

BEHIND THE MASK 2020



Behind The Mask

more than words

2020
Volume 51

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Poetry and Short Stories

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“The Wavelengths of Emotions”

by: Olivia Padrusch

Our eyes are designed to see colors,
yet those colors mean so much more to us.
They are only mere variations of different wavelengths of light.
Colors tend to signify various meanings in human culture,
Colors symbolize our thoughts through art,
Colors are often associated with our emotions,
Colors are more than just a simple word,
and they are more than just products of our eyesight.
They are an essential part of our lives.
Colors are part of our emotions.

Yellow - a color of bright, radiant light,
Bearing evidence of the sun's great might.
It was in the morning when the golden ribbons of yellow danced in through
the window,
And blanketed you in a warmth that can only be as soft as a cloud.
It was the first color you ever saw,
It was the first drawing you ever made.
The yellow lines scribbled across your page emitted joyful youth.
Yellow was the color of your hair that breezed past me
as you whizzed and wandered up and down our backyard.
I would always smile as soon as I caught sight of those blond strands flying in
a crowd.
Yellow would be the beaming sun in our souls whenever we embraced in a
hug.
You came into the world as the ray of light that shone upon my lonely heart,
You were the yellow sunshine in my life.
Green - the soothing tones of nature.
Green surrounds every creature.
Green was your favorite color.
Green witnessed your first words under the tree in front of the house.
I saw green in the sparkling emeralds that you wore every day.

We would take walks; the wind slowly breezing past us,
causing idyllic ripples in the green grass.
Green watched as leaves above your favorite swing.
You rolled down hills of dark ferns with such exuberance.
You were enraptured by the greenery of the world.
It swooped down upon you like an alacritous hawk,
flying with your curiosity for the rest of your life.
I felt like a child again whenever we would play in the springtime,
cracking up at your silly dances with the twirling leaves and flowers.
That day, I felt your tendrils of green vines wrapped around my heart.
Green was there the first time I realized that you were my everything.

Red - a burning, fervent flame;
It is often too strong for anyone to tame.
Red is present in all of us, deep down to the core,
Often taking forms of scorching anger or wine-dark jealousy.
But in you, it ignited like wildfire into a great inferno of ambition.
Red were the trails of ember that revolved around your mesmerizing
movements as you danced.
It was then, that I saw the true spark in your eyes
and knew what you wanted to become: a dancer.
But red was also what clouded our connection in the midst of arguments.
Red often engulfed us in a fury of fits and malevolence.
It was everything I bled for you to forgive me when I had an outburst.
Red was the most beautifully destroying color of our small family.

Blue - a color of incessant, sorrowful rain.
Amongst its hues lies a deep pain.
Blue was the color that set me free,
like a sparrow stretching its wings and flying directly into the sapphire skies
of an early spring.
Your deep, ocean eyes never fail to entrance me.
Blue skies were the tranquil mornings when you would bring me breakfast.
We would cuddle up as I read books to you, with blue observing just outside.
It was waving from outside the window, engulfing the world in a sea of icy
raindrops.
Blue were the dark-colored carnations that sat perched upon the doctor's
desk.
Blue was the calming beat of crashing ocean waves on your favorite beach.
Blue stalked us in the brushstrokes of a painting on a sterile white wall.

Blue was a tsunami of my broken tears and the surging hurricane inside me.
I was drowning in an endless pit of blue.
Blue was a never-ending reminder of that time.

Black - a color of absolute chaos and oblivion.
It has no mercy and encases all it touches in a pure color of obsidian.
I had met it many times before,
but it didn't have quite as much savagery until it took everything I loved.
Black welcomed me when you went to the other side.
It watched from the front rows of fate and destiny.
It slowly seeped into the fading life in your eyes as I held your hand for the last time.
Everything was black;
my clothes,
my feelings,
My hopes.
Black was there in the roses I laid on your grave.

Here I am, staring amongst a landscape from your favorite lookout.

A truly magnificent scene, full of colors, each one telling their own story.
The green still holds the scent of all the blooming flowers from when I felt the warmth of holding your hand in the park.
The sun slightly trickles light into the shadows of my soul, which was once illuminated by you. Your eyes still haunt the cyan blue rivers, your gaze lurking in the swift currents.
I'm in a wondrous world with so many emotions.
Bursting with such beautiful, mournful colors.
You're still here with me.

“Masked Soliloquy”
by: Olivia Padrusch



“Forest Fires”
by: David Mantilla

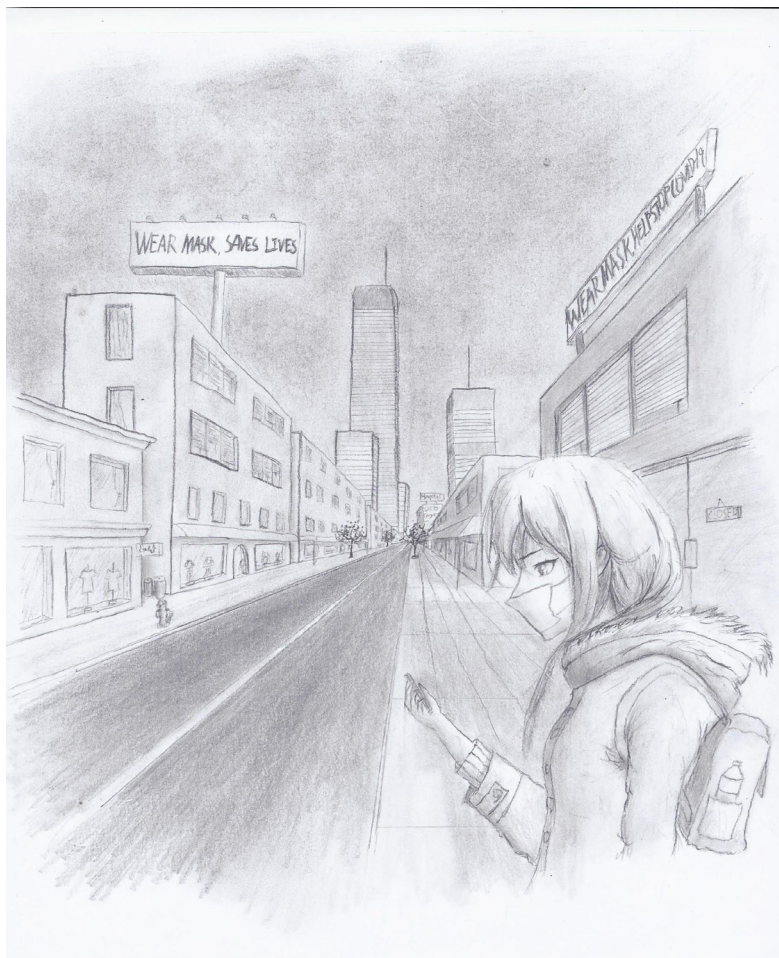
“Stress” burns inside us,
It crackles and blazes in our heads.
The forest wants to be calm,
But sometimes the fire spreads.
Smoldering fire or raging fire,
Does not matter which kind.
In the heat of the moment,
The flames scorch the mind.

