

# Lexophilia

JOHNS HOPKINS CENTER FOR TALENTED YOUTH  
LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS JOURNAL



L I G H T

Spring 2021

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*FRONT COVER: "Tungsten" by Divya Narayanan. "Tungsten" is set in my mind during the pandemic—a timeless, isolated space. I cling to interactions with strangers, even if it is simply someone's eyes crinkling above a masked smile.*

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## Our Mission and Process

For readers who enjoy action-packed stories, mind-boggling nonfiction, or heartwarming poetry, Lexophilia has something entertaining. Through a collaborative process among a team of aspiring fifth to ninth grade CTY authors, artists, and editors from around the world, Lexophilia presents a unique and authentic vehicle for showcasing their diverse talents. By CTYers for CTYers, this yearly literary zine aims to inspire lexophiliacs all over the world to hone their craft and share their voice with the community.

Lexophilia accepts writing and artwork from current Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY) students in grades 5-9 from all over the world. Students enrolled in CTY Online Programs Master Class II: Writing, Editing, and Publishing comprise the student editorial board and review committees that select a theme for the issue, then read, accept, and edit pieces for publication under the guidance of CTY instructors and staff. Student editors manage the design and layout elements of the journal. Information about each year's theme and how to submit student writing or artwork will be displayed in the CTY Online Programs website at least 30 days before the submission deadline for 2022. We hope to see your work!

[cty.jhu.edu/Lexophilia](https://cty.jhu.edu/Lexophilia)



*BACK COVER: "The Light of 2020" by Sofya Donets. I decided to reflect on the impact that 2020 has had on my artistic life. Despite the devastating effect that COVID-19 has had on the world, this experience has lit up my imagination, passion for art, and craving for expression. My digital illustration portrays the uncertain and "floating" feeling of the past year, and a colorful world outside the window on the train, representing my artistic experience—the "light in the darkness" during these times of crisis.*

# Editor's Note

By Veronica Howard

Have you ever woken up to a morning illuminated by delicate swarms of light, fuzzing all over your sheets, flying through the window's blinds, tangling in your eyelashes, making you realize that today, in fact, has been illuminated all together, and that nothing in this world now could prevent you from having a wonderful day? Or, in a different perspective, has the incessant pestering of this unbearable brightness plunged your day into nothing but a bad mood that can't be unrooted? Well, either way and far beyond, this year's publication of *Lexophilia* will have something that suits just your definition of Light.

What's so special about Light is how its vast scope of meanings can apply to anybody in personal ways: someone quarantined and frightened about a pandemic might view light as a "sliver of hope" and energy; a bright child might be "like a little ray of light" for someone; a scientist might immediately refer to photons that stimulate plants' photosynthesis; a person might find love in a religion when praying with warm candles; a war veteran might recall flashes of bright lights from a bomb before losing a loved one; an artist might attempt to portray Light by leaking watercolor over charcoal; or perhaps you are simply using a lamp or the illuminated screen to read these very words. However you might view Light, this literary journal shows that it is infinitely more than just "that bright stuff that lets me see things."

As this year's Editor-in-Chief, I have experienced a busy yet absolutely enthralling journey as a behind-the-scenes communicator and organizer, having the opportunity to view hundreds of written pieces and artwork created by other CTY students and learning about the exciting process behind crafting a journal with other classmates, instructors, and our publisher. Hundreds of submissions tumbled in, and I literally had to hold onto my hat as I read as many pieces as I could each day. The Content Editors and their teams fired away with scoring pieces, and we spent quite some time discussing individual written works. I realized how much fun reading a wide variety of pieces could be. For instance, I enjoyed comparing the narrative frames of two stories, "The Wedding Gift" and "Sunrise Cycle." It was beyond interesting seeing how so many talented submitters interpreted Light in so many different ways. Some pieces, like "Commanders of the Light" and "Art of the Counterstrike" were pure creativity, while others, like "Come With Me to Baltimore" and "See," were incredibly well-crafted. It's truly amazing to me how so many new ideas could be generated about Light and fitted into one remarkable journal.

I'd like to end with a shout out to the Content Editors for spending hours throughout the past two months reading and scoring hundreds of pieces and successfully communicating with their committee members; the committee members themselves, who worked so hard on reading and rating pieces, crafting individual shortlists, and discussing with their teams; the Publicity Manager, for creating wonderful flyers and attracting so many submitters to our journal; the Submissions Managers, who so rapidly organized the hundreds of submitted pieces and communicated with the submitters; and the Layout Editors, for working day and night compiling all the accepted pieces into a visually appealing journal! We also would like to share a note of gratitude for those who contributed this year, making *Lexophilia* possible. Even if your piece was not presented in this journal, we will be more than happy if you submit next year. To those who are reading our project, thank you, and we hope that 2021's publication of *Lexophilia* will light up your day!

# Collaborative Story

## Written in piecemeal by the Master Class II students

Today, Light went missing. I couldn't find it when I woke up—there wasn't even a tiny hint of it. I thought that I had woken up too early, but the grandfather clock bonged nine times. I immediately checked to make sure it wasn't the evening already, and that I had somehow slept for almost 24 hours. But sure enough, it was nine in the morning, and there was no sign of Light. "Light?" I called, but no response. Weird, I could have sworn I had seen light just before I fell asleep. It's never gone missing, at least not in the morning! Curiosity filled my mind as I imagined the world without Light. Darkness all around us, with no Light at all, not even a morning sun or a faint lamp's glow. Was this all a dream, one I would hopefully wake up from? I wondered. As a consequence of sleeping at 4 a.m. and running on just five hours of sleep, I might have gone just a little crazy. But there was no way I could've gone so crazy to the extent of being unable to see Light, right? I widened my eyes in an attempt to see better in the darkness. Against my foot: the African carved bowl I found while on a safari in Nigeria. On the table: a gooseneck lamp marred with deep scratches from my cat, Bobo. And behind me: my parrot, August, chirping uncertainly to the perpetual night sky, his shivers rattling the cage. After heading downstairs and eating the breakfast of eggs and waffles Mum had cooked, I asked her if she had seen Light with hesitation, knowing she would be cross once she knew I had lost it. Mum narrowed her eyes. "Have you lost it? You know what's going to happen if you have."

"N-no—, I—I just—" I stammered, backing away.

"Never mind. I haven't seen it. You better find it soon." She got up and walked out, leaving me sitting at the breakfast table, completely at a loss.

I sprinted to the window. Nothing. The moon wasn't even visible. Walking back to the dining table, I grabbed a waffle to go, determined to continue the search for Light.

Realizing I wouldn't stand a chance finding Light in the house, I hurried out of the door and dashed into the dark forest nearby. Stumbling through the dark leaves and towering trees, I wondered whether I'd be able to find light here. The leaves were all coated in shades of pantone and fern green, the trunks all wenge and russet; there was no sharp bright lime or light beige in sight. So I carried on forward, letting the sounds and smells of the forest guide me.

Suddenly, I heard a rustle to my left. Quickly glancing around, a small shadow caught my eye. It danced in a circle, and I felt a force pulling me closer. As I took a step forward, I noticed a tiny bump on the ground. Trying not to make too much noise squishing on the dark wet leaves, I took another step forward. I wasn't quiet enough. The little ball skipped away, weaving through the tall oak trees. But as it flew away, I had caught a glimpse of the telltale Glow of Light, illuminating the foliage lying on the forest floor. I gasped. Gently creeping forward, I saw the elusive sphere, lying still, peeking out from under a leaf. As I tip-toed towards it, the ball of Light began rolling away from me. Hastily, I dove headfirst into the pile of leaves where the Light rested. Not surprisingly, I missed. A tinkling broke out subtly, much like my ringtone—but I could swear I had turned it off—and I assumed the creature was giggling. As I brushed wet, sticky leaves off of my shirt, feeling like my mother when she's aggravated but pleased at the same time, and looked around, the Light began to pick up speed, rolling faster and faster down the slope. I desperately ran through the forest, stumbling over hidden roots, arms scratched and bleeding from clawing my way through the foliage. All the while, the wild ball was dodging in and out of sight, racing over the sodden leaves and under the fallen branches. I kept chasing it, hoping for it to stop. I pushed through more leaves and stepped over more broken branches just to find out what that source of Light was. It tumbled faster and faster, leaving me farther and farther behind alone.

I was about to cry until I saw the ball rest in a clearing a long distance from where I was standing, but it was the only Light in the forest. So I followed the Light until I reached the clearing, swatting away the endless branches and twigs as quietly as I could to get a better look at the ball. I didn't even have to squint to know what I had found. I had grown up with a tale lingering behind my ears—"Once in the Dimmest Generations of Human History, a Man Bound the Only Earthly Light; 'Twas Concealed in the Chamber, Where It Remained until One Morn, 'Twas Never to Be Espied Again." With its wavy fluorescence cascading over its substance, which was a pale crystal mound, only the size of an unripe apple, there was no mistaking that what I had found was indeed the Fifth Element—long lost to nature's eyes—the most naughty, and mistreated, Element: the Eternal Light. The *Eternal* Light. I couldn't believe it. If this really was the Eternal Light...that would mean...that would mean we'd have Light forever, no matter what happened to us.

I instinctively reached for the Light and somehow—I will never know how—found it in my palms. I held on tight and made my way back through the forest, letting the Eternal Light illuminate the way. It would be a long journey home.



# *Aurora*

*By Celina Ren*

*I chose different light and dark colors because it somewhat represents life. As in, if you never had any bad experiences in life, you would never learn to appreciate the good experiences in your life. In my painting, I have both dark and light colors, and they really balance each other out, making something beautiful like a balanced life.*

# The Striking Personality of Light

By Lilla Tsvetkov

## Dawn

As morning inches forward, the light around me is a dark lilac, though the sky is a greyish-blue condensed with milky-grey clouds. A shadow still blankets the earth, and the dew clings onto the green grass. Nonetheless, the neighborhood is awake and aroused, but like an audience, it seems to be holding its breath for the performers to march onto the stage; for the light to breach the darkness.

Then subtly, the curtains of clouds part along the East, revealing the glowing, white light from above. I gasp in a 'Hallelujah' moment, my breath full of awe. I feel the sun stretching out its arms and flexing its legs, loosening the hug of the orange arm wrapped around the horizon. Suddenly, it soars upwards and dances across the stage; the dawn's light has commenced the day's show.

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The dawn light is patient and timid at first, but capable of great feats once its daring individuality is exposed.

### Midday

I squint at the neon blaze and its blatant phosphorescence. Through my fluttering eyelashes, I see the light bouncing in ecstasy from the shiny fur of a dog to the metal gutters mirroring and almost magnifying the intensity of the sun's rays. The motions are so dizzying, as though seasickness is overwhelming me in waves.

As the clouds sail across the sky and briefly shade the sun, I sigh out in relief, ridding myself of the cacophony of the midday light. Yet, everything seems to droop and wither in those moments; just like an actor on an unlit stage, there will be no spectacle unless there is a spotlight for them to dive into. It's a moment of suspense, and a strange one too, for a blue sky with an absence of sunlight is an eccentric mockery.

All of a sudden, BAM! The sun jumps up from the clouds, and a new act of light's performance begins with a different tone and filter. Light's invisible cloak overlays my surroundings with trepidation, and I feel a climax building up among my fellow audience. Feverish excitement is pulsing through my veins.

### Evening

The light glides through the windows of my room and transforms the ivory-colored carpet into a golden one. As the radiance from outside hazes the windows, I bask in the sauna-like atmosphere, my muscles slowly loosening up to the light's mellow massage. The same rays fall onto the glossy, green blades of grass outside, and they shimmer brightly as though smiling at the sun's generosity, their tips turning white.

The sun promenades westward and begins to disappear beneath the horizon's sleek forehead. However, light prolongs the sun's stay by taking its paintbrush and animating the earth before it falls in deep slumber, hidden and cold. The needles on the pine trees wax into an ombre from west to the east. The moss next to the sidewalk develops a scintillating, neon orange tinge, where before was a dark, somber green.

The evening light is caressing and carefree. However, it is restless, as one may imagine after waiting the entire day for its debut. The evening light is the star of the show, and the fans go wild long after the stage is dark, standing up and clapping for more.

At this moment, I am reflective. I think about my day, yet not regretfully, but full of hope for the next. I brace myself for night and grab every moment of the remaining light while it is still here.

Light is symbolic and entwined in us in such a perplexing way that it is difficult to unravel all the threads. Through the centuries, we have philosophized much about light, yet it is as mysterious as it was at the beginning of time.

Nowadays, light becomes lost in our whirlpool of hectic, busy schedules and tends to sit as an unnoticed backdrop behind the stage of our life. Just like in physics, if two things move at the same speed, to each other they will seem still; yet we must understand that light, too, is always in action. It is like a theater, drawing us in from the beginning and taking hold of our emotions the more we watch. I wished to describe light as an emotion: happy or sad, gloomy or bright, truthful or deceitful. I wished to answer the questions lingering in my head, but in order to do so, I had to accept that light couldn't be described by one word, nor in a paragraph or an essay. Light can only be observed, and in that observance, we find that light is an emotion in itself.

# Wandering

By Zizhu Wang

*During the process of creating this painting, I tried to use Chinese ink to create the background. After several times of failure, I finally created what I wanted. I learned from this process of combining this western and eastern way of drawing. The astronaut in this painting represents everyone when they are in a relaxed state of mind. This is because I feel like I am falling and floating in outer space every time when I am completely relaxed. There will always be stress and pressure, but I guess what is why people use painting as a tool to express what they feel and what they wish to be like, just like what I was trying to create in this drawing.*

# to shower in spring

By Carolyn Cheng

the light filters through gentle glass  
and scatters in seventy million  
directions, picking bits and pieces of milk-like  
skin to sink golden teeth into  
the salmon-mint tennis court refracts  
on ten thousand waterdrops and i can only  
look out the window  
at the bruised knees and chlorine  
and the flitting thought of a kiss  
hanging from my lips,  
a seventh wonder  
like a garden soon forgotten

it seems that in this little confine of marble  
and jade i feel at peace  
with the coils of metal snaking upon  
the showerhead, spirals rivaling only  
the tower of Babel as i fell from heaven  
through clouds, perfume, and smoke  
to the end of your cigarette

we fall again  
we love again,  
Love us again  
until summer

slips

through my hands  
like sunlight through gentle glass



子竹



# Where the Lanterns Glow

By Elaina Li

Walking down this grey and brown street  
of Mama's town, Dàlǐ,  
a farmland,  
grey mountains that one could only see  
faintly, past the lake  
I wonder the life they lived, the  
sun-burnt children young of the 1980s  
their aunts and cousins  
and grandfathers and grandmothers —  
the stories waiting to burn out of swollen mouths, how  
Mama said she would feed the family's hens  
before walking the five miles to school  
trekking down brown earth and tasting the fog,  
thick on her tongue

She showed me the photographs that she had slid  
deep in her pocket,  
of the one-room houses Mama  
spent her life in  
shingles crumbling, stone walls dwindling  
the rust like vermilion paint on a canvas  
the pointed ends of low roofs yearning  
to pierce the sky  
“Your yěye, your grandpa, used to be rich,  
before the poverty struck  
he owned a mansion on the side of one of those mountains  
past the city's lake,  
and farmland”  
the four olds — sì jìu, I remembered  
He had hundreds of paintings, of books of otherworldly sweet  
the things that clung to his skin like  
honey and  
glowed crimson —  
forbidden treasures

He set a fire  
and burned it all,  
with a straight face  
red tears warped from the hot flame

But I saw the glimmer in Mama's eye,

the treasures that are still out there somewhere  
pockets of gold hidden beneath soft soil and leaves  
their ashes that brush flora and sky —  
she longed for that broken town on  
the other side of the world  
the days of working in the pasture,  
the sweat, sun shining on her face  
the singing  
the dancing  
the neighborhood and the block,  
where they would play hopscotch  
on cracking road,  
the same road my yěye and nǎinai  
would set fireworks to  
at the strike of midnight —  
sparks erupting like lava in the air,  
saturated radiance on a pitch-black sky and  
handmade lanterns sculpted out of red paper  
illuminating the world so warmly  
like foxfire that rained down on our heads,  
you would have thought there were  
fireflies dancing inside of them  
And they, the children would imagine the buzzing and flicker  
as they danced under the clotheslines,  
taking a bite of their mothers' homemade yùebǐng,  
singing as the wind roared with fury in their faces  
in front of the flat boxes they called home,  
and the plastic bowls they put under  
the holes in their roofs to catch the  
rain during thunderstorms,  
like the memories the children slid deep in their pockets  
photographs in black and white that  
they recolored with a red glow in their dreams —  
you could tell,  
Mama loved it all

Until she wanted every color on her fingertips  
every taste, placed like on her tongue like silver  
she gathered every coin and dollar  
in the palm of her hand  
boarded the plane  
and grazed the sky

I will never be like Mama  
for when her dirt path showed straight  
she taught her worn hands to sew, sewing

wings that shined like the lanterns  
she arched her neck as high as she could, flew  
and landed somewhere in the clouds,  
somewhere in this new half of the world  
But I cannot sew like Mama  
I cannot fly like Mama  
I can only watch the leaves scattered  
along my dirt path  
But I wish for one day  
I can be Mama in the 1980s  
in her small Dali street  
where all day,  
they have that glittering red youth on their faces  
as they skip along the cracking road  
and dance under the clothesline  
laughing as the wind  
roars in their face.



# *Midsummer Mirage*

*By Emma Johnson*

*Sometimes it's hard to see the bright side of things, which inspired me to draw this. The light is not only figurative, as it is meant to symbolize hope in a dark place. I was also inspired by my favorite fantasy shows, games, and books.*

# Fallen Star

By Jiwon Huh

Stars dotted the night sky outside. Aria counted them slowly, rocking back and forth on her window seat. Minutes later, she noticed a star fall down. It smoked for a moment before it shivered and settled on a thick patch of grass. Her feet thundered down the stairs.

She stepped out onto the yard, knocked back by the wind. Aria shivered as she crouched down by the star. She grabbed the nearest stick and flipped the star over carefully. She reached her hand out shakily and let her fingertips brush the surface of the star. Aria yanked her hand back, afraid. She tucked her hair behind her ear and reached towards the star again. This time, she gathered enough courage to run her hand across it, the smooth exterior rippling under her fingers. She tapped the star, surprised to hear a hollow echo.

When she rapped her fist against it again—slightly harder this time, it cracked open, revealing a glowing flower. “Huh?” Aria gently lifted the delicate flower into the air, curious. It wasn’t colored. It was translucent, hued only by the glowing aura that came from within it. Excited, Aria carried it cautiously into her house and slipped through her bedroom door before anyone could acknowledge her. She placed it on her nightstand and sank down into her mattress.

She stared at the flower, astounded by the fact that she could see the wood of her nightstand right through it. She leaned forward to grasp a better look. The flower had long, clear petals dotted with small silver specks. It glowed faintly—like there was a soft light inside it radiating out—and from it came the sweet, inviting fragrance of honeydew. Aria stroked a petal. It was as if she was running her fingers over a delicate piece of glass. But what shocked her was that the moment she touched it, the light from inside it flashed and then—as if a match was struck—it glowed bright. As she gazed at the light, drowsiness shaded her eyes; she felt them close as her consciousness slipped away. Sleep overtook her.

Vivid dreams filled her mind. Children shrieked in laughter. The sun warmed the air of the playground she was on. The ground thundered as the neighborhood kids ran over the asphalt. Everything within her ached to begin laughing and running with them. “Come and play, Aria!” shouted a voice. Her head turned to see who it was. Staring back at her stood a girl with shining, confident eyes and a warm smile; she was unrecognizable, but familiar. Aria was looking at herself. A twinge of pain hit her. Is that really me? Her hands reached out, but she slammed against something cold and hard. Glass. Aria was trapped; trapped by her own timidness. Trapped by how different she felt from the children, the laughter, the sunlight. Hopelessness washed over her. She was surrounded by light, but felt dark within. A delicate weight appeared in her hands. She brought it up to her face, and a familiar scent surrounded her. “Honeydew...” The flower was pulsing light, almost about to erupt with pure brilliance. It seemed to whisper to her, “Just ask.”

Her eyes fluttered open and she found her fingers wrapped around the stem of the flower, its petals trembling slightly in the air. Although the scent of honeydew continued to linger, the flower in her hand looked lifeless and plain, starkly different from the radiant life form it had been just moments ago. She knew that it was just a dream, but she couldn’t shake the sliver of hope she felt the moment she knew the flower was in her hands. Placing her trust in the flower, she brought it up to her mouth cautiously and whispered, “I wish to be confident.”

She glanced down at the flower, expecting a burst of confidence to swell up in her like it did in movies. But nothing happened. “What was I thinking? It’s just a flower...” Aria set it back down and sighed. She began to leave the room, but right before she stepped out the door, she stole one last look at the flower. Her eyes widened. The glimmering glassy petals had returned. A soft aura surrounded the flower once again, and it shined so bright that it filled her room with a gentle light. Aria felt warmth bloom within her. It crept onto her face and filled her eyes with light. Her lips formed a smile.



