gasps: "Why isn't my name on this plaque?!"

Inspired by G.F. Watts Memorial to Heroic Self Sacrifice in Postman's Park, London, UK

On Duty

Sue Penk Russell Sage College



The Middle Ground in 2024

Graziella Hartman **New Visions**

Donald Trump won the election. To be completely honest, it hasn't fully hit yet. I'm sure it will hit when he begins his work unraveling our country. Last night (11/5/2024), I had a very healthy discussion with a friend of mine (17, male). He and I don't fully agree politically, but one key quality that allowed us to have a constructive conversation was our mutual agreement that it's okay to disagree. As a male, he had his own views on abortion and the morals of it, though he regularly reiterated that he understands where other people are coming from. He actively listened to my input on the topic. In the end, we agreed the bottom line is that democracy is supposed to represent the basic right to choose.

The question that prompted the writing of this essay was: "do you have feelings about today?" In short, yes. I have feelings about the fact that Trump is a convicted felon who isn't able to vote, but is still somehow able to run for and win a presidential election. I have feelings about the fact that up until a few months ago, the democratic candidate was incapable of completing a thought without falling asleep. I have feelings about how some of the most influential people have managed to slip through the cracks in their own values, dragging the masses with them. I have thoughts about the possibility that my rights and the rights of other women and queer people are in severe danger. I have feelings about the

idea that the majority of my family voted in favor of those rights being stripped away. I have many, many feelings about how so many Americans claim they're in favor of democracy while actively endorsing the means of ending it. All of this, in the name of democracy. The truth is, what I see is division being driven further between the red and blue of our country, all in the name of liberty and, somehow, justice. I guess we are free to be divided, but what's concerning is that our leaders seek to widen that gap rather than close it.

Constructive conversations between people who disagree are few and far between these days. It breaks my heart, quite frankly. So yes, I have feelings about today. I'm not scared yet, but that's the thing about having the leader of your country threaten your human rights under a veil of equality and progression; I could very well become scared. If this had happened four years ago, I would be a lot more scared, had I not had that sense of security in the back of my mind that if I were to become pregnant with a grown man's child as a 14 year old girl, I could still have a chance at completing my life on my terms. Unfortunately, millions of women are not so lucky.

One of the main arguments my friend mentioned in our conversation was that women shouldn't resort to taking the easy way out instead of facing the consequences

of their own "stupidity." He mentioned a woman he heard of who got a clothes hanger tattoo every time she got an abortion. To that, I replied: that is one woman who pro-lifers choose to represent the whole of the concept. They never choose to address the women who are assaulted, who are not financially or mentally stable enough to support a child, or who are not able to provide a healthy, stable life for that child. These people fail to address the cost of childcare, the lack of resources in the foster system, or the fact that on average, women still make only about 84% of the income of a man doing the same work. They choose only to focus on one example that validates their beliefs, overlooking the millions of women who practice their rights out of necessity. There is also the age-old issue of men not becoming fathers despite their willing contribution to make women into mothers. A man can wipe it off and walk away, all the while shaming the woman for her "irresponsibility." While I don't think my friend was able to fully understand, he was an active listener and there wasn't one bit of disrespect between us.

When it comes to speaking about politics, I tend to stand on the middle ground between far left and right. I am a strong advocate for upholding democracy in its most basic sense: people are entitled to the right to choose. For me, this means that regardless of your opinion, you don't have the right to strip

someone else of their freedom to express their own. This goes for both parties and their affiliates. No extreme is better than the other.

I guess to come to some sort of conclusion, I believe that our country has never truly put its foundational ideals into full practice. The gap not only between opposite political views, but also in societal tradition vs. progression, economic equality, and systemic isolation from other countries, is ever-growing and excuses only continue to be made in place of real change. I don't think even the first female president could change that. I think that with power comes corruption, no matter who you are or what form of government you influence. And I think most people only understand the surface of any problem bigger than their immediate surroundings. I think I can't blame them as I am in that majority. I think I'm disappointed and drained. I think I feel that today is just another day and tomorrow will be too. And I know that's all I can carry right now.

The (Model) UN at Wartime

Leon Jiang **New York University**

It might surprise you just how diverse our childhood experiences can be. While two Christmases might sound appealing to you (double the presents!), for years it reminded me of the conflict that had torn my family apart. My early childhood is punctuated by the deterioration of a marriage.

I have a distinct memory of sitting in my mum's lap the last year my parents were together, burying my head into her shoulders. All around me were the resonating sounds of the phone smashing against the hardwood floor, its fragile plastic casing breaking, spilling out the battery from within. You see, my dad had thrown this grenade in a fit of rage amidst their argument.

I also remember my grandparents banging on the locked door, pleading with my parents to stop fighting, to let me out.

This was my earliest experience of true conflict, one that seemed to revolve specifically around me. With hindsight, I can see that they each had their own motivations, striving to do what they believed was best for me. My mother was determined to move me to Australia, while my father was adamant about me staying in China.

When two stubborn, strong-willed individuals clash, not even the taboo nature of divorce can halt their determination. Over five long years, a relentless battle for custody over me raged. Neither side was willing to yield – not even a temporary ceasefire could be agreed upon.