Step away from the situation,
Or the feeling will bring out the worst.
Deep breaths– life won’t end,
The world is not cursed.

“Showing Myself”
by: Gabriella Dudajek

I look left
I look right
Who's there?
I look up
I look down
Starting to get scared.
I freeze.
I see my knees
Are trembling beneath me.
The silent killer
Out to get me.
Remove my mask...will it enter?
Will it make it hard to breathe?
Will all my symptoms take over?
Why did I take off the mask?
I feel like everyone is judging me.
I should not have revealed that part of me.
I'm drowning in a sea of scrutiny.

“A Silent Street”
by: Yang Li



“Golden Eyes”

by: Morgan Hodorowski

The moon, solemn and dignified, graced the night sky with its illumination. Clouds dared not mar that perfect darkness by enshrouding the stars, nor stifle the lunar brilliance. Nonetheless, despite all its beauty, that midnight was cold and unforgiving. A crisp breeze scraped against the car window, and dead leaves spiraled in umber twisters. Light rain, a foreshadowing of the approaching thunderstorm, danced upon my vehicle's roof, producing a mesmerizing yet unnerving symphony.

It had been a long, tiring day. As the car slithered through the forest backdrop, my eyes fluttered close, only to abruptly reopen. I couldn't focus, couldn't maintain my sight on the road ahead. I shouldn't have been out this late, much less driving in the midst of an autumn squall. Yet, here I was, silently swerving down a desolate lane, nestled among the woods, drifting in and out of slumber.

That was when I saw it.

In retrospect, who knows what I really encountered on that strange night. My fatigued mind, susceptible to imagination, could have easily distorted reality, transforming a simple deer into a nightmarish beast. Yet, it felt real and otherworldly, as if the realm of fantasy was tangible.

It was 12:30 am. The drizzle had intensified to a full out downpour, water cascading down the windows, bathing the outside world in a liquid blur. My car was idling at a traffic light, that crimson glow penetrating the ebony haze. The whole aesthetic was rather ominous.

A malodorous odor crept in through the vehicle's vent: pungent and revolting. It soured the air, tasting like death itself. Bile rising in my throat, I rolled down the window, only to be hit with a stronger, more nauseating wave of stench. Raindrops invaded the car's interior, soaking the leather seats and chilling my skin. I quickly shut the windows, thankful for having worn a winter coat.

Yet the malodor remained. “Stupid skunk,” I muttered, incredulous. “And just my luck too! Now the damn light is broken.”

Amid the struggle, I had failed to notice the consistent red. It had been ... what? ... at least ten minutes, yet that scarlet shine still provided what little light was present in the dead of night. Though I was not a person who actively violated the rules of the road, this incident was an exception.

Gently pressing my foot on the gas pedal, I drove through the light until the vermillion radiance was a distant memory.

I, once again, continued, though the recent events had left me on edge. My fingers tightly gripped the steering wheel, as if preparing for a sudden veer. My eyes widened, searching the road ahead for ... something. Goosebumps elevated the hairs on my arms, and an unnatural coldness snaked down my back. Everything was off.

A weird sputter started to come from the car, like the vehicle was panting. Slowly but surely, it came to an unwanted stop. Dead.

Frustrated, I pounded my fists against the car horn, releasing a deafening scream that pierced the silent black.

"Why?" I seethed through gritted teeth. Leaning back against the leather seat, still drenched in rain, I gave an aggravated sigh before thinking of a solution. I checked the dashboard; it was now 1:00 am. Tow truck companies operated all day. So, unfastening my seatbelt, I shimmied into the backseat to retrieve my phone. I sifted through my purse until my hand came upon that miraculous object. Turning my body back into the front seat, I eagerly pushed the power button.

Nothing.

I pressed again, more urgently.

Once again, nothing. Of course, my phone had no power. Fortunately, I had a power cord

stashed in the glove compartment, which I removed and plugged into my phone. Now having to wait for a few minutes, I took the opportunity to rest my eyes.

The car was so warm, the seat was so soft, and the ...

THUD! The ground quivered, wobbling the car, jolting me awake. The trees violently brushed against each other, emitting a cacophony of screeching. Through the whirling gale and wild torrent, I thought that I could discern a snarl, malicious and feral. Then, the earth quaked again, so viciously that the car groaned. I started to sweat, that cold perspiration that left flesh slick and lips trembling. My breath came out in shallow, vigorous wheezes.

All of a sudden, a branch flew from the woods, colliding with my car.

Luckily, it landed on the hood of the vehicle, only demolishing the front half. Nonetheless, shock rendered me paralyzed, as I watched steam seductively twirl from the busted engine. The fetid odor sharpened, inciting me to vomit.

In a delirious state, I stumbled out of the car, the cool rain now a comforting presence. Everything was spinning, fading in and out of reality. Then, from the midnight forest, emerged a wraith-like beast. Golden irises that contrasted its ebony body, this monster of nightmare and delirium completely seized my attention. It floated like a ghoul, magic and horror oozing from its pores. A muffled hum crawled from its grin, the Hymn of Hell, and its sable cloak remained motionless in the tumultuous tempest. I was completely, utterly fascinated.

The monster grinned harder, evil personified, as a savage growl emanated from its throat, breaking the spell.

Terror rushed in, overcoming and all-consuming, as the realization of my mortality punched my gut. I gathered myself and scrambled into the car, slamming the door shut. I reached for my phone, momentarily relieved, and dialed 9-1-1.

“Help ... me —”. My phone died, inexplicably. I locked the doors, hyperventilating, and cowered between my legs. It had become deathly silent except the distant howl of wolves. Hesitantly lifting my head, I peered outside, only to see two hollow yellow eyes pressed up against the window.

A hysterical scream escaped, just as a blinding light illuminated the road, slowly covering everything in a white brilliance. My world shattered.

... ..

