



# LEXOPHILIA

TO CREATE, TO SHARE, TO INSPIRE

JOHNS HOPKINS CENTER FOR TALENTED YOUTH  
LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS JOURNAL

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LOST & FOUND - SPRING 2023

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## *Passing Memories*

***Celina Ren***



## *Background Art*

***Bella Zhong***



# MASTHEAD

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# MISSION STATEMENT

Through words and works of art, this year's Lexophilia literary journal is by the teamwork of CTYers globally who bring new, unexplored worlds and issues into the light. This journal allows their hidden pieces to be discovered by readers. The diverse collection takes them on a journey to get lost in stories of forgotten kingdoms, people, and artifacts while finding their own ideas along the way. The whys of Lexophilia are simple:

To Create, To Share, To Inspire.

# SELECTION PROCESS

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 2024. We hope to see your work!

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

# Letter from the Editor

## Dhanvi Sheth, 2023 Editor-in-chief

A purple jacket collecting dust and lounging in my school's lost and found bin, while I frantically tried to search for it in my closet two weeks later, heedless to the fact I left it in the classroom. That's what comes to mind when I think of this year's theme. Others may think of a young child being adopted by a loving home, the feeling of uncertainty and loneliness until guided by a new friend, or a good old game of hide-and-seek in the backyard. Some lose every penny given to them while some can spot each one on the ground. It's funny how three words seem to connect themselves to countless aspects of our lives. But regardless of whether you're better at losing or finding, I hope this year's issue of Lexophilia expresses that sometimes, it's ok to be lost, as you may just unveil a better path.

Being elected Editor-in-Chief, it was a pleasure to oversee the creation of this journal from a blank page to \_\_ pages of thrills, emotions, and imagination. Although the role demanded a busy schedule, it was worth seeing emails pop in about layout meetings and submission numbers going up every day, reading the voices of students who excel at their craft. The inner-workings of a literary journal are quite the process, and this experience opened my eyes to the extent in which quality is sought after, even in the magazines at a dentist's office. Working with the CTY students of the editorial

board was a smooth adventure despite the few road bumps we hit. With everyone creating a productive and supportive environment, I felt as though we became closer each week, even if many of us haven't met face to face. It's bittersweet to see the journey of this journal fade to an end, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity of having been part of it.

I would thank every CTY student and staff member who contributed to this journal but for the sake of brevity, I want to thank the Content editors and committees (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art) for their hard work throughout the weeks, whether it be for creating assortments of background art or drafting shortlists. Though some genres were hit with the submission wave more than others, their insightful and detailed opinions are the basis of the selection of pieces this journal shares. I want to shout out the Layout editors for their dedication and creative, unique ideas, working from day one to create templates and enliven the words into attractive visuals. Thank you to the Multimedia and Publicity Manager who spread the word to share our work, and the Submissions Managers, who were tasked with the tedious job of compiling a hundred submissions, not letting any one slip through the cracks.

However, none of these roles could've done what they did if it weren't for the

CTY students who took the time to submit their best to this journal. It takes a bit of bravery to put your writing or art piece out there for unknown people to decide its worth, but I've learned that acceptance and rejection are more than a simple measure of skill. Your effort, talent, and support are the backbone of the journal, and it would, quite literally, not exist without you. Finally, to our readers, thank you. We're proud to present this year's publication of Lexophilia and are privileged to share it with you. We hope that you'll find a story to get lost in!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dasha". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

# Collaborative Poem

**Each Master Class II student was asked to write two lines, one about something they've lost and one about something they've found. Mixing and matching the different lines together, this poem is a collection of lost and found stories that were discovered in unlikely ways.**

Missing and longing for the memories of the past	return to me in tears showered from above
Keys floating through the void of a purse	a small penny tucked snugly in the corner
Five minutes became an hour until the sun went down	scrolling and searching till all is surpassed
A forest of mysterious faces gawking and judging everyone	of the lines of customers, I am now on the other side
Piles of marbles, forgotten in the dust	only to be hiding in your hands all along
Buried within stories, the truth concealed from the mind	under overdue papers, messages left on read, a match hides
Light exploded into black darkness, falling into the oblivion of hate	relieved by a friend who cherishes my every action
Memories swept up in the rolling winds	grains fluttering, uncovering wisped echoes
Flames dwindle low, before a brush of air leaves only a trail of smoke	but friendship, a true connection was the key to the light
Just an ordinary day, a boy drifting with a tiger in the tranquil ocean, no land to be seen	at the end of the horizon, a green mound appears, sounds of civilization grow louder



# Crystal Hunting

## Yanling Lin

Nobody needed to tell me to run. I had to get to my spot before anyone else even had a chance to consider taking it. What was mine was mine, and what was mine yesterday should've still been mine the next day. I liked being by myself. I wasn't sad alone, in fact, not even alone at all. I had all my thoughts, the weird and philosophical, all to myself. I wouldn't call that alone at all. Even now, my thoughts are my imaginary friends; I'm never alone.

Plop. Sitting down on the dirt under the termed "Tree of Hope" was the first moment of many to come where my pants became coated in a fine dusting of dirt. I wasn't sure where I had gotten the name from, but it was here to stay. Winds buffeted the leaves, casting moving animations of shadows on the ground. I craned my neck up into the sky to look up at the leaves, still a fresh lime color. The sky was an ocean of blue, a beautiful backdrop for the playground. Scanning the ground, a strangely placed rut and an oddly dense area of leaves caught my eye. There was the dig site where I spent my recesses quietly "mining" and staying away from my peers. Picking up a kindling-sized stick, I began the routine of digging. Digging was difficult work. It was slow and provided few fruits of labor. Still, it gave my hands something to do as my mind meandered through the complexities of the world. I could ride a unicorn

through the sky, climb a tree of any height, live in the world of my favorite book characters, or go on a fancy heist. Tranquility of the spring breeze and distant chatter was a catalyst for intricate daydreams.

After some mental adventures, I found a new, sharper digging stick. I picked it up and continued hacking. I brushed the loose dirt away, covering my fingers in a thin layer of shimmering dirt. I smashed the semi-sharp wooden tip towards the ground, breaking off clumps of earth, but it seemed like a hard mass was below. It might have been a super massive rock, or one just big enough for me to give up in that spot. I scooted over, altering my target to another part of the shallow dent in the ground I made.

Glancing over my shoulder, I made sure my other hole was still covered and protected. I took one of the leaves off to check if my "crystals" were still there. I didn't think people would steal them, but I needed something to remind me of the passage of time during eternal recess. I put the leaf back down and went back to stabbing the ground. After I had created a sizable amount of loose dirt, I ran through it with my fingers, hoping to find another translucent, scratched stone. Pebbles were everywhere. Some looked like the byproducts of the loose parts when constructing the playground. The clay-



colored and flat-edged rocks were my favorite. Once I had spent sufficient time digging and caking dirt onto my pants, I would take clay-like rocks to the blacktop where they could work like chalk, leaving a brownish red residue. That was for later. I could draw random lines and shapes at the end of recess; right now, I needed to find crystals to add to my minuscule collection.

A new pile of dust gathered at the bottom of the hole with the next jab. Poking through the loose earth pile, I felt something hard and jagged. I didn't need to pull the rock out to examine it. Logically, there was no point. The chance it would be a prized crystal was impossibly small. Fortunately, the five-year-old me did not appreciate sound logic. I dug around and pinched the rock despite knowing that the odds were stacked against me.

As a kindergartener sitting on the ground near all the teachers hoping for recess, revered among others, to end, I didn't expect miracles, or even good luck for that matter. That's the trick. By keeping my expectations down, when something even slightly positive happened, it would lighten up my whole day. That was exactly what happened here. I dusted off the dirt, revealing not another speckled gray rock, but rather, a translucent one dotted with yellow and brown. It didn't matter that the crystal was dirty or that I would probably lose it by the end of the day. What mattered was that my collection would be one pinky-nail sized crystal larger; it mattered that my time-killer of plunging a stick at the ground did have a physical reward.

"That's enough work for today," I mumbled. The other part of me didn't agree.

"Yes, but you found one, which means you could find another," the other me mentally argued.

"Over-ambitious."

"Lazy."

Lazy me won. I picked up one of my chalk rocks and ran to the front blacktop. People ran, jumped, screamed. Dots of color in the form of playground balls bounced everywhere. The very idea of it all made me want to run into a corner. Eyes sweeping over the ground, I paid careful attention to avoid all the different groups of people. I sat by the door and crouched down, scribbling twisted snakes and overlapping shapes.

Since kindergarten, I haven't dug through the dirt looking for Earth's natural trinkets. Even so, I wonder if I tried today if I would be better or worse than my kindergarten self at doing it. A lot of me is still the introverted "I talk to no one" me that chose to dig in the dirt instead of play during recess. Now, though, that part of me likes to find sticks and sharpen them into spears. I've learned to socialize with people and do the stereotypical act of talking, but I still live for being with no one but my thoughts. Some call it alone, but I call it peace.

# Pumpkins and the Loss of Kitsen Grumer

**Sophie Lenoel Quang**

Dear Kitsen Grumer,

Your dad used to call you Pumpkin. You never knew why but you never questioned it, that's the beauty of younger you. You used to go on nature walks with Mammi, you would climb into the trees to find the perfect leaves to build little boats that would never float. But you still loved them. You used to be chubby and slow, but you never cared. You would go around in your stained shirt and your sister's skirt, saying and doing whatever you wanted. You never paid attention to what they said about a boy acting in such a way. That was the beauty of younger you. You were already gorgeous, with curly brown locks and a little nose perfectly framing the centerpiece, your gray-blue eyes that danced and shone like a little ballerina. You wanted to be a ballerina.

You loved those fake-tasting watermelon candies. I'm not sure why that's important but I wanted to remind you. You've lost all the little pleasures, always striving for more, more, more. You loved holding caterpillars, their flimsy bodies curling up and down mesmerized you as their sticky feet slowly inched up your finger. You don't remember what it felt like to lay up against your mother's loving chest, defended by her warm embrace. That feeling is important and I need to remind you.

You weren't like the others. You knew from the very beginning that time was a trap. You never wanted to grow old, you never yearned for the next year. The setting sun always haunted you. Whenever you saw it, you knew you were one step closer to the future, a future where you would have to grow up, a future where your peers don't stop to appreciate the little things, a future where you wouldn't fit in, but this time you would care. I remember when you swore to never abandon your childish self, to hold on to your childhood tight and never let it go, your delicate words so faint against the thundering world. But you broke that promise. It wasn't your fault, younger you didn't know what was waiting for you.