Like the UN negotiating between warring nations, I attempted to play a role of diplomacy in their deepening struggle. When their argument resurfaced, I would work behind the scenes to smooth the resultant wounds. I'd express positive sentiments about each to the other, figuring (perhaps naively) that by reminding them of each other's good, they might stop this senseless battle of wills.

Over the war-torn years, I endeavored to help them reach a peaceful resolution where they could coexist happily. To strengthen my efforts, I solicited the support of my grandparents who joined forces with me to mend the fences, presenting a united front.

Ironically, my parents' resultant formal separation would eventually lead to their reconnection with them both wanting what's best for me. This showed me that peace is best sought, and nurtured, on common ground. Nonetheless, time also played a significant role.



Twelve years since my parents' divorce, and not only have their temperaments changed, but so too has their interaction with each other. Consequently, during the holidays, my mother and I now visit my dad in China, where we all live under the same roof, coexisting happily. In fact, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there had never been any conflict between them.

As my parents have embarked on individual journeys of self-improvement, their resultant growth has had a profound impact on my relationship with them. Previously, I felt like I was standing in no-man's land, afraid to choose a side, but equally afraid not to.

As they have worked on bettering themselves, their interactions with those around them have also seen positive shifts. What began as an effort to repair their relationship has rippled outward, leading to the improvement of countless others.

This gives me hope that despite the conflicts raging across the world, through time and the efforts akin to those of the real UN, there might just be a day where we can all live happily under one big metaphorical roof.

The journey towards peace, whether on a global scale or within the intimate confines of my own home, demands courage, understanding, and compromise. Just as nations should strive for peaceful resolutions to conflicts, individuals too can pursue harmony in the midst of separation. Overcoming their differences for a peaceful divorce, my parents chose mutual respect, empathy, and a commitment to minimizing harm, offering a path forward that prioritizes healing over hurt, collaboration over contention.

Peace is fragile.

In embracing the principles of an amicable divorce, we demonstrate our capacity for growth, resilience, and the profound ability to foster harmony, even in months or years of pain. Like my parents, let us all choose peace, not as a fleeting ideal, but as a steadfast commitment to building a better, more compassionate world, one relationship at a time.

International Student Creative Writing Competition

We are proud to introduce this year's International Student Creative Writing Competition produced in collaboration with Aralia Education. This is the third year in which we have engaged with this cohort of young people, and we couldn't have enjoyed reviewing their work more! We received 100 submissions from middle and high schoolers studying in America, Canada and China. Of those works, 11 were accepted for print publication in our magazine. This includes our 1st place winner, Haoyuan Li, whose poem: *Is This America?* was unanimously accepted by our editors as a piece of writing that stood out for its timely and powerful content.

The decisions for publication were incredibly difficult as all of the writing submitted reflected careful intention, control and originality. This is why we have long listed a further set of 23 writings on our blog. We also received a handful of artworks, and are excited to publish some of those online as well. Please visit www.creativity-unleashed.org to enjoy these pieces.

Enjoy what these young voices have to say!

For further information about Aralia Education, visit www.aralia.com.



Is This America?

Haoyuan Li

Pinewood School

When I walked into the classroom,
head bowed long past a throng of people,
I saw expectant faces turn in curiosity,
wonder and (possibly) disdain.

I stood like a tree rooted to packed dirt,
or a soldier, rigid at attention,
mouth dry and muscles numb.
I felt myself an intruder:
a bear inside a honeycomb,
a fly in a spiderweb. Trapped.

I scanned the faces of every student,
searching for a savior, but
each turned away to solidify
my isolation. Far from home.
An interloper despite some shared Asian skin.

Is this America?
With classrooms cruel and (seemingly) torturous?
Where questioning, calculating eyes probe?

My hands twitched,
fingers clawing into my palms.
Break the ice – a faint voice muttered.
But my tongue clung willfully
to the floor of my mouth until a
tentative "Hi" squeaked from my parted lips.

A heavy silence followed, that
launched an avalanche.

When a woman entered the classroom,
 door swinging emphatically,
 she gazed at me,
 like a person regarding a lost puppy, and
 gestured to an empty desk.
 "You must be the new student."
 "H. H~~~Haoooo Yuaaan~~?"

I gulped –
 how do I explain my complicated Chinese name?
 "Call me Jacob."

A wildfire spread in my body
 and my voice went mute again.

Is this America?
 Where a once talkative, funny boy
 stands dumbstruck by lightning.
 Where a name, once a symbolize for
 a big heart like the Sun, of far-reaching aspirations,
 is reduced to an incoherent mess?

I forced my jaw open,
 put on a charismatic, enchanting smile,
 made eye contact with "Ms. Teacher,"
 and stepped forward into dismal failure.

Syllables tumbled from my mouth
 to form a pitiful "good morning" that
 reverberated through the classroom.
 Every object amplified its volume.
 The words sounded more German or Russian than English.
 Ms. Teacher seemed to think so too.

"Class," she dripped.
 "Let's not forget that Haoooo yuaaen~~
 just moved here from China.
 English is his second language."

With sagging shoulders and resigned defeat,
 I sat where she told me to,
 knowing that nerves had dug my grave.
 My English tongue was strong –
 yet my voice had betrayed me.