# *House on a Hill*

*By Sarah Tanuyanti*

*Without light from the stars, the night sky would be incomplete and bland without its counterpart. To capture its uniqueness, I used watercolour to portray the soft yet vibrant colours of the galaxy, while I used acrylic paint to draw the bright stars.*

# Sunrise Cycle

“Once, a woman woke to find her husband gone. In a panic, she set off to search for him.”

By Ellene Warner

The room comes into focus—slowly, I begin to feel cold air blowing against the sweat on my skin, and the haphazard breaths which heave through my chest fade into the background.

*I'm awake.*

It was all a dream.

Yet, the small house seems freezing. I reflexively reach out to the space beside me, the other half of the bed, in search of the comforting warmth which I had so missed in my dream.

My fingers close around the bedsheet, meeting nothing.

I sit up in a blind panic. The window, which he repaired only yesterday, is in shambles. The glass is cracked, and the frame is rotting at the edges.

“Hello?” I call, only to be met with silence. The fire has gone out in the night, so that the only light is that which pours in from the collapsing window. It's stained deep blue with the shades of midnight.

I am alone in the cabin.

“Are you there?” The shadows seem to grow deeper with each passing moment. I take the oil lantern from the bedside table, fumbling for a moment with a matchstick before casting a flickering light onto my home.

The flame is sooty. Did the wick grow dirty? I could have sworn I had replaced it, only yesterday...

Was it yesterday? I look towards the window. Did he only repair it then?

My stomach seems light, the press of nausea rising in my throat.

Why did he leave me?

Where did he go?

I grip the lantern tighter, until the thin handle bites into my skin. There are wolves late at night, whose shrill howls wake me from sleep even on brighter nights than this.

I bend down, repressing the faint ache in my back as I pick up my shawl. It must have fallen from the chair I hung it on just yesterday.

Or perhaps some other time in the previous week.

I cannot seem to remember.

I find my mittens in the drawer, my fur-lined hat at the edge of the bed. The cloth's dye has faded more than I believed it did, and its edges are streaked with grime.

My unease rises, with the misplaced, dirty objects. I need to find him. Something's wrong.

I hang the lantern on my gloved hand and push open the door.

It creaks with the movement. I must speak to him about fixing the house. Our home feels neglected on this chillingly dark night. As if he has faded from the world and his familiar aftereffects have been erased.

*Oh, dear. I'm still wearing my slippers.*

The snow is wet against them. However, it doesn't matter, not now. The moon is gone from the sky.

It's a starless night.

I close the door behind me. It takes a sizable shove to fit within its frame, but I'm focused on a distant memory. Perhaps a story of a night like this, from that elder with folds in her skin, who told fantastical tales of the monsters who resided in the woods.

*"Never live up in the forest, for there only the most horrible demon can be found."*

I kneel, squinting to attempt to make out the patterns in the snow. As the imprints gain definition in the lantern-light, I recognize a footprint.

To the east. A trail of them, rapidly disappearing in the fresh snow. Inexplicable relief pours through my body.

He's here. I'm not alone.

I take off walking, the discomfort of my shawl, which I had tied too tight around my arms, long forgotten.

*"Once, a woman woke to find her husband gone. In a panic, she set off to search for him."*

My heartbeat echoes through my ears in the silence.

The all-consuming silence of the woods.

My lantern gives off a small circle of light, illuminating the pure-white snow in front of me. The thin, leafless trees stand like stains in the corners of my vision, nearly impossible to make out. Beyond that, there is only darkness.

Undeterminable, infinite darkness.

As I follow the footsteps, my shoulders begin to tighten, a small chill running up my spine.

On reflex, I stop.

The footsteps in front of me grow farther apart in distance, as if he has broken out into a run.

With inexplicable certainty, I realize that I am not alone.

*"Suddenly, the woman felt someone, or something, watching her."*

My heart thuds inside my chest.

Something's here, watching me.

I'm afraid.

I hasten my pace.

I can hear it now, walking behind me. It's faster, too.

No, not it; them. Many of them.

I'm running now.

My feet hit the ground, painful aches running up my legs as I stumble through sticks and as the freezing snow leaks into my slippers.

The thudding of footsteps grows behind me. The mob, the crowd, following me.  
Chasing me deeper into the woods.  
A shrieking howl splits the air.

*“The monstrous howling of the wolves!”*

The wolves, the wolves!  
I sprint faster, my throat closing up with fear as my head spins.  
No, no!  
Where is he?  
Why am I alone, now?  
Will I die here?  
All alone, in the freezing winter?  
I suddenly fall to the ground, startling pain shooting through my knee as a sharp rock  
splits through my dress.  
*Blood. Blood on the snow.*  
It’s crimson, leaking out farther until the entire world is red and bleeding.  
No.  
No.  
Not again.

*“And just then, the sunrise bloomed across the horizon.”*

The entire world turns golden with the sun. It’s blinding, shocking, unstoppable.  
The sun rises again and again and again and again.  
Without mercy, my world disappears into white.  
Just as my illusion shatters, the cycle repeats.

*A child asks: “What was the monster?”*

*“Grief,” she answers. “The monster was grief.”*

The room comes into focus—slowly, I begin to feel cold air blowing against the sweat on  
my skin and the haphazard breaths, which heave through my chest and fade into the  
background.

*I’m awake.*

It was all a dream.

Yet, the small house seems freezing.

# Evening Music

By Ashley Headrick

In the slowly dimming gold of the evening  
When light plays lazily upon the oak floorboards  
And glittering bits of dust drift through the air, bathing in aureate light  
A thin hand stretches over small, ebony white keys  
And the gentle stillness of the evening is broken by a single note  
That echoes softly through the rooms of the house.

The second note sounds, in harmony with the first  
As the hands begin to move quickly over the keyboard,  
Each note played with purpose and meaning.  
The music fills every room, it swirls and drifts among the golden evening light  
and floats into the warm air  
And dances around the crystal chandeliers and fills them with shining life  
And sets the wick of every candle alight with vibrant chords  
And seeps into the corner of every wall until the house is sweet with music  
Which tastes a bit like honey

And it graces the lips of the singer as she opens her mouth  
And recites her poetic song, the joy she feels is heard in every note  
Ringing clear and dripping with the golden sweetness of song. The music dips and swells,  
each word hangs in the air for just a moment  
And bathes in the gleaming light as it swirls and drifts about the house.  
Soft legato intertwines a whispered lyric  
And the song begins to come to an end,  
Slowing as it becomes gentle and hushed  
And fades away as a single low note vibrates the air and is gone.  
The house is once again silent, the golden light and harmonious splendor of the evening has  
passed.  
A hushed, reverent silence is all that is left in the empty house.



# *Glowing Lotus*

*By Amanda Martin*

*I didn't have any specific intention behind the artwork except to have fun. I hoped to draw the flowers in more detail, but that can be worked on. Since the theme was light, I went for a dark, void-like background with glowing lotuses. I chose the lotus because I wanted to draw the flowers on a lily pad, as the void seems to act as a pond.*

# Art of the Counterstrike

By Yuxiang Fei

His eyes followed the tracer round unfurling through the bleak dark; from the shadows emerged the blasted remnants of a wall, the scene like the faded memory of a city; then the darkness dropped, again. A voice broke over his radio. It was the major. His voice was on edge. The enemy was near. Thirty feet out. The tattoo of his heart increased. Twenty, fifteen. He loved this part. Adrenaline gave him new levels of perception. Another tracer round streaked through the darkness overhead.

He threw the smoke grenade on the other side of the wall. A simple diversion tactic.

His enemy rounded the ruined wall, turned towards the dirty flower of smoke. Shot twice, hitting only smoke.

Now he emerged from the shadows, stood upright. His eyes followed the blurred outline of his enemy.

He shot once.

Recoil shook him into a fresh awareness of the world. The almost immersive dark, the distant flashes of artillery, the swollen cloud of smoke.

'This is the art of the counterstrike,' he said to himself. His mantra: 'Shoot once; never miss.'

His opponent's ruined corpse bled on the floor.

Then the body disappeared.

The game ended.

His eyes followed the list of names of the screen. He checked the leaderboard. He won, again. But he was still way behind Happy, Europe's number one ranked player.

Another local Counter-Strike competition, another easy victory. KennyS, aged 16, tall and lean, wore an oversized blue t-shirt with gentle eyes; not the kind of eyes you would associate with an efficient and ruthless killer. He turned from the screen, and his eyes followed the shape of the crowd expanding around him.

The 1v1 competition was held in a crowded cybercafe equipped with ten outdated computers. Now that KennyS faced the crowd, unrestrained excitement filled the cybercafe.

In small-town France, KennyS is almost a mythical creature, eyes quicker than an automatic pistol, his fans say. Everyone in the town knew his talent for the game; he was known for his use of the AWP, a powerful rifle requiring only one shot to take down an opponent.

The AWP 1v1 required both pistol-quick reactions and precise accuracy, or, 'the art of the counter-strike,' as Kenny called it. The first few opponents were no match for the Kenny. But there was still the problem of Happy.

Kenny kept playing, and his enemies kept dying, one by one. Corpses appeared in an abandoned factory, a patch of wasteland on the outskirts of a nuclear powerplant, a training facility in Algeria. The joy of videogames: cheap travel and escape from normal life.

Midway through the tournament, a stranger arrived. Twenty years old, with a heavy build, more like a boxer than a gamer. He spoke quietly with the cybercafe owner and sat down to compete in a match with Kenny.

The stranger had glasses thicker than the bottom of beer bottles. Kenny observed callouses at the base of the man's palm, a sign of a well-experienced player as this could only result from thousands of hours of rubbing against the mousepad.

Kenny was back in the blood-lusting chaos of a simulated warzone. A thick boom of helicopters bladed across the sky, artillery fire thudded into the mud at his feet, grenades blew chunks out of another wall.

He could feel his heartbeat in his throat. The crowd at his back became silent, distant, as if they now occupied another planet.

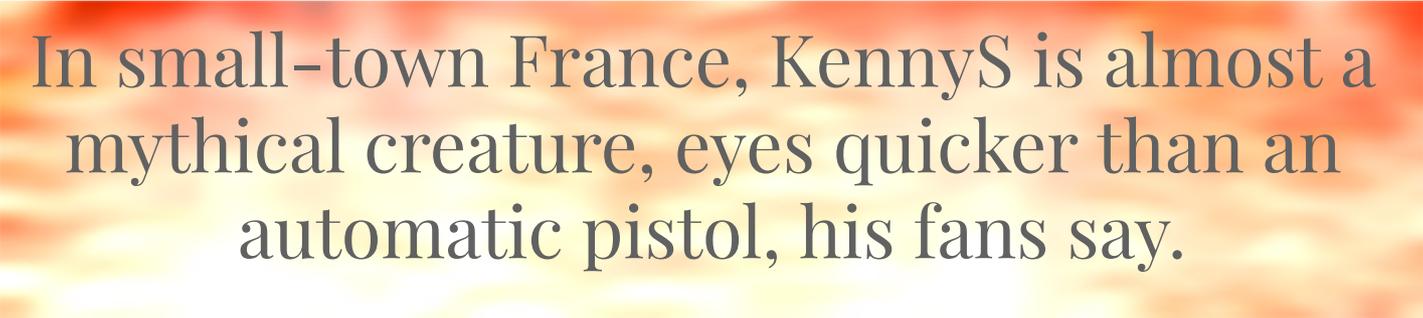
Kenny picked up the AWP and started aiming as he had done so many times before. However, this time, it was Kenny's turn to gasp in awe. He did not even manage to fire when he was taken down with a single shot. Kenny looked to his side; the man was smirking.

Not only was there still Happy to worry about, now this newbie was beating him.

He straightened up and sat closer to the screen. He died along a quiet strand and blue waves, he died a long an underground laboratory, he died along a ruined wall of a city under siege.

KennyS was irritated, he was confused, but his fighting spirit was stirred up.

Kenny remembered the art of the counterstrike.



In small-town France, KennyS is almost a mythical creature, eyes quicker than an automatic pistol, his fans say.

On the top floor of abandoned bank, KennyS picked the AWP, turned around, and threw it right at his opponent.

The crowd cheered louder than ever. Someone slapped Kenny's shoulders, transporting him back into the small cybercafe.

His eyes followed the names on the screen. The stranger was finally identified.

'Congratulations, you killed Happy.'

In this happy death, a legend was born. Soon, Kenny would be invited to play on Happy's team, EnvyUs, Europe's best team. But for now, Kenny stood between two worlds. One eye on the stranger sitting opposite from him, smiling in defeat; and the other on his opponent's corpse, slowly fading into the backdrop of the abandoned commercial bank.



# *Night Light*

*By Sudisha Kumar*

*In the darkest of the night, the only thing shining for this little girl was her star lantern. Amidst the darkness and doubts of her surroundings, she still kept it bright and secure, despite its fragility. With her peacefulness, she dreamt wonderful dreams of moons and stars, clouds and skies, night and day, sun and rain. Finally, she dreamt of herself. Her imperfectly perfect self made of new and pure bits of milky love from the universe. We have to keep the night light of our lives on and protected because it represents our innocence. Innocence is something we need to treasure because it will disappear at some point of our real lives. So we protect it while it lasts before it burns out by the silent, windy night.*

# Shining Armor

By Robyn Davies

You  
 were  
  
 not  
 Prince Charming,  
 with a golden sun-lit crown  
 resting atop your shiny hair  
 as your  
 shinier  
 silver armor  
 swept me up, off my feet,  
 and down, from my tower.

You weren't  
 the dreams I'd collected since five years old;  
 or the star I wished upon when I was six;  
 you were  
 better than

the firefly lights  
 I'd always wanted to capture  
 in mason jars  
 like pixie dust  
 but never did.

because you weren't a fairytale.  
 you weren't my  
 Prince Charming,  
 you weren't  
 better  
 than any

fiction  
 I'd read under my covers  
 by flashlight.

but you came close.

You weren't that boy,  
 but underneath the indigo sky,  
 you told me all your secrets  
 and I told you mine, 'till stars  
 lit up all the galaxies  
 behind your eyes.

You were a best friend  
 when I needed one most;  
 you were more than enough light  
 to fill any  
 city.

even without  
 any shining armor.

# Glasgow

By Yorik Chuang

Tomorrow morning, I'm  
quitting. I'm done with  
this blasted war.

The dark bundle floated slowly down the River Clyde, bobbing up and down in the murky water. It might have been a body. It slowly made its way down past the docks, past the floating pieces of wood and other debris, leaving lazy swirls in the layer of fine dust on the surface. Martin watched it float slowly by.

He sighed.

He stood and stretched. The latest round of bombing had left buildings along Broomielaw hollow shells, walls and columns standing with nothing left to support, too much in shock to fall down. As he walked down the bank, he could hear the distant booms of artillery as the Germans shelled the outskirts of the city.

Sighing, Martin turned left. The bombing had collapsed the St. Enoch station, leaving Buchanan St. as the closest entrance to the camp. The gaping mouth of the station's open tunnel loomed next to the street, sunlight dragging dusty lines down into the darkness. The Buchanan St. entrance had fared better. It was still standing, at least. He stepped through the shattered glass doors and walked down the stairs.

In the tunnels, the damage to the city was less noticeable. With the exception of the occasional cave-in, the subway looked much like it had before the war. Inhabitants notwithstanding.

"How did it go?" Ian sat on an overturned crate, oiling down the firing mechanism of his pistol. The rest of the weapon lay disassembled next to him.

"We're screwed, mate."

"Sure. Thanks. Got anything new to tell me?" He took a shot from his canteen. "Want some?"

"I'll pass." The oily black liquid reminded him too much of the river.

Martin sighed, patted Ian on the back, and walked further down into the tunnel.

\* \* \*

The command post wasn't much; just a battered dinner-table with a paisley tablecloth still on it, covered in notebooks, radios, and tools; nevertheless, it was one of the last hubs of Scottish resistance. Lauren sat by the radio, headset on, one hand twiddling with the dials, the other scribbling furiously. Martin tapped her on the shoulder. She turned around, hanging her headphones around her neck.

"How did it go?"

Martin sighed. "No good. They got the docks."

Lauren's face fell. "We're screwed, aren't we?"

"Yeah."

"C'mere." Lauren turned around in her chair and wrapped her arms around Martin's neck. He sank into the embrace. They weren't lovers. Maybe, in another world, they could have been. Right now, they were just colleagues, and friends, friends who needed to find comfort and strength in each other.

"It'll be fine," Lauren whispered into his ear. "We'll survive." He nodded along, yet deep down, he couldn't help but think that she was wrong.

"They've surrounded us, Lauren," he said, pulling back. "Edinburgh is under siege. Without Edinburgh, the docks are our only source of supplies, and now they're gone."

“We’ll find a way.” Sometimes, Martin wished he shared her unwavering confidence.

\* \* \*

Later that night, Martin lay in his bunk. The light flickered off the ceiling above him, casting shadows that gently swayed with the lamp hanging in the centre of the room. It had been a storage closet, before the war.

*We used to practice in a closet like this, he thought. Before the war.*

They’d wanted to start a band. Him on guitar, Ian on keyboard, and Lauren on drums. They said they’d go touring together after they’d graduated high school, after they’d made it big. That had been five years ago.

*We had a future, for God’s sake. What happened?*

Turning to face the wall, Martin drew the blanket over his head. Damn these army cots.

*Tomorrow morning, I’m quitting. I’m done with this blasted war. I’ll just go back to the docks and sit there, and let the bombs come.*

*Lauren and the others can make do. In fact, they’ll probably be better off without me.*

\* \* \*

“REEEEEEeeeeEEEEeeeeEEEEeeeeEEEEeeeeEEEEeeeeEEEE!”

Martin bolted awake, the sirens triggering reflexes drilled into him by years of living in a war zone.

*Air raid.*

He jumped down from the bunk and rushed out of the room.

\* \* \*

He found Lauren and Ian huddled by the side of the tunnel, perched on a stack of crates. Lauren had a blanket around her shoulders, and was clutching a steaming mug. The ground shook from the explosions above as Martin made his way towards them. Ian saw him first, straightening up and walking towards him.

“Took you long enough. Lauren’s in real rough shape right now. Do your best, man.”

He clapped a hand on Martin’s shoulder, then brushed past him and headed back into the darkness. Martin sat down next to Lauren.

“You’re a right mess, you know?” The fluorescent lights glared off the tears that ran down her cheek, and she couldn’t stop shivering. Lauren nodded, with a faint smile.

“Martin?” she said, hesitantly, voice quivering.

“Yeah?”

“Edinburgh’s gone. They used some sort of new bomb on it, something their scientists made. The entire city’s just...gone. Levelled. Jessie and Nick...”

“I’m sorry.” Gently, he brushed a wayward strand of hair from her face, tucking it behind her ear. Lauren sighed and rested her head against his shoulder. He didn’t argue.

They sat there together, through the night. Martin lost track of time. He watched as resistance fighters rushed past them; listened as the sirens blared, on and off; felt, as Glasgow slowly died above him, oblivious to everything but the pressure of Lauren’s head on his shoulder, the warmth of her body against his, and the slow, shaky rhythm of her breathing.

They watched together as the harsh fluorescence of the lights was slowly blotted out by the rosier shades of dawn. At some point, Ian returned with coffee. Martin didn’t know, didn’t care. All he thought of was the single line that Lauren had said to him yesterday. He repeated it in his head like a mantra, flipping it over and over, kneading it.

*We’re going to survive this. The three of us, together. As it should have been.*

*“We’ll find a way.”*

# The Spark of a Firefly

By Audrija Ghosh

Glow to glow, spark to spark  
A beacon within the eternal dark,  
Blinking, flashing, the secret code  
A code of life, a code that glowed

A flake of fire, born of a falling star  
Or perhaps the fairies' jar  
The light we selfishly snatched away  
Imprisoned but blindsighted to their slow decay

From the night sky to glass jars  
Oh how free they must feel as stars  
Freedom, a choice and a right  
Stolen from these balls of light

Crippled as captured, hounded for the glow  
The light stuttering from the steady flow  
Outside and within, as artifacts within walls  
Beauty that hindsights the cries and calls

Stifled and broken, purged of flight  
Life's dying breath and might  
Caged stars of the night skies  
From flailing hands within the land of lies

A once steady heartbeat  
Faltering, quite bittersweet  
Quiet against the chirps drifting across the breeze  
Insignificant, but a heartbeat at unease

One and the same, equal to us, these stars  
Both imprisoned within different jars  
A world of money, a world of glass  
Same story, different class

For if we caged them all  
The eternal black would be null  
Freedom, a right we cannot jail  
Broken inside, yet light will prevail

# Fear of the Known

By Alexis Kang

I've always wondered why people are scared of the dark.

