



One Step Forward



# **One Step Forward**

more than words

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Hillsborough High School  
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“Untitled”  
by: Manasvi Tata



## “First Loves” by: Riddhishree Badhan

The cold wind nipped at Lily’s shoulders, and she shivered, adjusting her cardigan.

Meanwhile, Aaron stuffed the last of the balloons into the back of his car. “Here, hold this,” Aaron said, passing her a handful of blue balloons while closing the trunk. He was holding a few balloons himself.

“We’ll probably have to bring some up front. There’s not enough room in here to fit them all.”

“Splendid,” Lily replied, slowly climbing into the passenger’s seat, careful to avoid popping the balloons. She took Aaron’s share so that he was free to use the steering wheel. Then, she realized something.

“Uh, Aaron?”

“Yeah?” He was moving a couple of stray balloons.

“How are you going to use the rearview mirror?”

Aaron glanced behind him. The back of the car was completely covered by dancing balloons.

“Shoot,” he muttered. He looked down at his phone, which had just offered him up a new serving of notifications, and he threw his hands up in exasperation.

“Who changes the location of a party and forgets to tell the people who are decorating?”

I love him and all, but I’m seriously going to kill Owen when this is over.”

“I second that,” Lily said, reaching behind her and scooping up an armful of balloons to clear the area. “But then again, it was you who decided we needed a hundred balloons in the first place. My cheeks are still sore from blowing them up.” She rubbed her cheeks then, wincing, and a balloon from the floor bounced up to her nose.

Aaron grinned, starting the engine with a shrug.

“Well,” he said, “you can never have too many balloons.”

Lily laughed, and Aaron pulled the car out of the driveway.

It was a cool night, and stars were scattered across the sky. The crescent moon illuminated the few wisps of clouds that drifted by, painting them silver.

Lily watched the peaceful scene, slowly bobbing her head to the music from the car. She noticed that Aaron had set it to her favorite playlist. Did he always do that? She turned to him.

Aaron was focused on the road ahead, his hands lightly positioned on the

steering wheel, sleeves casually rolled up. His hair was a little ruffled, and a soft smile played on his lips.

He was always so extra. Who would inflate one hundred balloons for a friend's small birthday party? Especially after breaking the balloon pump and having to blow up over half of them manually? Then again, who would spend hours helping a stranger study after being tapped on the shoulder for a homework answer? Plant a flowering tree for their cousin's anniversary instead of getting a bouquet? Read every book in the library until they found the perfect one to recommend to her?

Who else but Aaron?

Lily didn't realize she was smiling until her exhausted facial muscles began to complain.

She shook her head abruptly and moved to increase the music's volume at the same time as Aaron. Their hands brushed, and she jerked hers away, feeling her cheeks grow warm.

What was wrong with her?

"Sorry," Aaron laughed quietly, increasing the volume by a few increments.

"Is this alright?"

Lily nodded quickly, turning her head to the window. She hugged a balloon to her chest, trying to focus on the stars instead of her rapidly beating heart.

“After the Empires”  
by: Jenna Caruso

This world will end  
And these empires will die  
Time will never bend  
All we have is the rest of our lives

I'll be buried with my words  
And our bodies will become dust  
Remember when we danced among the songbirds?  
I hope that everyone had a love like us

Our souls will go on forever  
Reminiscing about our adventures  
I hope you lived a life like no other  
Free of the world and it's lectures

So I'll see you in another life, my love  
My heart will always be yours  
Perhaps I'll see you up above  
And together we will soar

“Creative Genius”  
by: Samay Dhawan





“florastronaut”  
by: Mira Das



“Because I Could No Longer See”  
by: Saikalyan Jogannagari

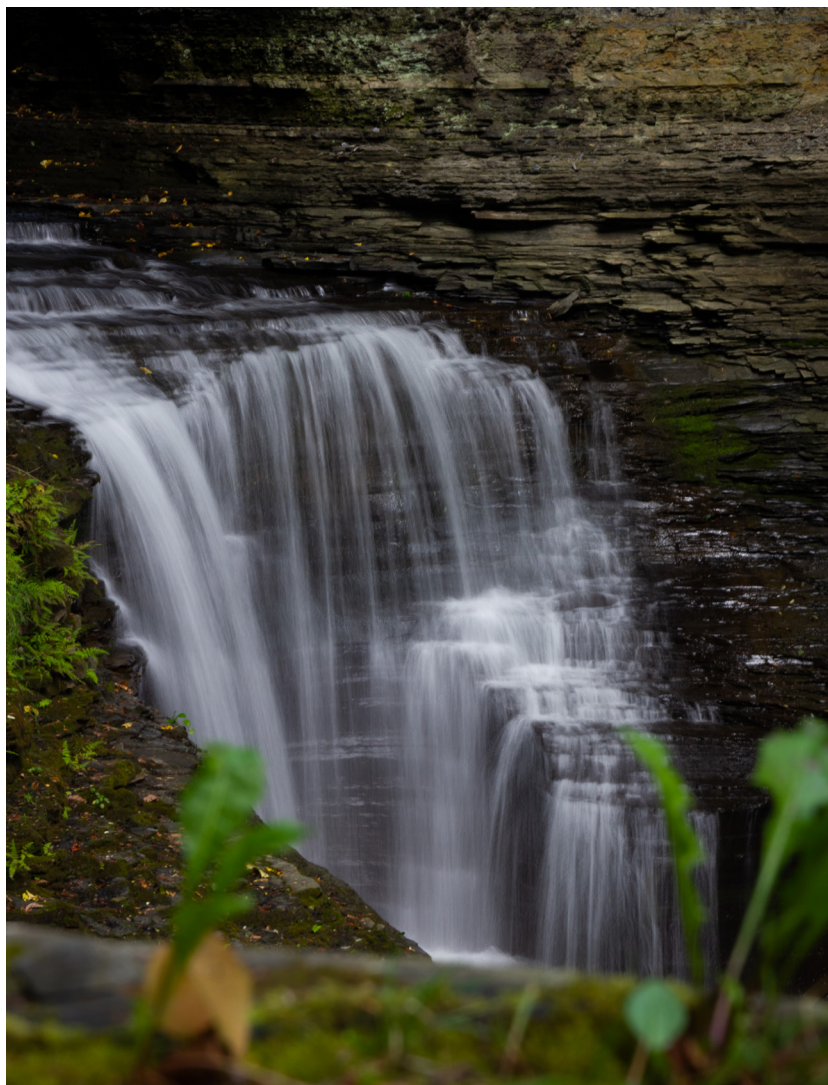
Because I could no longer see —  
The light behind the dark —  
Or could it not be seen by me?  
The hope so slight yet stark.