Class crawled on.
 The buzzing, whispering voice of my peers pierced
 even harder through my heart.
 And when my voice finally flowed
 for Ms. Teacher in perfect English,
 her tones changed: "You speak great English!"

With a rekindled spirit, I set forth to redeem myself,
 I approached.
 I struck up conversation:
 NBA, NFL, celebrities, books, movies...
 to no avail.

For the rest of the month
 I ate alone and worked alone.
 I walked alone and sat alone.
 For no one wanted to befriend
 the 'non-native' who couldn't
 say "good morning" right.

Is this America?



Look

Alice Wu

Basis International School Shenzhen

In each second
Four of us leave
Two new arrive

In moments of stillness
While we breathe and blink
We become aware
Of so much more

Look up
At the cosmic tapestry
Mirrors of ourselves

Ancient scars of the moon
Marked by red burning liquid
Meandering through

Just like

Blue branches underneath skin
Carved from red fiery liquid
Pumping through

Look up
At the cosmic tapestry
Mirrors of ourselves

Iridescent cloud of filaments
Remnants of destructive life cycles
Illuminating the periphery

Just like

Colorful crisscrosses of brainwaves
Pathways of ideas
Guiding our way

In moments of stillness
While you breathe and blink
Are you now aware
Of so much more

Two new arrive,
Four of us leave,
In each second.

In a Time Before Me, In a World Today

Alvin Su

Benjamin Franklin High School

I Remembrance 緬懷

Monday, June 26th, 2023, Taipei

Accompanied by my father, we landed in Taiwan under a soft, gray sky. The air, thick with the smell of rain, clung to our clothes as if it too remembered things better left forgotten.

The old days are woven in like a piece of brocade with faded patches here and there, certain memories now unclear and worn out. As I stood, the wind whispered through the willow trees like a gentle lullaby from mother nature. At the same time, my father's silhouette cast a long shadow against the vibrant green hills.

The June heat in Taiwan felt particularly stifling. Walking through the dimly lit stairwell of the columbarium, I glanced around and saw rows of urn niches quietly displayed, their faded numbers revealed from a ray of sunlight that pierced the solemn darkness through one of the few dirtied and tiny windows.

"You know," my father's voice was soft yet stern, "I never met him. He died before I was born. But I heard stories about him my whole life. It's a little strange, isn't it? To feel connected to someone you never knew."

I nodded, even though I couldn't understand. I was aware that my father carried these passed-down memories, stories told by older relatives, fragments of a man's life reduced to anecdotes. But that's just it - he carried them. Not me. Yet in his reverie, it felt inappropriate to do anything but agree.

The columbarium was quiet, almost eerily so. Rows upon rows of niches stretched out before us, each one identical to the last. The space felt impersonal, as though history had been packed away into these small, uniform compartments, with nothing to differentiate one life from another. We ambled through, my father checking the numbers against a slip of paper in his hand. When we reached the niche that held his ashes, I was struck by its

蘇耀光

生於民國14年3月29日

終於民國48年1月24日

1084

No photo. No inscription - just a name, birth and death dates, and a serial number. 1084. 1084. I wondered how many others there were – how many lost lives had been turned into just a few digits.

It felt deeply unsettling. This man, my great uncle, YaoGuang, whose life had been so involved with my family's history, was now reduced to a few, bare details. With no image to remember him by, time had wiped him away completely, leaving only this faint remnant of his existence in a land both familiar and foreign.

I knelt beside the niche, carefully unfolding a handkerchief in my hand. The air, mixed with the lingering scent of stale dust, felt thick and oppressive, wrapping around us in the stillness. As I gently wiped away the thin layer of grime from the cold stone surface, I could sense the weight of time etched into the niche.

My father stood solemnly, his hands tightly clasped in front of him, his eyes fixed and unwavering as he stared at the compartment holding my great uncle's ashes. Here rested the remains of someone more myth than man, a distant figure who had been in battles that belonged to a war I could scarcely fathom, fought in a time I could never touch.

Now, here we were - paying respects to a man I never met, whose life ended quietly, like so many others. My father bowed three times, murmuring soft words in Mandarin - regret, respect, sorrow. I stood beside him, uncertain of how to mourn.

I imagined my great uncle wandering through those first days in Taiwan, disoriented, unsure of what would come next. The world he had known had vanished, only to be replaced by uncertainty and exile. He had no family with him, no way of returning home.

In the end, Taiwan became his final resting place, even if it never became his home.

II Past - 往事

Saturday, July 1st, 2023, Beijing

We returned to my grandparents' hometown, where the scenes of Taiwan positioned themselves comfortably within the frames of my current memory. When my father stood before my grandfather, the heaviness of a photograph cradled in his hands, there was a moment of pause before he passed over to him the picture of my great uncle's urn.

My grandfather inhaled deeply from his cigarette, the smoke curling like ghosts of the past. He had a pensive expression as he held the photograph, and his far away gaze went right through that image, indicating that he was back in that day in 1949, the last day he ever saw his older brother.

"I still hear him sometimes... calling me." My grandfather's words drifted off, and I could see his eyes cloud with the burden of recollection. He paused, and then, as if the imprint of the past had taken hold of him, he began to recount that episode.