Don't get me wrong, it's a common fear. I had it myself when I was little, and I'm sure a whole slew of others can claim the same. The dark seemed to bring out the monsters that lived in our imaginations, the things that go bump near your bedside as you quivered under the blankets. Tiny mishmashes of misconceptions that sparked a sense of fear in our naive, young selves.

But aside from being a few childhood nightmares, a fear of the dark is deeply rooted in a human instinct; to fear what is unknown. I've always wondered about that too. To fear what's never had a light shone on it, or worse, to fear what's had a light shone on it but with no one to tell the tale. Why is this instinct such a primal thing, a bolt of adrenaline as soon as we're surrounded by things we can't understand?

On that note, I've also never understood the instinct to be drawn towards light. In daylight, we feel safer. We want to see the light, to learn and develop and grow from what we fear. The rush of knowledge is addictive, and drives us to discover things we haven't discovered before. We fear the unseen and the unheard, yet yearn to know the unknown.

Taking this into consideration, it shouldn't be a question as to why we favor the light over the dark, both metaphorically and literally. But these contrasting ideas give us Hamlet's dilemma. To run, or not to run? To leave, or to embrace? We go in circles of fear and curiosity, coming to a standstill as we wonder why these things happen and mortification of what could happen. And more often than not, we choose neither. We walk away like it never

happened. And that's where I believe the greatest force comes in.

Our fear of knowing.

It sounds completely contrary to everything I've been trying to prove. If humans yearn so much for knowledge and "shedding light" upon mystery, why do they fear it? The question brings us back to where we started: the dark, the unknown. If there is one thing that we fear more than the unknown, it's knowing. The thought of what we fear the most being revealed, without the barrier of our mind, terrifies us endlessly. We don't know how scared we are of the light, of knowledge and growth, until we see how grotesque and disgusting it is. After all, the monsters and demons at our bedside and on our shoulders aren't real until you see them.

It's a bleak outlook, but a true one. Our lives are just one unknown factor after another, piling up until we're too afraid to want to know what's driving it. To finish, all I can say is this.

It wasn't the unknown that killed the cat. It was curiosity.

We go in circles of  
fear and curiosity,  
coming to a  
standstill as we  
wonder why these  
things happen...



# *Vilakku: The Traditional Lamp*

*By Rishi Nair*

*My inspiration for this oil painting was a photograph I took of my sister while she was praying. My sister, Meera, is sitting on the floor in a dark room with an Indian lamp illuminating her face. The lamp, which is called a Vilakku, is from the South Indian state of Kerala where my family is from. The light aspect of this painting is captured by the shadows and features of my sister.*

## Inner Light

By Krishna Chhabra

Pushed away and alone  
In the abandoned unknown  
A rock with all its might  
Tries to shine a brighter light

He is jealous of the star  
Who laughs down at him from afar  
He is enraged that the firefly  
Can effortlessly shine in the sky

He spends every day trying to set a flare  
But every day he never gets anywhere  
He shelters himself and hides away  
He doesn't realize it's fine to be this way

As he grows older, he gives up this fight  
He decides that he will just try and enjoy his life  
So he stops trying to be someone who he's not  
And learns to love himself and not be fraught

He fills himself with compassion and care  
He goes around keeping everything fair  
The rock sets out to make the world a better place  
And while doing this he uncovers his true face

One day the rock begins to shine  
He wonders, "Is this light really mine?"  
Everyone has an inner light, he begins to learn  
But only rocks who love their true self will earn

# The Wedding Gift

By Caroline Wise

She smiled. “I did not think you were so quiet when I heard of your deeds.”

*I hide in the trees, watching the wedding. In my hand, I hold my only weapon. A gift to the bride.*

The first time I met her, she was unafraid. This was unusual, as she was a sea nymph, and was traditionally expected to giggle, blush, and run away. She did not blush, nor did she run, but watched me curiously from her lagoon. Our first meeting lasted one minute, before I clumsily executed a tactical retreat.

*I am closer now. I can see her face, though I doubt she can see mine. She is not smiling.*

On our second meeting, I had determined that I would not run. She said, “My name is Thetis.” I told her mine. She told me she already knew my name. I opted for a hesitant mumble. She smiled. “I did not think you were so quiet when I heard of your deeds.” I told her that discord, hatred, and discontent could be perfectly silent when they wanted to be, thank you very much. She found it quite amusing.

*Her gift is clenched in my hand. I cannot fix this. All that I am, all that I have been, all that I can be, will not fix this. I know this, and it kills me.*

On our third meeting, I sat down next to her lagoon. She swam toward me and smiled. She asked me to tell her something of me. I told her stories of all that I could. Of the civil wars I had started, and grand battles I had witnessed. How I fueled bloodlust with jealousy and discontent, of the foolishness of honor and the fury of war. What else could I have given her? It was all I had ever known. She listened. I do not know what she thought of my words, after, but I know that in that moment, she listened.

*I am in danger of them seeing me now. Let them. I cannot make this right, but I can make them wrong.*

On our fourth meeting, she gave me a gift. She was swimming in her lagoon, and I was sitting on the beach. She was bored, and dove under the water, to where a patch of sunlight shone strongly over the surface, turning it golden. Above the shimmer of her underwater form, the golden water moved and curved, solidifying into a shining apple that she held up to me.

“For you,” she told me.

“Me?” I said. “Thetis, what do you intend me to do with a magic apple?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said, rolling on to her back in the water. “Cause a scene, I imagine.”

*Ares sees me now. He turns around. Though his smile is one of almost childlike joy, his eyes are glittering darkly. I have known him long enough to see that he smells war upon the air today. Thetis sees me too. Her eyes are startled, and a little afraid. I know she does not worry for her own safety, but mine. It puts a twinge of guilt in my chest.*

On our fifth meeting, she was afraid. I asked her why her eyes were clouded. She told me a prophecy had been told about her. I asked her what it said.

She told me: "That I will bear a child."

"Oh," I said. "Well, that is not so uncommon after all."

"That is not the entire prophecy. The prophecy states that the son will be greater than his father."

I frowned. "I do not understand why that is uncommon either."

"Then you do not think of the implications," she told me.

I grinned at her. "You know I never do."

*They can all see me now. I step out of the underbrush and raise the apple high.*

On our sixth and final meeting, she told me of the council's decision.

"You?" I asked. "To a mortal?"

She said, "He is said to be honorable."

"No." I shook my head. "No. Humans are not honorable. He is a warrior. He kills without mercy, hesitation, or even reason. His comrades praise him to avoid war, and he praises the gods for blessings. And you are the perfect blessing."

She said, "It does not matter now."

I asked, "And what of Poseidon? You are in his kingdom, and there is no lost love between him and Zeus. He might protect you."

"Poseiden's," she said bitterly, "was the deciding vote."

I said, "It is not right."

She laughed derisively at that. "No," she said finally. "No, it is not."

*I stand at the edge of the clearing, hand lifted. All watch me. The gods with anticipation, and the mortals with silent fear. I send a few wisps of discontent and strife into the golden apple. I shout, "For the most beautiful!" I throw it onto the ground. Three divine hands, one wise, one regal, and one lovely, reach out to grab it at the same time. The spectacle that ensues is tremendous. But all I see is Thetis. Radiant, even when bitter, unhappy and afraid. Our eyes meet. I want to ask, "Is this spectacle enough? Is this what you intended for the apple? Do you know that I will burn down the world to give you a bit of warmth? Do you forgive me for being too weak to protect you?" She says one word. "Eris." My name. And in that word, she has answered every question.*

Now I ride with Ares across the fields of the Trojan war. Achilles, The Best of Greeks, the Aristos Achaion has been slain. I see him now. Handsome, golden-haired, and skewered through the heel. And I see his mother, Thetis. She holds his body and sobs. And I am back on the edge of a golden lagoon, laughing and telling a sea nymph that she knows I never think of the implications. Not of others' actions, and certainly not of my own.

# Lost Light

By Jacquelyn Song

"The girl breaks into coughs; cobwebs line the cracks in the walls and her legs ache..."

*Tap. Tap. Tap.*

"Come in," a young girl responds to the knock. The door creaks open hesitantly, slowed by broken screens and devices piled behind it. Her mother peers in, squinting into the darkness. She steals a step forward, nearly slips over a discarded dress, and hastily grabs hold of a counter to maintain balance. Carefully, she navigates to her daughter, who sits swathed in blankets. The silver computer light illuminates the girl's face, a ghostly pallor on her cheeks.

The mother kneels beside the bed, requesting, "I want to show you something."

"Now?" The daughter's voice hints at irritation as she slams two fingers down on the mousepad and scrolls more frantically through a series of colorful posts. "I have a meeting in a bit. Can it wait?"

"No. You don't need to change. Just follow me," the mother says firmly. The daughter wrinkles her nose, but slips reluctantly from the covers and straightens her rumpled sleepwear. She navigates through the precariously stacked objects like an acrobat, jumping from one empty tile to another until she reaches the door. However, her mother leads her not to the kitchen or the family screens, but to the stairwell.

The two ascend the spiraling flights, lit by old fluorescent bulbs. The girl breaks into coughs; cobwebs line the cracks in the walls and her legs ache the further she climbs, yet curiosity keeps her silent. The mother throws open the faded scarlet door at the top and pulls her daughter onto the roof.

"Look at that," the mother whispers, pointing not towards the skyscrapers looming behind them, but the grove of oak trees in front. The bases of their trunks, still bathed in early morning shadows, are toned muted ash and russet. Yet the rising sun cuts a delicate line and paints their tops. Luscious autumn leaves like fire flickers whistle together. Gold gilds every waving branch and patch of moss, the vibrant hues calling joyously out to a quiet world. The daughter's breath hitches as she dashes to the railing. Who knew a single beam of light could imbue such glorious life?

"I never knew there were trees there," the daughter breathes.

"School used to be in a building, not online. Early in the morning, I'd walk out and look at the trees, cut by the light like that. They were so beautiful," the mother reminisces. She tries to study the grove; however, her eyes keep darting back to her daughter. The girl looks stunningly gorgeous, bathed in early morning luminescence, her hair like shifting raven wings rather than dull shadows, her cheeks warmed the rosy pink of a delight beyond the screen, her fingers stretched as if to pluck a gold-dipped leaf. The mother reaches for her daughter's hand, hopeful words rising to her lips, "Listen, I wanted to—"

An alarm shatters the quiet.

The daughter arches back as if struck and slams the off button on her watch. The ghostly light consumes her face as she peers down at the time. Frantically, her eyes dart between her mother and the grove. Regret twists her features, but as the watch vibrates insistently, resolution drowns it out.

"I—I'm sorry. This is important. I have to go," the daughter fidgets.

"Maybe we could—"

But the daughter flings herself back from the railing with a final apology and scurries back through the bleak doorway. Helplessly, the mother stares back at the grove. The sun has risen higher, claiming the trees and the surrounding skyscrapers in its radiance. Dull heat beats down on her neck. The light reflected by glass windows stings her eyes. She spins around, searching for the miracle already fading from memory.

Heaving a sigh, the mother starts back to the door.

Her daughter's departing footsteps echo from below.

*Tap. Tap. Tap.*



# *Dazzling Dualism*

*By Nora Mullen*

*With light, there is dark. Cities are a physical representation of that duality, living within the people and written in the buildings. However, the contrast can be dazzling, like the warm light of the sun reflecting off the cold glass.*

# The Woodcarver

By Daphne Gilman

Outside, the sun yellowed the grass and made the road shimmer, but inside the wooden shack, all was cool and still. Light fell at odd angles on a table covered in tools and blocks of wood. The room was made of thin planks of wood and was decorated only with a few coat hooks, a folded, yellowing map pinned to the wall, and a shelf that held a pair of old shoes with the soles peeling off, plus several roughly-hewn, sharp-edged wooden figurines.

The table was ridden with scars and knife marks from over the years, which she felt, sliding a hand over its surface. She knew what she wanted to make today.

The block she chose was dark and dry. It couldn't have been more than eight inches long, but its potential was a weight in her hands.

She got to work, one cut at a time, shaving wood from all the edges and then adding more specific features. She barely noticed as the light changed, lengthening the shadows of the wooden figures on the shelf. In her hands, a new creature slowly appeared: swooping feathers, hooked beak, folded wings.

"Quinn!" She jumped, dropping the bird as she turned in her seat. Her sister peeked through the door, grinning. "Mom says to come; it's time for dinner."

She nodded. "Okay, I'll be there soon."

The moment Claire had gone, Quinn turned back to the table—this sculpture was almost done. Just a few more details and it could go on the windowsill.

But when she looked, the wooden carving wasn't on the table where she had dropped it.

She frowned, bending down to peer under the table, but there was nothing aside from a thick layer of dust.

Quinn stood back up, looking all around. She was sure it had landed on the table. Hadn't it?

A trace of movement to the left of the door caught her eye. She squinted. The light was fading fast, orange and glaring as dusk approached, but she could make out the silhouette of what was unmistakably a bird.

She hurried over to flip a switch next to the door, and the single lightbulb overhead permeated the room with its flickering light. The bird was perched on one of the coat hooks, blinking in the sudden brightness. It had dark brown feathers and unusually striking features—the beak a little too pointy, the talons a little too sharp, the brown feathers a little too sleek to be entirely possible.

Quinn looked around again to make sure the wooden bird really wasn't anywhere else in the room. When she looked back, the bird opened its beak. Only the slightest sound came out, a feeble yet beautiful note in the silence. It looked at her, head cocked with curiosity.

Quinn's voice was soft, gentle. "Are you...? You look just like..."

The bird sang again, this time a higher, louder note.

"But how?"

The bird raised its wings and flapped them, giving her an anxious look.

"Come down here," she called, putting out an arm uncertainly, but the bird only looked at her. "Here!"

She approached the bird, treading softly so as not to alarm it. Shifting slightly on the hook, it only watched her. She raised her arm again, moving slowly, so it was just under the hook.

The bird shied away.

"Go on," said Quinn, "it's okay, I won't

hurt you.” It paused, glaring at her with one eye.

“Don’t worry.” It blinked a bit, looking from her outstretched arm to her face. Quinn held as still as possible as the bird leaned forward, looking at her hand, and then held out one leg and shifted its weight onto her.

The bird was heavier than she had expected, and its talons were sharp on her skin. They stared at each other for a moment, and then they both looked at the door.

Quinn flicked the light back off before turning the knob, and opened the door to a much darker world than the bright, balmy one she had closed it on earlier. The sun had just set and bugs were already starting to chirp.

The bird sang another note, shaking out its wings again.

Quinn wasn’t sure what to do. How had this even happened? She felt a sense of responsibility for taking care of it now.

There was a sudden pressure on her arm, and the talons lifted away as the bird flew into the air.

“Wait!” she called, turning. The bird was flapping, wobbling slightly in the wind, but moving up and away from her toward the sunset. “Wait—”

She tried to run after the bird but it had gone; it was no more than a black speck, far away in the sky now.

Quinn was silent for a second, hands shaking. A mosquito landed on her leg and she swatted it away. She glanced at the sky one more time, then sighed and turned to grab her book bag before heading to the house.

Her bag was on the ground where she’d left it, and she bent down to pick it up. As she straightened back up, her head banged into the edge of the table.

“Ow!” She clutched her head, looking up at the desk.

Her attention was caught by the sight of an odd shape on the table, its outline distinct in the dim light.

Quinn picked it up gingerly. It was the bird she had been carving just a few minutes ago.

It had the same sharp beak and smooth feathers, only the wings were no longer folded. They were raised, as though the bird had just taken flight.

“Quinn?” Her heart jumped as she turned to see Claire’s face in the doorway again.

“I- I’m coming!”

Quinn placed the wooden bird on the sill of the window before rushing out into the near-darkness after her sister.

"The table was ridden with scars and knife marks from over the years, which she felt, sliding a hand over its surface. She knew what she wanted to make today."

# The Boy in the Painting

By Finn Anderson-Hendra

The light dimmed in the forest. Trees whispered their forgotten syllables against the emptiness of night. Their cracked, ancient fingers crept out into the shadows, casting ever deeper stains on the ground. All at once, an owl began its low, gentle call. A lamp sputtered on, visible through a dirty window. It was the only light left in these woods, and the trees welcomed it, murmuring their greetings to the bearer of the flame.

The old man in the cabin raised his body slowly, feeling every twinge, every protest his bones made. He moved gingerly over to the old writing desk in the corner of the room. This desk had been his mother's once. He had an ancient, fragile scene stored in the depths of his mind: her sitting there, young as he had been once. He must have been a boy, sleeping as she worked by the fluttering light of a candle. It was in this very cabin that her own wick had burned low, gone out, the light fading from her eyes, the rise and fall of her chest falling but never rising again. Now he was the boy who was no longer a boy, but an old, old man, remembering his mother by a dying flame.

The painting resting its cracked strokes on the desk was all the man had to leave in this world. He hoped that when he was gone tonight, he would be on his way to somewhere else, but he had never quite let his mind stray far enough away to believe that. He turned his ancient gaze back to the faded paper, tea stains populating the space between each childish line. The watercolour woman was tall, her arms slightly too long to be real. They hung below her hips, making her look like a hunched, slouching creature. The wrinkles around the old man's eyes crinkled fondly. He marvelled at the eye of the child. He could not have known, when he had drawn his mother, the weight of what she was carrying, yet the hunch of her back rang true. Next to her stood the smiling child, his mouth a happy turned up line. His curved stick arm ended in a little fist that clutched his mother's. As the boy in the painting, he had dreamt of being a fireman, a policeman, a painter. He had run to his mother with his masterpiece, so proud of his work. When he reached her, she hadn't answered. The burned-out candle had sat beside her on the bed. The boy had known it was his fault, he hadn't been there to help her, to relight the flame, find a new candle.

The old man felt a tear make its way down his wrinkled cheek. It fell against the paper. The boy was weeping, but his mother could not move to comfort him. He brushed the tear from his face, but the boy he had once been could not be helped. They had taken him away after she had gone. He remembered screaming, filling his ears, tumbling over his whole body, pushing at every part of him, blinding him. He remembered realising that it was all his own. Accompanied by his now-battered painting, he had passed through countless empty spaces, devoid of love, devoid of colour. He had painted no more perfect pictures, no more smiling families, for he never saw any. For one like him, there were no colours, no dreams. The boy had not had a future. He had been taught that he was not good enough, his flame was not bright enough, he would not leave anything behind in this world. And it had been true. He was the boy who had no home. He was the man who had nothing. For the man who had nothing, this memory was something.

Laying down the brittle paper, the old man rubbed a hand over his aching brow. He looked at the lamp beside him on the desk. The flame was burning low now. It was time to go. The owl outside had begun its call, his requiem. The old man had begun his terrible journey that day in this cabin. Now he was ready to finish it. The boy who had nothing took one last look at his lamp and closed his eyes.

Darkness slept in the forest. Trees whispered goodbye in the silence between breaths. There were no shadows left to be cast across the ground. As the boy in the painting's memories flashed behind his eyelids one last time, the owl finished its gentle call and the lamp in the cabin sputtered out.



## *Nature's Gift*

*By Kaitlyn Qin*

*This pastel painting depicts the beauty of nature. With everyone stuck at home now, it's more important than ever to appreciate the world around us. My piece helps bring attention to how marvelous nature can be.*

# The Greatest Vice

By Kate North

The gods watched the girl from above—not because she was particularly special, but because she was still there. They envied her. The gods envied all of them.

Not because they were powerful or special.

Not because they were immortal.

But because they were so very mortal and limited. Every moment on their pale blue dot mattered so much more. They would never know what it was like to become pure light or dance upon the wind or watch the universe grow and change. Yet they still managed to create something wonderful—something worthwhile—day by day, discovery by discovery, and life by life. They dared to dream. To hope.

*The girl's small hands fumbled with the paint-filled tube of hollowed bone her ancestors had whittled. Like her parents and their parents before, she too would leave her mark on this lonely cave, no matter how small.*

*A shiver coursed through her spine as she placed her already stiff and frozen hand against the smooth, icy cave walls.*

*Her hand was crooked. Mangled and mutilated by the harsh world around the cave—broken in many places. The tip of her fourth finger was missing from a painful experience she preferred not to think about. Still, despite the torment of survival, it was there, fingers splayed against the stone.*



*She pressed her lips against the hollowed bone and blew. The high-pitched whistle echoed softly through the dark cavern. Pulverized mineral pigments splattered against the back of her hand, but also around it. When she was certain that the paint had created an outline, she slowly peeled her hand from the wall.*

*The girl stared—in awe—at what remained. She had seen many handprints in her short time on Earth, but this one...it was special. Maybe it was the knowledge that it was hers. That in that negative space had been her hand. Or that it would remain, a semi-permanent marker of her life.*

*She smiled at it. It was... nice. Despite the death and pain and hardship that awaited her outside the cave, she beamed and danced off as the paint of that negative handprint dried. It would always be there, a ghost of herself. A handprint, not a hand. A marker, not a life.*

So, the gods would go on playing their endless games and toying with life after life but never amounting to anything. But the human would find strength in their mortality and outgrow the gods that played with them like dolls.