You don't remember when they first came for you, but they did. They were ghostly figures with shadows masking their faces. Stress, Pressure, Doubt, Self-Consciousness, and Anxiety, each one loomed over you, working systematically to wear you down. They trailed you wherever you went, moving swiftly in the dark at first. In time, though, they grew more and more prominent. They inflicted little wounds, easy enough to hide but building up over time. Losing weight, dressing right, getting good grades, making money. They sucked away your dreams with their eerie mouths and fed you lies about yourself. Their words were

so wrong, so disgusting, but they had you under their spell, Fear. And when they told you that you should starve yourself, you did. And when they told you that your mother's arms wouldn't guard you anymore, you believed them. They bombarded you with questions that infiltrated your mind and planted seeds of insecurity. Their presence haunted you, never knowing when the next shoe would drop.

Then, after years of torture, they flayed you alive, peeling back the innocent skin that masked you from life's true horrors. They left you raw and exposed, alone to fend for yourself in this raging chaos. In your bare flesh, every tear stung more, every step made you want to collapse, but of course, that would only hurt more. Over time, though, you grew back stronger, and in the place of your raw flesh came thick, ugly callouses. It was gnarled and rough, nothing like your soft baby skin. It was necessary to guard you from your hardships, but it also blocked out your love. For survival, you shed your curiosity, your trust, and your appreciation for the little things to make room for the pressure you carry around every day. You lived, but not really. You lost your love for the world. You lost your love for yourself.

Your mistake was not misunderstanding the changes ahead, you always knew they were coming. Your mistake was thinking you could fight them. This evolution was horrid but inevitable. Now you fit right in with the very people you wanted to avoid becoming. You run around, always rushing. You stress out, always worrying. You let other people tell you what to do, what to think, how to act. You don't want to be a ballerina anymore.

I barely recognize you, but it's not your fault. You know too much to marvel at the world the way you used to. You've seen too much to be optimistic about the future. While I think you could've defended yourself from the world as Pumpkin, you needed this transformation to protect you from yourself. Your dulled feelings shield you from your own hate just as your mother did, back when you were Pumpkin.

I hope you've found your place in the world, but I wish you could've kept me.

Love,  
Pumpkin



# Rods From God

**Ava Zhong**

“What do we do?”

The voice echoed throughout the room, silencing all the other murmurs and sounds. For a moment, you could only hear the heartbeats of frightened scientists and the ticking of a clock on the big screen, counting down until the missile’s impact with Russia. Carter Grant, a general of the U.S. military army, scanned the scene.

“Well? What. Do. We. Do.”

The military’s nuclear missile #HJ7328 had just been deployed. In merely 15 minutes, the missile would reach its target and obliterate the eastern Russian border. The explosion would kill millions, and Russia would have to retaliate with hundreds of their own missiles. Should the two world-superpowers go to war again, Earth will become a lifeless dust bowl. World War V had just ended, and the whole world was still recovering from its effects. Why would America want to re-ignite the war?

But this wasn’t on purpose. Hackers, the largest legion anyone had ever seen, combined their computer power and hacked into California’s 23rd century military database, and triggered an attack on Russia. Their motive? To rebel against the harsh terms set by Russia after the last war. And now, 5-star-General Carter Grant was the only one capable of resolving the issue.

“Listen. We are about to go to war with the strongest military army in the world. I need answers.”

A long pause. Many people were too afraid of Grant’s formidable wrath. Grant

was known to fire people on the spot whenever they wasted his time, sometimes violently. However, the world was at stake, and there was no room for selfishness. A man weakly stood up, his glasses trembling. “M-maybe... maybe we can use the Rods from God? To knock out our missile? It would cause some damage to the countryside, but we can just make some excuse to Russia and...” the man stopped, terrified.

“Rods from God?” Grant frowned in disbelief. “But those are just prototypes. However,...Jim!” he snapped, and a short man quickly looked up. “Give me some numbers. Are the Rods from God operational yet?” Jim quickly typed something on his computer, the holographic display illuminating his sweaty face.

“Yes. But they’ve never been tested before, sir.”

“What’re the odds?”

“Um, there’s a 36% chance their successful, sir.”

The silence returned. “Sir,” Jim said tentatively, “we can’t launch the rods without the president’s approval, and there is no time to send a request. Are you sure you want to do this? You could lose your position, your whole life...”

Grant looked at everyone. Determination shone in his eyes. “If it means saving our nation, then yes. Everyone, prepare for the first launch of Rods from God!”

Immediately, the room began to buzz with chatter as everyone quickly set

up their technology. More and more holograms lit the room. Voices started to chorus statuses, preparing for the launch. On the screen, the timer ticked down.

“Orbital, go.”

“Thrusters, go.”

“System, go.”

“Shielding, go.”

“Rod A1, go.”

“All systems are go. You are clear for launch, General. Your orders?”

Everyone looked up at Grant. His face was fixed, like a steel mask, yet you could just barely see the emotion racing through his eyes. He was doing this for the nation. “Launch Rod from God #A1. Target: missile #HJ7328.” A woman pressed one final button. The rod was launched.

1408 kilometers away, drifting aimlessly in space, was a large piece of metal about the size of a telephone pole. A small hidden thruster suddenly fired, adjusting the pole’s direction. Aimed like a needle, it started accelerating through the dark space, growing faster and faster. Soon, it had reached 10 times the speed of sound. Careening through space, it entered the atmosphere, becoming red hot. It was aiming right for missile #HJ7328.

Back on Earth, General Grant paced around the base. On the screen, they were able to watch the rod’s path, as well as the missile’s. As the timer ticked down, they could only hope that they would luck out. As the rod and missile drew closer to each other, the whole world seemed to be holding its breath. Grant stopped pacing. 00:00:14 until impact with Russia. 00:00:13. 00:00:12... The two objects got closer. And closer. And closer...

00:00:03,

00:00:02,

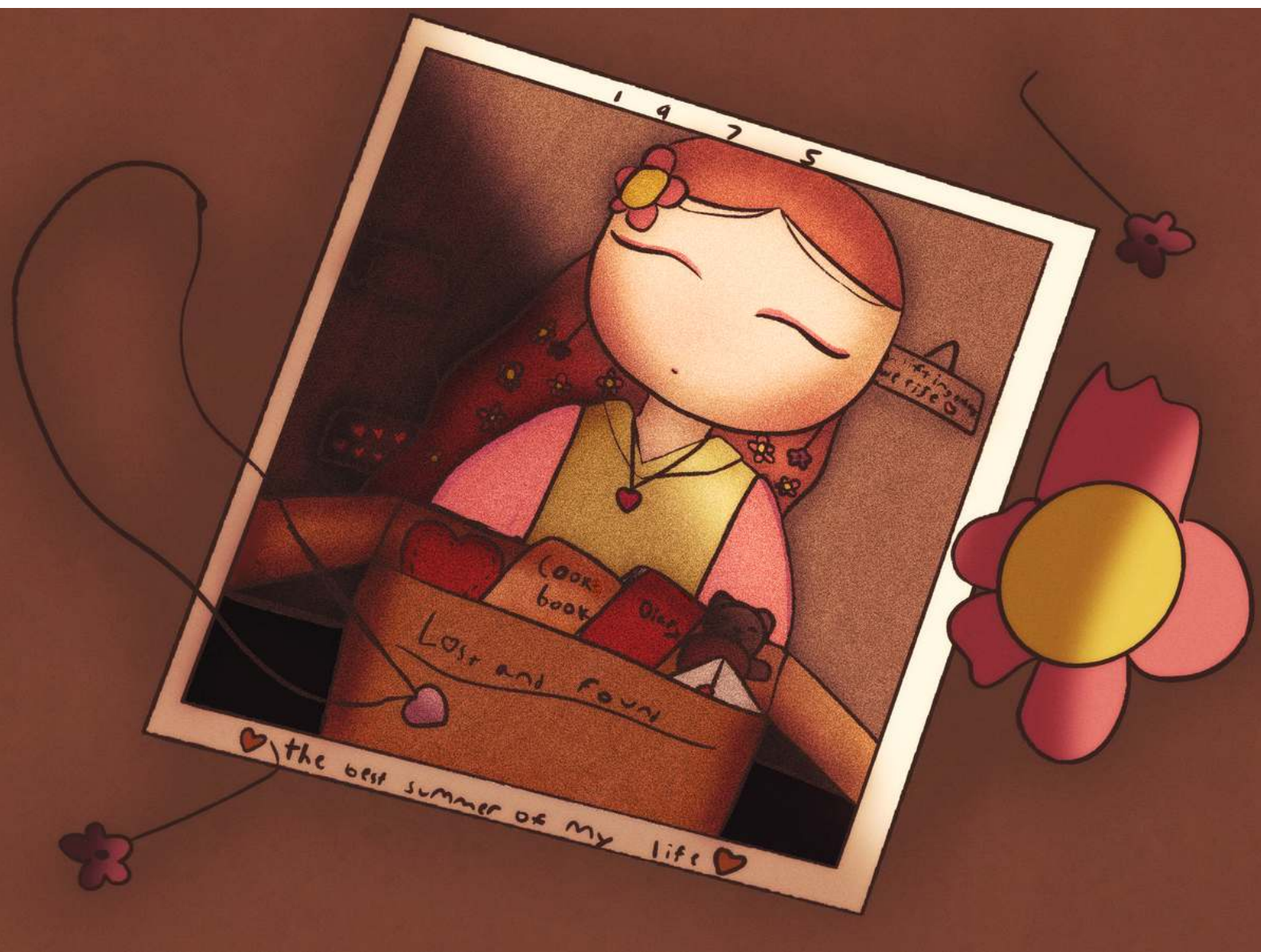
00:00:01,

00:00:00.

Did it work? Did the missile get destroyed? Or did it hit Russia?

The room held their bated breath. Suddenly, a shockwave rocked the whole continent of America, knocking down everyone from their chairs, throwing them around the room like rag dolls. All glass shattered, and the earth cracked above them. An earthquake rumbled around them. All over America’s west coast, people were thrown around, receiving thousands of injuries ranging from dislocated limbs to broken spines. After what seemed like hours, the rumbling finally diminished. As General Grant climbed up from the chaos, wincing from his broken ankle, he saw the flickering, dusty screen. “Missile #HJ7328 destroyed. Missile #HJ7328 destroyed.” The Rod from God had made its mark! Over the Pacific Ocean, the Rod from God hit the missile at supersonic speed, and the force caused the missile to explode with 5,000x the force of a hydrogen bomb. But America was lucky. No direct assault on Russia happened. The world was safe.

The shockwave injured many people, both in America and Russia. Thankfully, America was able to pass the explosion as a failed nuclear-bomb test over the ocean. Russia, not wanting war, readily agreed. General Grant, being seen as a hero for avoiding nuclear war, was forever memorialized as one of the best generals that had ever lived. His face was on the front of the new, Americanized Dogecoin currency, and he soon became president a few years later. As for the Rods from God? They were being heavily modified to lower their speed and impact force, as the shockwave from rod #A1 was far too powerful, spreading over hundreds of miles. However, maybe one day, perhaps in our current 2023, the U.S. Military will finally use Rods from God.



# *Found Memories*

**Ellis Roe**

*Visiting the Lost and Found turned into the best summer of her life.*

# Finding Drops of Wonder

**Aimee Burmeister**

I hold my hand over moist soil, sprinkling seeds.  
They lie there, lifeless; what did I expect?  
I walk back indoors, wiping dirt on my jeans—  
The denim is no longer rich with blue.