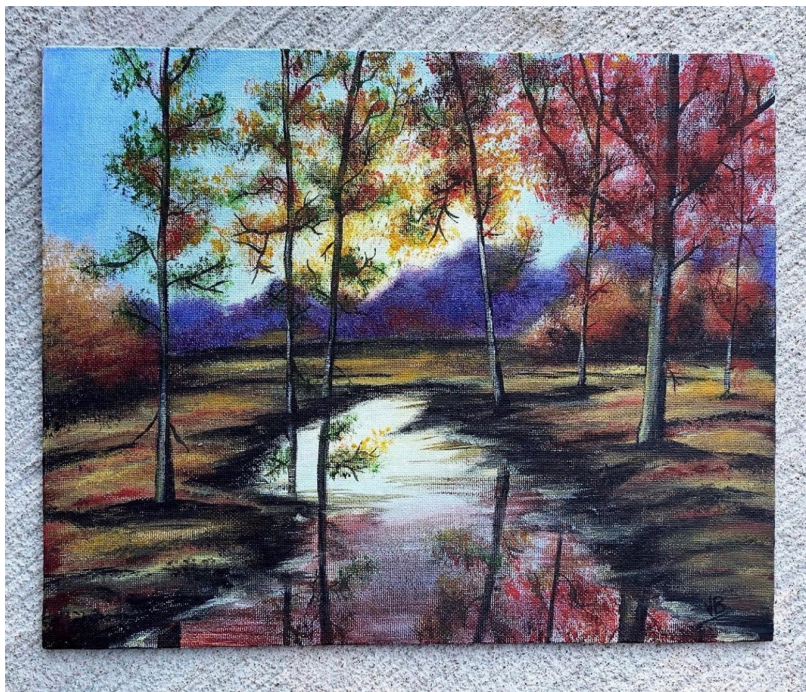
I was startled awake by hands persistently shaking me. Disorientated, my eyes slowly opened to bright lights and wailing sirens. A warm, thick liquid dripped down my cheek, the metallic flavor of blood fresh in my mouth. I moaned in agony, the pain awakening. A paramedic stood over me, as a police officer in the background shouted, “Female ... crash ... asleep at the wheel ...”.

I couldn’t formulate a coherent sentence, couldn’t cry.

And as I was hoisted on to a stretcher and rolled to the ambulance, I swear that I saw two

golden pupils paired with a malevolent grin watching from the woods.

“Autumn Forest”
by: Vinisha Bhagdev



“I See the Light”
by: Vinisha Bhagdev

I heard of the mystic angel,
With gleaming snow-white wings.
The one who'd make my life tranquil,
Despite my fickle path.

Here I still remain wondering,
Why my dismal soul stays?
My mind afflicted with sorrow,
Crying tears for days.

I still search for my white angel,
For I can't see its wings.
Lighting up my precious candle,
I let go of my wrath.

Now I stand here, brand new, hoping
To meet the angel's gaze.
I hope to find peace tomorrow,
As it starts a new phase.

“Energy Surrounds”

By: Sabrina Eilers

Inspiration is espresso. Fresh, strong, deep, cleansing, new it is injected into our hearts. Rich and bodied, the very spirit of inspiration arises in a moment's notice and carries us out of bed and through our days. It energizes as it flows through the bones of those with the heart open and of the need for something new. It starts with the idea of bitter and rich liquid pleasing the taste buds with simply the thought of such activity. Energy is embodied in four ounces of liquid, just as it embodies the inspiration that pumps through your blood with a fiery passion. The topping to milk or cream, espresso is the lighter to the lighter fluid, the nudge to the idea that has now been inspired. The pressure on the trigger, the foot on the sidewalk, the first letter in the journal. A needle in the haystack, a diamond in the rough, the grounds are pressed squeezed for the very inspiration you seek then to flow with the liquid of life, the water fuels the ideas. The pressure for its value is uncanny, you seek relief, energy from available sources. Just like a dead car battery you use the very cables and make of you being and fill your body and heart with fuel, rejuvenating, life-giving fuel. How we wish such a gift of a small, compact, bodied life could always be given, but that is not the way that it can live. It requires a starting point. The very point you get out of bed, the accumulation of your dreams, thoughts, ideas. The stream and creation halted by the single buzz of the alarm. One, two, three, four. The clock for revival ticks, as the jolt of passion, life, and inspiration stuck on fast forward. It comes and goes, leaves us in time but rejuvenates with the very light of day and positive state of mind. Inspiration is espresso, it does not leave us but flows here and there, with a jolt upon the first touch.

“Hopefully Flying”
by: Mary Buist



“Thump”

By: Samay Dhawan

The story I am about to write is a sorrowful and dismal one, in which many may or may not see the killer as the “bad guy”. This true story is one many should know about, which is my main purpose of writing about it. In my eyes, the killer was not wrong of murdering him, but at the end of the day, a crime will always remain a crime, no matter the reasoning behind it. The night it occurred would be one I would always remember, mainly since the assassination helped set me free...

January 18, 2013, was the night he was found. It was clear that he was murdered by someone, but the question was, who did it? Though the man who was killed was my husband, I was not displeased by the demon being gone from my life. My mother-in-law, or my husband James’s Mom, was the first one to see the bloody scene, and immediately called the top detective known to citizens of Amsterdam, Netherlands. The investigator, Alex English, arrived at the scene a quarter past ten during night time, about ten minutes after we called him to inspect the scene.

English was a middle-aged man, possibly in his middle thirties, with eyes in which you could see the sky. His monstrous height and bushy beard raised fear inside of everyone who saw him. His hands, when I shook them, were softer than silk, and his luscious locks of hair were combed over to the side. And his smile which went across his face indicated how cheerful and joyful the man was, regardless of the tough cases he had to deal with. He was quick to enter the bedroom in which lay the dead body of the devil himself, and already found a lead to solving the case. Before he could completely grasp the situation and understand the details of what had occurred, Mr. English noticed a knife sitting to the right of Alex. He rapidly put on his gloves, so he could examine the fingerprints on the weapon. While doing so, he asked me, my mother in law, my father-in-law and my eleven-year-old daughter to give copies of their fingerprints, so he could match up the prints on the knife with one of theirs, in case one of us was the killer. After picking up the fingerprints from the knife, he noticed that none our fingerprints matched up with the ones on the knife, sparking the question if my husband decided to kill himself, or if someone from outside the house snuck in and perpetrated the crime.

The detective now decided to take the fingerprints of the dead body, and while doing so, he finally noticed that the body's left wrist was slit, supporting the claim of the man killing himself. Ironically, the fingerprints on the knife's black, bloodstained handle matched up with my husband, making the suicide claim clear to the detective.

Not believing it, all four of us yelled at once, "Impossible!"

We all knew that James would never think about killing himself because of how rich and jubilant he always was. Though he was drunk many times after coming home late, just the thought of James committing suicide seemed unlikely to all of us. But, the detective knew that just two clues would not decide if James commit suicide. He asked us, "By any chance, would you happen to have any cameras set up in the house, which may have picked up footage of the killing or suicide?"

We luckily did have cameras set up in the house since James was such a well-known businessman. The chance of somebody looting the house was always high, and cameras always saw something that the human eye possibly did not. Mr. English went to the computer in which the footage picked up by cameras was located, and started analyzing what had occurred that night. When Mr. English looked through the footage, something seemed abnormal to us. The footage showed all four of us in the living room, sitting down and watching television. But, all of us knew that when the body was found by James's mother, around 8:45 pm, all of us were in separate rooms. My daughter Julie and I were in the living room, as I was helping her with a school project, while Julie's grandpa was taking a nap in his room, and her grandma was out playing bingo. This was all confirmed by Jules, her grandma, and myself.