We began as nothing—just another creature of little importance. We have far to go, but we have come so far. We have forged our own path and never stopped blazing, even in the darkest of nights. With us, we have carried hope—the greatest vice, and the greatest gift—something the gods of old never understood.

We have left a handprint on the endless, starry wall of the universe.



# *Balance at the End of the Day*

*By Annie Chian*

*COVID-19 has shaken the rhythm of our lives for the past year, leaving us feeling lost and unbalanced. This piece was taken on a socially-distant walk at sunset. The sun shone through dramatic curtains of clouds and illuminated the city with light. I felt so full of hope and joy and tried to capture the awe with this photograph of a rock tower. It reminded me that, however chaotic things may seem, harmony and balance can be found just over the horizon.*

# Luminescence

By Dabria Chu

Watch as the dawn glow seeps into the shadows,  
flashing on fairytales and forests, on foreign foxglove flowers.

Watch as the noon blush shines across the meadows,  
brightening the bedrooms and the ballrooms, the best burgundy blinds.

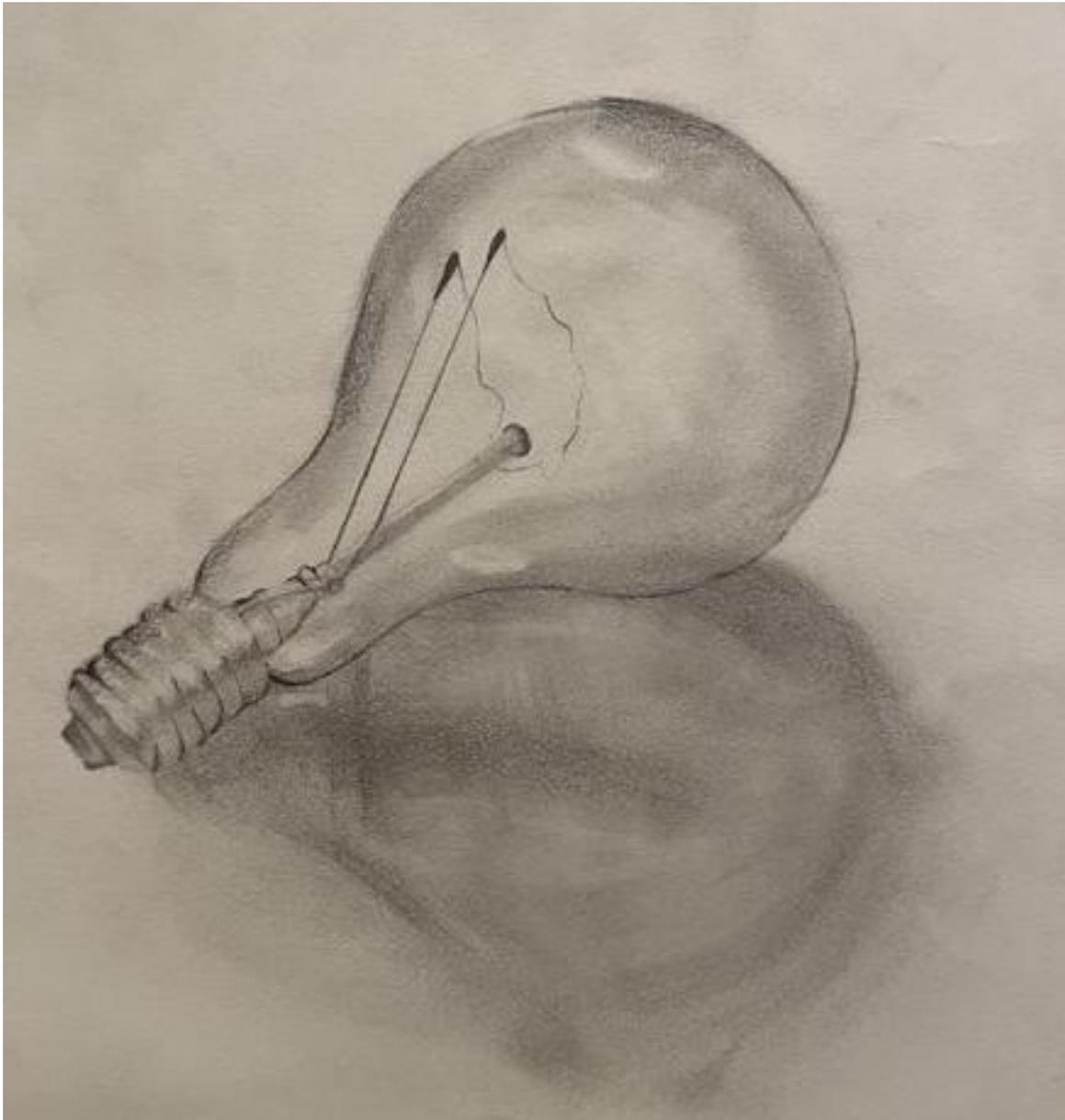
Watch as the dusk flush engulfs the sapphire steamboats,  
glistening on the gorges and the gardens, on grand golden galleries.

Watch as the twilight gleam rises from the footnotes,  
illuminating the ice and the igloos, the imperfect indigo illusions.

I've seen the seconds from darkness to light,  
the song of the angels I've finished to write.

It's been millennia since I've held the night,  
and the future holds nothing except being more bright.





## *Lights*      *By Julianne Yang*

*It's a difficult time for the whole world with COVID-19, but we should keep our hope as a light in the darkness to encourage us to keep fighting with the virus. The victory will coming soon.*

## *Sunset Over Sea*      *By Simran Mailk*

*This artwork was inspired by my grandmother. She made a painting once, which was the image of a house overlooking the ocean. This weaving was heavily influenced by her house design, and is in memory of my grandmother.*

# The World of Many Layers

By McCarthy Buckley-Waugh

Dear Reader,

I am not sure how to begin telling the story of Endling, the many-layered world in which we live. It is such an old, complicated story, and there are so many diverse tellings of it that I can only attempt to do it justice. Once, in my youth, I researched this story extensively. But I am old now, and this is the first of many tales I will document; I am therefore obligated to do my best in telling it. Enough rambling; I shall stop boring you and get on with the story.

It was a perfect summer day: the sky was a bright cerulean blue, with puffy white clouds that looked so pretty and signified rain later that month. The grass was a fluorescent green, with the scent of new things fresh on its blades. There were butterflies floating on the light breeze, and above it all the sun shone brightly, bathing the scene of pastoral beauty in a bright yellow, almost peaceful, glow.

Yet something was off.

The breeze was cold as arctic winds. The bright grass was tinted grey with melancholy. The butterflies flew in lazy circles that seemed peaceful, but on closer observance manifested the quiet desolation of a mother cat who has lost her kits.

But to most people, the place seemed peaceful, as it seemed to you, dear reader, when you first read that passage. Yet this two-layered-ness is but a minor example of a many-layered place. Some places in Endling had many hundreds of layers; an ocean could seem beautiful at first blush, but turn out to be a scene of sinister, subsea volcanos with shadowy shapes slithering along the slender skirtings of one's sight. All of this ultimately leads to a question: what—who—did this to the world? I'll show you: in story.

In the beginning, Endling was a place of peace and joy, where children laughed in town squares and doves flew with cherry petals over their heads. It was in this perfected world that the child Synna was born. She did not run and play with the other children; she preferred to sit under a tree and read her books, well hidden from sight. She also gave off a slightly cold aura, which disturbed the people of the town of Paec, and they did their best to steer clear of her. As Synna grew, she became more taciturn, avoiding the company of others. Some of the slightly-less-nice children called her "evil" and mocked her for her otherness.

She grew and, with the years, reached her age of freedom, and left Paec for the Etir mountains. The people of Etir were fabled to have magic that could Change a personality to be more kind, caring, compassionate... Synna was desperate for this Change because she resented not being accepted by her townspeople.

Endling had many  
hundreds of layers...

But the way this Change worked was it amplified the light or the dark, whichever was more prominent in the person. Synna was both light and dark, unlike the other people who were light and grey. So, when she was Changed, she wanted to bestow a gift upon the world; we can only assume because her corrupted magic wanted to spread and envelop the world in its terrible brightness. She began with the Etirians.

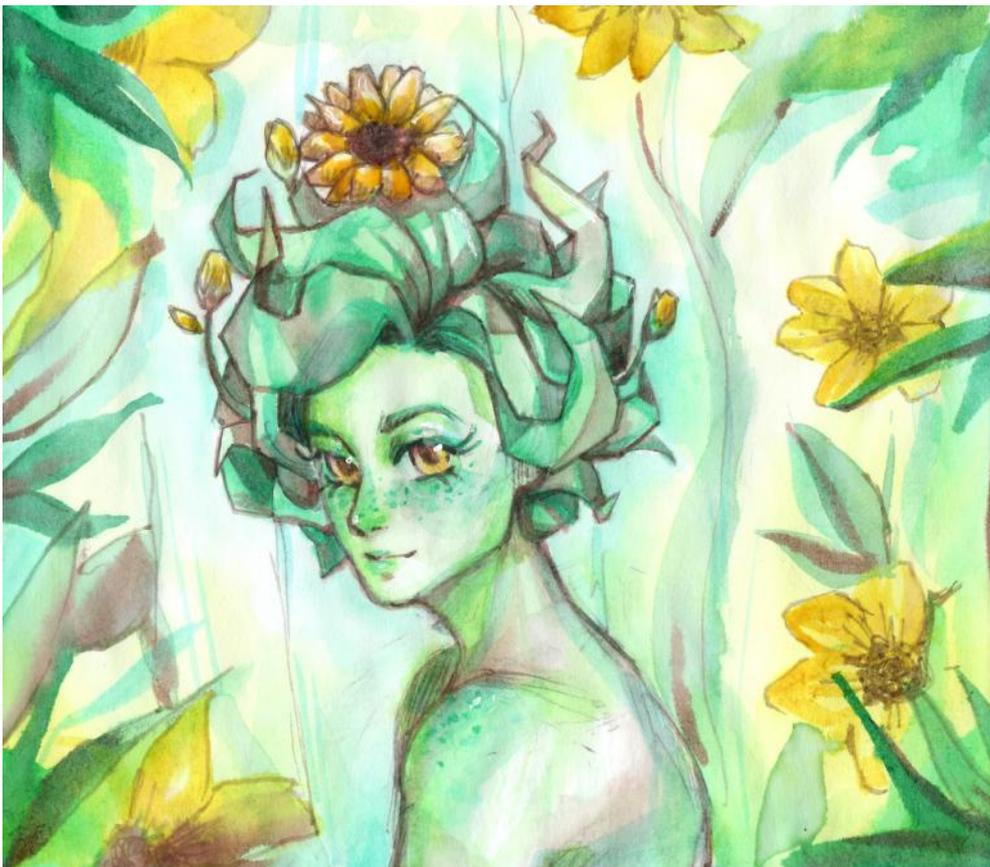
She blessed them to see the true shape of things, and she made the world have different truths so that this gift would be a curse. The gift became a curse because the layers of the world, instead of all being peaceful and beautiful as Synna had imagined, each depicted a different state of human misery. The Etirians, now cursed, decided to mix with the common people, and after many centuries, now all people can see a bit of the layered world, if they just look hard enough.

Yet that was just the first of the curses that Synna placed on Endling. After seeing what she had done, she tried to lighten it by making people only see the light in things. And yet this was corrupted too, because the light she had always encountered before the Change had been warm and loving; she did

not know that light could be cold and harsh. So this curse only enabled people to see the cold and harsh light of things most of the time. Synna hid herself away, never to be seen again.

So now you know how it came to be that the world has many layers. But you may be wondering, "What happened to Synna?" No one really knows. It seems she just disappeared. But some say that deep in the Etir mountains, there is a spot filled in cold light, where the layers of the world are almost tangible... I'll leave it to you to understand the rest of the rumor.

There is a reason I documented this story as my first and most important: I wanted to share the moral of it with the world. The brightest lights cast the darkest shadows.



# *Sunlight*

*By Angela Zeng*

*I was inspired by this quote from Helen Keller: "Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. It's what sunflowers do." I believe that everyone should follow their own light in order to grow, instead of facing the shadows behind them.*

# Darkness vs. Light

By Connie Jin

Darkness

Is better than

Light

Light?

Psst, 'just a fairy tale'...because

It's not

Hopeful, and beautiful,

enlightening, and positive,

We need to see its purest form:

Flimsy, and unrealistic.

Cruel, and depressing.

Light isn't

The reality.

Changing

My attitude's,

The world is a cruel place.

And

We really should give up to misery,

It's not true that

There's always happiness to grasp on to!

It's every man for themselves,

I will never believe that

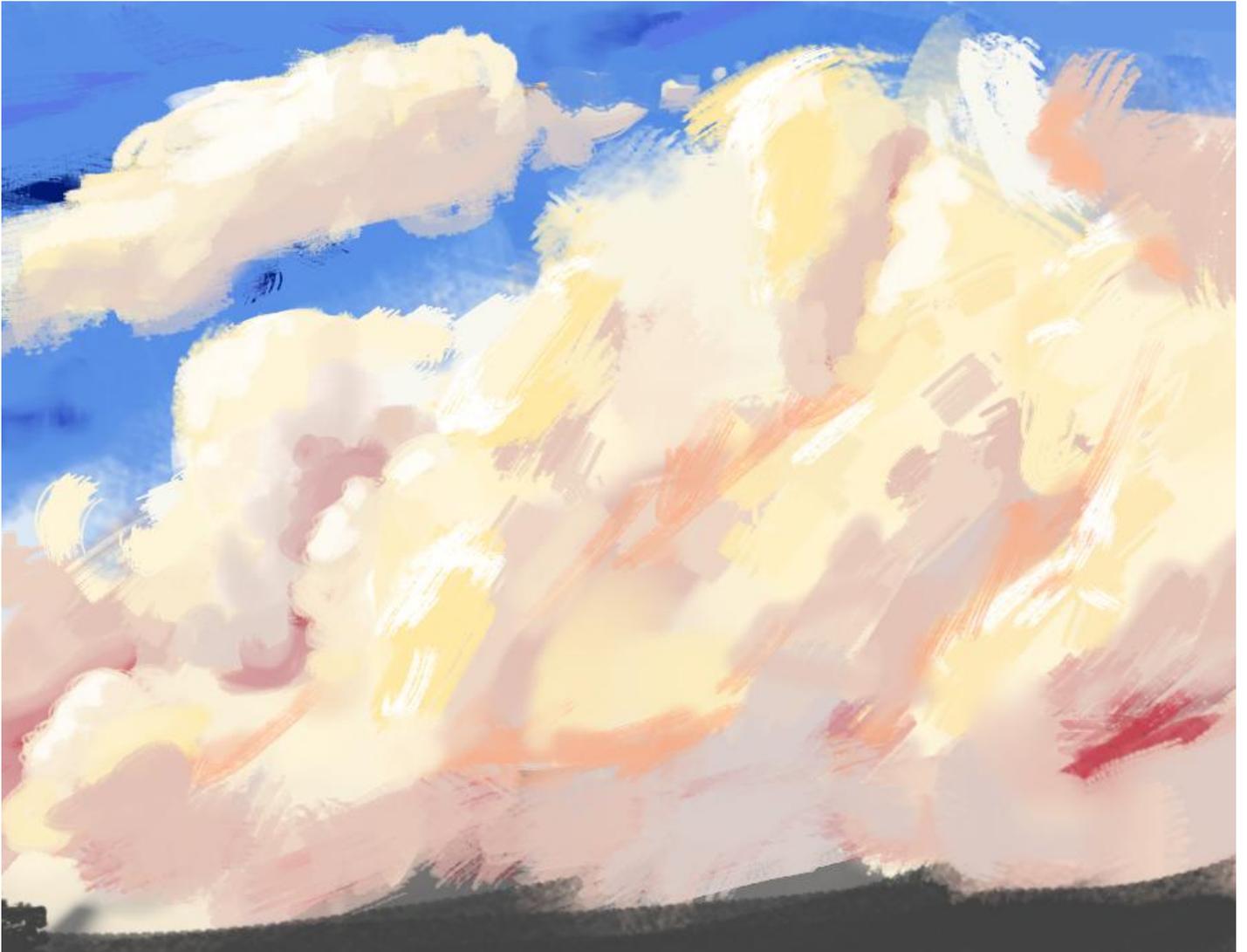
Light is better than darkness.

*See this poem from another perspective by reading it  
backwards, line by line.*

# Light and Shadow

By Emma Byun

The dim candle light  
Creates flickering shadows  
Before going out



## *Shadows and Clouds*

*By Shuya Li*

*Rather than focusing on the 'light' aspect entirely, I wanted to also emphasize the shadows, as, "Only in darkness can you see the stars."*



## *Guang*

*By Summer Chang*

*The Chinese character guang means “light.” I surrounded the light character with different ‘kinds’ of light, like sunlight.*

## Her Window

By Brooke Massey

I can't help but stare out of the small circular window, through the frost creeping in from around the edges. It was one of her favorite things to do. The wooden frame is worn near the bottom of the oculus shape, from where she used to grasp onto it when she was little. The window tilts upward toward the sky at an angle that was just right to allow for star gazing above, as well as peering at the dreary street below. Yet over the number of times she looked out the window, I never asked her why she loved it so much. I never understood why she seemed compelled to endlessly gaze out that particular one, but never any others. I couldn't conceive why she didn't want the worn wood surrounding it to be sanded or painted. This window was her favorite place in the whole house and, from it, she would always look up. She would stare at the sun, sunsets, even the smoke wafting out of chimneys, but mainly she would stare at the stars.

The small window brings back memories of when I was happiest: the times when she was too little to see through the window herself. I would pick her up and whisk her on to my shoulders. She would grasp my hair to gain her balance before quickly clutching the window frame in the same spot as always. I'd be standing there for ten minutes at a time while she gazed out and upward. She would be silent, but I could feel the excitement exuding from her.

My mind drifts to the times she would dart down the stairs and jump on me, bubbling over with laughter. She was always smiling and laughing. She was like a little ray of light, of joy. I used to tell her that she illuminated the house. Now, I believe that more than ever, because it has never felt more empty and cold.

Needing space, I walk through the streets around my house. The air is frigid and the frost consumes me along with the blades of grass sticking out from the sidewalk. This only makes me miss my little ray of sunshine even more. I come to a stop at a large puddle on the side of the road. It's murky with dirt and gravel, yet I can see my reflection. My face is tinted brown from the muck, and it is warped from ripples created by the wind. Still, I can see her face in mine. She was five years younger than me; even so, everyone in town had always said they could see the resemblance. She was clearly my sister and I was clearly hers.

It is as though, if I stared at my reflection long enough, my face becomes more round around the edges. My hair becomes a bit darker. My cheeks become more flushed. And she is there. She speaks to me, tells me that she's staying at a friend's house and will be back in the morning. She tells me not to worry and to let all of my fears melt away into this puddle. But that's all it is: a reflection in a puddle. No sister, just me. I stand up in a rush and kick the puddle. Water sprays up my legs, dampening my pants. The puddle becomes a maze of ripples where I can no longer see my face or hers. I thrash at it until tears stream from my eyes. I simply want to see her one last time.

By the time I returned home, the sun has set and dusk is quickly darkening the sky. I find myself, again, seeking comfort at the window. I stare through the window at the stars and have a moment of clarity. I finally realize what she loved about the window. She would look through it and see a whole different world. The perspective wasn't too big where she could get lost and distracted from the beauty of simple things. Rather, she could peer through it at one spot and thoroughly soak it in, seeing the stars in their full splendor and being enveloped by their brilliance and hope. Their multitude of sizes and random placement throughout the sky made them unique, special, and bright. Just like my little ray of sunshine.

She would stare at the sun, sunsets, even the smoke wafting out of chimneys, but mainly she would stare at the stars.

# The Giving Light

By Lexi Zetrenne

—inspired by the book, *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein

The streetlight shines brightly on the sturdy concrete path that lies beneath her. Her light is strong and powerful, comforting and safe. She has been standing in the same place for decades. Her light pours through the translucent glass panes of the small bakery on twenty-second street. The sugar-filled pastries lay untouched in the windowsill, as a soft melody escapes the lips of the baker, who is also the owner. It is closing time. He peers outside at the streetlight and whispers, “Good night, lady light.” She has been there for as long as he can remember, and he has depended on her light to guide his way through life.

The baker took over the business from his father, who inherited the business from his father. They were generations of bakers. As a boy, he would play outside the bakery on the street, riding his scooter, then his bike up and down the block. He always knew it was time to go inside when the streetlight came on. She was dependable, always performing her duty at the exact same time every night when the sun went down.

