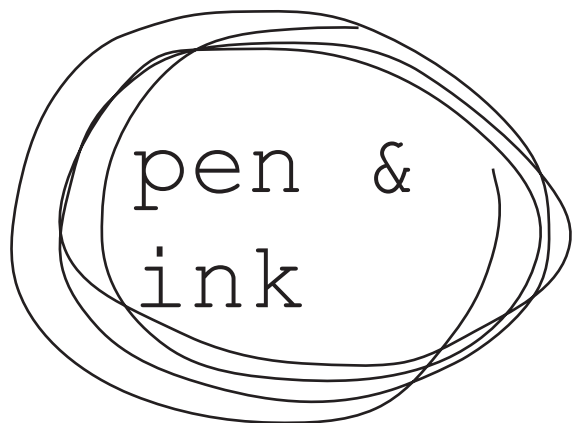




Pen & Ink is a showcase of the literary and visual artworks of high school students in the Helena School District.

Through this publication, we seek to recognize the talents and creativity prevalent in these young artists.

A special thanks goes out to all those who contributed, as well as to the Helena Education Foundation for sponsoring this magazine.



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Pages 3-12 contain the works selected
for the Harrison Writing Award

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Edgy Edge - Seeley

I see an infinitely long, obsidian tunnel,
 no light shining out from the end.
 It is tantalizing; the suspense is hanging on the air, permeable,
 and so, we jump,
 unknowing, yet always trusting.



Yet, perhaps this time, our trust was misplaced.
 For as we blindly step into the obscurity,
 there are occurrences of injustice flowing all around us.
 As we take a step forward,
 we take a step back yet again, never gaining ground.

Suddenly, the tunnel is filled with colors;
 tendrils of vapor with all different hues,
 reaching out to us,
 calling us,
 as if screaming at us to touch them.

You touch the red,
 and it becomes anger.
 Madness is instilled within you:
 you are more upset than you can remember,
 and yet, your reasoning for being this way is clouded.

You're upset because people with different views than you
 are fighting against the way you see this world.
 You're annoyed because the LGBT community
 has gotten rights to equal marriage,
 and the purple hatred flowing through your veins will not allow you to be joyous for them.

You're angry at Mexican immigrants
 (even though America is a nation made up of people who have come in search for hope).
 You're angry that they're coming over the border,
 escaping the pink oppression of their own country
 for the discrimination you show them here.

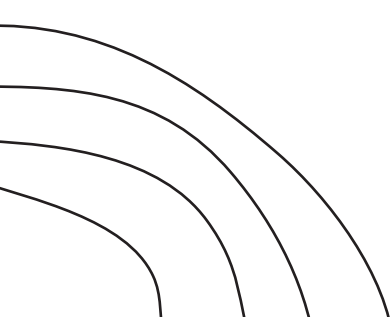
You're sickened at the sight of strong and independent women.
 Your sea foam green mind thinks that the rent we must pay for our existence
 is practicing silence,
 and being an object
 for men to lust over.

You're frustrated because rape shouldn't be placed on the perpetrator's shoulders;
 no, instead, we must find a way to
 blame the victim
 in a situation of oppression,
 because that's what the startlingly blue patriarchy has taught us.

You're mad because colored people want their lives to matter,
 when they've been fighting this battle for the past 150 years.
 There's been a violet Civil Rights Movement,
 there's been a crimson Civil War,
 and yet, we cannot get past the image ingrained in our heads that we must have slaves.

And, as if all of this violence swirling all around us were not enough,
 there's a man,
 a human being,
 and he just earned an elected position
 leading the most powerful nation in the world.

And he has stirred the pot;
 he has brought back up
 all these feelings-
 these ones of coal hatred and blackened supremacy;
 those of navy bigotry and stark white divisiveness.



Every day, I ask myself
 if this is the reality
 I am forced to live with.
 Or, is it a dream?
 Will I wake up and see the sunshine?

And then, suddenly appearing,
 I see a light.
 A spark, coming through the darkness,
 growing in size,
 becoming bigger than the rest of the colors you see.

I reach out, remembering once again
 the naivety it took and
 the painfulness of what it felt like to trust the last time,
 and then, there's an explosion.
 An explosion which reminds you
 of all the good there still is in the world.

Swirling around me is a sensory overload
 of fantastical, powerful, incredible images

which will remain ingrained in my brain
 for the rest of my life.
 I am uplifted.

I see red;
 but no, not the red of anger,
 nor blood flowing through the streets.
 Instead, there is the red of resilience,
 the red which represents the resistant revolution.

There are orange hands reaching out to me,
 handing me my faith in humanity again
 on a golden platter.
 Instilling bravery within me;
 once more teaching me that I am brilliant because I am myself.

Yellow sunshine spreads over us all
 as we begin to march,
 as if giving us a symbol
 that the world is not the dreadful place
 we've all seen it become in the past 4 months.

I see green movement,
 always going forward,
 always progressing,
 always hoping for peace,
 always fighting for integrity.

Blue fills the air,
 signifying the progress we are making.
 It signifies the history behind the movement,
 the strength behind the people around me.
 The weight is lifted off my shoulders, and I am free.

There's purple tendrils grasping out,
 holding each other's hands,
 telling each and every one of us, "You are not alone."
 We stand here united,
 because each and every time we are stronger together.

There's a pink vortex swirling all around,
 lifting all of us up.
 I am higher than the stars in the sky,
 surrounded by fellow women and men
 wearing knitted hats with cat ears; standing, forever strong.

I see white.
 I see smiles so brilliantly shining that it's as if
 the stars have come down from the heavens.
 I see glistening signs being held up,
 telling us we never stand alone.

I see black.
 I see black trying to bring us down,
 yet we are too secure in our beliefs.
 I see hatred pulsing all around the nation;
 yet somehow, we still rise, and I hear the roaring of the women surrounding me.

There is a rainbow of color.
 It lifts us up,
 it gives us strength,
 it reminds us of the good,
 and it helps us realize that we are one.

Our neighbors,
 our families,
 our community,
 our nation.
 All of us have the capability to shine brilliantly.

And the light,
 pulsing ever brighter:
 it is tantalizing; the suspense is hanging on the air, permeable,
 and so, we jump.

Unknowing, but always trusting.



Freedom Fighters - Clara McRae



I promised myself I wouldn't text him first. I promised I'd wait for his name to pop up on my screen, But what's the harm in texting him? What's the harm in coolly asking how he's been? I've texted first our whole time talking and I always reply timely I wait and wait and wait and wait I wait some more till finally! "Hey:" I said with just enough interest "Hey" he replies without a smiley "What's up?" I respond with a saddened grin He better not reply so dryly. The conversation flounces on In an awkward, cringey way It tapers off to one word answers And in my bed I'm left to lay I check my phone 500 times And the last time breaks my heart "Read" it says "at 9:52" This is tearing me apart! It must've been the way I looked Today, all day, at school With my hair that way and clothes that color, Ugh I looked like such a fool Or maybe it was something I said last time In another clumsy convo But I text my texts quite carefully, Trust me, I would know so. I'm sure he thinks I'm such a twit I'm annoying and so eww No wonder he leaves me stuck on "read" There's nothing I can do.	I need a distraction from that evil boy I need to get away I'll escape to an island off the coast of Greece Alone and calm I'll stay... <i>Oh woe is me!</i> My life has gone completely down the drain! My heart can never be repaired I'll forever be in pain. My life is over, it's gone to shambles So young, and yet so wise Such a tragedy, the death of my soul And all because of what we call "guys" I'd rather call them meaner names But I promised not to curse I'll swear off boys for once and all They only make things worse! I'll become a nun with nifty sisters And never give my love To an undeserving boarish man Or to whomever I can think of Never again shall my heart feel pain Once more I will not weep For an immature, vulgar, disgusting- Oh look! My phone just beeped! It's him! It's him! It's really him! My heart is soaring high My head is spinning so dang fast I'm afraid I'll take off and fly I knew he'd come on crawling back I knew he'd return my text I knew he wasn't blowing me off I knew what would happen next I unlock my classy iPhone7 And open the cause of the bleep I read his beautiful love note, it reads, "Sorry, I fell asleep."
--	--

SMH



Dead Weight

My coat of flesh falls to the ground
It is mostly dead and rotted
But the sparse remaining tissue tears like paper,
And burns like fire in my new cells.

I have remade myself.
I've slid the sickness from my skin,
Piled on the ground, it lays
I see it with disgust, yet I mourn my loss

Can the head not tell the heart this is dead weight?
If I run, my legs burn,
But if I stand they feel the same.

Often, I forget, that rational thought has never ruled my
mind,
I am constant in my feelings, And now I seek refuge
alone.
I have shed your dead weight,

And I will mourn on my own.

His Disguise

I can not forget the way your brown eyes looked, swimming in red.
Dark hair, long eyelashes, dope in your head.

I feel guilty, for trying so hard to teach you to swim.
The water was rising and I should never have let you in.

Because no matter how hard I tried and no matter how hard you
kicked,
You could not tread the water.

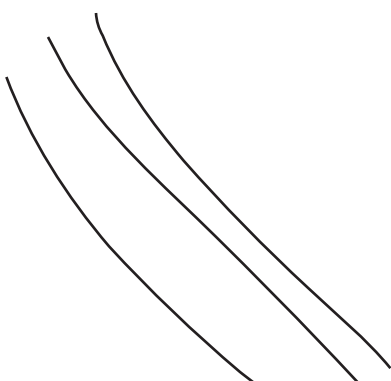
All I could give, tired muscles and a heavy heart.
I filled the ocean and tried to force you to swim, dooming you from
the start.

I know now that I can't teach you to love me,
I know now that it's not that easy.

I'm sorry that I couldn't replace the pot
And that I let the flames I started burn too hot.

You filled my lungs with all the smoke you couldn't hold,
I took everything I could, I coughed and gasped, and sunk so low
Yet you wondered why I couldn't breathe.

I turned my eyes from your bloodshot whites,
And suddenly, I could see.



Dagger

What kind of knife
Can split a soul in half?

There are two sides to each story,
But I've got things I need to forget.

I've got faces that I miss but
I've got lives that live within me,

I can't seem to rid myself
Of what I carry, time has worn away such
willpower.

My bones are breaking
Splintered pieces, scattered everywhere

I've got knots in my past,
Like my tangled hair.

The wind steals away my breath
And I can't seem to get anywhere.

What kind of weapon,
Can split a life?

I am half passion, half fatigue.
I am lacking in hope,

I no longer believe.

Clovers

I've thought the world rigid and full of sharp edges.
One stumble can leave behind some skin.

And yet, the clovers beneath his four paws are soft, pain-
less.

And the grass is still a bit green from the fading summer.
His pink tongue licks my nose, and I'm five again, despite the
chill of life.

The smell of autumn fading into winter doesn't hurt either,
the nakedness that plagues the trees.
Like I yearn for a warm blanket, they anxiously dream of re-
birth.

The clouds in the sky are scarce,
And though the sun doesn't bake the earth like it did a few
months ago, when it shines right my skin is warm.

I suppose the skin I've lost will return, as the leaves do
for the trees.

When I fall next, I'll remember that the world is soft,
Like clovers beneath my childhood dog's paws.

I Go Back to Christmas 2002

i see them sitting
against a grey backdrop
in a room meant for pictures.
i see them posed in a perfect and pretty position,
arms around each other and hands folded together.

it's a comforting look, but it is not comfortable.
it is not comfortable to know that soon, things will
change.
their smiles will fade, no longer
showing off pearly whites,
but dulling ivories.

her strands of dark hair will be cut
off, along with her dreams.
his waist will grow
larger, along with his guilt.

her round eyes will see so much more than they
should,
and her tiny ears, tucked behind thick hair, will not
hear what they need. i want
to warn them, to let them know that their yellow
brick road is
soon going to turn to the color of ink.

i want to run up and throw the camera down.
tell the photographer to stop, that this isn't natu-
ral, this isn't real.

but i don't.

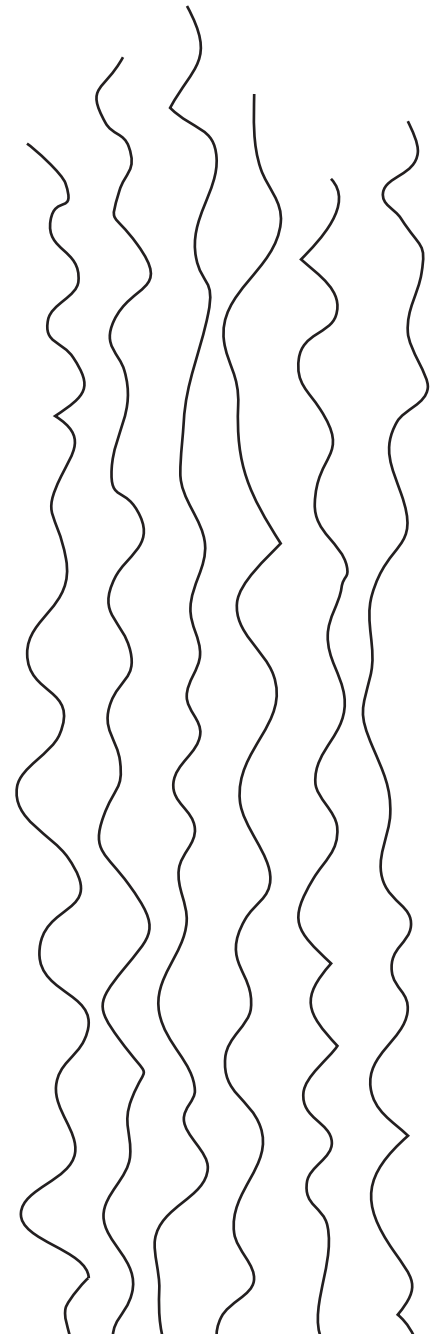
some sort of unity was formed as they carried their
burden together.
never would they have guessed it, but it did.
they are a cracked mirror, staying together because
there is less debris
than if they all fell apart.

i want to go up to the little girl with her hands so
nicely on her knees.
i want to grab them and hold them and never let go.
even if the unknown is unknown.