If I were a poet, I would find meaning, find life,  
In dirt and seeds and denim—but how?  
I sit at a block of wood (a desk?)  
And write about Shakespeare,  
Thinking of meaning, trying not to lose sight of it.  
Is my writing profound enough?

I close the silver machine (a computer, I know)  
And look down at faded jeans, again—  
Where is the meaning?  
Before the sun sets, I tie my hair back, constraining it,  
Stare at the unseen seeds now deep beneath dirt,  
Pushing myself to find meaning in their willingness to suffocate.

If I were to find meaning, I would open my notebook, write in it,  
Hoping that the symbols on the page are words  
That could prevent the loss of wonder.

As I look through my window at clouds,  
I try to find the sky behind them—  
Should I attach meaning to what is hidden?

I look at the glass, at the faint remnants of rain.  
Before the droplets dry, I tread through grass, fill a bucket,  
Hold it tightly in my hands, and splash water on the glass.  
The water slides down, dripping to my shoes.  
My socks grow wet and cold.

If I were a poet, I would hint that the water is symbolic—  
Drops of wonder that slowly evaporate;  
The window is already starting to dry.

# Flying Mind in a Still Body

**Amy Ji**

I've always wondered what are acts of bravery. In some books, brave acts are daring heroes, facing their fears and conquering tasks that seem almost impossible. In real life, dozens of people save lives and protect the environment every day. However, I was never a courageous person, to be honest. Safety and familiarity are my safe haven, and I'm perfectly happy with who I am and what I want.

I think maybe my head wasn't that clear that misty morning. Maybe I slept too late, or maybe I spent too much time worrying over my grades, or it might be that I was just tired. But the past few months of new assignments and new classmates exhausted both my mind and body, and I was frustrated to find that even a light-hearted vacation couldn't keep my mind off the looming problems waiting for me. The first few months of sixth grade had already thrown me off balance and tore through my mind, and I seemed to have lost my way in the mist.

So that day, through the rain, I stood under the rollercoaster, pondering my choices. The moist, heavy air seemed to muffle my senses, and I thought:

Sure, I like being safe on the ground, but new opportunities are only for once, and perhaps I've got to try new things, and being a hermit crab won't help. So why not give it a try? People around me are all so brave, so I could be too, right? My mind

strangled my logic, and at last I surrendered.

In the end, I went on a rollercoaster thinking of bravery and a new point of view in life, although actually I'm not really brave, nor do I ponder great questions in life. I sat there in the cart, and the moist air and the cramped seats. The rustling sounds of my raincoat heightened in my senses and became loud in the silent rain. Tiny streams of water trickled down the railings.

I can't remember anything from that ride, and all I knew was that the cart shot up so fast, so fast that I couldn't feel anything. My soul seemed to drift away from my body and into the sky as I levitated into the air, with the background noise fading until it felt like nothing but white noise. My senses heightened and pupils widened and I felt like flying. Is this what flying is like? The wind went up my head, and perhaps I saw stars.

Another drop, down down down. Perhaps I was dropping into an abyss? Or into the deepest part of the ocean?

"Why down again?" I thought, but there was no time to guess as the cart flipped. Maybe I was dying, and I guess I really believed that at the time, even though I was strapped safely in my seats. The cart slowed, and I stepped down, looked up at the skies, which should have cleared up if I was in a Disney movie, but it was still misty and foggy and tasted like dust. I also didn't



understand any important qualities in life, either. But for some reason, I felt lighter realizing that, well, perhaps I can't be perfect, and sometimes accepting that is better. Maybe that is what courage felt like, facing your insecurities, and perhaps appreciating them in the future. Maybe that was what I was looking for.

I would never want to go on a rollercoaster again these days, but in the future, I might learn to like them, turns and twists and everything, just like I always get used to everything in life and learn to love them, like I learn to love myself.

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# *Finding Octlantis*

**Rishi Nair**

*Octlantis is an octopus society, located off the east coast of Australia. In 2017, scientists found a community of about 10-15 octopuses living together, which disproved the notion that octopuses are solitary and reclusive creatures. The idea of discovering the impossible and exploring the unknown led to my inspiration for this oil painting. "Finding Octlantis" is a tribute to the hard work of the scientists and researchers.*

# With an Engraving on the Back

## Dhanvi Sheth

Dear Diary,

The watch is gone. The family heirloom that's been passed down generations and was trusted in my hands. Gone. I haven't risked telling Mumma because she'd go into a lecture. About how my great-grandmother immigrated to the US from India to find better educational opportunities. And how she crafted the watch to remind her future children where their roots are. It truly is a beautiful watch. With a dark, rustic brown strap and a chestnut color dial, engraved with the letters A. L. M., which stands for Aahna Laal Makkar. My great-grandmother's name.

I've had this watch for almost a year. It feels like second nature to glance at my wrist. So, when I was walking home from a café in the evening to find only the imprint of the watch, my feet refused to take another step. I was stuck. In shock. At the café, I was talking to one of my new friends I made at art class, Reria. I remember taking off the watch because my hand started to feel a bit sore. Stupid. I got so lost in an art conversation with Reria, I completely forgot about the watch on the table. When I ran back to the café later, the watch disappeared. I tried asking the waiters, but they said someone took it a few hours prior. Of course.

It's all my fault.

Stuck in a situation,  
Aanya

.....

Dear Diary,

I acquired a peculiar watch today. When I went to get my afternoon tea at a café, my eye caught the glint of a beautifully crafted watch on a table. A.L.M. was engraved on the back of the dial which I presume stands for initials. I questioned others seated around about whether it had an owner, but everyone declined. Unfortunately, my clock store has been doing poorly, and I could not pass the opportunity for an addition to my watch collection. I doubted it was worth much, but folks these days seem to be into these "vintage" items.

Returning to my workshop, I placed the watch on display and priced it at \$40. I avoided placing an excessive cost so it would fit with the other discounted watches in my collection. Fortunately, fifteen minutes before closing, a messy blonde-haired, wide-eyed, young man stepped into the shop inquiring about the watch. It was sold in a matter of minutes. As I reflect on the day, I am grateful for the sale as I was genuinely wondering whether it was time to close the shop and settle down. Although it wasn't much, the watch was a sign to keep going.

Whilster

.....

Dear Diary

Good news. Yesterday evening I was roaming the market square, hoping to find a store where I could purchase some flimsy watch on discount. I've been trying to discipline myself to save money, but I could only save \$50. My parents have been on top of me to invest in something of my own to prove to them that I can be responsible and what better way to show them than buying a watch, especially since all the other ones are broken. Anyway, I stumbled upon a clock store with an actually affordable watch on display. For \$40, the watch was incredibly well made with wood and a dial with strange letters. Once I bought it from the old man who owned the shop, I showed my parents this morning. It was safe to say they were quite impressed even if I exaggerated the price a bit.

Bad news. Today afternoon I was walking to the local pharmacy for soap. The watch was in my pocket since I hadn't fixed the clock. I'd probably keep checking the wrong time if I kept in on. Anyway, supposedly the watch fell out or someone pickpocketed me because once I got back home it was gone. I'm obviously disappointed, but the watch got the job done. My reputation with my parents is slightly better and it's got me thinking. If I can save \$50 and buy a watch, surely I can save up for a bike too.

Until next time  
Marion

.....

Dear Diary,

I am ECSTATIC!!! This is my first diary entry since Aanya convinced me to start one, so it's only fair it's about her. Yesterday, Aanya explained to me over the phone that when she and I were at a café the day before, chatting about our favorite artists (mine's Claude Monet), she forgot her watch, which was a family heirloom. She described it being an exquisite, wooden watch with A. L. M. engraved on the back. Her voice kept breaking from crying and my heart broke. Since she was the FIRST person that talked to me when I moved to Boston a month ago, I wished I could've helped her back :(

Well, THE WISH CAME TRUE! When I was coming out of a pharmacy from buying lotion, I found a watch on the ground just like Aanya described, and when I flipped it over, A. L. M. was clearly written. Can you believe it?! The watch looked a little beat up but nothing some soap and water can't fix. I CAN'T WAIT to surprise Aanya with the watch tomorrow at the café. It was meant to be!!!

Can't wait,  
Reria :)

.....

Dear Diary,

The watch found its way back to me. Luckily, Mumma never found out. But to avoid this whole fiasco happening again, I swear on this diary, I'll never take my watch off. Even if my hand gets sore. Because preserving a part of my family's roots is way more important. But I can't stop thinking. What exactly happened to the watch the whole time?

Out of the situation,  
Aanya

# Gayer-Anderson Cat

**Shiyu Zheng**

Once born amongst the flying sands, you rose,  
The figure of solemn Bastet enthroned.  
A daring warrior in you bestowed,  
The blood of the Nile thrums deep in your bones.

Long lost in the blurred haze of history,  
Now found, rived, sundered, continents apart.  
Heaving voices arise thunderously,  
Egypt still stands, an obelisk in your heart.

But imprisoned in a cold, barren case,  
Confined and shackled in strange, foreign names.  
Eyes sullen, the light vanished of all trace,  
The tides of time smothers the brightest flames.

Rise, rise, struggle against the surging fates,  
Return, return, the pounding Nile awaits.



Historical Context: The Gayer-Anderson Cat is a bronze statue that depicts the ancient Egyptian cat goddess Bastet. It dates back to the Late Period of ancient Egypt (around 600 BCE). The statue is named after Major Robert Grenville Gayer-Anderson, who donated this to the British Museum in 1939 and has been on display there ever since. *Image Source: Wikimedia Commons (public domain)*

# Lost, and Found Again

**Ann Joseph**

here I am, lost,	my emotions engulf me,
waiting to be found,	my heart skips a beat,
no one seems to know,	all the love, joy, tears, anger,
the places I've been to,	exploring feelings unknown,
life's lucky compass, so	nuanced, I've never known
true, how much was inside	myself until now, until now,
and all around my world,	these feelings drowned,
my truth, my story,	my being, in an ocean.
but if I set the bird free,	then, from the cage, I rise,
letting my emotions flow,	not withholding these feelings,
if I learn to let myself be,	no barriers to the truth,
I'll find myself somewhere	amidst the chaos, I'll be there.

Note from the editors: "Twin cinema" is a poetic form indigenous to Singapore. The twin cinema poem features two columns of text; each column is a standalone poem. However, when one reads the lines continuously, across the white space that separates the columns, a new meaning arises. This combining of columns produces a third poem, with more nuance and complexity than either of the columns alone.

# Reconnection Through Music

**Ellaine Ban**

Communication.

That is the core of how we live. A lot of elements of everyday life revolve around it, like talking to friends, texting, and relationships. But to communicate, you need some kind of common language with the people you converse with.