There is no life, if it lacks death —  
No dawn without a dusk —  
If Nature is so – so unclear –  
There is none left to trust...

Complex simplicity is the  
Beginning of the end —  
For all in this world, nonetheless,  
Exists with a close friend

Are not emotions, all attached?  
Connected yet apart —  
Since opposites do all attract —  
Is hate not love, just dark?

“Untitled”  
by: Jared Yili



“I, Too, Hear America Singing”  
by: Saikalyan Jogannagari

I, too, hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of the mechanic, the carpenter, and the mason,  
With each expressing the unique identity of its conveyor, and the true being  
of those that build up the hill upon which our nation stands,  
And though I do believe these songs of Joy should not pass unnoticed,  
We must not let them drown out those of Pain and Suffering,  
As we cannot turn a deaf ear towards those seeking Justice and Equality,  
And as a nation, we are large and contain multitudes,  
Which is all the more reason to pay attention to all groups of people, and  
not merely the ones which bring Joy and Happiness to the forefront of  
society,  
Since, behind that facade, that maya, that illusion, there is a deeper truth,  
buried in the foundation of the hill which lifts up our country, which is the  
notion that all people are created equal,  
And it is in that place, that if you listen closely enough, there are even more  
songs to witness,  
Those of the oppressed communities facing violence and discrimination,  
who are fighting and hoping and dying for Justice and Equality,  
Those of the poor struggling to make a living on minimum wage, who  
are becoming more and more reliant on welfare programs as the global  
pandemic rages on and leaves many others without jobs,  
Those of the people trying to bring awareness to widespread issues,  
including climate change, global warming, world hunger, and the list goes  
on,  
With each conveying the truth of the nation which would be foolish to not  
pay attention to, since it is these songs that we must address,  
And we must address them if we remotely want any chance at moving  
towards a society full of Purpose,  
And we must address them if we want to transform the nation to one which  
acknowledges that it is large, that it contains multitudes, since without  
darkness there is no notion of light,  
And, I, too, hear America singing,  
I do hear America singing,  
Yet I hear all of America singing, for 'tis not solely the varied carols of  
optimism which I hear,  
I hear those of Pain, Suffering, and Injustice just as clear,

And if we are to try to fix our nation's problems, we, as a nation, must first  
hear the songs of all,  
And break the facade which prevents us from listening to the dark side's  
call,  
We, too, hear America singing,  
We do hear America singing.

“Tech Neck”  
by: Diana Bozoyan

I sit and see the sorrow faces and shrugged shoulders in the seats  
I slumber to the sound of typing and video games  
The luminous screen reflected on the children’s hazel eyes and reddish  
cheeks  
The thumbs constantly moving and shoulders hunched over  
I sit and see the Snapchat and Instagram hungry bodies attached to their  
devices like glue;  
adhesive glue, never meant to be removed  
While at family dinners, church service, birthday parties; while in the shower  
or the pool  
The never ending texting and Youtube videos filling the young brain with  
unimaginable thoughts  
and images  
Thoughts and images causing bleeding eyes and rotting brains  
I sit and see the people turn into robots, numb of feelings and pains



“More Than Words”  
by: Natalie Machavariani

The young are a newly built home  
The wind slipping through each crack,  
Along the crisply painted crevices,  
A location to store life's most precious discoveries

Each event that unfolds throughout and individual's life  
Wears down the varnish, cobblestones, interior and exterior

Affliction spreads its wings of roguery  
Swooping down, shaking the sediment  
Encapsulating the dwelling with no desire to escape

No...