She will be here.

They will be together.

And I will have to watch.



Imaginary Friend

"Am not!"

"Are to!"

"No! I don't have any imaginary friends. Those are for babies!"

Ruby is forgetting me. Well, she's not forgetting me. She's leaving me. What's wrong with me?

Is it because I stole Kit Kittredge's spot at the dinner table? Because I spilled the tea at the tea party? Maybe because I cut her bangs and made Mom mad?

"Ruby is a baby! Baby Ruby, baby Ruby!"

The girls all tease her. They are absolutely ruthless.

Ruby steps back, gripping my hand.

"Go away!" she shrieks. I do not know if she is talking to me or to the girls.

Ruby runs to the slide and huddles underneath the scratched plastic. She makes a small circle of gravel around me.

"You're not real, you're not real, you're not real," she fiercely whispers. The gravel is piercing my feet, but I don't move. I try to grab her hand again, but she tears it away.

"No!"

"Ruby, please," I beg, "I love you. Remember when we painted the dog's nails? And when we snuck an extra popsicle when Mom wasn't looking? What about the time when we put our face under the water for the first time at the pool?"

She won't look at me. The girls are laughing on the swings and throwing leafs in our direction.

Ruby kicks the circle of gravel at me and runs away. I cannot move without her. I am not real without her. So I sit under the slide and wait.

Traveling

after John Ashbery

She was clothed in rich, stringy hair, with a
Dark tuft on her oval face like a yak.
Her skin was as gray as a hippos is
And covered with the wrinkles of a
Well-used map: A prehistoric
Device to wander around the world, like a cabbage
With layers to peel and a sturdy core of
Gold. And with that,
The map could take us anywhere. At
Dawn, down the winding roads least
Traveled, and at daybreak, into the fields we
Ran through until mother called for supper, the may
Flowers tickling our ankles where our jeans used to be.
Her face tells the story of her life, I'm sure.

The Bubblegum Building is Me

I am from question marks and tears,
Bubblegum buildings filled with tiny humans.
I am crib-lined walls and many 'māmās' cooing.
I am from luck, loss, and lullabies (and hopefully love).

I am a choppy-tongued city with four tones
And 6 hundred thousand faces.
I am from an eggshell shooting star which flies
Me from my motherland to another land.
I am anxious air in a calm courtroom granting citizenship
(With a side of replacement).

I am tough-love and a should've-but-wasn't world.
I am from report cards, book fairs, and hawks that paint the sky blue.
I am keys A through G and passionate words which make up glorious art for the ears.

I am from promises and quotes that soothe and scare.
I am intimidating and daunting words like
'High functioning depression' and 'acute anxiety.'
I am from a pit of darkness that seems inescapable
(And a ladder made of orange bottles and expensive listeners.)

I am raw nails, bleeding skin, and indented fingers from twisting and pulling.
I am from ideas and adventure that have no limits.
I am disappointment; no, I am failure.

I am from crippling stress laced with endless support.
I am empathy, compassion, and inspiration.
I am from an existential crisis that screams 'why am I here?!'
At the top of its flame-red lungs; its massive, enraged uvula hanging
Over its frigid heart like a head in a guillotine that's ready to close-
Tantalizingly close to The Final Surrender.

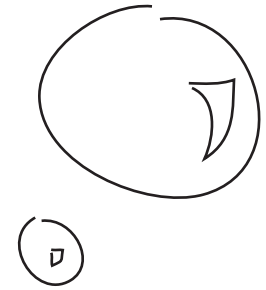
I am creature comforts and smells that become home.
I am from damp soil with seeds strewn about, waiting to bloom.
I am laughter deep within and a withering faith in humanity.

I am from control and structure, living on a basis of need-to-know;
There is no such thing as 'go with the flow.'
I am the black sheep, the duck in the henhouse.
I am from rituals, rebellion, and the refusal to settle.

I am emotion.
I am from overthinking, overdoing, overpowering, overanalyzing, overwhelming, overreacting...and underestimating.
I am rough-drafts, letters, (in both senses of the word), and maps.

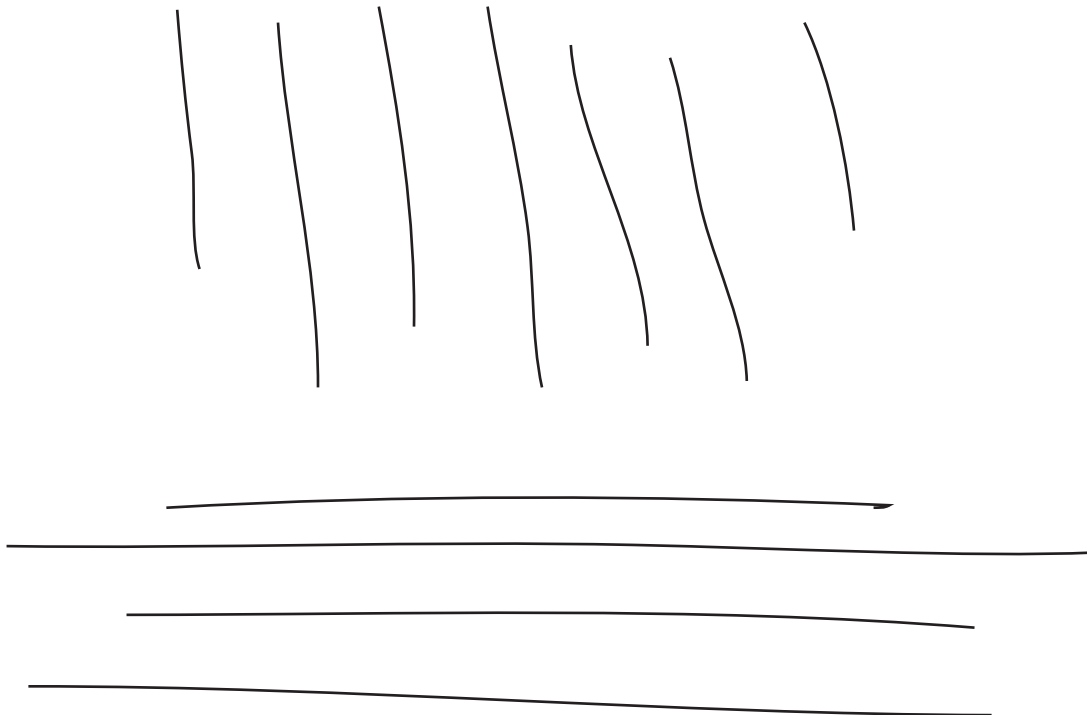
I am from worry stones, the smooth rock, and perfect pebble searching.
I am florentines, crinkles, and worms 'n dirt.
I am from the summit on the last day of summer.

I am almonds, bananas and something exotic swirled together in a mistake
That forms the word "chink."
I am from whos, whats, wheres, and whys-
The support blocks that make up the eggshell star.
I am the bubblegum building.



after Joanie Mackowski

That it's worth anything, so I keep tapping. I
tap not for
Her, but for me.



Tiny People Tiny Minds

Tiny Knives

Continuously pricking my skin

Making the cold unbearable

The dark of the world

Crashing onto my shoulders



Tiny People

Their blank faces smiling

Watching

Mocking my every move

They expect me to stay strong



How?

They berate me with sharp words

Just like those knives in my head

Chopping away at my light

And at my joy

I am shoved into The Box

Over and over

Coaxed into the light

"Be yourself"

Then those tiny people

Pay me tiny glares

Scrunch me down in The Box,

Into their mold,

They cut me to size so that I may

"Fit in"

Is that possible?

How am I supposed to be myself

In a world where everyone is expected to be
the same?

I think the answer is to ignore

The ice, the knives, The Box

The shrill voices from the tiny people.

Them whose minds have been trimmed

By those who think they make "normal".

Like tiny gardeners

Tending the World Estate.

Like rushing waters

Causing the riverbed pebbles to smooth.

We are fighting a battle

Some are still here,
Too many have moved on.

Against those who make "normal".

Many have lost

Physically and mentally.

The tiny people
Who rule the world,
Who are oblivious to the uprising,
The war that is waging
With the people who refuse to sit in the box.



Emma Anderberg



Water Warrior



Somewhere, on a world far away from here, two opposing kingdoms live together. The world was filled with green forests, dry deserts, massive rainforests, and bright blue oceans filled with the most colorful fish in the universe. There used to be more, but one kingdom grew greedy and began to take over other lands and use the resources there for their own purposes. Eventually, the greedy kingdom stopped conquering and lived in peace with their last neighbor.

These two kingdoms, these two magnificent, opposite forces, were the Light and the Dark. The Light is the reason why on Earth, they only see night and day, nothing else. Whatever happens on this planet, affects what happens on Earth. The Light and the Dark lived on their shared planet peacefully for many years. The leaders of the two forces, Day and Night, respectfully, decided to keep the armies and defenses intact in case the other decided to invade.

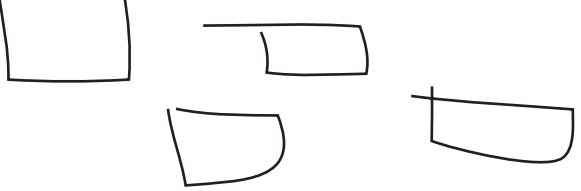
You wake up in your room. The dusty walls that used to be a vibrant navy blue surround you with a feeling of home. You get up from the bed, which creaks whenever you move, and walk across the black wood floor to the deep purple door. You do not step away from the doorway because you want to listen for any sign that your family is awake. When you hear nothing, you go into the hallway down to the kitchen. The moonlight from the window shines on a spot of the wallpaper. The hallway wallpaper has always been black, despite your protests to your parents. But when the moonlight shines on it, the wallpaper turns into a silver. You arrive at the kitchen to yet more silence. You are in the clear. Your gear sits on the table in the dining room next to the kitchen. It is a dusty mess compared to the immaculate china glasses sitting in their cabinet, gleaming coldly in the moonlight. It is in this room, and your parents' room, that the moonlight no longer feels welcoming.

You shake your head to clear your mind before you leave, you knew what the consequence of becoming a guard would be. You knew that your parents would be angry. But you put on the gear anyway, and walk to the door and go outside. You stare at the moon, eyes closed, feeling its light bathe you. You open your eyes and look out at the street. It is empty because it is so early in the morning, but that does not bother you. You have your job to get to.

As you walk to the wall, you start thinking about the sun. You have heard of it, and did a research project on it while you were in primary school, but you have never actually seen it. Others think that it's a myth, something that Night came up with to keep her people in order, but you know that it is real. Your father had seen it, and painted it on his canvases. But there is never any sun in Dark, the moon is always up.

You get to your post on the wall. The wall is exactly what it implies. It completely surrounds Dark and your job is to patrol the wall around the Dark capital: Mávros. You go to your position and nod to the other guards on the wall. They have stood by you through training and small skirmishes throughout the kingdom. You trust them with your life. As a guard, your duty is to watch over the wall, and see as far as you can beyond. You almost have the best eyesight in the kingdom, you can even see the Sentinels in the distance.

The Sentinels are a special group of citizens who can see even farther than you can. Farther than Night can. They watch the Light. Everyone knows about the Light, even though some think that the sun is a myth. The Light conquered the entire world, except for your kingdom. Your kingdom has stood strong for ages. Something catches your eye from your left. You gesture to the guard closest to you to move over to you. With your eyesight, you can see a bloodied Sentinel running towards the gate across the moonlit desert. You can see that the sand behind them is stained with its blood. You cannot yet tell if the Sentinel is male or female, but you run down the wall to the gate to meet the Sentinel. The gate is open now, as the gatekeepers have awoken, and when the Sentinel gets inside, they



close the gate up tight. You watch as the desert disappears behind the massive, thick, black wooden doors. A metal portcullis comes down after the gate closes as an extra defense.

The Sentinel collapses in your arms as he, for you can see his gender now, cries out "They have killed them all! The Sentinels, they are all gone. Light has declared war on Dark. We must evacuate and protect the Holy City." The Sentinel looks into your eyes and closes his and breathes once more, his wounds proving to be fatal. You look around, seeing fellow guards surround you. You nod and they all take out their obsidian war horns, used to signal war, and blew. The sound of the air blowing through the obsidian sounds like the shrill shriek of a person in pain. It echoes through your ears and makes your head hurt. But you barely notice it. The feeling of fear and adrenaline is running through your veins faster than you can think and when you stand up, the others back away from you in fear.

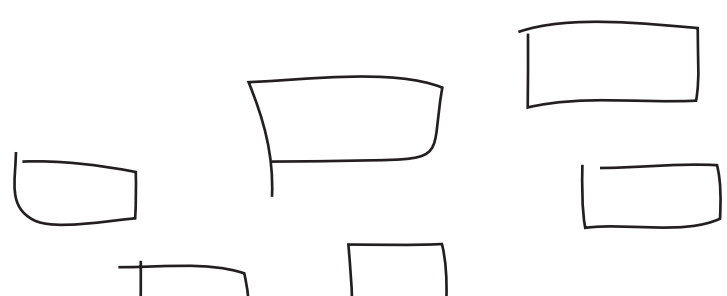
You yell out "Get the men, protect Night and the Holy Family. Get them out of here." The guards all listen to you and run to complete your orders. Your powers come surging up from where you kept them suppressed for years. Your gear melts away into dark armor, made from pure dark crystal. It is the strongest armor the guards have even seen. You turn around and face the gate and the wall and see the darkness break, turning into a red sunrise. You see that the Light has arrived, and it will kill every last one of your people. The gate breaks in half, completely failing to hold Day's armies at bay. You step back, your power swirling around you, ready to be used for killing. You kill many soldiers until you see a man step through the gates. He ripples with light, and you know on instinct that this is Day, the leader of the Light. He points to you and sends a ripple of pure sun toward you. You remember feeling the cobblestone hit your temple as you fell unconscious.