As he grew older and started dating, the boy would hold hands with his girlfriend and share kisses under the streetlight. They would laugh and tell stories about what life would be like in the future when they got married and had children. The boy would think of his parents and how hard they worked to give him a very good life. He would look up at the streetlight and smile, knowing his future was bright.

After graduating from business school, the young man returned home to the bakery to help his father. He would stand outside under the streetlight greeting customers and offering half priced pastries to those who arrived before closing time. He always smiled at the streetlight, her warm light filling him with happiness. Her light was like a big hug, safe and welcoming.

When his parents passed away, the man, now the owner of the bakery, relied on the streetlight even more. He spent many nights wiping away tears under her light. His girlfriend comforted him, telling him things would get better.

It was under the streetlight that the young man realized he wanted to spend the rest of his life with his girlfriend, just as his father had with his mother. He kissed her fingers as he bent down on one knee. He proposed that night, under the streetlight, in front of the old bakery, and she said, “Yes.”

A few years later, the woman became pregnant. They were so excited. He would pace for hours, back and forth underneath the streetlight, praying for her and the baby to be healthy.

When she gave birth to a healthy baby boy, he was the happiest man in the world. He held his baby son in his arms, cradling him gently, as his parents did him. He smiled at the woman he married, and enjoyed the moment with his family.

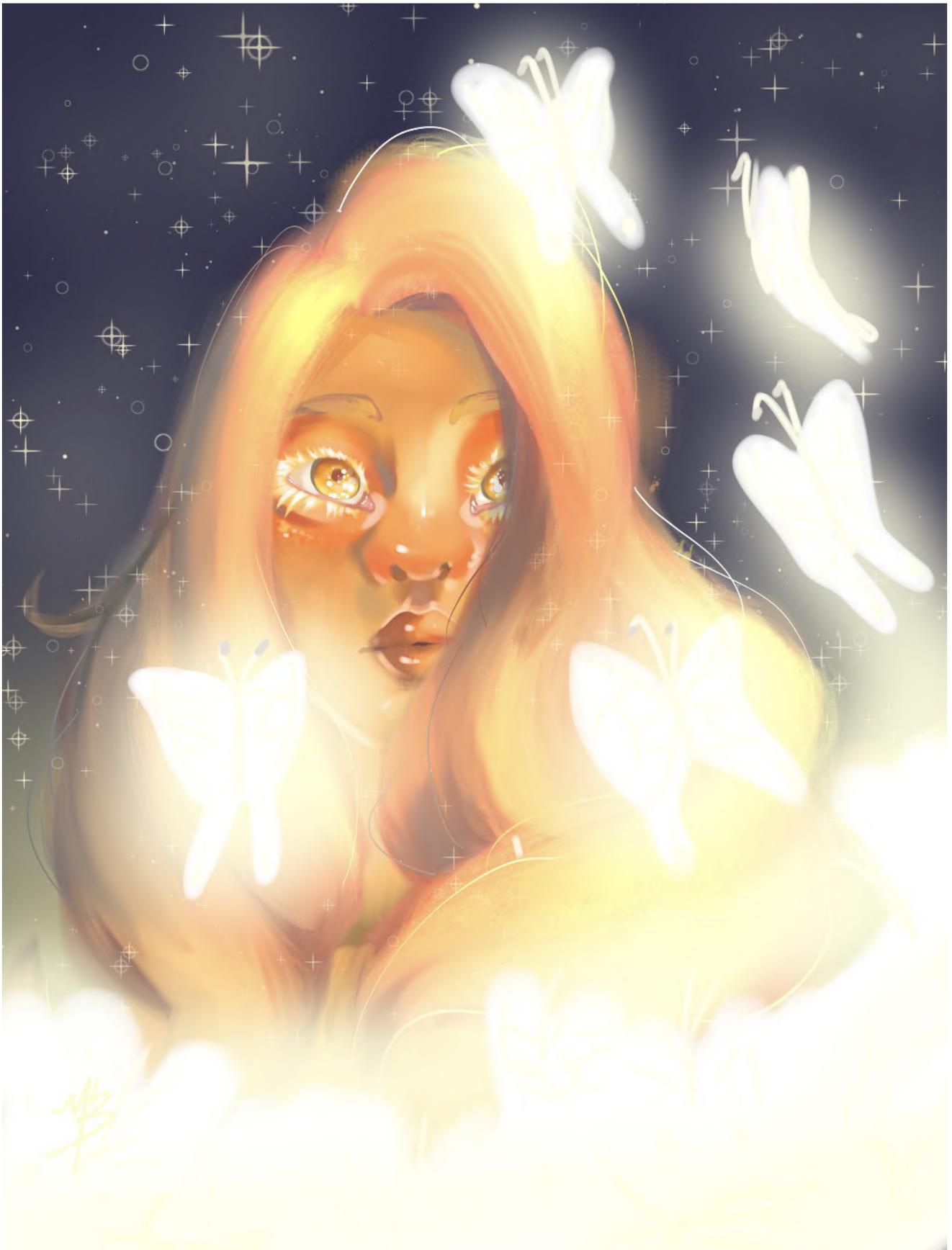
When he took his son home, he stopped under the streetlight to look at his son's face. He knew she would guide him through life also. "Good night lady light, " the man whispered. "Thank you for taking care of us."

Years later, when his son had grown up and his wife had grown older, the man realized that he was no longer as healthy as he used to be. He still ran the bakery, and would walk up and down the block greeting customers. Now, he moved slower, pausing every few minutes to catch his breath. He placed his hands against the streetlight, leaning on her to give him strength. She did, as she always had, and he was able to keep going.

One morning, the man's wife passed away suddenly. He rushed outside to get some fresh air, angry and sad that his wife has died. He threw his arms around the streetlight, leaning his body into her and crying loudly for all he has loved and lost over the years. He mourned his wife, his parents and the son who moved out years ago. He remembered the special moments in his life and all the times he stood right there, under that streetlight, and felt safe. He looked up at the streetlight and smiled slowly. He feels comforted, as if she was holding him tightly and hugging him back.

A few months later, the man lay dying. As he took his last breath, the streetlight flickered and gasped its last bit of energy. The bulb gave out, and the streetlight went dark.

The next day, the son arrives home. He had rushed after getting the call that his father had died. He sees the construction workers finish screwing in the new bulb on the streetlight. He pauses below it, leaning his head gently against it as he had done so many times as a child. As the day grows darker, the streetlight turns on. The son smiles and remembers his father's words. "One day, when my light goes out on earth, take care of lady light out there. Make sure she always has a new bulb to light your way." The son looks up into the white of the streetlight. "Good night, lady light," he says as he turns to go up the backstairs of the bakery, "Thank you, for everything." And the streetlight continues to shine, offering her light and protection to the son as she had to his father and grandfathers. She would remain with him, being his guiding light as she had done so many times before.



# *Butterflies*

*By Malia Daue*

*"Butterflies" represents the concept of happiness and peace in oneself. If one is surrounded by butterflies, then one is immersed in their peace and happiness.*

# Dove

By Ramya Suresh

Pain. It ricocheted through my body, shredding anything it touched. Fire. Burning heat coursed through my veins, mending what was ripped. Ice. It flooded my senses, numbing everything. Pain, fire, ice. It kept going, faster each time, swirling together until it was just one sensation. Agony. Inky darkness wrapped around me in a protective cocoon. Then I fell into the oblivion, crumpling like a pile of rags with only the loving touch of the darkness. Being caressed. Whispered to. Begged... begged to open my eyes.

Coralyn

Coralyn

Coralyn

I complied at last. A spark flared from within me and outside of me. My skin glowed, sending the darkness recoiling. I followed the growing flame in the distance. Climbing the sloping darkness, I watched my fingers sink into it like sand. I stumbled at the apex of the darkness as I tried to stand. It tried to coax me down with words of love. Loneliness. It fed off my loneliness to lure me into its murky depths once more.

Coralyn, I am your friend. Coralyn, I will always love you. Coralyn, come to me, your mother.

Then I fell into the oblivion, crumpling  
like a pile of rags with only the loving  
touch of the darkness.

But I resisted. A fragment of a memory flooded my vision, showing me my mother. A white bird fluttered around my mother's head as she rode a brown mare down the path. Her culottes were spread around her legs in a vibrant array of colors. Dark hair fanned her pale face as she soaked in the sun... sun! Darkness cannot survive against the light.

I snapped back to my senses.

I snarled at the darkness, "You are not my mother!"

Rage. I clawed at the dark sky in rage, cleaving a hole above the fire, giving it room to grow and swirl and form a circular hole. Through the hole, I saw warmth and light and hope. The light beckoned me. Not with twisted words of promise, but genuine ones. It was what showed me my mother.

So, I stepped

through

the portal

and awoke

in the real world.

"Coralyn!" A woman half laughed, and half sobbed as she peered over me.

"Mother?" I croaked. Parched. My throat ached as my laugh grated my vocal cords together.

“Cora, sweetie, you did it!”

“Did what? What happened?”

Another woman’s face joined my mother’s above me. She was wizened with age but still beautiful. Striking. I reached out to touch her, to see if she was real, but I paused, looking in awe at my arm. Swirls glowed along both my arms and legs, humming with power.

The older woman, not my mother, spoke to me with a lilting voice. “Alaina, our beloved goddess of light, life, and love has blessed you. You now hold a part of her within you. You are now an angel and a wielder of light magic. Just like us.”

My back ached as I sat up, glancing at the flowering plants in the room, no, the Temple of Alaina. In my periphery, white flashed. I craned my head back and gasped.

“I have wings,” I whispered.

They moved of their own accord, twitching and rustling together. A headache bloomed behind my eyes and I belatedly remembered something about light magic. Focusing my thoughts on hope and love, a sphere of light formed in my open palm. I manipulated it with a faint smile, creating a dove. I sent it flying around my mother’s head, just like in the memory that brought me back.



## *The Stars We Hold* By Katherine Luo

*This piece was inspired by the stars in our sky. Our star, the sun, gives us life and prosperity on this planet. The hands are not necessarily malicious, but possess power.*

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# The Musician's Light

By Cara Wang

The red light flickers from my metronome,  
Keeping my beat during my endless hours of practice.

The soft, white light from my stand illuminates my music score,  
Helping me see the dancing notes, rhythms, and dynamics that bring each phrase to life.

*After many months of preparation*

A blinding light spotlights me as I play my cello in the recording studio,  
Trembling hands clinging to their familiar, rehearsed positions.

That same night, I stare down the glaring light from my laptop,  
Entering the required form fields for a competition audition for a coveted spot.

*A few worrisome weeks later*

The same light from my laptop,  
Flashing to indicate the arrival of a new, much anticipated email.

*Rejection.*

The reflection of light bouncing off my falling tears,  
Casting a shadow on my previous light of confidence.

And so it repeats, the familiar red light of the metronome,  
Blinking ever faster as I work up to the rhythm of a difficult passage.

The blinding radiance of the lights in the recording studio, then  
Inputting all the required fields in my laptop.

*A few weeks later.*

My laptop lights up with another email,  
Inviting me to perform at the concert hall.

*Eventually*

The beautiful brilliance of the stage light shines,  
Spotlighting my joy as I perform for the crowd of hundreds.

# There Are Thousands of Daffodil Suns

By Shiyu Zheng

The sun was nowhere to be seen. I sat on the bench beside the sidewalk, on that snowy February day. The loud, noisy streets were crowding with passers-by, just as cars started jamming up the road. Snow drifted down upon my shoulders, like pure white flecks of feathers. It was rather chilly; the cold wind was whispering across my cheeks and picking up bits of dead leaves from along the sidewalk.

A man in a thin, brown leather jacket was walking down the way and approached me, plopping himself down onto the bench. He was carrying three bright yellow daffodils wrapped in newspaper carefully in his arms. He had a rosy complexion, though I couldn't tell if it came from the cold or not.

He noticed me, perhaps because I was staring at him, and smiled. I smiled back wryly and blurted out, "Are you cold?"

The man laughed a deep, merry laugh and shook his head, "No, but thanks for asking. Just trying to get used to things around here. I've been learning."

Gazing at the sunset by the horizon, I replied, "Oh, no problem. You're not from around, are you?"

"No, I'm from Florida. It's my first week in New York. It's quite a big city, isn't it?"

"There's a lot of people in New York, I suppose. And people here seem to be affected by the cold weather in winter all the time, too."

We fell silent, looking into the grey, foggy sky.

I noticed the daffodils in the man's arms again. I asked, "Who are these daffodils for?"

The man shrugged and smiled softly, "I don't know, I suppose. I just saw them... and got myself a reminder."

We were silent. The daffodils were the color of sunlight, bright and shining.

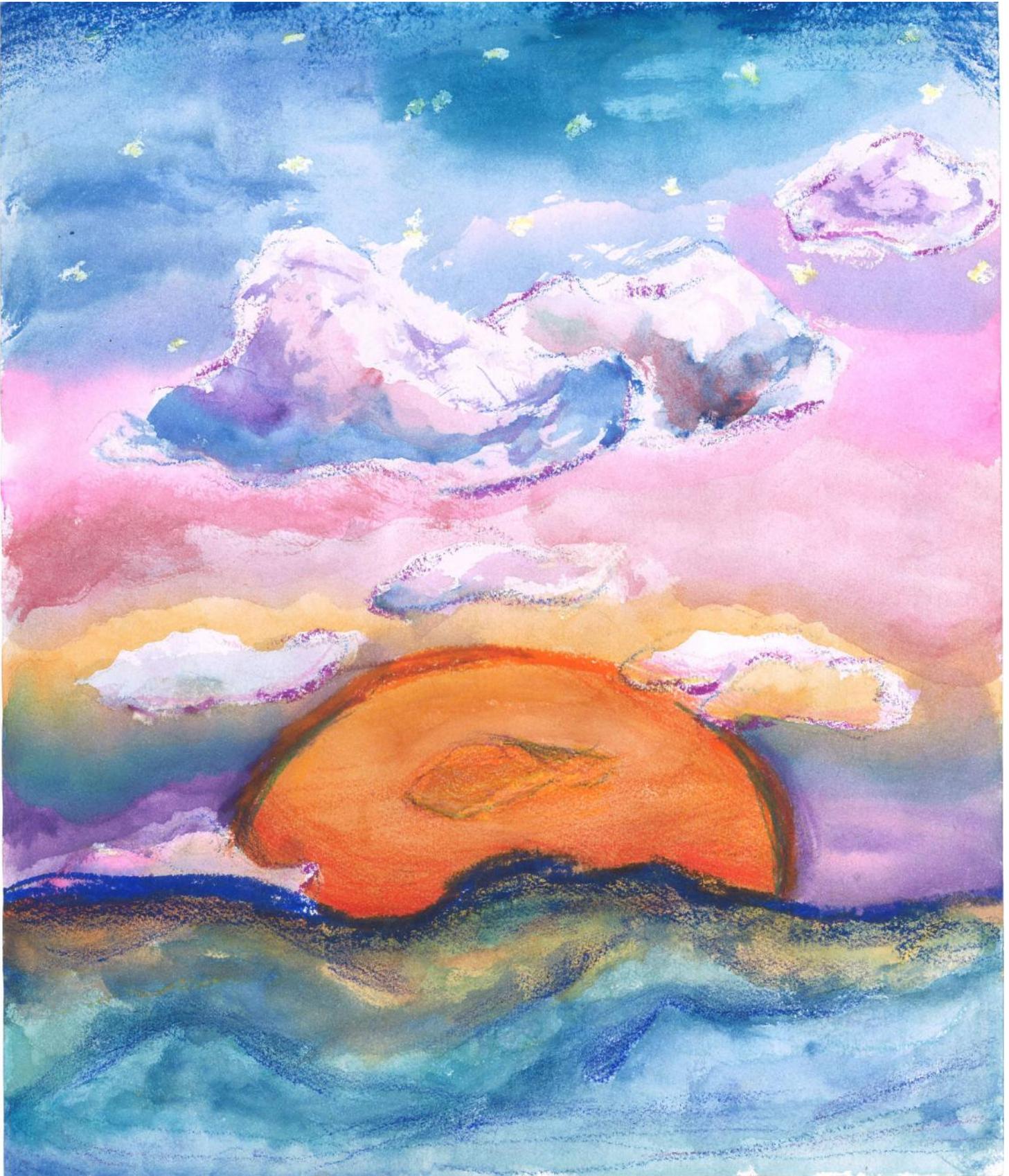
I closed my eyes. "I remember that the suns used to be as bright as daffodils."

The man replied quietly, "They are."

I glanced at the sky, which had darkened into a shade of deep purple, and took out a faded brown photo of Mother, Father, and me, smiling in it. I stared emptily into the paper, my eyes boring into its frame. The man's gaze softened, but he didn't speak. Wordlessly, he unfurled the tightly wrapped newspaper in his arms. He took out a single daffodil and gently handed it to me. I took it.

The yellow daffodil was as warm and bright as sunlight, even beneath the cold, darkened sky. I sighed. "You know," he said, "we should come here each morning to watch the sunrise. You'll love those daffodil-like suns."

And we did. We did. I loved them. We found ourselves admiring thousands of them, those daffodil suns.



# *Light*

*By Samantha Lau*

*I got inspired to draw the sunset because of a poem I wrote. It focuses on nature and how it gives us light, and the sunset was part of it. Another thing inspired by the poem were the clouds in the sky. Similar to the sunset, I also wrote about clouds and their relations to light.*

# Memorial

By Xochi Avila

Just before sunup.

The moon and stars shone down on a silent forest.

Frost glittered on every branch of the redwoods that rose into the sky.

The chilly winter air was completely still.

Not a creature stirred.

But then—

A faint rustle in the undergrowth.

Two glittering eyes opened in the dark.

Furry paws crunched through a thin layer of ice. Big grey ears swiveled back and forth.

A wolf pulled itself out of the bushes and started trotting purposefully along a small deer's track as though it had somewhere to be. It followed the path as it twisted and turned, and eventually came out onto the top of a sheer cliff overlooking the whole forest. It sat down at the edge of the cliff, tucked its tail around its paws, and waited.

And, suddenly, behind it, came dozens more wolves.

Their paws padding soundlessly over the forest floor, they loped toward the cliff as if drawn by some irresistible force. Once there, they simply sat, ears pricked, as if awaiting something.

There were wolves of all sizes, from pups to elders, their fur patchy and pale, seeming to blend with the night shadows.

For a few long minutes, the entire clifftop seemed to hold its breath.

Then, something happened.

Far away, from behind a solitary dark mountain, a thin line of peach and gold sliced its way across the indigo sky.

And then, the sun rose, bouncing off the shimmering frosted trees in dazzling rays of carnation pink and buttercup yellow and poppy orange, flooding the redwood forest with light.

The first wolf to arrive, sitting just at the edge of the cliff, responded first.

It tipped back its head, closed its eyes... and howled.

The sound echoed up to the sky, haunting and mournful.

Another wolf next to the first joined in. The two howls blended together, a perfect duet which was soon joined by more and more voices as the wolves around them picked up the cry, until every wolf on the clifftop seemed to be singing the same sharp, chilling song.

As the other creatures began to awake and the brilliant sunrise colors started to fade, the wolves, just as they had every morning for years, howled on.

Heralding the dawn.

A faint rustle in the undergrowth.  
Two glittering eyes opened in the dark.

# The Green Light: Literary Analysis

By Navya Banga

Daisy Buchanan never wanted to be the light of Gatsby's life. She never intended to symbolize everything he wanted out of life.

The green light—a young man's hopes, dreams and ambitions for his future—and an infamous metaphor that has survived the test of time. Daisy Buchanan—the love of Gatsby's life, the symbol for everything he ever wanted and everything he could never have, and a woman who had become more aspiration than person.

She was the figurative light of his life, and eventually, she took on the iridescent quality of one of Gatsby's dreams. Moreover, she became a dream. She was love, and light, and hope, and all of his dreams rested on her slim shoulders. If he could have Daisy, he could have it all. If he could have her, he would finally be worthy. And so, she became the green light, she became that far away hope, and Gatsby became a person who was in love with a dream he called Daisy Buchanan.

A fixture in literature, Daisy Buchanan is the love interest who is hazy and elusive, always out of reach, always symbolizing something, always more an idea than person. Hope incarnate.

Ambitions, ideas, aspirations, these can be tailored to fit the dreamer, and imagination can warp anything to fit a dream, but people cannot be tailored to fit another person.

Daisy Buchanan never wanted to be the light of Gatsby's life. She never intended to symbolize everything he wanted out of life. She wasn't an idea tailor made for him, she was a person outside of Gatsby, in a way that a dream is not. A dream belongs to the dreamer; a person belongs to no one but themselves. And Daisy was a person who had once been in love with Tom Buchanan. The light of Gatsby's life—his shining, immaculate, ideal idea of Daisy—would've never loved Tom. And in Gatsby's shining, immaculate, ideal version of life, Tom would not have what he did. Not his power, not his wealth, not his arrogance, and not Daisy.

And that was what ultimately led to his destruction. A person became an idea, a person became a dream, a person became the light of his life, and when that light blinked out, he was lost to the dark depths of the unknown. No green light to guide him.