"Brother... Brother..." YaoGuang's voice rose in urgency, piercing the stillness of the moment. It was only after the younger man finally responded, "I heard you," that YaoGuang spoke again. His words, heavy with finality: "Brother, I'm going to Taiwan and will be back soon. I just wanted to say goodbye... You must take care of our family for me."

In 1949, as the Chinese Civil War reached its climax, the Nationalist government, led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT), faced defeat by the Communist forces under Mao Zedong. With the mainland falling under Communist control, the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan, accompanied by an estimated 1.2 million soldiers, government officials, and civilians. Taiwan, which had only recently been returned to Chinese rule after Japanese occupation, became the last stronghold for the Republic of China. The Nationalists hoped to regroup and eventually retake the mainland, but their exile marked the beginning of a long and tense standoff with the People's Republic of China.

YaoGuang, a lieutenant, was among them. He was 24. I pictured him in fragments - a young man, perhaps like the younger pictures of my grandfather, but more worn, more beaten by the world.

My family said he was filled with hope during those turbulent times, a flicker of optimism amid the chaos. They say he believed in the possibility of returning home one day, holding on to a dream that the conflicts would eventually cease and peace would prevail.

However, in a world dominated by hate and violence, it is, and always will be, hard for hope to manifest into reality.

Tuesday, December 22nd, 1987, Tianjin

The chill lingered thick all around, and the dust clung to the walls of the aging buildings. An old man knocked at the door, carrying news like weights on his shoulders. My grandfather's heart stirred as if after all these decades, the silence would finally be broken. There had been fleeting rumors, but nothing certain. And now, the truth stood before him, delivered in a simple breath: your brother died in 1959.

The years that stretched between them fell away like dry leaves in a windstorm, leaving behind only the melancholy reality. My grandfather's hope slipped through his fingers like water through a broken dam, rushing away before he could ever hope to hold onto it. This was the brother who had stood with him in 1949, promising him, vowing to him that he would return. My grandfather had upheld his part of the deal, taking care of their family, but my great uncle had not. And now that voice was gone forever, eternally trapped at the age of 34.

And just like that, a blade had cut through the last few threads of memory, severing the bond that had stretched across time and place. All those sleepless nights, all that waiting, the unspoken questions - they had led to this single moment, this bitter end. The man who had once called out to him, who talked with optimism, perhaps in a last ditch effort to assuage his own doubts, had left this world long ago, and only now had the truth come to light.

My grandfather sat down slowly, his hands clenched tight, fighting to hold back the flood of grief. "I should have known," he whispered, his voice trembling.

"All these years without a word... he must have been gone a long time. But I kept believing, hoping he was still somewhere out there, in Taiwan... that one day, he would come home."



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In Your Pockets

Jaden Lu

Hamilton High School

In first grade, your pockets swelled,
brimming with warmth and sticky treasures—
melted chocolate, soft and half-forgotten,
crumpled napkins holding secrets in sugar-streaked letters,
freshly picked daisies, love sprawled by neon markers.
Sunkissed, my fingers stained with green grass,
intertwined with yours inside pockets,
a little world of summer, a little world of happiness.

By middle school, your pockets thinned,
skinny and bare, weighed by a slim phone,
a capped pen that left faint, blue tattoos.
The swing of the playground a memory,
hands now clenched and damp in your pockets,
a lone cough drop tucked in a crinkled corner.
Pockets for studying, waiting, searching for a signal.

In high school, your pockets sagged with heavier truths—
imperfect origami of folded hopes,
fragile confessions too shy to unfold.
Notecards scribbled with the unspeakable,
crushed cigarette butts, ashes burning your pockets,
burning holes not just in fabric.
These pockets carried shattered responsibilities.

Before you could hold out
your pockets grew empty—
scraps of wrappers, lint from long pauses,
fingers shoved deep into worn fabric like strangers.
Forgotten earbuds lay tangled and cold,
their silence heavier than sound.
Your hands, pale and stilled, feel no warmth now.
If only I had reached in your pockets then;
would you still be here now?

Lament of the Nightingale
Christine Wang

Harker School

Their lips contort; their screams echo in night.
Philomela and Procne, sisters wronged by cruel fate,
their vengeance sought, but never really took flight.

Philomela's silent scream with her tongue slit in dreadful fright,
her still-bloodied hands weave draperies of the rape.
Their lips contort; their screams echo in night.

Procne's tears suppress into quiet whispers of endless plight.
She smiles bright as her son's flesh piles onto gleaming plates.
Their vengeance sought, but never really took flight.

Tereus revels in his might, believing his power eternal and right,
unaware of the horrors soon to confront him, his joy soon to abate.
Their lips contort; their screams echo in night.

They'd been blessed to soar yet not to sing, perhaps out of spite,
Their bodies transformed, yet their souls in purgatory wait.
Their vengeance sought, but never really took flight.

No song can truly heal nor soothe agony that constantly blights,
Nor wings lift their burdens, their hearts heavy with hate.
Their lips contort; their screams echo in night.
Their vengeance sought, but never really took flight.