The battle has never been lost,  
Each day by the strokes of the grandfather clock  
And the sun's wispy golden hair,  
Dawns a new day, with a new chance  
For the depleted dwelling still bursting with competence

“Hidden Problems”  
by: Adhithi Rajesh

Just like a misty road  
the progression of my life is unclear  
Just like a vase delivered with a crack  
I was born imperfect  
Just like a dark room  
my mind is obscured and can't find the light  
Just like harmful rumors  
my thoughts are only negative  
Just like a storybook villain  
I always feel as if I've done something wrong  
Just like a seizure  
my brain is almost always rattled  
Just like a sad song  
my life's experiences all seem to hurt  
Just like a wrapped gift  
my life from the outside seems wonderful  
Just like a locked diary  
my true experiences are hidden from the world

“Whirlwind”  
by: Julia Zhang



“Rule Of Secrets”  
by: Adhithi Rajesh

If you hear it  
Don't mention  
If you see it  
Don't say it  
If you pass it along  
You violate the law  
The rule of secrets

If you have one  
Hide it  
If you share it  
Choose wisely  
If you deny it at all  
You violate the law  
The rule of secrets

We knew it  
From birth  
Never said  
Aloud  
If you don't  
Follow these lines  
You violate the law  
The rule of secrets

This law is ours  
Crafted by civilization  
Never explained  
Never written down  
Details what to do  
When you hold  
Something no one should know

This law is ours  
Seen to be  
Common sense  
Never read into

Never disobeyed  
For the fear  
Of consequences  
When the world finds  
Your secret

This is what we hold dear  
What we all know  
The rule  
The one we follow  
Without regret  
To prevent our deepest parts  
From coming to the light

This is  
The Rule Of Secrets

“NY”  
by: Anika Batki





## “Mysteries” by: Shivang Giri

The seaside is the gateway to an uncharted place: the ocean. The ocean contain many of our enigmatic mysteries, urging the brave to embark on adventures. The ocean has an allure due to its endless number of creatures and endless horizons. We, as humans, have this voracious desire to explore its secrets, similar to a child trekking through the backyard to find their misplaced toy. This eagerness to explore is an essential human trait that compels us to make profound achievements, ranging from Columbus's discovery of an entire continent to Einstein's development of the Theory of Relativity. Personally, the ocean's mystic appeal is a phenomenon not created elsewhere, making it contain many of my mysteries. The allure of the ocean mirrors the curiosity of my mind. The countless creatures in the ocean are like the countless ideas teeming in my mind, similar to puzzles waiting to be solved just like new species waiting to be discovered. The endless depths of the ocean represent the endless depths of my thoughts, encompassing life's deepest contemplations. Such locations are ubiquitous in our lives, but recognizing them is what captivates the mind

“Self Portrait”  
by: Ritu Patel



“Two Sided Love”  
by: Kiara Mundt

She sang with passion to all who could hear  
Her voice was passionate velvety smooth  
Yet there was only one listening ear  
Through the mist of people eyes were her truth  
The glance that drew them closer and closer  
Faces meet nose to nose eyes gleaming up  
Mankind melts away bodies move closer  
But the melody of his eye abduct  
Heart trembling, jaw clenching, stomach churning  
A new tune filled his ears leaving heartache  
Fireball of rage runs through her burning  
Leaving her with memories and heartbreak  
Moving on trying to find a new tune  
Her pain and heartache have become immune

“Resurfacing”  
by: Amanda Gianetti

After drowning in thoughts it is time to resurface  
Time for happiness  
Like a day on the beach  
The best day ever  
Feeling like you belong right there and then  
Realizing everything happens for a reason  
But beach days come to an end  
Because the sun sets  
And summer leaves  
Happiness can come in waves  
The ocean is pulling you under  
Feeling the pressure pushing you down  
The waves of sadness gulp you down whole  
Like an anchor tied to you  
You sink down  
Deeper  
There is no escape  
Maybe this is your fate  
Waves wash over you crashing down  
The silence is motionless  
The silence kills  
Then suddenly  
The light shines through the water  
Faith pulls you to the top  
You are saved  
Happiness is yellow  
Not grey  
Happiness is the sun after the rain  
And the smile of happiness is here to stay

“Distanced”  
by: Sierra Skala



“Untitled”  
by: Shani Vasquez





“In The Light”  
by: Anais Bouchatta





## “It’s Not Just a Disability”

by: Olivia Bernhard

“Are you, deaf or something? Can you hear me now? Can you read my lips?”

I found out I was hard of hearing in second grade. Life until that point seemed fine, kids were friendly and nice to me. Once I put those hearing aids on, the bullying began. Elementary school was tough. I have a twin sister, who is hearing, and she would help me cope with the bullying. Things started to get better in 4th grade, when some teachers would ask me to speak to younger kids about their peers with hearing loss, to hopefully reduce bullying. The elementary school was small, but once we changed to intermediate school, things changed.

The intermediate school was much bigger and included our whole town. I met other kids who wore hearing aids or had cochlear implants. I started to feel more confident, showing the kids my hearing aids before they asked about them. I started to really advocate for myself. From when I first was diagnosed to my freshman year of high school, I used an FM system that allowed the teacher’s voice to feed directly into my hearing aids. In 5th grade, I was asked to create a youtube video to show the other teachers how to use the FM system because many of them did not have any experience with the FM system. I was now the ‘go-to girl’ for anyone with questions about hearing loss in the school. As I entered Hillsborough High School, I relied more on reading lips, as opposed to just using the FM system, because it was just easier for me.