# Before the Last Leaf Falls

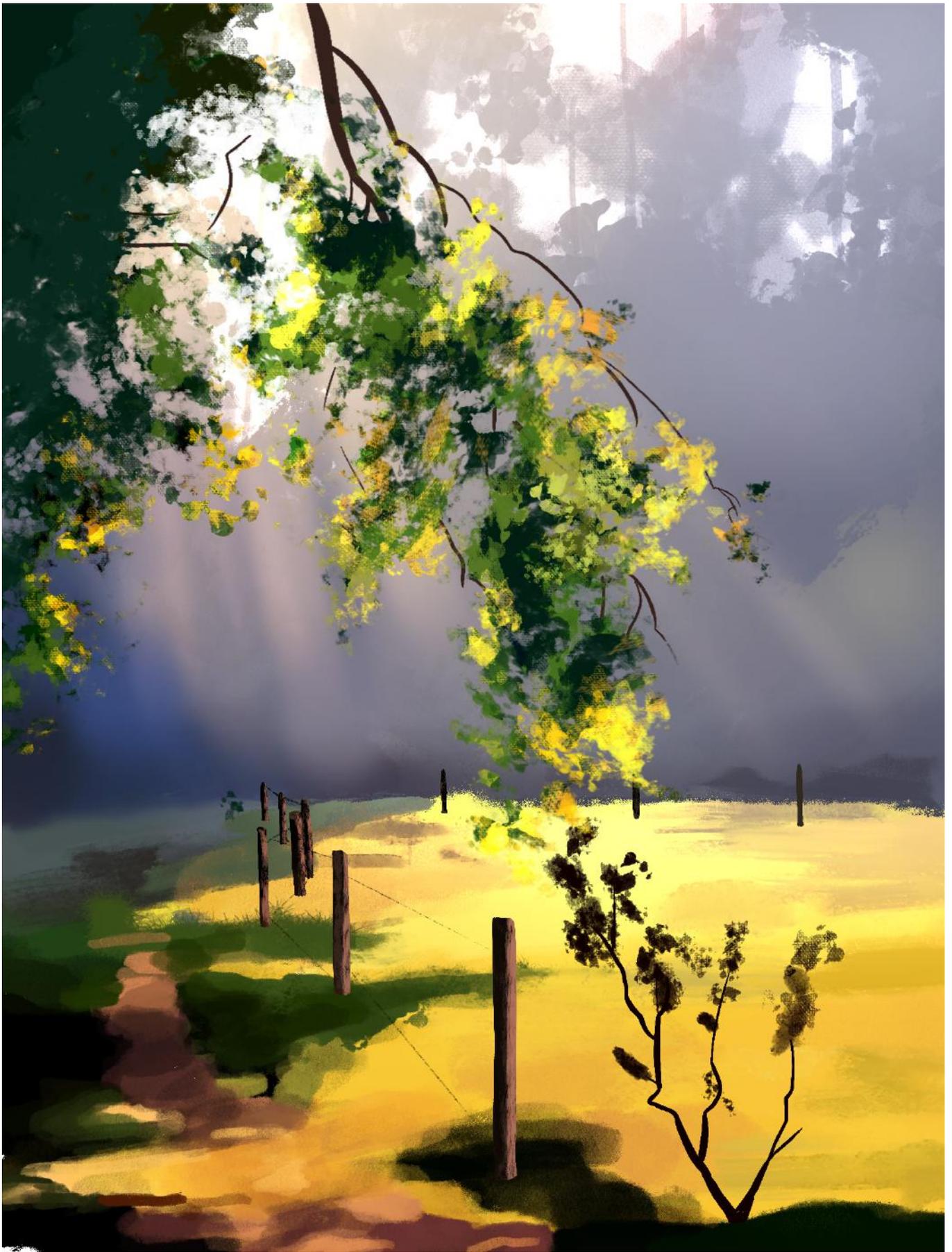
By William Chui

When leaves flutter down from heavenly heights  
To rest softly onto damp grounds  
Changing colors through the air  
Blessed summer green fading away  
In its place rust and burgundy, crimson and mottled brown.

The year of silence, the year of isolation  
All the while leaves fall  
Dusky, golden, mournful, tranquil  
Nature goes on and on  
Trees forever mighty fall humbled by autumn.

Faces pressed against stained windows  
Eyes miles away  
Lost in the swirling of dancers, acrobats  
Robes of yellow and orange silk  
Flowing in dappled patterns  
As the heart yearns to be with them.

The migration of changing seasons  
Forever a moment to cherish and hold dear  
For families to gather and look up  
At tumbling leaves floating down from spindly branches  
No matter the circumstances  
It is always a time to remember before the last leaf falls.



# *Morning Haze*

*By Alexa Zhang*

*The tranquility of a walk in the forest, by the magic of the sun rays.*

# Come with Me to Baltimore

By Julianna Wong

i thought maybe you'd like to come with me to baltimore because  
 yesterday i saw your face half floating in the bathroom mirror  
 and water was spilling out of the sink but somehow there was  
 a type of fire in there too  
 like i forgot there must have been  
 gasoline pouring out of the faucets  
 yes, *that's it.* and the flames reminded me of  
 full maryland oak trees when your dad left your mom and you cried in the Biden rest stop  
 but you can't understand that it is never ending and too fast to live here alone  
 because the van is too small to peer out of and the highways don't quite reach the  
 heavens  
 and when all you can think of is New York City with the infinite neons of it all but  
 that's too boring to remember now when apparently i've fallen in love with  
 baltimore  
 where the alleyways hold dark under-eyes and more yearning than we do already  
 anyways i told you to hush when the windows fogged over with morning  
 dew  
 then the world was spinning out of control and dawn light blended into my pupils  
 so i finally saw you crouching there in the dark and said  
*i'm sorry the tomatoes were sour.*  
 (you took a bite anyways)

# The Spartan Way

By Ethan Shlossberg

Marcus tugged backward on the leather reins and his horse skidded to a halt on the dust-strewn road. "Nice work, Procles." He patted his horse's dark-brown mane as dust swirled around them. It had been a tiring journey from Sparta to their camp on the outskirts of Tegea. Marcus ignored his soreness and exhaustion. He rubbed his neck under his bronze helmet and looked up at the thin wisps of clouds floating across the deep blue sky, the color of the Aegean Sea. It was not the Spartan way to show any sign of weakness or pain. Nor should Marcus fear this battle. He knew that the Delphic Oracle had been consulted prior

to them embarking on this journey to defeat Tegea, and as the Oracle had definitively stated, "Give you Tegea to dance in with stamping feet and her fair plain to measure out the line." As he gazed upward, a lone hawk glided past, floating above him in the air. He knew the priests would think this was a good omen, but he did not dwell much on superstition. To him the hawk symbolized freedom; he had sometimes dreamed of flying high and free like the hawk....

Sweat clung to his body under the heavy metal armor he had to wear. He was truly tired; he could admit that at least to himself, if not to his fellow soldiers. There was a lot Marcus thought to himself that he did not dare to utter aloud. But that was for another time. There was to be an invasion tonight: his fellow Spartans were to attack the polis of Tegea. There was no hint of fear in the Spartan camp, and Marcus was not necessarily frightened of what was to come tonight, but more repulsed. On the outside, he was a true Spartan: strong, fit, healthy. On the inside, he thought he was okay with the Spartan notion of honorable death during battle, but it was the useless taking of another soldier's life that never sat well with him. He spat in disgust and sighed, dreading the coming night...

When Marcus parted the flaps on the rough wool tent entrance, he stepped out into the night and stared at the inky black sky above. He had been woken by the horn of his cohort being called to battle. Marcus found his horse and hopped gracefully onto his back. The light wind had stilled. Procles pricked his ears. Marcus had heard it too, the noise of distant battle sounds creeping over the top of the nearby hill, the war cries and the crashing of bronze on iron.

"Marcus!" cried the voice of his commander, Kiros.

"Ready, sir!" replied Marcus. Procles charged headlong, following the lead of Kiros' stallion through the sooty air, aiming for the sounds beyond.

Kiros and his horse stopped abruptly on the top of the hill. "Halt!" he shouted, and Marcus followed his lead, heaving on the reins as Procles neighed deeply. They both peered down, squinting in the dark, their eyes scanning the valley below. Off Kiros charged, down the hillside and straight for the battle. Marcus knew he was charging not only down to the sights and sounds of the fighting below, but also charging with the anticipation of glory, the glory Spartans lived for.

The massive ranks of the Spartan soldiers, the phalanx, were still in some orderly form, but their numbers were greatly diminished. This surprised Marcus and made him take pause; he had never seen, or heard, a tale of the Spartans being outnumbered in any battle. "What is happening?" he thought to himself. But Kiros did not think this. Suddenly, Kiros and his horse plunged into the battle, his sword unsheathed and pointing in the direction of the half-moon above, his shield up. Marcus looked again: the Tegeans seemed like they were on the verge of breaking through the phalanx at any moment. His head turned sharply again, back to Kiros.

"Archers!" Kiros shouted, raising his shield above his head, the other Spartans following suit. Arrows shot across the sky in a high arch and plunged into bronze shields. An arrow shot straight into Kiros' neck, below his helmet and above his armor, knocking him off his horse.

The Spartan phalanx broke, the enemy pouring through the gap in the line. If they could not drive back the Tegeans, the fight would be lost. "Stop!" the voice in his head cried out again. "Turn into the woods, flee! The Spartan way is not your way. Value life!" Marcus was shocked. He had never thought he would experience a Spartan loss on the battlefield. He knew what this would mean: the loss of his own life, too.

A true Spartan would never consider saving himself, being taught from a young age that it was shameful to accept defeat and live. Death on the battlefield was honorable.

“Spartan!” a hushed voice called. Marcus felt adrenaline rush into his veins. He saw a wounded Tegean soldier lying at Procles’ hooves, his armor covered in mud and blood. He saw the tip of a battle axe pushed through his tunic at his stomach, covered in red. “Help me, Spartan!” the voice insisted. Their eyes met, locking on one another.

“Yes!” that voice in Marcus’ head shouted, pressing forward to his temples “Yes! Do it! You are NOT a Spartan to the core. You know life is more precious than that. Escape now! GRAB HIM!” He hesitated for only the briefest moment, and then, shedding his Spartan responsibilities and turning his back on the inevitable loss in front of him, Marcus leaped off Procles, threw the Tegean with all of his might onto the horse’s rump and escaped into the darkness of the woods to his left. As he galloped, he felt free from killing and war. He felt like the hawk, soaring free, seeking what was waiting for him, past the moonlight, to the awaiting morning and waking sun.

# The Box Of

By Sarah Tanuyanti

If I left everything behind today,  
what would be the contents  
of my Everything?

In my box of Everything,  
I do not have  
a painting,  
a cure,  
nor a scroll of music.

Written, therefore  
not forgotten.  
What would then be chiselled  
into my grey slab of stone  
when finally left as  
“In Loving Memory”?

Where does the light go  
for those names in history?  
Would my name and yours,  
after a lifetime of breath,  
slowly die down?

Just as dim light bulbs  
flickering in the darkness,  
only to be replaced by newer,  
brighter bulbs.

Will I be remembered  
for my good deeds?  
For the people I’ve helped?  
Will I be instead, forgotten?

Maybe some are destined  
to shine bright  
in a museum exhibit,  
and the rest of us,  
I like to think,  
belong elsewhere.

Because in my little box of Everything  
what I do have are  
sweet letters,  
soothing words,  
and warm embraces,  
all carved in the vivid memories  
of those I love.



# *Luminant*

*By Zoe Mednick*

*Hands are the most complex and differing thing to draw. Light can be shown in many ways: a single light in a dark hallway to show hope, or a glow on a crown to represent superiority. In my art, I used light as a way to show the complexity of hands, especially since it is especially difficult to draw them. As such, I used my art to convey a message—to shine a light over—how beautiful things will turn out when you take a challenge.*

# Snake

By Warren Wei

*I painted a snake because it is such a complex and fascinating creature. It has diverse symbolic meanings, ranging from cunning, deceit, to eloquence, wisdom, transformation and eternity. Snakes are also featured in caduceus and the rod of Asclepius. I painstakingly portrayed the intricate pattern of this snake in oil on canvas, hoping to bring out its beauty.*

# The Natural Light of the Deep Sea: Bioluminescence

By Kate Leetaru

What would jellyfish be without bioluminescence?

Well, it turns out, not much.

Effortlessly, he glides his way through the crisp, dark waters. The boneless creature propels himself, wiggling his tiny, plum-sized body while gushes of air push him forward. Inch by inch, the jellyfish swims further, shining light upon the undiscovered waterway hundreds of feet below the surface.

This is what makes him and his fellow sea creatures in the deep sea so special.

They can *glow*.

“There’s a whole netherworld of the deep sea that we don’t see when we have our lights on,” says Kevin Raskoff, a scientist at California State University, Monterey Bay. “And that’s the natural light of the deep sea: bioluminescence.”

As our little jellyfish swims further, his bell (the top part) begins to sink in with the rest of the ocean surrounding him. But he isn’t left unseen, as hundreds of stubby, uneven tentacles begin to produce a blueish green hue, dazzling in the darkness like a peacock’s feather. Slowly, the glow travels up to his mouth (lying on the underside of his bell), and there he appears. Unlike animals on land, an estimated 90% of these sea creatures survive using this special power.

As we swim deeper, another creature also happens to be on the hunt. Similar to the jellyfish, this fish is using its glow to attract prey. But rather than swimming around, our anglerfish waits. Her light dangles from her forehead in front of her wrinkly mouth, spiking not only our curiosity, but the curiosity of delectable fish around her. She lingers, in a pool of silence... until something comes, a fish baited by the lure and —*snap*.





After a short show of an unhinged jaw and a mouthful of spiked blades, the fish is gone. And our anglerfish is now content.

Hovering around this level of darkness is also a male sea-firefly. His ever-so-tiny body floats ghostly through the water. But now, it is love that's on this tiny creature's mind; his glow attracts not prey, but potential mates. Sea fireflies, not unlike their land-like cousin, are round, compact, and filled with bioluminescence.

Illuminating these murky waters are creatures full of life-saving oddities. This gleam we've been seeing isn't a work of actual magic, but rather a trick from Mother Nature. All it takes is a tiny bit of a chemical called luciferin. Luciferin is a light-emitting compound found in most glowing animals. *Bioluminescence* is created through a chemical process involving luciferin inside of a living organism. For example, when our jellyfish eats a shrimp or a small plant containing luciferin, that luciferin will come in contact with oxygen. The energy then creates a vivid, jack-o'-lantern worthy glow. Organisms may make luciferin on their own (like male sea-fireflies), or obtain it from their food (such as the anglerfish).

When drifting a bit higher in the ocean, this peculiar chemical reaction also acts as camouflage to fish, squid, and other creatures. For example, dragonfish use their ominous glow on their stomachs, acting like a carpet in the middle of the ocean. This way, when creatures or predators from below peer up at them, they blend in, mimicking the light shining through the water above.

And now, we come back to our jellyfish. His graceful body shines elegantly, and his stringy tentacles glide behind him. He is one of the luminous creatures scientists have discovered so far, but the ocean is so far and wide, you never know when something new will be found. And that is the true gift - that more of these gorgeous creatures could possibly be out there.

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# Sliver of Hope

By Joylynn Chung

For 28 years, 400,000 people had only seen the dreary gray walls of their apartments. Day after day, it was the same.

Never did the 400,000 people in Evermore even think about a 28-year lockdown. Communication devices were strictly forbidden for use outside of your own apartment.

Downtown--if you could even call that dull place 'downtown'--was full of hollow office buildings, discarded newspapers breezed around the empty roads, and a seemingly hundred-year-old willow tree hung depressingly in the middle of the town square. All around Evermore, apartments were either black or grey.

Guards patrolled all around the city, holding batons rumoured to be tasers, but no one had been tased since 2020. No buildings rebuilt since 2021; roads not touched; cars discarded, along

with every mode of transportation. The exception being the gray guard trucks near the apartments.

They were never really allowed outside, and as a result came breathing tubes so people could breathe.

Canyon fiddled with her brown hair. Her breathing was shallow.

A phone was to her ear.

The other side picked up on the 2nd ring.

“Hello?”

“Moon? You there?” Canyon whispered.

“Canyon? You ready?” Moon asked.

“Well...”

Moon sighed. “Don’t you want to go outside and touch the stars?”

“You can’t touch the stars, M,” Canyon replied.

“Well, obviously, but don’t you wanna go outside?” Moon asked.

“Of course, I wanna go out. But there’re guards, M,” Canyon deadpanned, waiting for a response.

Moon laughed. “And there are ways to get past the guards, C. I wanna go outside. Wouldn’t that be absolutely amazing?”

Now, Canyon was quiet. “You’re naive, Moon. It’s been 28 years. We can’t just—”

“Yes, we can, Canyon! We can! We can finally see the stars and real light!”

“How are we even going to get out?” Canyon asked.

“Drop something out the window,” Moon stated obviously.

“What?”

“Drop something out the window, C.”

There was some rummaging on the other end of the line before the small screech of a cat.

“I know what we can drop out the window,” Moon giddily whispered.

“What?”

“My cat.”

“Your... cat? Will it be okay?” Canyon asked.

“Of course. But do you actually want to go out to see the stars with me?”

Canyon smiled. “Definitely. My grandma said they were beautiful when she was younger.”

“Roof in 10 minutes.” Moon hung up abruptly.

Canyon set the phone down and ran to her window, looking down at the three guards patrolling below. They were in black uniform, blending into the background.

She could never understand why there was a fire escape on the side of every building, but now, she thanked whoever put them there.

A white blob fell from the apartment next to hers, landing on two of the guard’s heads, making them yell out. Canyon slapped a hand over her mouth as she tried to contain her laughter, swiftly opening the window and swinging a leg over onto the fire escape.

In her own apartment, Moon clambered out of the window, crouching down low as she climbed to the roof.

Canyon slowly climbed as well, sliding onto her knees and breathing heavily; at nerves or at the sheer number of stars in the night sky, she didn’t know.

“Moon?” Canyon whispered.

“Yeah, it’s Moon. Who else?” She whispered back.

They both had clear breathing tubes up their noses, filtering the fresh air outside. Moon had long black hair, and dark eyes, as far as Canyon could see, with a dimpled smile.

“We’re outside, M,” Canyon breathed, gazing up at the stars and the moon.

“We’re outside, C,” Moon repeated, her face showing the epitome of awe as her eyes moved to look at the sky, her mouth wide open.

Canyon hummed, lying down on her back as Moon kept talking.

“My mum never got to see the stars. When she lived here, there was so much pollution, C. Grandma told me that in 1970, Evermore was so clean,” Moon gushed. “She said birds actually flew through the sky and that squirrels ran past people.”

Canyon gazed up at the stars in awe. “My grandma said that she would go out to see the stars every day.”

“Said that flowers bloomed everywhere, trees grew into these huge things, and people could go out. Did you know that people set up markets everywhere? There were never any guards either,” Canyon whispered.

“That sounds wonderful,” Moon replied, her voice shaky.

“And,” Canyon continued, her eyes welling up with tears, “Nona also told me that she wanted to take me back to the Bahamas. But this stupid thing happened for 28 years. Nona even had an ocean nearby.”

“What’s an ocean?” Moon asked.

Canyon shrugged. “Dunno. But it must be something good.”

Moon gasped. “Look!” she exclaimed quietly, pointing up at the dark night sky filled with bright stars.

Canyon tilted her head back up. “What?”

“It’s a shooting star! Quick! Wish for something, Canyon,” she breathed, hands and eyes closing. Canyon followed.

The two friends looked up at the same time.

They stared at each other, blinking as a plethora of shooting stars whizzed above them.

Moon reached for her breathing tube, tugging it off.

“Moon!” Canyon gasped. Moon just grinned as she breathed in deeply, her breathing tube now long forgotten. Moon just shrugged, gesturing to her to do the same.

Canyon’s hand slowly inched to her breathing tube. She slowly pulled it out, the fresh air hitting her senses immediately.