Oddly, during the speculation, father-in-law stood next to the bed, staring at the body, quietly. But, I felt as if James's own father would never execute the slaughter. We told the inspector about the footage, and how it was false. "None of us were in the same room at once with the exception of myself and my daughter," I claimed, as my mother-in-law agreed.

"Clearly, somebody hacked into the footage and changed what had happened," said Alex English, while glaring at James's dad with suspicion, as he continued to stay silent. Though the footage was meant to favor the killer and confuse the inspector, it ended up being an advantage for the private detective.

As soon as taking a look at the footage on the family computer in the kitchen, Mr. English went back into the bedroom with James and picked up a cloth under the bed with his droid-like eye. He ran the cloth under a machine designed for such situations and found that the fingerprints on the cloth matched with grandpa.

The final clue noticed by the investigator was the dried up blood on the wood

To add, there was a substance on the fabric which knocks out anyone who smells the drug. The case began to open up finally, and it was starting to become clear who the killer really was.

The final clue noticed by the investigator was the dried up blood on the wood floor of the room. Though it was possible that the blood was from the dead body, the detective still inspected it, with there being a chance that it could have been the blood of the killer. While testing the blood, the first person whose blood he tested was grandpa's, because of how many clues pointed towards him. Surely enough, the blood found on the wood floor was grandpa's blood indeed.

"Interesting..." The detective stared at father in law with his ocean blue eyes, squinting at him, and examining him head to toe.

Finally, grandpa admitted to everything. "Alright, alright. It was me. You all probably already guessed it," he said with his scratchy, rough voice. "I had no choice. Even though he was my son, I just couldn't see more of the harm he caused to you, dear." He stared at me and Julie and began to tear up.

"Detective, the reason I murdered my very own son, the one I loved and cared for since the day my wife and I brought him into the world, is because of the harm and pain he caused to my daughter-in-law and my sweet granddaughter. I decided that the only way to stop James from physically abusing Jules and her mother Anne was to kill him. I thought that if I used footage from two days ago, when James was out on a business trip to New Jersey, America, and edited it over the footage of tonight, I would get away with the crime. But, I guess I was so caught up in the moment, I forgot that there were three witnesses in the house that could prove to you that all four of us were not in the same room. And to make it seem like James killed himself, and that I never committed the crime, I was able to get his fingerprints on the knife I used, and slit his wrist. But, before doing that, I made sure that I knocked him out unconscious while he was sleeping so it would make the crime easier to commit. That's where the cloth comes in, which I forgot in his room. After knocking him out, I had a tough time controlling the knife, as killing my very own son was so heartbreaking, resulting in my accidentally cutting myself. The blood from my cut is probably the same blood you analyzed a few minutes ago."

After my father in law explained himself, everything made sense to Mr.

English, myself, my daughter and his wife. Mr. English replied back saying, "I understand how tough it was for you, all of you, to undergo the terrible actions of James. I'm sorry for that. If he were alive today, he would most definitely be behind bars. But, as for you, what you did wasn't the solution to this mess. At the end of the day, a crime is a crime, and that's something you committed."

My father-in-law ended up getting a sentence of twenty years in prison. Five years have passed since the death of my husband and the sentencing. I understand that the murder was wrong, but my daughter and I have never been happier since James passed away.

“Fear”
by: Evan Ngo

We've all seen it happen
A young boy, alone in a mall
A lovestruck girl, afraid of rejection
A terrified child, hiding from his parents

We've all heard of it
School shooting, 12 dead
Man assaults young woman
Senior home robbed, one senior attacked

We've all lived it
Did I fail the test?
What if there's a monster under the bed?
Is the yeti on the roller coaster in Disney real?

Fear is everywhere, whether you like it or not
Some choose to conquer it, some choose to hide from it
And some choose to instill it
It comes in many shapes and sizes
Some fear objects, other people fear ideas
Some fear others, and some fear themselves

Fear is dangerous
It leads people do to gruesome acts
Because they're scared

But fear can be helpful too
In a strange way, it makes people live

People conquer their fears because they want to live
People hide from their fears because they want to live
Others instill fear to feel alive

Fear is unstoppable
For as long as minds exist, fear will reside in them
But fear can be slowed
Even eradicated for a little, but not forever

Maybe it was a traumatic event of your past
Or a deep down insecurity
Or natural instinct

Fear is evil, I know
But conquering fears is possible
Dive in headfirst, don't even think about it
Knock it right out of the sky
But whatever you do, don't let it consume you
Because then, fear no longer resides in you
It is you

“The Yonder Mountain”
by: Samay Dhawan



“Embodiment of Quarantine”

by: Sareen Muthyala

They say, “Life is what you make it.”
But I say, “I’m bored”

“What is boredom?”

When you don’t have anything to do
Yet, you could be productive
Suddenly, that pancake looks seductive
As you watch episodes go through

“Do you want to feel this way?”

Of course I do not
But there is void that needs to be filled
Perhaps it will come unwilled
Eventually it will be filled, the clot

“How do I get out of this state?”

I wish I knew the way
But I assure it will come and go
Similar to erratic nature of snow
Perhaps the best thing to do is to pray

They say, “Thank you!”
But I say, “Good luck.”

“The Mailman”
by: Melanie Crockett

The mail never stops,
It never lets up,
It slows and speeds up,
But the mail always keeps coming and coming,
Always bringing them to the places they need to be,
They always need to be somewhere,

Some get lost and found by me,
Some don't want to leave,
Some comes with acceptance,
Some comes with me unexpectedly,
Some wants me to take them,
But they don't get to decide,
Regardless of what they did,

I always find them,
No matter what,
I always carry them to where they need to go,
No matter the pleads or prayers,
I do my job,
I carry the mail to their final destination.

There's more mail now,
I have been through busy times,
This not nearly as much as the past,
Still,
It's more than usual,
Nevertheless,
It will slow down,
It always does,
Then pick back up again,
The mail always fluctuates,
But never stops.

“Through My Eyes”

by: Kamari Williams

I SIT and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame;

I hear the tv sounding of gunshots, the shouting from protests of those born a crime;

I hear people singing along to the latest hit, saying the word that was originated to keep us under, and we know there's a double meaning under it;

I mark the separation in our society, understanding the need to be aware of how it impacts the ability to have conversations

I see the fear in the oppressors' eyes as I enter the room. The air around me becomes heavy because I know those who feel “threatened” by the color of my skin are watching closely;

I see a car pulled over by police, as the person keeps their hands gripped on the wheel, they are in fear of this being their last day;

I observe my people leaving this world left and right, we truly live in a black and white world;

I observe conversations being started giving those a chance to speak out and hear different stories and see different point of views;

All these awful things and deep down inside I know I'll continue living them, so

I continue to sit, look out upon,

See, hear, and am silent.