I never learned how to properly speak English until I was about 3 years old. Both of my parents are Korean, but I was born in America, and for the first few years of my life, I was surrounded by Korean people, Korean babysitters, and Korean friends. Mostly everyone I interacted with were people who talked to me in my mother tongue.

I used to be miserable when I went to school for this reason. I begged my grandma to stay with me at school because I couldn't speak English.

My grandma always would pretend to wait, and leave when I went to play outside.

As I grew, I began to learn English and I started to enjoy school. I took some classes to learn English and got more fluent in the language. But because of that, I lost some of my connection with my first language. As time went by, I wasn't as fluent in Korean as before. I couldn't spell words in Korean correctly, and I felt awkward while speaking the language. While I was once more fluent in Korean, English took over, and I lost crucial parts of my culture.

It was hard for me to adjust to this sometimes, because I took yearly trips to Korea during the summer. My grandparents could speak English since

they traveled a lot, but they preferred Korean, and the rest of my relatives did too. I was forced to speak Korean by my environment, but just going to Korea over the summer did not help me with my language barrier. It was too short of a time to actually regain what I lost, and sometimes, it stressed me out. My Korean was choppy and awkward, and I felt embarrassed for other people to hear me speak it sometimes. I spoke more and more English than Korean around my family, deteriorating my knowledge of Korean even further.

Until the middle of fifth grade. That year, I transferred to a new school, and it was a weird year, since it was the beginning of the pandemic and a hybrid school year for me. I met a lot of new friends, and we sometimes Zoomed with each other on days we were having remote school.

One day, my friends invited me to Zoom randomly, and the two of them were playing a "try not to sing/dance along" challenge. I didn't usually listen to music, if I did, it wasn't pop or vocal. The only pop artists I knew were Taylor Swift, Rihanna, and Beyonce.

As they started the video, imagine my surprise when I saw that the singers were Korean! I didn't really know what K-pop was at the time, and it never occurred to me that people could be fans of music.

Later that day, I asked my mom what K-pop was. She said the obvious answer,

“Korean pop.”

“I know that... But what is it?” I asked like a curious child would.

“Korean pop. K-pop,” she responded again.

I gave up asking, and went to find out for myself.

The artist that was mostly featured in the video was Blackpink, so I looked them up on Youtube to listen to their songs again. I hadn't really been wowed by the songs the first time, but listening to them again was definitely better. The songs were really catchy and fun, not too happy, but not depressing, exciting but not too loud. Blackpink music was the perfect match for me at the time, and so for the first time in a long time, I enjoyed pop music.


It wasn't that I had hated pop or vocal music, I was just not brought up with it. My house had speakers blasting Mozart or Beethoven, and whatever piano piece I was learning at the time, instead of Maroon 5 and other bands. No one in my family really kept up with musical trends or the latest hits, they just had piano and orchestra pieces from 300 years ago. Not a bad thing, but it also meant I had no idea who Post Malone was until fourth grade.

K-pop changed that aspect of my life for me, it opened my eyes to more possibilities of sound beyond classical music. I slowly became immersed in Blackpink, and that was all I listened to for the next few months. My friends and I talked about music more, exposing me to more new artists and styles of K-pop. However, the music part of K-pop wasn't the only thing that changed me. The lyrics had

English in them too, but the vast majority of them were in Korean. As I became more invested in K-pop, I looked up translations to the words I didn't know, and built up my vocabulary.

I gained more fluency in my pronunciation from “singing” the songs and it was easier for me to speak in my language. K-pop brought back a part of my life that was fading away. My sloppy Korean speaking skills improved, I used the language more, and I was happier with my time in Korea because it was simpler to communicate. I defaulted less to English when I spoke with my parents because of my returning comfort with the language.

Since then, it has been 3 years. I still converse often with my Korean relatives without any awkwardness or nervousness. I proudly speak in my language without worrying about whether I'm pronouncing words correctly or making mistakes. Being introduced to K-pop started my journey of getting reconnected with my culture and one of the most important elements of it, language.



**"K-pop brought back a part of my life that was fading away."**

# The Likeness of a Snowflake

**Celina Ren**

I refresh my web browser to see the results of a test I took last week. I cross my frostbitten fingers, a plea for a grade to satisfy my thirst for excellence. The little blue ring at the top of my page paces around in circles, snickering at how I grasp desperate hope. I count the 3 seconds it takes for the page to load.

1

2

3

As the page appears, I see the number 89 carved out in an ugly black font. 4 seconds till I process my anger.

1

2

3

4

I know it's four seconds because it's always been four. Just like how my grades have always been 100. But not anymore.

I dig my fingernails into my palm, scattering disfigured snowflakes across my skin, a trophy case of collected failures.

A fitting beauty to my bitter mood. How could I mess up on a test I had a 93% chance of getting 100% on?

For the first time, numbers had failed to provide a satisfactory explanation. All I know is how I fear the looks and whispers, a gifted kid fallen from grace. I need to stay ahead, I need to. Amidst these thoughts dragging through my mind, I can't bring myself to click away, hands shaking over the cold trackpad. So, I stare at the cruel number again.

Why not 90?

Why?

I find myself drawn to the screens of others, wondering if I could find the answers to my failure between the lines of blocky text and video games. But I find no such answers. Instead, a belief of mine coats my tongue in the bitter snow of cynicism, casting the world in a colorless shade.

The room is unassuming, the setting of an average high school class. Bright posters plaster the walls, inspirational quotes twirled in fancy cursive fonts. The room isn't special, but the students are. I like to drop all of them upon my imaginary chart, each represented by a single black dot. These dots pile on top of each other until there is no more white space, nothing but a dark mass. The reduction of a human to a single data point may seem a bit confusing as humans are all special, but there is a stark difference between being unique and standing out. Humans are snowflakes. Everybody knows we are all unique in some ways, there is no denying that. Most of us are just not special enough to stand out in a snowstorm. Only those who work hard, those with a stroke of luck, are captured by the shutter of a camera.

1

2

3

4

5

*Click*

I want to be a snowflake captured in *The Little Book of Snowflakes*. I have no desire to be lost in a storm.



Now the question remains on how I stand out, and what shiny skill I can flaunt. I think I have no special skill, no obvious talent that others are graced with. The only thing I can do is study. Memorize the numbers, understand the equations. I shove nonsensical rules inside my head until there is no space for the setting sun, no space for philosophical what-ifs. Conversations, snippets of a past time play in my head. I usually shove them into careful cassettes and shelve them deep in my mind waiting to collect dust, but the box has spilled over.

“Ha! I got a 98% on the last Alg test.”

“How’d you fail the biology test? I got like a 99%.”

“I can’t believe you got such a bad grade!”

“I thought you were good at this!”

“I did so much better than you!”

These words play repeatedly, a suffocating noise that has no desire to end. I can hear a voice outside, clear among the recollection of dialogue laced with static from years of neglect. I turn towards the voice, as they repeat their statement again.

“What did you get?”

A boy from my math class glances at me with kind eyes, curiosity pulling his eyes to the open tab on my computer.

“Oh ok.”

Even though he smiles, I feel like his eyes scorn the number. What does he think of me now? Questions I avoided play on the big screen, leaving me no choice but to confront the truth. The realization tightens my chest, drawing my breaths faster and sharper.

The words have gotten too loud, akin to the whirling whip of icy wind. But the wind strings harsh criticism and contempt around my wrists.

Unique little snowflakes are carved into my skin until it devolves into a blanket of

marks.

I am not special.

A snowflake. Not one photographed in *The Little Book of Snowflakes*, but one lost to the snow.

I feel a soft tap on my shoulder, as I look up. The boy from earlier smiles at me gently, glancing at the way my hands shake. “Are you ok? The grade isn’t even that bad. We all make mistakes. See? I got an 83.” He shows me his computer screen confidently, without an ounce of shame or disappointment. This time I choose to believe in his smile, indulging in the belief that he is sincere. His kindness fascinates me, as does his carefree nature. How does one live with those beliefs? Then, I see his arms are bare of snowflakes mine are scarred with, and I wish to be different.

I don’t want to be a snowflake.

We are not snowflakes.



# The Sands of Time

Mahima Kolar

I rest, as the golden evening sun strokes my cheeks  
A quiet breeze whispers through my hair  
Wind-whipped branches dance overhead  
To nature's eternal harmony  
I close my eyes, and let my mind drift  
Down a river of thought and memory

I remember happy days long past,  
A sea of tears, laughter, and emotions  
The plastic birthday crown proudly perched on my preschool head  
Thin, babyish books that invoked a lifelong passion inside me  
The faces of old friends, long forgotten, resurface in my mind's eye  
As the sands of time fall eternally through my grasping fingers

Tendrils of darkness slither through my life  
My smiles are choked by the grasp of a mask  
I clutch my head as the blue light of my screen slices  
Shredding my brain as I try to think  
Loss pervades my every movement  
Loss of life, loss of health, loss of hope

Nothing will ever be the same again  
Still, I reach for the stars, pinpricks of light in all the black  
I find new friends, new happiness, new hope  
I find the strength to press forth, to move on  
And let my laughter and feelings fly free from my lips  
While the lonely memories of masks lurk in dusty drawers

I explore my world, traveling far and near  
India, New York, Houston, the Peninsula  
I walk the path to the horizon  
Hail and wind biting my face  
I tire, but press forth, determined.  
Then, the storm clears, and I see the rainbow.

*Bloom*  
*Celina Ren*



Celine 12/5/2022

# Wandering Stars

**Katie Ong**

The middle school I go to sits on a hill. Its gate welcomes students who enter excitedly. All types of people are found here. A group of 8th graders can be spotted gossiping as a 6th grader chases a friend. This school is filled with people, yet even so some students can still feel lost, especially the people who seem the least likely to be.

## Ena

Slightly slouching, Ena sat across from me. The breeze rustled the tree creating a melodious sound as sunlight reflected off of the metal bench we sat on. As their best friend, I already knew Ena's story. Neither male nor female, Ena is nonbinary. Choosing to use "they/them" pronouns, they are often misunderstood by society, which never grasped the concept of another gender.

"I definitely feel lost in a few of my classes. Especially knowing to them, I'm just that one weird kid," Ena explains as I hit the record button. They described how hard it was to talk to classmates who weren't their friends. I witnessed their situation too. In English, while other students chatter, they sit quietly.

Yet, silently sitting in the classroom was only part of what made Ena feel lost. Society seemed to constantly pressure people into binary ways. "Sometimes I wish I could disappear whether that is 'unaliving' myself or running away from all of it," Ena reveals. These instances were not rare either. Just a few days ago, they had a suicide attempt. Ena could never be themselves due to the world constantly believing that nonbinarism doesn't exist.

As my friend continued to explain the hardships they faced, I remembered when I first became friends with Ena. Misgendering them, I forced Ena into a binary position as I used "she/her" pronouns. I firmly believed nonbinarism didn't exist, leading me to constantly discredit my friend. I would repeat to them, "It's just something

on the internet. It's just an excuse to seem cool." Unbeknownst to me, nonbinarism was never a phase for Ena, but their identity. It was a slow process for me to begin realizing who they were, but I now understand them.