Since our school went virtual in March of this year, I was able to work from home without any classroom background noise. I was invited to a Zoom call with the Teacher of the Deaf and a new hard of hearing student who was entering kindergarten. The student was curious about her hearing loss and wanted to know how she would be treated in school. I was honest with her and told her that she might encounter bullies, but that she should advocate for herself as I have done. I told her she was going to have to stand up for herself and in the end, she will gain confidence. I really enjoy helping kids and know that Speech Pathology is really a passion of mine. As school is going back into session for my senior year, the talk of going back to school with masks scared me. I wouldn’t be able to read anyone’s lips with a mask

masks scared me. I wouldn't be able to read anyone's lips with a mask on. I reached out to the Teacher of the Deaf and the school to make sure they had the right accommodations for me if they decided we were going back to school. The school was very willing to help me and they not only got the teachers clear masks, they also got them for all the students in my classes. Knowing that I would be able to participate in class without the added stress of worrying I might miss something important made me feel included. Asking for the clear face mask and making the video makes me feel like I've accomplished something that would not only help me but also others in my situation.

This year I am starting a new job at the YMCA in my town. I knew my knowledge of ASL, American Sign Language, was useful because the person interviewing me asked me if I would teach some of the young campers ASL. I enjoy teaching children and adults about sign language and my hearing loss because it's a topic that many people are very unfamiliar with and a topic I enjoy teaching.

Being hard of hearing is just one part of me, but doesn't define me. Just like wearing glasses or contacts, it is accommodation but doesn't have to be a barrier.

**“The Real Picture”**  
**by: Gabriella Steele**

I cling to you because I want a special kind of love  
I create this thought in my mind that you're the one  
I dress you up... and washed away your red flags  
I painted the perfect picture... and stood in awe of my masterpiece  
But what I created was merely a dream  
Only to be enjoyed if I closed my eyes  
I was blind to your disguise  
Although my creation... you're my greatest demise

“An American Beauty”  
by: Olivia Padrusch



## “Stressful Situation, Sneaky Solution”

by: Samay Dhawan

As I walked up to the tournament director, a sense of excitement electrified me. Even though this was my first tennis tournament in two months, I felt optimistic about my chances of winning. I checked in with the director indicating that I was ready to play, and restlessly sat in the Monroe Sports Center’s lobby until my first opponent arrived. Since the tennis center was much warmer than the chilly, damp weather outside, I took my hoodie off to place it in my tennis bag. The second I opened my bag, my heart dropped, and my face turned as pale as parchment. My mood immediately matched the gloomy, grey December weather outside, a shift from the thrill that was charging me earlier. “My tennis shoes... how could I forget them? I could have sworn I packed them in my bag last night. How could I be so forgetful?!”

*Thump. Thump. Thump.* My heart was racing not just because of my carelessness, but mainly from the thought of telling my dad. Have you ever been so worried that you literally can’t speak or breathe? So scared to death that you feel paralyzed? That’s exactly how I felt. I tried to swallow the cotton that suddenly grew in my mouth and reached for a bottle of water from my bag.

Staring at the void in my bag, the exact spot where my tennis shoes should have been, I imagined a scenario where I told my dad about my sneakers missing; in my mind’s eye, I could vividly picture the look of disappointment, due to my irresponsibility, on my father’s face. Snapping out of my funk, I had an epiphany. Even though I was missing my essential tennis sneakers, I still had the Vans on my feet. Relieved, I sat back in my chair with a nonchalant and collected attitude. “It’s not like I haven’t played with my Vans on before, and it’s not like I need my tennis sneakers to be able to properly play and win,” I thought to myself.

Oh, but how wrong I was. I stuffed my water bottle into my bag and looked up at a sizable, rectangular sign over the lobby’s help desk. It stated the usual: NO FOOD ON THE COURTS, NO PROFANITY, DO NOT ABUSE THE NET OR OTHER EQUIPMENT. The only difference between this sign and ones I’ve seen in the past was the large, bold “NO BLACK SOLED SHOES ON THE COURTS” plastered at the bottom of the sign. Of course, this was the one day I chose to wear my black soled Vans too. With little to no hope left, there was no other option left other than to tell my dad that I had no shoes to wear to play my match. As expected, he began to lecture me for a minute or two; “How could you forget your shoes? I reminded you multiple

times last night to make sure you aren't forgetting anything! What're you going to do now? How are you going to play?!" murmured my father. With no explanation, I simply looked down at the floor praying for him to stop rattling on about something I was well aware of. It was starting to get very irritating.

Despite my tolerance swiftly decreasing because of my dad, he was quick to change that with an idea that would solve my problem. "There's a Target about five minutes away from here," he said, "and I think I'll be able to quickly go and buy some tennis sneakers. Your opponent still hasn't arrived, so I think I should be able to be back before the start of your match."

Unfortunately, luck was not on my side that day since the second my dad uttered those words, my opponent (whose face I had seen on the online tournament ladder, allowing me to recognize him) walked into the lobby to check in with the director.

The tournament director called out, "Samay! Your opponent is here so take this canister of balls and head out to the middle court right in front of us."

