

Lesley University

DigitalCommons@Lesley

Commonthought

Lesley University Student Publications

Summer 7-2020

Commonthought (2020)

Commonthought Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/commonthought>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Commonthought Staff, "Commonthought (2020)" (2020). *Commonthought*. 30.
<https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/commonthought/30>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Lesley University Student Publications at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Commonthought by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.



COMMONTHOUGHT 2020

COMMONTHOUGHT

2020



Faculty Editor

E. Christopher Clark

Contributing Editors

Emily Alcantar

Christina Appignani

Catherine Callanan

Michael Cook

Julia Demarjian

Tara Gall

Natasha Gonzalez

Bailey Haines

Jack Lynch

Rachel Lyne

Tanner Malave

Montana Mendes

Brenna Peterson

Hannah Robinson

Sandra Tirado

Cammie Welton

Victoria Wright

Cover Art

“Falling Down” by Maggie Lin

Commonthought is a celebration of the creative endeavors of Lesley University. Visit digitalcommons.lesley.edu/commonthought/ for more.

CONTENTS

Morgan Frazier — The Scars of Growth	1
Evelyn Cameron — preface to a pandemic	3
Emma Ricci — Kids Today	4
Emily Alcantar — Mexico	6
Natasha Gonzalez — A Room With No Roof	7
Christina Appignani — Death Certificate	9
Morgan Frazier — The Media Isn't Human, But I Am	10
Morgan Frazier — Rainbow Colored Lenses	11
Mary Bekelian — The Great Lie	13
Maggie Lin — In a Cozy Day	21
Susan Merrifield — Survivor	22
Victoria Wright — The Kitchen	23
Emily Alcantar — My Spanglish	24
Amanda Grace Shu — To Morian	25
Maggie Lin — This Summer Tastes Like Watermelon	26
Evelyn Cameron — Lemongrass Tea	27
Catherine Callanan — The Green Surface	28
Hanna Hawkins — Escaping Reality	33
Morgan Frazier — Floating on a Paper	34
Emily Alcantar — The Name that Splits Flesh	36
Morgan Frazier — Caking Myself	38
David Morimoto — I Don't Want to Be You (But I Am)	39
Amanda Grace Shu — Villainelle	41
Emma Ricci — In the Garden	42
Jack Lynch — Collected	43
Maggie Lin — The Freedom Trail	48
Victoria Wright — Candy Man	49
Montana Mendes — lovebug	50
Cammie Welton — Puddles	52
Hannah Pandya — Paradise Waiting	54
Sandra Tirado — Requiem for War	55
Katya Novosad — Untitled	57

Emily Alcantar — Malditas Raíces	58
Katya Novosad — Untitled	60
Brenna Peterson — Untitled	61
Casie Vergato — Our Planet	64
Bailey Haines — The Joys of Retail in Portsmouth...In a Pandemic	65
Maggie Lin — Roaming Boston	68



Morgan Frazier — The Scars of Growth

Evelyn Cameron

preface to a pandemic

i watch everyone who stops
to take pictures of the chickens
who live in our yard.
i never thought anything of it
until my dad put a lock on the coop.
things might get weird here you know.
i imagine someone stealing away
a screeching chicken in the night.
he looks at me when i laugh.
people in this town hunt, evelyn!
he's back in with the chickens before
i realize what he means. i turn back
to ask him how a lock would stop
a gun, but he has Peach in his arms
and the girls at his feet and i can't.

Emma Ricci

Kids Today

You say,

“Kids today can’t take a joke or have fun”

We say,

“Yes, we can, we just don’t like the racist ones”

You say,

“Kids today are lazy — they have no motivation”

We say,

“It’s difficult to stay focused while you’re destroying our
nation...”

You say the good times have been dissolved,

But what problems did they resolve?

We are the generation of acceptance and inclusion.

Your “good old days” were just a delusion,

People who were silenced lived in fear—

Constantly wondering if freedom was near...

We are not perfect, but help us! We’re trying,

While you sit back and watch the earth as it is dying.

The trees scream out as the land becomes clear,

You do not notice that the world sheds a tear

As the children lose their nature,

Acre after acre.

What can we do to help when all of our energy

Is put into trying to fix this economy?

Education is key,

But we don’t have the money.

College is barely affordable,

Debt is unavoidable.

We say,

“We have to clean up after the mess you made”

We say,
“We have to help the people whom you continue to degrade”
We say,
“We can barely pay back our student loans”
You say,
“It’s because you spend too much time on your phones...”

Emily Alcantar

Mexico

Green and Red is the blood that runs
Through these veins.
Above, the skin is embellished in brown.

These eyes Mirror.
Just like the hawk.

People stare
Cause they're mesmerized.

This tongue is native;
It turns heads
Like a whip rolling with r's.

People stare
Cause they're in awe.

They're face with disdain
Flashes.
It mimics the art of my ancestors.

They stare
Because I am more;
I am Mexico.

Natasha Gonzalez

A Room With No Roof

Forcing herself beneath a bridge she finds weathered sheet
music taped to a piece of cardboard
and holds it above her like a showerhead hoping it would seep
through
and cascade over her like an orchestra prepping for a
symphony,
unintentional but strangely harmonious.
This water will not stop moving until it finds itself a place to
sleep
A shelter of its own but, there's never an empty bed
so, she takes refuge under a bridge.



The smaller children lie tangled beside her,
their chests rising and falling under tattered coats.
Children marked by more longing and loss than most adults
Transforming a crowded street into an imaginary family.



A mountain of spare change newspapers
defying the gusts of wind surround them,
dark ink of those printed words are now slowly rustling
to become stale blankets.



She was dumped unceremoniously at the doorstep of this
room with no roof
to a place where mold creeps up walls and roaches swarm.

Here, there are few exits yet she is surrounded by not a single
wall.

Her small scrub-worn hands are always in the shadows.



Fished from the garbage bin of a stranger's home
They find a mattress that has come apart at the seams, its
rusted coils splayed.

They all carry it to a shelter with room for one more
And curl up at each corner of the bed
A ceaseless drip from a decaying sink,
and the scratching of hungry mice intrude on their sleep
In the absence of a long-awaited home, there is only
the direction of rainwater,
and where it will carry them.

Christina Appignani

Death Certificate

Black ink of a pen sprinkled on wood pulp
Like the strike of a blade, drowning one in their own blood.

The sheet framed on the wall like a slap in the face,
Too slim to carve a heart's abundance of agony.

A tree cries as it's severed from its stem,
A whole is murdered, decapitated into two halves.

The trunk remains, unwillingly forsaken and preserved.
As the branches are diminished, stoned to death.

Though the branch transforms, constructed to a new purpose,
The trunk is rigid and alone, suffocating to stay alive.



Morgan Frazier — The Media Isn't Human, But I Am

Morgan Frazier

Rainbow Colored Lenses

I've never been ashamed,
I've only been proud,
But now I feel useless,
Foolish,
Torn down,

My mind is a problem,
To everyone else it is different,
Slower,
mixed up,
and swimming with the fishes,

Lost on its own,
Can never find a path,
Jumps from tree to tree,
Swinging and falling from every single branch,

Maybe they will one day understand,
I am not stupid,
Dumb,
Retarded,
And no, I do not lack simple common sense,

But I am sure that you do,
You person who stands,
Sure that they are better,
Because their mind is "normal"
At first glance,

You lack the ability to empathize

With the different,
With the unique and creative,
Who see the world not only through their eyes,
But rainbow colored lenses.

