

Calliope

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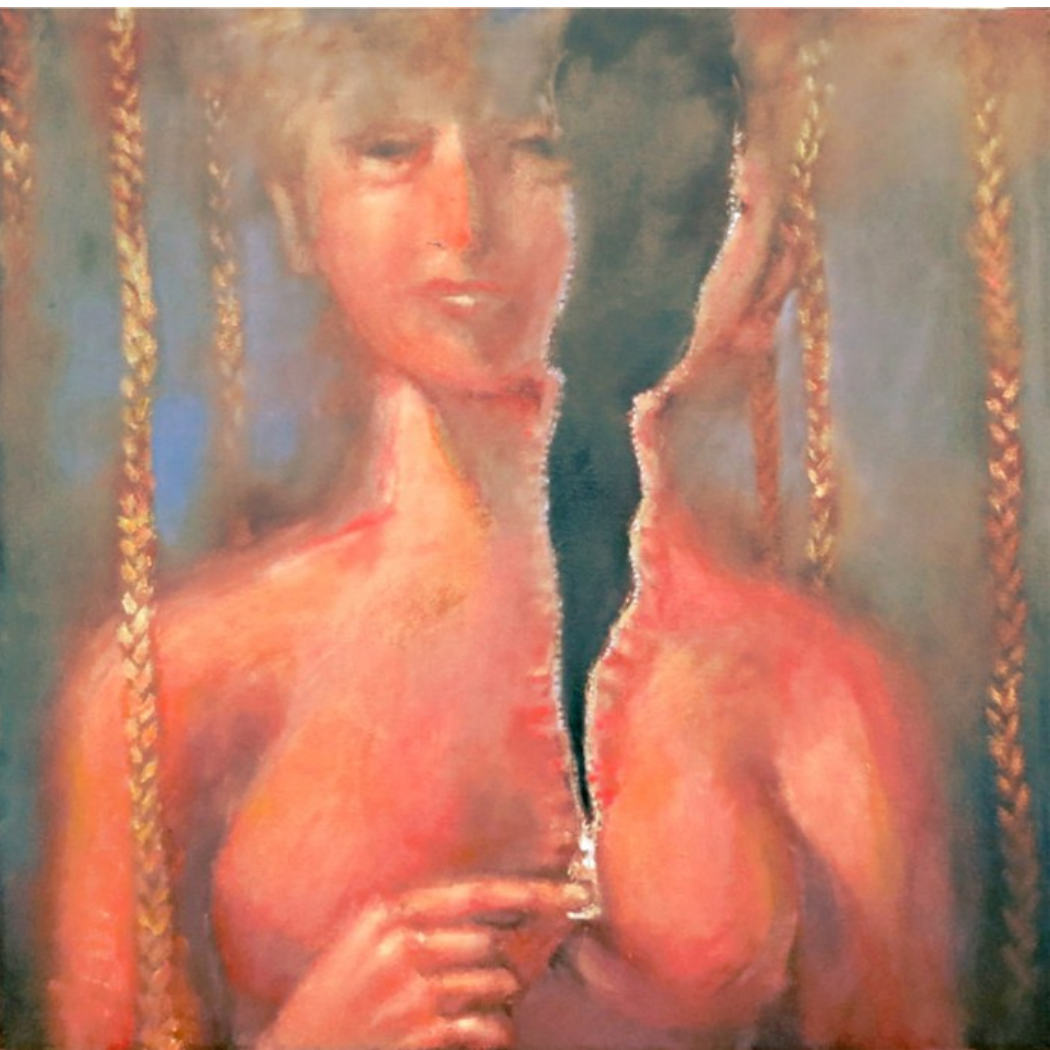
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Alli Dorneo (V)

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Sydney Li (VI)

dysmorphia

By Erica Cheung (V)

the search for skinny waistlines
is like trying to evaporate
your ribcage into
the atmosphere.

O+

By Mahmoud Aliamer (VI)

The ruddy rose stem
clamped in between my fingertips.
The petals' red flows to the place where my
fingers meet,
and O+ drips off my elbow.



Brian Hochberger (VI)

Admission

By Ashley Zhou (VI)

Gracey, Gracey, Gracey – so admirable and kind and *respected*. Revered. You thought it was your place to bring that first form in, a form we could see you were anxious to fill out before us, before even your sister because you didn't think she was smart enough to go there.

You were wrong on both accounts. I knew. It was my position to saunter in with the file of applications, in my manila envelope. You should have been peering over my shoulder as I sifted through my essays and finally threw the stack down on the table for you to pore over like it held the location of the Holy Grail. Perhaps it was a treasure of sorts, lying there so magnificently white against the faded grains of the cafeteria table; after all, hadn't our mothers told us that "education was the best legacy they could give us?" Hadn't they promised to cut our inheritance money by at least one quarter in order to pay for school expenses? Your sister was the rightful one to stand on the valedictorian's podium. Not that you did. No, you were too busy battling off Karen to notice me, slipping by quietly behind your back and mounting the platform to look upon everyone and have them honor me. To see the light that bounced off the stage lights and reflected in their eyes, eyes so full of wonder and amazement. Your sister knew the feeling. She knew the tingle of power that ran up her fingers when everyone applauded, heard sighs the teachers emitted as she finished her speech, felt the graduating class clapping and clapping, the vibrations tunneling to the soles of her feet. She was

that infallible first place, the grand shadow you always lived in. She was a golden statue. You never stood a chance.

Did you know Cornell uses the font Myriad Condensed Web for their heading? They do. And you would have known, too, had you not brought in your application first. Moravian. Pathetic.

Yet we scoured those pages, touching them until the corners curled up from the sweat of our fingers. Lily asked me, "What do you think of Wellesley?" Odd – she always did like boys a little too much to be able to concentrate on the important things. "An all-girl school," Karen said, "would get boring after a while."

"How many lesbians do you suppose are there?" Grace grinned wickedly.

What a *faux pas*. "Grace," I admonished, "we're still in school."

"Like the teachers would care." Her smile didn't waver. "They adore us."

And the question of distance surfaced. Malleable Lily wanted to be far away from home to achieve independence, as did Karen, who wanted to *see the world*. Her postcards cluttered our mailboxes in the summer – Bermuda, Japan, Zimbabwe – I threw them all out. And pretended not to see the obvious hurt on her face when I told her. Far away and warm climates were nice but I preferred not to stray too far – all the Ivy Leagues were on the east coast anyway – in order to stay rooted to my family. A family with important connections and relatives at corporations that offered prestigious internships.

Thinking about the future already. That's what we said in third and fourth grade when we didn't even know of each other's existence. And that's what we said in sev-

enth grade when the rungs of the ladder were placed, super-glued, and filed down so that anyone could lose their grip so easily. We smiled at our new friends and thought of how we were going to demolish their quarter's averages. X , y and z ; if x equals my friends and y is the number of hours I waste their time chatting about frivolous things, find z . Figure out the days I have to count before they discover that they *actually* have to study.

"Growing up too fast, too fast," our mothers said.

And also told us to grow up faster.

It wasn't just our game – it was theirs too. They were all immigrants, all people who had grown up with Survival of the Fittest as their Qur'an and moved to find a more suitable nest to raise their chicks. Never thought they'd have so much competition for territory; in their homeland, everyone lived off the maggots that grew underneath their fingernails. They came in different ways and liked to tell of the hardships they had to endure in order to cross into a safer country, then here, to America. The broiling heat as they traveled along the equator, up filthy Mexico – where those Mayans had lived – and evaded the eyes of the border patrol. When we were younger, all of us – all four families – packed our bags and went on a road trip to the mountains. A fire in the middle of tents, our mothers' screeching voices telling us to appreciate, to worship them. In four days I gained the complete trust of every single adult. "See Audrey, she's such a good child – she takes good care of her parents, so young, so much talent, so much opportunity." They told me everything. Their ancestors were the Incas, dominators of the Americas at one point and that it was always their dream: to have someone in the family return that honor to their country. Centuries and centuries of it,

they explained, breeding to attain only the purest Peruvian blood and they still had the primitive greed to gain power and status over others. We weren't the only gifted ones; they had been special in their homes as well. A first place for arithmetic in the neighborhood here, articles printed in the newspaper there. Gold trophies everywhere, dug up by the father-miners in the community to make just for them. Then they met each other and had to be the best mother as well. But motherhood turned on them when summer flew into fall, and they pecked each other's eyes out. And then they pecked at their weary nestlings, pecked at them too.