Panic. Anxiety. Fright. I would now have to forfeit the match. I began walking up to the tournament director slowly, with pearls of sweat forming across the top of my forehead. I hadn't even played a second of tennis yet, but I was already exhausted. I was so excited to play, but now my foolish mistake was taking away this opportunity. With disappointment across my face, I began to explain my decision to forfeit the match. "Hi... as much as I want to play, unfortunately, I won't-"

Before I could finish my sentence, my dad stopped me faster than a tennis service. I turned around to him whisper-laughing, "The shoes on my feet aren't meant for tennis and they're a half size smaller than yours, but just use them for this match. The sign on the wall says to not wear black soled sneakers so these are perfect. It's a better decision rather than forfeiting the match. Just wear mine and give me yours to wear so I can at least walk around without looking like a total idiot who has no sneakers on."

Releasing a sigh of relief, I quickly turned back to the director: "Never mind, I'm ready to play! Just give me a minute to put on my sneakers." I quickly shuffled back to my seat to lace up my father's Nikes with a sense of reassurance. With a chance to still participate in the tournament, my enthusiasm once again returned, all thanks to my dad.

That is to say, this would be the last time I would make a careless mistake that can strip me from a monumental opportunity. In all honesty, if I had to forfeit, I would have been devastated, which is why this moment was key to my maturity. Making such errors in the future for any activity, whether it be



be tennis or even school, was no longer an option. I simply had to grow up and take control of my mindfulness when preparing for something.

“France”  
by: Anika Batki



“Is this just a dream?”

by: Kristen Caruso

I am lying on the ground, among roses of the brightest red, and breathe in their sweet, sweet scent.

I do not feel like moving and do not remember why I would want to in the first place.

All I can see above me is a blue, blue sky. So blue.

I hear songs. Birds. Singing. A beautiful, beautiful tune. Though there are none in sight.

My mind is blank. All thoughts seem miles away and like they belong to someone else. Maybe they do. So peaceful.

“It must be all a dream,” I say.

My arms are heavy and tired, my legs feel like lead.

All a dream.

And then, though I can not be sure how, a flash of purple lightning cracks open the blue, blue sky.

A bolt.

And I remember. This is not a dream.

I pull myself off the ground.

And beyond the roses and their sweet, sweet scent, past the springtime fields, is the world.

Engulfed in flames.

And the songs of the birds morph into screams. And the thick perfume can no longer cover the smell of burning flesh. And the unnatural sky barely conceals the black smoke of the fire.

And this is not a dream.

It is a nightmare. But I do not remember going to sleep.

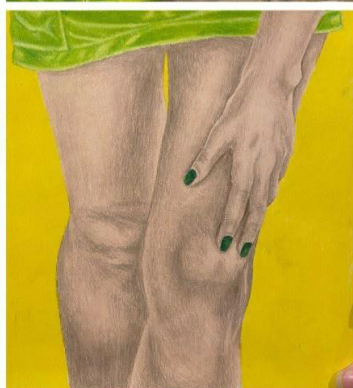
Tentacles of thorns wrap around my legs and dig into my skin. They crawl up around my body and drag me to the ground before my horrified eyes can shed even a single tear.

Now I see the sky. It is the only thing I can see. It is so blue.

And soon, I can not remember (they do not want me to remember), the flames fading to a distant memory.

I am lying on the ground, in a bed of roses.

“Self Portrait”  
by: Jessica Herman

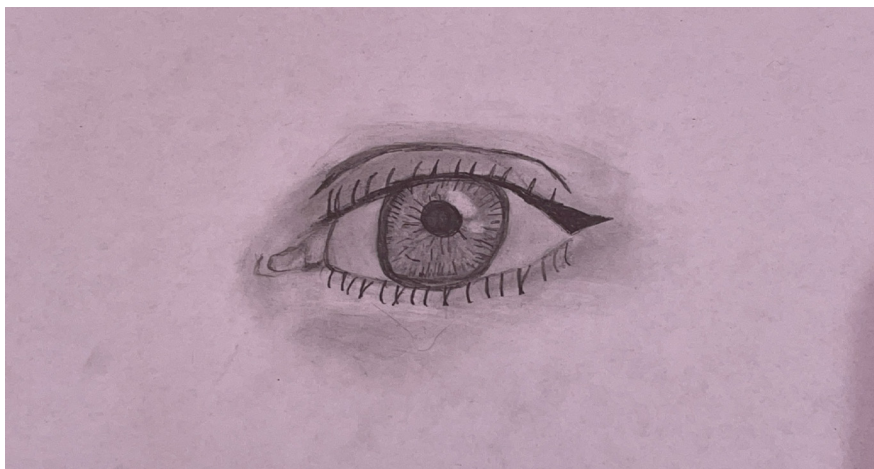


“Gentle Blossom”  
by: Marissa Valdes





“Untitled”  
by: Aiza Rana



## “Dreams Made a Reality”

by: Shani Vasquez

My yearning for adventure fuels me. The number of countries I wish to visit in my lifetime is ultimately daunting, yet I can't help but get butterflies when I think about going to the post office to submit another passport application for having filled my previous one to the brim with stamps. With every stamp comes a story, and with every story comes memories and feelings so clear it's like rewatching your favorite film. My wish is not to see every place on the list in my phone (though that would be nice), but to be impacted in such a way that no stamp or souvenir would be needed to recall that moment.

