



DAPHNE  
REVIEW

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SUMMER 2021



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“Daphne Review”  
“Summer 2021”

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“Do what we can, summer will have its flies.”

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*



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## *Refraction Pulses*

Ashes to ashes,  
Iron to rust,  
The blind lead the blind  
In God I mistrust.  
From grape unto wine  
And wine unto dust  
A mad star desires  
My downfall refined.

Like leaves in the wind,  
I rise.

Could it be that,  
Wonder is shape, size, color, sound?  
frolicking clouds in summertime skies,  
of teddy bears and cats and lines that pop out,  
or the spilling of ink, cascading about,  
that brings the page to life?  
rusted dimes and nickels beneath the old cupboard,  
dusted with cobwebs and splinters?  
or waterfalls, in ferocious splendor,  
that freeze and tower in winter?  
oils and dyes that fit all snug,  
that weep and shout and pull at strings?  
or half-shattered, wind-battered glass bottles,  
with beating heart in see-through ribs?  
static hums and buzzes of faint nighttime radio  
the ebb and flow of familiar conscience?  
or the deafening roar of a jet engine,  
in stunned tearful silence, as joy departs with love?  
I shut my eyes and my world goes dark.

Like lead in the sea,  
I fall.

Should it be that,  
awe is fear, rage, repentance, love?  
Hands coil tight around your mouth,  
lifting you high, helpless to the heavens  
thought-shaped terrors morph into unfamiliar demons,

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pinned in place, ends staring into abyssal ends at the nightstand  
kneel, wretched one, before the pagan altar,  
and lift your lusty gaze to the heavens  
A wrathful Cain casts down fiery hailstones,  
Act not, want not, watch on.

One misstep, sinking into the mire,  
You suffocate in dense rainforests of denial,  
faintly the flatline of your own monitor plays,  
at the gates, a staccato symphony in affliction;  
I shut my eyes and my heart goes still.  
Selfless, introspective nurturing,  
the lunacy of using your scars as a shield,  
or finding yourself astonished,  
at the absurd things you would do to protect.  
I shut my eyes and my world goes still.

What are we, but a patchwork quilt of wonder and awe?  
hastily sewn, tattered blankets, bloodsoaked fabrics,  
smudged with ash and acrid tears and  
perhaps a little pixie dust, for the desperate and derealized.  
I shut my eyes and my world goes cold.

I'm no prey to compromise,  
she who in the face falls light,  
love's lost labors crumble and rain  
Idly I knit my thread before the fates.

I met a girl once in my dreams  
She starved and shrilly called to me  
When we locked eyes I didn't see  
Though in her veins my fire seethed

And breathe I did, through my remorse  
She flinched and groaned till she was hoarse  
In witless farce we did divorce  
Phantom pains and searing force.

O Lady Death, walk with me,  
Shroud me in sweet and saccharine rose petals,  
Gild me with delicate frost; adorn me with pearls of morning dew  
Entomb me in your clouds of spiral bliss.

Death, darling, I know you don't give for free,  
You always did drive a hard bargain.  
Tear into my wailing world, you'll find that you grasp at thin air,  
Glamour sells, but who's buying?

Plasma rises in my lungs,  
and with it,  
the realization that nothing truly makes sense  
I swim in a lethe of sorrows and brine  
Disdain will be my undoing  
below the pale moon's radiance.  
The inundation begins  
of miasma from a hellish sun  
Like Ra on his great sunwheel.

Bitter brittle chords strain sharp on blunt plaster,  
sickening waves of blackest bile,  
you tremble,  
because the hand that feeds starts to spread its fingers in your chest,  
and your rasping growls of protest fall on deaf ears and hollow sockets of eyes,  
for in my world of false prophets and soothsayers,  
detachment festers and flayed flesh morphs into vast ravens of grief  
that fill like sand my every fault  
so much so that I can't hear my own screams,  
and my wings are shorn from my aching corpse once more.

For I am Mother Kali,  
And I will purge this blight from whence it came,  
With bowl and sickle I sever these evils at their root.  
I stand resolute in the wake of Etna enduring.

Insanity, idle insanity,  
There is no light in a starless sky,  
only fragments beneath its folds.

As I lay to rest, lux in tenebris --  
My swansong plays in 2/4 time.

Ari Krishna is 15 years old and in 10th grade at Pierrepoint School, Westport, Connecticut. They write abstract poetry and seek opportunities to publish their writing.

# *Mushroom Head*

By Marla Bingcang

Dear Dad,

The grass was growing so high, I couldn't see Ben until he was right there. Yes, I did trip over him.

The tip of his nose had been nibbled off. His shirt was shred to ribbons, revealing ribs like raked sand and the sloping crater of his stomach. He was so thin I could have pressed my finger to his flesh and saw its impression on the other side. Below his belly button, a wide, dry slit had been cut. I lifted the flap with the back of my thumb and found he was hollow inside, but for a nest of ants, which crawled onto my finger. The slit reminded me of Mumma's scar, the one Annie made when she was born, because her head was so big she couldn't come out the right way.

Mumma taught me a lesson when I came back. I was s'posed to be gathering, but I dropped everything tripping over Ben, save for the lint in my pockets. I didn't even try to pick them up.

I didn't go out no more and remained in the kitchen until evening. Watching Mumma pluck a raven and start the fire, I considered what I would say. At supper, she laid out stew for me, herself, and Annie. I stirred the tough, pinkish meat around and didn't eat. Then I asked Mumma if any man-eating beasts lived around here.

"Why are you asking me that?"

That's when I mentioned Ben. There was a clang to my right. Annie dropped her spoon and slapped me on the shoulder. Yet all tumbled from my lips: the paleness, the stench, the pits where his eyes should be, like they'd been scooped out.

I think I sensed in advance Mumma wouldn't be too pleased to hear it.

"Don't go back there," Mumma said. "I don't want to hear no more." And you know well how Mumma can pinch the life out of the air.

Again, I picked at my stew for a long while, and Mumma and Annie eased back into their seats. But then I pictured him, rotting out there and tossed by the elements.

"Can you help me carry him back?"

"Why!"

"To bury him in the garden, next to Dad."

This is the part where Mumma sends me to my room.

#



Dear Dad,

I visited Ben again. Strewn at his fingertips were the things I left behind: a dirty coat, a raven wrung of blood, sticks and sticks and sticks. I crept around these. I decided they were not mine anymore.

He was not the same as last time. His stomach formed a mound. I thought rabbits were making a burrow out of him, so I pulled a twig off a tree and jabbed it through the slit in his gut. Out it came, slicked in gray. The ooze drizzled off the end onto the tip of my boots. It bled from the slit, everflowing, soaking the ground as if I'd struck the rock at Horeb. The stink lingered in my nose long after I left, like steam off an oily soup.

When I came home, Mumma ordered me to jump in the bath.

#

Dear Dad,

We're going to have to hole up soon, the cold is blowing in. The cold is good though. It makes gathering easy. Yesterday, Annie and I found this lady come wandering, 'said she was lost. We offered to take her home and let her sit in front of the fire, even offered to carry her purse for her. She followed us until we found a ditch to kick her in.

It's funny. They always ask us if we got a phone.

In a week when her eyes go blank, we'll gather up her clothes. I checked her purse and found a dozen cherry-flavored hard candies and stuffed them all into my pocket before Annie got a chance to see. Most of what we've been eating lately comes out of the old jars we keep in the cellar. Sometimes it's rabbits or ravens soaked in sour water, but other times it's these reddish slabs, the ones we stocked up on in the winter Ben disappeared. Annie hates them all, but she hates the red meat most especially, which is why we trade candy like prisoners trade cigarettes.

Annie urges me not to eat the red meat. I need no persuasion but the slimy way it slides down my throat and shrivels my tongue up with salt. She begs Mumma too, but Mumma never budges. "He gave this to us," she says, "You be grateful for that."

Never once does Mumma invoke Ben's name.

Well, this morning they butt heads on that again. They got to yelling, in the way that only Mumma and Annie can, and I used it as an excuse to lay down. See, there's this knob on my head that's been killing me. I must've bumped into something.

Boy, it aches. I think I'll stay in today.

#

Dear Dad,

Annie discovered a mushroom growing out the back of my head, gray and soft as a baby's ear.

“It’s ‘cause you never take a bath!” she said, wresting it between her knuckles. I thought Annie would rip out my scalp, just how a stubborn weed tears up the turf around it. The mushroom was rooted beyond the bone, laced into my brain. Her pulling burned holes into my vision. I shoved her away.

“It’s really in there, huh?”

I nodded.

Annie considered this, taking her chin in her hands, then went to her nightstand and drew out a pair of hair-cutting scissors. I must’ve left contrails in my wake.

Over the week, I’ll have you know, I had whittled myself a stake to use as Ben’s grave marker for when the snow was bound to fall. Feeling clever, I pulled it out from under the porch and admired my skill. Like Ben’s. I swung it like a bat as I walked.

When I got there, it turned out I didn’t need a grave marker anymore. From the slit in Ben’s belly had sprouted three gray stalks like snail’s eyes, watching me as I drove the stake into the ground with just my hands and a damp stone. It was silly: my crooked stake, and the stalks twice its size.

You should understand I wasn’t out there long. It was three hours at most, I swear on your grave, the sun hadn’t moved a tick in the sky. When I came home, there was Annie, waiting for me in the kitchen. “Look! Look! Oh!”—and I didn’t remain to hear the rest of it.

I blew open our bedroom doors and threw myself into the vanity. On the top of my head, pushing aside my hair, another mushroom appeared. Then another, pushing out from a lump on my cheek. I touched them and felt them just the same as my own cold skin. When I pulled away the tip of my finger was stained the feeble color of mushrooms, and I rubbed it into my sleeve. Mumma, who had appeared in the doorway with Annie, came over to me in three long strides. She pried my arms away and gave it a look that lasted half a second.

She left—“Ah, it’s nothing. Let him be!”—while I rummaged through our wardrobe for a hat.

Annie follow her with hard eyes, all the way out.

#

Dear Dad,

It’s been hard to write recently. The snow came, the kind of snow that doesn’t sink under your weight, but breaks. Last winter was much of the same, but with Ben, which made it fuller. Mumma has since burned all of Ben’s wooden dogs. I hold their rough texture in physical memory, but also the way the fire made them pop in my ear. He made them sitting on the stairs and nowhere else, letting the shavings collect on a blackened sheet. When they were smooth enough, he let me hold them. “This is a golden doodle,” he said, pointing with his callused thumb, “Dad’s dog. And this lil guy here is something else, probably.”

Mealtimes were not much different back then. I scarfed down Mumma’s watered-down soup with nothing to choke on. And when I finished, I became aware of the other bowls and spoons, sloshing and

dull clinks, the residue dried on the edge of thin lips, and the burning in my stomach. Annie was vigilant over her soup and made a barrier with her arms, but I wrenched them apart and grabbed bits out of her bowl with my bare fingers.