“The World in Quarantine”
by: Stella Perovich

Movie theaters, hair salons, and restaurants
vacant, waiting for the day they can once again assist

Schools, offices, and cubicles
abandoned so suddenly, places you thought would never be missed

Six feet, masks, and gloves
necessary protection required everywhere, even at the park

Charities, fundraisers, and virtual events
people working hard to provide some light in this dark

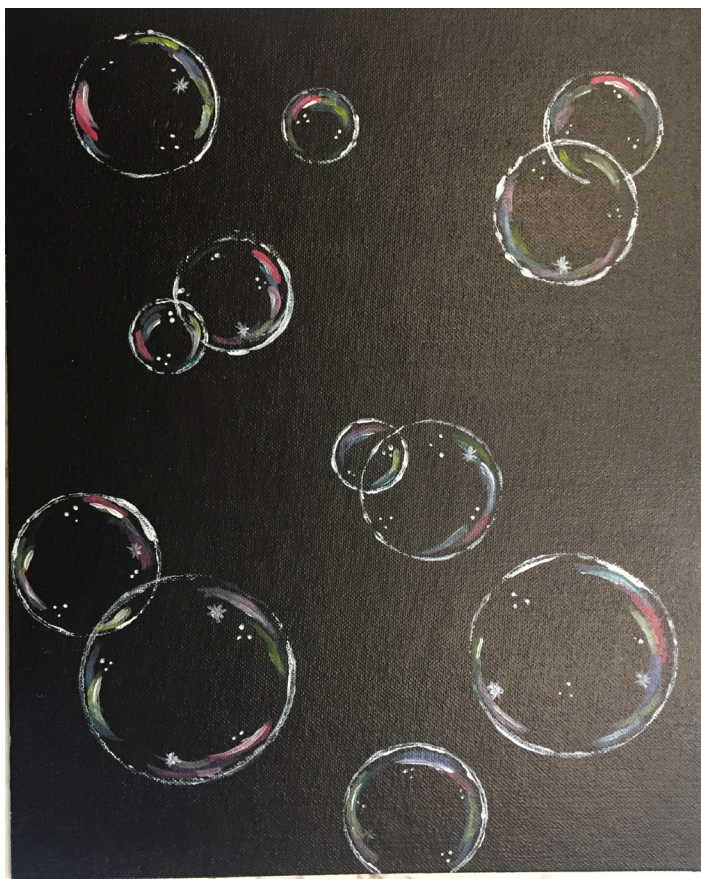
Prom, trips, and graduation
canceled events that were desired for many years

Nurses, firemen, and grocery store clerks
essential workers persevere through their blood sweat and tears

Quarantined, isolate, and alone
day after day seems like it will last forever

Faith, hope, and optimism,
help us realize that we will get through this together.

“Bubbles”
by: Aprilmae Reagan



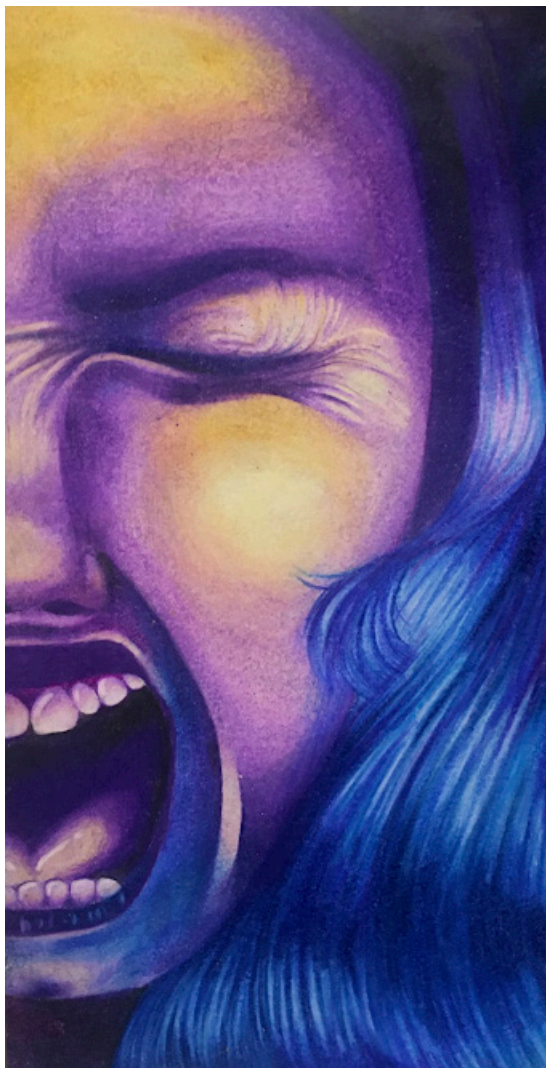
“Roll The Dice”
by: Aditya Ahuja

People are complicated,
You cannot tell if a person is alright from their hearts until you dig a bit deeper
They are gated;
Protecting themselves with force to hide their treasures
They all are indistinguishable from the outside
All seeming identical to the previous.

However among these people,
Is one that seems like it fits in,
But rather is gloomy and dark as you meet them
Their beauty labels them as the fairest and prettiest of them all
But their soul is broken into pieces that cannot be put back into place
Their life seems to be slowly peeling away,
Everything seems to fit perfectly together from the smile on their face
One step into the darkness
And you finally understand its pain,
It's never-ending loneliness and unattainable gain

Loneliness is part of life and it will always haunt you
You can play different cards to avoid the darkness, but you can never get rid of it
Rolling the dice when we take a chance on what we do
Sometimes moving two spaces forward but getting bumped three spaces back
Having joyous wins followed by hard defeats and sadness
Hoping to win and not to lose
It is all a game of life
And that is a never-ending cycle,
Of people who make the choices to make this world a beautiful place,
Or a dark and haunted one that leaves people with the angst and misery which they will face
Play your cards wisely in this game of life

“Expressive Faces”
by: Alyssa Rivera



“More than a Word“
by: Gabriella Nascimento

Family

A singular word that has so much more meaning

Family

An idea in which who we are, and where we come from

Whom we associate ourselves with

Family

Those who we share laughs, create memories and share emotions

They watch us grow and shape us into the person we become

Whether it is our first step or last breath they continue by our side

Family

There may be arguments from time to time

Or disagreements over one's design

In the end, we always reunite because nothing is strong enough to break the bond

Love

Selfless, unconditional, and eternal

A word that can be easily associated with family

They mean the world and beyond, and will forever be irreplaceable

More than a singular word, this is the power of family in my eyes

“She is Me“

by: Lily Marino

A home, a place where she goes every day, for the few hours of simplicity of her life. The delicious smell of her dad’s cooking and his warm hugs, bringing light to her dark days. Seeing the comfort the family brings to her life keeps her fighting everyday for them.