My years of history classes have taught me that the world is made up of billions of people who have varying global experiences. They live in all different countries, celebrate different cultures, and have very different lifestyles. I have visited a handful of states and though the chain restaurants remain the same, there are stark differences in cultures. I often find myself perusing the gift shops and corner stores for unique trinkets. Whether it be a handmade bracelet, a wood carving, or clothing suited to the area, I wonder what it is about these items that represents the story of the place I'm visiting. Whatever that story may be, I want to hear it.

With every state, country, and continent I have visited comes culture shock. This shock, like a bolt from Zeus, is what reminds you to take in your surroundings- the people, the food, the atmosphere, and acknowledge that this experience doesn't come every day. I want my limits to be pushed and to question my understanding of the world around me every time I visit a new place, while keeping my eyes open to the possibilities ahead. With every country, I will tread the beaten and unbeaten paths to help build my understanding of what lies beyond my bubble.

Growing up, I often watched National Geographic and Discovery, and admired how the photographers and photojournalists left no area uncharted. They captured everything truthfully and fearlessly. I aspire to shoot unfiltered and from the heart. I will take every moment during my gap year as an opportunity to begin my future. I will take honest photographs that represent and celebrate our similarities as well as our differences. Travelling will expand my global mindset and citizenship through a stronger understanding of cultures unlike my own. Through my camera, I will learn to appreciate the differences between cultures while also identifying the common threads that

ultimately make us all human. In Costa Rica, I will become one with the language. In Thailand, I will become one with the service. In Ireland, I will become one with the industry. Regardless of where this adventure takes me, I will learn to become one with the people.

“Mirror, Mirror”  
by: Anya Shah

Life lived is a mirror,  
reminding you  
of all the times  
you’ve slipped, fell,  
and made mistakes.

It’s recorded  
your missing teeth,  
your experimental hair,  
your burns, blisters, and  
bruises.

It has seen your hair grow longer,  
you become inches taller,  
gain scars, good and bad.  
As you travel through time,  
scars become light lines,  
wrinkles run like streams  
across your face.

A mirror is like a time machine,  
ready to show you  
every year,  
every moment,  
every step  
that led you  
to your final look in the mirror.

“What Is Reality?”  
by: Cora Attias-Inzano





“Untitled”  
by: Kody Magliulo



## “Replacements” by: Morgan Hodorowski

I met Evelyn in college during freshman orientation. It wasn't your cliché love-at-first-sight or kissing-in-the-rain story—despite her persistent claims that she knew I was the one the moment our eyes locked. I had my doubts. Regardless, I do admit (though, never in front of her) that there was something inherently special about the day. Amid the unbearable Arizona swelter, crowd of wide-eyed freshman students, and the overall chaos of the first day of college, Fate must've dabbled when someone — with untamed, frizzy red locks — collided with me. And, in that following moment of profusely apologizing, there was a spark: that somehow instinctual yet, at the time, ignored understanding that this was my person. Shy smiles, parting looks, burning cheeks — it was all wonderful and stupid and confusing and absolutely perfect.

Five years later, we were married—the wedding was an intimate ceremony consisting of only relatives and close friends. And, beneath the golden haze of sunset, we spoke our vows, that irrevocable promise to eternally cherish, support, and guide each other, while a star-speckled sky observed with wonder. That night, we reminisced and imagined the future, our future: traveling the world, owning a home, maybe even starting a family. Complete unadulterated happiness. Within this matrimonial utopia there existed a paradise of infinite possibilities, unfettered dreams, limitless love. Everything had seemed right.

I should've known it was bound to collapse.

Now, I sit at a bare table with a stranger. This stranger looks like Evelyn. With her unruly curls, freckled cheeks, inquisitive gaze, she can still illuminate any room with a simple twitch of her lips. This stranger talks like Evelyn. In moments of spontaneity, her mouth rambles and runs until her lungs can no longer keep up, leaving her breathless, teary-eyed, and laughing. This stranger dances like Evelyn. This stranger smiles like Evelyn. This stranger drives like Evelyn. This stranger cooks like Evelyn.

I want this stranger to be Evelyn.

But—a plate of scrambled eggs is placed in front of me. “You know,” a familiar yet painfully unfamiliar voice starts, “my co-worker Lacy — you met her once at a company outing — well, she told me her brother is getting a Double.”

“Oh, really?” I can't look at her.



“Yeah, I was surprised.” Evelyn ties her hair up into a ponytail. “I mean, his wife did pass away recently. Hmm ... well, anyways, I can’t blame him. Heart-wrenching to lose your partner after only four weeks of marriage.”

“Yeah.” She frowns at me, obviously agitated with my disinterested responses. The truth is, this normalcy is anything but normal. In every interaction, every conversation, every farewell peck on the cheek, the reality of my artificial life threatens to mar my blissful ignorance. It’s not real. And, I know that’s true, but I keep suppressing, keep deflecting because I’m scared that, if I accept it, my perfectly constructed lie will give way to grief and pain. So, I continue to plaster on a happy face, forge genuine smiles, paint a picture of domestic content, all while the knowledge that it’s a fantasy lingers, my own personal shadow. Yet, undeterred, I deny its existence.