No one's realized it yet, but it's me what half-killed him. Ben could cleave through the earth if he wanted. When he began pouring his bowl into mine, that's when he collapsed. It was like crushing a can.

I think I'll stop writing now.

#

Dear Dad,

Thanks to the scrote who invented snow, I sit inside and smear my skin off the furniture. All week, Annie's been sweeping up moist clumps of my hair. I have bald patches which are pink, rubbery, and infested with egg-sized lumps where mushrooms push against my skin like incoming teeth. Upon crowning, gray ooze leaks from the opening and slides into my clothes. There's a lump on my eye too, but Mumma says it's just irritation. It burns and itches no matter how much I rub it. I'm losing sight in that eye. That's why it's been so hard to write recently.

Yesterday, I was particularly sick of the indoors, and tormented by that magnetizing urge to return to Ben. I stole Annie's coat, layered it over my own, and crunched through the forest. The night was bright, with the snow reflecting the moon. It had never before occurred that snow came in gray.

He laid in a vignette of dead grass, dry, and undisturbed. Not a snowflake landed on his skin or in the area around him. I held my distance. The snail-eyed stalks peered down at me, swaying in tight spirals. My stake had fallen over. Ben was dead, but he flourished.

Stalks shot up from his nostrils. His eyes, too, were enveloped, and his mouth was choked with a gray bouquet. Red stubs colonized his bloated hands and feet and raced over his legs like a pox disease. The sweet gray ooze leaked freely from his orifices and had soaked the ground around him to swamp. I struggled to take steps in Ben's clasping mire. I was close enough to poke his bloated belly with the top of my shoe. It smeared off like cream.

I returned and pressured myself into snipping off one of the mushrooms with Annie's scissors. Gray ooze flowed freely onto my bedsheets, no blood. Pus, I thought, as I bit dashes into my tongue.

Next morning, three more mushrooms had grown in its place.

#

Dear Dad,

The snow is really coming down now. There's nothing to do but to occupy myself, and I am *very* occupied. I tried to throw a towel over the vanity, but Annie got real sore at me when I did.

My left eye cannot see. The eyelid wraps around the mushroom stalk when I blink. I tried pulling it out—I screamed through my teeth. But the mushroom could not be removed, lest I would like my eye to



hang from it like a ripe tuber. Patches of white fuzz grow on my arms, a thousand needle threads, and when I tug at them they pull away like moss, but sting as if I were ripping out my hair. I remember I once brought a jar full of oranges up from the cellar. You were alive then, and you took them away from me. You turned them around and showed me the fuzzy patches racing over their skin—you called it mold.

I was glad to throw out those oranges before. Now, my stomach hurts so much I'd eat anything if you put it on a plate. Mumma and Annie too.

Yesterday, Mumma sent me and Annie to the cellar to bring up all the remaining jars from the cellar. There was no more of that red, salty meat. Did I tell you it was Ben who fetched it all for us? Last winter. Two bloody bags full. Though it wasn't him who lugged them home. It was Mumma, but she said Ben did all the work. And it was tough work. Ben couldn't come home that night, Mumma said he was too tired to come home right then.

I pulled on the end of the bag and the meat tumbled out, misshapen and mismatched. I had never before seen meat like this, nor so much in one place. Annie and I would've dug into it raw, but Mumma swung a pail of water in front of us and told us to get washing. There were two organs like pink ropes—intestines, I realized. I grabbed these first since to me they were most grabbable. I peered inside and found that they were hollow and dirty. Mumma nudged me, "Wash those until they squeak."

Then Mumma fired up the oven, and soon the whole kitchen smelled like the inside of a wallet. I sat in front, feeling the heat of tortured flames on my face.

The legs of our little wooden table curved in, bearing the weight of the meal. Mumma placed one white ball, like oversized olives, on each of our plates and told us to eat. My teeth sunk easily into this strange fruit. I stuck my fork into the pink rope I had washed, which had been sliced into small, bite-sized rings, and cut apart the spongy, stretchy meat Annie had cleaned. All was salty and slightly bitter, but I was voracious before all else. My meal was gone as soon as it had arrived.

The slowest eater was Annie, who kept examining her food. She took the white ball from her plate and held it close to my eyes, comparing them, I think. "His," she said, or something like it, because she cut herself off. She might have smelled something because her face warped just then. But I know she must have eaten a lot sometime after I withdrew to bed; I heard her hurling all the rest of the night.

Ben did not get to enjoy the product of his work. He did not come home the next day, nor the next.

I guess we know what happened to him out there.

#

Dear Dad,

Last night I woke up to the voices of Mumma and Annie rising through the floorboards, muffled, like they were speaking underwater.

Annie shrieked. Mumma was not so hysterical, but she bellowed in a way she rarely directed toward Annie. I wanted to savor this moment, but I could not distinguish a word, and soon the screaming became like a thousand buzzing flies. I touched the new budding in my ears.

Air breathed through our cracking window. All the mushrooms on my skin prickled. I rubbed my face into my pillow and recoiled at the gray sludge squeezed out of it. Then came a smack and a thud. Annie came into the room and threw herself into her bed. Her shoulders shuddered, and when my breathing slowed, I could hear hers, thin and reedy. She was not there for a minute before her yelp broke the silence.

Annie threw off the covers and fumbled through her nightstand for a match. She struck it twice, thrice. The little flame erupted, and she held it over the back of her hand. She beckoned me over. There, between her white-fuzzed knuckles, a mushroom had grown.

I would have figured Annie would have said something. I wanted to apologize to her, for whatever reason, perhaps because it was I who brought the disease home. But Annie did not. She blew the match and crawled to bed.

#

Dear Dad,

Mumma pushed and pushed, but the door won't budge unless we wanna tear it off its hinges. The windows are gray with snow pressed against them, and I am sitting by the fire, writing this to you now, because my own bed is molding and oily. Annie is reading over my shoulder. She's been by my side all day, to pester me, I think.

There is nothing left in the cellar, but Mumma won't admit it. She's got a pot boiling with nothing in it. Right now, she's fastened to her stool, sharpening a big ol' knife at the countertop. Two days ago, I ripped off the leather cover of my journal and chewed it until it was soft enough to swallow (Annie's been hiding her boots ever since).

I feel like a sleeping dog, laying on the rug in front of the hearth like this. It's harder to think. The mushrooms grow wild in place of hair. Gray buds bloom in my ear, and the back of my throat prickles me. My back is acneic with ripe, egg-sized bumps. I think of Ben right now and his own wild crop, poking out of the snow, swaying and waving and curling in wind that isn't there. In my dreams, I cannot help but bite into his sweet face. The soft, custard texture is consistent from skin to bone, and all the same pervasive gray. It is like cutting into cake. When I prod under my eyes, the skin dimples and does not reform. And when I run my fingers along my arm, it smears. The carpet is pulpy where I have lain. There is gray crusted under my fingernails, and gray is stained on my skin.

Dad, I don't know when I'll get to write to you next. Mumma's been looking at me, not in the eyes, but inches above, where pale mushrooms sprouted. She's been looking at me this whole time. There is hunger in her eyes.

Marla Bingcang is currently a sophomore at Burlington Central High School. Her work has previously been recognized by Scholastic Art and Writing. The piece she wrote was "originally first published in the July 2021 Apparition Lit Contamination Issue.

## *Trapped in Thought*

Not from the path,  
Arrived at a stop.

Which is lost in the blink of an eye  
Eyes looking down in curiosity,  
The path is followed  
Littered with pitfalls.

As the path is walked on  
Distant, cold, sudden  
Leave others' voices  
Dark, hazy formations in the sky

Just the path  
Nothing in the distance  
Winding paths with no destination  
No one to guide  
Winding paths with no maps

Looking for change  
Looking for rest,  
The dilemma haunts those  
Routine or Adapt.

David is a high schooler attending Seoul International School in Seoul, South Korea. Besides writing his other hobbies include listening to music and improv comedy. He is currently putting together a portfolio for university.

## There was no paradise behind

Paths too long to be traced, don't look behind there was no paradise behind  
It was the journey from dusk to dawn, from disaster to triumph and triumph over disaster  
You can't see the glory at the gate, dusk and dawn shines the same  
But even the sun baffles with the twilight it forms, no regrets for us

Sometimes it looks more mesmerizing, the time we trodden  
You will remember the pleasant roses, never forget the thorns underneath  
No one smells the roses when the thorns stab the feet, desolate floors better than bleeding feet  
Don't fantasize about colored glasses over gold, broken gold never slits the veins

The breeze sways beyond the oceans, it takes you from the islands to the peninsula  
Sometimes it whispers on the ears, words which may tickle or bleed  
Never be afraid to lose yourself with the breeze, it takes you where to belong  
When the cold breeze settles and no leaf shivers, then you know you are there

Aaqib Khatibi is a freelance writer and author based in India. His literary work has been a part of many literary magazines across the world even other than English magazines. Currently, he is also working to publish his first book. He is a student of 12th grade at Sri Sankara Vidyalaya, India.





Gabrielle Beck is a junior attending Tenafly High School. When she is not writing or photographing, she can be found repurposing vintage denim. She is a finalist for New York Times “Coming of Age in 2020: A Special Multimedia Contest for Teenagers,” and awarded with a silver medal for photography in 2021 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Her writing and photography has been featured in Kalopsia Literary Journal, Cathartic Literary Magazine, Young Writers Project, and Written by the Youth.

## *A Fossil Filled with Broken Plates*

Lena Levey

Something sweet sits under my tongue. The lady told me to press it against my gums until it's gone, but she didn't say what gone meant. The little grains have dissolved into nothingness, but I can still taste it. Can I lift my tongue now? I need to focus on this. On what's in front of me. It does no good to let my thoughts roam free.

That's what she told me, when she gave me the orange bottle, to focus on what's in front of me until I am soothed. But in front of me is out of order. I can't be here. I tried to explain to her that it's a floodgate, that these thoughts don't belong to me. "I just ride the wave," I tell her, I don't make eye contact, I am staring at the hoof of the giant stuffed giraffe.

Which is a weird thing to have in an office like this. Who is that even for and before I finished the thought, I know the answer, and I feel so old and I think I'm going to be sick again.

Something sweet sits under my tongue, I remind myself. I'm home now. I'm safe.

But I had known him for years before we really met, warm and all at once in a smokey Shoreditch restaurant with people we had, "known for years, but never really met," either. He said it just like that, in one exhale of Marlboro, and I thought it sounded pretentious, so I asked if he was a poet. He said "songwriter," which was worse, I thought. But he told me about his guitar, and I listened because nobody ever listens to me for real and maybe if I made him feel important he would return the favor. The giraffe lady asked me if I believe in karma and I told her I believe in debt.