Inspired by the myth of Philomela and Procne

Cicada Season

Cindy Miao

Holton-Arms School

home within the thick-veined trees, the cicadas sing again.
maybe that is why my father stops the car in the middle of the road

after I laugh and tell him *my teacher called me Judy*
only because we share the same colored skin, but not *really*.

the growl in his voice revs to life *again?* and *again?*
we claw through the dirty fog ahead, but I still don't understand

his anger. like how the sharp-shouldered road signs dictate *40 MPH*
but his red arrow rages past *60*. like how the posters on the metro tunnel jump

with frothing sour spit/yellowed teeth/peeling skin/soggy paper lungs/
but the men in the darkened parking lot still blow smoky rings

from their lips. like *how money can't buy happiness*,
but with every paycheck, his smile reaches terminal station:

this is the last stop on the train. we're at the zoo: please
don't touch the animals. *don't touch me! don't touch me!*

in the sixth grade, a classmate chased me with a cicada shell—
(OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR)—
like how years later, his calloused hand grips mine

tight. *don't make eye contact with the beggars on the street. it'll only make you feel*
worse. like how he drinks outside because *one beer doesn't make you*

an alcoholic, but I found a dozen caps in the trash. like how he drawled,
the trees are so fucking loud tonight, but now I understand

that it was the cicadas. that it was Judy, too, but not the beggars
on the street. that it was the millions of cicadas digging

out from the blanket of heavy earth, their dirt-clogged throats
screaming underneath the weight of song.

Summer Milkweed

Congran (Emily) Yang

Berkshire School

kindergarten, tremella soup // disgusting, like floating fragments of unhatched eggs // I imagined the caterpillars born and pupating and pushed these cocoons away, yet the stern farmer towers and pours them into MY mouth // I threw up right after // another week; another bowl of spawns // the cocoon cracked, welcomed a monarch butterfly churning in MY stomach // I yelled for the clinic // the farmer frowned // her claws clasped ME; her sharp nails cut ME // MY iron chest poured open // YOU WERE LYING, she engraved // wasn't I loud enough? couldn't you hear ME? I welcomed another guest in.

grade four, Singapore trip // the crimson empress commanded dolls patrolling – I peeked from the closet; a ponytail doll gestured to ME to stay quiet // empress roared, exhaling fire; MY buddy dolls were all burned // empress sniffed my scent, her face twisted // MY heart stopped pulsing // I joined the dolls and supplicated // the crimson claws seized MY shoulders, reshaped ME to a flying flag – chief criminal // I denied // she opened her mouth wider and wider into an abyss // her tongue delineated the words left by the farmer, hissing: YOU WERE PRETENDING // wasn't I loud enough? couldn't you hear ME? The heat melted ME.

grade nine, home feast // stuffed after the fifth dumpling // the pink peach persuaded ME to have more // I refused, but still reached for the sixth // he urged ME again // I smiled and declined; politeness I offered to MY elder // ai-ya, he smacked his lips // MY rage suppressed, until he put a dumpling in MY bowl; butterflies broke out of MY belly // dolls shrieking in MY ears, dumplings shrinking MY stomach // I pushed MY bowl away, slammed the door // I waited for comfort, but the pink peach's voice pierced through the wall: YOU DISRESPECTED // wasn't I loud enough? couldn't you hear ME?

of course – both were true // you are a child seeking recognition; you are a child ignoring signs; you want to be a child — so I am to be an adult...

Bittersweet Tastes That Linger

Violet Yan

Langley High School

Such a fond lollipop-memory
Childhood's beginnings all gummy drops
Life sweet in its sugar packet
A fairytale of possibility, of endless time

Childhood's beginnings all gummy drops
Before years march on to adolescence
So that we wish for a return to a
Life sweet in its sugar packet

Before years march on to adolescence
Barefoot dancing on shag carpet
So that we wish for a return to
Stress not enshrouding our shoulders

Barefoot dancing on shag carpet
All replaced with panicked worries
Stress not enshrouding our shoulders
As we fret about straight As

All replaced with panicked worries
Thinking too far ahead
As we fret about straight As
We agonize about the Future

Thinking too far ahead
Somehow we must dig out lollipop-memories
We agonize about the Future
But we must find our journey's joy

Somehow we must dig out lollipop-memories
Holding onto them to remind us of our purpose
But we must find our journey's joy
So we clutch onto a fading glimpse of

Such a fond lollipop-memory...

Uncontrollable Shadow

Alex Ziqi Teng

St. Andrew's College

I stand on the concrete ledge,
eyes locked on a radiant beam,
riding his bike like a devil in Hades

Carefree
Giggling
Sparkling

I stand and watch him pedal,
passing the void between two cars
unknowing the peril approaching

Imminent
Threatening
Ominous

Pedaling onwards, blind to the
on his right.

I scream, yell, but it feels that I'm
taped and chained,

because

my beam rejects the light.
Hearing the plea,
feeling the tone
but cannot

nightmare

understand

my voice

Dark
Dire
Dim

I wish that my seed
could grow and

blossom

All noise blurs out,
sight gets blurry,
what's left is
the silent echo
of a

boom.

My head fogs,
the screeching of tires,
the taking of my growing

flower.

into a colorful,
red rose,
without the deadly,
careless insects
that take the

life

from my flower.

All For Greater Peace and Stability

Andy Kong Weiyan

Culver Academies

President Stonebridge's Global Tour Secures \$32.5 Billion in Military Aid for Allies Amid Rising Tensions

On October 21st 2054, our president Elliot Stonebridge visited important political, military, and economic allies to our nation. The issue on the table was a considerable increase in our military and financial support for 'their security'. President Stonebridge, as always, accepted all requests. He visited a total of 7 nations, and gave them the support they needed.