They weren't songbirds and nightingales, they were vultures who finally got to Lily's drying carcass. Lily liked to think she was strong. I saw the way she walked with her unimpressive chest puffed and her hips swaying, her furtive glances to check if anyone was looking. She liked to use big words that weren't in our SAT vocabulary books and waste afternoons reading about castles in the air, sphinxes, happily-ever-afters. Grace read about the 1917 Russian Revolution. Karen read the science textbook. And then Lily – Lily watching interviews of her favorite bands instead of writing her essays. I don't remember how she got to be in our circle. Her body slumped after every test returned; the teacher always threw a glance at her paper, wondering why her grades were dropping if she hung out with *us*.

Lily was my best friend.

Friends forever since the beginning of seventh grade, from the start of the first year we knew each other. She trusted me quickly; a new school, new faces, relieved to meet a friendly body to welcome her. We talked about everything: boys, school, grades, boys. Grades. Always trying to figure out where we stood compared to the rest of the

nation's children, taking IQ tests that were meant for adults. Our scores were atrocious but she was the only one who knew. Boys were a conflicting topic— she loved them, I really didn't care. She had dated a peevish boy earlier in the year; Karen called them the perfect contrast. Perpetually laid back and the most worrisome child we had ever seen. Lily did the boy more good than he did her. She calmed him down a bit. Just enough to see Lily was a waste of time and leave her. I saw him holding hands with a British foreign exchange student the next week. "Hey Lils," I IMed her, "u dated a fruit."

"Rly? He did always stare at that kid with the glasses a lot."

Wrong person, I thought. "Ya." And then signed off, and studied for a few hours. Lily's mother called me a machine, in praise, of course. Asked me if I ever slept. Wondered why I never acquired rings under my eyes like everyone else did. And she wanted to know if Lily was all right. Lily was fine – better than she'd ever be again.

But she got a C- on her math test and although she wouldn't tell me it at first, her mother called me and asked why on earth this would happen. I asked Lily. "I had a loud, aggravating song stuck in my head the entire test," she said. Her mother sent her to my house to study together before the next test. Study-therapy, not retail-therapy. Lily bounced in and instead of working, spun me a story about a delightful little spider. The spider had built a web under a myriad of criss-crossing webs that belonged to other spiders. After every catch the others made, the carcass of the insect – the filth – would drop onto the little spider's web. The waste piled and piled up so that the web was overwhelmed with weight and collapsed. "Oh," she added,

“the webs were atop a fast-moving river. And there were jagged rocks.”

I asked, “What happened next?”

She said, “It died.”

She was clawing upwards at the time, trying to shake the unmovable rungs of the ladder. She wanted to perfect everything: her papers, her handwriting, her smile. Her face. Too fat, too round, she complained to me. “When I make enough money, I’ll get a face transplant.” I nodded. “Is that your number-one goal?” Lily said it was. Lily said she would be best at everything, would peel off a blue ribbon and stick it on her chest. She burned through the ranks: fourth to third, second but never first. That position had already been filled. I asked about her grades after we received our midterms back; I had already calculated my average in my head. She stared at me and wrinkled her nose. “Better luck next time,” I said.

“Since when is there a next time?”

And she kept slipping to the edge, never enough to fall off a rung entirely, but enough to scare her into spending another all-nighter with a six-pack of coke and handfuls of cereal. Karen had to remind her about a science test on molecular bonding. She fell asleep during the test and wouldn’t wake up. Then the principal noticed how thin she was getting to be – so thin, fading into air. The science teacher didn’t let her retake the test. Her mother called me again but I unplugged the phone after a while. No more help for you, Lily. In her cock fight, she had a blind left eye and a freshly injured leg. Her parents circled high overhead. The fight would not be fair. Still, she gambled her last eye and attacked furiously. Her grades soared. Her parents were thrilled. But I didn’t say this game was even. She came

into school with bags under her eyes and crescent moons dug into her face, like fingernails. I flaunted my perfect grades in front of her, asking why hers were fluctuating so dramatically. I sat on the opposite side of the classroom on testing days. I stopped smiling in front of her and she stopped smiling. A fight is never easy with an impossible opponent. That opponent was me. Lily took the chance. Then she had nothing.

Ring around the rosy... I remember when we held hands and spun in tight circles. When we promised we would always be friends. We spun and scratched each other's wrists raw to twirl faster. *A pocket full of posy...* or a pocket full of good deeds we could pull out when negotiating with a stubborn teacher. It's not our fault they were incompetent. It's not our fault they favored us over the pool of average students. *Ashes, ashes...* unlike us, our lives; we never dimmed, never faded. We plodded along and kept on trudging until someone got trapped in the mud. And then we left them. Ashes, ashes of each other's cremated bodies that fell like snow and we caught with our tongues. *We all fall down!*

Fall down, Lily.

We three attended her funeral with elegance. We wore matching black dresses – dresses we had bought together in the ninth grade. Lily wore the other in her casket of ash. Her parents had decided on oak, strong and sturdy, but I cried out that no, no, she should have only the best. Only the finest for our Lily. Only the wood that had a name that described how she and her work charred to crisp, into delicate ashes fluttering in the wind. Her parents wouldn't have her cremated so I convinced them to give their daughter something better than she really deserved. What kind of

child would demand so much attention even after death? The parents listened to me, naturally, and had the casket lined with the most expensive silk from India. Grace brought her a book – *Raise the Red Lantern* – to take to heaven. Karen placed a fountain pen beside her body. “For our writer,” she said. I touched two fingers to my lips, then to Lily's forehead. I didn't bring an item. When Karen and Grace went to console the deceased's parents, I looked at her face again. Her cold, white, dead face, spruced up as if she were attending a party. You'd never think she was the type to hang herself, except for the bruises the undertakers couldn't hide under all that makeup. Lily never wore makeup; she was too arrogant even to disguise her blemishes. Better just to rid of them entirely. The mourners cried because when they looked at her, they saw memories. When I looked, her remains were pockmarked with mistakes.

The school buzzed with the news of her death. Psychiatrists began to flit around like they owned the hallways. Suddenly everyone had a symptom of impending suicide. Our principal was so afraid of a lawsuit he forgot to pay attention to his students. “She seemed like such a nice girl,” everyone said. Such a nice girl, even when she was buried six feet under and couldn't smile or walk or talk or breathe. I wanted to scream at them. *Well, what did you expect?*

She wasn't the last to go. I made sure of that. Gracey was stronger. After watching Lily get lowered into the earth, though, she left us too. We saw her in the halls still, by her locker, in the cafeteria at the table where she had thrown down the first form. Karen and I brushed past her every day. Karen even called “hi!” to her, but she didn't call “hi” back. Her sister didn't come home from college one

weekend. Their mother called and told me she had an exam approaching but they were embarrassed. My mother asked why I never went over to Grace's anymore. I didn't answer her. That silence I had borrowed from Grace herself, now that all she did was shuffle along in the corridors, trailing a finger along the wall. She always had to be touching something. Once she streaked through wet paint and when she finally noticed, could only stare blankly at her blue fingertips as if unable to decide what to do with them. A shrink gently led her to the nearest bathroom, then observed warily as Grace fiddled with the faucets. Her mother said, "Grace, what's wrong with you?" Grace stood there silently. Her mother slapped her arm and she didn't flinch. Then shook her shoulder. Then bent Grace's arm in the most awkward position and curled her fingers into a tight fist. Grace just stood there for hours, never moving. Her mom called me after three, not knowing what to do. "I don't want her to be Lily," she cried. "What's happening to you girls?"