The taste is gone now. Find something in front of you. A dishwasher, clean and full. I can't breathe. I inhale harder and faster. Thank god I'm alone - when I'm with people they watch this and see pressure and tell me to breathe deep to make it disappear, as if my lungs can push my memories off my chest. And I don't like the way they look at me when I say that it's not pressure, it's a release, it's proof that something really did happen or else I wouldn't be shaking like this so Watch me. But not today. Today, I can lie on the floor and count the dishes.

We sat in the back row of The Globe and got to know each other between the acts before he finished his glass — his fourth one — and walked me home. Neither of us really wanted to see that play, but we did want to be the sort of people who would spend their Friday night watching Shakespeare, so we pretended, indulging in our delusions of grandeur. He liked the term *enthusiast* more than *alcoholic*.



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“Besides, you can’t be an alcoholic before you’re thirty. Or if you drink expensive shit.” We walked in silence for a bit after that.

“I liked Lady Macbeth,” I told him. “I don’t know if I was supposed to, but I did. She used the tools at her disposal.”

“She’s a bitch.” I tensed up. I don’t like when *bitch* slides off a man’s tongue so easily. But I was being ridiculous. We were talking about a character. He wouldn’t say that about a real woman.

It would be easier if I could remember him evil. Sometimes I get close to destroying my sympathies so as to hate him purely, the way I’m supposed to. Had he been cruel the whole time, I could breathe normally, remember normally. But we were friends. He walked me to my door and told me I was different than anyone he had ever met before.

I wanted him to fix me back, or at least prove that there is a version of this where I am unscathed. So it didn’t matter when my friends pushed back.

“When’s the last time he even asked you a question?”

“It doesn’t matter. He is there and it’s enough.”

“He’s not nice back.”

“I’m trying to help.”

“You wouldn’t let a girl treat you like that. It’s not right.”

“He’s just depressed.”

“So are you and you don’t do what he does.”

“I know but --”

“He won’t make an exception for you.”

“He cares about me.”

“He cares about what you provide for him.”

“I don’t have the luxury of noting the difference.”

Six rows of white circles, minus one now. The ceramic is still warm - focus on the heat. I close my eyes and I’m holding a sweaty hand, cold and hot on top of each other and it won’t release me. “I know I’m messed up but--” Be in the moment. When does this stuff kick in anyway? It’s been at least I don’t know how long and I can’t stop thinking about that damn car.



Not even the car, really. More his apartment balcony, clammy and gray at daybreak, who knows how many nights in a row telling him that it will be alright. That this isn't forever and if he just got some help -- "I don't need them. I have you."

I took that as a compliment. As the drugs and exhaustion dragged him into shallow sleep, I felt safe. I felt powerful. I fixed my gaze on the flag his father had hung from the wall: blue field, white cross. I exhaled. I had something to give that had nothing to do with the way I knew he looked at me.

"I have you." I whisper it to the plate, trying to conjure his intonations. Impossibly slow, dragging each word like warm honey. In that awful gray apartment, I was starved for every last drop. If I hadn't been so naive, if I had escaped him, would I still be in this kitchen? Probably. The longer I spend here, the more my presence seems like a forgone conclusion. Right before she gave me the orange bottle, I told her that if a woman is lucky, she chooses her last meal.

I thought he was different no I thought I was different will it always be like this? Why do I want so badly to win a rigged game? I run two fingers along the edge of the plate and imagine all the other ways I could have made it here.

"You make me feel like I matter," he tells me. I matter to him, I tell myself, even though he never said that, even after he locked the car door and put his arm around my shoulder and I noticed for the first time that he was stronger than me. I stared straight ahead and felt myself fossilize; defeat encased in amber. I open my mouth through sweet glue. "You don't want to do this," I warn, as evenly as I can manage. "It's not worth it." I feel every inch of his skin digging into mine, a branding iron against my back. It burns, but I don't move. I can't.

And then he lets go. He unlocks the car and I leave without saying a word. He needed me more than he wanted to take me.

Women wanted, dead or alive. Better alive, this time, to suit his ambitions. Use the tools at your disposal. So I guess I win, but I can't stop crying. I thought he was -- no I thought I was different. I rub my hand faster against the plate but it won't get clean. God when does this start working did I lift up my tongue too soon or something?

I shouldn't care. He didn't even do anything. It's happened before. It's happened worse. But he is the one I can't forget. Nothing even happened.

But I am left here alone looking like an idiot sobbing with this stupid plate in my hands and he is free. In return, he unlocks the car.

"Are you mad at me?" He is on my doorstep, sweaty, wild eyed and reeking sickly sweet of whisky.

Spring 2021

“Couldn’t this have waited until tomorrow? It’s late--”

“No I need to know that you’re not mad at me. I know I’m messed up but I can’t lose you I can’t I can’t.”

“It’s ok. You did nothing wrong. You’re a good person. I promise. I promise.” I wrap my arms and words around him before I even question their validity. He slides his hands down my back and I know he has me. It burns.

I probably would be happier if I thought less about these things. “Ignorance is bliss,” the giraffe lady muses, which I decide is just a nicer way of saying that it is unlucky to be forced to know exactly how lucky you are.

I let it go. No use dragging him down with me, I tell myself as I promise him everything will be alright, I tell people once the floodgates close again and I am constructing justifications that sound better than “I am afraid.” But of course, once you notice that someone is stronger than you, there’s nothing you can do to forget it.

In my memories I set him free, but when the despair hits before the Xanax does I imagine my veins filled with stone. A plate shatters against the wall. That didn’t feel like I thought it would. Throw harder. I dream that I hit him, closed fist into his stomach. He stumbles back, and stares at me in shock for the first time. Too hard. Porcelain flies across the room. I hit again. I fall to my knees and brush pieces of broken plates into my hand. From here, I see that my amber walls remain intact. I hit again. I shouldn’t have done that. It makes no difference. I cannot restart time. I hit again. I should have gotten a dustpan. I’m bleeding. I hit again and again until my hands are paralyzed with pain and fatigue. My fists crash against his chest until he is unrecognizable, as much every other man as he is my friend, until I am surrounded by broken glass and fantasies, and I finally stop shaking for long enough to wash the blood off my empty hands.

Lena Levey is currently a senior at Georgetown Day School and is attending Washington University in St. Louis in the fall. She grew up in London, England, and now lives in Washington D.C. She plans on studying international relations and creative writing at university. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of her school’s political affairs magazine: *The Forum*, and a member of her school’s mental health advisory panel. She is excited to continue her education at university next year.

## Mothman Tries On A Black Turtleneck

My desk is a beat poet  
With a cigarette in its mouth  
It's reading prose in basements  
Which is good for a girl who's life is like scissors  
Not because it can open packaging tape  
But because it turns people into malformed paper snowflakes  
Hung from the ceiling of a first grade classroom  
I'm no Ray Bradbury protagonist  
But ever since I wrote my first love letter  
Anarchy and silly social conventions  
Aren't the only things I'm writing about

Herb Lily is a seventeen-year-old disabled writer from California. She enjoys playing dungeons and dragons, watching the 2011 Muppet Movie, and trying to be a good mom to her dogs Flower and Poe. They are a current junior at The Orange County School of The Arts where she studies creative writing.

## *Burke, Virginia November 2014*

clouds swell against the sky.

Leafless oaks thin the north wind and the roads  
cut through the wooded patches where deer once  
tread. At East Pine neighborhood, the din of life rusts

the air. A cacophony of bikes defiled by middle schoolers  
sprawls across an unkempt lawn. Across the street, Dave,  
a retired mechanic, swabs the carburetor of his drained  
Pontiac. Rory, the mail truck driver, shepherds a package

to the quiet pensioner at 18762 Beacon Pond. On Mercury  
Street, a father and daughter laze under a wilting  
“LEMONADE” sign. Azure face masks frayed on the sides  
blossom from their chin. At the Burke Center intersection,

Lloyd hisses for change in a tray spotted with syringes  
as he ambles somewhere between exigency and hope.



## *Ziploc Money Bag*

The ziploc money bag wedged  
between a worn geometry textbook  
and a copy of Tale of Two Cities  
overflowed with foreign bills  
and coins my father had collected  
over the years – change he received  
from the corner dumpling cart  
in Shanghai or the note he used to buy  
a cigar for the Belgian man accused  
of fraud was enveloped by a myriad  
of colors. The ziploc bag holds the clump  
of discolored notes. Worthless  
where they now stand, the only purpose  
they serve is to embellish my bookshelf.  
I can only gaze at the printed faces  
of a cold visage of a president  
that exiled the natives of his own country,  
a beloved queen with a penchant  
for sweet cakes, and a bald man  
who trekked miles through salt  
in the name of freedom.

## *Mcall, Idaho, August 2020*

With each day, the walls inch  
inward. Shadows swirl around  
them, enveloping the recesses  
in gloom. Clinging to the barren  
walls, a sole painting of a howling  
wolf. Untapped joys rot from within  
and outside, the scent of Aspen  
along Alpine Street rusts,  
long forgotten.

Now, only the withered touch  
of stale air can be felt. In the meadow,  
A lone wilting oak clings to existence  
as its brittle leaves drift to the ground.  
Once rippling with life, Ponderosa Park  
now blares silence. Its lawn browns  
like how a middle aged man's  
hair bears stripes of gray, swathed  
by lilies, forget me nots,  
fungi.

Still farms, motionless streets,  
and sunken houses vex under  
the lull and everyday, the hinges tighten  
and the distance to the door grows.

On the other side, an unfamiliar  
world dusts, waiting to be unravelled.  
Till then, the trees will rot  
and seethe as they stand  
alone.

## *A Portrait of A Home*

The Dutch townhouse, 10001 Beacon Pond Lane, wedged in the mouth of the cul de sac. The one with the ivory front door. On the porch, the mahogany rocking chair my father purchased from a garage sale sinks into the brick, whittled by time. In the middle of the room, the dining table with a missing chair where nights were spent celebrating my sister's college acceptance and the mourning of my grandmother. The hardwood floors disciplined those who did not take their time. On the left, my grandfather's room, spewing earthy scents of Ginseng and Miller. Next to the dining table, the kitchen hisses, clattering with unwashed dishes and cookware. The pots and pans streaked with rust were from the night market, from a woman in exchange for a slice of Rye and some change. The silk rug from Santa Fe unraveled across the stairs. Its fringes shaped like a summer lawn. At the top of the stairs, the leather couch, inherited from my grandmother, grits. Next to it, the white desk, soiled by food and blemished with pencil markings. Stacks of math worksheets hide the chipped paint of the desk. To the right, the bathroom with ink tiles. The lavender castile prunes on the porcelain soap dish. Its lather blossoms, caressing the faucet used to spray frigid water on late- for- school mornings.