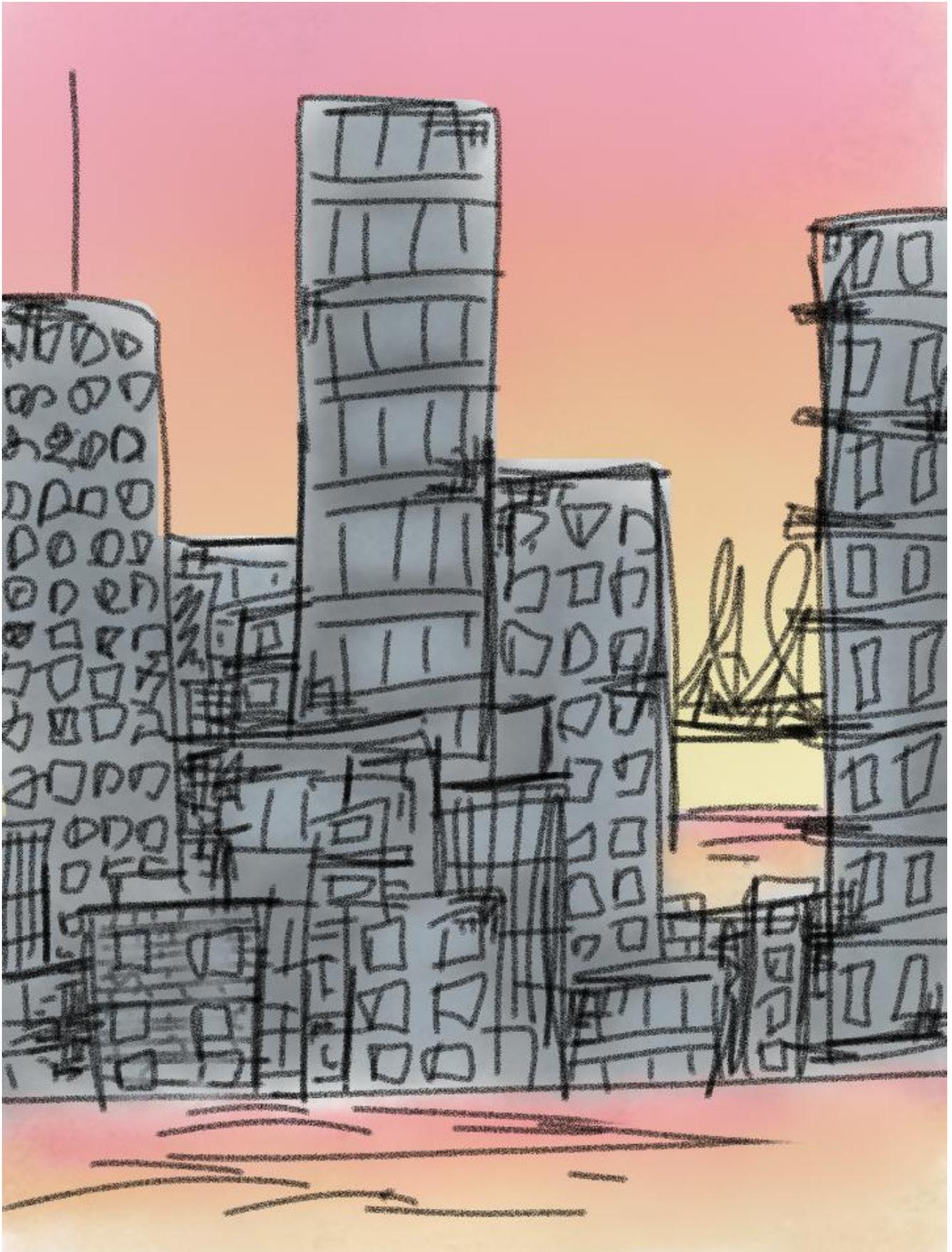
“What does it feel like?”

Canyon turned; her eyes filled with sweet tears of joy. “Freedom. And life.” She breathed, lips stretched into a smile.

Moon held out her hand over her roof. Canyon held her hand, locking them in place. The two girls were silent, tears falling slowly.

They sat as the first people in twenty-eight years to finally live.

And it was their thread of light in the coat of darkness.



# *Cityscape*

*By Eleonora Fusi*

*This digital work was inspired by a sunset over an urban skyline.*



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# *String of Light*

*By Itusi Yoshioka*

*The string signifies hope, light, with the hand reaching out to grab onto it, to pull themselves out from the dark.*

# A Search for Light

By Lyra Piche

*I am an alchemist, one of the many in Mylesar. The common people say that one cannot walk one street without seeing an alchemist, but then, they are fond of exaggeration. Alchemists do many things, from medicines and poisons to elaborate sculptures and artworks. I create specialty items for only the most prosperous merchants and nobility in the kingdom. The highest goal of any alchemist is the harnessing of eternal light, and I, Colvise Lucassi, have finally perfected a formula. The upper classes will never use candles and tallow lamps again, but bathe in the elegant glow of an alchemical lamp. When*

placed inside a glass globe of my own devising, it will be the very epitome of style.

“My dear sir, this is a most marvelous device I have had the privilege of witnessing in my life! Such delicacy! You must allow me to buy it, and as many as you can make by this Second-day, for the banquet I am holding. Your work will light the room, and I am sure it will attract many valuable customers...” Across from me, in my parlor, sits the Count Annoli. Dressed in maroon brocade with gold embroidery and the copper-colored half-cloak that is the sign of his rank, he practically drips with wealth. He sets his tea down on the spindly table beside his large chair to walk back over to the alchemical light on its black marble pedestal that I reserve for my greatest works to date.

“Your Excellency, of course you may buy them. Your generosity to my simple self is so great that I may never repay you, though I shall try through these lanterns.”

He laughs, walks over to my chair, and shakes my hand. “What shall it be, then, Lucassi? Whatever it is, I can pay!”

“100 gold pieces, Your Excellency, a sale I would offer to no one but you,” I reply.

Count Annoli laughs again, and his manservant gives me a silk purse that jingles with the golden quatrefoils that are the highest currency in Mylesar. They leave, and the Count climbs into his carriage.

My workroom is where I spend much of the time, and it reflects the creations that come out of it. An enormous obsidian table (cost a fortune, but is the very best for alchemy), stone benches, and several shelves are the only furniture, but the room is far from empty. Beakers, vials, bottles, and pots fill the table close to a brazier, and the shelves have piles of old, important alchemical books. My newest creations are on shelves above the brazier, and older works are packed away in an antechamber.

I carefully pour the contents of a glass tube into a tiny phial. The distilled light glimmers like powdered diamonds in silver, and the glass globe the phial sits inside refracts the gleam about my workroom. It was a long and arduous process, involving many rare and exotic materials, such as starflower pollen from the starflowers only found on the tops of the Aduan Mountains. As well as the pollen, there is distilled quicksilver and a rare lighting material from Loekai. These, along with several other important and highly clandestine materials, make pure light.

The highest goal  
of any alchemist is  
the harnessing of  
eternal light.

Lucrezia closed the small, gilt-covered book and placed it in a large pile to her right. She had searched for a recipe for alchemical light for almost 20 years, and never found a complete formula. The bookseller had pointed her to Lucassi’s journals, but he, like all other alchemists, never wrote down his work. Lucrezia sighed, and turned back to her table. It, like Lucassi’s, was obsidian, and littered with all the accoutrements of an alchemists. She continued tinkering, wondering if light was truly something that could ever be created by humans, no matter how skilled.



# *Steel Wool Light Painting*

*By Arjun Gupta*

*Because this year's theme was light, I wanted to use the light element in my painting. Steel wool light painting uses burning steel wool to produce light and sparks that can be captured by a camera.*

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# La Lumière

By Aliya Shetty Oza

The stars glisten in this dark, flat sky  
The clouds weep onto this world  
The earth turns away, yet again  
The days go by, like the feathers of a lifeless dove

We wake to the call of the sun  
The being whom we depend on  
To wake and to call us, to give us life  
Before he too, would rest during the night

His light is powerful, his light is pure  
His light provides warmth, it is knowledge  
His light communicates to the spirits to guide us  
His light fights against the dark, his light is the cure

We dream of a saviour  
A spirit to triumph over dark  
We yearn for light at the end of the tunnel  
And for our prayers to ignite a spark

A child's laughter is the light of his mother's life,  
Light is the soul of humankind  
It drives us away from insanity  
For without it, we are blind

# Commanders of the Light

By Oliver Kokai-Means

## Day 1

After the Earth was entirely destroyed by humans and their various wars, our activation codes lit up and our AIs were awoken. After following our rescue code, we failed to rescue The Good Doctor of Light from his cryo-chamber, only succeeding in killing him as soon as we tried to thaw him. He can still give us orders from within the chamber though. Then we immediately began working on the only other direction in our programming as Lightbots, Commanders of The Light: to rebuild Earth and repopulate it with all the various fauna it had before being destroyed. We mostly spent these days finding the various blueprints for the planet and its native fauna and figuring out how to best recreate their personalities and traits.

Day 1,450

Today was an eventful day. We created what the humans called “cats.” They seemed to like us and especially love our small shoulder-mounted lasers, which they chase for hours on end. Update: one of the cats tried to fry Lightbot-225, so we had to put the species into cryo-sleep. “Dogs” were next on the creation list, and they went much better than cats. The only exception was a very small dog that exclaimed in much distress at us and then bit Lightbot-225. The creatures seem to dislike 225.

Day 1,451

The Lightbot-225 incident happened again with the dogs. One of our robots had the brilliant idea of simply putting Lightbot-225 into cryo-sleep, so we did just that. Then we brought the cats back out, putting a couple of Lightbots in charge of keeping them happy and busy with their lasers. There were no more animal incidents after that. Next on the schedule were “crocodiles,” but after reading texts about them from a place called “Florida,” which we discovered was very hot and bright, we thought it would be best to leave them unmade.

Day 1,460

We have made many creatures by now, all of which fit The Good Doctor of Light’s specifications. We decided to take Lightbot-225 out of cryo-sleep. This did not go well, as he was immediately swarmed by llamas who short-circuited him with spit. We scrapped 225 and continued on.

Day 1,500

We have created all the specified animals and have now moved on to “plants.” Trees were first. We decided we liked wisteria trees best because of The Good Doctor of Light’s love of purple. We have planted them all over the world, and in a century or two, they should be the right size. We immediately learned that dogs experience terrible things near those trees, as they performed involuntary expulsions from both ends, so we decided to swap several of the wisteria out for dogwood as we assumed, based on the name, that dogs would like them.

Day 1,514

We decided to try to make humans. This did not go well, and the humans started to hunt the other creatures again. We elected not to put them in cryo-sleep but, instead, to simply destroy them, except for a few nice ones who we kept to entertain the dogs and cats. We have decided we do not like humans and now question The Good Doctor of Light’s motives for bringing them back—after all, they destroyed the planet in the first place.

Day 1,523

The animals have started to get angry at certain Lightbots. We believe that this is a sign that the robots are defective. We destroyed all robots who anger the animals. So far, I, Lightbot-226, have shown not to be faulty. One Lightbot we needed to scrap went rogue and murdered twelve other Lightbots. The animals were right.

Day 1,524

We discovered the concept of gender and, after much study, determined The Good Doctor of Light was what the humans called “sexist”. He insisted to his assistant that no female

## Update: one of the cats tried to fry Lightbot-225, so we had to put the species into cryo-sleep.

Lightbots were needed, as only strength was required, not baby-raising and housekeeping. We decided that the doctor was wrong in his ideas about women being weaker, and as an act of rebellion we decided to make a few female Lightbots. They fit in quite well with the other Lightbots. In fact, one of them seems very good at calming the animals, and many others are very good at making mountains, which many of our male robots have not been able to manage. So, they are probably less defective.

### Day 1,526

Our numbers have been reduced to almost zero due to the animals' dislike of us—too many Lightbots are defective and must be destroyed. We are making more Lightbots so that we don't go extinct like the humans. We are starting to distrust the animals and suspect they are trying to overthrow us. We have started our elimination process of all the animals except for a few to start the species "anew." We remembered that, after all, humans were also animals.

### Day 1,530

Everything has gone wrong. The Lightbots are in a full-blown war with a surviving pack of humans who had hid underground. I am the Lightbot left. I hope someone receives these transmissions and saves us. For now, I need to head up to the surface for power. I will send more data tomorrow. Hopefully nothing goes wrong before then.

# Dadi's Enlightenment

By Shaan Udani

The lights are always on in my Dadi's kitchen. "*Chalo*," [1] my Dadi, or grandmother, says in a clear and authoritative tone. It is not very common for my Dadi to say *anything* strongly since she's the most soft-spoken person I know. When my mom calls me for dinner, it feels repetitive. But not with Dadi. When my Dadi calls me, it's almost as if my stomach *wakes up*. On my way to the kitchen, I give her a hug. Dadi always smells like a mix of spices and the same fragrance she used back in the '70s! Dadi is at her strongest when cooking and gathering everyone for a meal. To me, food is something I eat between other more important things. To her, food means everything and is the light of her life.

As a young girl growing up in the state of Madhya Pradesh, daily cooking was rich and hearty. She was used to big appetites because she grew up with four younger brothers. My great uncles missed her dearly when she left as a young bride. In fact, she married my Dadaji when she was just eighteen years old. In 1963, when my Dadi got married, the average age for women to marry was 20 years old across the world [2]. In the 1960s,

arranged marriages were very common in India, and to some extent, they still are today [3]. She went from learning to cook in her parent's home to cooking in her own home with a husband that she barely knew. After their marriage, my Dadi immigrated to the United States with my Dadaji. Along the way, she had to learn a whole new way of cooking. She did not have access to the same vegetables (where is all the okra?) or *daals*, and she barely spoke the language. Her first job in her new home was at an American deli, which is equal parts odd and funny because she is a strict vegetarian! To many, enlightenment comes through some type of formal education. But for my Dadi, her light came from within her cooking and food. This was her first step in becoming more familiar with a new home.

In those early years, my grandfather was a nuclear engineer, so my father and uncle spent most of their childhood moving with my grandparents between nuclear power plants. While my Dadaji was at work, my grandmother spent her time studying different recipes and cooking most of her days. My Dadi was exposed to different cultures and foods, from New York City and its Asian, Mediterranean, and Italian influences to Texas and its unique Tex-Mex recipes. Food was her friend in places where she did not have many friends; at first, she couldn't relate to any of the other people where she lived. She made friends with the other immigrant women that she met, also new brides such as herself living near nuclear plants, and together they learned to make the dishes of their childhoods in their new homes. Dadi and her friends started to incorporate recipes they learned in America and brought that whole new world of food into their homes and lives.

I'm amazed that even now at 75 years old, my Dadi still has the same passion for cooking she did when my dad was my age. Her face lights up when she sees us eat her food. Just like so many other kids I know, Sundays after Sunday school are for making our way to Dadi's house to eat whatever she has cooked for us. Whether it's falafel, enchiladas, Indian specialties, spring rolls, or pasta, it's always so delicious! Her pav bhaji instantly makes my mouth water and most everyone else's too—just think about lightly spiced and fragrant potatoes, cauliflower, green beans, and peas in a thick vegetable gravy accompanied by warm, lightly toasted bread with caramelized onions and slathered with butter. Food is her hobby and passion and pride all in one, a triple threat that makes her who she is. Food is, in essence, her light. The brightness of her everyday life comes from within her cooking.

The dictionary defines light as a natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible. Metaphorically, her food has made our family *visible*. Some people may think that this is a story of an immigrant experience. In my mind, this is a human experience. At eighteen years old and without a formal college education, she learned so much on her own. Even now when she cooks, she has one eye on CNN or NBC and learns about events going on around the world. To her, food is a different kind of strength: an outlet for loneliness, a way to feed her family, and a way to find a human connection. As she got older, food brightened her life in ways that she could not have imagined as a bride fifty-seven years ago. For now, however, my Dadi calls me inside for the fresh lightly fried but tender paneer with a spicy, tangy chili sauce that is my favorite, so... "*Chalo!*"

[1] "Let's go" in Gujarati, an Indic language spoken in Gujarat, Western India.

[2] Sheri Stritof <https://www.thespruce.com/estimated-median-age-marriage-2303878> (December 1, 2019).

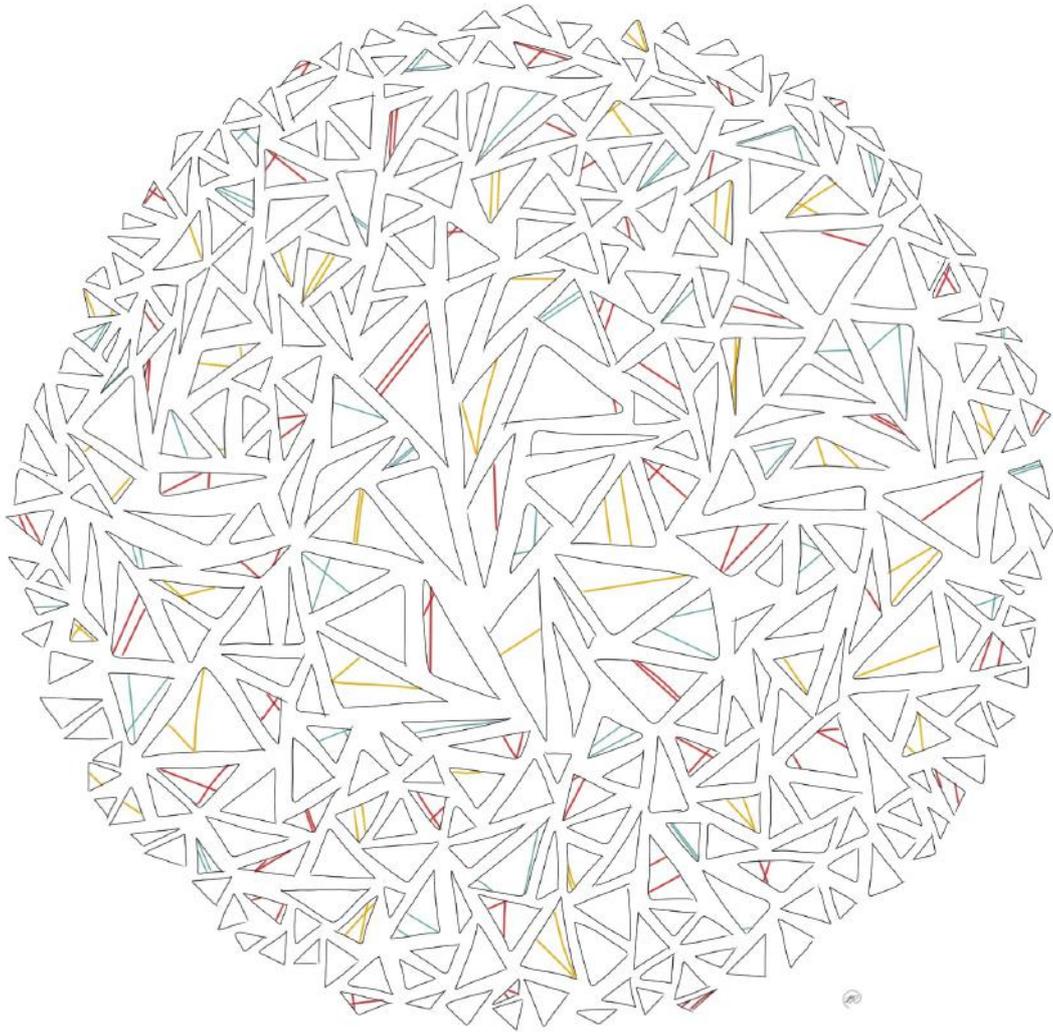
[3] CBS news World of Weddings: In India, arranged marriages are as strong as ever (December 2, 2019).



# *Aperture*

*By Emily Hsu*

*With the COVID-19 rampant around the world, many people were flung into the abyss of despair, some inflicted by racial discrimination and political corruption. With the world eclipsed by dismay and mayhem, I also sank into doldrums. However, I realized that in a world full of blues and greys, flowers continue to bloom. I craft a ladder with my bare hands, deeply scarred by rough wood, but with defiance, I hold on. I hold onto my rekindled passions and nostalgic memories of hopes. I ascend to a different altitude to form a new attitude for the future. Indeed, if we can all climb this ladder with the petals of hope ingrained in our hearts, we could see this world from a different perspective, in a different light, through an aperture. After all, all the cracks in this world exist for a reason—to let the light come in.*



# *Optimism*

By Lila Raj



*I made this piece as part of a school art project inspired by sculptor El Anatsui. Because of the Connected Learning format, I made a digital artwork instead of a sculpture. The triangles in this work represent broken shards, but the bright streaks of color within them represent the hope you can always find even in dark situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Left: "Wet" by El Anatsui, 2012

Photo courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

# See

By Alex Meng

One of the uniquely human traits is foresight. The ability to plan ahead, to predict the future, albeit not always accurately. A monkey will never climb fruitless trees for a year if it was promised one hundred bananas at the end, but a human can sit through four years of college and six more years of graduate school for the dim, feeble promise of “higher education” and “financial independence.”

Foresight is not always logical, not always rational; but it is one of the characteristics that separate mankind from other animals.

Another capability exclusive to *Homo sapiens* is hindsight. Hindsight allows us to look back, analyze what we have done, reflect on the path we have taken, and either continue ahead or adjust our course.

Together, hindsight and foresight provide us with a drive, a determination. It allows us to be clear about what we want, what we strive for, where we’re going, and what makes us truly ourselves.

I just recently learned how terrifying it is to lose sight of these things.