You wake up again. You do not know how long it has been, but you can hear screams in the distance. Your vision is slightly blurry as you turn to look from the gate to the inner city. Lights shines on the buildings from the now present sun. You get up and run towards the palace on the inner city.

When you arrive, you see the most horrible sight that you have ever seen. The Holy Family is being led out onto the street. Night is brought to her knees in front of Day. He pulls a sword from a scabbard on his back.

Your mother turns to face you. She can somehow see you. She smiles and you see that it is full of love and understanding. She sends one last thought to you telepathically: Be strong, my daughter. Day puts his sword through her neck and her head rolls to the street.

You become filled with anger, but you can not move. You feel someone wrap their arms around your waist pulling you to your feet. You suddenly come to life again, pulling out of the hold. You turn, about to decimate the person, but you see a fellow guard. He motions for you to follow him, and points to a small group of guards and women hiding in the corner of a building. As you walk to them you look back and have one last thought before leaving your home: I will kill you Day, if it's the last thing I do.

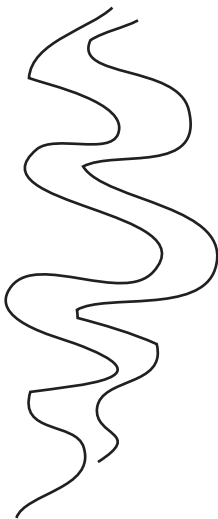


rough retro



out of line

R Y L E E

D
U
N
N

Grey Denim

My mother plaited my hair the same way every morning. Two chocolate serpents from the crown of my scalp reaching to the dimples on my back. She peeled an orange like a blooming lily and placed it in front of me in the grey light of the forever overcast dawn. Her fingernails smelled of citrus always. She was my best friend.

We walked together hand-in-hand to the flower shop, her grey denim coat unzipped, and my violet corduroy jacket with the big buttons reaching my knees. She let me turn the big brass knob and push the door open into the jungle she called our family business. The grand glass windows allowed light in, but the mess of plants never allowed me a good look out. She trimmed, I watered, she hummed, I listened.

I grew older

I bought sharp scissors and a navy sweatshirt the day the schoolgirls came into the shop and laughed at my braids and snickered at my purple jacket. I ran home, and cut the serpents from my head, making my dark locks reach only to my shoulders. I stuffed the jacket under the couch cushions, and slipped the new attire over my petite shoulders. Mother looked at me with surprise, but said nothing of my new look. I did my chores at the shop, she trimmed and watered, I swept, she hummed, I ignored.

We grew apart

As time passed, like it will do relentlessly, I fell into a routine of not talking to my mother unless it was necessary. The peeled orange would be left on the counter and coffee and cigarettes would take its place in my system. Her citrus smell continued. She was no longer my best friend, she was only my boss.

We would meet in passing at the flower shop. Her denim jacket, still unzipped hung loose on her sagging shoulders. Grey vines began to grow in her once deep brown hair. The plants in the shop flourished, our relationship diminished. I opened the shop, I rearranged, she trimmed and watered and swept, she closed the shop, and I never heard it, but I know she hummed.

She let me leave

I moved away, as all children do once in their life. I made coffee in a big city a few hours from the jungle business. My apartment was filled with plants my mother had delivered to me with notes wishing me luck in my developing life. They eventually withered and died, but I never threw them out. My small violet coat with the big buttons hung by the window and a bowl of oranges sat on the counter, the only colors in my life.

I worked all day at my new job. I opened the shop, I brewed coffee, I served customers, I cleaned, and often was asked by my coworkers why I always hummed.

A mother and her daughter came in often, holding hands. The girl's hair was braided, and she wore a coat of rose pink, with big buttons lining the front. I smiled.

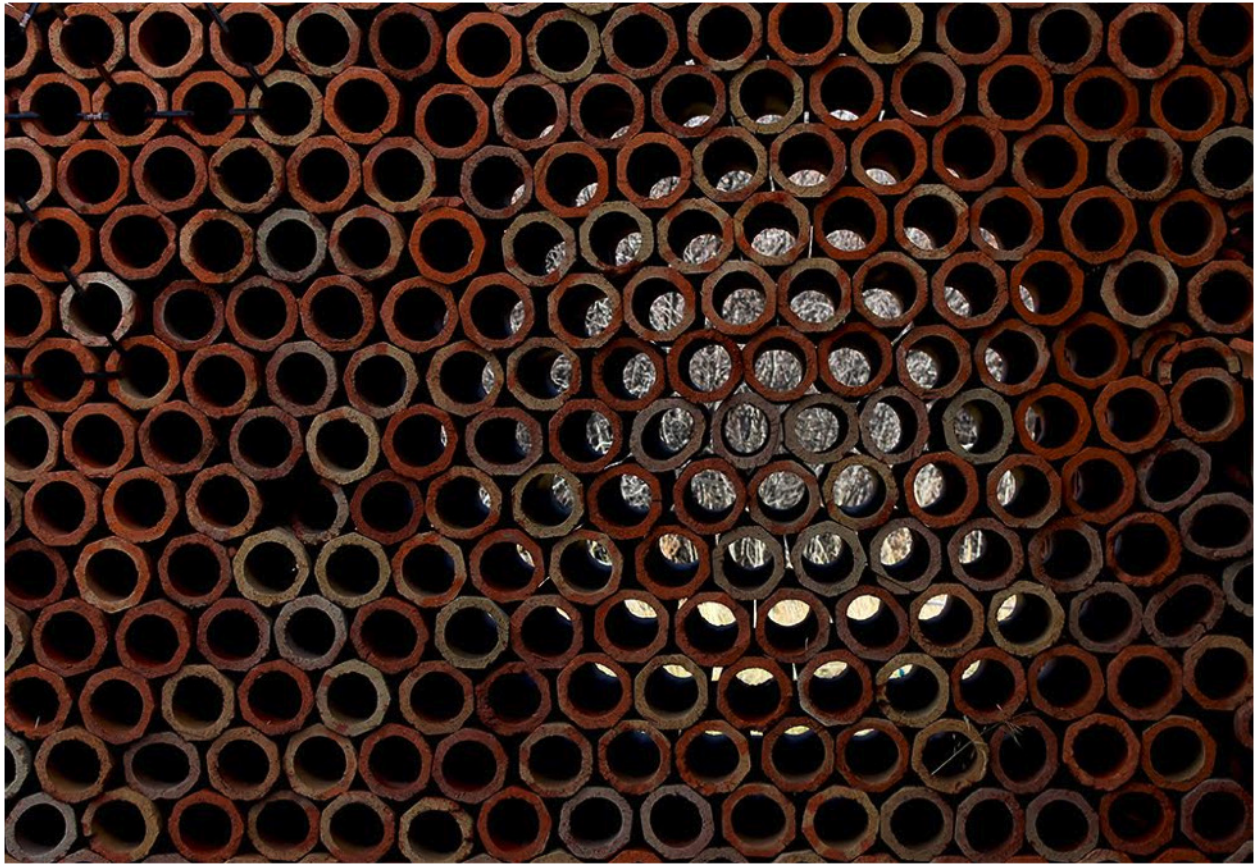
I returned

I plaited my mother's hair the same way every morning. Two grey ropes littered with fallen star streaks, reaching from her crown down to her shoulder blades. I peeled an orange like a blooming lily, and picked the petals and fed her them one by one. My fingernails grew the citrus scent. We were best friends.

She wore a deep green corduroy jacket on her frail frame, I did the big brown buttons for her every day. Her grey denim jacket fit nicely, and I wore it unzipped. I wheeled her to the jungle every morning under the overcast sky. Plants were shifted so her chair would fit nicely between them and she sat there all day in her throne of flowers and vines. I worked, she watched, she hummed, I cried.



Oh the burns on the edges
They weren't supposed to be there
Some people can't hear very well
Sticky sweet, courtesy of the bee
Cut, slice, create
Every whole grain for itself
The pile of them are shaped into a taco to eat them alive
Some stick to the plate not wanting to let go
The bee's creation is strong and won't even move
That's where the tool comes in
It helps occasionally for me
I scoop up the remains of the paper
And they go in the dungeon
They'll be seen again, made again, created again
Hopefully not tasted again.



Inside the Hive - Madi Kelly

No words
 tied together with string
 string that will be cut by misspoken words
 only misspoken words of what they thought was love
 but it's not love
 they believe that they are the exception
 that they can make it past high school
 whereas they are the rule
 the rule that everyone knows
 love does not last
 it is a temporary attachment
 until something better can come along
 until then they will be attached by the hip
 no room for anyone else
 let alone themselves
 not the same without the other
 completely dependent on a lie
 but then it ends
 and they finally see the light
 but he keeps her on that string
 with lingering looks
 small talk

and the same lie that he misses her
 and that he messed up
 so she falls down that same rabbit hole
 waiting for him to catch her at the bottom
 and again
 he's not there
 the two of them like a knot
 so complicated that no one cares anymore
 the two of you are just another complicated
 pair
 plastered on the hall walls
 algae on the side of a ship
 the high school titanic
 the same sob story



Ania Alduenda

Chapter One
February 1944

"Onto the train you vermin!"

The harsh man yelled at everyone. My family, friends, and husband were nowhere to be seen. As I was being loaded onto the train I heard my husband yell, "I love you Eva!" Howard's deep voice pulled me back, begging me to find him. Bringing his gaze to mine he screamed for me to run. Finally noticing the scene around me, I saw what was happening.

Tied to a post, Howard was restricted from movement. Twenty feet in front of him, a line of soldiers stood ready with rifles, pointed at Howard, along with thirty other men. Seconds seemed like hours as I ran towards him. Though I ran hard, he came no closer. Before I could reach him, two German soldiers took hold of my arms, pulling me back. They dragged me back to the train, kicking and screaming, to be loaded like a mindless cow. A split second before the doors of the train closed, I saw the soldiers fire. Bullets tore through my husband, turning him into a lump of bloody meat. He was gone. My husband was dead. A sound resembling a primal animal escaped my throat as I collapsed onto a heap of ragged clothes.

Someone's hand touched my shoulder. Turning around, I looked into a dark pair of brown eyes. Realizing they were attached to the head of a German, I shrank back like a scared deer.

"Beruhige dich bitte. Mein name ist Hanz Baumer."

Calm down please. My name is Hanz Baumer. I shook my head vigorously, wanting to be left alone. Being the stubborn ass he was, he leaned closer and asked, "Was ist passiert?" What happened? How was this his business? He was a monster.

"My husband was killed by your firing squad."

"I'm sorry. That shouldn't have happened. No one deserves that."

Wait... Was he apologizing? A German soldier? I must have turned into a meshugine.

"Ich brauche ihren namen kennen?" I need to know your name.

"Eva Korren."

A look of pure terror crossed his features as he asked, "Are you Anne Korren's sister?" I nodded. Again, the same look crossed his features.

"I was told by my supervisors to take you to the front car to meet your sister."

I nearly knocked him down as I barreled toward the door. Grabbing ahold of my elbow he said, "Miss, don't hurry. Please."

I complied with his request, mostly just to get to Anne with no trouble. We must have gone through twenty train cars. They were all filled with the same thing. Crying. Screaming. Moaning. All my people. People who would never do this to other humans. I had never seen my people in such distress.

We entered one of the car trains near the front, and I almost vomited at the sight of what was happening. German soldiers were taking each child under ten, and tossing them out of the train. They were sending them down the side of the mountain. One by one, small children. The mountains echoed their screams long after they had been impaled on the rocks below.

I recognized a young girl that was fighting the soldiers. My seven year old niece Hanna was kicking, screaming, and biting her way to the edge of the train car. Her eyes met mine and she screamed at me.

"Eva! Eva help me!"

I tried to go to her but the soldier held me back. He kept telling me not to go to her, but how could I not? She was family. His grip tightened and her screams continued to heighten. Her last desperate cries for help continued to echo in my ears as she tumbled down the side of the mountain.

Too petrified by what I saw to move, The Soldier picked me up and carried me the rest of the way. He set me down in front of a large metal door.

Walking into the room, I saw nothing but metal. Sterile metal. A squirming Anne was strapped to a metal table in the center of the room. A man in a white coat was standing beside her. Then he looked at me.

"Ahh, Eva. Welcome. My name's Josef. Dr. Josef Mengele. You and I are going to become very

close to each other."

Two burly men took hold of my arms and stripped me of my dress, then tied me to the metal table next to Anne's. The doctor picked up a knife and leaned toward my eyes.

"My my my, what amazing eyes you and your sister have. I've never seen anything like them."

His scalpel began to cut into the flesh of my shoulder. My screams echoed into oblivion as I faded out of consciousness.

I could hear her screams through the metal door. She didn't deserve this. She had already lost so much. Her husband. Her family. Must she now lose her sanity? I wanted to help her, to help all of them. Get her far away from all of the hurt she was experiencing. Eva reminded me so much of Maja. She was beautiful. Her long braided hair was an incredibly dark black. As dark as the midnight that was coming into the world.

The only thing Mengele was right about was her eyes. They were the deepest blue I had ever seen. Like sapphires. Even more fascinating, were the rims of her eyes. Around the edges of the dark blue, her eyes looked violet. Everything about her was... new. Special.

She was brave as well. In the past five years, everyone who was Jewish had been warned about wearing necklaces or other jewelry with the Star of David. But the lock on hers was rusted, like it hadn't been removed in years. She refused to give up her heritage.

I was absolutely exhausted, but there was no way for me to fall asleep. I could hear the screams. God... what was he doing to her and her sister?