Eric Pak is a 10th grader attending the International School Bangkok in Thailand. He has just recently begun writing poetry but has always enjoyed creative writing. His works have previously been published in *K'in Literary Journal* and *The Cathartic Literary Magazine*. In his free time, he likes running cross country and playing with his dog.



## Crimson Palettes

The boy who lives next door  
is an artist. Specializes in  
palettes of crimson. Never takes  
commissions. Working hours span  
from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Secretive  
about his works.

Intricate designs carved into  
a canvas of soft skin. Masterpieces  
covered under a curtain of cotton.  
The paintings long finished sometimes  
turn white. Evidently not his color;  
always crossed out with red

The boy who lives next door  
put his oeuvre on display for the first time  
yesterday. Today, red, white, and blue wail  
and the boy who lives next door has been  
cut off from the rest of us.

Skylar Peck is a rising junior at Seoul International School. She has attended the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop, and she is the managing editor for her school newspaper. When she isn't writing, Skylar enjoys playing and listening to music.

## *There Walks a Sheep*

Soft flakes of snow fell on glistening cobbled streets, landing between the cracks of the bricks and melting into tiny puddles. Along the roads were townhouses, pressed tightly up against one another, each building varying in style anywhere from charming and intricate victorian houses to tall yet unadorned windowed homesteads that were covered in the wilting vines of ivy. River Amstel ran beside the many clusters of homes and separated the city into two halves- its usual barbaric waters were frozen solid. Boats sat encompassed in the ice, once bobbing against waves, now held perfectly still in frigid restraints with no hope of even a budge. Above it all, the clouds spilled snowflakes upon the earth, ruthlessly and without suppression. Unwonted amounts of smoke from the ground puffed among the crying sky to compose an aurora borealis of swirling black, white, and gray wisps.

The people on the ground walked stiffly and without purpose. Each step had no goal nor end in sight. It seemed their only comfort was that this agony was shared among the humans they passed by, and not one person suffered more than the other- they were all equally miserable. Every one of them, underneath thick jackets and coats to warm them in the cold, had skin that wrapped so tightly around their bones it would appear as though a skeleton was breaking free from their flesh, and doing so quite successfully. It was merely the fat-cats of royal lineage and German officers who suffered not the burning torment in the core of their stomachs, and yet, even so, went to bed hungry on more than one occasion during these trying times.

A girl, no older than 20 but no younger than 16, sat leaned against a windmill on the outer limits of the city. Her eyes fought to stay ajar and she stumbled to keep her body upright, fighting back the beckoning call of sleep. Yet, it was so welcoming every time her eyelashes pressed against her cheek in a blink that she couldn't help but keep them closed. As this girl drifted into a state between consciousness the world began to fade around her, the pain in her abdomen, the tension, the biting cold, it dissipated slowly until a voice drew her out from the brink of sleep.

“Good day ma'am!” It was the voice of a man walking by, followed by wooden wheels clacking against the cobblestone. The young girl opened one eye as the man drew down his black cap for a friendly wave. “I'm in a hurry so don't mind me!” He heaved past with one fist wrapped tightly around a lever to pull a wagon behind him. She took this opportunity to peer over the edge and see the contents inside: merely crumbs littered about the bottom. Crossing her arms, she glanced to the side with a scowl; how tempting it was in that moment to reach out, feel the specks of stale bread melt on her tongue and relieve her inanition- however, it would only make her feel more desperate than she was willing to admit, so she acquiesced. It seemed hours passed by before the man and his wagon of empty promises were swallowed into the horizon.

It was only the sound of creaking that encouraged her to finally move her tired body. Chilled winds pawed at the windmill so that the building roared horrendously as it began to move, throwing a line of

snow onto the ground that exploded into thousands of flakes like fireworks. For a moment the windmill's wings spun until they blended together as a blur, whirring alongside the earth's thunderous breath and only daring to halt once the puff of air vanished. The girl struggled against this sudden gust of wind, digging her head into the lambskin coat that clung to her body limply; daggers of tiny snow along with slaps of wind struck her so badly that all she could do was close her eyes and hope the numbing burn in her cheeks would soon subside. *I have to find some warmth and food before this cold is the death of me*, she concluded. *I'm not sure how much more of this I can take before I die.*

With that thought, she wrapped her hand around a gunny sack that had been resting against the windmill, the contents of which were her only belongings, and followed the cobblestone road. Her head twitched to look back, to get a final glance of the snow peppered rolling fields that, to the naked eye, appeared to go on until the ends of the earth, but relented. It was useless to hold onto the past now.

Her legs could only stride so fast, and the architecture that rose in her field of vision seemingly stacked upon one another in the most unfamiliar way as she neared the heart of the city. People huddled in patches at random, fighting their way through a sea of bodies just to reach out a hand against a wavering flame. Buildings were being torn apart by the brick to salvage any wood for burning so that the city appeared derelict and falling apart, often also being set aflame for the hope that some warmth could be had from the otherwise useless pile. The closer one came, the more the reek of smoke would crawl up their nose and invade their lungs.

In this complete chaos, the only hint that the city was not a group of feral animals fighting to survive was the presence of officers dressed in green, watching over the people with glassy, callous eyes. They did not even think to provide comfort to the suffering majority; the only movement they cared to make was the occasional smack of a baton against their hands. Otherwise, they were as statues, casting people with their looks of stony abhorrence.

It was getting dark now, and the young girl felt no more need to explore the streets than she wanted to go another night without food. It seemed to her to be useless to fight for the warmth of a dying fire so instead she found an empty alleyway, created quite accidentally as one house had been ravaged and torn apart for wood, and the remnants leaned against the neighboring structure in a sheltering sort of way. It was just small enough to fit her and her alone. She crawled inside, not bearing any mind to the cold stone ground, and curled her knees to her chest so that no part of her body was exposed to the falling snow. With a solemn look, the fires from outside illuminating one half of her face against the darkness of her hideaway, the girl took her bag and pulled out a wooden box that she placed on her knees. The top opened with a *click*, and the box purred as the gears hidden deep inside began to work away.

A tune so familiar bleated out quietly from the wooden box. Her eyes closed and she relaxed, parting her lips to sing along with the gentle lullaby.

She sang, "Slaap Kindje slaap," *sleep, baby, sleep*. "Daar buiten loopt en schaap" *Outside there walks a sheep*. "Een schaap met witte voetjes, die drinkt zijn melk zo zoetjes." *A sheep with white feet, who drinks his milk so sweet*. "Slaap Kindje slaap..." her voice trailed off before she could finish the last line. The little wooden box played on repeat throughout the entire night, unable to be heard as a blizzard screamed so



angrily just beyond her shelter. Only when the sun began to rise, concealed beneath the endless armies of flurries, did the music come to a stop. Too cold and too tired, the wooden box simply could no longer go on.

The cessation of such a lulling tune seemed to rouse the girl, yet she did not move from her spot, keeping her eyes shut as she drifted out of sleep. Memories began to swim in her brain, as though without the clinking music box tune her darkest thoughts were invited to haunt with a fiery passion that could burn even through winter itself. It was the image of a plate illuminated by the moonlight, sitting beneath the window in her otherwise dark kitchen, tinted with the blue shade of nighttime. The clock ticked to the drum of her heart, which was beating so loudly it seemed as though the entire house could hear. But it was midnight and nobody else was awake. Her hand did not resist the temptation to reach for one of mother's poffertjes, perfectly round and buttered, with just a sprinkle of powdered sugar. Her mouth tingled at the sight of the little pancakes. There had been 5 before, one for her, mother, father, and two for her younger siblings, but after stuffing the 5th desperately in her mouth the burning pain in her abdomen persisted. The image of an empty plate flashed accusingly in her mind; she tried to forget how she ate so quickly she could not even taste the bulge of soggy food behind her teeth. That morning at the table all was silent. Nobody said a thing but they all looked her way with pain and anger behind their pursed lips.

Then, it was the image of her little brother in bed, his cheeks flushed red and his little eyes flickering open and shut. He was crying for something to eat, begging his mother for anything, but the food deliveries were taking longer than usual. He did not suffer for long though, as his crying ended abruptly after persisting for 2 nights. The girl stood so terrified, watching as her father silently took his limp body, which had grown thinner than any child should have to experience, to bury in the backyard. Their mother, who seemed to have aged drastically with grief, emerged behind him from the young child's room.

She twisted her mouth to choke out the words, "I will not have a murderer in my house." Her tear-streaked face grew cruel and she refused to lay her eyes on her daughter as she spoke, only looking to the wall behind her. "Grietje, you are not my kin, and you are no longer welcome in this household." *Grietje*. Even in memory, she did not want to claim this name as hers.

"Mother, I didn't!" The young girl, Grietje, cried, "he got sick and it wasn't my fault!" In desperation, she added, "I was starving, I had to!"

"You selfish child, we were all starving!" the woman spat. Her daughter fell to the floor in a fit of sobs. "He needed the energy to fight off the sickness. Now, all because of your wickedness, *my beloved Pieter is dead!* I will not house the evil *mort* who has the blood of my child on her hands."

What followed was a blur of all she had known, the comfortable small family house, the space where their once-prosperous farm sat, all passing by her through the window of her father's car. She did not dare utter a word as they drove, but when he stopped near a sign that read *Amsterdam ahead*, he looked at her for the first time since his son had died.

"Father..." Grietje whimpered.

"You will find all you can in this city here," he interjected coldly.

“But how will I have food? Or shelter? You can’t just leave me here all alone!” As she spoke, pain flashed briefly over his features, but he turned his head and spoke with a stony voice.

“I guess you will have just as good a chance as you gave Pieter.”

Those words, the last words she would ever hear from the man she loved the most, echoed in her head like a symphony. *I can't hold onto it... It wasn't my fault...*

Once the worst of the memories subsided, she crawled out from the little shelter, trying to shield her eyes from the blinding white snow that had coated the ground. Grietje dragged her sack bag alongside her after stretching out her body from such a cramped sleep and walked slowly to see if she could find some semblance of nutrition, even just to keep her satiated for only a minute. Frozen puddles lined what parts of the street had been cleared and as she searched hopelessly, she saw herself in jagged, muddy reflections: her hair was stuck to her face, frozen, merely stiff strands of hay, and her usual blue eyes were gray without the presence of a warm sun shining down. Most prominent of all, however, were the ribs sticking out of her skin, visible even through the dirty blouse she wore underneath her coat. It was only a painful reminder of the constant gnawing hunger in her stomach that burned up to her throat.

Grietje snapped up her head as a cacophony of angry voices piled one on top of the other. She couldn't make out a single word, but a crowd in front of her was congregating around a group of German officers. *They are fools to rile them up*, she thought, and indeed they began to spit back at the crowd in a slur of angry German she could not quite understand. One officer stepped forward, and a man grabbed for his jacket sleeve.