Mary Bekelian

The Great Lie

THE HUES OF RED, orange, and pink faded the sky, leaving only a black canvas with no stars to shine even the darkest of times. Lili did not mind as she used a small lamp by the bedside table to read a book in her bed. It was a book of Armenian mythology. Learning about the legendary heroes and the gods of her culture made her heart beat faster per minute. She remembered every story from the soldier that stopped a war from firing a single arrow at the heart of a king to a god who slaughtered a bloodthirsty dragon in a river. It put a warm smile on her face to remember when her father traded his pocket watch to buy the book for her eighth birthday two years ago. She was forever thankful, because it was the fifth book that she owned.

Her father was a humble man who had served in the military for a few months. When he told her that he had to fight for his country, Lili's eyes swelled, and she wrapped her little arms around his neck. She begged him not to go, but he told her that sometimes people had to do things that they did not want to do even if they were scared. It would take another four to five years until he could return home, and his daughter counted everyday for his safe return.

Lili looked over to see her baby brother, sleeping soundly in his crib. When her mother was pregnant with him, her father told Lili that while he was away, he wanted her to take care of her brother, because she was to be a big sister. Lili wrapped her pinky finger with his own as she swore that she would protect her little brother while he was away.

The pitter-patter of rain thumped the earth, quenching the soil of its thirst, and thunder cried out from the blackened sky. A whimper caught Lili's attention as she turned to a crib where her brother slept. His eyes were brimmed with tears. He quivered his lip, and his chubby cheeks wobbled with jarring action. Lili left the book she was reading on her cover as she walked over to him. She placed her hands on the wooden crib and rocked it gently back and

forth. It creaked with every movement that it gave. Lili hummed softly as she remembered a lullaby that her mother would sing to him. Her dimples crinkled when he sniffled and drifted back to sleep.

A sudden bang snapped Lili's head to the front door. The pounding demanded for someone to open it. Lili crept over to the living room. Her bare feet walked across the rotted floor. When the banging grew louder, she looked at the closed door that was next to her room, so she knocked on it and said quietly, "Mama." When there was no answer, she tried again, ignoring the stranger from the front door. "Mama."

Giving up, she wandered over to the front door, turned the knob, and opened it. A black silhouette stood before her. She was a foot taller than the stranger. Lili tried to see his face, but his head was hung low and he wore a hood.

"Can you help me?"

She immediately knew that it was a man when she heard his voice, but there was something off about it. He sounded like rocks in a sack, moving and grinding against each other. The girl's heart twisted when their eyes met. A pair of fiery red orbs stared into her brown ones. Lili's hand shook on the knob, and she wanted to scream and run away, but her parents told her to always be kind and to never judge anyone by their looks, yet she was terrified as her other hand crumpled the skirt of her white nightgown while she bobbed her head to her mother's room and said, "I don't know if Mama wants me to-"

The man slammed his hand on the door, shutting Lili up. Instead of looking at him, she stared at the claws that stretched against the frame. They were reddish brown, and they were sharp like talons. Lili tightened her teeth together when his nails screeched against the wood.

"Didn't anyone tell you that it's impolite to *stare*?" Lili froze when the last word came out like venom. "The least you could do is let me into your home. What would your parents say if they saw you being rude to me?"

She looked away from his fearful gaze and gripped her nightgown tighter, wrinkling it. Lili wanted to tell him to leave, but her saliva thickened in her throat and a bead of sweat trickled down her brow. Whenever she looked at his eyes, she flinched and bit her bottom lip.

Those piercing red eyes could make any child squirm and flee to their mother. It was a miracle how Lili stayed firm in her spot.

“Well?”

Lili scrunched her nose when his face drew closer, because his breath smelled like fermented fish guts. She then gasped and fell backwards when she saw him more clearly. His nose dug into his skin, and his chest sagged to his stomach. Lili trembled when she saw huge dribbles of thick saliva, rolling over to the tips of his tusks.

“What’s to be scared of?”

When his cracked lips parted, he bared his crooked, sharp teeth. Having enough of it, Lili fumbled, stood on her two feet, and shrieked as she slammed the door in the creature’s face. She heaved air into her lungs as if it would save her, and then she rushed over to her mother’s room.

Lili turned the knob and pulled, but the door would not budge, so she used her fist to ram it repeatedly against the wood. A choked cry for help lodged out of her throat, and a drop ran down her cheek. All she wanted to do was to curl up in a ball and have her mother wrap her arms around her little body.

Lili trembled when she heard a familiar voice say “Isn’t she a rude little thing.”

Her eyes scanned the area until they locked on her room. She slowly approached the door. The floor creaked with every step she took, but it was the least of her concerns. Her insides quivered, and small bumps formed on her frigid white skin.

There by the crib was the same creature that Lili met. Her mouth dropped, and she breathed heavily when her little brother was cradled in his arms. The creature cooed the baby to sleep. Lili thought it was strange how a monster could be so gentle.

“Get away from my brother!” Lili exclaimed.

The creature snapped his head at her and gave her a toothy grin. “Looks like someone decided to grace us with her presence.” Lili rushed over, trying to take her brother back, but the creature extended his hand, stopping her. “You need to show your guest some hospitality.”

“B-Bu—”

“You won’t even offer me food.”

She stayed by the door and tightened her grip on the knob. “What do you want?”

“Meat.”

“Sorry, but I don’t have any.”

He raised his eyebrows slightly, and the corner of his lips fought back a sickening grin as he replied, “Of course you do.”

When he looked at Lili’s baby brother, his blood-red eyes gleamed in delight, and at that moment, his meaning came at her like an electrical storm. A frozen panic made her breath go still, and all she wanted was her mother to come out of her room, but if she did not come out, then what was Lili going to do about it?

She knew she could not let the creature take her brother. Lili had to do something, and she did when her heart told her to protect her brother. Her feet ran over to them, and then she grabbed her brother away from the monster. Her eyes watered when he brought his claws up, ready to strike. Her shoulders refused to stop shaking when there was a gleam in the creature’s red eyes. Lili held her brother close to her chest and stood a few feet away from him. Her baby brother stirred in his sleep and whimpered, and all Lili did was to let her tears stream down her face.

“Hmph.” The creature snarled. “Like I said,” his claws screeched the wall, tearing off the yellow wallpaper as he said menacingly, “rude little *thing*.”

When he sauntered over to her bed, Lili circled away from him until her back hit her brother’s crib. Something caught his eye when he looked at her bed. He extended his hand out and took the item off of her cover. Lili gasped when she noticed that it was the book she was reading. The creature extended his claw out, stroking the spine. A string of nails curved into an alienating imitation of a smile, while two bright red orbs glowed in perverse eagerness.

“Please. Don’t,” Lili pleaded.

“Hmm.” He extended the book out to her and asked, “You want it back?” When she nodded, he looked at the book before their eyes met again. “My dear, you should not have crossed me.”

A ball of blazing energy formed in his palm. Lili’s eyes widened when the book bursted into a small explosion until it was nothing but ash. The glowing embers twirled and leaped into the air in a fiery

dance. Lili could not hold her gasp when a gold coin twiddled between his fingers.

“Even petals on a flower do not compare to the beauty of gold.” His red eyes sparkled in sheer delight when he put the coin in a bag that was strapped to his waist.

A raging black hole swallowed her heart. Tears blinded her vision as her treasured gift was destroyed in front of her. All she thought about was her father. She dared not to imagine how he would react if he found out that his daughter failed to protect the book from the hands of a wicked man.