The first nation he visited was Urkanistan. Two years ago, Sarvossia launched a barbaric invasion against Urkanistan, and our nation never hesitated to provide a significant amount of military aid for the valiant and faithful soldiers to rightfully defend their beautiful country. Some soft Pro-Sarvists in Urkanistan, after seeing too many casualties, wanted to trade their land for peace to stop the bleeding.

"Continuing the war would mean the death of all Urkanistanis!" they said. When these words and their anti-war sentiments spread recklessly across Urkanistan, the leader of Urkanistan, Vladimir Horsky met with Stonebridge, expressing his concern regarding the loss of confidence and determination in battle. He hoped the President could give some encouragement to his people.

"I treat Urkanistani people like my brothers. Their loss is my loss, their death is the death of my own citizens. The war shall continue! We will continue fighting! Even if this means we all die!" These powerful words surprised and encouraged Leader Horsky and every Urkanistani watching, arousing tears in the eyes of all.

The second nation visited along the tour was Istafa. The leaders of our nation and theirs visited the memorial of The Terrible War to mourn for the victims and the families that suffered.

A publicly televised ceremony was conducted, during which a solemn recitation was delivered of the last paragraph of the epitaph on the monument. They paid tribute to the innocent souls lost in order to remind viewers that their visit was in the promotion and interest of peace. It read: "10 million lives that experienced joy, sorrow, fear, and anger perished in pain. Let their death remind us, everyone should be valued and respected equally, and may such atrocities never happen to any race again." After the ceremony, the President and Istafian leader discussed matters of increased aid for a total invasion of a neighboring nation, Palerstan, as a retaliation for the slaughter and kidnappings of Istafian citizens committed by a terrorist group of that nation. This kidnapping was thought to be an aggressive tactic from Palerstani citizens resisting the rightful territorial expansion of Istafa across their land, stopping the spread of the Istafians' way of life.

After some negotiations, the President promised military aid every month as follows: 200 new artillery units, 400 fifth generation tanks, 90 mobile radars, and 115 newly developed missile launchers. "With these weapons, only God could stop Istafa! Palerstan will be erased from Earth, and Istafa will again be at peace" the Istafian Leader stated confidently in an interview. Once again, our President led a great step forward in advocating world stability.

The third nation the President visited was Borland, which lies northwest of Urkanistan, 2000 kilometers away. Their leader, Victor Kartsonovich, expressed his concern that Sarvossia might invade his nation too. Despite the fact that the battlefield of Sarvossia and Urkanistan is two countries away from Borland, Kartsonovich stated: "the safety of Urkanistan is the safety of Borland. When Urkanistan is invaded, we will surely follow. We deserve funding as well!" Our generous President granted his request, and more than 5 billion dollars was aided for "the security of Borlish citizens."

The other four nations, all members of the Military Alliance of We Want Military Aid, asked for further funding because of some "national security problems" that they haven't managed to solve for decades. Being a model world leader, all of their requests were granted.

A total of 32.5 billion dollars of military and financial aid every month were promised to be given to these nations without any hesitation. With these supports given, our nation's global standing is sure to strengthen, even if the domestic situation might seem less clear.

Reported by Sarah Stewart at Central Broadcasting of World Relations.

Broadcast: Interview with the National Minister of Finance by Old Boston Daily

Interviewer: Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. I am Daniela Kingston, and tonight we host the annual Budget Explained to allow our citizens to have a better understanding of what the government's plans are with the current budget. This year we are lucky to have a really special guest. Welcome Mr. Nathan T. Levin, the National Minister of Finance!

Mr. Levin: Good evening Ms. Kingston.

Ms. Kingston: Well, let's get started. First question on the list, what are some big changes to the distribution of money to different sectors?

Mr. Levin: A great question to open up with. Well, as we all know, the President visited several of our allies this October. We highly value the lives and welfare of fellow democratic states, but their wars are harder and harder to continue. Because of this we decided to give them more weapons and money to fight with. We estimate that there will be a 30 percent increase in foreign aid, which will of course result in an increase in national security. The enemies of our allies are now becoming our enemies.

Ms. Kingston: How about other sectors? Citizens are hopeful that our government will improve their infrastructure, healthcare, education, transportation, etc.

Mr. Levin: Uhhh...ummm...When I look at these sectors, I often hesitate on what I should do with them. I need to pause and think if it's worth giving them funding. Our government is fully committed to strengthening global peace and stability. To that end, we'll redirect resources from infrastructure projects to support our allies in their ongoing defense efforts. We'll be focusing on the long-term strategic benefits of these investments. As the government, we think that we're not doing enough of what we're supposed to do: to spread our democracy on every inch of Earth. Some of our aging systems will need to make do for now, but that's a small price to pay for international stability. People have to realize, these are some trivial sacrifices to make! Just like a wise president once said, uhh... "ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." Now, your country asks you to make a little bit of sacrifice in your daily transportation, health care, and education, so we can better help defend democracy elsewhere.