The screams didn't stop until just before we reached Auschwitz. I walked into the train car, trying to keep my eyes off the blood. Mengele looked at me pointedly.

"What are you doing, officer?"

"I was told that I would be allowed to choose a female prisoner for myself. I have chosen Miss Korren. Would you care to challenge my authority, Doctor?"

Fully knowing that I outranked him, Mengele tsked at me and turned away. While I was not in his line of sight, I grabbed some bandages, wound disinfectant, and Eva's dress. Some people raised eyebrows as I carried Eva to my quarters, but no one dared ask me why I had her. I was too highly ranked for them to even try.

Once I got to my plush, undeserved quarters, I wasted no time in cleaning her wounds. I could barely look at them. Mengele had purposely cut dangerously close to her arteries, but had avoided them to see what would happen. Putting her dress back on her, I sat across the room at the table. After about thirty minutes, she woke up.

"You're not... putting your hands on me."

She was looking at me like she would rather do nothing but send my head spinning across the room.

"Don't worry. That was just an excuse to get you out of there. I have no intention of putting my hands on you."

She tried to get off of the bed and walk, but stumbled. Luckily, I was able to catch her before she hit the ground. Her face reddened in anger, and she cursed under her breath. I picked her up with ease and carried her to the table, where I set her down in a chair.

"Eat, Eva. They may not give you food once you're with the others."

I set before her a plate of hot bread, potatoes, and a bowl of broth. I had barely moved my hand before she descended upon the food like a ravenous wolf.

A few minutes later she looked at me and asked, "Why are you sorry? You said earlier that you were sorry for what had happened. No one else is sorry for what's happening to us. So why you?"

"It's a long story."

"Believe me, I have absolutely no problem with a long story."

Settling down in the chair across from her I began.

"When I was eighteen, I saved someone's life. That someone happened to be Adolf Hitler. I didn't know who he was at the time. For saving his life, I was given the rank of reichsmarschall. The only person above me was Hitler. I was in the Army for three years before I met my wife. She did not want the type of marriage where she was constantly worried about my safety, so I left. Nine months later we had a baby girl. Her name was Hanna. She was a beautiful baby. My wife, her name was Maja, always loved me. Despite my secrets. Last year Hitler Wanted me back. I refused. He had my family killed. My mother, father,

all of my younger siblings. I still refused. I wouldn't be a monster. I came home from work and found Maja and Hanna dead. Maja's throat had been slit. Hanna's neck was broken. So I went back. I was mostly hoping to do something stupid, get myself killed preferably. But no such luck yet."

She looked confused as she remarked, "That's terrible, but that doesn't exactly answer my question."

"I'm Jewish. I could find happiness with someone, be successful, but only because he didn't know who I was. Had he known I was Jewish, I'd probably be dead by now, but because he knows nothing, I'm one of the highest ranking officials in the German army."

I looked at my watch and felt my heart drop. I had kept her here too long. I had to take her to her cell. I couldn't. Who knows what the guards would do to her. There were no restrictions on what could be done to them. I had known guards to force prisoners to eat their own feces.

It was sickening. But I had no choice.

"I need to take you back. To the cells."

Her face went white. She looked scared to death, and rightfully so. She slowly nodded and stood up, still slightly unsteady on her feet. The five minute walk to the cells wasn't even close to what she would be experiencing. Mengele would use her until there was nothing left but insanity.

My cell was small. There was a drain in the middle. Disturbingly, it was relatively clean. More so than the rest of what I had seen. The Soldier had given me a piece of paper. He told me to wait five minutes before opening it. I opened it. I started to cry.

Viel Glück Eva.

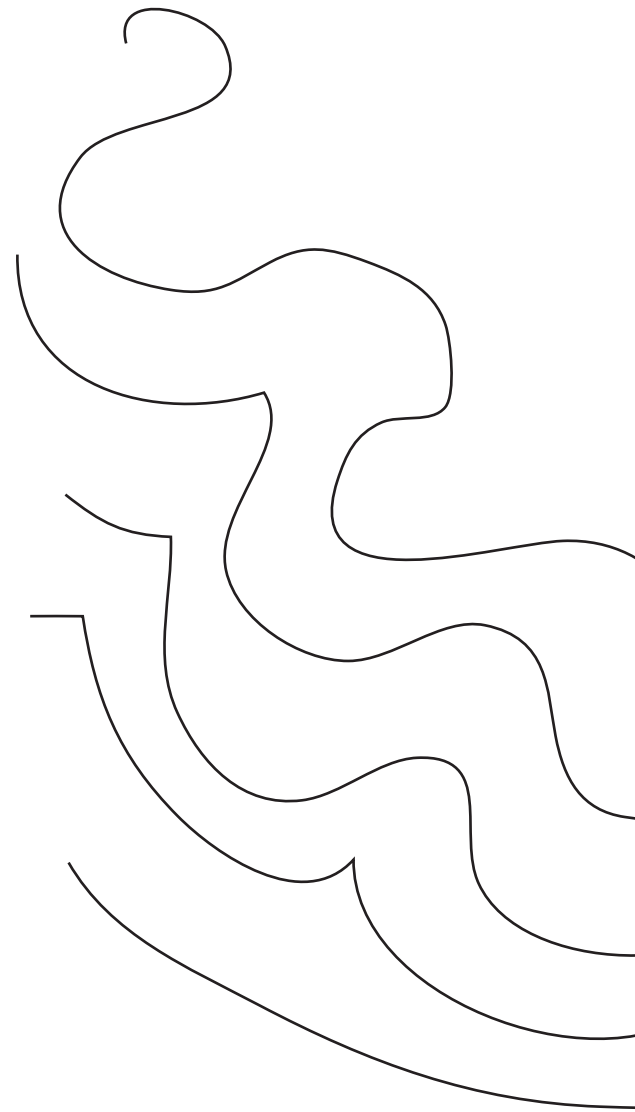
Good Luck Eva.



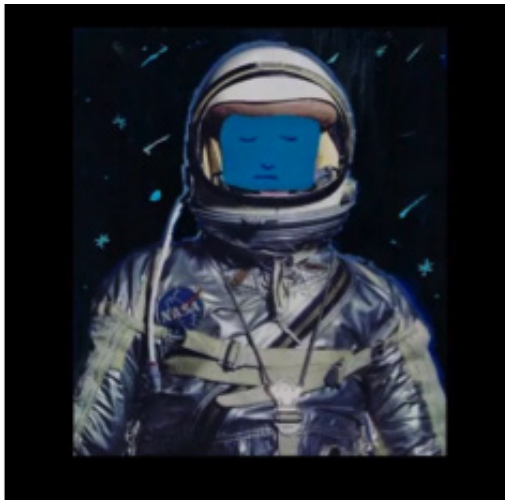
Within the Eye of the Beholder - Madi Kelly

What's this now?
 A beautiful red silhouette
 Grabs my soft hands and
 Leads me to an unknown fate.
 It takes me through
 A crimson wall of blood
 Spewing like fire
 That almost disguised it in the color.
 The warm, liquified feel of its hands
 Entices me to a point
 Of no return.
 The sickly sweet smell of the room
 Is almost drug-like.
 Taking the first breath
 Gives me a high
 That only it can give.
 My vision goes into a tunnel shape
 And leaves me faint.
 I can feel the throbbing
 Of my veins throughout my body.
 Closing my eyes takes me to
 A beautiful world.

I know it's artificial,
 But I would like to go more often.
 After the repetition,
 I need the feeling to be intensified.
 It happens so often now,
 That I can barely see the beauty
 In the artificial world.
 The more I go with
 The red silhouette
 And the more I go
 Into the red crimson wall of blood,
 I can barely see the world.
 So, I grant myself the promise
 Of intensifying the feeling of the beauty.
 Now I see multiple red shadows
 Wanting to lead me to the wall.
 I am now so trapped,
 I can not see the true world.
 My veins pulse
 And my eyes bulge in anticipation.
 I cannot breathe
 The sickly sweet smell.
 From now on,
 I start to ignore
 The red silhouettes.



Waiting for me
 To take their hands
 And follow.
 I need to focus
 I need to leave
 I cannot do that
 If they always tease
 I start to appall myself
 To the beautiful smell and
 feel
 The wall would always give me.
 The last time I went
 I asked it's name
 They softly said, almost in
 unison
 Addiction.
 They tease and poke



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What's In A Name?

Naming is such an essential part of who we are. At the same time, it's just some letters on a certificate that happen to be what everyone is socially obligated to call you for your entire life. But if you do put it in that light, names are incredibly important to our identity. Your name can be an indication of ethnic background, a reference to a parent's favorite singer, an emotion, a book character, or for some of you, the biggest embarrassment you will ever face. I mean, not everyone has the luxury of an interesting, pyrotechnics, conversation-starter name. Some people are named Ashley, and that's the whole story. It was trendy at the time. Boom. I guess as one of those people with not the most exciting names in the world, that's what drew me to them in particular. It's a virtually useless pastime, but something about names and the strenuous process some go through to catch the good ones fascinates me in a way that I'll try to explain.

I can't pinpoint exactly one moment in time when I first started collecting names. But I do remember when I was about seven or eight, I was crazy for the name Gwendolyn. I don't remember how I first heard the name, but when I did hear it, something in my mind clicked into place. Gwendolyn was all I could think about. I had daydreams of naming a daughter Gwendolyn. I had daydreams of naming a daughter Gwendolyn and her wearing a pretty purple dress in a school play. One of my friends had a soccer ball with a face on it, and I convinced her to name it Gwendolyn. In all my pretend games, I was always Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn. I think the amount of times I used that name in that phase of my life was unhealthy. It has since lost all meaning to me.

It wasn't until I was a few years older that I realized the name Gwendolyn is really ugly, though I still believe Gwen goes with everything. Gwendolyn didn't stick. The sensation of finding a good name did stick. The naming infatuation didn't fully develop until sixth grade and then throughout seventh and eighth grade, it fully bloomed. Bloomed isn't a good term to use. How about exploded? I started realizing I cared about people's names and I started developing rules about naming. These aren't for other people, but I mentally created this list of rules for names to decide whether they are worth my time. Which brings me to this list:

Amy Elizabeth Thompson's Official Naming Rules ©

1. No names that exceed ten letters, except Christopher.
2. No names that exceed four syllables. They're lengthy and unnecessary.
3. Also please, for the love of God, don't name your child Sexburgis (a German name I had the pleasure of finding once).

Mind you, I don't judge anyone based on their name. Well, I don't judge anyone based on their name for longer than five minutes. If I meet someone named Sarah, I will immediately jump to the conclusion that this Sarah character is about as interesting as a bottle of glue, but many Sarahs have proven me wrong, even if I have a strong dislike for their name. All my silent judgement is completely subconscious, and I don't even realize I'll be analyzing someone's name when I'm supposed to be having a conversation with them and had since passed the introductions ten minutes ago. When it comes to names, my brain is like a computer. Someone could input "Sabrina" and I'll spit out a ton of information in a monotone, "Sabrina. Latin origin. Meaning: Boundary Line. Seven letters. Three syllables. Logging out now. Goodbye."

I don't hold anyone responsible for their name, even if I detest it. I'd be a complete jerk if I did. 99% of the time, nobody gets to choose their own name. I can't even fault parents or guardians who name their children. I mean, unless they name their child something like "Shadow Deathblade X" then I think we might have a problem. In general I try to tell myself that people have their own naming tastes and I have mine. This line of thinking doesn't usually help my naming OCD, but in this day and age where people can name their child whatever they want, naming tastes are varied and downright strange. Being a frequent member on the naming site Nameberry, I have seen everything. Speaking of Nameberry, I knew my love for naming was a little strange when I got an account on the site eighth grade, which is something that's still a little difficult to explain to people. I've spent a disturbing number of hours reading through birth announcements, hovering in forums, and participating in polls about what someone should name their fifth son. However, through Nameberry I found a title and community for my incurable dis-

ease. I'm a Namenerd. I didn't know such a thing existed, but when I found that out, I was downright relieved.

Before the days of Nameberry and non-dialup internet at my house, I had to be a little more old-fashioned. I didn't even have a baby naming book because Mom's eyes widened when I asked her if I could get a used one at Goodwill, and she told me that I didn't need it. When I was in my later elementary school years, I had to thumb through phone books, yawning at how boring everyone's name is in Helena, Montana. I gained some access to interesting last names that were useable, but that wasn't going to cut it.

Eventually, years later, age fifteen, Mom let me get a baby name book after years of nagging. I paid for it, of course, but I made her go to the checkout line so the nosy cashiers wouldn't say things like, "When's the baby due?" because I can assure you that there is no baby. Of course I was overreacting, but so did Dad when he found my new book on the kitchen table. His face turned red, and the only words he could say were, "Why?" and "I didn't think we were in that stage of our lives yet." I just rolled my eyes at him. I eventually made a fake book cover with purple construction paper that conveniently left out the word "baby" so I could take it in public and it wouldn't raise eyebrows. It had said, "The Official Naming Guide." (The babies on the front cover had been freaking me out anyway). Of course, within a month, the fake cover ripped off as well as the real one, and now I have to be very gentle with it.

Even though I've only had Bruce Lansky's 100,000+ Baby Names book for a few months, it's already well-loved. Obviously the cover is missing, there's significant water damage due to a rainfly incident while camping, and there are already so many marks in the book it's hard to read what name was supposed to be there. The annotations in my book range from ones such as, "I like this name" or "I need to hold on to this one" to "God, this name is just a wannabe Anita" where I realize it must've been three at the morning when I wrote that. In the margins I keep track of names I want to keep for book characters in a possible future project. Though some of them I don't know what I was thinking. Three months ago me? Why did you ever think the name Prairie was a good idea?