“How could you?” Lili cried.

“What?” the creature scoffed. “It’s only a book, and there is nothing more greater than gold. Also, if you had not been so rude, then there was no need for me to take action.” When he pointed at her brother, he snarled, “Now, give me the baby.”

“No! You’re so mean.” Lili clutched her brother to her chest as she said, “I won’t let you take my brother away.”

“Really? And may I ask who will stop me?”

“My Mama. She’ll come out and make you leave.”

When his eyes lit up in response, a loud throaty laugh strained Lili’s ears. “She won’t come. Do you want to know why?” Lili’s brain stuttered when the next sentence came out of his mouth, “I put an enchantment on the door a while ago. She can’t hear you, and the best part is no one can get in or out. However, it will disappear as soon as I leave.”

“Please.” More tears fell down her face when she said, “Don’t take my brother away. I promised Baba I would take care of him.”

“A promise. Is it?” The creature drew nearer, forcing Lili to flinch. “Then let’s make a promise. Shall we?” A slick smile spread across his face, baring his rows of menacing daggers, frightening Lili. “I am known to many as The King of Lies, so I promise that if you come up with a great lie, then your brother will stay here with you, but if you cannot come up with a convincing lie, then he will belong to me.”

She didn’t even give it a second thought as she stared him down and gave him her answer, “Okay.”

He sat on a stool in the corner of the room and crossed his arms

over his chest, waiting patiently. “Three tries.” he said, raising three fingers. “No more. No less.”

Lili’s mind was scrambled with ideas. She tried to come up with a lie to protect her brother. She was determined to come up with the greatest lie she ever told, but what could she say? When Lili looked at the swirling black blur on the floor, she thought of her book. Perhaps it was the key to solve everything as she thought of the mythological creatures, so Lili took a deep breath and said, “Years ago, my family and I went to Mount Ararat for a picnic, and then a dragon flew to us, breathing fire.” The edge of the creature’s mouth pushed up, scrunching his eye. “Baba used a sword to beat him. All of the dragons are scared of him now.”

“Dragons? Very interesting.” With a wave of his hand, a puff of blue smoke wafted through the air and seven heads appeared. Their scales came in various shades as they gleamed in the dim light. Their teeth were swords that ripped through armor, and their eyes were deep in amber with an endless streak of mystique. “I, myself, have slain seven dragons.” Lili’s palms were caked in sweat when the heads disappeared as he said, “Two more chances.”

She huffed in frustration and clutched her brother when he whimpered. She refused to go down without a fight. There was no way she was going to let him take her brother, so she tried to think of something else that would save him. She wanted to wipe the smug look off the creature’s face, so she said with great confidence, “There is a cat that comes to my house sometimes for food, but it’s not a normal cat. It talks.”

“Pfft.” His laugh radiated off the thin walls like the waves of cackling crows. “Really?”

Lili’s pulse pounded in her temples when he waved his hand. Wisps of blue smoke danced its way through the air. It formed into an image that was familiar to Lili. When the smoke disappeared, a cute little creature was on all fours. Its fur was light and fluffy, its tiny cheeks were covered with long whiskers, and its eyes were shaped like tilted round leaves.

It moved in long strides and purred in a sweet singsong voice, “Hello there.” Lili’s jaw dropped when she heard it speak, while it raised its spine against Lili’s bare leg, moving in circles. “You look so

cute.” When it stopped in front of her, it sat on the floor and asked, “What is your name?”

She shuffled her feet against the floor to move away from the talking cat. “Um, Lili.”

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, Lily.” The cat raised its paw and waved. “Bye now.”

Before she had time to react, a cloud of blue smoke surrounded the cat. It waved its paw one last time before it was completely consumed by the smoke. It then drifted into the creature’s palm as he formed a fist. When he opened his hand, it was gone. Lili bones lacked strength as if every muscle in her body was ready to give in. The only reason why her feet stayed firmly in place was the love she had for her brother and the promise she made to her father.

“One more try.” the creature said with a toothy grin. When Lili looked away to gather her thoughts, he laughed like a madman. “You might as well give up.” He paused to grab a busted clock on the wall and turned it into a gold coin as he put it in his bag. “You are just embarrassing yourself.”

As soon as Lili saw the coin between his fingers, a buzz of electricity circulated through her brain. It was her calling card to save her brother. Lili reached deep inside to search for her courage. She was terrified, because she knew it was her last chance. She had complete faith in her last lie. All she had to do was say it.

“I guess you can take my brother then.”

The creature stilled and stared at her. “You’re giving up?” Lili refused to answer, so she extended her arms out, offering her brother. “Alright.” He jumped off the stool and crept his way over to her. “Give him to me.”

“Okay, but first you owe me the money.”

He contorted his lips into an awkward cracked smile as he asked, “What?”

“You forgot?” Lili looked away before she replied, “You said that if I couldn’t answer, then you would give me all the gold you own to pay for my brother.” His bushy eyebrows raised slightly, and then he laughed ferociously. “Am I lying?”

“Of course you are.”

His smile faltered when she stated, “I can keep my brother then.”

It took him a moment to comprehend what she said as he gasped and said, “No.” The creature licked his cracked lips, and his corrupted smile grew too wide for his face to fit. “You’re not lying.”

“Then give me all the gold you ever took.”

His mouth parted, but no words came out. Lili smiled when his grin fell completely. He stomped on the ground like a child throwing a tantrum and grunted, while Lili held her brother tightly. His eyes were hard-rimmed and fixed on Lili. He then extended his hands out to his sides and muttered, “You win,” while the blue smoke surrounded him until he vanished without a trace.

Lili gazed at her brother lovingly as she placed him back in his crib. She crept over to her mother’s room and opened the door. Her mother’s back faced her as she slept soundly in her bed. Lili heaved a sigh of relief before she shut the door. She went back into her room and looked at her brother one last time before she gave him a soft kiss on his temple. Lili went back to bed to dream that her father came home to tell her that she did a great job looking out for her brother.



Maggie Lin — In a Cozy Day

Susan Merrifield

Survivor

Last night
I dreamt
You
Were
The oldest man
In the world.

Sitting
In your garden,
Shrouded in sunlight,
Your hair
Catching the breeze
Like milkweed.

Your grandchildren
Walked toward
You,
Carefully
Calling,
“Grampy.”

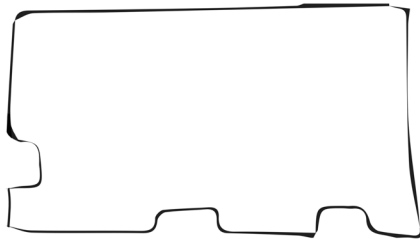
You reached
Out
Touching
Each face.

You said
Their names
But remembered
No more.

Victoria Wright

The Kitchen

It's 6:30 p.m. and this is all I've been looking forward to, though I've dreaded this moment before. I walk in the back door and am greeted first by the dog, then my family, then by basil, garlic, tomatoes kissing me on the nose. I sit in *my* chair and examine the faces of my household through the veil of fragrant steam emanating from the large aluminum cauldron in the center of the table. My sister's lips are level, her eyes pensive (or just tired). Maybe high school is dissecting her, like the frog in biology class. I was once on the cutting board myself, being sliced away by all the sharp edges I couldn't dull down. I don't ask what's wrong, I just spew enough nonsense for her to crack a smile; eggshell teeth. I imagine her view from the other side of the steam. I'm not there anymore, and ever since I've left, I wonder who she sees in My Chair. And then there were three. Whenever I stop by, my careful fingers wring nostalgia from the cloths that have soaked up the last sixteen years in this place. I wipe my tears with them, then I laugh. It's all so familiar yet tastes just a little better when it's been awhile since the last time. Welcome back.