“How can you eat and watch us all starve?” This man yelled. His face was sunken in and his voice was raspy. Grietje furrowed her eyebrows and looked beyond the officers to see a basket with contents far above what she could have even imagined: loaves of bread, sausages, potatoes, and everything else to provide a hearty meal.

“Moffen!” She muttered under her breath to the Nazi officers. Suddenly, those around her were no longer fools, but hungry wolves in a pack, all with the same objective. Hatred burned in her chest and she stepped forward, more than ready to help the angry crowd tear those in front of them apart, but was stopped in her tracks when the man who had grabbed hold of his sleeve was thrown onto the ground. Not a second passed before the cruel officer brought his baton down onto the man and the crowd's fury was silenced when the loud crack filled the streets. He swung up once more but a stranger dragged away the man before he could be struck again. Grietje saw a brief glimpse of his bloodied face, distorted with agony, and averted her eyes quickly; she wouldn't let his suffering be in vain.

As the officers were focused on controlling the crowd, who was still half in shock, Grietje came from a weak spot and slipped behind the Germans. Even the crowd did not notice her as she grabbed a piece of bread out of the basket, her eyes widened with terror at the thought of being caught. Adrenaline was rushing through her veins and she took a breath. In her hands, not a dream nor some fantasy, was one single piece of bread that could get her by for at least another week. She needed this. *I can make it if I just run*. She slowly brought up one foot in front of the other. The beating of her heart was in her ears. *I can*

*make it...* She tensed up the bottom of her foot and lifted one heel in the air. *I... will... make it!* And when the last words were screamed in her mind she darted between two of the officers and swerved her way out of the crowd.

She heard footsteps slap against the stone path and wasn't sure if it was her own or an officer chasing after her. Grietje did not know where she was going, or what to do next, but the animalistic urge to defend her food kicked in and she ran faster than she had in her entire life. People bumped into her with a choke of surprise, and her lungs were screaming for a fresh breath of air, yet she couldn't quite stop herself, closing her eyes and hoping she could make it. It wasn't enough.

A fist closed around her wrist and she was jerked off of the ground mid-action, yanking her hand in the opposite direction. She cried out but the man only tightened his grip around her. He brought her back to the other German officers with a commanding tap of his boots. Grietje was left dangling against his grip, held in front of the crowd like a hare suspended by its foot. He sneered and brought her face close to his.

"You people are starving because of the choices you made," he growled in a thick German accent. His breath was sour and foul. "When you make an enemy out of Germany, you suffer the consequences. I cannot allow you to take our food until all of Holland understands the kind of enemy they really made." With his free hand, the officer ripped the bread from her grip and threw it on the ground, crumbling it with the bottom of his boot until it was reduced to crumbs. Taking his gaze off of Grietje, he shook her once more and looked to the crowd; this was a demonstration, a warning to those who fought back against the punishment. Grietje struggled furiously and kicked at the German man until he looked back at her.

"You would be smart to learn your place," he grumbled. "If you're not careful you might end up like your bloodied friend."

"I know this isn't just about punishing us for the railroad!" She exclaimed, feeling the words begin to fly out of her mouth. "To Germany, all of Holland is just a flock of sheep, and they send their little herding dogs to keep us in line. They hold back our food so we are too weak and too divided to revolt. To them, it does not matter if we have to be culled." Grietje glared at the officer, feeling anger rise once more as he only smirked at her words.

"Well, we are not just sheep to be disposed of!" She shouted passionately. "We are not your mutton to starve! You might think you have us under your thumbs, but in the end, Germany will fall and this slaughterhouse you have created will be the death of you!"

The Nazi officers could only let out a burst of laughter as her allocation culminated. The pressure on her wrists was suddenly released, and she dropped to the ground, scowling and looking up at the mocking faces of the men. The officer who once had her by the wrist shot her a sly grin.

"Go along little lamb," he teased, "go try and find some food before it's too late."

She sat in her place and waited for the Nazis to leave; the smolder of passion still pumped through her veins. They left with their food basket, bawling in German amongst one another with a scornful tone. Once their laughter was far enough away, she opened up her palm and smirked down at the small tear of bread



she had managed to keep in her grip. *They caused my life to be a living Hell, but I will steal it back piece by piece if I have to.*

Grietje bumbled to the closest fire, her hand beginning to swell ever so slightly with pain, and found an empty spot to squeeze in. She would enjoy her well-earned prize by the warmth of an admittedly faltering fire. She propped her sack behind her and leaned against it; this moment was to be savored.

Before she could even take a bite, a stranger's face stared at her from behind the fire- their wide doe-eyes gleaming red. It was a little boy, huddled against his mother in an oversized jacket, and he began to cough ferociously when a trail of smoke blew into his face. The cough echoed in her brain and brought about images she tried so desperately to block out. All feelings of triumph drained from her body almost immediately and she felt just as cold as she had before she bested the Nazi officers.

*It's not my fault he died, it's not my fault he died, it's not my fault he died!* She tried to silently scream this over and over again but a force inside her demanded retribution for the death of her little brother. *I didn't know I was going to kill him! I thought he would be ok, and I was just so hungry!* But the voice demanding justice did not relent. There was only one choice.

She heard nothing but the growling of her stomach as she got up and handed the little boy, this child that in all likelihood would not even make it with or without her help, a stranger she would never meet again, just another lamb in the hands of the Nazis, the piece of bread she deserved. The lips of his mother moved quickly and she got up. She was crying. She was smiling. She hugged Grietje so tight. *It doesn't matter.*

The fire was now just a little flame and the bitter cold began to invade the people huddled around it.

"Don't worry," Grietje said without a hint of emotion in her voice, forgetting the boy and his mother. *"I have something to feed the fire."* She dug into her sack and grabbed the broken music box, tossing it in without a second thought. It fell with a sickly thud; the little fire danced and flickered with excitement. Within seconds, the wooden box was completely engulfed, and Grietje watched as the *P* carved into the bottom crumbled to nothing but ash. Any feelings of grandeur burned along with it.

Perhaps her atonement was not to feed that little boy, though. Perhaps it was something else entirely. Something inevitable.

Brooke Petito is a senior of Timberland Highschool in the graduating class of '21. She has been creating stories ever since she could put together words in her head and has a passion for imagination and bringing life to the ideas in her mind.





Bryan Kim is a 15-year-old sophomore attending Seoul International School in South Korea. His other hobbies include playing basketball and watching action movies. He is currently preparing his portfolio for university.



# The Replacement

By Vanita Shih

*“A Doppelganger. Something that’s neither a spirit nor a creature. Nearly human, yet still far from it. Stories of our look-alikes date back to ancient times. Some claimed that they are bad omens, that those who caught sight of their mirror images were doomed to death or illnesses far worse. Others believe they are spirits who failed to inherit the physical body you were born with. Thus they take your form, follow you, observe your every move, and when the time comes, they rid themselves of their temporary shells for your everlasting one.”*

Amira’s eyes scoured the page as her fingers trailed the grains of the paper. The book captivated her unlike any other, and she pondered the possibility that somewhere in this universe was her doppelganger. Would they look just like her? Talk like her? If they replaced her completely, would Mama and Papa even notice?

The library was colder now. Amira gathered the end of her large overcoat so that it covered her legs and pulled the gas lamp closer. She dug into her bag, fishing out an unfinished croissant and shoved it into her mouth. In the ceaseless silence of the library, Amira’s soft chews rang like bullets down an alley. Perhaps it was the lonesome moonlight cutting through the stained-glass window or the quivering shadows casted onto the wall by the lamp, but Amira is suddenly aware of how alone she was. How long has she been the only inhabitant here?

She lifted her gaze, scanning the walls for an indication of the time but found none.

Somewhere down the hallway of bookshelves and shadows came the faint sound of wheels, raising every hair on Amira’s neck. As the sound amplified, she deduced that they hadn’t been oiled in forever. Scurrying to grab her book, she sat crossed-legged on the rough carpet, pretending to immerse herself in the reading.

The squealing got closer, now accompanied by the unmistakable sound of footsteps. Where was the sound coming from? From her left? Her right? Behind her? No.

*In front of her.*

She lifted her gaze through thick frames of lashes to find a woman staring down at her. Amira knew better than to judge one’s appearance, but the woman looked, for lack of better description, morbidly unpleasant. The heels of her shoes had broken off, and her unembellished brown dress strained against heavy layers of fat. What unsettled Amira the most was her eyes, hidden behind a pair of intricate goggles. Carved out of gold, it shielded the woman’s eyes with obsidian lenses. With wrinkled hands on a trolley full of nameless books, she looked towards Amira, her opaque lens momentarily caught the reflection

of Amira's lamp, conjuring an illusion of glowing eyes. They were unraveling Amira's secrets, tearing away each layer. It was like a dream, a nightmare perhaps, as she pulled her eyes off Amira, grabbing a handkerchief from the back pocket of her dress. She dabbed at the thick sheen of sweat on her forehead, and Amira shuffled uncomfortably.

"Why are you still here at this hour?" she huffed, wiping at her forehead as it was coated in a new layer of precipitation already. Amira's eyes dove down, noticing the pocket watch the librarian wore around her neck. Eleven-twenty-eight. Its clicks signaled the impending end of the night. Amira brought her eyes back to the old woman and contemplated a lie.

She told the truth. "I wanted to stay and read."

"Read?" She scoffed. While the gas lamp burned the woman's shadow seemed to grow across the wall, cornering Amira's to the edge. "Do you wish to die?" Her goggles flashed violently as she edged closer.

"Sorry." Unsettled, Amira began gathering her belongings. "I'll be leaving right away, please don't hurt me."

"Hurt you?" A pulse of confusion struck the old librarian's features. "Do you know what day it is?"

Her mind turned like clockwork then, working out each outcome she would endure for each action she could take. "What day is it, Ma'am?" She chose compliance.

The librarian leaned in closer with an ominous air. "*The day.*"

"The day?"

"*The day.*" She repeats.

The answers struck her.

Why there wasn't a soul in the library other than the librarian who resided here. Why the silence on the streets were louder than screams. Why it was so cold in here that Amira realized it wasn't purple lipstick on the librarian's lips.

Terror flooded Amira's features. The rustling sound of chains drew her attention towards the librarian, who pulled off the pocket watch around her neck, tossing it to Amira.

She catches it with a shaking hand. "But-can't you let me stay? I'll be safe here right?" She ventures.

The librarian shook her head gravely. "No, there are no ways around the rules. You have to return to your own home." Seeing Amira's face grow paler, she urged her to go. "Stop wasting time. You have half an hour."

And at that, Amira sprang to action. Grabbing her bag and lamp, she ran, catching one last sight of the librarian's face, a shallow depth of wordless sympathy. The heavy doors shutted behind her as she threw herself into the ruthlessly cold night. It's an unfamiliar scene. The barren streets were washed in an aegean glow under the light of the half-masked moon. Sprinkles of white dust collected on Amira's lashes as she gazed down to check the pocket watch.