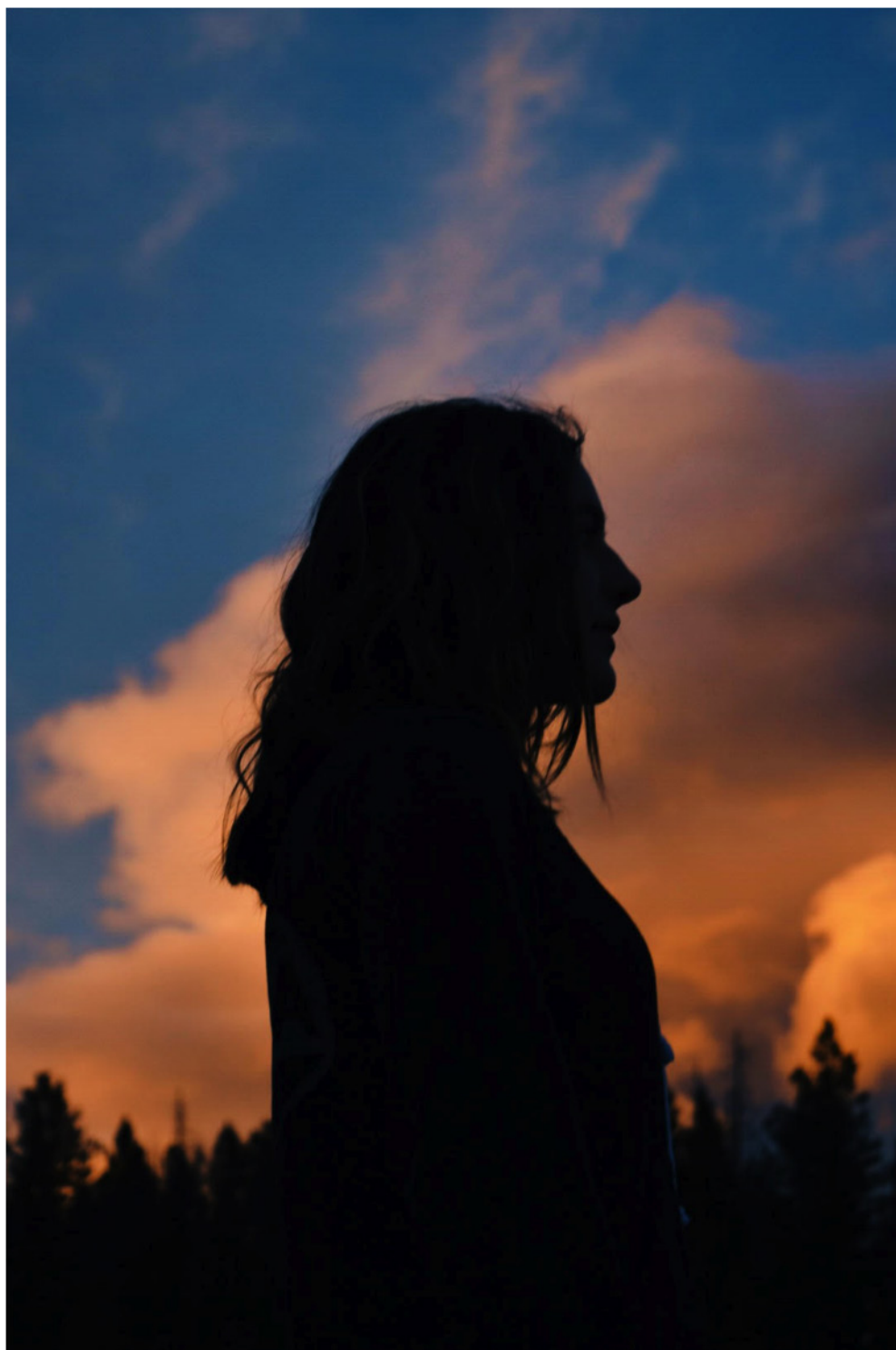
Originally, that was the excuse I would make. I need good names for my book characters. That's not a lie. I've had regular writer's block, of course, but I have this strange occasional condition called namer's block where one can't keep writing because a character that's literally in the story for one page needs to have a good name or one might as well scrap the whole story because what's the point? I can't be like normal writers and have an occasional character Jim or John. I wish I could, but my mind won't let me. A good example is, just a week ago, I spent two and a half hours to find the name Jada. Precious time I could've spent world building or character developing, but no. Jada.

But that's not even the main reason I'm a Namenerd. Yes, characters are a big part of it, but in a pie chart they wouldn't even be half of it. Maybe 75% of the pie chart would be because I just think it's fun. Some might say I'm shallow with names. Sometimes I'll only watch the news because I like the sounds of Lester and Holt together, and I think it's a solid first name last name combo. I'll spend days going through the adoption records on humane society websites, not necessarily because I want to look at all the cats I can't have, but because I'm silently criticizing whoever's job it is to give them temporary names.

I have this dream world where I'm the almighty name counselor. Everyone brings their baby, cat, dog, horse, pangolin, or whatever, to me and they tell me what they were going to name it and I have to approve of it. Everyone would respect and cherish my naming opinion, and I would disapprove of names like Ava (unless they had a very good reason) and give my approval on names like Clayton. I would be respected and feared, and there wouldn't be a boring name in the entire world.

I guess that's why I like names. Since I have such a bland name, I live vicariously through others that I wish could be my own. They're fun. They're cool. They're boring. They're unique. They're clever. They mean nothing and they mean everything. Next time someone asks me why I'm a Namenerd, I will smile and I will gently hand them my beat-up copy of Bruce Lansky's 100,000+ Baby Names book and I will say, even though I know they won't understand,

"You might want to read this."



Steady as the Sun - Clara McRae

Today - Emily Kelly

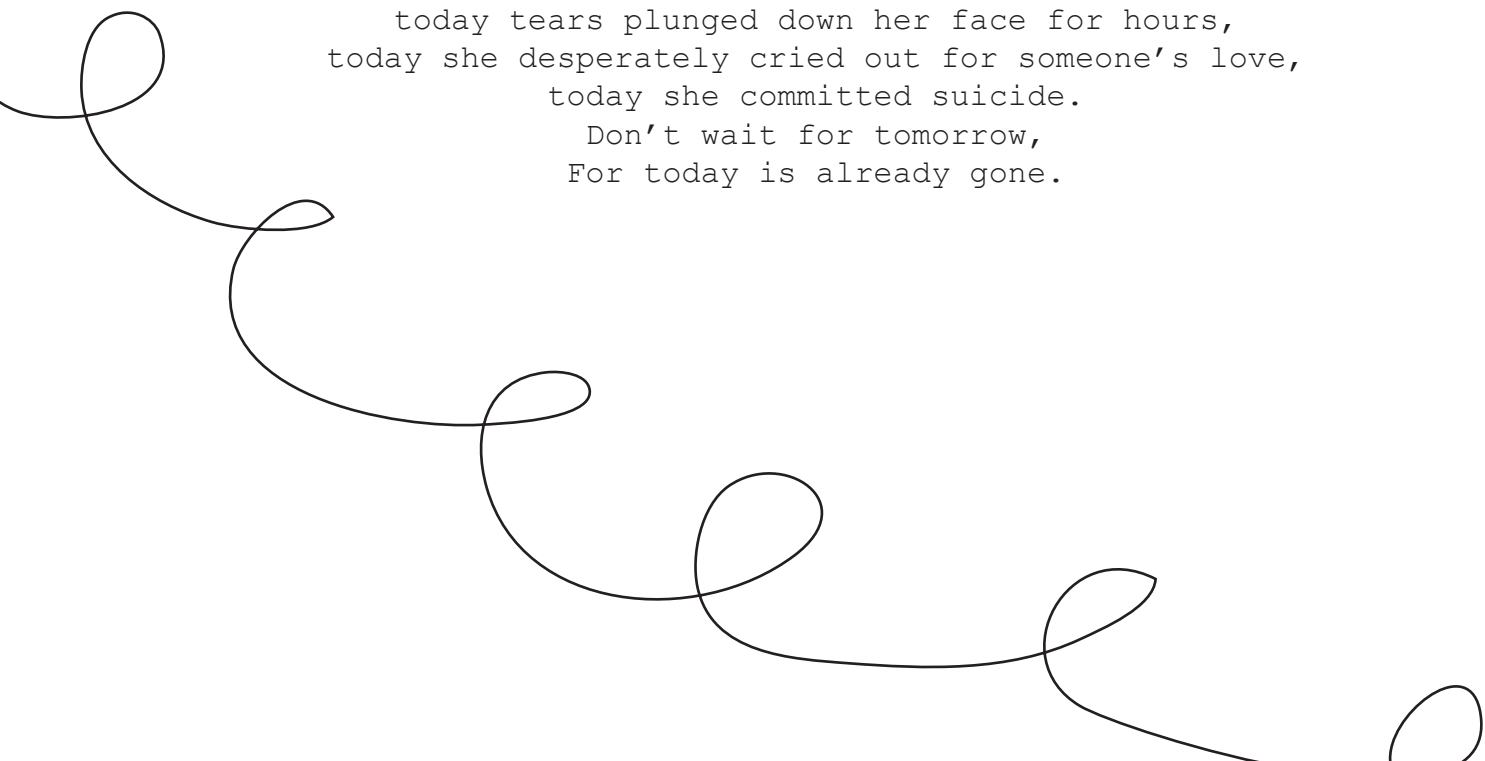
She always sat in the back of the room,
she was quiet, but had a vibrant laugh that filled the emptiness,
her smile was so contagious anyone would join unknowingly.
But I saw more to her than what met the eye.

I saw behind the curtains that were her hair
and glimmering blue eyes that hid her darkening mind.
She was fighting demons that were her own
as blackening shadows were slowly beginning to take over her beaming imagination,
the only thing she could comprehend was how numb she felt.

She felt as though her heart ceased to care and love,
she could jump off a five story building and feel none of the consequences,
yet she swallowed those feelings,
and hid them behind the curtains that were her hair.

Tomorrow I will be her friend,
tomorrow I will make her feel like she is not alone,
tomorrow I will stand up for her,
tomorrow I will stop the bullying.

Tomorrow, is too late.
Today she felt so alone,
today tears plunged down her face for hours,
today she desperately cried out for someone's love,
today she committed suicide.
Don't wait for tomorrow,
For today is already gone.



Messenger From Olmslau - William Southworth

Gently breaks forth the golden, subtle dawn,
And with it, the courteous come out quickly beside.
Carts laden, hay-brim, amble clumsily along,
And yeomen bend and draw to harvesttide.
Chill night camps on the lamplit borders,
As errand-bound footsteps wind fast away.
Swiftly falls sudden night on shut quarters,
As hammering hooves march into day.
Ignorant feet flee to some distant shore,
On heaving timbers suffering to stand.
Darkened fords ferry them from unseen war,
On deeps currents carried to further land.
Westward, wending wearily past the horizon,
Westward, under the young sun rising.

**Sunshine Flower** - Will Wilke

My name - Arianna Herron

Some say it's beautiful
Like a sunset on the mountains
Some say it's hard to say

Chosen by God is the name
Given to a girl that doesn't even
Know if there is one

Just a name that no one knows
Fit for a girl that doesn't know herself

Said so many ways, like a different language
said every time

I don't know what my name is anymore
It is a forgotten nursery rhyme
I don't call myself my name
I'm me.

A name holds people down like a vice
I want to be free as a bird
No longer having to call myself one word

But my name is free
I am me
I am my name

Liberty Oldroyd



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She nods sympathetically as one by one her friends lay out their suffering.

"I'll never know who my birth parents are."

"I feel exhausted all the time; I can't even remember what happiness feels like."

"My mom is constantly making passive aggressive comments about my weight...so I've stopped eating."

Her head bobs up and down like a jack in the box with a painted frown.

Their accusing voices are on constant repeat in her head, "You're so lucky. Your family loves you, you're skinny, you don't have any mental health problems. Life must be so easy for you."

She doesn't deserve sadness. How can she be afraid and anxious when her life is so perfect? She carries a frown, and she carries shame.

Traffic moves by like a well-oiled machine. The same old stores, same old people, same old sky. The only thing breaking the safe monotony of it all is a crumpled man sitting on the street corner, a ragged cardboard sign propped up by his feet. Too young to be so weary, beaten down, and down, and down.

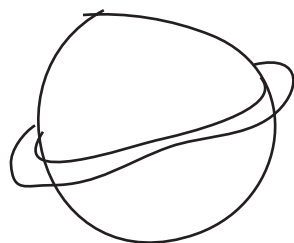
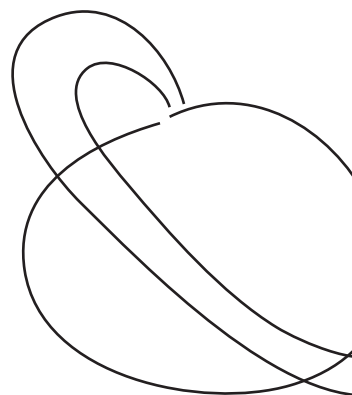
Cars continue to swish by without a glance towards the castaway of society, of humanity. A banged up, red jeep slows, disrupting the machine. The window rolls down and her small 12-year-old hand carrying a dollar emerges. The two hands meet for a brief moment—one small, soft, and dainty, and one filthy and rough—in an exchange that the world will soon forget. The jeep rolls away, back into the street's pattern. The girl's young eyes carry a deep, deep world of sadness. A vortex that threatens to suck everything in it's path away. The girl carries a smile for times like these, a red slash to cut through the misery.

Now, hiding behind the fluffy winter coat she carries and her earbuds that drown most out, she carries the weight of memory—only sixteen years old. The man on the street. The dog at the pound, looking at her with big hopeful brown eyes. The disgust in her mother's voice as she asks, "You never cry. Aren't you ever sad?" The late nights sobbing into her pillow before she remembers that she has a good life. She has no right to tears. She carries clean clothes, good schooling, white privilege, a healthy body, plenty of food, a bright young mind, an almost certainty of success. She carries quiet suffering. The injustice of the world, animal farms, abusive spouses and parents, careless destruction of the earth, she carries it all.