Don't think you're invincible, Karen. Do as I do: learn from other peoples' mistakes. If you've been paying attention to Lily and Grace as intently as you focus in class, there's a lot to learn. I hope you're ready, because you're next.

Do you want to know a secret, Grace? I suppose I could tell you, since you're incapable of speaking. Did your psychiatrist say that was permanent?

I killed Lily.

I made you catatonic.

My, my, isn't this game *fun*? If you hadn't lost your mind, you could run off and warn Karen that the big, scary Audrey-monster was coming to get her. Scamper to Karen

like she was your mommy and tell her that I was scaring you again, to make me stop. Have you ever known anyone who could tell me what to do? It's really too bad our parents aren't playing too. Then their wings would be caught in my crosshairs as well.

You know, I'm quite disappointed that you aren't in the game anymore, Grace. You were so lovely sometimes – you had your brilliant moments here and there, scattered about. Karen isn't so clever, not in the way you were. All she does is exhume information from that retentive mind of hers and plug it into the situation. No creativity at all. Her ideas are borrowed, yours were original.

It's such a shame none of those Ivy Leagues want a girl who can barely drag herself to perform the most primal functions. I don't remember, can you even still *move*? Last time I hung up the phone on your mom, she was complaining of how you were stiff as a corpse on your bed. Remember when we used to fight over which college we would attend? Do you know what happens now? A Harvard and a Yale are out there, pulling every string they can to get me. To have me choose them instead of the other, to have Audrey go to them and carry with her prestige. They're fighting for me.

Let me tell you a story about a little spider. This undeveloped insect had enough idiocy to build its web over a shallow creek. One day, a foot was wading through the creek and it collapsed the entire web, spider and all, into the water.

Can you guess what happens next?



Yandley Almonte (IV)

The Man and the Mountain

By Steven Sun (VI)

He was a blessed and cursed man.

One day, as trophies were being handed out to
the winners at Carnegie Hall, he stepped
out.

One day, as praise was given to the Olympians,
he flew away.

One day, as companions touched the sky and
crashed to the earth, he watched, from three
-fourths up the mountain.

He stretched his arms to take flight once, but was
stopped.

By the weakness of his faith.

By the shallowness of his knowledge.

By the cracks in his heart.

And so, as that man, chained just below the peak,
stared at the eagles,

And the larks, And the falcons, And the doves,

He choked. Gagged. Fell.

And though he rose each time – enough to see
those glistening wings touch the sun,

With each fall, his chains grew heavier.

His body grew weaker.

Until, withered and gray, he placed his hand on
the tip of the mountain.

Pushed off. Flying. Breathing – Soaring – Living
As God, smirking, whispered in his ear:
So far so good.
So far so good.
So far so good.



Sydney Li (VI)

The Monster Within

By Stacey Chen (V)

I think I understand why adults stop being afraid
of the monsters underneath our beds,
Why kids are so terrified when they are young,
too scared to go to bed at night, and waking
up in the middle of the night,
To seek comfort with their parents or older sib-
lings,
Afraid of the monsters in the closet, the monsters
underneath the bed, the big bad wolf who
will eat children,
And why as we grow up, we lose this fear, almost
completely.
Because as we grow up, we are faced with more
fears, fears that are real, fears we can touch
and feel and see,
Nightmares that come to life and are a million
times scarier than any trivial hairy monster
with three heads and long claws under-
neath our beds.
Fear of responsibility, fear of losing someone, fear
of hurting someone, fear of all the burdens
of life and adulthood.

And all our nightmares seem to come true, so that they not only plague us in our most vulnerable state, but in the daytime when we are wide awake.

And there's no escape.

No waking up.

So that fathers at night are afraid of not being able to support their families, not being able to find a new job, not being able to give his daughter the doll she wanted for Christmas and a real childhood, afraid and terrified that he can't even bring her food to the table every day.

So that mothers at night are afraid of their children, their own flesh and blood being abducted on their way walking to school, scared to death that their babies will never have a chance to grow up, to have a nice childhood, or to even live.

So that growing teens at night are so afraid of making mistakes.

Trying to overcome the challenges in life, in succumbing to the peer pressure of sex, drugs and alcohol, or maybe the constant pressure of doing well in school and having a successful future, of trying to please just about everyone but themselves, and most of all- the fear of pain.

Hurt and targeted in so many ways, bullied from best friends talking behind their backs and spilling all their secrets, to people they've never talked to in school who will spread rumors that aren't the slightest bit true, to complete strangers online who will target and torture them until the day that they feel like they can't take it anymore, and the only way out is to slit their wrists or starve themselves.

Or even worse that they feel like they have to end their lives with the bottle of pills in mom's cupboard, or to drive dad's car into a tree on- to their death.

Their feelings—indescribably real and tangible—are certainly not comparable to the trifling monsters underneath their beds.

It's not that we lose the fear and forget the nightmare, but rather the nightmare comes to life.

And they're much scarier than what we were ever
scared of.

And it haunts us, in ways we couldn't possibly im-
agine.

The monster within mercilessly threatens to
break out and overcome us- every day, every
waking, breathing moment.

It slowly becomes a part of us.

We **are** the monsters underneath our beds.

And that, that is why "grown ups" are truly the
scared ones. The kids who go to sleep at
night, with terrible nightmares that are
still **only in dreams** – they are actually the
lucky ones.



Andrew Supron (V)

Guilt

By Isabel Kim (V)

Take it as a whisper, a shot in the dark,
hits the jugular vein down to your heart,
a curled up ball folded in on itself,
the inverted colors of feelings unfelt
draining slick whispers out of your lungs
an ouroboros word that trips off the tongue
dark and pulsing, expertly pressed
and stored, like poison, in the hole of your
chest.

Haiku

By Jack Hickey (VI)

Bananas
in my cereal
like lungs.



Tracey Lin (V)

Enough

By Tiffany Yu (IV)

She stared at the toilet.

I really should, she thought. *But I really shouldn't.*

The lines between the tiles on the floor pressed painfully against her bare shins, leaving indents along legs that were barely more than bone but *still not thin enough*. Sure, there was finally a gap between those thighs, but it needed to be wider – it wasn't big enough.

Nothing was ever enough.

Her hands dropped down to fold over her stomach, clutching her sides with ice-cold fingertips. Staring firmly in front of her, she refused to look at the offensive flab that her arms dug into. It didn't matter that her ribs were jutting out of her skin; if that stomach wasn't completely flat, then she had failed.

She felt the urge to laugh. Of *course* she failed. She never could do anything right. They told her it was just perfectionism getting the better of her – but what did *they* know about what was in her head? Was it really a bad thing to aim to do her very best in everything she did? She knew that her best wasn't necessarily perfection (but it should have been) and that it was unrealistic to set her goals so high (but they weren't *that* high) and that as long as she *tried* she would be a success (but she definitely wasn't). Yes, she knew these things (but she didn't really know them).

If only she had been stronger before and held her head up on her own, rather than running to somebody like a weak little child. If it hadn't been for that, things

wouldn't have gone downhill, and she could still be living a *normal* life. There wouldn't be any doctors or therapists or nutritionists pinning her down with those unwavering eyes. There wouldn't be as much abuse placed on her bedroom door, having been slammed shut after one too many arguments with her parents. *She* would be in command of her *own* life.

But instead, the decisions had been ripped out of her hands, leaving them wrapped feebly around her waist. The pressure against her stomach was sickening; she had obviously had too much this night, even though they were "certain" that it was barely adequate for her circumstances. A slight wave of nausea passed over her, only furthering her resolve as she focused her gaze on the toilet water right under her chin.

She had been honest when she'd told them she'd never done so. It had only ever been holding herself back (which was *necessary*, since she had never had good control over herself when it came to this). Even so, she would receive that *look* from behind those glasses as her blood test results came back irregular in some chemical or another, signifying some imbalance that she couldn't be bothered with.