Evelyn sighs, breaking me from my spell of introspection and sorrow. “Well, if you’re not going to engage with me this morning and—” she gestures with a spatula to my barely-touched dish “—if you’re done eating, can you look for my phone in the bedroom? I swear I put it down on the desk last night....” She trails off, and I stand up to leave, giving her a quick side-hug as confirmation.

Upstairs, our bedroom is a mess. Evelyn isn’t an organized person; while we were dating, she used to say, “I know where everything is, so that’s enough” in response to my futile pleas to at least categorize her notes — which had still remained splayed across her floor in disarray.

Pushing aside unfolded clothes and random papers, I lean down and stretch my hand under the bed. Evelyn is a restless sleeper; a flailing limb usually results in her phone falling from atop the desk. While searching, my hand hits a box, which I pull out. It’s covered in dust, evidence of its neglect and my avoidance; this box is full of memories.

Some force, some need to feel real, compels me to have a look—nothing too long, just enough to remember that beautiful past not stained by illness and regret. Lifting the lid, I first spy a postcard from Tokyo, Japan: Evelyn and I, engulfed in a loving embrace, shimmering underneath cherry blossoms for our honeymoon. Next, I spot a pair of friendship bracelets. During our first year together as an official couple, Evelyn made these to emphasize that “our friendship will always be the foundation of our relationship.” So sappy. Beneath the bracelets is a necklace. And a hospital wristband—

A deafening crash wrests me from my daze. It's loud, too loud, reverberating like the somber toll of church bells, and an indescribable, overwhelming sense of panic sends me racing into the hallway and sprinting down the stairs. This anxiety, this fear, it's just like that time—when everything suddenly went wrong.

In the kitchen, leaning against the cabinet, Evelyn rubs a hand over her forehead and eye. Besides her, water oozes, like blood, from an overturned pot. Kneeling in front of Evelyn, I gingerly place a soothing hand on her arm, and she releases a stifled yet relieved snuffle. She's crying. This simple fact elicits an ire so potent and raw that I feel it searing me from the inside. I hate that she's crying. I hate that this imposter can seem so, so human, while everyday my own sense of humanity is diminished by my inability to cope. While I live a lie, she lives in oblivion. So, yes, I hate that she's crying, because I should be the one crying. And, when this strange, fake, Evelyn removes her hand from her head and eye, there's no blood, no bruise, no indication that she's made of flesh and bones. No, instead broken skin gives way to machinery: gears in perpetual motion to provide sentience and false life. Her eye is glitching, the pupil rolled up revealing her robotic nature. This thing is merely a replacement for something lost.

A Double.

Evelyn asks, "Do I look okay?", and I have enough control to refrain from blurting, "You look hideous." Instead, I say, "You look fine", proffering her an arm to help her up, which she readily accepts.

Glancing about the room, Evelyn groans, "Now, I have to clean up this mess." Pivoting towards me, she smiles, "Thank you. I love you."

She looks at me expectantly, and I cringe.

I'm still angry. Angry at Fate. Angry at Evelyn. Angry at myself. And, yet—And, yet, sometimes a lie is more powerful than the truth. Sometimes we need to protect ourselves within a fantasy. The strength of moving on is an elusive being; it taunts us with promises of peace yet leaves a wake of destruction.

So, with this pitiful thought in mind, I tell myself, once again, one more month. And, this is the biggest lie of all.

Because I'm in love with a memory, and I don't think I can escape.

"I love you too, Evelyn."

Because I'm in love with a memory, and I don't think I can escape.  
"I love you too, Evelyn."

“Untitled”  
by: Kody Magliulo



“Untitled”  
by: Mary Buist



“Untitled”  
by: Mary Buist



**“Untitled”**  
by: Ella Karolewski





## “My Grandfather”

by: Atishay Jain

The story began in a small village in India. The village's name was Aligarh. My grandfather's name was Man Singh Jain, and he dreamed only one thing in life: fight and succeed. He was determined to beat all the people who taunted him, telling him that he couldn't do anything. He was very happy that he achieved that very thing in his life. His only aim in life was success, so he studied a lot. One day he was studying, but he did not have money to fulfil his dreams, so worked as a laborer with his father, to pay his fees and he could study without any distractions. One day, he was studying near the canal and friends came and said, “Hey! Man Singh, come and play with us.” He responded, “No, I want to study. Please don't disturb me.” His friends were so angry because he refused to play, so they tore his books. “Now study, now become educated.” He was very angry, sad and depressed that he worked so hard to get his books. He went to his father. “They tore my books. How can I continue my studies?” he said. His father said, “Don't worry, I will get new books.” They both worked hard to get new books and got them. The village did not have lights; they only had lanterns, so he studied with a candle in very harsh conditions. Sometimes when oil was available in his home, he used to study with street lanterns. He studied and went to the University of Aligarh, and he studied Civil Engineering. He was a very ambitious man in life, and he was very very very successful in his life. He became the Chief Engineer in Delhi. It was a very high post in India, and he directly reported to the chief minister of Delhi. He did lots of things in Delhi, like creating a better sewage system and many more. He retired from Delhi Jal board in 2010. After some time, he was diagnosed with cancer and his condition was very critical, The cancer from his gallbladder reached his lungs. We all thought that it was his time to go but he never gave up and he won the fight against cancer. He was a very honest and peaceful man, and he always helped others first. He was not arrogant even though a car came and took him to the office. Everyone loved and respected him. When anyone greeted him, he smiled. During the pandemic, my grandfather who beat both economic disadvantages and cancer, contracted COVID-19 and died from the virus. My father, my aunts and I all prayed to make him healthy again, but he still left us. I love my grandfather, and I am determined to continue his legacy through my own success.