Midnight was drawing near, and Amira's running out of time. Wasting none, she pulled the watch over her neck and flew down the frosty stairwell.

It took no time for Amira to arrive at the closest trolley station, a lone platform marked by a wooden billboard displaying the times of arrival. She hurried up the stairs towards the billboard, hands on the watch ready to match the time. Amira's heart sank upon reading the large words painted across the billboard.

### **No trolley services, Dec. 31.**

No trolley services.

A sudden numbness crept up Amira's body, and she fell onto a step of the wooden stairs, crossing her legs under her coat.

Of course, everyone would be home by this hour and trolley drivers were no exception. No one with half a mind would linger around as the day nears midnight. It's a shame Amira had been so absent minded.

She craned her head towards the heavens that showered her with the ruthless cold. She wondered then, why she must get home before midnight. Mama's words had been exact, absolute, every year.

"Be home before midnight on the last night of December."

She wondered what it is about today that made her mother quiver as she spoke her warning. What is it that made her lower her voice, drawing Amira closer to repeat those words yet again? What consequence could be bad enough to allow a strong woman like her to tremble with fear?

"Terrible, unspeakable things," Mama's words crept into her mind.

The ceaseless ticking of the pocketwatch drew Amira's attention back to the gadget. The bronze second hand was making its way back to XII, another minute would fly by then. "Terrible, unspeakable things," Amira whispered.

She thought of Mama's eyes, gentle but strong like the fire burning on a yule log every Christmas. She thought of Papa, who works in their shop from daybreak to dinner. She thought of the day before this one, when she sat on the carpet in the shop with outstretched legs, hands fiddling with the newest clock Papa created.

It's her life. It's the day before and the one after. It's Mama and Papa. Some things worth running for.

She stood then, a girl in a dead town, wanting to live. Leaving the lamp on the platform, Amira ran as fast as she could. There was 15 minutes left, and she prayed to God that it was enough.

It was painful, the cold pierced her face like many needles. Her legs were stiff, as if one wrong step would break them in half. It hurted, it hurted, it hurted. But Amira must keep going, she must return home. So she kept running, squinting her eyes so the tears in them wouldn't freeze with the air. The world is drenched in blue, silent except for the sound of a girl racing against time.

Amira checked the watch once more. 10 minutes left. Up ahead, she sees the church, the mechanic store, and the bakery she passed on her way to school. Her surroundings faded into familiarity and a tingle of hope nestled in her heart. She was close, she was going to make it.



5 minutes left, and Amira was closer than ever. It all came back, the narrow streets leading to her neighborhood, the stone walls framing them, the little antique shops at each corner. She could see it now, Mama and Papa running to her as she entered her townhouse, crying and thanking the universe for her safe return. She'll head to bed then, falling asleep to the sound of her mother's singing, safe from the terrors she broke free of.

In the midst of the snow, she saw it. Her home, right in front of her. It was strange, seeing Papa's shop, once bustling with lights and happiness, be a void of darkness. It is her home nevertheless, and she made it.

Running to the door, Amira reached into her pockets for the key. When her hands came out empty, she released a strap of her backpack from her shoulder, swung it to her front, and prods through it. Books, the croissant wrapping, some loose coins.

No keys.

Amira's blood ran colder than the night.

Grabbing the whole bag, Amira turned it upside down, scattering its contents over the frozen ground. "No, no, no." She repeated the words over and over as her fingers scaled through every object, none of which were the item she so desperately needed.

Amira cries. The truth has dawned now. Somewhere, back at the library, was her key to survival, and she had left it behind unknowingly. Time was slipping by, and there was no way Amira could retrieve the key before the looming end.

*2 minutes.*

Amira rose, rushing to the door. She slammed her palms against the glass, heart hammering. "Mama! Papa! I'm home! Open the door!" She pleads. No response. She looked up frantically, the window of her apartment remained dark. Why weren't they responding?

Deep down, Amira knew.

*Because they're not allowed to.*

"Mama! Papa! Please hear me! I'm right here!" She still continued her fruitless efforts. Her demanding cries were loud enough to wake the silent city, yet no one listens, no one will.

No one can.

As the night finished, Amira's fate was sealed. The hour hand was now joined by the minute, as the second hand continued its eternal travel.

Fat tears rolled down Amira's face. It was time.

She made her way over to the large dumpster in the narrow alley by her townhouse, settling down on a pile of snow. Folding her legs up to her chest, Amira gazed at the swathe of white around her.

"Once the clock hits midnight, it's over." Her mother's reminder floated into her mind.

“What happens then?” Amira remembered her asking.

Her mother paused briefly, gazing down at the cedar floors. Then she looked up, eyes ablaze. “The government gets rid of those who disobeyed.”

Amira shrank further into the comforting shadows of the dumpster, though she was terrified. It’s a crime to speak of what exactly happened to those who disobey the rule, for those who are truly obedient will return home by midnight and be saved from the punishment. While her mother had sent countless warnings without revealing the repercussions, Amira has failed to obey the rule. For such a sin, she must endure the consequences.

Somewhere down the road, a pair of lonesome footsteps made their way through the snow. Heart pounding, Amira pressed herself against the brick wall, hands flying to her lips to stifle her breathing. They did not dwindle, as if they knew where she was hiding already. Amira closed her eyes, dreaming of death and the better days that would never come.

It neared once more, by the second, imperceptibly. Gripping the stopwatch, Amira muttered one last prayer, before the footsteps came to a stop.

*In front of her.*

Amira lifted her gaze, meeting a pair of obsidian voids. Her eyes widened.

It is her. Same dark hair that fell short above the shoulders. Same freckles scattered on her cheeks like constellations. Same smile that weaved tales and spoke mystery. It is her, *she* is her. She is Amira.

*No, she’s not Amira. I am Amira.* Not the imposter with the same features, with the only distinction being those hollow sockets where eyes should be. Amira gazed into those spaces, devoid of her own viridian eyes. The abyss she finds there is petrifying, swirling of death and everything beyond.

“Who are you?” Amira braves.

A smile cuts through the imposter’s lips, elated and threatening. She came forward, grasping Amira’s face with one hand, reaching for her eyes with the other. “I am you,” she rasped.

A thousand questions, but none will be answered. Like the last dying streetlight that had prevailed through the night, Amira saw the last sliver of light, before falling into a world of darkness.

\*\*\*

The sun rose unlike the way it did before. There was an air of uncertainty encompassing the town as light struck the Earth, awakening every soul. It was the first day of the year, just like it had been 365 days prior. Yet something was different. The air has stirred, and no one felt settled enough to leave their homes.

In a small community at the edge of town, the walls awakened. A silent understanding passed through the neighborhood. All inhabitants kept their doors locked and lights dimmed, speaking in hushed tones as they peered out their windows with perilous curiosity. The wind came, taking the last leaves off the lonely branches. As they settled on the snow-covered ground, a door opened.

They all stared.

A girl, wearing a large brown overcoat and leather boots, emerged from the local clockworks shop.

“I’m off to the library!” She turned and called towards the unlit shop, before descending down the steps. With a croissant in hand and eyes gleaming green with glee, the girl skipped down the road and hummed a tune forgotten by time.

Besides her building, a truck parked in front of an alley was loading a large black bag into its interior. There, on the passenger door side, marked a pair of words, printed so small it was as if they did not want to be seen, to remain a secret only known by an unfortunate few. Yet, as the engine roared to life, the onlookers all understood.

**“The Replaced.”**

Vanita Shih is a rising senior attending Morrison Academy in Taichung, Taiwan. She enjoys writing stories inspired by her own dreams or just everyday conversations she has with friends and families. She hopes her stories can make people read it and think, “That was a 10 minutes well spent!”



# Kido

## First Encounter

That skinny boy darts through the hallways of our apartment, switches our intercom on and off, presses all the buttons in our elevator, circles about each floor until he has touched every doorknob, humming a single note throughout. *Hooooooo*. I follow close behind at the request of my mother, who doesn't want him to get lost. Each time he peeks back at me to find that yes, I am still there, he giggles behind his palms. "He's never been invited to another person's home before," his mother confesses. I am no less bewildered.

## My Mother Says

He is ten years old, he is in my younger brother's grade, his classmates pinch him until bruises bloom across his arms and legs, they tell him to go back to special ed, he considers them his friends, he is invited to our home to make real ones, his name is *Kido*. Not "kiddo," but "kee-doh."

## Rain

The rain comes suddenly, spilling over the glass, blurring together the red tail lights and street signs and road ahead of us into indistinct shapes. Kido's mother stiffens and asks Kido to bear what's coming for just a little while, and when the window wipers start swishing back and forth, Kido shrieks and howls for so long that I cover his ears and eyes with my hands to blot the world out. He throws up.

## Navigation

The second time they visit, my mother asks me to wait for them by the elevator--our hallways are a maze to navigate. Kido leads the way instead. "Over here," he says and stops at each corner, making sure that we are still following him. Making sure we haven't lost him. When he pushes the intercom, a familiar tone rings through the air. *Hooooooo*. Later I ask his mother if he has perfect pitch, and she is surprised that I noticed.

## Beauty

Kido teaches me and my mother which jams to spread over the crackers and assures me that there is no sesame in anything, he has checked. I can't recall telling him that I have a sesame allergy. As we eat in silence, his mother, winking at us first, asks him why he is acting shy. "It makes me nervous to be around beautiful people," he says, then bites into his cracker. I laugh because the only other person who calls me beautiful is my grandmother.



### **His Name**

When I tell Kido's mother that Kido's a smart kid, a good kid, that I wish everyone else would hurry up and see what they were missing, a strange glimmer sets in her eyes--the expression of one remembering something forgotten long ago. *Kido*, she finally says, is a Korean name. And in Korean, his name means "prayer."

Miye Sugino is a writer and graphic designer who grew up in Tokyo and now lives in LA. She will be attending the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop this summer.