Well, if she had known *how*, she would have had to begin lying about that since her very first day at the hospital.

That day was somewhat of a blur in her head (because she wasn't getting enough nutrients to think straight, they would've said). Phrases like *treatment goals* and *meal plan* flew around her as people she had only met a few hours ago took the summer break just ahead of

her away. It was a pointless overreaction because, like she had said, she was *fine* (although she probably wasn't).

After all, there was *no way* it could have been true. She was far from skinny; one look at the girls around her would show that she was bigger than all of them. And on those increasingly less common occasions where she *just might possibly* have been smaller, those girls had amazing skills in other aspects that still made them *so much better* than her.

It was obvious that she had to do something about herself. With all of the headlines and advertisements of diets and ways to lose pounds in weeks everywhere, it was hard to believe otherwise. Besides, if she just glanced at those models – their long, lean legs and the perfect curves in perfect places – it was clear that her own body needed serious fixing.

She wasn't doing anything wrong. She was just being healthier, exercising more because it made her feel good (even though she despised running with a passion). Choosing fruit and vegetables over candy and chips couldn't have been a bad thing (but a fear of having her best friend's birthday cake might have been). Cutting back on snacks and a little during meals shouldn't have been harmful (although she had been slightly aware of how each day, the amount of food on her plate went down and never stopped decreasing).

So maybe things had escalated, quickly. Still, that didn't (it *couldn't*) mean that she had an eating disorder.

Anorexia nervosa, if you wanted to be precise about it. With such an official name, she felt that it sounded much more serious than it really was (but maybe they were right to do that). They had even considered putting her inpatient;

fortunately, she had ended up being placed in a program where she could still go home for the night, although she was forced to eat every meal in the hospital.

Eight hours a day spent cooped up inside was hardly the summer she had wanted. Even worse, there were the endless attempts to get her to speak about what was in her head (which *she* couldn't even understand anymore). Every day, she came home and promptly locked herself in her room, stomach feeling like it was about to explode and head reeling from – well, *everything*.

Her arms shook, shivering in spite of the mid-July heat. She wanted to grab the oversized hoodie she had been wearing too much these days (big enough to cover all of her upper body), but her dad had taken it back from her. It wasn't natural, he had said (echoing what *they* had told him to say), to wear so much when it was ninety degrees out.

Her head pounded against her skull, a barrage of sharp daggers of cruel insults that stabbed and slashed at her self-worth, constantly opening and worsening the deep wounds she had (only metaphorically, *honestly*, though she had certainly considered it) inflicted on herself. The thoughts had been there for as long as she could remember, but it had only been recently when she discovered how much they really hurt.

You're not skinny enough. You're not smart enough. You're not pretty enough. You're not good enough. You will never be enough.

The mantra repeated itself on a continuous loop, never relenting, slowly eating away at whatever fragile image of self-confidence that could manifest in a teenage girl. All of her thoughts contained the same undertone, casting a

dark shadow over her mind, smothering any light that attempted to enter.

And then she realized.

It was normal to feel insecure, but it wasn't normal to hate yourself.

It was normal to have a favorite hoodie, but it wasn't normal to wear it in the peak of the summer heat.

It was normal to try and live a healthy life, but it wasn't normal to starve yourself while doing so.

And it was most definitely *not normal* to spend a Friday night hunched over in the bathroom.

She wanted so badly now for her life to go back to normal.

She couldn't bring herself to believe that she was thin, but she could believe that she had a problem. It ran deeper than whatever her physical appearance might have been; inside, she was broken, and she needed – *wanted* – to be fixed.

It was the first glimmer of hope – that if she set her mind to it, she could overcome it. It was probably nothing more than a fleeting feeling, not meant to last, but it was more than she had ever believed in. This brief moment wouldn't save her from faltering and slipping back down as she tried to pull herself out of this hole. But it was a start, and that was enough for now.

She had had enough of this.

She pushed herself up to standing and walked away from the toilet.



Kate Sienko (VI)

Jailbird

By Michael Ketchum (VI)

I bared my teeth and dug into the dry, flaky earth. The merciless sun grinned down at my pain. I grunted in exertion and continued my endless toil. It had been a simple mistake... it felt like years ago, at this point. I had been the quintessential young, reckless kid. How was I supposed to know that one rash action would lead to... that? It was an accident; I wasn't trying to be malicious. I'm the victim though. What right did she have, anyway? Why should she have them and I be kept away? I tried to ask politely, with tact. I appealed to her humanity. I just wanted to have my fair share of time with them. To play with them, and have them be a part of my life, yet she spurned me. I just wanted her to understand, to sympathize, but she treated me like the same dirt I was carving into. It was... logical to take them from her. It was only fair, right? They're just as much mine as hers, and she's the real villain for denying me access to them. But, of course, no one else seemed to agree. I was unfairly condemned to a terrible sentence. So here I remain, hewing a path with my sweat and blood directly into the sun-baked dirt. Worms did not come here. They would come to feast upon the leftover nutrients in the dirt, but there is none to be found here. Plants that were abandoned here withered and died from the wrath of the sun and the unbearable temperatures of the Arizona desert. The dust swirled around my legs and leached at the mounds of earth I had created. It just added to the feeling of helplessness – knowing that if I was not rescued I would join this dust, endlessly wander-

ing the wasteland. Never resting, never sated, a wandering shade of a man. I sheltered my eyes from the sun's glare and briefly surveyed the landscape. The sun had turned this place into a scar. As if that was not enough, God had become a big, mean kid with a magnifying glass, trying to burn an ant. I shifted my weight and continued on. Endlessly, I dug and dug; I planted and planted - if it could even be called planting. I was killing these plants by depriving them of their basic needs of food and water. What an apt fate for them, considering my punishment. I finished the hole I was working on and wiped the grime and sweat from my brow. I groaned and stretched my back that ached from being hunched over. I rolled my neck, squatted and picked up the hopseed bush. I placed into that crevice as delicately as I would my first born child. I buried its roots beneath the dust and I gazed my handiwork: a line of identically trimmed, identically planted bushes, standing in a line as if waiting for a firing squad to release them from their prison. Each is trapped in a world in which it cannot survive – placed there by a power greater than itself. Doomed to live its days suffocating in the sand. I turned away from it, not wanting to lament my own life in the process. Time rests for no man, and certainly not the warden. Oh, my life would be grand indeed if not for that warden. She taunts my fortune from the air conditioned gazebo, sucking a cool ice tea. I know she would never admit it, but I can see that she clearly enjoys the pain she inflicts. She feasts on our misery. She would say she's punishing us to deter future offenses, but we all know the truth. A real sadist, that's what she is. Noting that I was done, the warden casually sauntered out of the gazebo and looked at the bush. It was satisfactory,

she supposed, but not great. She pointed to some imperfections in my replanting. Add some dirt there, some more there. When she was finally satisfied, she jerked her head back to the big house. It was time to get working on the rest of my tasks, and then it's back to my cell to be left alone with my thoughts. At least the labor was something to do, but being kept in a room with nothing but a bed and my thoughts was the worst. Replaying every movement I had made up until the point in which I had been captured. Maybe I had lost my temper, maybe I might have made a small mistake, but this was downright unnatural. Humans aren't meant to live like this. The warden snapped me back to reality by barking my name. I stood at attention for a moment. Then she tossed me a juice box.

"Next time, I hope you'll think twice about slapping your sister over who gets to play with the toys. Now get inside and clean your room."

This broken system will not hold me, it will not keep me and it will not dictate my life. That is my promise, mother, that is my promise.



Brian Hochberger (VI)

Tumbled

By Andrew Zola (VI)

I'm standing in Brooklyn
and as I bound down my
front stoop I see the steam
from the previous rain storm
jumping off the glistening
pavement into Empyrean-like
thankful ghosts that are all-
too ready to get away from these
plastic streets; but that's
all right because I see my
worries carried with the ghosts
and there's no more angst
(at least for me for now)
because I see the eggs of the swallows
that were nesting in the tree
on my street have finally cracked
open and out of them bound
three, four, five bald, whining
chicks that think they carry the
weight of the world on their
shoulders—

Just let them learn that life is
more than a nest and the terrifying

ride we're all on is—despite
the suffering—not too half-bad.