She laughs with her friends as they joke about being married to satan, a hatred for children, dull, black hearts with no hope of being saved. She carries a strong shield of judgement and darkness, and the appearance of carrying nothing.



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The peace talks closed for the night. Everyone shook hands, and I left the room. Today had been long, and I needed to sleep. I began walking down the white-stained and brightly-lit hallways of the embassy towards my assigned living quarters. The talks went well; the UNE delegates and Martian diplomats were coming to a successful compromise that would benefit both parties. I, personally, was honored to be part of such an event. After ten years of war between the United Nations of Earth and the rogue colonies of Mars, after countless facilities and settlements destroyed and millions killed, everyone, put simply, needed a break. Both sides' economy was struggling, with lack of food and transportation slowly decimating the lower classes of society.

I guess several decades ago I would have said, "lack of food, water, and transportation," but due to technological advances made by countless scientists and engineers, humanity created the ultimate condenser, a machine that could pull water from the air even in the most dry of environments, even on Mars. The invention of this condenser enabled the UNE to establish colonies throughout the solar system. And so they did. We had over half a billion leave Earth to colonize Mars alone. The largest colony was named Ares Station, and is currently the capital of Mars- the city I am in today. The UNE prospered, and the condenser was held as the invention of the century.

However, as time progressed, the colonists of Mars, or "Martians," as they liked to call themselves, became victims of their own mineral-rich world, and of the UNE. Once the abundance of material was discovered on Mars, the UNE decided to start mining operations on the planet immediately. Thousands of colonists were quickly employed and subjected to the stresses of a massive mining operation. The UNE decided not to regulate the mines in order to maximise the output of the mines, which led to terrible working conditions, and the miners were constantly exposed to the extremely turbulent storms of the Red Planet. The UNE always claimed to be an advocate for human rights, yet always turned a blind eye to the cries of help from the Martians, because their mines produced quite a lot of income.

After two decades of hard labor, the colonies of Mars grew tired of the poor working conditions, and rebelled. They quickly seized control of the mines, and used the material to start creating war exosuits, armed Mars buggies, and some spacecraft. Civilian ships were converted into surprisingly effective strike craft. Ares Station became an absolute fortress- in fact, it had more firepower than almost all UNE outposts and bases. The Martians wanted freedom, and were determined to get it.

So war began. Everyone soon became involved in the conflict, and the UNE started producing war equipment like mad. The war slowly escalated, with small skirmishes turning into huge operations that involved at least half a million soldiers on each side. Chaos and numerous battles ensued, with millions of lives lost. And ten years later, we are done. We are finally done. The United Nations of Earth and the Colonies both called for peace at nearly the same time, after almost all available resources, including the populations of their armies, had been expended. Each government sent ambassadors to the other, and set up embassies in every major city, Earth and Mars. I happened to be one of those ambassadors, sent from the UNE to the Ares Colony embassy to discuss and implement the final peace treaty.

I was still walking down the hall when I looked up from my contemplations just in time to see myself run into a tall, regal-looking woman with thin glasses. She looked about fifty years old. She stumbled back a little, but recovered quickly. I stepped back in embarrassment.

"Ambassador Lätt. What a surprise. You are clumsy as ever," she said, sneering. My cheeks grew red. Being a good diplomat does not prevent you from being uncoordinated. "I am so sorry, Prime Minister Branton! I was lost in my thoughts! I should have paid more attention."

The leader of Mars glared at me disapprovingly. "Now I can see why you chose to be a diplomat rather than a soldier during the war. You would have accidentally ran in front of your own gunners," she said under her breath.

Out of the number of retorts I could have aimed at this woman, I chose the optimistic, diplomatic approach. "After these talks, no one will need soldiers!" I cried enthusiastically. I smiled, partially because I was honestly happy about the peace treaty, partially because I did not want Branton to kick me.

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "You may leave, Ambassador."

"Yes, Prime Minister."

I gladly accepted the invitation to leave. I walked past Branton, grateful that I had made it out without her aura of disapproval turning me into a babbling idiot. She was a hard woman. A strong one. She had to be, to lead her people, the Martians, through ten years of war.

I kept walking toward my room, scolding myself to make sure I never did something like that again. Shoving a head of state, even if it was an accident, is a terrible thing to do, especially when negotiating a peace treaty. My diplomatic tutors would have been ashamed of me.

I passed numerous meeting rooms, offices, and living quarters until I arrived at my destination. My room was on the left side of the hallway, as the right side was a thick glass window overlooking the vast, red, Martian landscape. I entered my passcodes into the door lock, and it glowed green, showing that I had been authorized to enter. I entered into my room.

The room itself was quite modest; it had a simple queen-size bed on the left wall, with a Martian-style dresser on the right. To my immediate left there was a small walk-in closet which stored most of my apparel. There was a desk on the far wall, filled with my notes and papers, with a small window above it, looking down into the colony. There were children playing cheerfully in the streets, which would have never happened in the war. During the war, the Martians would have been training soldiers and running drills in those streets. I was delighted to see those boys and girls playing tag in the streets. They attested to the fact that the war was getting ready to leave, and peace had almost arrived.

I flopped down on my bed, and I closed my eyes for a moment, feeling relief at being able to rest. The moment was short; I had to get ready for bed so I could sleep and be refreshed for another day of work. I walked into my closet to take off my clothes, but noticed that some clothes were on the ground. I was pretty tidy. I did not usually throw clothes on the ground. I looked around the closet, closely inspecting every drawer and shelf. Many shirts were ruffled in their drawers, and several items were out of place. Someone had searched my room.

Without authorization.

I pulled out my personal communications unit to inform security about my room's state. I connected to the security station to ask for an investigation. "What is your need, Ambassador?" the security guard asked. I was about to reply, when I heard a shuffle and a faint whirrr come from behind me.

I didn't need to worry about my room, not yet.

I needed to worry about me.

I was tackled by a figure wearing all black. Instinctively, I tried to shake the figure off, but it was too powerful, probably using some sort of silent-running exosuit. I had no idea where this person came from, or where they were hiding before I noticed them. I tried to slam my fist into its gut, but pain shot up my arm as my knuckles cracked against the figure's metal battle armor. Whoever this was, they were well equipped. In retaliation to my attack, the figure delivered a swift punch to the side of my head.

Stars filled my vision, my body went limp, and I fell to the ground, almost blacking out. I then heard the security guard's voice again: "What is your need, Ambassador?" It took all of my remaining energy to lift the comm unit to my mouth.

"What is your need, Ambassador?"

"Help."

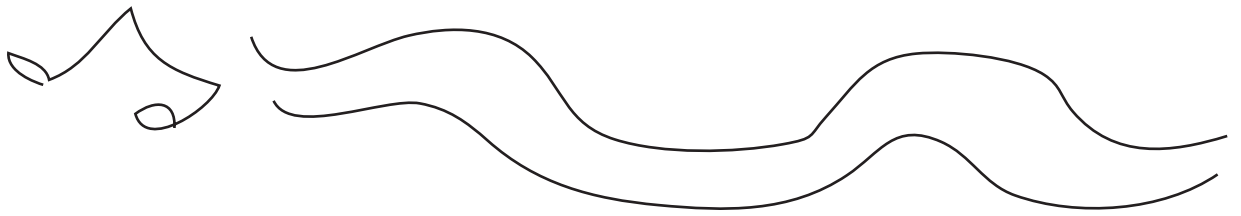
The figure noticed my comm unit, and, using its black boot, quickly crushed the device, along with my hand. I yelped in pain, and my injured hand finally drove me into unconsciousness.

Fall - Tricia Fulkerson

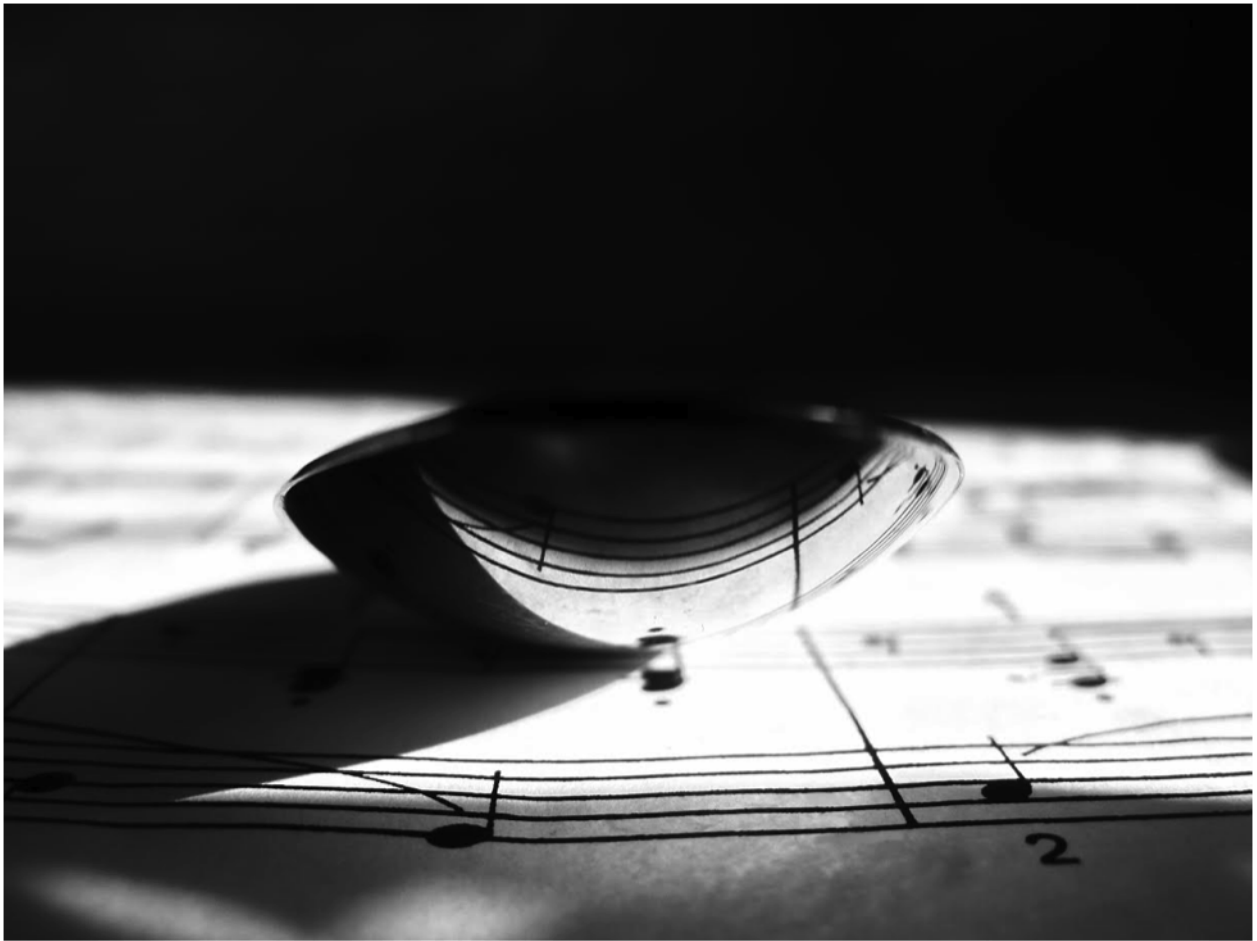
As I relax, I breathe in the cool, autumn air that tingles down my throat. It is late evening on a Thursday, and I see sun-colored and crimson trees swaying peacefully in the slow breeze. The wooden chair I sit in is lightly cushioned, and the warm, green tea in my chilled hands tastes slightly sweet. The small children next door play in a screaming and laughing frenzy. The sky is buried in navy blue, heavy clouds that threaten to release all of their held-in fury. The cars driving around seem melodic and blurry. My worn, black Converse-covered feet sway back and forth as peacefully as the wind. The bright, rust-colored porch still gives off a fresh paint smell that fills my nostrils. The cool, crisp breeze seeps into my clothes, making me shiver.

Someone catches my attention. She is a stunning figure that stands out like a sore thumb. Even though it is late fall and the weather is horrid, she seems to glow like the sun. Her hair, that is blowing slightly behind her, is long and is the color of fire. Her eyes are the color of polished emeralds that are beautifully framed by her long, full lashes. She is tall and slender, and she looks very daring. Her jacket is of jet-black leather, and her grey, faded jeans have holes in the knees. Her creamy, white skin is littered with faded freckles along her brushed, pink cheeks. When she smiles, her teeth seem perfectly sharp and white. Her presence gives me a sense of excitement and bewilderment. I have never seen someone so breathtakingly audacious.

**Bicycle** - Abby Stiffler



Notes



Abby Stiffler



My Lives Excerpt - Caitlyn Robinson

Prologue

The darkness beckons me. I can't remember feeling anything different from my current muddled emotions.

Wait... Yes I can.

But it was so long ago. A lifetime. A different life. My first life.

My first life was quiet. Peaceful, until the end. I didn't have the pesky mix of emotions I do now. They cloud my mind and heart too much for me to rely on them.

I lived on a farm in England. In the 1400s. A long way away from London, the nation's capital. I lived close to the ocean, and I could see it from my house. I lived with my mama because my father was in the King's service. We never saw him much anymore, and the last letter we received from him said that he had met a young Spanish girl, and that he was going to seek a divorce from Mama.

Mama was a seamstress for the county's lady and her daughters. Every month we would be called to her home, a marvelous mansion, and we would take their measurements. They would order the fabric and have it delivered to us so we could make their dresses. They always paid us nicely, and Mama and I never wanted for anything.