Emily Alcantar

My Spanglish

En The United States
My classmates tell me:
I like your accent...

En my hometown
My family tells me:
Asi no se dice...

But I don't understand,
Por que

En The United States
My tongue is tied
Cuffing my wrists behind my back

En my hometown
My tongue is cut
Like the meat in my taco

Mis palabras
Unvalued
Neither here nor there...

Amanda Grace Shu

To Morian

Like Medusa, you wore serpents in your hair
and petrified me. You fixed me in your sights,
between the crosshairs of your sniper's eye.

Instead of me, you shot my map
and broke my inner compass.
I had to learn to navigate by stars,
your beacon pointing me toward freedom's north.

That and a bloody nose was why
I was looking up, that night
when I came stumbling back from the pub,
singing. I gambled on your snake eyes
and got punched in the face
because I loved the way my heart pounded
when I said you were my wife.

My heart was stone when I met you;
you made it tremble. Your hard glare
turned me from marble to a man again.

With each glass shard you pulled from my hand,
a little cut, a little scar, formed constellations
across my palms, your back, my brow, your eye—
a map of our wounds and how we healed them.

Count my apologies. Hold me to that count.
I owe you as many as there are stars,
an apology for everything but loving you.



Maggie Lin — This Summer Tastes Like Watermelon

Evelyn Cameron

Lemongrass Tea

We float above the flowers in the greenhouse,
giggling when our toes brush the leaves.
I blinked and you were gone,

hidden in the pansies nearby. You gasp when I
find you, peals of laughter reaching the ground even
as we float. Above the flowers in the greenhouse,

we backstroke through the air, calling to them as we go.
Marigolds! Snap dragons! I bring a petal to your nose but
I blinked and you were gone.

The gardener beckons me down when he notices, his
green thumb growing to jealousy since he can't join us
as we float above the flowers in the greenhouse.

Feet planted in the dirt, I turn my search to the sky when
I see you backflip out of a rosebud. Dirt flies into my eye so
I blink. And you were gone

again, twirling and aiming for the clouds above us. I leap
up to join you, but the glass holds us back from the sky,
leaving
us to float above the flowers in the greenhouse.
But I blinked, and you were gone.

Catherine Callanan

The Green Surface

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a princess who was locked away in a tower. As an infant, she was kidnapped by a witch and in order to keep the princess out of sight, the witch created a tower so tall that it disappeared among the clouds. There were no doors for the princess to exit or stairs for her to descend. All she inhabited was the circular room that was located at the very top of the tower. The witch cast a spell on the room so that the princess could not suffocate from the high altitude. The tower was simple to spot; however, finding it was a different matter. It was placed in a forest, but the witch cursed it so that the path toward it constantly changed. The princess remained there for years and the only way she could keep count was by carving the number of days on the walls. She stopped once there was no longer any space to carve but she knew that she had been there for at least eighteen years.

All the princess could do was observe the clouds outside of her window and daydream about the world below. On rare occasions, the clouds would clear, and she could catch a glimpse of the green surface that was miles below. She desired to feel the texture of the green because the only tangible objects she had access to were the things in her room. One time, she reached outside of her window to feel the clouds; however, they had no touch and dispersed as soon as her hand got close. Sometimes, when the loneliness overwhelmed her, she would stand on the ledge with her bare tippy toes. She would look down at the clouds and imagine jumping. *Perhaps I have the ability to float and I do not even know of it.* While she contemplated, the witch's spell would wear off and she would immediately gasp for breath. Reason and logic would take hold of her again and she would hop back into the small, dark room.

The princess was a heavy sleeper and would often dream about being saved; however, the only face that she could envision was the only one she knew, the witch. She also had no clue about how her

savior could possibly reach her. *They must climb I suppose. But who would do something so bothersome for someone such as myself?* She knew that praying for a rescuer was hopeless and when she became fifteen, she began to plot her own escape. Every day, she would slam into the walls with the hope that one brick would eventually tumble down and take the rest of them with it. Her arms morphed from fragile icicles into swollen grapes and when she lost feeling in them, she would resort to kicking the walls with her legs. She would halt once her legs fell before her and then she would resort to clawing at the floor, but it would only file them down. There were no cracks or scratches for the princess to exploit because the witch would always repair them, even the most miniscule ones that the princess was unable to notice. Due to her efforts, the princess became the strongest of all the maidens; however, it was useless to her if it failed to aid her when she needed it most.

There was no source of light in the room beside the rays of sun that would beam in from her window every morning. The princess never complained to the witch about it because she preferred to sleep when the day transitioned into night. She desired to experience new sounds that were different from the tranquil silence she was used to, but when the night arrived, the world below was dead silent. She would observe nothing, but darkness and it would even paint over the snow-white clouds. The stars and moon provided some light to the sky, but they only highlighted the red tint that was hidden behind the darkness. It was as if the sky was smeared with dark red blood. Whenever she thought about exploring the world below, she would shiver at the thought of wandering through the dark. *How would I see if my vision was smeared by blood? I would surely lose my way in the forest.*

Even though the princess was kidnapped, the witch treated her more as a daughter than a captive. She was provided with luxuries such as a comfortable bed, exotic foods, and entertaining books. The princess would feign gratefulness, but she felt resentful toward the witch all the same. Perhaps she had a shelter over her head and food to eat, but it did not change the fact that the witch had stolen her from her real home and never gave a reason for doing so. Every so often, the witch would teleport into the room and provide the princess with necessities. The princess used to hesitate questioning the witch but as

she grew older and stronger, she became more rebellious. She would ask “What is that green surface below? Perhaps I could feel it just once?” and the witch’s reply was always the same. “Do not ask silly questions and allow me to protect you in my tower.” *I am no longer the innocent youth you believe me to be.* Even though the princess thought this, she never dared say it aloud. *I may be strong, but I am no match against her magic.* After their exchange, the witch would take out her spell book, place her hand in one of the pages, shut her eyes, then teleport away.

The princess was alone again and prepared for bed once the sun began to set. She snuggled under the covers made of cotton and propped her head on her pillow filled with goose feathers; however, her mind refused to allow her to slumber. *When will this nightmare end? When will I see my parents again? What purpose did the witch have for stealing me away?* Tears seeped out of her eyes and she opened them but to her misery, the darkness had enveloped her entire room. She could not see the walls, the floor, or even her own body. She felt as if she was covered in blood and quickly hid under the covers. *Perhaps the witch is right. Maybe I am safest here.* Suddenly, a light appeared and could be seen from beneath her blanket. She peaked out toward the window and was met by the luminous moon. Its body filled up the entirety of the window’s view and it simply floated there. At first, she felt threatened by the moon’s daunting gaze, but the light comforted her. She allowed it to stay outside of her window all night long. *So, there is light in the darkness after all.* That was the best night sleep that she had ever had.