The same routine, the same walls, the same paintings, the same family. Every day, no matter how different the day was from her last and the last before that. Always the same. The busy nature of her life, brought out by the size and culture of her family. This busyness keeps things interesting, acting like a small breath of air in her life. This small breath is like a small yellow flower in her life, surrounded by the black roses of her mind. She does not want her mind to always be full of black roses forever. The love for this one small sunflower, giving purpose and life, for the entire field of flowers. Giving hope to the rest of the field, that every black rose can turn into this one, pure yellow flower, with time and patience.

Home, when the family is eating dinner at the table, talking collectively about their days, the good the bad and the ugly details. The dinner, eaten slowly because mouths are not for eating at this moment, but talking. The two smaller children talking their parents’ ears off. Her, the eldest sitting back quietly and listening, observing everyone’s speaking patterns and psychology. Waiting for her small turn to talk before she is interrupted by the little ones. But during this time of year, she doesn’t mind. She mostly just talks about school and superficial topics. She doesn’t want to do this, so she doesn’t try to interject, savoring her moments of silence and lack of stress. Helping her to get her mind off of her problems, small satisfactions in life. Small satisfactions that make everything seem worth it, for now. For now, she has these small things to hold on to. These things are enough for her and she looks forward to them daily. For now, she is content. For now, she can continue without letting the black roses take over her life. For now, she lives her life like it’s full of yellow flowers, even though it’s the opposite, because hopefully, one day, her pretend will become a reality. She works for that one day, the one day that makes everything worth it.

She is me.

She is tired, but she is strong. She is quiet, but she is kind. She is sad, but she is fighting. She is fighting to live. And she will never give up that fight. Because she is worth it.
She is me.

“Solitude”

by: Daria jelenkovic

As I sit here alone in my bedroom I ponder about what activities would be overtaking my body and soul on this reposeful Wednesday morning. Would it be sitting in an uncomfortable chair receiving an education of a senior? Would it be kicking a ball into a net regardless of how much I resent P.E. class? Or would it be the laughter of my friends at our semi-crowded lunch table, with only for a few more weeks left? But, instead, it's the loneliness of my thoughts racing about how I could be sitting outside with my class, eating, chatting, having the time of our lives. Unfortunately, we don't get to experience what we had left. We don't get to experience being a normal 18-year-old. We don't get to say our final goodbyes. We sit home, and we stay. The moment we step outside our identities are covered up. The only image we see are eyes lurking through the fear of this whole pandemic. Breathing becomes harder and frustration arises. Instead of dancing on the dance floor with our partners, we dance in our rooms to apps alone and isolated. Instead of walking across the stage and waving good-bye we sit behind a screen, tears dripping down our cheek. No sand on our feet, no sun on our skin, no music to dance to. Just loneliness and confusion. It's okay to be sad, it's okay to mourn the loss of great milestones, it's okay to feel the way we all feel. Once freedom is back into our souls we can once more taste the melting ice cream on the boardwalk, see our loved ones, and feel grateful. Feel grateful for everything we have not lost, feel grateful for our health and wisdom. We can finally feel that solitude is not our worst enemy. We can feel that despite all of our hardships we are here and we are alive. We are the class of 2020.

“Masked Identity”
by: Kayla Faynor



“March 14”

by: Isabella Moyacarneiro

The crunch of the woodchips beneath my feet.
Being pushed on a swing, I felt like a child.
We took over the playground.
I felt bad for the little kids.

We made it home.
The lighting was soft.
Sinatra crooned from the record player.
I felt at peace.

In your arms.
The moon smiled down on us.
I laughed with you.
I felt at home.

I'm sorry about this disaster,
But it will end.
And we'll have nights like this,
Again.

“The Specter”
by: Michael Shouldis

For Melanie

I'm standing in a tunnel.
Water drips down the wall,
Bats chirp behind me,
And fungus grows beneath my feet.
There's a certain stench,
Of plagued, stale air mixed
with pleasant flowers carried by a soft wind.

I look back and I hear the darkness call.
It whispers of a reassuring nihilism:
Give up, sit down, slow down.
I look forward, and I see my dreams in the light.
A family, a home, a cat and a dog, and I step towards it,
But as I do, the darkness reaches out
With a cold arm and
Grabs my ankle. It pulls. I fall.
I land on my chest and begin to slide backwards,
Towards the darkness, towards nothing.

I feel a warmness in my clenched fist.
My fist glows and I open it.
A small specter floats out,
White and bright
And she speaks
To me.

She whispers in my ear,
And I grab hold of the dirt.
I stop sliding and the darkness
Pulls harder. I hold on.
I pick myself up, dust off my shirt.

I fight the darkness and take a step
Towards the light.
Step.

Step.

Step.

The darkness loses its grip, and the
Specter enters my chest. I feel myself
Begin to glow, too.

I'd been standing in purgatory,
Being dragged towards Hell.
And if not
For that little specter -
My motivation, my love -
I wouldn't have been able
To light the way
Towards paradise.

“Garden Syndrome”

by: Aarushi Singh

i planted a flower in a place
where it would not flourish,
for you gave me no water or sun,
so it became malnourished.

i had the chance to walk away and
plant the flower in a different place
where it would blossom and bloom,
but I couldn't walk away from your alluring face.

over and over again
i planted all my seeds in your gloomy garden,
all of them slowly, dreadfully dying
before i had nothing left to plant.

it took me a while to realize that
as much as I wanted to blame you,
it was i who broke myself.
it was me who gave you everything i had.

“The College Essay”

by: Gabriella Pertab

Burning with exuberance I took off. I bursted through the doors of my elementary school unaware yet buoyant of the future ahead. I made my way through the seemingly large halls navigating the path to my education. My short fingers ran against the bright blue concrete walls that made up those hallways as I galloped looking into all the rooms I passed. Freely walking around encouraged me to want to touch, hear and see everything that crossed me. I considered myself an adventurer, someone on a hunt for the best experiences that I could gain. Each hall seemed like a maze constructed of extended rectangles, enclosed on every side. Before I had the chance to continue my quest down the stretched halls, I was pulled into a classroom which, ultimately, put the lid on my adventure. Each day following, I'd float down the halls in different directions still reaching the same destination. Over the course of my Kindergarten year I came to the realization that everything people do is on a line, a path. Week after week I would follow the same path down the halls every day like everyone else. Ultimately, this became a monotonous ritual of my life.

Moving onto the next school of my educational career, I expected to be intrigued with more opportunity to branch out. Yet to my disappointment, the next school, presented itself with the same cement halls and constant paths. The increase in the building size had no impact on the hall sizing, if anything they only felt more and more constricting. The elongated labyrinth remained windowless, tying my eyes down from the possibilities on the outside. Students continue to only go through the motions of moving from point A to point B and became devotees to just “getting through it”. The dullness of the narrow maze made my insides twist feeling like I was stuck on a one-way never-ending flight. Within me, an anxious feeling bubbled, and my mind intensely built up with speed bounding to breach my escape.

Following the same tedious hallways every day is what bred all students to always live on a single timeline without any desire to branch out or explore new ways. It has educated us all on how to be followers instead of leaders and decision makers.