Once, there was a massive storm. The lady and her husband invited us and the whole town into their home for safety. When the storm passed, they helped the town rebuild all of the houses.

Of course all of this changed that day I saw him. The French boy. He had gold blonde hair and emerald green eyes like the leaves Mama and I sometimes played in. He was beautiful. I should have known then that he was bad news, but my young foolish heart ignored my mind. Two months after the boy arrived, the French invaded our town. They slaughtered everyone, starting with the lady and her family. Mama and I were last. I suppose he thought it would be some sort of mercy, but it wasn't. I was more afraid now, and my last sight was him grimacing in disgust at my mother's body hitting the ground, headless. Right after that, I was beheaded. At sixteen. My last thought was I will never trust a man again.

After my death, I was a seraphim for a couple hundred years. I fought in His holy wars against the demons. Over and over. I got tired of being called to war repeatedly.

I requested an audience with Him and asked him for a second life. He granted my request and told me to follow my heart. That was His last piece of advice to me before I was pushed into a new life.

In that life, I was a blacksmith's daughter in France in the 1700s. My father hated the royalty, especially the queen. Queen Marie Antoinette had scorned my father in his own shop. She called his work the work of a peasant and not someone on the royal workforce. She cast my father and me out, and she made it so no one would go to us for our work. We did however supply the Revolution with weapons.

My father told me not to leave the house, but I left anyway. I ran to the palace, and I accidentally ran into someone. A young boy. He had deep, copper hair and beautiful, brown eyes. I didn't realize it then, but it was the same boy who had been the cause of my first death.

He saw me, and he jumped back in shock. He was dressed in the colors of a noble, and we stared at each other for a moment or two. When that moment ended, he leaped for me, and grabbed my arm, pulling me to him. He spun me around, and I felt something on my neck. It was a knife.

The boy and I walked out to the balcony, and I saw my father on the edge of the garden outside the palace. He saw me and started running for me. That was my last sight as I felt the knife dig into my neck and spill my peasant blood all over the balcony.

I was in Heaven that time for a couple hundred years. I did what I do best, and that is fight the demons that plague the Earth and the humans. I stayed longer this time because I thought about my lives. As a seraphim, I thought about and remembered the pain I had encountered as a human. But after the first hundred years, I started thinking about the good things. How good things were before that stupid boy, put everything to hell.

When World War II started, I was sent by Him to fight on the side of the Allies. Against my will, I might add.

I want to make something clear: generally, souls have no gender, but their hosts do. But when a soul has had many lifetimes, the soul adopts the gender of the form that it inhabits most. I was mostly a girl. This is the only life where I have been a man. A boy actually. It was very strange. I didn't like it at all, and it was very uncomfortable.

I died in that life on Doomsday. I was one of the young men who jumped off the boats first. Though I didn't jump, I was pushed off. That resulted in my death. Stupid soul. I could tell that this was its first lifetime, and I knew that it wouldn't have anymore. I was born again on April 23 of 2001. I was a girl again, which was very nice. But I would discover in this life what it meant to be sad.

In every life I've had, I have received some sort of sadness. But it was never as bad as this one. And of course, it all started with that boy.

I met him when I was thirteen this time. And the damage he did on my soul this time was astronomical. I felt every lick of pain I had in former lives, except I couldn't die. I still didn't know what I was though. I was still a fairly innocent young girl.

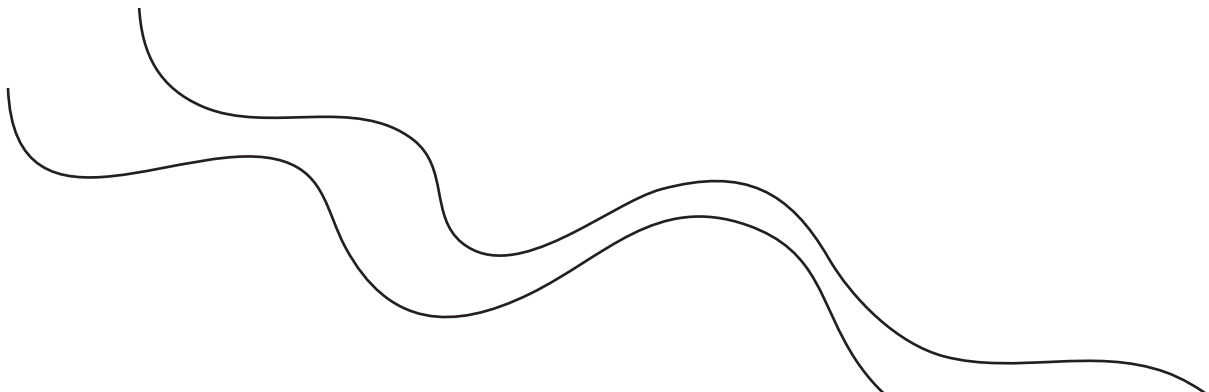
Souls that have had former lives or that were angels cannot commit suicide. We find that our resolve gives out just before we do the deed. But that didn't stop me from trying. I grew attracted to that boy. My soul was at war with my heart. My soul screamed that he was bad news, but my heart just wanted to be with him and wanted him to love me. I decided to listen to my soul, and retreat before I could get hurt more.

The darkness came after I made that decision. It filled my mind with all sorts of sorrow and anger. All of them turned into a muddy puddle of unstable emotions. So many negative thoughts. My judgment grew too clouded for anything to make sense anymore.

Almost everyone has become my enemy, and I have to train them out of my thoughts. I have to focus on my goal. Except, I don't even know what my goal is anymore.

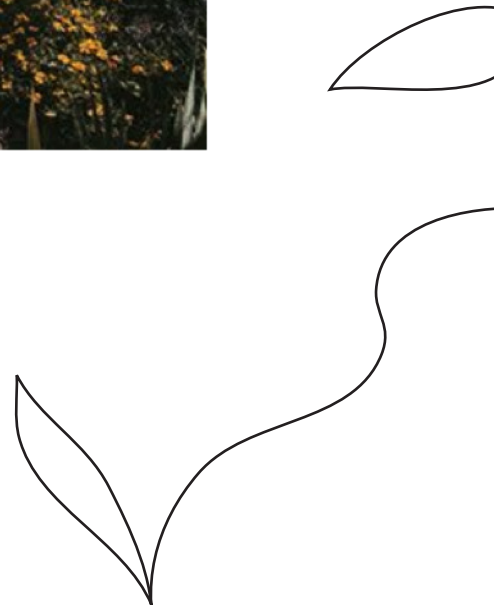


Slow Flow - Kaysen Spencer





Nature Walk - Carolina Pozzaglio



Invader

I know I'm not supposed to be here. I'm out of place, not wanted, a reject. Even though everyone wants me to just disappear from reality, I can't. This place has been my home for so long, and they only noticed me three weeks ago. Yes, I know I do not deserve to be here. I can even say that I probably deserve to die. There is absolutely no use for me to live except to erase and destroy the good things in the world. Before you are quick to judge, you should know my story. I haven't lived a long enough life. I have done just about everything you could think of, but it still isn't enough. It's never enough. I've seen Central Park freeze into a beautiful polar palace in the winter, watched the leaves dance to the hard ground in a brisk Montana autumn, and my toes have touched the rugged sand of the mighty Pacific Ocean. I have done all of these things, just not in the way you would imagine. I see these memories through a distant window, almost as if I myself didn't actually do these things. It's like watching a TV broadcast from various moments in your life. Maybe that's why I'm not allowed in this place—I don't quite fit in. I've spent all of my life almost wandering through this hopeless maze of life's both beautiful and bashful memories.

No specific one thing made me this way. I stayed in the same, comforting place I was born in, and I haven't moved from it my entire life. It is filled with an abundance of great memories. My favorite one occurred when I was a small child. I got lost and found myself in an ice cream shop surrounded by a countless number of people trying to cool off in the hottest summer I can remember. I found a few coins in the street and went up to the counter to buy a strawberry cone (my favorite) when my father picked me up and carried me outside where I met my brother and our family dog. That's all I remember from my childhood. The memories come back in waves, and I have to search in the deep corners of the brain to find them. I guess you could say that I was born to be different and for me, that's okay. Well, at least it was okay until they found me. They saw me for who I really was—a lost traveler.

What exactly did I do wrong? What could I possibly do that would cause so many people spending a tremendous amount of money just to kill me? Nothing. I did nothing to deserve this, but exist. It's like winning the lottery, but in my case, the lottery was death, and I won the ultimate prize. But what could they expect me to do, just sit around and wait for them to finally capture me and force me to cash in? No, they waited until I became too dangerous, until I was causing too much damage for them to ignore. It is so hard to be lost for so long and to finally be saved only to realize that your rescuers want you to perish. Imagine yourself in a burning building. A fireman pulls you out of the house, only to set your body on fire again. That is what I am feeling right now. I can't move. The space is getting tighter. They are getting closer. They are armed with knives and flames while all I have to defend myself is my hiding skills. Now I can see them. The knife is closer and closer to me. Suddenly, I can't breathe, and I realize that my life is soon coming to an end. In my final moments, I understood that I didn't know that I was the problem until the very end. Maybe that's the best way to live life. You don't know how you are going to die, but you enjoy every moment of life and do not worry about the end. I can hear them again. They are so close, I can feel their breaths, and see my heart pounding. My whole body goes into a state of daydream, pondering about my life and how I survived for so long. But like all dreams, you must wake up. For me, waking up was the last thing that ever happened to me.

"Alright," the surgeon said as he pulled off his mask and ferry boat scrub cap, "Jonathan is now tumor-free."

Everyone in that sterile, white, operating room was ecstatic. I, of course, was still out cold, but that's how the story was retold to me. As weird as it may sound, there is a moment when someone is regaining consciousness in which they just lay and think about their journey so far. For me, I had my first moments without a tumor all to myself. Yes, I should be sharing this time with my family, but I just needed a minute to gather my thoughts and adjust to the reality that I could now have a normal life. No more regular hospital visits, no more endless pills that I had to swallow day and night, and best of all, there wasn't a foreign invader taking over my brain.

I open my groggy eyes to my parents jumping with joy. My mom is crying while she

hugs me, and my dad is holding my hand so tight I think it might fall off (good thing we're in a hospital). A nurse dances into my room and asks me to say a few words to make sure that I still have brain function.

"How are you Jonathan?" my surgeon asks with the biggest grin on his soft face. I am fully awake at this point, and I joke, "Well, I don't have a brain tumor now, do I?" Everyone is so overwhelmed. My big brother strides into the room with our old golden retriever, Wellis. Since I could finally eat, I had a ginormous bowl of ice cream with cherries on top. This is surprising for my mom, who is always the dinner first and dessert last advocate. The whole neuro floor held a party that night and my parents ordered enough cake for everyone to have a slice. Back in my room, after what seemed like hours of partying, I lay in the hospital bed with my mom gently stroking my dark, oak hair. I looked out the window, just gazing at the stars and being grateful that I no longer have a pounding pain in my head. My eyes were filled with sleep, and just before I allowed myself to drift off into the endless world of sleep, I looked at my mom and whispered, "During my surgery, I had the strangest dream..."



The Color Red

Emma Brandt



Purple - Megan Bonde

The Smiling Jellyfish

I wake up every morning to see my smiling jellyfish. At first I was concerned as to why he had come to my house uninvited, but now I can see the invitation was on the floor the whole time. At first he was just a small, orange bud on my living room floor. He was merely minding his own business when my foolish child stuck her hand into his mouth. My smiling jellyfish was quite happy with that until I very rudely tried to pull him out of the ground. However, his tentacles were lodged deep into the floor, preventing my brash actions from succeeding. My foolish child's hand hurt after that, or so she said. My smiling jellyfish would never lie to me. She wept and wept tears of lies on the way to the hospital. "My hand hurts! My arm hurts," she said, until finally the kind man with the needle shut her up. My smiling jellyfish tells me it serves her right. My smiling jellyfish bit me too, but now, it only tickles. I don't see anything wrong with a little tickle now and then. But for some strange reason, I again tried to pull out the kind and patient smiling jellyfish after leaving my fool of a daughter at the hospital with my wife.

I hacked and sawed at him, but the smiling jellyfish did not budge. Then the smiling jellyfish gave me a peck on the cheek. I understood then! It was meaningless to hurt such a kind smiling jellyfish; he just wanted my help. At first it hurt, then it tickled, and I soon understood that the dog would have to go. My smiling jellyfish was delighted when I gave the dog on over. My smiling jellyfish made the most delightful noise as he slowly hid the dog away in his mouth.

But how selfish it would be of me to only give my smiling jellyfish one dog? My wife came home that night, and I quickly put her to sleep with a bat. It would be such a good surprise for her when she woke up in his warm embrace. However, she didn't fit at first, so I had to put her in bit by bit. The ax was really heavy, but encouragement from the smiling jellyfish kept me going. I still can't wait for her to wake up and see my smiling jellyfish's delightful innards.

The next couple hours my, smiling jellyfish grew in size as I felt our relationship grow, spreading across the floorboards and giving me more and more kisses. They stung at first like an electric zap, but now I can't help but giggle because my skin is just so tickly. And sometimes I can't help but cry. I don't know why, because despite the wonderful company of the smiling jellyfish, the tears just leak out of my eyes like something is wrong or missing.

My daughter still has not come home. I'm not sure why. Maybe she's just jealous of my relationship with the smiling jellyfish... In any case, I'm excited. Soon we will be one, for tonight is the night I crawl into his mouth. I can't wait. My smiling jellyfish won't be disappointed.

He's hungered for so long, he tells me, so long for a friend like me. He tells me soon we will make even more friends. From a distant country beyond Jupiter, he tells me there we will find our friends, coming as quickly as they can, surfing across the stars. Now we need only wait, for he tells me soon they will land, and everyone won't be able to help but make friends and share in the richness and kind, fulfilling nature of this sort of relationship: this sort of relationship between me and my smiling jellyfish.