Why? Because the ghosts and the
swallows and the heroin dealer
who lives in that shabby apartment
two doors over—the one who
captures young girls and sells
their bodies into sex slavery—
and my soul, that shriveled little
thing that has grown a callous shell
against the world, are all
interconnected and whether we like it
or not, we're strapped into this ride
called life.

The swallow chicks will learn
this soon enough, this hard truth that's
so difficult to accept but so
difficult to renounce. And then
they'll fly. Jumping out of their
cozy nest, they'll tumble with life
right to the very end. And they'll
learn to enjoy themselves.

And eventually, you will too,
my dear—

You'll learn the bumps and the bends
of your ride and you'll blind
yourself to the pain and the
heartache and the suffering and
instead choose to only consider
the beauty of this life.

Give it time—
Just give yourself time—

july

By Erica Cheung (V)

i want to be the pink lemonade
sticking to your lips,
stripping everything but sweet
and sour
from your mouth.
your words are as sweet
as they are sour.
i want to piece you together
from golden-glazed skin
and friendly july eyes.
i want to make you burn
like twelve o'clock noon,
fierce enough
to mold airwaves into love songs.
i want to write you a love song.
and sing it to you
through melted popsicles and broken air condi-
tioning
and empty bottles of aloe vera, but
for now, i think
i'll be the effortless
evaporating the ocean
from your eyelashes.



Alli Dorneo (V)

The First Summer

By Sara Gagnon (V)

The first summer after my mother died came like a slap in the face. It was proof that I didn't want: life went on even when you didn't want to. My father, who was too broke to take any vacation time and too broken to want to, was sending me away. While I'd begged to keep him company in our small city apartment, he wouldn't hear of it. I'd go to the beach, like every year; it seemed he'd made a promise to himself to not let my summer change. But it already had. I didn't want to feel the sand between my toes, sit on the rocks where I'd spent so many hours with my mother, or float in the waves and let the salt water dry on my face. Those memories scared me so deeply that I knew I wouldn't have the willpower to trek down to the shore every morning with my aunt.

Nevertheless, summer came. I hadn't been out of school for a week when my father shipped me to Aunt Eleanor's salty little cottage. I had loved it for the first fifteen years of my life; why did I hate it so much now? Getting out of the car, walking up the aged cobblestone pathway, I could hardly look at the house or my aunt. She'd been my mother's sister, and unbelievably strong through her illness. It wasn't until the day my mother passed that I saw her break down, and I never saw it again. Therefore, my behavior for the first couple weeks of refusing to leave the house seemed completely unacceptable. After all, it had been almost six months, and my mother "would want" me to go to the beach. But no, I couldn't do it, and my

aunt grew tired of arguing with me and eventually left me alone for the majority of the day.

That was fine with me; I loved the solitude. Climbing out onto the roof outside my bedroom window every morning with my camera swinging at my neck, I had a perfect view of the people on the beach. Never growing tired of the families and teenagers and old couples on the beach, I took pictures for hours. I could pretend I was as happy as they were, as perfect as they were. I could pretend I was still the same type of person, who loved sunny days and giant waves and crabs in the sand. Watching the mothers serve hoagies out of large coolers made me ache for my own. I could pretend she was simply out running errands, picking up our own sandwiches for lunch. I could pretend she wasn't gone, even just for a second. Watching the fathers guide their toddlers through the water, I could pretend my father cared enough to want to spend every day with me. I could pretend he was strong enough, pretend he hadn't sent me here to hide from the reality that was our broken family. But I was hiding myself, and I knew it. The view from the roof was only so large.

At dinner one night, as I picked at ham and green beans, Aunt Eleanor put down her fork as if she had come to some sort of great conclusion. I stopped eating and looked up cautiously, dreading another lecture about the beach. "Lawrence, I understand that the beach is too painful for you right now-that's fine. But I refuse to let you waste your whole summer with that camera. I've gotten you a job at Freeze, Teddy's little ice cream shop about a mile away."

“Eleanor, I-” My aunt was a do-er, she took things into her own hands whenever possible. I should have seen this coming.

“He did this as a favor to me, so take the job, baby. It’ll be good for you. I promise.” She went back to eating, and I knew the conversation was over. Eleanor didn’t ask me if I wanted a job, she told me I needed one. That way, there was no room for error and things could get done her way. Eleanor thought it was best; thus, it would happen. That was the way things worked.

The thought of scooping ice cream with other workers and serving cones to dozens of customers made me sweat. I’d never been a people person, and even less so now. I’d been described as composed, calm, and reserved; on the inside, I was a wreck. Could I handle however many hours a day, filled with people? Other human beings who expected me to be things that I wasn’t right now. They would expect me to be charming, courteous, friendly, and patient. A year ago I could have done this. I had done this, waitressing at the bed and breakfast in town. Now, working seemed like an alien concept to me.

The next day after lunch, an overcast Saturday, Eleanor set out the rusty blue beach cruiser and dictated the directions to me. Hugging me for a second, she marched back inside. It was in my hands now, and she required my best efforts. I took a deep, shaky breath, and swung my leg over the seat, adjusting my old jean cutoff shorts. Riding a bike is like being in a dream. You don’t have to pay attention, because for the most part you just keep going. Generally, the wheels keep turning no matter what, and your feet guide the pedals in an endless cycle. I rode past the pastel and grey houses on the edge of the beach, zon-

ing out as the colors passed by. I didn't think about Freeze, and I arrived far quicker than I would have liked. I parked the bike and wandered inside, looking for Teddy's familiar face.

"Ay, Lawrence! I haven't seen you in ages, kid." Teddy appeared from the kitchen, a milky apron around his waist, and pulled me into a bear hug. I'd always like the old man, and he made me smile even now. "Damn, when Ellie asked if you could have a job, I was thrilled. We've been needing extra hands, and I know you're about as reliable as they get."

"Thanks, Teddy. I'll try. You'll have to show me the ropes, though, I've never scooped ice cream before..." My eyes wandered around the parlor; I was already putting up a facade of cheerfulness.

"Ohhh no. That's not my job. That's Tony's. Tony! Get out here, come meet your new coworker!" Teddy called into the kitchen, and a boy who looked about my age came out. He was quite easily the most attractive guy I'd ever seen, with dark chocolate-colored hair and piercing, turquoise eyes. His smile revealed perfect teeth, and he shook my hand with enthusiasm you couldn't fake.

"Hey! I'm Tony. Welcome aboard."

"Lawrence. Nice to meet you. I have no idea what I'm doing. You're going to show me how to serve this stuff?" Tony looked over at the tubs of ice cream in surprise, as if noticing them for the first time. He laughed.

"Uh, yeah. It's pretty simple, and the job has lots of perks. You'll be fine." Teddy left to run errands, leaving us alone. My heart sped up, for no apparent reason. Tony led me behind the counter and showed me around the space, pointing out the freezer, the scoopers, the cones,

and the topping bar. He demonstrated the correct way to make sure a scoop wouldn't fall off the cone, and he even made me laugh by dropping it once. Around one-thirty, customers started to pour in. Tony served them with ease, instructing me to watch for the first fifteen minutes, then helping me with a small orange sherbet. Before I knew it we were scooping alongside each other almost seamlessly, the smell of chocolate and black cherry and birthday cake-flavored ice cream filling the atmosphere. Ten o'clock came too quickly, and we wiped the counters clean together.

"Congratulations, you have made it through your first day at Freeze!" Tony declared in a sports-announcer voice. I laughed and hugged him good-bye effortlessly, and riding home I felt happier and more satisfied than I had in forever.