The interview ended with a simple question, "Do you think you are found?" Ena's reply was complicated. Society still portrayed them as an outcast. All their actions seemed only to make the world dislike them even more. "I'm worried that by me doing something that's not even harmful, that would make people dislike me." However, Ena didn't reveal another side of their story. Although many may never understand their identity, Ena was also surrounded by many accepting friends. I learned to support who they were, and I believe many others can do the same.

## Peter

I wasn't anticipating much from his interview. Of the four I interviewed, he was the least likely to be chosen. As the vice president of our school, Peter knew everyone and everyone knew him. How could he possibly be lost?

In the hallway, he sat on a chair in front of our classroom. As I prepared to begin, he brushed his coppery brown hair from his face. I fumbled with my phone, stalling for a bit. I was scared I would say something wrong. Nervously, I began. "Have you ever been lost in society?"

Peter began explaining how he was often excluded from elementary basketball games. His friends deemed him not skilled enough and, therefore, didn't let him play. Just like I expected, he talked about incidents from a long time ago. After he had become vice president, everyone seemed to gravitate towards him.

Peter began explaining how he was often excluded from elementary basketball games. His friends deemed him not skilled enough and, therefore, didn't let him play. Just like I expected, he talked about incidents from a long

time ago. After he had become vice president, everyone seemed to gravitate toward him.

I paced around before beginning my next question. Why was I spending time interviewing a popular kid when other students didn't even have a friend? I glanced down at the light bouncing off of the blue tile floor. The mere second of silence seemed to scream at me. You wanted a different perspective. I continued. "As a popular kid, do you feel that you need to be friendly or act a certain way, so you won't feel popular or accepted?"

Peter didn't even hesitate. "Oh yeah, all the time. Especially as vice president, I need to be friendly toward everyone around me. I can't be myself. I have to be something other people like." Stunned, I never imagined him to be lost amidst tons of kids, who admired and liked him. I pictured Peter as an outgoing and charismatic guy who effortlessly gained people's liking. Never did I realize he was hiding behind a facade to please others. I imagined him to be lost amidst tons of kids, who admired and liked him. I pictured Peter as an outgoing and charismatic guy who effortlessly gained people's liking. Never did I realize he was hiding behind a facade to please others.

A student happened to pass by during our interview. Peter greeted him before returning to our conversation. I wondered, was that an act? Did he want to say hi to him? His words made me suspect if he ever was himself. Was everything a lie?

I suppose not everything was a lie, though. As the interview progressed, I understood Peter was surrounded by people who genuinely liked him too. "Yeah, I think people accept me," he explained as he described how many of his friends approved of who he truly was. Despite acting a certain way to please people, he felt some did embrace him for who he was.

Peter's story revealed to me that even the most popular student could be lost under the pressure of satisfying everyone around him. I never pictured him confined to the expectations of society as he seemed so carefree. Then again, Peter's story demonstrated how even in a judgmental world, one can still discover people who genuinely like him. His friends accepted him not because he was the vice president or knew a lot of people. Rather, they liked him for who he truly was.

My middle school rests on a hill. Filled with a variety of people, its gate welcomes everyone. Even people lost in society can discover an accepting group of friends. Like wandering stars, everyone can be understood and liked for who they truly are.



## *The Chameleon*

**David Ji**

*So many people these days want to blend in with our society that we lose a sense of individuality in our day-to-day lives. In the wild, a chameleon needs to blend in with its surroundings to survive, but in my artwork, I wanted to represent how humans don't always have to do the same. In my artwork, the chameleon has vibrant colors and stands out from its surroundings. Even with bees and hostile creatures nearby, it regains its individuality again and isn't afraid to show the world its true colors.*

# Tea for One

Robyn Davies

Dean doesn't drink coffee, but he spends every Sunday morning at Eastside Roast, on the corner of Oakwood and Heimson. He must have started in... God, how long has it been now? Four years? It must have been his junior year, sometime somewhere amidst that storm. Yes, that must have been it. Back when he swore he'd marry Sarah and buy her a big white house with one of those porches that wraps all the way around. Let her come home each night to a well-trained dog, and a cat too, if she wanted.

He would have given that girl the world.  
He'll try not to think about it.

Four years passed so quickly. Four years of tea and Sarah and coffee and Sundays. Every week, the same wooden booth, waiting for the traffic to catch up to them and watching as red and orange taillights twisted into smears of sun. He remembers telling his friends that: calling them after that first date swearing that she was the one. They laughed, and Dean smiled, because how could he have expected them to understand? It was too pure, too innocent. A secret to be kept between the two of them.

Sarah and Dean, and Dean and Sarah.

Sundays became their own: for people watching and chocolate croissants and Sarah's coffee and Dean's cup of tea. Sometimes there was too much to catch up on: too many stories that were better told in person. Other times, they'd sit in silence, content with kisses between croissants as Sarah studied with a furrowed brow and Dean tried to write a single poem not about her sunburnt freckles and curly copper bangs.

They got older, but that secret did too. It didn't matter that Dean didn't drink coffee. He'd order tea a hundred times over just to be sitting next to her and her hazelnut brew.

Dean and Sarah, and Sarah and Dean.

Even now, after all that's happened, he can't help but think of it all so fondly. He fell in love with her over four years of Eastside Roast, walking

in that door with her hand in his for each of four seasons and their four interchanges and every Sunday in between.

Maybe that's why this booth feels so empty without her.

It's been seven days.

Seven days since four years of Dean and Sarah, since he told her he didn't want to live without her. Seven days since he told her that nothing would be enough if she wasn't the one holding his hand along the way, since his speech dissolved to nonsense the minute his knee hit the ground. Seven days since *Sarah Truson, will you –*

*Oh my. Dean, it's beautiful. Where on earth did you find that?*

*Sarah, will you –*

*It couldn't be more perfect. Really, it's a beautiful ring, I just,*

*Sarah, wait,* he laughed. As if all he needed was a second to catch his breath and she'd be his. He should have recognized that look in her eyes. He shouldn't have asked, he should have just waited, he could have –

*Will you marry me?*

Beat.

It's a Sunday in July. He's kneeling to the ground on the corner of Oakwood and Heimson and praying that she wants this too. He's praying, and she's shaking her head, and for a moment he thinks he's won as her fourth finger touches the center of his mother's ring. She whispers in his ear.

*Dean...*

*Yes?*

One. Two, Three, Four.

*I'm so sorry.*

Seven days pass; she doesn't call.

He follows suit.

But Sundays are supposed to be theirs.

Sarah and Dean's, and Dean and Sarah's.

So he grabs a seat at a familiar wooden booth and orders a green tea. As the waiter starts to turn, he reaches out to stop him.

*Could you make that a hazelnut coffee too?*

He doesn't know how long he sits there for. He sips his tea alone and watches the taillights blend into the day, counting the cars that drive past with out-of-state license plates. He wonders what he'd do if Sarah were here. He wonders if she'd still be here if he hadn't –

No, he's trying not to think about it. Not a porch that wraps all the way around or sunburnt freckles or the kind of love too innocent to be understood. He sits there, on the corner of Oakwood and Heimson, in the last booth of a café that hardly lives up to four years of loyalty.

He thinks about Sarah, and he thinks about himself.

And he waits for a call that never comes.



## *Lost in Pandemic – Found in Nature*

**Siddharth Garimella**

*This work was inspired by the Coronavirus Pandemic 2020. The centerpiece of the art is a sanitizer bottle- the elixir of life against the deadly virus in those early days. The entire world came to a standstill, and we all lost our freedom—no school, no eating out, no travel. As I sat and looked outside my window in Bangalore, there was a newfound appreciation for all things that nature had to offer—flower-lined streets, pink Tabebuia Rosea trees in full bloom, unpolluted starry night skies, and blissful tranquility.*

# Finding Family

Charlotte Hull

“Do you think they’ll like me?”

“Of course, Ghedi. You’re amazing.”

“I was amazing with all the other parents, but they didn’t like me.”

“Sure they did!”

“Not enough to keep me.”

Vanessa gives me a Look.

Vanessa has lots of Looks.

She has a Look for when I play indoor badminton and knock over a glass vase.

And a Look for when she has to come to school after I’ve been called to the principal’s office.

Another Look for when I’m being silly, and she’s trying not to laugh.

And an extra special one for my return from a failed foster placement when the parents decide I’m ‘not the right fit.’

This Look isn’t any of those. This Look is for ‘don’t blame yourself.’ I haven’t seen one of those recently. Probably because a blameable situation hasn’t happened in a while. She crouches down next to me.

“Hey, you know that’s not how it is, and I have a good feeling about these folks. They aren’t a last minute placement. They picked you after looking through a whole file full of kids!”

I look down at scuffed shoes, and chewed fingernails clutching tightly to a black bin bag. “Why me?”

She shrugs, “I’m just as surprised as you are.”

It’s my turn to give Vanessa a Look.

She laughs at me and ruffles my hair.

“Because you’re amazing.”

I raise my eyebrow.

“You just remember that. You’re amazing.”

I make a noise somewhere between a grunt and a sniff.

I’m not disagreeing.

I’m also not agreeing.

But I owe it to Vanessa to acknowledge her efforts.

I play with the corner of my jacket.

Like most of my clothes, it was donated by someone who didn’t need or want it anymore, or who lost it.

I call them my hand-me-donates, since I don’t have any hand-me-downs.

Sometimes they’ll come to me after being left on a school playground, and spending months in a lost-and-found bucket.

I like this jacket, although I often wonder what the small stain on the left shoulder is from.

You know, I hear the jacket saying, *You’re every bit as lost as I was on the playground.*

*Oh really? What makes you say that?*

*Well, for one thing, you’re still waiting to be found, and secondly, you’re always conversing with a stained piece of clothing.*

I choose not to reply to that. Partly because I have no good answer, partly because I know my jacket is right, and partly because a car has just pulled up.

“Here they come!”

A young couple get out and approach us with cautious optimism.

They smile, and shake Vanessa’s hand.

I don’t put mine out to shake.

I don’t know anyone who greets their parents by shaking hands.

“Hello,” the woman says, “You must be Ghedi.”

“Yes,” I say. “You must be Mum.”

I crack a smile so she knows it’s a joke, but unlike the others, she doesn’t pretend to laugh.

Instead, she gives me a genuine smile.

“Yes,” she says, “Or Gina. Whichever you prefer. And this is Tim.”

Tim smiles at me too, with nervous excitement.

Vanessa is right. These parents seem different. I try the joke on Tim.



“Nice to meet you, Dad.”

“Nice to meet you too, um, Son.”

I raise an eyebrow at Vanessa.

Vanessa gives me another Look.

This is her Look for barely contained glee.

I don't see this Look very often.

It's nice.

My Dad puts my bag into the car boot.

I fiddle with the corner of my jacket again as  
Vanessa talks to my Mum.

I hear her say the A-Word.

The A-Word makes me squirm.