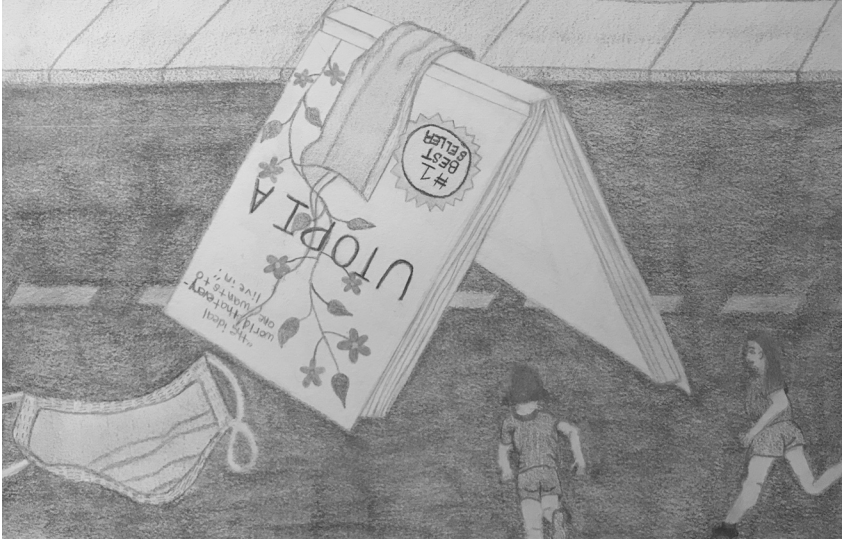
When the princess awoke the next morning, she no longer intended to wait, but to leave. After a week, the witch teleported in her room and placed food in a bowl, books on the shelf, and a stack of papers atop the dresser. Then, the princess asked “What is that green surface below? Perhaps I could feel it just once?” and the witch replied, “No you may not, for the world below is dead.” The princess was aghast. “You lie!” The witch pitied her and attempted to reassure her. “You need not worry about such things. Do not ask silly questions and allow me to protect you in my tower.” After, she pulled her spell book out of her bag, flipped the pages, and applied her hand on it. As she shut her eyes, the princess slammed the book out of her hand, and it

fell to the floor. The witch's eyes shot back open but before she could react, the princess had already wrapped her arm around her head. Then the princess whispered to her, "I do not require your protection, witch." The witch attempted to utter a retort but struggled against the princess's grip and her first gasp for breath was her last.

The princess laid the witch's limp body in her bed and as she observed her lifeless corpse, she felt a pang of guilt in her chest. *No. It is her fault for keeping me here. If it was so safe, then she should have taken my place.* She turned away and kneeled to the ground to pick up the spell book. It landed on the page that the witch opened so the princess merely had to flip it around. She applied her hand on it and shut her eyes just like the witch did, but nothing happened. She continuously reapplied her hands and shut her eyes and did so until the blue sky faded into a bruised purple, but it was to no avail. She became so frustrated that she almost threw the book out of the window, but she was put to a stop once she came face to face with the moon. She had not met with the moon since the week before and even believed that she may have dreamed about it, but here it was yet again. She began to gravitate closer to it as if she was hypnotized but rather than being fearful, she felt soothed. *Is this what it feels like to reunite with a friend?* As she admired it, she noticed that a beam of light shot down beneath it and cleared away the clouds below. The green surface that she had admired all these years was revealed and underneath the moon's rays, it glowed. Once again, she decided to try her hand at the spell. She took the book, applied the palm of her hand, and shut her eyes but this time, she envisioned the green surface and when she opened her eyes, she was floating directly above it. As she came closer to the ground, she felt the air around her which was gentle. There was a breeze, but it did not blow her away as it would have atop the tower. Instead, it kissed her skin slightly and left her wanting more. Once her feet reached the ground, she clenched them and felt the surface. From miles above, it seemed as if the ground was painted in green; however, it was uneven and split. It was as if the ground was made of dulled and soft blades. She clenched her feet harder and discovered another ground beneath this one. It was brown and crumbled beneath her feet. She was transfixed by both the grounds and their textures and knelt down to feel them with her hands and as she did so, the green and

brown began to fade away and were replaced by the dark blood red of the sky. She looked above and noticed that the moon had disappeared. *I am abandoned yet again.* She glanced back down at her hands in the ground and suddenly remembered the witch's corpse laid onto her bed. She pulled both her hands away and frantically rubbed them. *Get it off!* She scrubbed her skin raw but was unable to expel the darkness that had tainted them.

She stood up on her legs and began to run through the forest and as she got farther away from the patch of green, she realized that the rest of the floor felt differently. Every time the soul of her foot hit the ground, it felt as if she was being stabbed and burned. The ground now felt dry and the blades could actually cut. Despite her sore feet, she continued to run and had no knowledge of where she was or where she was going. Her sprinting came to a halt when she bumped into something that felt like a boulder and fell to the ground. Its texture was tough, but it felt warm as well. The boulder began to move, and it was so large that its breaths resounded throughout the forest. Even though she could not observe the creature, she felt its presence above her. The princess remained on the ground and did not move, hoping that this creature's vision was smeared with blood just as hers was. She slowly turned her head forward and was met with illuminating dark red eyes which could see her perfectly fine.



Hanna Hawkins — Escaping Reality

Morgan Frazier

Floating on a Paper

I tried to find a quote,
To say the feelings trapped inside,
Floating on a paper,
That I thought I just might find.

No work to be put in,
Just a read it and weep,
But the truth is,
You can only count so many sheep.

The ink will keep on spilling,
The pen soon will break,
The paper will start to dent itself in
ways it may not shape.

My tears may keep on flowing,
Forging rivers through my path,
You can only build so many bridges,
But the monsoons won't make them last.

In the end,
it's a flood,
Covering the land,
Here it is they say,
Sink or swim!
you've done all you can.

Did I make it?
I don't know.

I am still drowning underwater,

My heart is in a boat,
While my clock is ticking harder,
When I'm gone I hope to float.

Not all do get that pleasure,
The broken tend to be forgotten,
Because Humans like to measure,
What you did the worst and How far to tie the knot in.

Emily Alcantar

The Name that Splits Flesh

They say my name and look up at me,
their jaws drop in
disbelief or
is it in awe?

Thick black hair,
Braided neatly behind my ears.

The extra melanin sprinkled
Across my nose.
Beauty marks
kiss my skin.

My skin,
A tad too dark.

They do a double take

The three generations
Before me
Dismantle me

They fix my braids and
Throw me into the sun
to love myself

The specks
Across my nose
Barely visible

My skin,
A tad too light.

Is it in awe,
Or disbelief?
They say my name and look up at me.

My skin,
Does not match me.



Morgan Frazier — Caking Myself

David Morimoto

I Don't Want to Be You (But I Am)

I'm singing and rapping and asking myself
What do I think of you, human being?
You're spastic and stinking - what else?
I'm aghast! Quite frankly, you're plastic, you're sinking.
You're bringing your hapless self-basking self
to the brink of a nasty extinction.

You're obsessed with yourself and your bling.
Eyes pinking, you're living in sin with no inkling.
Giving in, you're grasping, wimpy and fat - what else?
You're possessed by your wealth.
Despite what you think you're not linked in.
It's simply fact, the missing link is that you're missing linking.

You're lapsing, you're limping, your gasket is blown, warning
lights blinking.
You answer by lancing yourself with drastic self-inking.
Earth moans, her skin pimpling and rasping and crinkling.
Your cancerous flesh scratches and spreads, it's not shrinking.
You're like the fink in the White House
drinking in his Russian whores' tinkling.

Human being, you should be acting with urgency, not
winking.
This is no happenstance, this emergency. It's perverse as can be.
You should reverse instantly and get minds clinking,
Asking yourself, agreeing, emerging to see what I'm seeing and
thinking.
Instead, you prance at the chance of more tactless self-tasking
and tinkering.