Ms. Kingston: But Mr Levin, our citizens are already dissatisfied with the state of these three sectors. In fact, 70 car accidents happen everyday because of poor road conditions; people can't go to the doctor when they're sick because appointments themselves are too expensive

(let alone the resultant medication, procedures, etc); and we have a below world-average literacy rate. How do you respond to the opinion that we are experiencing a crisis in our country?

Mr. Levin: Umm well, no matter what we do, there's always going to be people who are not satisfied. So let them be unsatisfied. We're the ones who had the most votes, so, to those people who're unsatisfied, too bad! It's democracy. Vote against us next time. Honestly speaking, between sending top-notch military technology to our allies, crushing our enemies and flexing at the whole world versus renovating old roads and bridges for better transportation and making our citizens lives easier, healthier, and more educated, which makes you feel more proud of our nation?

Ms. Kingston: Hmm... Now I see your point! Clearly the former!

Mr. Levin: You know, it might not be the budget's problem at all. Are there too many car accidents? Drive more carefully then! Healthcare is too expensive? So take care of yourself and don't get sick! Can't afford a high level of education? How about trying harder and earning a scholarship! We're committed to ensuring the security of our nation's allies. The citizens of our country, who have always supported our global initiatives, will undoubtedly recognize the long-term benefits of this investment.

Ms. Kingston: Certainly.

Mr. Levin: We're elected. We gotta do what our people like the most, and that's to spread our democracy and to be a model world leader.

Ms. Kingston: Oh Mr. Levin, I am sure that this is what our people want to hear! But before we close out our interview, there is one last problem that has bothered our citizens for decades. More than half a million of people are homeless, and 11% of the population lives under the poverty line. Should we spend more money on social welfare and poverty alleviation?

Mr. Levin: Good question, but again, there are better ways to spend this money. Right now, helping the Urkanistanis and the Istafians is more important than helping lowly citizens who are incapable of helping themselves. And anyway, most people in social welfare programs can still eat, drink, and sleep under a roof. As for the homeless? We trust that the citizens, even those facing hardship, will understand that their sacrifice is part of a larger global mission for peace.



Welcome to the Electoral College!

Katelyn Yeh

Sage Hill High School

Where tradition meets ambiguity.

We are honored that you believe you are in any way appropriate and able to study at our pristine academy. With our rich history of questionable methods, TEC has been shaping futures (or ignoring them) since 1787. At TEC, we pride ourselves on our perplexing ideals of democracy, even (and perhaps especially) if people disagree.

Our History:

Who cares about the future?

Our great nation's Founders had a simple vision: to create a school that wasn't just about education, but also about symbolism, legacy, and ensuring that certain students were always more equal than others. Our school strives to keep that tradition alive. We don't really care if you think it's impractical. We like it. As the saying goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

In 1787, our founding fathers created both TEC and PVU as a compromise, claiming that the balance between these two colleges would ensure a fair collegiate education system.

Yet, this balance has never really materialized. Although PVU has been rated

and ranked higher, we're still valued more, so who's really winning? Furthermore, while we're supposed to be rival schools to ensure the balance, we haven't lost a single football game to them since our schools were founded. Read more about that in the Student Life page.

The Electoral College Admissions Information:

We consider some applications with care.

Just like our history, TEC's admissions process balances unique qualities with its position as one of the longest standing traditions of The USA democracy experiment. Nothing about us has changed since we were written into the Constitution.

Similar to other schools, our esteemed admissions committee, or electors as we like to call it, will read your application with great care and detail. (There will probably be less care and detail if you don't live in a swing state). Once the decision is made, we will notify you. If you are unhappy with the result, too bad! We don't care!

An incomparable part of our admissions process that sets us apart from other schools is that you get to watch while our electors either accept or reject you in real time. In fact, there is an infamous shift that happens almost every time. How thrilling is that?

If you are looking to transfer, your process will be put into a different pool to be evaluated separately. Unless you're from the Popular Vote University. We don't like PVU. You will not be accepted. Sorry.

As TEC is an elite school, the admissions process is challenging and ruthless. Only strong students will be accepted. It's important to know what is required in your applications, but we don't like to share this with our applicants as we would like to remain mysterious and interesting. It adds a certain je ne sais quoi, don't you think? Use your best judgment. Good luck.

Student Life:

Athletics, and clubs, and chaos - oh my!

Ranging from athletics to school clubs, there are so many opportunities for you to seize at TEC.

Athletics:

Our sports teams are an integral part of student life here at TEC. Every 4 years, we have the big championship game against PVU. Although they score more points than us, the referee still declares us as the winner. If you decide to join our football team, we promise you will never lose. This is tradition. Who cares about fairness?

School Clubs:

TEC offers a wide variety of different clubs, ensuring that you will be able to find the best fit for you. For example, here are the three most popular clubs that TEC has to offer:

Swing State Sobriety Society: Practice your sobriety by denying poison from entering your body. Boycott alcohol, coffee, tea, and hot drinks!

Med(dling) Group: Provide healthcare to those in need!

Who cares about (minori)tea?: Dump tea in the sea every Thursday to commemorate the Boston Tea Party!

Similar to other schools, most of our clubs have an application process for inclusion. But what makes us especially unique: club leaders do not get to choose club members. A raffle does. You put your tickets into a hat, and someone will pick out the winning tickets. The number of raffle tickets you have in the bag will be based on your dorm, specifically, the number of people in your building. If you're from California, congratulations! You get 54 chances to be accepted into the club of your dreams. If you're from Wyoming, good luck! You get 3 chances. Why? Because we say so. Sad? Too bad!