I'm nearly a teenager.

Close to aging out.

The A-Word gets further and further out of  
sight the older you are.

Everyone knows that.

“Alright, call me tomorrow and let me know  
how you're getting on, okay?”

I nod, lost in thought.

Vanessa pulls me in for a hug as my parents  
head to the car.

“You're amazing. Never forget that.”

“Amazing enough to be adopted?”

I whisper the words quietly.

For a second, I wonder if Vanessa has heard  
me.

But then comes her reply.

“Amazing no matter what.”

She can't promise me anything.

She never can.

She can only hope, wish, and pray, like I do.

“Thanks, Vanessa. See you soon.”

“See you soon, Ghedi.”

I climb into the car and fasten my seatbelt.

I look up and make eye contact with my  
parents, both of whom are happily watching me.

“Ready to go?”

I wave at Vanessa, who I can see is on the  
verge of tears.

Her Look tells me she thinks she might have  
finally found my family.

“Yes, I am.”

I stare quietly out of the window for  
a while, watching the houses pass by in a  
blur.

As always, I wonder what the  
families inside are like.

As always, I hope that will soon be  
me.

“Want a toffee?”

“Sure, thanks.”

My Dad passes back a bag of sweets.

I smile when I see them.

“My favorite kind!”

“Me too, Son.”

He pops one in his mouth, and  
smirks.

They don't look anything like me,  
my parents.

And they're very young.

But they're friendly.

And they love the same sweets I do.

I like that.

My Mum's eyes find mine through  
the rear-view mirror.

I like the way she smiles – just like  
Vanessa.

Then she gives me the Look for ‘I'm  
concerned.’

“Are you okay, love?”

I look down, twiddling with the  
corner of my jacket.

I definitely don't feel as lost as  
before...

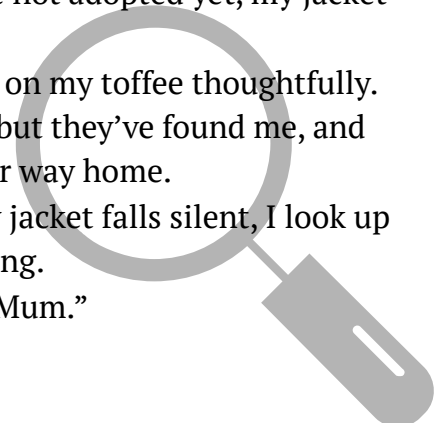
You're not adopted yet, my jacket  
warns.

I suck on my toffee thoughtfully.

True, but they've found me, and  
we're on our way home.

As my jacket falls silent, I look up  
again, smiling.

“Yes, Mum.”



# Ages of Loss


Emma Telpis

When I was 6,  
I lost my hat,  
the one of red hearts and blue pom poms.  
Tears streamed paths down my cheeks.  
A week later,  
the snow melted.  
The hat was waiting for me,  
right in the driveway.  
My heart sang.  
Some things are so simple to find.

When I was 9,  
I lost my project  
the day it was due.  
So much work into it, so much hope.  
I searched high and low, lockers, hallways,  
rooms ...

Fear gripped my heart in a vise.  
I ran back to my classroom,  
slid tearfully into my chair,  
and there it was, my poster board,  
waiting to be noticed.  
Some things are still there, if you look.

When I was 11,  
I lost my best friend.  
I searched for the sparks of our friendship  
in the movies we loved watching  
in the games we played,  
the places we went.  
In the end, it wasn't their fault,  
it wasn't mine either.  
We drifted,  
like leaves carried by a meandering stream.  
The currents of life tugged us apart.  
No matter how much I wish,  
some things are lost,  
and there's nothing to hold on to.



It won't be perfect, it  
won't be over,  
but not all is lost.  
While some things  
may never be found,  
that may still be ok.

When I was 12,  
I lost my straightness.  
I checked in my heart,  
which didn't throb or beat any harder  
for the teen boys with tousled locks and wide grins.  
I was at a loss, I didn't understand  
why my heart didn't sing  
when ordered.  
Would it obey if I tried hard enough?  
But then the rainbow swept me away,  
and I found my people,  
who didn't tell me to change or hide,  
but to be proud.  
And I found something else:  
some things are better lost.

When I was 13,  
I lost my grandma, my baba.  
I didn't know where to search,  
how to stop the grief,  
to fill the empty hole where my heart used to be,  
but it would never be again.  
The jagged edges burned, flooding me with pain.  
The voice I'll never hear on the phone.  
The drowning silence in the empty house.  
The time I didn't make ... while there was time.  
Slowly, I stitched myself back together.  
Now I find her in the old photos,  
In the language we speak,  
in the candles we light,  
in the stories we tell.  
Some things are found in a different guise.

When I was 14,  
I lost myself.  
Somewhere, somehow, I slipped away.  
I fell in between the cushions on my therapist's couch.  
I hid in the hospital walls,  
in dark shadows that stretched for miles,  
because sunlight burned patterns of pain on my skin.  
I vanished into the color of the world,  
fading away into the red of the lines on my arms.  
The orange of fire.

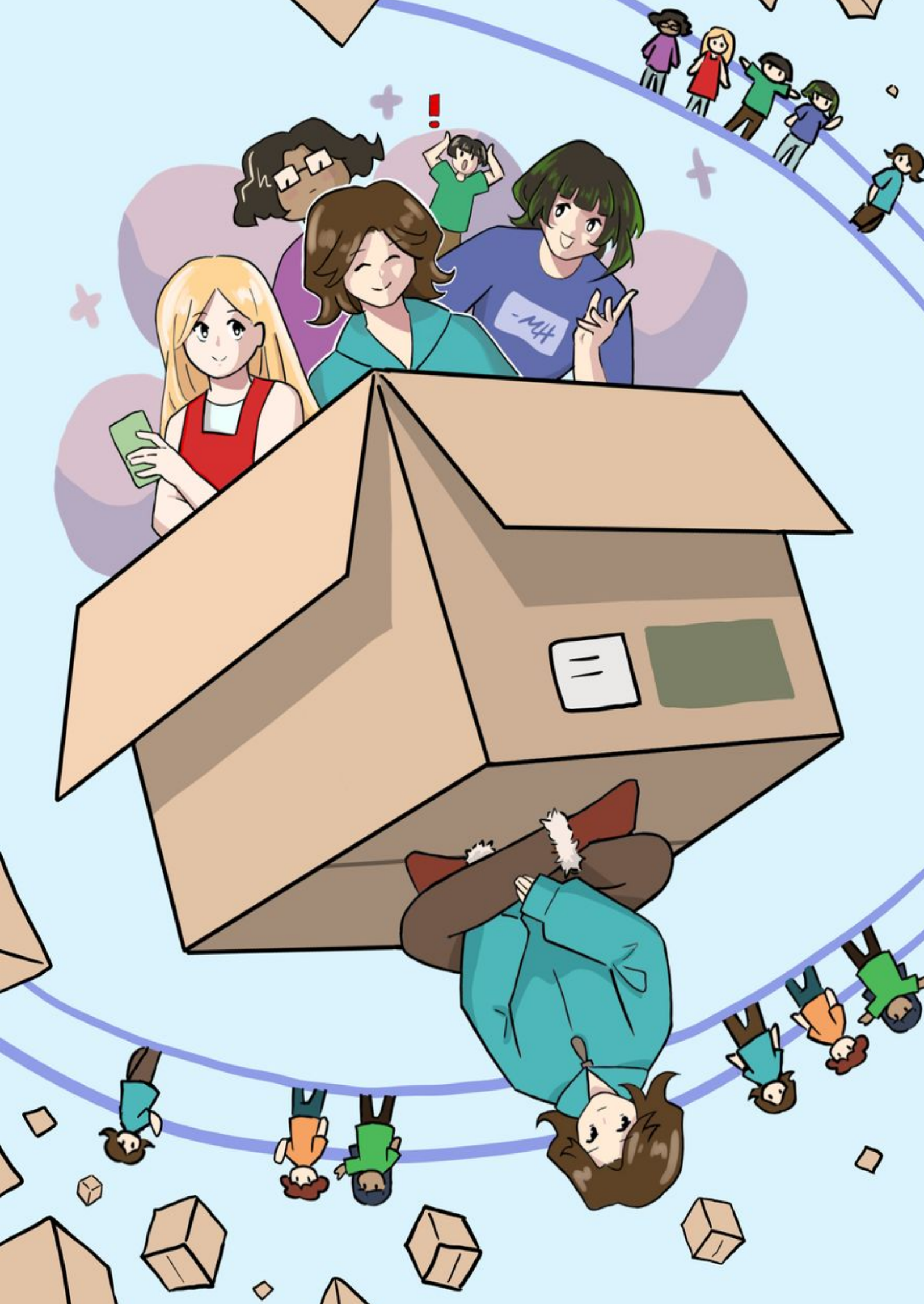
The blue of deep sea rising up in my lungs.  
The green haze of seaweed strangling me.  
The purple light behind my closed eyes.  
Lost, and yet to be found.

The day will come  
when I'll look around and find little joys.  
The dewdrops in the morning, the sun in the trees,  
the cool sea breeze, the laugh of a friend ...  
And I will find my grasp on life.  
It won't be perfect, it won't be over,  
but not all is lost.  
While some things may never be found,  
that may still be ok.

# *Unpacking*

**Margaret Howell**

*To go with the theme of "Lost and Found," I drew the experience of someone moving. From my experience, moving is like packing away your life and starting a new one somewhere else. During the move you might feel lost or feel that you have lost people and places, but when you begin to rebuild your life and make new friends, it feels like you have found your place again.*



# Unlocking Maryland

Mary Keller

I scan the rows of blue lockers in the congested hallways around me, looking for number 279. The odd numbers are on the top row, so I search them when nobody's head is in the way, searching for the place to put my backpack. My shoulders already ache from the inane amount of supplies my new teachers think I need, and I shift the pack's weight to ease the burden on my sore muscles.

271, 273, 275, I read, and the row of lockers ends. I look around and find myself at an intersection of hallways and want to scream in frustration. Being new to the school district is hard enough already. So why on Earth must the school be so confusing?

At least no one has talked to me yet.

I stare at the dripping paper in my hand that used to be a map of the school. Of course, nature had decided to bring rain on my first day of school in Maryland. I squint at the labels for the hallways on the damp paper, but water has turned the letters into little black smudges. I sigh and try the hallway to my left first.

The sound of wet shoes squeaking against the floor fills my ears. 375, the first locker reads. Wrong hallway. I turn around.

As I spin on my heel, my foot flies out from under me on the slick floor, and I struggle to balance for less than a second before my other foot follows suit. I land on my tush with a jarring impact that travels like an earthquake from the epicenter and up my spine. The only good news is that I'm not all the way flat on the floor. The bad news is there's a girl standing next to me. Staring.

Can this day get any worse?

It will if she talks to me.