“Watercolors and Colored Water”  
by: Shayna Friedman



“We Are Still Drowning, We Are The Sea”  
by: Surayyah Fofana

We are barely surviving the treacherous waters, trying to tread violently but making no progress,

Suddenly we are submerged deeper in the sea, unable to escape, and expected to just drown.

Then in the midst of the havoc, our ancestors look to us to persevere and swim upward, they paved the way

while our oppressors insist that we aren't even underwater.

That we aren't even drowning.

But I sit, with water filling my lungs near my last breath,

While they know nothing but fresh air, unaware of what is like to drown.

Back then, they Captured us, and told us we were inferior, uncivilized, monkeys

While they whipped us out of mere pleasure bonding us to shackles referring to us as objects.

Aren't they the real animals?

Now they remind us we are all equal we all receive the same,

While they have all the air,

And we are still underwater.

Now, our brothers and fathers can't even make it home without the fear of drowning,

In fact many of their bodies lie deep at sea.

Out of reach, and never had a chance to have clear air.

All of us were born underwater.

And we are still there.

But just when we are close to reaching the surface,

To taking our first breath of air,

We strain our voices and say that “we matter”

That we deserve to breathe air

That we deserve basic human decency and equality

And to no longer suffer at the hands of the violent riptide

They sickness that is racism and all bigotry

Says, “we all deserve to be above water, to not drown”

But we are the only ones drowning,

Although barely surviving,

We keep the ocean waves flowing,

We keep society moving,

We matter

I matter  
Black lives matter

## “Grandma’s Recipe “ by: Stella Perovich

I swing open the door of my grandma’s quaint house that I love so dearly. The smell of nostalgia enters my nose and I am instantly reminded of the years of memories I have made in this house. My grandma greets me and my sister with a huge hug, like always. After the small exchange of necessary small talk has finished, I know my favorite sentence is coming next. “I made you a banana bread,” my grandma says with the widest smile. My body is instantly filled with excitement as I run to the kitchen and see that shining golden brown loaf that I love so dearly sitting on the counter.

The sweet, delicious taste of banana bread is a popular concept that many people know and love. The mix of banana, butter, sugar and flour all come together so seamlessly, and it becomes irresistible to not devour the entire thing in one sitting. It is a simple, yet delicious treat that many have taken time to perfect. I am a huge fan of banana bread, along with most people of the world, but it holds a deeper meaning in my heart. When I see that shining loaf of perfection come out of the oven, I am not only reminded of the delicious taste but also of my sweet grandmother who taught me all about my favorite treat and shaped me into the person I am today.

My grandma is the most generous and kind-hearted woman you will ever meet. She spends her days clipping coupons so that she can donate items in bulk to soup kitchens and people in need. I love my grandma endlessly, but you do not fully know my grandma until you have tried her banana bread. Although I have attempted to make it once or twice, I know that my loaf will never be able to live up the flawless and pristine combination of ingredients that my grandma has worked years and years to perfect.

As I continue to grow up and drift further from my childhood, I am delighted that I am able to keep this memory of my grandma’s banana bread so close to my heart. With the ever changing environment of my teenage life, there are a few things I am confident that I can hold on to to keep my childhood alive. Whenever I feel uneasy and anxious about the world and growing up, the mere thought of my grandmother’s banana bread is able to calm me down and help me feel some sort of ground. It has, and will continue to be a constant in my life that will always make me feel safe and loved. This concept has changed my life, and continues to shape my personality to this day. I am able to remember that no matter how nasty and evil the world may seem, it is important to recall the little things in life that will be able to make you smile, and that there are good people left in the world.

Although it might seem silly to say, I would not be who I am today if it wasn’t

for my love of banana bread. My grandma passed on the tradition to me when I was such a little kid, and I have never known life without the sweet delicious treat. No matter how many years pass, there will always be a place in my heart left for my grandma's banana bread and I will always be reminded of her and her impact on my life whenever I see that shining brown loaf.

“Ice Cream Cake”  
by: Kiley Chen





“Just Some Cherries”  
by: Atharva Katkar



“Undergrad”  
by: Sabrina Eilers

Finding the end  
Becomes one step closer to the beginning

Everyday is a new end  
By measure  
We take our beginnings as endings.

We take off our caps  
Our gowns  
To put them back on again

Our milestones become our endings  
Some chosen by us  
Others chosen by those around us

To know our true endings we look to our people  
Our family  
Our supporters

Step into the future of our end goals  
The new classmates  
The new rules  
The new environment

This is the beginning of our start, our middle, and our end

This is the new end to a new beginning

“Untitled”  
by: Allison Lazaro