When Eleanor asked me how the first day went, I'd told her, well. But it had been more than that. Painful, yes, at first, and difficult. Not so much the job, but the situation. More pretending, at least in the beginning. But I'd laughed, I'd learned, and I'd been busy. I was left feeling accomplished, over nothing but a few hours of scooping ice cream.

Over the next couple weeks, my hope only escalated. And I was surprised how often I thought of Tony, and how genuinely happy he was. He was the kind of person I liked to be around, a polar opposite to my constant solemnity. Hours at the parlor slowly became something I looked forward to instead of dreaded.

Tony was things I simply wasn't. Not only was he smarter, he was wittier, bolder, and more sympathetic. While I followed instructions beautifully, he charmed eve-

ryone into an extra scoop. When it came to the younger children, Tony could carry on a conversation about Oreo ice cream forever; yet he laughed along just as easily when adults teased him and shot their own imperfections back at them. And with me, he imposed just enough to surprise, but never scare me.

“Wanna come out with some of my friends, Lawrence, after closing time today?” Tony mentioned one particularly hot July day. Immediately I knew my answer, and I felt bad, answering almost automatically.

“No, I should get home. But have fun.”

“Then have one ice cream cone with me instead,” he insisted, making me look up from the chocolate-chip cookie sundae I was preparing in surprise. “What?” he asked innocently, sensing my shock, “I want to talk to you.” And he left it at that, not even waiting for my answer. So I consented, mulling the idea around in my head for the next three hours. By the time ten o’clock rolled around, I felt fully prepared.

After we finished cleaning, Tony pulled me over to the tubs to choose a flavor. I sheepishly picked Double-Chocolate Fudge Brownie, feeding my chocolate addiction. “Me, personally, I’m getting Mint Chocolate Chip.” Tony smiled fondly as if remembering something. “My mom makes the absolute best homemade mint chocolate chip ice cream. Ever since we were kids. And my brother used to eat it all.” He trailed off, lost in his thoughts. I tried to smile politely, but I felt my heart throb as we walked to one of the fifties style red booths.

“You have a brother? What’s he like?”

“Rob, yeah, he’s awesome. Like the perfect older brother. Taught me how to play baseball, make a sand-

wich, talk to girls..." I laughed. I could talk to him effortlessly. "Just us four. My parents are great, too. You should meet them!" I nodded slowly. The giddiness was wearing off and the conversation was starting to get painful. "What about you?"

"My mom passed this winter. It's just me and my father." I looked down at my soupy ice cream, regretting letting him see this much of me.

"Lawrence, you're amazing. The way you hold it together every day. I'm so sorry." Tony was looking in my eyes, and that surprised me. Usually people looked down or behind me when I told them. But, maybe, he cared more than that.

We talked for hours. I was lost in the topics; I could tell him anything, and he always knew exactly what to say in return. And his stories of growing up, how we'd never known each other on this small island, of his family. He spun tales that made you want to pay attention with every fiber of your being. And suddenly, it wasn't his eyes, his smile, his hair. It was his words, the fondness on his face when he told me his memories with his brother, the attentive silence that ensued when I opened up to him. I shouldn't have stayed out late, but I did. I wanted to. Tony drove me home at one, and for once I feared the solitude of my room.

It only took two months for him to become my best friend. I trusted him more than I'd ever trusted anyone before. I cared about him so much it scared me. I was particularly terrified when he stomped into Teddy's office a week before I was due home, ignoring me completely, his face shiny with what I was sure couldn't be tears. My heart raced; I couldn't lose him. As he emerged from the

back room in no better mood, I grabbed him by the shoulders frantically, surprising myself. I forced my face into his field of view even as he tried to avoid my eyes.

"Hi," he grunted, like a stranger.

"Hi? Hi? Tony. What's wrong? What happened?" I could tell he wasn't angry at me, and I felt relieved and worried simultaneously.

"Rob's been arrested. He was found with drugs. He didn't even ask to see me... He wanted to see his girlfriend of the week." I let my hands drop off his shoulders and hugged him.

"I'm sorry," I said, but I knew it wasn't nearly enough. After all he'd become to me, I knew him well enough to know he'd never felt betrayed like this before.

The concept that people weren't perfect was foreign to Tony. He looked utterly shocked, even as he told me, and I could see the hurt in his tense shoulders and reddened eyes. I could see him losing hope. The air of optimism he usually sported was absent. Pain like this could break a person. I knew. It had already broken me.

"Let's get out of here," I said, swiping the keys from the counter and guiding him towards the door. I barely had my permit, but I didn't care. Sliding into the driver's seat of his pickup truck, I backed out of Freeze.

"Where are we going?" Tony sighed, sounding tired.

"The beach."

"We can walk." He went to open his door, but I stopped him.

"We can't walk. You need to feel like you're going somewhere, fast."

Silence. Who had I become? No longer holed up in my room, camera lying untouched by my bedside table, driving to the beach. I had a moment of doubt, but it only lasted a second. Tony needed someone, and I needed to be that person. I pulled up to the edge of the dunes and got out of the car. Suddenly, Tony was by my side.

“Lawrence. You haven’t been to the beach in over a year.”

“I want to go. With you. Let’s go.” I sounded more confident than I felt, and the breeze off the ocean warned me to get back in the car, spare myself the hurt. I took Tony’s hand, more now for my own sake than his.

We walked onto the beach together. The crashing waves numbed me, the foam reflected my mother’s face in every bubble, and the sand felt as if it would fall out from under me. I willed myself to look up at Tony.

“Everything’s going to be okay, isn’t it?” he asked me.

“I think so,” I replied, and for once I really did.



Lucy Miao (III)

Wonderings

By Claudia Jiang (IV)

Why is it that you can say,
"I'm proud to be an American,"
and "George Washington is a hero,"
with a smile and not be judged?
While when I state,
"I'm proud to be Chinese",
and "Mao Zedong is a hero"
I see eyes roll with dismissive scoffs.

Why is it that you can critique
My culture and country with light-fingered con-
tempt
expecting me to stay silent and accept the insults
And are outraged when I disagree and stand for
myself?

Well I will tell you now,
my culture is not something I am ashamed of.
I will not bow down to your superior sneers.
What you see as manacles that keep me from be-
ing like you,
I shall wear them like a crown,
for I would rather be an outcast,
than an ignorant hypocrite.



Kavita Patel (VI)

31 Miles

By Sam Ricciardi (VI)

The gun went off. Half the course was coated in ice. The hills were bigger than I remembered. It was 20 degrees outside. The white trail markers were almost impossible to make out in the snow. But there was a bandana stretched tightly around my ears and there were gloves on my hands. I was ready to run my race.

I can tell you the exact amount of preparation I put in for this moment: 1,128 miles over 9,588 minutes. Just over 6 and a half days of straight running. The Watchung Winter Ultra is a 50k, just over 31 miles of hilly, snaking trails through the forest. My goal was to finish in under 5 hours. I even hung up a sign in my room that said "5 or bust." But in all honesty, I just wanted to finish.

In my daydreams I would always picture myself, bloodied, snot dripping from my face, crying, and everything hurting, as I passed the finish line of my first 50k. Twelve months had passed since the daydreams started and that whole time I had trained. At times, it was shoddy. Cramps, bird shit, being chased by dogs, you name it, it happened. But whenever I was met with pain, I would always remind myself, you can slow down, but you can never stop.

I attached myself to a group of much older and more experienced ultra-runners and ran the first ten miles strong. We then came upon a treacherous stretch of steep downhill ice. They all jammed the breaks and began to crawl down. But I didn't. I couldn't. Because sometimes your failures come to the forefront of your mind and the

only way to expel them is by proving something to yourself. Because I could've been the president of my school. Because I could've been a peer leader. Because I could've been a slam poet. Because I could've been an athlete. Because I could've gotten the girl. Because I could've applied to West Point. But I didn't. So I began to run down. I sprinted. All my failures, all my fears, and all my insecurities, they could be expelled – I just needed to finish as hard and as fast as I could.