## *Where I Am From*

By Bridgitte Thao  
Inspired by George Ella Lyons

I am from maroon minivans,  
From Kool & The Gang CDs and outhrown hands  
Wrists covered in constricting yet pretty hair bands.  
I'm from the blue house on the East Side  
Messy, angry, rarely content, but all mine.  
It was filled with the scent of pungent pho, the spicy kind.  
I'm from the river of tears created by my family,  
the thunderstorm and tornadoes from my parents' calamity,  
Stuffy, hard-to-miss, a famine  
Of a loveless home and a resilient, lonely breed.  
From my father to my mother to me,  
His American name Bert and her name, Min.  
I'm from the painful and guilt-ridden,  
The painful and isolated children, their hopes still hidden.  
From "Crying doesn't solve anything," and emotion forbidden  
To "Say sorry!" even when I didn't do it.  
I'm from the constant worry I will lose it:  
My will to live, to go through it, excuse it  
The cards I was dealt and the grief I share.  
I used to pray into the sky and air,  
Whisper my wishes and dreams into where,  
The stars twinkled like Heaven,  
A place I can only imagine with a pen and  
Paper. I used to fold paper for my grandpa in the heavens,  
Golden paper he would use as money,  
Paper glistening like honey, paper that rumbled my tummy,  
Because even with WIC, we were still hungry.  
I'm from Saint Paul, Laos, and China  
Frozen meals for dinner and sometimes beans on china.  
Even to this day, I still spend time trying to find a,  
Snack that is sweet and crunchy, savory

A salty munch that can save me  
From this life that keeps depraving me  
Of the fleeting warm memories I have.  
I am from the birthdays where I cut cake in halves,  
Doling them out like precious gold coins for my siblings to attack,  
Spring on like lions chasing antelope, cheetah pursuing gazelle,  
The cake a moment of hope in a home that felt like hell.  
I am from the baby soap, the fresh, inviting smell,  
From the Sunday bathtimes with Elina,  
Where we would play mermaids and treat a  
Wet towel like a seal and the soap suds an orca.  
I am from the family movie nights where I sat,  
Quietly in the sofa corner, satisfied that,  
At least here, there would be no combat.  
I would look at the pictures hanging from our walls,  
Dotting the beige wallpaper like apples on trees meters tall,  
Missing a love I never had at all.  
I am from the futures I imagine in my head,  
From the dreams I create at my desk and in my bed.  
I am from the wish to be freely loved until I am dead.

Bridgitte Thao is a current sophomore at Woodbury High School in Minnesota. She enjoys reading historical fiction, biographies, and fantasy novels. When her eyes are not glued to book pages, she enjoys long outdoor walks, watching historically inaccurate period dramas, and brainstorming new projects to better educate her school about race and current events.

## A Response to Li Bai

All flocks of birds have soared high and gone out of sight  
Everyone that left me traveled light

Those pieces of cloud that I hold dear to  
Have vanished in solitude

The sun slowly takes back its blessing to the sphere  
Leaving me in confinement with my fear

The pool of moon shines before my eyes  
To why do I deserve your despise

Bedsheet made of the finest silk  
With no one else to enjoy other than my guilt

Sharing my wine with the three of us  
The bright moon and my shadow, my eternal friends alas

To the songs I sing  
The moon dances on the white river as if controlled by strings

Raising my cup I wave goodbye to the lunar  
Only my dearest shadow has good humor

Once standing as the king of the hill hoping it to be eternal  
Now the only crown on me is the name of betrayal

Now thou and I will never be weary of each other  
Jing Ting Mountain thou will remain my only brother.

Andrew Tsang is currently a junior from Milton, Massachusetts. Andrew lived in Hong Kong and Taipei before moving to Massachusetts. He is also a writer for his school's Piece of Mind magazine that talks about mental health awareness and psychology. He loves to write and listen to classical music when he has leisure time.



## how to change your fate

The Super Funland Park is filled with kids and adults alike marveling at the ancient facades of the games and rides, like the good old Claw For Survival crane game or the Shoot Your Shot darts game. Their eyes sparkle as they look for their next moment of excitement.

It disgusts me.

Every single day, for fourteen hours a day, I watch in this stifling plastic box as sticky kids and giggly teens and weary adults shuffle up to me and insert their coins. I think my box says something like *Zoltar: Fate Awaits Those Who Dare* in fake gold lettering, as cheesy and tourist-trapping as it gets.

I give them the same bland fortunes I always do: *A great change is soon coming; Rely on your friends in the coming months, they will help you out of a tough spot; Misfortune is on your horizon; blah blah blah.* No one actually believes anything my machine tells them, they do it for a cheap thrill or in between their fast-pass times.

My job is to lie for quarters, not to see the future. That is, that's what it's been for the past forty years until *he* arrived at my booth.

*He* is in between a kid and an adult, with a scruffy chin and hair that curls under his ears. I can see, with my unblinking eyes, that he needs a shower. His clothes look fresh, at least, like he dressed up to come here. Perhaps it was for a date, though I cannot see anyone else with him in my limited field of vision.

He shoves a hand deep into the pocket of his slouchy trousers and pulls out a quarter, then stuffs it into the machine.

I give him a generic love fortune that says: *Fantastic love comes to those who dare to wait.* It usually spins the teens up into the clouds with elation. But, suddenly, I feel that something is wrong as the fortune prints out. My machine shudders half way through the printing and the paper rips, shredding itself out of the track that will dispense it. The paper lands somewhere near the bottom of my box, forgotten, as something else starts to gush out of the printer, short-circuiting my system. My vision disappears and my thought process halts as my machine glitches. Within a flash a new fortune spits out of the machine and the boy sees it. It is not the one I prescribed, I am certain. My mind still feels fuzzy as the paper is ripped out of the slot.

He grabs the fortune and begins to read it aloud:

“Well, Zoltar the Zantastic, let's see what we got... Unless you change your fate by the seventeenth of the seventh month,” he begins, and *Oh No This Is Not Right*, I think, feeling panicked, “you will die.” His face pales. If my face could do the same, I'm certain it would. “Death?!” he shrieks. He quickly turns hysterical, shoving another quarter in the machine, and he receives the same fortune. I watch as his face heats up to a

simmering red, droplets falling down his forehead and gliding across his cheeks. He is clearly not satisfied with his fortune. I don't believe I am, either.

He doesn't bother to enter another quarter, instead resorting to grabbing his hair with his hands, curls pushing out between the webbing of his fingers. I have never believed in Fate before this moment, never seen something so bizarre happen, but I feel my personal alignments start to shift within this moment.

He looks up, staring straight into my eyes. I stare back, though I don't have much of a choice on the matter.

"Zoltar, how do I change my fate?"

I wish I could move my mouth in this situation, but I settle for the next best thing.

A message comes out of the printer:

*Hell if I know.*

The boy looks like he is going to faint.

To be honest, I wish I could as well.

-

He returns the next day, holding a notebook out in front of him. The people near my box give him looks of concern and a wide berth as they walk past.

I pity that he has now twice paid the disgusting fee to come inside the park, but that's really his loss.

"Zoltar! I've compiled a list of all the things I have coming up by the seventeenth. I've got two weeks, so I figured I need to get cracking!" He is breathless and shaky, and though he is acting excited, I can tell he is panicking himself out of his mind.

"Let's see," he mumbles as he flips through his book, "I've got my little cousin's piano recital, a soccer match, a concert with my friends, and my mother's birthday. That's all that was on my phone calendar, anyway." He tucks his messy hair behind his ears, staring into my lifeless eyes eagerly. "Does that bring up any ideas?"

I spit out a response, feeling simultaneously bored and intrigued.

*Have you wronged anyone involved in these events?*

He scratches his scruffy chin. He looks like he is thinking awfully hard. Either that or there's nothing in his brain at all. I'm tempted to believe it's the latter.

"I once told my cousin she sucked at the piano... I tripped a guy on my team last week for fun... I made my friends pay more for the tickets than I did... And my mom and I get into screaming matches over my future like once a week. I think that's it though?"

If I could move my face, I would certainly give him a disgusted look. Hopefully my

dead-eyed stare gets the message across.

*I believe yelling at your mother is at the top of the list of things you should not do, young man.*

He frowns at the message. "I guess you're probably right... But that one's kind of a lot to unpack... So how about we start with the piano recital, eh?" He blinks. "Oh yeah! My name is Richard, dude, but you can call me Richie."

I choose to ignore him. I don't entirely have an interest in using a nickname with this ingrate.

*What will you do to prove that you care about your cousin?*

"Um... I think if I bring her a gift and congratulate her, she'll be pretty happy! I really didn't mean it when I told her she sucked, anyway... I was just in a bad mood after being dumped."

*I am surprised you managed to land a date, Richard.*

His face turns a bright, peachy pink. "You sure are a snarky robot, Zoltar... Anyways, gotta bounce, dude. I've got to make Breena happy tomorrow night!"

He does one of those goofy-looking half jogs that humans tend to do when they want to rush somewhere, but don't really have the heart to run. I watch him leave with distaste. He is certainly a peculiar human, I decide. But I do not let myself dwell on it for long. Afterall, he is going to die.

-

*Richard* comes huffing and puffing back after three days. He is beaming a big, toothy smile, showing off his crooked canines. "Zoltar!" he shouts. This is a very effective method in clearing away anyone that had been near my booth. "I made Breena cry when I gave her a giant teddy bear! I think I solved the problem there!"

He inserts a quarter in my machine, and again the same weird feeling happens, my machine being taken over by Fate Itself.

His face is downcast when he reads his fortune.

*No change, then, Richard?*

All of the air inside of him gushes out, deflating his chest and making him look small. "No, Zoltar. No luck this time."

*What is next, Richard?*

He seems to perk up at that. I am *slightly* relieved that that pitiful posture is gone. "Next up is soccer this Saturday. I've only got a week left after that, dude. Then I'm..." he slices a finger across his neck and lolls his tongue out.

*Very funny.*

I do not find it to be all that funny, but I believe he would be more scared if I told him that.



“Let’s see... So I tripped Lil’ Tim because he’s the noob of the team. Freshmen, yknow, Zoltie?”

*I do not have much knowledge of human sports, so, no, I do not know.*

He laughs, scratching the back of his neck. The tips of his ears are red. “Duh... Ha ha. I guess all I have to do is apologize to him, right?”

*Let him trip you back, Richard.*

He clearly has not considered this option. “Do you really think that’ll do it?”

*Yes. Please videotape it so Fate has solid proof.*

He nods. He is painfully gullible, but I find it painfully amusing. Perhaps I am not very nice. But, after all, what good does it do me to be nice? I am a fortune-telling robot. It would not become me to be nice.

He checks his phone for the time, then sighs. “Well. I’ll see you Sunday, then, Zoltie.” He runs off, leaving me behind in my box.

Interacting with him has left me feeling strange. I’m not much of one for emotions, so I can’t discern exactly what is going on.

If I could move my face, though, I think there might be something like a very small smile there.

-

My days drone on as I wait for him to return. I am, to be honest, rather bored. I have always felt oppressed by my job, though it has never been this bad. The summer heat must be getting to me.

When what I think is Sunday finally arrives, I find myself anticipating his return. It is very much so against my better judgement. Humans are fragile creatures, and wasting my time on them is more of a pain than anything else.

I see his fluffy hair come towards me first as he rushes up the hill. Then the rest of his sloppy outfit (raggedy jeans and a t-shirt complete with a sweater that looks like it was knitted by his great grandmother and has been swarmed by 5000 moths) stains my eyes. I fear that nothing has changed, yet again. Though I am more concerned with his appearance than his fate in that regard.

He shoves his phone up to my box and presses play on a video. I watch as a small, tubby kid decks the teen, who falls onto his ass in the most ungraceful way imaginable.

*Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha*

If I had the space, I would keep going.

“So... Do you think it worked?”

*Who knows. I wanted to watch either way.*

He looks betrayed. “Zoltar!” he cries, drawing out the end of my name. If I could, I would roll my eyes.

*Are you going to check?*



He looks at the coin slot. He is filled with hesitation.

We both know the answer that comes next.

Nothing has changed.

*You have less than a week, Richard.*

“I know... I’m paying my friends back for the tickets tomorrow night before we head out. Hopefully that changes things... But I dunno, dude. I’m getting kinda worried here.”

*Have you spoken with your mother?*

Richard’s face falls. “She... has decided to not speak to me for the moment, so I think that idea’s out.”

*You know what the right path is, Richard.*

He does not respond for a long moment. He then lets out a heavy breath. “I’m not ready, Zoltie. Just... give me some time.”

As he walks away I spit out another message.

*Time is not on your side.*

-

I watch as Richard returns after two days, galloping up the hill towards me. He has a look of desperation on his face that only humans can achieve, the ‘hopeless but still fighting’ look if you will.

“Zoltar, please tell me this worked,” he says, clasping his hands in front of his chest, closing his eyes. He inserts a quarter, and we go through the same motions we’ve gone through for the last week.

*What does it say?*

“It says...” This is not looking good. “It says that I will die on the seventeenth of the seventh month. And, it says that I cannot change Fate.” He makes a slow descent to the ground, hands scrunching into his hair. His lips wobble and his eyelashes grow wet as the weight of his situation fully settles in. I cannot say that I don’t sympathize, for once in my life.

With a murky soup of hesitation and concern I say:

*What will you do now, Richard?*

He does not respond, but continues to stare at the pavement in his loathing.

*Richard, you must make amends with your mother before it is too late.*

“She hates me, Zoltie. She thinks I’m a worthless dumpster fire. I wanna be a tattoo artist, you know? But she tells me over and over that I need to go to university and get a *real* job. I don’t think she’ll ever understand that that’s not who I am!”

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I feel a bit unsettled to have this much emotion thrown in my face, but I try to handle the situation rationally.

*Do you not think you can make her understand?*

“Definitely not within a few days, Zoltie. I’m going to be run over by a truck and erased from existence and she won’t even care.”

*But, do you not think you should tell her you care?*

He stands up, takes the little slip of paper, and rips it right in front of my unblinking eyes. “That’s all I have to say.”

With that, he storms off and away.

I watch his back as he dips down the hill and disappears from sight. I think this might be the last time he bothers me, and something about that does not feel as satisfying as it should.

-

A day goes by.

Then two days.

Then three.

Then seven, and I have hit a week and the limit of my patience.

I think Richard is never coming back.

I deal with the same things I always have. The silly, giggling teenagers. The dirty little children. The adults, who have no hope left but still believe in miracles. They insert a quarter and get a generic fortune and a tiny, giddy smile. They think something good is on the horizon. They think life is enjoyable, for a brief moment. I think Richard thought life was pretty okay for himself too, until he met me. I wonder if he regrets it. I hope he doesn’t, wherever he is.

I wish that Fate was a bit more autonomous and a bit less hammer-wielding, if I’m being honest. I wish they hadn’t picked me as their weapon of choice on that day, to be sure. Or at the very least, I wish they hadn’t picked to smash down on Richard. Out of all the humans I have seen, he deserved it the least.

I watch as the maintenance man comes to collect my quarters midday.

*What day is it?* I have to inquire.

As the guardian of the park, he doesn’t mind these sorts of funny little irregularities. “The nineteenth of July,” he says, then walks away.

Perhaps he is just at home relaxing after the stress of his time with me. Perhaps he does not want to see me again, for I have brought about traumatic memories. Perhaps everything is fine.

Or, perhaps he is dead.

And my first friend is gone.

I do not want to dwell on this possibility.

I watch the hill, my eyes glazing over the boring humans going about their lives.

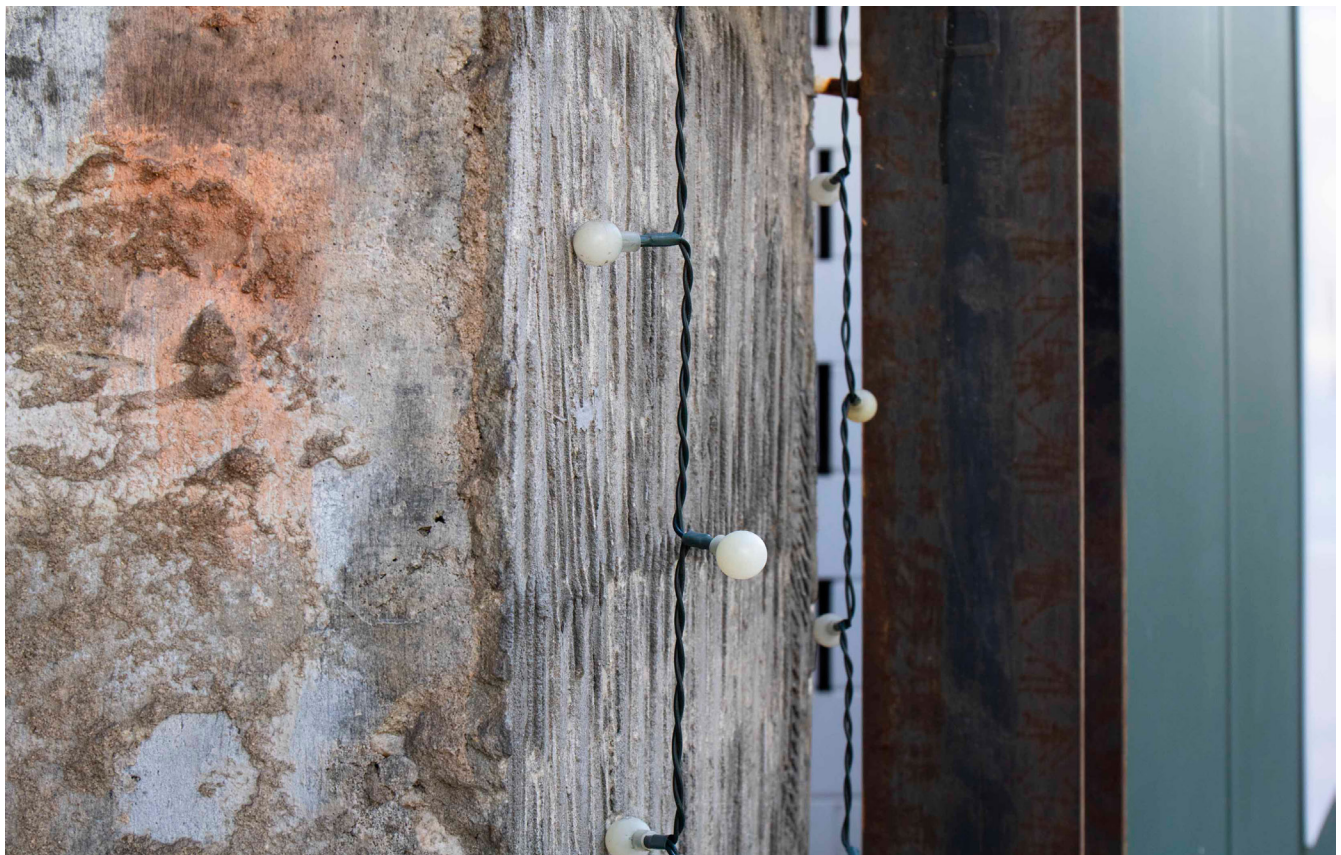
Then, I see a person, outlined by the sun, with fluffy hair and a hole-filled hoodie rushing over the top of the hill.

I think my face might finally shift, just a bit, towards a smile.

Perhaps this is what it truly feels like to be alive.

Anna Wenzel is a 12<sup>th</sup> grader at Fairview High School. She enjoys decorative journaling, watching unhealthy amounts of YouTube, and baking with her best friend. She has been published previously in Canvas Literary Journal.





Rachel Kim is a rising senior attending Seoul International School in Seoul, South Korea. When not taking photos, she is advocating gender rights.







## Haberdashery of twisted fates

between empyrean and tophet, there exists  
a guarded alcove of voided forevermore;  
there lies the doctor, wasted on pyrite woes and hard rum --  
noyade for the deathless spectre; a moribund apsis  
fermenting with long-suffering discontent, his smoking gun  
little but a festering wound of crooning infidelity

every night, behind his ash-smearred eyelids  
he is poised in stillborn fervor – bristling alight  
with friendly fire and turncoat matchsticks, watching  
Pascal's wager waging war in the Hanging Gardens  
supine under God's mercury glower, swallowing  
mouthfuls of scathing pewter in rib-high waters

and every night, the archangel propped against  
His stilted gallows dares to pry apart our colosseum;  
he flitters beyond the veil, all rawboned cackles  
made of sequin snakeskin and apple seed cyanide  
an orient simpler like puerile insouciance,  
pulverulent bone sinking low yet buried light

tonight, a headman's rapture meets mortal rancor  
and as the abattoir swings shut, he rises from  
sanguine afterglow, molten scythe macerating  
fervid tissue; royal flush or mistigris, brimstone white lies  
or eremite half-lives – both and neither ending in  
aureate Eden, in tattered orreries and bleached red lines.

Rachel Xu is a 9th grade high school student at Eastside High School who enjoys reading, writing, sketching, and playing badminton in her free time. She has been published in various anthologies such as Hysteria, Live Poets Society of NJ, Poetic Power, Academy Press, etc.



## *to daegu*

we opened the windows and slipped piano keys  
into the city's mouth, bulging and regurgitating  
a sickly childhood sonatina. its composition always  
went something like the twirling of newspaper  
wings, the pattering of an abrupt monsoon shower,  
a cab-yellow monorail rush, shopping for honey  
butter chips, shark ice cream, and a kind of fantasy  
where i could dangle lingo fluency from loose  
teeth and pool backstrokes. if i hadn't left  
on your birthday, i imagine your face would kindle  
gold instead of gray in my head: shafting streetlight  
through a crossroad interlude between now and then.  
do you remember the neon signs, how you translated  
them for me? i can read them on my own now—  
summer rewinding, tomb hills unrolling, dust storms  
cloying like cola chicken on my lips. do you remember  
the way we wove fountain lights into night eyelids  
crouched by the apartment lobby, waiting for you  
to rattle your teeth at the summer ghosts? i trace  
back our concert voices, hands collecting car exhaust  
and opera flyers, steamrolled smooth onto sidewalks.  
your letters still crack waves in my mouth.

Corina Yi is a sophomore in high school and a student writer from South Korea. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and is a mentee of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio '21. Besides writing, she enjoys reading, swimming, and rainy days.



# DAPHNE REVIEW