From the beginning, people are put on a life path to ensure they will accomplish the best possible version for the future which contains entertainment of the present. It is forgotten that the world beyond our path is quite larger than it presents itself and time we are given is limited. Instead of allowing myself to fall into the trap of the monotone path, I let the path inspire myself to make my own opportunities to branch out in the fields of anatomy, softball and medicine. I changed my mindset from the rest of the mass population and determined that it was worth making the most of rather than just going through the motions. Being boxed in a hallway instigated my desire to know what is beyond. It developed the magnetic field within me to be attracted to any activity which is considered out of the ordinary. I personally blame the narrow hallways for the emergence of my curiosity for the surrounding environment.

“Cold Lips”
by: Vinisha Bhagdev



“Thief”

by: Maya Karkhanis

A painted canvas masks my face
I draw up canned jokes
Or sketch bristled laughs
For you, my favorite muse
I'll color your mind
And pencil in your perfect answers
In a serene starry sky
Against my distraughtly dim moon
Patiently blinking at my desperate beams
For you are a collage of golden hues
A scarlet sunset
Reflecting off my navy sea
And when you steal away at twilight
My best efforts staining your hands
I can't help but wonder
Were you captivated or horrified by the palette underneath?

“Shades of Yellow”

by: Sahana Desai

The vibrancy of yellow's vivid ring,
Surrounding me my luminary gleams.
The coat of birds incessantly they sing,
Their cheerful song remains in gentle dreams.
The Sun, his rays of light upon the fields,
His warmth encapsulating man always.
The marigold has shined, a smile yields,
Old memories that passed in summer days.
But now this light, so strong, it burns my eyes,
An artificial sun beams down on me.
Instead of joyful songs I just hear cries,
Of longing to return and roam carefree.
And still my crystal windows do not show,
The lovely petals that I used to know.

“Hills of Sorrow”

by: Kelly Riggs

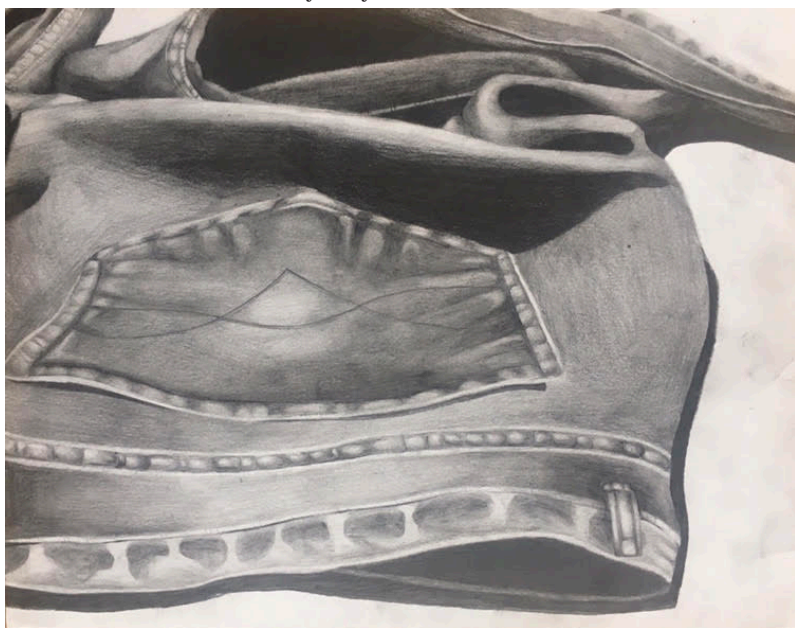
Hills of brown and rich stinging tears
The buzz of the wind drowns the distant sobs
Matted grass trails to the cottage, steady and standing
The gleam of the window almost blurs her silhouette out
But time and time again she fails to hide herself

Focusing on the rose buds that refuse to ever bloom
Trying to block out the cries that are swallowing her whole
Once, her voice was a soft melody that eased us to sleep,
but now it was rough and hoarse with sorrow

The brittle boards were holding in the memory of you
Which is why salt stained her cheeks every night
Too fast were you whisked away with the screeching of tires

No goodbyes were exchanged, only silence
As we watched your tattered clothes exit the broken door
Forever gone was your presence and,
Forever was the heartbreak that tainted our hearts.

“Old Jeans”
by: Alyssa Rivero



“Ruler of Life”
by: Kristen Caruso

My heart-
It longs for adventure
And freedom.
It beats from beneath my chest
Pounding and thrashing,
Feeling like it'll tear from
Its arteries and veins
Just to be free.

I can not be held down,
Chained, or tied to the dock,
Watching all the boats float freely.
How I want to sail with them,
Embracing the wind,
Unafraid of the dangers that lie ahead.

I cannot be cooped up inside all day.
I must be free:
Feel the breeze in my hair,
The drops of rain on my skin,
The heat from the midday sun,
The moisture of the soil beneath my toes.

Oh, how I'd rather be a lioness,
Running free in the savanna.
I could be a hawk,
Soaring through the sky.
Perhaps even a shark,
Shooting through the ocean.
Or just a whisper of air,
Floating endlessly across the world.

I will not be held back,
Or stopped,
Because I will break free.
Because I want to live,
Fast and daring.
My heart doesn't just long for adventure,
It craves it. For
I'd rather die young and free than
Live long and enslaved.
Dreaming Dreams

“Procrastination is Deadly”

by: Saikalyan Jogannagari

From the moment
you pick up your phone
you restrain yourself
with invisible handcuffs
and you can no longer
do anything productive
for you have fallen
deep down into a dark dangerous abyss
where the handcuffs shift your focus
away from what's important
yet you never realize
the impending deadline
and your productive ability
is held back by the handcuffs
which are as deadly as venom
but likely more
because they make you
want to keep them on for longer
and everytime your brain shifts back
even if it's just for a moment
the restraint of the handcuffs
is much too overwhelming and
suddenly you look at your clock.

The handcuffs magically disappear.

You realize the essay is almost due
and you still have all five paragraphs to do.

“Signs of Spring”
by: Mary Buist



“Where I am; Where I’m Going”

by: Tina Dong

I am surrounded by open curtains,
opened patio doors,
The creek of the windows
that haven’t been opened since summer.
I am staring at stocked up fridges.
I have sleepless nights,
from the bed
that has kept me company
for these past few weeks.

I am in isolation,
from this awful virus
that has kept me inside for so long.
This monster has led me to keep indoors.
These days have imposed
procrastination and negativity.
I am losing motivation
to complete assignments,
to fight the burden of weight
pushing me down.
My momentum
has come to a stop.

Anger and then sadness
have built up inside me.
From the racism, to the death rates.
I take a moment to close my eyes,
envisioning life months from today,
frolicking in the green grass,
giggling with friends and family,
forgetting about the isolation
we once had faced.
I will be from these moments,
I just have to make it through.