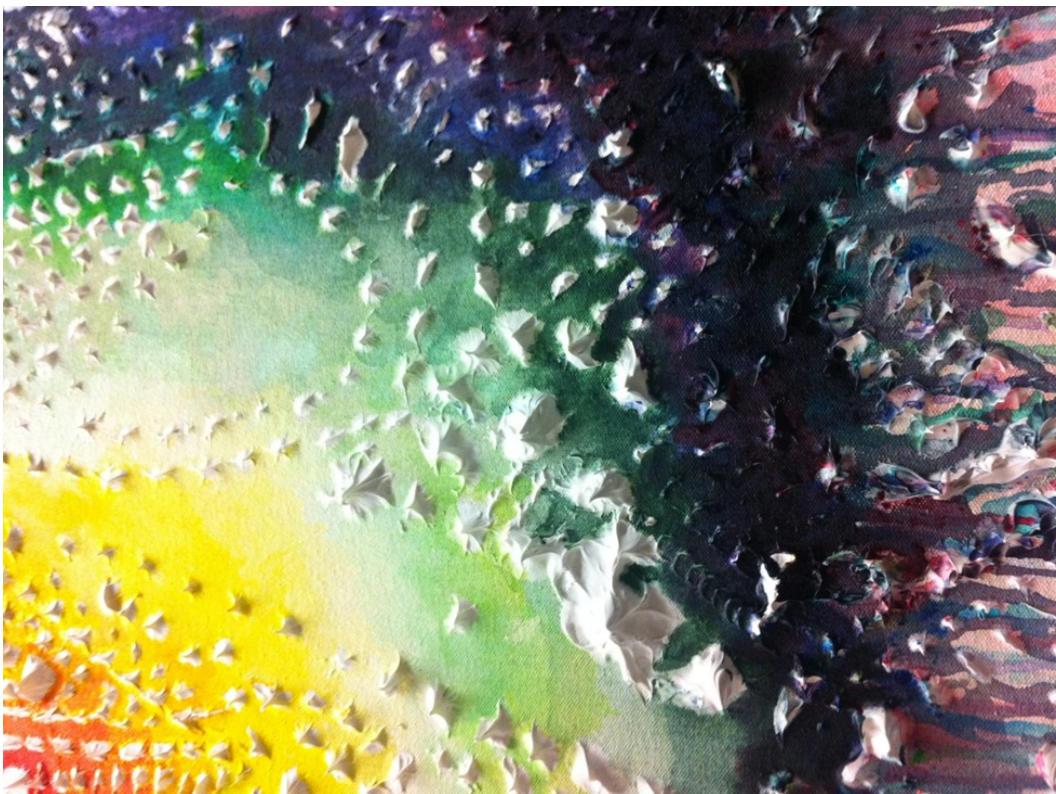
God did not make me a great runner. I made myself a great runner. Of course, that sounds egotistical, but running is the one thing I can truly take pride in. It is my identity. It is the only skill I've forged almost entirely on my own. Simply, my self-worth is inextricably connected to my running. That's what made this race so important.

And that's when I fell. I fell hard. Smashing my knee into the ice and rolling down like a broken rag doll. That was it. Skin was missing from my knee. Everything was raw. Everything hurt to move. I was just about done. And so, just as I had predicted in my dreams – there I was covered in blood and snot and tears. Except one thing was different – I wasn't crossing the finish line. I was just returning back to the start.

Running is a continuous battle of pain and pride. And sometimes, the pain wins. But the one satisfying part of this continuous battle is just that – it's continuous. Defeat is only temporary.

And as I reached the start with a cake of blood hardening on my knee and 14 miles un-run, I knew one thing for sure – I would be back.

Because you can slow down, but you can never stop.



Gladys Teng (IV)

Grapefruits & the “Kissing” Disease

By Anonymous

Dear Ava,

1. I wish that you could admire the scent of grapefruit that lingers on your fingertips after you nibble away the pink, succulent pulp.
2. I wish that you could remember the one time your father yelled "*Bitch!*" to the driver who cut him off on Interstate 87.
3. I wish that you could call Liam a *bitch* when he cut you in the lunch line.
4. I wish that you could taste your first Marlboro cigarette, even if it covers your lungs with ebony soot and tobacco remnants.
5. I wish that you could contract mononucleosis (aka the "kissing" disease) and live to tell the tale.
6. I wish that you could be revered by your fellow sixth graders for contracting the "kissing" disease when you probably just got it from an infected doorknob.

7. I wish that you could take pride in filling out a black lacy 34B push-up bra in a Victoria Secret fitting room.
8. I wish that you could hurl *The Official SAT Study Guide* across the room two hours and thirteen minutes into your four-hour practice test because enough is enough.
9. I wish that you could lose your "kissing" virginity to a game of "spin the ketchup bottle" with week-old acquaintances in a cruise ship cafeteria seating booth.
10. I wish that you could fall in love with a man with the literary ability of Shel Silverstein and the sex appeal of George Clooney.
11. I wish that you could point your middle finger at your Honors Spanish teacher when she harangues your excessive split-end picking and ineptitude with the language.
12. I wish that you could hold your newborn cousin close to your breasts and pervade her eardrums with your favorite Emily Dickinson poem.

13. I wish that you could tend to your parents
when their bones become as brittle as saltine
crackers and pencil lead.

14. I wish that you could realize how important
you are to me.

Perhaps autism is just a phase.

Maybe you will outgrow it. Then you would be
freed from your obsession with jigsaw puzzles
and hard-boiled eggs.

Love,

Your cousin, and big sister,



Andrew Supron (V)

The Queen and Queen of the Squeemish Island Res- ervation Paradise

By Emily Kamen (VI)

Sit on their matching majestic thrones
And eat key lime pie until their bellies are so full
They have no choice but to retire to their bed-
chamber
Which luckily is also in the kitchen

They roll around on their fuchsia satin duvet
Squealing like pigs
About how royal they are.

Queens of the Squeemish Island Reservation Para-
dise

Queens of the out of tune upright piano that sits
behind the thrones

That neither of them knows how to play.

Queens of the cast-iron spiral staircase

Queens of their tabby cat, Miss Whiskers

Their palace is small and all the walls are glass

It is important for the inhabitants of the Squeemish
Island Reservation
To see their queens every morning
Dunking crumpets into rich chocolate milk

The fish in the lake
And their neighbors, the squirrels and deer
Bow dutifully to their royal highnesses
Who dance together every evening,
Their rolls of fat swinging and bouncing gleefully
Ignoring the beat of the only record they own,
spinning rigorously on the turntable

There is no heir to the thrones
So the queens will have to live forever
In their glass castle by the river
Just as they always have
Thriving and jiving to the sound of their own man-
ic laughter

Spring

By Claire Chen (VI)

I

listen

to the birds trilling your words

cicadas cackling your laughter

your breath whistling over my ear

a shh, shh

don't you cry

don't you be

afraid

of the breeze carding through my hair

in rhythmic, soothing fingers

the petals falling on my face

in a light press of lips

so gentle and soft it

hurts

because the magnolia-sweet comforts

the apologies in squeaking cricket chirps

I could've

wouldve

shouldvestayed—

No matter how many times you return
it won't ever change
the fact
that you left.

Flawed

By Kathleen Zhu (V)

I do not mean to spin you a web of naïveté
And lies
Because utopia is not on the tip of our tongues
And perfection is not yet within our reach

Because now the stars don't shine behind city
lights
And people still hide behind masks carved from
Fear, insecurity, and deceit

Because poetry is not about beauty and idealiza-
tion
But flaws, imperfections, and doubt

But tonight I can tell you that the world is indeed
Still beautiful
In its imperfections, it's absolutely gorgeous

I don't want to weave a melodramatic tapestry of
Metaphors and similes
Trying to conceal the truth of the matter, but
The truth of the matter is that I do
Regardless.