Shoes

I sat on the rooftop undoing my shoes, I was planning on jumping off the building just like so many other kids had. The building was an old schoolhouse where the roof had a fence built around the edges, so the children and faculty were safe if they were to go up there, but it had been years since the fence was in good condition. Rusted and torn by time, the fence was now just small pieces of scrap metal that had broken and worn away. Children like me had come from all over this ash-covered town to free themselves from the sorrow and weight life had given them, they took off their shoes at the edge of the rooftop, set them neatly down in rows against the edge as though they were entering a room with a floor so clean that the soles of their shoes would stain it for life, and stepped off the roof, never to come back. Countless shoes, dress shoes, pumps, uggs, heels, sneakers and boots. It didn't matter what walk of life you came from, but you came here to stop walking. I had slipped out of my shoes and approached the end when I had finally noticed a figure sitting on the ledge: A boy my age with his hair standing on edge.

"What are you doing here instead of me?" I asked him, pulling him away from the ledge, and he replied whimsically "oh, you've probably heard it all before..." and he told me his story, a story about how he met a girl and loved her with all his heart, and tried his best to get her to reciprocate his feelings, he asked her on dates over and over, and they were finally together. They were the happiest moments of his life, he really thought she might be the one, until one moment, she just quit on him, and left. His heart was broken, so he came here to end it all, with his shoes against the edge.

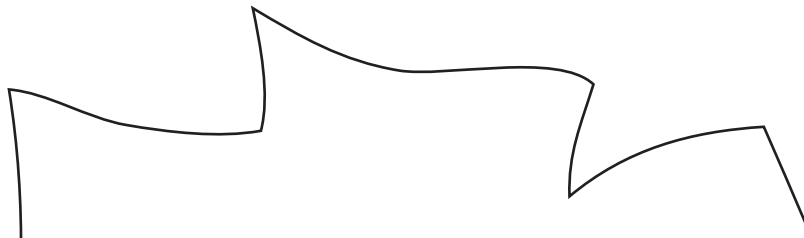
"Well, why do you think that's a good reason?" I said with a glare, "you think that some girl is worth killing yourself over? There are millions of girls in the world, don't center your universe around one, center your universe around yourself." The boy looked up at me, tears filling his eyes gently as he stood up and replied "you're right." and as he began to walk away, I swore I saw a pair of shoes missing from the line that so neatly traced the edge. I went home that night, to sleep, to dream, and to regain my conviction to go back to the old schoolhouse the next day.

I came back the next day only to find another boy sitting on the ledge as I took my shoes off, I threw them to the side and pulled the boy off the ledge in frustration and asked him, as I had done yesterday "What are you doing here instead of me?" And the boy, holding a pair of weighty boots looked at me with piercing eyes and said "well, you've probably heard it all before..." and told me his story just as the last one had done. He told me about how people had never noticed him, how he had no friends and he had never fit in with anyone around him, so he had come to the ledge, and hopefully he'd find a friend when he stepped off it.

"That's not a good reason to jump off this ledge!" I yelled "you don't have to fit in or be loved by everyone! There's always someone in the world who's noticed that you're there. And even then there's always dinner waiting on the table for you when you get home!" and he replied, laughing and crying. "You're right! I'm hungry, so I guess I better go home to my family!" and he walked away laughing, and a pair of weighty boots went missing from the line of shoes. I went home that day, to build up courage to finally leap off the ledge.

When I walked up the stairs to the roof the next day I saw another boy standing and staring at the sky, he was ready to jump, his shoes put in the line, and in that moment I had screamed something that I didn't believe "Hey! Don't do it please!" and he replied with a smile that leaked out his sorrow "I just want to stop the scars that grow, every time that I go home. I'm not beaten or battered, but I don't want to live like I do. So I came up here instead" I couldn't come up with the words in time and he smiled at me again with a pitiful expression I couldn't describe. "I guess today's just not for me" and he leapt off the edge as though he were to fly. I went home crying that night, and came back the next morning knowing the tears had burned into my skin.

I walked up the stairs to find nobody there, I unlaced my weighty boots, stared at the sky with my piercing eyes, and with my hair standing on edge, I went and leaped right off the ledge.





Contrast - Madi Kelley

Father

The pill, the potion, that magic brew
Processed and packaged for consumption of an adult mind
Take a sip slowly as thoughts
Begin to slip, stutter.
Vision slows, cognitive is no longer
In control
The mind
The brew
Mixing in an intimate embrace
A concoction of cloudy...
Sip away, blend your thoughts... until
Everything is blissfully distraught
Sit back, and watch the world go by
Slip into a slumber, sip by
Sip
Now upright, eyes insight. Pain makes for sharp thoughts.
Maybe you could have been apart if you simply stopped.

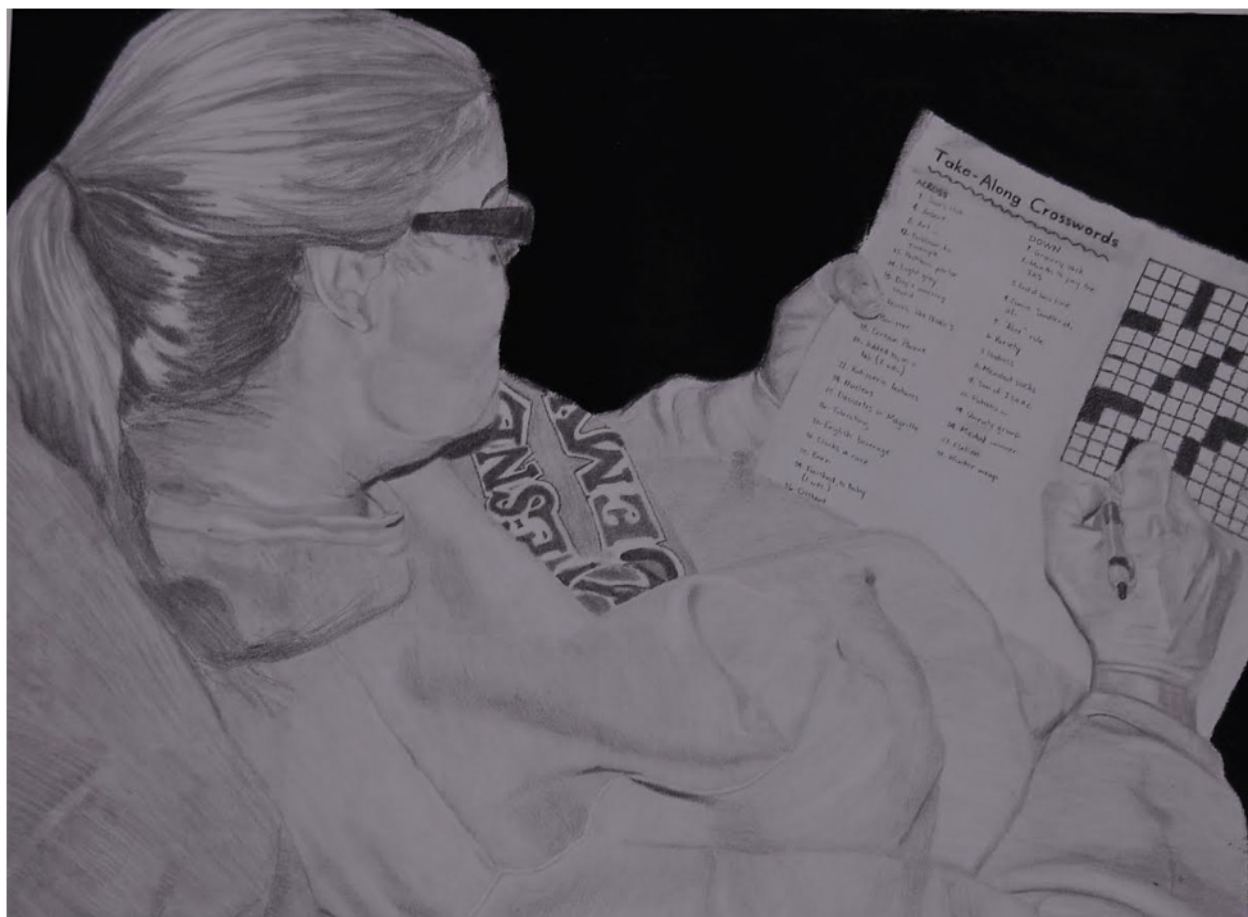
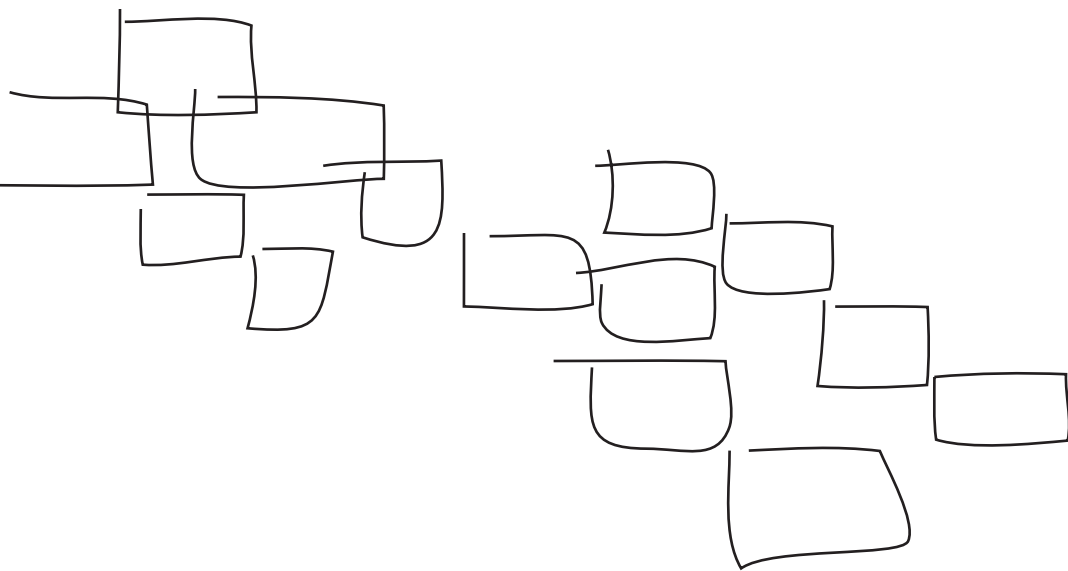


Greenery - Mikaela Latka

Robber

A sweet little bird, a song bird
A tempered man, an old man
Singing its songs, the song bird sings in its tree
Rocking on his porch, old man complaining of the song
bird singing
The song bird sings its tune of glee or pity
It sings of love and hate
The song bird sings its songs
Winds come whistling, storms come thundering, blowing
down the song birds tree
The bird does no longer sing, its music faded
Old man, tempered old man that was complaining
Now joyful and celebrating
The porch is quiet, old man can sleep
But something is missing
The bird, songbird, the songbird singing

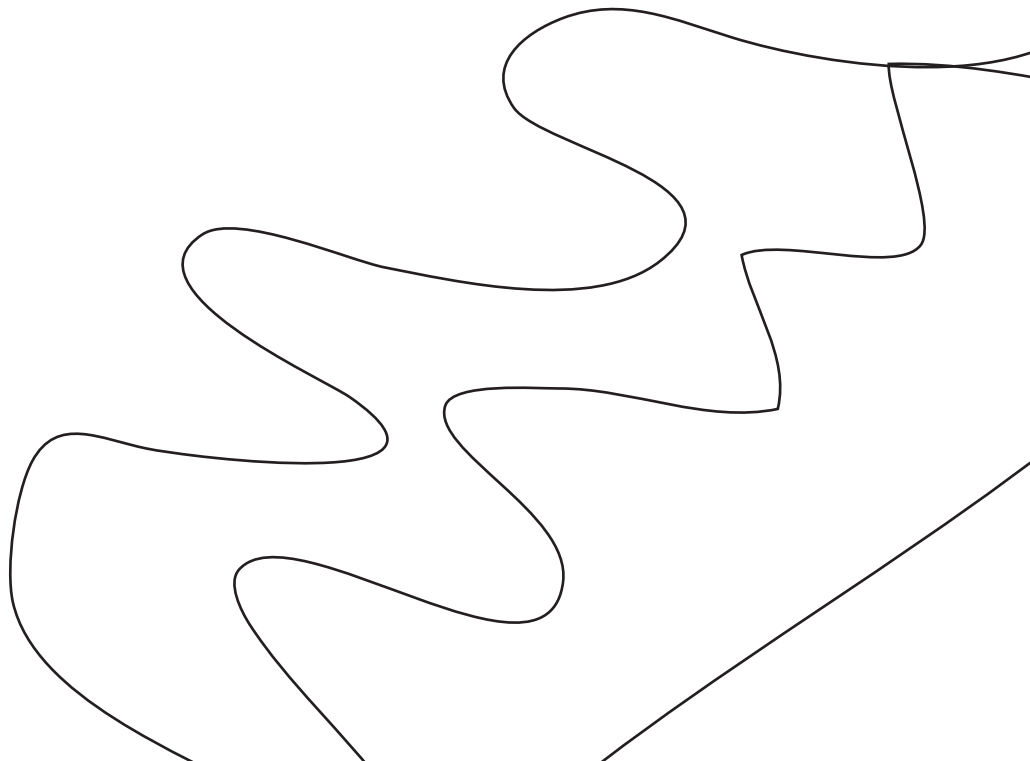
**Untitled** - Clara McRae



Jamie Seney



Nephew - Sarah Thomas





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* Madi Kelly	20, 47, 24
* Mariah Thomas	4-6
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Sarah Thomas	51
Seely Hoffman	3
Terry Wilbanks	46
Thomas Nelson	35-36
Tricia Fulkerson	37
Tyler Cummings	21
Will Wilke	31