“I Am From”
by: Rhenly Henson

I am from Bed,
from blankets and pillows.

I am from the woolen carpet.
(It is soft and white)

I am from the mahogany tree
with sweet, scented bark,
and a strong root system.

I am from the festivals with banderitas and strong family ties,
from Henson and Salazar.

I'm from the hospitable,
and dependable,
from make beliefs of Santa Claus and Fairy Tales.

I'm from the Holy Bible
from Old to New Testament.

I'm from the Pearl of the Orient Sea,
sweet rice and sea foods.

From Dad's migration to a new beginning,
myself adapting to a new home.

On the bedside table
a bunch of smiling faces,
that cheer me up during dark times.

I am from that family, the loving family
That brings the best in me.

“Six Feet Apart”

by: Juliet Becza

Three words that have been engraved in all our brains

Six feet apart

A distance that feels much more than just a few feet

Secluding ourselves to our own houses and to our own thoughts

Six feet apart

means cancelling events that we were looking forward to

Spirit night and prom, even just going to school

Baseball games and days in the sun, exploring nature, biking around

Six feet apart

means missing all my best friends

as we reminisce over our spring plans

And how we never knew the fun would end before it even began

Six feet apart

Means missing my family most of all

Because facetime can only last so long,

And hanging up means the day goes back to isolation

Feeling each day mesh into the next

Until a month has gone by, a month we can never get back

I feed off of human interaction

Meeting new people and talking about new things

But now I feel lost and far away from everything

All because the closest we can be is

Six feet apart

“Sunset Boulevard”
by: Vinsha Bhagdev



“A Thorn- Covered Rose”

by: Pooja Kedia

A thorn-covered rose,
She learned beauty comes with pain,
But she never found any gain,
Her mother bickered over her tight dresses,
Her aunt snickered of her calcium bred bones,
She hoped to hide,
She learned to abide,
She was not a fighter,
So she felt the need to be quieter,
All beautiful things are wrapped in woes,

A thorn-covered rose,
The night echoes of her soured dreams,
The light flickers in broken beams,
The unstable walls dwindle closer,
If only she is able to keep them up longer,
She fears her reflection,
She bears no direction,
It seems that all have a purpose,
She is no revolutionary to rise to the surface,
All beautiful things are wrapped in woes,

A thorn-covered rose,
She will not be confined to the black box,
For Pandora released evils but also Hope,
She will not be worn by the burden of others' goals,
She will aspire to seek what her fortune beholds,
She will seek simplicity,
She will not desire to be above ordinary,
She will know it is her flaws that make her extraordinary,
All beautiful things are wrapped in woes.

“Living through an Uncontrollable Pandemic”

by: Ariana Andrews

If feels like we are stuck in a hole -
Imprisoned by something out of our control -
Behind the mask-
Here we lie -
Seeing things eye to eye -

Helping others in a time of need is what a dream -
Sticking together like a team -
Making it through the tough times-
In the end everything will be fine -

And on one day when this will all pass-
It will be leaving us to last-
We will be back to normal-
Behind no mask-
To live freely and at last-

“Quarantined Island”
by: Samay Dhawan



“Facing Reality”

by: Elizabeth Gladstone

Enclosed in these walls,
We gaze through the pin holes of windows
As they look to see the world around us.

The mouth of the house opens wide for possibility,
Yet, we manage to stay behind the lips in comfort.

We watch the numbers rise and fall,
And lose a sense of touch and hope after each death.

We stay behind the mask of reality,
As anywhere but here is deadly.

“But We Are Coming With You”

by: Sean Oryniak

Early rise
Those are the hours on the front
Dawn what you must
Dawn what you can
And with the dawn
March on
But we are coming with you

Shield yourself inside your armour
Shield yourself from what's outside
Look on outside for hope
Look on not for yourself
And go to war
Because we are coming with you

Breathe the air that kills
Through the grey and blue you wear
Through the pain
That courses inside you
Through the loss
Of those around you
Shoulder what you can
We will take the rest
We are coming with you

So Rise
Go where you must
Do what you must
Risk what you must
Put your life on the line
But know

We are with you
We are marching along side you
You will do what you have to
But not alone
We are coming with you

“The Flags Fly Low”

by: Sean Oryniak

The flags fly low
They fly for honor
They fly for sacrifice
They fly for the future
They fly for us

Today the flags fly low
They've flown low for a while now
But the flag is still there
It defies the wind
It flies proudly low

It flies low for the honorable
And brings itself to their level, as they march to save us
It flies low for sacrifice
It mourns those many who fell victim
It flies low for us
And suffers along with us
It flies low for our future
And struggles to rise

But rise it will
Once more
When all this has passed
The Flag will Fly High

“Masked Identity”

by: Kayla Faynor

As far as I know, whenever I meet someone new, the face I show them is my own to be true.

I never mask anything of me, because I know that's not what the true me brings.

I look at people, and I see perfect, But little do I know, they put forth that mask because they believe their realness is worthless.

Their mask is much more glittery, bright, and positive. So nobody really sees the odds of it.

People hold a mask over their face, to hide something from the rest of the human race.

Whether it is due to insecurities, or worse; despicable meanness, at the end of the day, this evil is the weakest.

With times like these, it's extremely dangerous; because the people behind the screen don't know what is actually hurting us.

Pretending to be someone you are not has consequences; because then real traits of a person are hidden by masked inferences.

The world has forgotten the realness of this time; because everyone we talk to and everything is online.

And once the mask is removed, the party's over, and there is only full exposure of you.

That's why times like these; it's hard to leave it to us, not knowing if the person on the other side is actually really dangerous.

Masks can make someone appear to have a perfect complexion others adore, but under it they contain what only they know that others will not accept them for.

I mean, what's the worst that can happen? All we are doing is hopping on the bandwagon.

To look as perfect as everyone else, when really, the most perfect person can be masking themselves.

At the end of the day, the only person whose opinion matters is the one person with the face.

The one that may have held a heavy, dense mask, can now breath and live like a human, without it being a task.

Because being human is normal. And we ourselves can only act only so formal To the ways of society, not being perfect is what makes us most worried.

To my mom, opinions don't matter, but staying true to oneself rather.

And that's where I learned, it is me to whom I am most concerned.
But the mask that I hold for myself, is the mask of no one else.
I am me, and that's the only person I long to be.
And nobody's perfect, but we are all worth it.

“Confinement is The Friend I Never Wanted”

by: Alyson Oneill

Confinement keeps me away from those I care for the most
The ones who help me through everything-
Covid-19 spreading from coast to coast
It won't let me do anything without it whispering in my ear
It's toxic-
But I can't get rid of it

Confinement is causing quite a ruckus-
Not knowing if the end of this is near
It has caused havoc for all of us-
As many live in fear
I would hope to end my relationship with confinement
Once everything starts to clear.

“Hope Behind the Mask”
by: Allyson Lee