As it happens, gratis, you will see.
Your fanciful dance has elapsed, riotously.
You don't matter, just a tiny pitter patter
in your pattern of human absurdity.
This status won't last, you will splatter,
just a kink in the plan to be purged to the sea.
Collapsing, that is, unless you link fast to the land
and sync-in hand in hand with biodiversity.

Amanda Grace Shu

Villainelle

Groove to the rhythm of the underground—
Satan's saxophone and hell's maracas,
those bones in coffins rattling around.

The devil's the best dance partner I've found,
a reckless, careless siren calling me
to groove to the rhythm of the underground.

She goes by many names—the fiend, the hound,
temptation, all the thoughts inside my head
like bones in coffins, rattling around:

*Hell is the club where the cool kids get down.
Hell is where you belong, baby. Come on,
groove to the rhythm of the underground.*

She laughs, and God, I'm strung out on the sound—
her syncopated whispers prick my skin,
my spine a rattlesnake writhing around.

I'd damn myself for her, hellbent and bound.
We'll turn our torment's shrieks to swinging beats
and groove to the rhythm of the underground,
our bones in coffins rattling around.



Emma Ricci — In the Garden

Jack Lynch

Collected

My Existence: Year 2020:

MY NAME IS Richard Holdt and I live as a pet. It's been 4 years since the extraterrestrials took over Earth and wiped out human beings as if exterminating a rat's nest. The intense size of some of the Universe's newly discovered beings made us look like mice. The unlucky one such as myself were the ones that survived. We were taken in as zoo animals and pets. I lived for two years in a large cage with others like me. We slowly watched them tear down our cities and our landmarks to make their newest addition to their empire much more presentable.



My Life in Space: Year 2021

Then, we were taken off-world. We spent a year in a massive tank that was the size of a house.

It was as if we were living in a massive terrarium. It had lights shining down on us and large oxygen tanks strapped to it in order to simulate the Earth's atmosphere. To the right was a small encasement that was the size of an elevator. It had the same kind of oxygen tanks strapped to it and was capable of being attached or unattached to the rest of the tank. That was their way of locking us in the tank or moving us out whenever they wanted. There was also a pair of gloves attached on the inside of the tank, so they could grab us and put us in there. Our tank spent the whole year in a storage room on board one of their unusual space crafts. We were being shipped to God-knows-where. As always we were fed and given the same supplies as before such as clothing, books, sheets, and bedding. But, never anything we could use to escape with. Besides, there was nowhere to escape onboard that giant hulk of metal. Then, we were separated from each other. One by one, they took someone from our cage and sent them off to some other location. It was a horrible feeling. Every day, we

never knew if it was going to be our turn. The funny thing is, I was completely calm before I was taken away. I remember waking up thinking it would just be someone else who gets sent off. My mind was at rest as I woke up and ate breakfast, while everyone else was sitting hunched over and shaking their legs as usual. But, then when the giant gloves started moving, it was me who was lifted up by one of their huge hands.



My Second Transition: Year 2023

I didn't try and back away into the corner of the tank in some pointless way of avoiding the inevitable the same way so many others did. That was because I thought they were reaching over me to get someone else. I sat there in the middle of the tank eating my meal trying to ignore what was going on until I felt myself get hoisted up by my shirt and dragged into the small attachable encasement to the right of the tank. I must have appeared to my cellmates as if I were either a brave man showing a lack of care for what was happening or a man who had given up all hope. They may have also simply seen the truth, which was that I was just being an idiot.



My Captors: Year 2023

After being placed in the attachable encasement, I was transported across the spacecraft. The entire encasement shook, while the giant extraterrestrial walked me across. I kept losing my balance and decided to just stay seated the entire time. I felt like a dog in a moving car. I also got to see more of the spacecraft as I was being transported across. I saw some parts that I hadn't seen since a year before when we were first brought on board. But, what really caught my eye was the crowd of them in what looked like a mess hall. I hadn't seen that many of them since they first arrived on Earth and began storming through my home town stomping on the National Guard's tanks as they tried to

defend us. They stared back at me as I looked at them. I had never been looked at by so many before. Their yellow reptilian eyes scowled and they showed their fangs as I passed by. They looked at me and the one carrying me across as if one would look at someone carrying a bug in a jar across a cafeteria. A disgusting pest you don't want to see when you're eating, but also want to keep an eye on. I hate to admit it, but I couldn't give them any sort of angry glare or gesture. I couldn't get myself to look at them. I couldn't stand their humongous eyes staring at me, especially when I knew what they were capable of.



My Owner: Year 2023

We then arrived in a small room where a hideous and terrifying figure sat in the shadows. He was just as large as them. The only difference being he looked more human-like. He had a hairless body, small dark pupils and purple gills sprouting out of his neck. He wore an old-looking grey jumpsuit with large purple stains on it. He took the encasement away from the extraterrestrial that brought me in and stared at me for a solid minute with an expression as if I were gold. It was even worse than when the crowd in the mess hall looked at me. I couldn't even think. I just sat there, while that giant horrible face stared at me.



My Second Departure: Year 2023

The gilled man then took me away and we crossed a corridor where the walls were ruffled together. We then entered a new metallic room that was much more rustic-looking than the rest of the ship. He closed the door behind us to the ruffled corridor and pressed a button that made loud beeping sounds as if we were in a loading bay. I then realized that I was on another ship entirely. I was not only being separated from fellow human companions, but the creatures that ruined our lives forever, as well. I was taken away into the depths of the gilled man's

dark, rustic, and mold-infested spacecraft. He opened one of his sliding doors and flipped a light switch to reveal shelves of tanks such as the one I had just left, but with different sizes and inhabitants. It was a collection of creatures like myself. Too small to avoid these behemoths from taking over their lives.



My Terrarium: Year 2023

It all became so much more clear to me when I saw the tank that I would end up living in there for a long time. Naturally there were oxygen tanks strapped to it, lights at the top and a place to attach the transportable encasement. There was a layer of Earth's rock and dirt built up in the tank at a specific level. Grass was growing within it and there was a plain of soil for farming to the left of the tank. Near the plain was a small pond. At the center of the tank was a large wooden cabin with a bed and a drawer full of clothing inside it. To the right of it was a treadmill. I had become a part of the gilled man's collection of exotic pets.



My Routine: Year 2023

My daily routine was always the same. I would wake up and then wash my clothes and myself in the small pond. Then, I would farm my own food with seeds that were dropped into the tank every so often. Afterwards, I would simply keep my mind busy. I would exercise to keep my health in good condition, but that would never involve the treadmill. I have never so much as touched it during my time living in the tank and I never will. I refuse to be condescended any more than I already am.

Sometimes I would just spy on the neighboring creatures in their tanks.



My Neighbors: Year 2023

To the right of my tank was a colony of light green insect-like creatures the size of dogs compared to me. They are constantly burrowing into the yellow soil within their tank and feasting on the unusual plant life growing on the surface of it. To the left of my tank was a completely different story. There, lives a large red reptilian-like creature with a large pair of arachnid fangs for a mouth.

This predator constantly stalks me indicating how eager it is to hunt and kill me if we weren't in separate tanks. I've seen it attack and kill dozens of alien creatures that were dropped into its tank to be eaten alive. It's the reason why I despise farming my own food so much, because the plain is right next to the its tank. I can never focus on farming, because the predator is always staring at me when I do it. I can feel it looking at me from the bushes in its tank. The sick thing is that I believe that the gilled man purposely put our tanks next to each other just so he could watch our behavior for his basic interest.