So I'll kindly ask you to deal with me and my im-
perfections
And my hypocrisy
Because we are all human
And we are all flawed in this messy world that is
our home

Don't be afraid to stumble over your words even
during your
Climaxing monologue
Or even trip over your two left feet in that big
dance number
And even if you topple the chorus line
Make all the mistakes in the play of your life
And just let the audience talk

If along the way rumors spill,
And catfights break out backstage
If the occasional theater drama rears its ugly end
Just shake it off.

I do not value flaws in character
I don't treasure them
But these very flaws are what make us

So human.

But...

What I do want is to keep

All these moments in my heart

Tucked next to the perfect times and the darkest
times

Because these imperfections are the moments that
create memories

These times that we'll remember when we're old
and ailed with weary limbs

Spending our days in oak rocking chairs that creak
with every movement

These are the times we'll remember.

So dear,

When I don't meet your eyes

And pull my face to the floor and smile

Gracelessly

Because all words seem to escape me

I so appreciate when you see me through my invis-
ible veneer

And reach out to me

Thank you.

Because I am nowhere near perfect

And I need you to see that in me
And to see that in each other
And maybe get one step closer
To make this imperfect world

A little less imperfect...



Emily Yan (IV)

The Days before Com- mencement

By Ashley Zhou (VI)

We are old knights ghosting between battle mem-
ories
sinking crimson pools where armor from epochs
of clawing down temples cut disks into our shoul-
ders
Locked wrists curled around soft tipped swords
visors drooping the way time crawls on tails of
hours
Now we pause at the edge of war and listen to
years of sheaths blow away
Now we want to be filled with the burning dizzy
joy
and watch funnel-eyed as young streams bloom
with blood
if only to pierce chainmail against Alma Mater
gates
at dusk's cliff crying for this breath to open

We wait for each day to fall into the next
peeling grayed and grayed steel
 from spines bent weary
 dulled before their trumpets tipped

Eighteen

By Mahmoud Aliamer (VI)

I'd always thought I'd wake up on my eighteenth birthday and find that I had grown a beard overnight. I'd have a car and a job – two jobs if the car was particularly nice. I'd stumble out of bed mumbling about mother-this-and-thats and pour a cup of sugarless coffee down my gullet. Later, I would throw on a suit and tie and sneak out the back door of my apartment building because the rent was three days late and the landlord was looking for me.

I'd hop into my car and start driving to work, listening to smooth jazz along the way because smooth jazz is what adults listen to, and I'm an adult. Soon, I'd pull into the parking lot at the building where I work and I'd greet the other grown-ups, and they'd greet me back, maybe. I'd sit in my cubicle, crunching numbers or whatever it was adults did in their cubicles for hours and hours. I'd leave at the end of the day and drive back home, playing smooth jazz again.

I'd sneak into my apartment building through the back door, since the rent was four days late now and the landlord would be looking for me still. I'd pull my keys out of my pocket and open the door to my apartment, with my tie loosened and the top button of my shirt undone. I'd plop myself down on the couch and turn on the television to watch the news, because the news is what adults watch, and I'm an adult. With the remote control in my hand, I'd fall asleep watching stuffy old men, with the top buttons of their shirts done and hidden behind their

ties, argue about not *whether* society was going down the tubes – tubes that I had never seen or even heard the location of – but *how*, and *how quickly*.

I'd later find out that wasn't an eighteenth birthday, but a thirtieth and didn't know whether to be relieved or frightened.



Tracey Lin (V)

The Barbie Apology

By Kate Sienko (VI)

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
from the pink plastic toy chest in the basement.
Your holy shrine to Barbie
and all her friends
and lovers
opened, exposed
to the damp odor of mothballs.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
plucked from the Jacuzzi of her dreamhouse
and given her a new hairstyle
her dreadfully long blonde locks
now a jet black pixie – cut
thanks to that set of
sharpies you gave me for Christmas.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
from the arms of Ken
and inked her up
with the sharpies

rings of fire crawl up her arms
so she'll fit in with GI Joe's friends.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
and stripped her of her white glittery ball gown
and snipped it into confetti
that will create the perfect
storm
snow storm
for the basement residents.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
and drowned her under the running bathroom faucet
trying to wash the
splotches of pinks
off her eyelids and cheeks
just to see what she would look like
if she wasn't a clown.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie

because I heard you talking to Abby
when I was spying on your tea party
“Why can’t I be like her?” you asked, gazing at
your Barbie
stroking her perfect golden curls
she’s been mean to you
telling you that you aren’t pretty enough
or rich enough
or smart enough
or perfect enough
to have it all.

Forgive me, sister, for I have
stolen your Barbie
captured her
arrested her
and sentenced her to the basement dungeon
in the dark and dingy furnace room
and I threw her in the cardboard box
with the gross plastic insects
the scary Darth Vader
and the ugly monsters
and I took out my sharpie
and labeled it Garbage.



Sarah Wang (IV)

One Last Lamppost

By Liz Kraeulter (IV)

Rain. Dripping, pouring, *wet* rain. Rain that fell in torrents against the already glistening pavement, rain that slipped down the tall, proud lampposts.

“Between me and the lamppost,” the man thought.

What a funny phrase. Like it really meant anything at all. Because what kind of secret actually remains between its holder and a lamppost? All people feel compelled to tell someone else their secret, as if it will slip away from them in the darkness of night if they do not.

“Why do they do this?” he wondered.

Aren’t some secrets after all better left as... secrets? Something kept personal, hidden in the deep, shadowy recesses of the heart. For instance, the secret that she had kept from him. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months and still she had not told him.

“Why?” he had asked, earlier that very same, fateful day. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

He did not understand how it was possible to keep such an important secret hidden for so long, from the person he had always thought she loved best. Well at least, not then. But now, as he tramped down this cold, empty street, trudging through mounds of half-melted snow, now, he was finally beginning to understand.

The secret was that he, after all, had been wrong. She did not love him best; her heart still belonged to the other man. Even after all those years apart, she was still his.

“She might have known this,” he reflected. “When we first met.” That day in the café. She certainly knew by the end of their first date. Yet she said nothing. She allowed him to fall deeper and deeper in love, keeping the heart shattering secret to herself.

He’d never before believed in keeping secrets. The only right answer is the true one, he’d always thought. But now, once he had cradled the truth in his palm, pressed it to his heart and tried to live with it, he changed his mind. The truth can be destructive, soul-ripping, illusion-crushing...fatal.

“Yes,” he thought. “It can be fatal.”

Fingering the diamond ring that lay, not on his precious Julie’s finger, but in his own jacket pocket, the man knew that this would be the last rainstorm he ever saw. This was his last lamppost.

Leave Me the Mountains

By Tammy Gu (V)

You may take from me
ice-cream shops,
restaurants,
and street vendors.

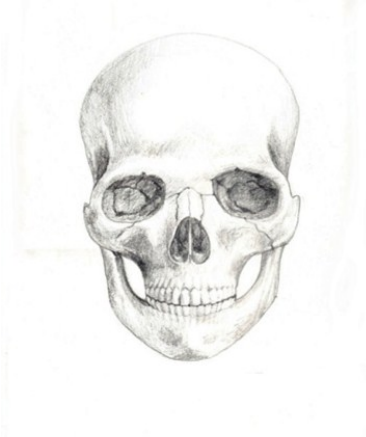
But leave me the mountains
and I will find energy
in the soft leaves of the bluebell
as they arouse my taste buds
with the sweetness
of the wilderness.

You may take from me
coffee shops
soda machines,
and water fountains.

But leave me the mountains
and I will drink
from its rivers, its streams, its lakes,
the water enhanced with the protective slime
coating the scales
of passing trout.

You may take from me
museums,

concert halls,
and galleries.
But leave me the mountains
and I will find art
in the fiery petals
of the Indian paintbrush
music
in the mating call of the pika.
You may take from me
my home.
But leave me the mountains
and I will find shelter
among quaking aspens
juniper trees
and lodge pole pines.
You may take from me
everything
but the mountains
because my heart beats only
in the wilderness.



Sydney Li (VI)