Campus Activism:

We still encourage all of our students to speak their minds and use their voices in an effort to inspire change. It's crucial that the younger generation learns to use their strength to fight for the issues important to them. This is, of course, what our Founding Fathers envisioned in their notion of democracy.



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Index

Akers, Jada	52	End...?, The	81
Alcee, Ethan	20	Escapism	50
All For Greater Peace and Stability	112	Family Photo	38
Allen, Magnolia	24, 80	Family String	37
Alsammarraie, Maryam	14	Feminism	26
Ansari, Leenah	4	Fluttering into growth	41
Aphrodite's Mirror	54	Frozen	63
Bastiani, Amanda	60, 61	Good Hair	74
Bates, Bailey	9	Good Hunter	58
Beacon	25	Goodbye	88
Bean, Christopher	19	Gorman, Mackenzie	73
Bittersweet Tastes That Linger	109	Groissl, Michael	84
Brain Fog	Cover	Hair Dye	23
Burris, Kyra	86	Handpicked Apples Under a	
Calderon Martinez, Alex	33	Midday Sunset	55
Capasso, Jayli	Cover, 50	Harris, Victoria	41
Carmen	22	Hartman, Graziella	88, 92
Catlin, Bailey	46	Herter, Josh	44
Chaos	45	How to Silence a Body	68
Cicada Season	107	I Believe in Many Things	66
Cioffi, Maverick	77	In a Time Before Me, In	
Collage	80	a World Today	101
Crawling Out of There	89	In Your Pockets	105
Crescendo, A	76	Is This America?	97
Crimson Curse	59	Jiang, Leon	76, 94
Cylkoff, Brier	37	Keihm, Evan	59
D'Angelo, Starlyn	54	Kepler 22 b	70
Da, Kaylee	62, 68	Kindred, Forever Ago	78
Deck, Gabrielle	63	Kinirons Mejia, Katy	57
Defying the Odds	9	Kong, Weiyan (Andy)	112
DeNitto, Olivia	18	Lament of the Nightingale	106
DeSilva, Chloe	58	Lawrence, Yazmine	42
Desrue, Germaine	7	Leech, Isabela	22
Detached Athlete, The	46	Left Behind	85
Diggins, Marleigh	85	Li, Haoyuan	97
Do You Pinky Promise?	34	Look	100
Douglas, Maverick	15	Losing Boundaries and Patience	36
End of the Line	71	Love (ing Myself) is Hard	8



Lu, Jaden	105	On Duty	91
Maki, Lori	74	Only Summer Yet	11
Mao, Felix	120	Oops Mom, I Made a Portal	30
Map We Drew Together, The	14	Passing By Experience, The	33
Maze, Charlotte	66	Pavel, Andreea	38
McGivern, Melana	34	Pearl, Sophia	32
Miao, Cindy	107	Penk, Sue	91
Middle Ground in 2024, The	92	Perusal of the Storm, The	73
Miles	12	Petersen, Laurel	70
(Model) UN at Wartime, The	94	Pivacek, Samantha	28
Morano, Carmela	16	Postpartum	48
Most Disgusting Treatment		Pretty Ugly	65
of a Tiny Existence, The	64	Pursue	61
Muller, Kathleen	40	Reese, Jonathan	55
NEK-A	77	Right to Bear Arms, The	5
New War Photographer, The	56	Road Less Traveled, A	10
Normal Girl, The	52	Run, The	119
O'Connell, Darcy	21	Sad, The	44

Sanctuary of Joy	42	Toy Gun, Real Wounds	120
Scherillo, Dylan	8	Twin Bridges	57
Schonhiutt, Sarah	26	Uncontrollable Shadow	110
Schools, Susannah	10, 11	Vaughn Larsen, Willa	45
See the Colors	40	Wang, Christine	106
Sheikh, Maysoun	71	Wang, Serena	5
Silent Waters, Shattered Dreams	62	Watchman, The	19
Slippery Survivor, A	16	Weatherwax, Kyra	78
Smith, Angie	90	Weight of a Guilty Heart	49
Smith, Brianna	12	Weinberger, Isobel	23
Snyder, Davis	30	Welcome to the Electoral College	116
Soar	20	What's Buried Isn't Mine to Dig	86
Soil to Soul	7	Whiteman, Wil	49
Song, Coco	56	Wilk, Newton	48
Soul	4	Wistful Window, A	18
Statue of Liberty, The	21	Wrieden, Emma	65
Step into the Light	84	Wu, Alice	100
Su, Alvin	101	Yan, Violet	109
Summer Milkweed	108	Yang, Congran (Emily)	108
Sunburst	60	Yang, Surie	25
Teen-Spirit	24	Yeh, Katelyn	116
Tenace, Savannah	64, 119	Your Cold Hands Are Scar-Free and Aveeno Soft: Don't Touch Me	28
Teng, Alex Ziqi	110	Your Speed	15
Thomas Griffin: The Hero	90	Zimmerman, Ash	36, 89
TIME	32		
Toumani, Bridelle	81		



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