My New View: Year 2023

It's been a year since I first arrived in this hell. However, today something new has happened. The gilled man has placed a new tank on the shelf across from the one where mine is stationed. I am now able to see the reflection of the label underneath the tank. Naturally the words on the description of humans are backwards, but I can still see the picture of Earth perfectly well.



Maggie Lin — The Freedom Trail

Victoria Wright

Candy Man

You've got a golden ticket.
Oh really? You thought it couldn't happen to you?
Step through the gate, but if you escape
Never tell a soul what you saw inside.
Lick the wallpaper, let it sit on your tongue.
Come along for the ride, we've already begun!
As you can see from these cotton candy trees,
It's pure disintegration.
Welcome to the sugar-coated nation.
Don't you know who I am?
That's right, The Candy Man.
I was once like you, and soon you'll be like me.
You want innocence? I'll give you my two cents-
Its everlasting if you give it a chance.
But be cautious of curiosity,
It might lead to more than you're searching for.
I know you broke the contract; I know you stole the drink.
Knowledge knowledge everywhere, but not a thought to think.
Still, you're the last one standing- the final player in the game.
Congratulations kid, the factory's in your name.

Montana Mendes

lovebug

shared custody of the bed and
city we spend so much time in
our sort of child
every two weeks i see you

sweat drips
cold lips
flood my body until i drown

toes hang over the bed
like fishhooks
using my love as bait
i am captured but full of life
yet i still gasp for more like a bass

your room is dark
but our eyes adjust
fingers run free to help find
what our eyes might have missed

warm hands contrast
the cool ac breeze
blowing slightly
enough to whisper

i will never admit to
how fast i have fallen for you
until you do it first

you hold my hand with such ease
as if i am part of you

counting the endless freckles on my body
and kissing each one

my home is with you
but i am afraid
of getting too attached.

afraid your love
will run out within a month
or four

my love ranges
the entire new york city skyline
and your pant pockets big enough
to store every love letter
written in my head

the world pressed play
on what i thought
would be a lifelong pause for us

Cammie Welton

Puddles

RAIN SLAPPED the pavement as I walked my usual route home from school. The sky was pale and grey, clouds shielding any sunlight from coming down and kissing the Earth. The sound of little drops was the only noise with the exception of the wind rustling the leaves every now and then. My backpack felt heavy on my shoulders and my knees ached from standing for so long, this walk always took me *so* long.

I cut through a metal fence and into the elementary school I attended many years ago. I saw the colorful playground and bright green grass, bringing back memories of playing spy with my friends in fourth grade. I heard muffled words from behind the play structure, right where I was headed to exit onto my street. Two girls sat on a brown wooden bench, holding each other's arms while glaring at me as I walked closer. They shared the same facial features and haircut leading me to assume they were twins or sisters, they had furrowed dark brows and deep black eyes. My skin crawled as I got closer to them, fearing what they were going to do or say to me. Their complexion reassembled the same color as the sky and were not dressed for the rain; brown cargo shorts and pink tank tops was all they wore.

As the distance between us decreased, I could see the horrifying look they shared on their faces. They stood up abruptly, still holding each other's arms and walked towards a puddle a few feet away from them while keeping eye contact with me. I stopped in my tracks, debating whether or not I should turn around and find another way home. The girls bent down to their knees right above the puddle. One girl grabbed the back of her sister's head before forcefully shoving her into the puddle, the girl shrieked and screamed but her sister would not let go.

The one dunking her sister's head kept eye contact with me as she did it, a smirk crawling onto her lips. As she pulled her sister's head out of the murky brown water I saw her face had started to melt off.

Her eyes were drooping down to her nose and her lips had already fallen into the water. The sister pushed her head in again, ignoring the flailing arms and bubbles her sister made, and brought her back up again this time, her entire face was gone.

The familiar sound of my alarm went off and I opened my eyes, startled and a little scared. I rubbed my forehead and pressed snooze. 'Just a dream,' I thought, 'only a dream.'



Hannah Pandya — Paradise Waiting

Sandra Tirado

Requiem for War

Here in terra firma,
the heavens grow sullen
over the buds of stillbirth we offer
that wilt in the great garden.
Above us the rays of red suns
have grown relentless
and poor of keepsakes.
No wilderness keeps shade
as hearts erode in fiery winds.
No sun cycle completes
to take the eyes to a gentle slumber.
What rises to be is the nuclear age
of waning souls sparse of family.
If you've ever heard a mother cry
for her lost children,
it is that very howl of rust and rain
that eviscerates the old centuries
where the stars have once too
been people born to gravity—
their land now taken to the tongue
of a great dragon.
Its greed is our undoing.
It shreds our celestial lineage
until no name can bear a spirit.
What a great sorrow to behold
that for this earth we've forsaken time
and made the atomic a reality
woven into the inferno.
We have missed our chances
to outlive it,

now that the gardens
of love and origin
instead bloom spirals of black sand
in place of their meant fertility.



Katya Novosad

Emily Alcantar

Malditas Raíces

Black, white, grey;
We stand condoning
The ruptures in our hearts.

We are shamed, then
Ashamed of our own pride.
But why?

*Spic, wetback,
Go back to your country,
stupid
Immigrant.*

But we still have not left
Our country, as it is
Embedded in our souls.

Let's scream, cry, plea,
Stand, resist,
And revolt.

Estamos Unidos.

Let's continue to dance,
Continue to sing, and
Continue to live.

They will slash our wrists,
Cut open our veins to explore
Our roots.

We, the people, bleed.

Hold your head high,

For our culture will not
Die.

Dead are the original
Roots. They are covered in blood shed
And later dried.

Ours are flourishing, thriving from
The rain that rolls down our cheeks
deep into the soil.

Ours are ready to be harvested;
Ours are until
The end.

Estados Unidos



Katya Novosad

Brenna Peterson

Untitled

I TRY to keep my breath quiet as I sneak through the abandoned department store in search of supplies. I could see my breath in front of me as the temperatures continued to drop. I manage to find bandages and shove them into my backpack before making my way towards the nearest exit and back into the cold. It all started a couple months ago, the freezing temperatures wouldn't stop dropping and the world turned into an icy wasteland, but I've lost track since then and I try to focus on my survival. I've been on my own, but I'm always looking out for signs of life, hoping to find a sign of anyone, anywhere.

Crash! I jump at the loud noise echoing behind me. I crouch down low to keep myself hidden, and the exit is within my field of view. It's so close! I hear a set of footprints draw closer, their breath as shaky as mine in the freezing temperatures. "Hello?" I hear them call out. It's a girl's voice. I stay quiet, unsure if I should give away my position or not. She could try to rob me! "Excuse me, I won't hurt you." She calls out again. 'She clearly knows I'm here.' I slowly step into the pale light shining in through the door, revealing myself to her completely, as if my body moved on its own. "Who are you? Were you following me?" I shout at her. The stranger backs up a bit due to the force of my voice. "I-I'm Eden. I swear I wasn't following you!" Her voice grew quieter. "Well, I was, but it's not like that!" She was flustered at this point, her pale face growing red, but I was unsure if she was blushing or if it was just the cold.