The girl extends a hand. She has long, straight, ash brown hair, with bangs just barely brushing the rims of her glasses. She wears a peanut-brown sweater and bell-bottom jeans. A corner of her mouth is turned up in a small half-smile. The fact that she seems to have her life together makes my cheeks burn red with shame as I realize how I must look, a rain-soaked new girl with freckles all over her face, sitting in the middle of the hallway.

I stare at the girl's hand for a moment, water soaking into my pants, until I realize she's trying to help me up. I grasp her hand, noting with a grimace that I'm getting her hand wet. She pulls me up, and I almost slip again, but the girl has a strong grip and is able to steady me. She smiles at me, and I cross my fingers, praying she won't start a conversation.

"You okay?" She asks.

Oh, no. "S-sorta," I say, shrugging nervously. There it is, that awful stutter that made me the laughingstock of Ohio. "A bit m-moist."

The girl gives a loud bark of a laugh. "That word is so weird. Moist. I'm Ruby, by the way."

"I-I'm Emilia."

Pleased to meet you. Don't you hate wet socks? They're making my feet all itchy."

Come to think of it, my feet are itchy. "Y-yeah," I say, a smile forcing its way to my mouth muscles. I stare at the map in my hands and remember my predicament. "Um, Ruby?" I ask as she begins to walk.

She turns toward me. "Yeah?"

"D-do you think you could show me where l-locker 279 is? My m-map is soaked." My cheeks burn with shame, knowing my stutter is making me look stupid yet again.

A huge grin spreads across her face. Has she even noticed my stutter? "I know where that is. It's the locker next to mine! I'll show you," she says, waving for me to follow as she leads me down a hallway.

She shows me to locker 279, then moves to locker 281. I try the lock once. It doesn't work, so I enter the combination again, frustrated. 62... I miss my few friends from Ohio. I won't see them until Josie's birthday next month. I turn the knob the opposite way. 07... I hope I can still make friends after falling in the middle of a hallway on the first day. Another wave of embarrassment hits me, giving me the tingly sensation of anxiousness I feel before I ride a roller coaster at Kings Island. Which is now four hundred miles away. I reverse directions with the lock again, my hands shaking only a little. 40... I hold my breath, willing the locker to open.

It does open, and as I finish getting my stuff out of my backpack, a hand taps me on the shoulder, and I whirl around. It's Ruby again. "Do you know how to get to your next class? I can show you, if you want," she offers.

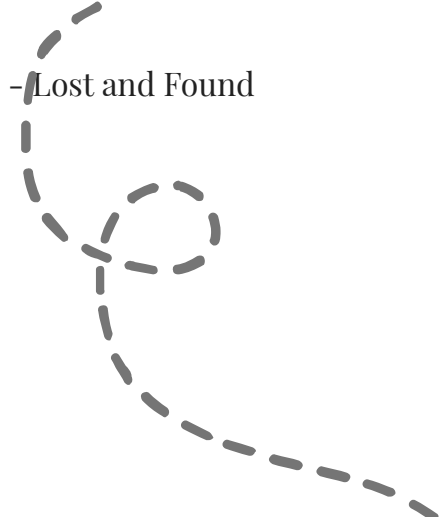
"Th-thanks," I say. "It's room 158."

Ruby's ever-present grin grows even larger. "That's my first class, too. Want to walk with me?"

My eyebrows shoot up, threatening to leap over my head and hit the ceiling. Ruby wants to walk to class with me? The girl with the stutter, who got lost and fell over? Is she loony?

Well. Ruby might be a nutcase, but she's the closest thing that I have to a friend in all of Maryland. This is an offer too good to pass up. "Okay," I say. Ruby nods, and I follow her through the winding hallways of the school. I try to keep track of each twist and turn, but eventually give up. I'll probably get lost again soon. But maybe not. I've just found a new maybe-friend who knows her way around. And it's only my first day.

We'll just have to wait and see.



"The girl extends a hand. She has long, straight, ash brown hair, with bangs just barely brushing the rims of her glasses."

# Burdens of Tears

Amy Ji

Tau rarely cried. Usually, she had no reasons to. Her life was a prestigious and perfect cycle; waking up, making breakfast, going to school and getting full marks, coming back home, eating dinner, and sleep. Her mother was kind and her father was one of the most important members in the village's council. Even when something bad happened, she coped and seemed to forget about it a few hours later.

But Tau remembered.

When she was just toddling around, a little dragonet fresh out of her shell, she remembered. How her mother would cook in the kitchen, with the delicious scent of bread and roast fish wafting out from the stove. How the pomegranate trees flowered, pearly petals in the fresh seaside breeze. And her father, back from work, her mother coming over, tired greetings are exchanged—

And then, chaos.

Suddenly, a deep growl and curse from her father. Claws slashed, with snarls and threats pouring and burning, a dangerous wildfire. Pleads, tears, everything was suddenly off balance, with pots smashing and vases breaking while the smell of burnt food filled the room.

Then everything was quiet again. No more fighting or shouting, just silence enveloping the room, a thick fog that was even more unsettling. Her mother seemed to have left the room, but her silent sobs still echos in Tau's ears.

Those were her mother's tears.

And then, when Tau was bigger, and started to grow her horns, she remembered again. This time it was the fresh morning breeze, birds were singing their sweet morning songs and the village was bustling with sound and color. She was going to the market, buying some fruit for her mother. Dragons were running, talking, laughing—her mind was blown-up from all these scents and feelings.

Again, that sound — wailing, cries that contained sorrow and anger. A sound that Tau knew too well. Dragons turned, pointed, stared. A group of dragons gathered by a small dragonet, covered in blood, their eyes wide and unfocused, milky shades of white. A blue dragon cried and clawed at the ground. Oh — Tau realized. It was her neighbor.

The kind neighbor, who often gave her fruit and bread. The neighbor who used to smile so warmly and spoke in such a tender voice about her late son. Now? Her son was gone. The neighbor's eyes seemed to lose their light. She slumped towards the ground, clawing at her own face.

These were her neighbor's tears.

And now, herself. As she flapped her wings furiously, with the life of herself and so many others stacked on her back, she wondered if this was the right choice. Why her? Why isn't it her classmates, her neighbors? Tau turned her head, and watched as a dim light glimmered down at the vast ocean, the island she lived on grew nothing more than a speckle of dust. Yet the tears, the love and sorrow — how could that one speckle of dust, contain burdens and tears that could fill so many oceans?

She couldn't wait anymore, nor could she hide from the truth, so these tears, these memories — they would have to be left behind.

And with that thought, Tau flapped her wings harder — even harder, even if the wind stings her eyes, even with the stream of tears flowing down her cheeks, she flew, without a single look back, on that speckle of dust in the ocean, with its sorrows and tears and love.

Perhaps without the burden of tears, hope could be regained.



# To My Cousin, With Hope

**Emma Telpis**

He lost

his confidence that the world works.  
His world is now upside down,  
fear instead of a smile in his mom's eyes.

His new life is one of waiting:

for the sirens to stop!  
for the power to come back!  
for his dad to open the door!

He lost

the cozy garden path,  
through the playground,  
around the willow tree,  
straight into the school door.  
The playground is not there anymore,  
a pile of metal not yet cleared away in its place.  
The school is not there either.  
Where are his friends?

He found

that he can live that upside down life,  
if he holds to hope  
that the world will find him  
and right itself again.

He found

that a building can crumble  
into a million tiny pieces  
at the blink of an eye,  
The old dresser in the middle doesn't have a scratch on it.  
Maybe his teddy bear is still somewhere in the rubble,  
waiting for him.

He found

that trains are not fun to ride  
when the crowd is pressing on all sides  
and he doesn't really know where he is going,  
and his mom's hand is squeezing his so tight, never letting go.

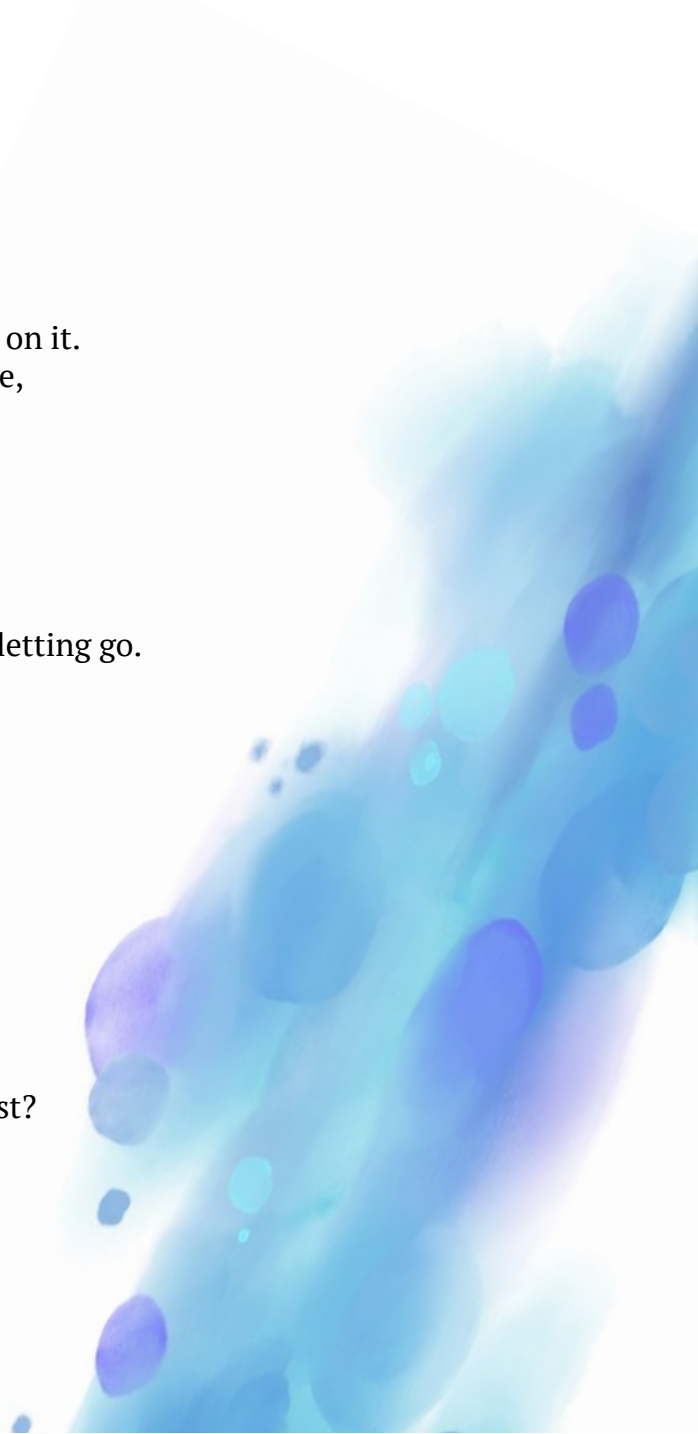
He has never felt so lost.

He doesn't get into elevators anymore –  
when power goes out, you can get lost in the dark,  
waiting and waiting and waiting  
for somebody to find you.