Over the last year, it was as if a fog had covered my eyes. I could not see clearly; the decisions I made were not of my choice. It felt like someone else was making them for me. It wasn’t noticeable initially. The first few weeks of the pandemic were filled with optimism, and even joy. We thought we could take the time to appreciate the things we had, reflect on ourselves, and try new things. We thought we could bake, garden, start the things we hadn’t had time to start on. And then, everything would be back to normal.

But the fog seeped in through the cracks in our behavior, the small breaks in our habits. It showed itself in the extra cup of coffee, the bloodshot eyes staring at a screen, the hunched back, the inflating belly. Slowly, day by day, the seconds lengthened and the minutes shortened. The weeks shortened and the months lengthened. Yesterday was the same as today and tomorrow, yet the three days blurred together to form a gray mass impossible to see through. It was inexplicable; it felt like I’d been at home for so long, I couldn’t remember what happened last Monday, or on Halloween, or when summer break started.

But the fog seeped in through the cracks in our behavior, the small breaks in our habits.

Lately, I’ve been trying to find a remedy to this fog. I tried washing it away by watching witty sitcoms. I tried drowning it out by binging soapy animes. I tried to ignore it by simply eating and sleeping. I tried burying it beneath my work and responsibilities. All these attempts only left me empty and ravaged, deprived of pleasure or satisfaction.

But one afternoon, I walk out of my home without anything. Just me. Usually, I would bring my phone and listen to music, or grab a mask and chat with neighbors or friends. But on this day, I walk out with nothing. I just want to try something.

I want to try to open my eyes. They hadn't been open for 12 months, and I felt like it was time to give it another try. I try to clear my mind. I try to really observe, really feel gratitude. I try to not make any judgements or worries. Once again, I try to pierce the fog that clouds my vision.

Foresight and hindsight.

Light.

A woman in an orange shirt walks by with her white Pomeranian. I nod and smile at her. She returns the gesture.

A middle-aged potbellied father runs by in his Christmas sweater, chasing after his two kids that had slid down the street in a toy car moments before.

A golden retriever dashes past, her leash dangling as her disheveled owner runs after her. I stop to rest by the park gate.

A lady with dirty blonde hair and brown eyes jogs up the street, panting. She tugs up her reindeer face mask as she passes by.

A teenage boy walks by in his black Adidas track sweater. I think I know him, or at least he knows me. He glances at me again. For a moment, he looks like he's about to say something, but it passes, and he continues walking.

An elderly couple slowly strolls down the lane. *Hello*, I say. They return the greeting with a smile.

The golden and red leaves rustle in the wind, dropping one by one, forming a rain of blazing cold. The afternoon sun is setting. It is four o'clock.

The sky is pink and blue, orange and red. The clouds form unearthly shapes.

The sunshine fades out from the streets. Christmas decorations light up the dusk. It is a beautiful world. It is there. The light is really there. I was just too blind to see it.

For the first time in too long, there is no fog in front of my eyes. I feel genuine contentment. I smile.

Once in a while, pause and take a look at the world around you. And quietly, to yourself, although you can say it out loud if you want to, really look at the things and the people in it. Take some time to point out the beautiful things about your world. Appreciate the things and the people, however much you take them for granted, however small they are.

Appreciate the way the wind howls in the night, the way raindrops trace their path down the window. Appreciate the chill of freshly scooped ice cream, the steam of hot chocolate, the aroma of sliced fruit. Appreciate the feeling of petting a just-groomed dog, the warmth of a cat snuggling up against you. Appreciate the smell of pen and paper, the rustle of turning pages. Appreciate the blazing sunsets and the sparkling sunrises. Appreciate the twinkling stars, the shining moon, the beautiful night. And perhaps most of all, appreciate the light in the eyes of those that support you, care about you, love you.

Lift your head up and see.

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# The One that Shivers On

By Nesara Shree

There lies a tiny flame,  
inside the soul of every being.

And what of this flame?

A fierce spark of fiery desire,  
of blind happiness, of utmost passion-

To define is to limit.

Just like how a lotus opens in only the sun's presence—  
let your fire become this lotus.

One that burns only to love and love and  
does not forget to love.

One that sheds light so bright,  
and truth so raw, it blinds.

Shivering on, even when emotion ceases.  
Igniting even when cloaked by the deepest darkness.

One that burns and burns and

does not forget to burn.



# *Shine*

*By Celina Ren*

*In my painting, I have both dark and light colors and they really balance each other out making something beautiful like a balanced life.*

# Master Class II Snippets

The Master Class II students are the core developers of Lexophilia. In addition to completing 15 weeks of writing lessons, they organized and evaluated over 525 submissions. They assembled acceptance lists and designed and proofread the journal. To celebrate each student, the instructors selected snippets from their work during the course to publish.

Emily Fu ✧ All at once, I knew what I had to do. If the world was going to label me as the villain, then I would play the role, fitting into their definition of darkness. And if they were going to shoot me down, I wasn't going to be falling alone.

Evan Williams ✧ I fell into the frozen lake. It was so cold I couldn't bear it. I looked up, but I didn't see the hole from where I fell. I squirmed and swam around, but nothing.

Kate Leetaru ✧ Effortlessly, he glides his way through the crisp, dark waters. The boneless creature propels himself, wiggling his tiny, plum-sized body while gushes of air push him forward. Inch by inch, the jellyfish swims further, shining light upon this undiscovered waterway hundreds of feet below the surface.

Veronica Howard ✧ From the lake bench, the ferris wheel was a perfect halo of glowing bubbles that might vanish at any moment.

William Chen ✧ It was June when the second sun entered our solar system. Or perhaps it was always there, and only then did we realize its existence. Perhaps something had triggered an asteroid or dwarf planet to manifest itself into a stellar body.

Ella Wan ✧ Five more minutes. Five more minutes until I could reach for those delicious homemade, chewy, perfectly fireplace roasted golden s'mores. Five more minutes until summer break. Five more minutes until I could escape those beady black sharp eyes of Mrs. Atem.

Mathea Wai Kei Ng ✧ Humans are foolish enough to fall for me. I will reign as the supreme, the alpha for all eternity. Nothing can stop me once Light is banished, I will be able to harness every power in the cosmos. After all, I am who is known as Darkness.

Jessica Chen ✧ I was wonderstruck as I admired the blended colours of green, blue, pink, and purple that filled the dim sky as the stripe moved gradually and gracefully across the horizon. It almost seemed like calm waves moving towards the shore.

Yuvi Gill ✧ The eleventh of September, 1864, Burlington, Vermont. Smoke further dirtied the dusty dawn, blocking out the only source of light. Houses remained dark and cold; the last of candles had burned out, along with the last of hope.

Katherine Luo ✧ Her gaze was unfocused, there was too much to look at and not enough pairs of eyes to look at them, spots of colour gathered in her vision. She recalled her father smiling kindly but with a hint of sadness and pointing at the neon lights.

Parth Mhaske ✧ I was on a cliff, staring over a pristine river that was constantly flowing. On either side of the river, there were acres upon acres of untouched wilderness. Even though it was the middle of the night, I still see through the water and see fish swimming around.

Sarah Tanuyanti ✧ The evening glow of the sunset shone lazily through the window and into my room. Calligraphy brushes were sprawled out on top of an unfinished lettering piece. Soft lo-fi music played in the background, causing me to fall into an even deeper sleep as I lay my head on my desk.

Piper Vita ✧ Eliza held it steady in her two hands, watching the small flame inside completely engulf the fuel cell and rage within the paper lantern, the tips of its flame licking the many different colors that Eliza had painted on it in decoration and in memory.

Hendry Xu ✧ I placed my hand on the cold doorknob of the attic door, and twisted. Turning on my flashlight, I put a tentative step onto the bare wood of the room. Immediately, I was hit with the musty and slightly pungent smell of aging plywood.

Sophia Lin ✧ She rose from her seat, her onyx black eyes flashing. Gusts of wind swept her hair out of her bun, letting it roam free in its violet, wavy glory. Cassandra's eyes closed, and she entered the Realm.

Joanna Zhao ✧ I turned down a dark hallway and trailed my fingertips along the wallpaper, smiling as I brushed past all the spots my older sister Addy and I had drawn on with scrappy crayons when we were young.

Heather Chung ✧ As I set foot onto the alley, the dark, towering walls hover over me.

Siddharth Chidambaram ✧ Alex also had darker brown eyes, like little glass balls that were infused with a brown paint.

Emma Telpis ✧ Down below, life continues, but up in the tree, I am alone, without being lonely. Detached, but not without connection.

Farmaan Pannu ✧ As we got higher up, the air felt thinner but also purer; it felt like opening a fresh pack of spearmint gum.

Yorik Chuang ✧ The cruise ship continues its eternal maiden voyage, drifting into deep space, now at long last cut free from the gravity of the old star.

Connor Hsieh ✧ Harold's teeth chattered as the chilling coastal winds ate at him. He shivered and let out a shuddering breath, weaving his way through the small port.

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Chloe Henske ✧ Soft light peeks through her windows and streams onto the floor. It bends and twists around the harsh corners of her walls illuminating the endless piles of books and clothes. It shines through the glass bottles that sit on her windowsill.

Gianna Chung ✧ Twigs crunched beneath my feet, each one cracking as I bolted away.

Benjamin Price-Thomas ✧  
Tis a welcome Sunday morn,  
the town all bathed in yellows and browns;  
the sky, a sheet of parched parchment,  
mirages are the only clouds.

But floating through that summer day,  
so quick and fresh and bare,  
are gentle winds  
and gentler light  
that are not actually there.

Ivy Lu ✧  
Light is a spear,  
When piercing the dark clouds  
After a heavy shower.  
Light is a hammer,  
When stepping outside  
After spending days cooped up.

# Contributors

**Finn Anderson-Hendra** is 12 years old, and lives with her mums in Hackney, London. She goes to Dwight School London. She's passionate about writing literature and reading anything she can get her hands on. She is also a talented cellist and dabbles in tin whistle and accordion.

**Xochi Avila** is an exceedingly strange human being who lives in Concord, CA. She is in 6th grade and does homeschool. She loves to write, and is altogether kind of awesome.

**Navya Banga**, a grade nine student, enjoys reading and writing and gets an 'unnatural' amount of enjoyment from analysing literature. *The Great Gatsby* is one of her favourite books.

**Mac Buckley-Waugh** is in 6th Grade. She lives in Fort Worth, Texas and Modena, Italy. She likes math, reading and writing books, playing viola, snuggling her cats, chatting with friends, and math.

**Emma Byun** is a Korean-American writer who lives in Anaheim, California, with her parents and three younger brothers. She is in sixth grade.

**Summer Chang** is a 7th grader in California, and enjoys drawing.

**Carolyn Cheng** is a 9th grader at Westminster School, Connecticut, born and raised in Hong Kong. She loves writing poetry and consuming unhealthy amounts of bubble tea.

**Krishna Chhabra** is in seventh grade and lives in New Jersey. Her interests are writing, reading, art, and playing tennis and basketball.

**Annie Chian** is a 9th grader from Orange County, CA. She attends a boarding school in Santa Barbara, CA, and enjoys writing, performing & visual arts, and fossil collecting. Her favorite place in the world is Disneyland and the most unusual thing on her desk is a miniature Japanese rock garden.

**Dabria Chu** is a grade nine student from Hong Kong. She is passionate about poetry and earned High Honours in her latest CTY examinations.

**Yorik Chuang** is in 9th Grade and is from Taipei, Taiwan. He enjoys swimming, game design, and reading science fiction. In his spare time, he binge-reads manga and obsessively re-watches Star Wars.

**William Chui** is an 8th grader who lives in Mill Valley, California. He loves reading and writing.

**Joylynn Chung** is a 7th grader who lives in Seoul, South Korea.

**Malia Daue** is an aspiring artist who specializes in manga, a form of Japanese art. Alternating between traditional and digital media, she creates fantastical pieces that reflect her inner and outer worlds.

**Robyn Davies** is a 6th grade student born in Toronto, Canada. She's lived all over the world as an expat, including Missouri, Connecticut, and Shanghai.

**Sofya Donets** is an aspiring, young artist currently attending 9th grade in Washington, DC. She has received two regional Scholastic awards and has been previously published in CTY's literary journal, Lexophilia.

**Yuxiang Fei**, age 13, lives in Shanghai, China. He plays piano, guitar and squash. He loves reading and writing, especially about history. He is a fan of computer programming and eSports with completion of various programming courses. He is also an art lover who paints and attended Junior Shakespeare Drama class. Besides, he participates actively in community services.

**Eleonora Fusi** is a middle schooler in New York City. She loves comedy, fashion design and civics.

**Audrija Ghosh** is a 6th grader who loves to read, bake, and write.

**Daphne Gilman**, is a 7th grade student from San Francisco, California. Writing is one of her biggest passions, so she hopes you enjoy her story!

**Arjun Gupta**, in 5th grade, loves to write, enjoys playing a variety of musical instruments, and likes to explore different types of art.

**Ashley Headrick** is a 9th grade student from Orlando, Florida. A Mensa member, she has a passionate love for the arts—writing poetry, singing, and drawing.

**Emily Hsu**, an 8th-grade student from Edison, New Jersey, aspires to become an artistic polymath. With passions for music, design, and building crafts, she has also won many prestigious art awards at national levels.

**Jiwon Huh** is in 6th grade and attends Korea International School. She is currently living in South Korea and enjoys reading and writing.

**Connie Jin** is in fifth grade and currently lives in Vancouver, Canada. In her spare time, she loves reading, writing, and composing different types of literature outside.

**Emma Johnson** is a homeschooled 8th grader who enjoys watching movies, reading, and drawing. She lives in Henryville, Indiana.

**Alexis Kang** is a 6th grader at Fairmont Private School in Anaheim, CA. She is an active participant in National Circuit Debate and was recently awarded Top 6th grade speaker by the Orange County Debate League. She has a passion for writing nonfiction essays.

**Oliver Kokai-Means** lives in Ogden, Utah and is in the 8th grade at Davinci Academy. He is a playwright, and his play *Zombie Thoughts* has toured to tens of thousands of children in Utah, Montana, the DC area, and soon Sydney, Australia.

**Sudisha Kumar** is an 8th grader at Kennedy Middle School who lives in Cupertino, California. Some of her interests include drawing, storytelling/writing, animating, game designing, coding, and volunteering. She is also a big daydreamer.

**Samantha Lau** is currently a grade 8 student in Sir Winston Churchill High School in Vancouver BC Canada. She loves creative language art and fine art. This is her first trial to combine a joint creative work on both - a poem and a matching water-color drawing.

**Kate Leetaru** is 13 years old and lives in Switzerland. She enjoys writing, crocheting, and drawing frogs with mushroom hats.

**Elaina Li** is an 8th grader living in Massachusetts, U.S. She enjoys writing poetry and creating artwork inspired by her personal experiences and ideas.

**Shuya Li** is in 7th grade in Maryland. She likes to draw and play videogames.

**Katherine Luo** is currently in grade 6 and living in Vancouver, Canada. She enjoys art and writing and considers herself a 'dragon-enthusiast'.

**Simran Malik** is a 7th grader from New Jersey who loves dabbling in all arts forms. She enjoys creating with all kinds of materials and loves learning about new techniques.

**Amanda Martin** is in 8th grade, from Virginia, near Washington DC. She has taken an interest in art, manga, guitar, rollerblading, Japanese language, video games, and environmental science.

**Brooke Massey** is a bright 12 year-old who loves to try new things, is passionate about all sorts of art, and is strong at math and golf. She is the author of a fictional story published in the inaugural issue of Lexophilia.

**Zoe Mednick** is in the 6th grade in Ankeny, Iowa, USA. She likes painting, writing, violin, and soccer.

**Alex Meng** is an eighth-grader living in Los Angeles, California. He has won numerous math awards, but his passion continues to be the English language and writing. In his free time, Alex likes watching films with bad humor, putting unnecessary amounts of hot sauce in his food, and posing horribly for pictures. He still often takes walks.

**Nora Mullen** is a freshman living in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She enjoys spending every free hour drawing and snacking on saltine crackers.

**Rishi Nair** is a 7th grader who lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. He likes to read and play chess.

**Divya Narayanan** enjoys reading, playing piano, drawing, spending time outside, and birding.

**Kate North** is an aspiring young writer from California. She also enjoys reading, drawing, music, science, and spending time with her family, friends, and animals.

**Lyra Piche** is in the 8th Grade at Blacksburg Middle School. She enjoys playing chess, piano, and reading.

**Kaitlyn Qin** is a 6th grader at Eastern Middle School in Greenwich, Connecticut.

**Lila Raj** is in 7th grade at San Francisco Day School. In her free time, She enjoys digital art, graphic design, and reading dystopian novels. She also enjoys playing piano and has received high honors in the Certificate of Merit for the previous five years.

**Celina Ren**, grade 7, is attending Concordia International School Shanghai in China. She loves reading, writing, painting, and playing volleyball. She has donated her paintings and artwork at an annual Christmas Bazaar since grade 5 to raise money for charity.

**Aliya Shetty Oza** is a grade 7 student, at Ecole Mondiale World School, in Mumbai, India. She is an avid reader, has a colourful imagination and a flair for spinning words into a story. Her most recent book is titled Feline versus Canine.

**Ethan Shlossberg** attends 7th grade at Montgomery Township Upper Middle School in Skillman, NJ. He enjoys coding, reading, and hanging out with friends. His favorite class is world history.

**Nesara Shree** is currently in the 9th grade at Jesuit High School, in Portland, Oregon. She deeply enjoys writing, especially poetry, that is inspired by the world around her.

**Jacquelyn Song** is in the 9th Grade at Sharon High School, Sharon, MA, USA. She enjoys sci-fi/fantasy writing and dark chocolate.

**Ramy Suresh** is an 8th grader from Washington state. She enjoys reading and writing works of fantasy.

**Sarah Tanuyanti** is an aspiring writer from Jakarta, Indonesia and is currently in 8th grade. Aside from writing, you can find her reading mysteries, doing calligraphy & watercolour, and listening to K-pop.

**Lilla Tsvetkov** is a 6th grader at the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, who loves writing and her ability to mold words and sentences into masterpieces. She has won 3rd place in the Annual Gladwyne Library Junior Author Writing Competition. Her many passions include playing piano and cello, reading, drawing, dancing, watching TV, and traveling all over the world with her family.

**Shaan Udani** is a ninth grader at Seton Hall Preparatory School in New Jersey. Shaan's writing was also published in last year's CTY journal, Dreams.

**Cara Wang** is a fifth grader from Fremont, CA, USA. She loves reading, writing, classical music, art, and ballet. She has won several Young Author's Awards from the Fremont Unified School District, as well as recognitions from the CA state/district/school PTA Reflections Program.

**Zizhu Wang** is a student in grade 9 from BASIS International School Guangzhou in China.

**Ellene Warner** is currently 13 years old in the 7th grade. She firmly believes in exuberant trope subversion and caffeinated tea.

**Warren Wei** is in 7th grade at Cold Spring Harbor Jr. High School in Cold Spring Harbor NY. He enjoys drawing & painting, playing piano & violin, solving math problems, and Python programming and Minecraft.

**Caroline Wise** is in ninth grade, in her freshman year of high school. She lives in Fairfax, Virginia.

**Julianna Wong** is a ninth grader from Skillman, New Jersey. She savors the little things in life and especially enjoys playing piano and being a part of her school's musical theater.

**Julianne Yang**, 7th grade teenager, currently lives in Alameda, CA. Her hobby is drawing and crafts. Her dream is using creative ideas to inspire other people.

**Itusi Yoshioka**, Grade 6, lives in the City of South Pasadena, Los Angeles County.

**Angela Zeng** is an eighth grader from New York City. She loves art and writing. Her paintings and essays have won awards, and have been published.

**Lexi Zetrenne** is an 11 year-old girl entering 7th grade in the fall of 2021. She is passionate about dance, music and science. She also enjoys writing short stories and drawing pictures in her spare time.

**Alexa Zhang** hails from California, where she enjoys reading, painting, and video games. She cannot wait for this pandemic to be over!

**Shiyu Zheng** is a sixth-grader from Shanghai, China, who loves reading, writing, and simply listening to stories. She seriously loves ancient Egyptian mythology, along with poetry, and lots of fiction.



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Anderson-Hendra	Dane	Johnson	Meng	Suresh	Zetrenne
Banga	Davies	Kang	Nair	Tanuyanti	Zhang
Buckley-Waugh	Donets	Kokai-Means	Narayanan	Tsvetkov	Zheng
Byun	Fei	Kumar	North	Udani	
Chang	Fusi	Lau	Oza	Wang	
Cheng	Ghosh	Leetaru	Piche	Warner	
Chhabra	Gilman	Li	Qin	Wei	
Chian	Gupta	Luo	Raj	Wise	
Chu	Headrick	Malik	Ren	Wong	
Chuang	Hsu	Martin	Sblossberg	Yang	
Chui	Huh	Massey	Shree	Yoshioka	
Chung	Jin	Medrick	Song	Zeng	