Somehow, I had allowed this girl to come with me. We walked together in silence, bracing ourselves against the strong winds. *I wished for a sign of life, but I never considered what I would do when I found one.* We walked for what felt like forever until we had noticed the sun was beginning to drop below the snow covered houses. We're in a neighborhood, the perfect place to set up camp for the night. "It's best we get inside before dark," I say to Eden, pulling her towards the

closest house to our left. As quietly as I can, I manage to push the door open just enough for us to slip in, not allowing any cold to follow us inside.

“So, why again were you following me?”

Eden crouches by the wood burning furnace, attempting to light a match with her frozen fingers. “You looked brave,” she says, her eyes focused on the stove. *I looked brave?* Her eyes met mine as the fire lit, and it’s the first time I got a good look at her. She was pale and thin, her cheekbones sinking into her face and her coat oversized. Her dark hair fell out from under her hat, and her eyes were a rich hazel, illuminated more by the glow of the fire. “You never told me your name,” she says. “Iris,” I say, moving next to her by the fire, rubbing my hands together through my gloves. “That’s a pretty name,” Eden smiles at me, “it’s my favorite flower.”



WE TOOK turns sleeping until the sun returned, listening carefully past the heavy winds through the walls of the house. We left as soon as the fire was completely gone, making our way out of the neighborhood and onto the open road. Snow came down lightly onto us, forming a pale powder on top of our heads. We ignore the frozen bodies curled up on the sidewalk as their backpacks have already been emptied of their contents. “How long have we been walking?”

I could hear Eden shivering, slowing down her steps. “If we stop now, we freeze.” The snow was coming down a bit harder now, and there was not a building in sight that we could take shelter in.

We walked for what felt like hours, our toes frozen inside of our boots. Finally, we were able to find an old barn to hide out in. The frozen pigs had been iced over, littering the white field leading up to the run down barn door. “It’s dry and warm compared to the outside, so it’ll do for now,” I said, falling backwards to the ground and pulling my boots off. I take my backpack off and put it up against a pillar, resting my back against the other side of it. Eden sat across me on the ground, hugging her knees to her chest to keep herself warm. “Hey, Iris,” she said. “You should get some sleep, you look exhausted.” She was right, I was. Though I hadn’t noticed how tired I was until she had

brought it up. I slump down against the pillar and close my eyes, crossing my arms across my chest. *I'll only sleep for a few minutes.*



MY EYES FLY OPEN, it's dark now. "Hey, Eden, how long was I-" She's not here. I quickly pull myself up off the ground and look around. "Eden?" I go to grab my bag so I can go to look for her, but that's missing too. *Dammit!* I push the door open, boots in hand, trying to see where she could have gone. The faint footprints are hidden by both the darkness and the falling snow. "She told me I looked brave," I said to myself, marching through the field to get back onto the road. I tripped over something hard- one of the frozen pigs I had seen on my way in. "I was brave, or was I just an easy target?" I let out a laugh, and it turned uncontrollable as my breath flew into the air in the form of white clouds. I finally pick myself up and brush the snow off of my pants and keep moving down the road. That's where I stumble upon her.

She was curled up on the sidewalk, ice cold. Both of our backpacks were gone.

How long was I asleep?



Casie Vergato — Our Planet

Bailey Haines

The Joys of Retail in Portsmouth...In a Pandemic

DOWNTOWN PORTSMOUTH certainly was not its normal, cheeky self as businesses reopened after closing for months, but it was something. And something was good. Something was refreshing. Something was much needed. The worn brick pathways are finally being walked upon once again. Baristas are back behind their counters, frothing oat milk with glee. Members of the local marching band that plays in the square are dusting off their instruments, and were now socially distanced in the delivery of their tunes. The old, black door of the shop where I work proudly displays its chipped paint and “open” sign as if boasting to customers entering that the shop was superior with its feisty knick knacks and laughable cards. Limiting the capacity to eight customers at a given time is tricky, forcing employees like me to be attentive in always counting heads, and often ducking to count legs instead because the heads got jumbled or hidden behind the various tall and pesky displays. The sign in the doorway informs incoming customers whether or not we are at maximum capacity. It is quite literally a sign on a pole in a glass jar, centered in the entry ramp. It may seem foolish to place it so directly, but it is the sole location that even *appears* to make a difference. If people do not literally walk into something and make direct physical contact, they seem to be indifferent.

Usually customers are pleasant and courteous: seeing the sign, making eye contact with me, offering a soft smize or perhaps a nod — acknowledging that the system in place will merely cause them to halt for a few moments while others are shopping inside. Especially prior to the pandemic, in a world that my boss begrudgingly refers to as The Before Times, our customers were generally bubbly Briannas whose smiles shine through the veil of their masks. They would bop around the shop, nodding along to the sassily upbeat tunes coming through the speakers. Their laughter would trail behind them as they would glide from one display to the next. They would cheerfully accumulate their purchases and bring them to the counter, always greeting me and

my fellow employees with warmth in their voices. Chatter at the counter would tend to be short lived, but generally perky regardless. They would wave and wish us well before they leave.

However, not all customers are Briannas, especially as we have taken new safety precautions. There are some people that exude their frustration visibly.

Some roll their eyes, others pout or groan. Then there are those that are a bit more bold and brash. Take the interaction from the other afternoon, for example. There were eight lovely people in the store, giggling about and collecting goodies for purchasing. Two came to the counter to pay for their items and then went on their merry way. I was preparing to wave my hand, gesturing for the next two folks in line to enter the shop as an entitled man marches in. I take a deep breath and quickly mentally prepare myself for what I am assuming will be an exhausting conversation. While I adore the general atmosphere of the shop and the people I work with, I am only working here to build up some savings since being stuck home from college—the last thing I'm looking to do is engage in an uphill, verbal battle with a stranger. I stop this man and explain that two people had just left and that our limit will allow for two more folks to enter, but that there appears to be a line outside of people that have been patiently waiting. Instantly, I'm met with defensiveness and furrowed brows.

We're all together. There are twelve of us, he barks and I'm sure his mask, which lingers below his nose, is now damp with spit.

Oh, thank you for clarifying! Two of you are welcome to join us for now and the remainder of the group can trickle in when the time comes.

My reply did not satisfy him.

I assumed all was well and that the situation had been resolved. It was not until I had nearly arrived back behind the counter that I noticed a herd of people rushing in. I politely and abruptly turned around to explain further. Yet, again I was met with resistance and did not even have a chance to utter a phrase.

Well you said we were all set, so I took that to mean we could come in.

Actually, Sir, I believe I said that two of you could enter at this time, but I sincerely apologize for any confusion.

His response? Nothing vocal, yet his actions screamed as he moved his gaze above my head. He motioned towards my boss, another

woman but one who had clearly been around the sun many more times, as if she would give him another answer. She did not. Instead she afforded me an empathetic glance and reinforced that the man and his entourage would indeed need to wait. It took time, but his group ended up filling the shop and, once he got his way, he was as jolly as Saint Nick. I do not know if I possess the correct words to articulate my rationale, but his jubilation only made me grumpier. If he was so capable of exhibiting kindness and composure towards others, why did I receive disdain? Was it me, did I invoke and awake the rudeness? Was it merely the fact that I am young and therefore, in his eyes, undeserving of respect and compassion? It then dawned on me, why do I care? Is my self-respect really dependent on that of those around me? Why is that the case? In the moment, I acted with great tact. While my insides felt as though they were on fire, I remained calm—pleasant even—and obeyed the disrespectful, rigid, and sexist ladylike standards enforced by society.



Maggie Lin — Roaming Boston



Lesley
UNIVERSITY