His dad calls but never comes.

How will he find them in this new place?  
Is he lost too?

Is dad wearing green-brown clothes to get lost in the forest?



# To Find Yourself

Jasmine Wong

A thousand words.

That was the maximum word count.

I wonder if I will even make it to one hundred.

I haven't written anything in so long. I had gotten tired of painstakingly laying down my stories, word by word, only to have them torn apart.

Now, writing is no longer a hobby, a talent. It is a maze, and I am lost. I am sadly, miserably, horribly lost.

And yet, my fingers type.

And yet, the words still flow from me like they used to, like water from a fountain.

I wonder if this is any good. I wonder if someone will read it and consider it to be good.

Even if you are lost in a maze, I suppose you do not simply sit around and do nothing. Even when you are sadly, miserably, horribly lost, you walk. You explore. You wander and hope that you find your way through.

Maybe it is okay if I don't reach the maximum word count. Maybe it is okay if I only make it to a hundred.

Once upon a time, there was a girl with a pencil. Every day, she wrote, and she wrote, and she wrote. She wrote poems and fantasies and dreams and so much more, endless words that flowed out of her like a fountain.

But people are sometimes cruel. People will rip apart the universes she created with her pencil, word by word.

People will call her names, taunt her, tease her, wring out every bit of her for their own twisted enjoyment until there is nothing left.

And she listens. She listens to their names and taunts and teases. She listens, and she begins to believe. She wonders how good her writing really is. She wonders if anyone really likes it.

She puts down her pencil and hangs her head in shame.

What more is there to do?

She has no more desire to pick up her pencil, to write and write and write. What is the point?

What is the point in writing and writing and writing if all it will become useless, torn shreds of paper and sources of relentless ridicule in the end?

She's lost her hobby, her talent. She is lost. Sadly, miserably, horribly lost.

Once upon a time, there was a girl who used to have a pencil. She used to shape grandiose tales and mystical creatures and beautiful kingdoms from the tip of that pencil. She used to, but they scowled at her tales and killed her creatures and burned her kingdoms.

Is there any salvation for her? Is there any hope for her tales and creatures and kingdoms, or shall they all be condemned to eternal death, never to be spoken of—or even thought about—ever again?

She lives, lifeless, without her passion. She thinks about these questions over and over again. She doubts and doubts and doubts. She loses track of time and the world and everything, for what is the point?

Yes, it is true. People are sometimes cruel.

But people are also sometimes wonderful.

People will bring her back to life, smile at her, encourage her, put that pencil back in her hand and tell her the words she'd been waiting to hear her whole life.

"I believe in you." "Your writing is amazing." "I would read this over and over again."

And she listens. She listens, and she begins to believe.

Perhaps everyone is lost in a maze. Perhaps some die without ever finding their way out.

I am lost in a maze. But I haven't lost my passion yet. Somewhere within me, a spark glows faintly, protected from the wind by a thin shield of hope, waiting to burst aflame.

A thousand words. That is the maximum word count.

I may not have written a thousand, but 662 words are enough to express what I want to say.

I am lost in a maze. But I have found myself, and that is what matters.

# Masterclass 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 every submission. 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.

## **Amy Ji**

Tau. Her name was a shade of wisteria purple. The word tangerine was a color of washed out sunset. Her mother's name, Nectar, was the color of warm sunlight on a sandy beach, the same color as her warm scales.

## **Andrea N. Watanabe**

At school it used to be just me on an island, feeling like there was something boiling inside my blood...It was like brushing your teeth every morning or practicing a song over and over again.

## **Andrew Wang**

... [T]o his left were abandoned farmland, ...grass yellowed and blackened due to years of neglect and war. ...[I]t mocked Nathan as he struggled to forget the scenes of everything that had happened yesterday, two weeks ago, and years prior. Falling bodies around him. People who were alive, but looked like they shouldn't have.

## **Angela Zihan Liu**

At first his strumming was barely a whisper, the strings murmuring to him in sorrow, but his fingers grew more bitter with each strum, plucking at the strings harder and faster each second that went by.

## **Ava Z. Zhong**

Suddenly, he entered a clearing. He had reached the summit. Below him was a handsome house. He ran down towards it. It was his only hope for survival...

## **Bella Zhong**

Meanwhile, happiness flooded Rain's heart, she had lost her hopes of trying to make Storm proud, the cold, unforgiving gaze of her mother always made her feel rejected, unloved. But now that she had finally did it, it felt like she could fly to the moon and back with her excitement.

## **Celina Ren**

When you've lived so little,/ Time passes at a jarringly slow pace./ It meanders at the side of the road savoring the spring bloom.

## **Coco Xu**

My time spent in kindergarten almost made me vow to never pick up a pencil again. Every Monday, we would be required to write a paragraph on what we did over the weekend. It felt like we were lions attached to leashes forced to pick strawberries.

**Deeksha Rajesh**

We have already witnessed catastrophic consequences from the rapidly melting polar ice.... However, we haven't lost it all yet. ...It is up to us to make sure that textbooks aren't the only place that future generations see and hear about these fascinating animals and habitats.

**Dhanvi Sheth**

Twenty-one candles dance/ in the distant eyes/ of a lost girl/ on a path that led/ to a terrain of nothing/ a heart no longer/ driven by the stars

**Katherine Ong**

I was like a small and puny weed lost in a forest of redwoods. Grandpa was a tall tree admonishing me for wanting to be strong and beautiful like everyone else.

**Mary Keller**

[F]or a bush to grow properly, it sometimes needs to be pruned, no matter how much you want to keep each twig. The same goes for writing.

**Seleste Syn**

For a moment, the dim, low-hanging and naked bulb flickers. I don't know if it's my imagination or not, but my thighs stiffen anyway, ready to sprint up the stairs.

**Sophia Kim**

But I was free. No owners. No cages. No birds. And I felt like flying.

**Sophie Katz**

Maybe that's why the only thing in my life that felt real were these papers. ...[t]he realest paper of them all. I let each word on that certificate of adoption sink in thoroughly until I got to the last line.

**Sophie Lenoel Quang**

But I have gotten used to his jaundiced eyes, sickening breath, and deafening voice[,] and I just stand there with a blank stare, num to all feelings, cloaked by my silence to wait out the noise.

**Sreshta Chalicham**

Ever since I was young, seeing a paper blank made my hands itch. The itch would not go away until the scritch of pencil graphite filled my mind and the paper. The itch would not go away until the daring words raced across the page. The itch would not go away until the flowing of the story was fresh in my mind.

**Yanling Lin**

Let's rewind a bit. You've heard this story before, but now I'll be telling you the truth. When I was five, my grandmother gave the necklace to me.

# Contributors

---

**Michaela Athanasakopoulos is a 6th grader in Washington, DC.**

---

**Ellaine Ban is a 7th grader from Massachusetts. In her free time, she likes to read and play cello.**

---

**Aimee Burmeister is a 7th grader who lives in California and likes to write prose, poetry, and nonfiction. When she is not writing, she is practicing piano, playing tennis, or hanging out with her family.**

---

**Robyn Davies is a current 9th grade student born in Toronto, Canada. She's lived all over the world as an expatriate, including St. Louis, Connecticut, New York, and Shanghai.**

---

**Siddharth Garimella is a Grade 7 student at The International School Bangalore. He enjoys all forms of creative arts including guitar, dramatics and digital art. In his spare time he works on Arduino circuits using advanced Python programming.**

---

**Margaret Howell is an 8th grader in Germantown, Maryland who likes to draw and play video games. She is currently trying to learn Chinese in her free time.**

---

**Charlotte Hull is excited to be published in the Lexophilia anthology, and her two cats are very excited too. They always like to give her writing their literal stamp of approval by walking across her keyboard whenever she's working!**

---

**Amy Ji is a 6th grade student who lives in Beijing, China. She loves reading, swimming, and biology. In her free time, Amy spends her days reading and spending time with her two dogs, Oreo and Tea.**

---

**David Ji is a 6th grader that lives in North Vancouver, Canada. He is passionate about reading, building, and playing soccer.**

---

**Ann Joseph is an ambitious 9th grader at The Indian High School, Dubai. Ann enjoys writing, reading, playing the keyboard, swimming, and playing with science. She won the Sheikh Hamdan Award for Distinguished Academic Performance in 2020 and is a frequent participant at the World Scholar's Cup, having placed first overall at the Dubai Global Round (2022) in the junior division. She is also an avid debater and public speaker, and is currently working on a novel.**

---

**Mary Keller is an 8th grader from Ohio who has dreamed of becoming an author since fourth grade. Her past writing accomplishments include writing for the Young Mensan magazine, the MPulse newsletter, and her school newspaper.**

---

**Mahima Kolar is a 5th grader from Seattle, Washington. She is an avid reader and writer, and has always nurtured a passion for literature. In 2022, she self-published her first poetry book, The World in My Words.**

---

**Yanling Lin is a 7th grader living in Virginia. She enjoys writing, reading, and creating various forms of art, from blackout poetry to crochet creatures.**

---

**Rishi Nair is a 9th grader at Blacksburg High School in Blacksburg, Virginia. He loves playing chess and is President of the BHS Chess Club. He is an avid tennis player and is on the school tennis team. Rishi loves oil painting and sketching and has been passionate about both since age 7.**

---

**Katie Ong is an 8th grader in California and part of the Master Class II editing team, who loves writing, talking with friends, and playing with her fluffy white dog, Elmer.**

---

**Sophie Lenoel Quang is an 8th grader from Boston, Massachusetts. She has been recognized on both a regional and national level by the Scholastic Art & Writing awards and is part of the Lexophilia poetry staff.**

---

**Celina Ren is a 9th grader living in the United States. She enjoys drawing, painting, and crocheting. She has received a silver medal from the Scholastic Arts and Writing organization.**

---

**Ellis Roe is a homeschooled student from Alabama that loves creating art. She also loves her dog Fozzie and her pet rats Holmes and Watson.**

---

**Dhanvi Sheth is a 7th grader from Chesapeake, Virginia. She loves to write across many genres and styles, including mystery, poetry, fantasy, realistic fiction, and argumentative essays. Outside of typing away on a Word doc, she enjoys ice-skating, painting, and playing the viola.**

---

**Emma Telpis is a 9th grader from New Jersey, of Bulgarian-Ukrainian heritage. She loves creative writing, music and theater.**

---

**Jasmine Wong is currently in 8th grade. She lives in Tampa, Florida with her mom, dad, and little sister. When her nose isn't stuck in a book, she can often be found drawing, listening to music, making origami, or all of the above.**

---

**Shiyu Zheng is an 8th grader from Shanghai, China. She spends her spare time collecting words, reading and re-reading His Dark Materials, and doodling Egyptian symbols in her math notebook. She is also weirdly obsessed with the idea of a zombie apocalypse.**

---

**Ava Zhong is a 6th grader in the United States. She has won many awards ranging from 1st-5th place in art, golf, and Chinese-public-speaking competitions.**



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