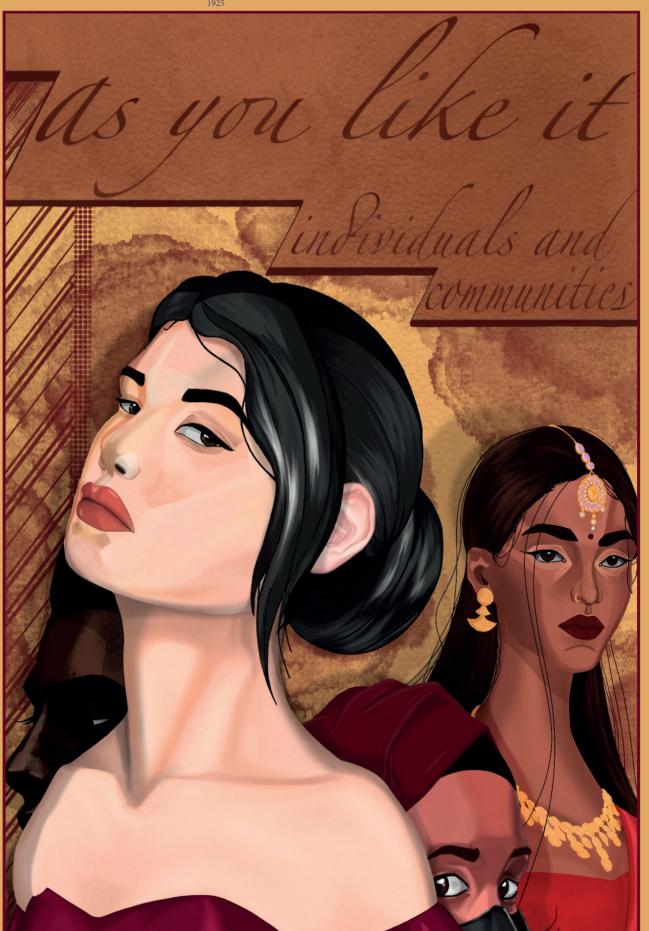


ATHENS COLLEGE Hellenic-American Educational Foundation

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A special thank you to the English Department for their support.

From the Editor

From the first stages of human evolution to the creation of brilliant civilizations, we humans have differentiated ourselves from the rest of nature because of the duality in *our* nature. We are what constitutes society, with a strong sense of and deep need for belonging, but we also have the intense desire to stand out from the crowd.

Indeed, in recent decades, especially in the wake of the global COVID-19 public health crisis, this struggle between achieving self-actualization and fulfilling our duties as members of various communities has intensified. How can we forge our own path when we have other obligations? Where do we fit in into this world? These are not new questions, but they are questions that so many of us have posed and will continue to pose.

This year's As You Like It explores the theme of Individuals and Communities to give our contributors and readers the opportunity to delve into these questions, thus realizing that we are not alone in asking them. This year's AYLI team is possibly the largest there has ever been, and more pieces than ever were submitted, which is a testament to the human desire to share our experiences and to find common ground in our own unique ways. From articles and short stories exploring our place in society, the diversity of the human experience, and how the individual perceives the world, to poems and artwork exploring the deeper meaning of belonging, our magazine features something for everyone. We proudly invite you to unravel the concept of Individuals and Communities with us. We hope that our articles, stories, poems, and artwork give you food for thought and help you to explore your identity in our amazing community.

Anastasia Giannoulatou

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Part I: Articles

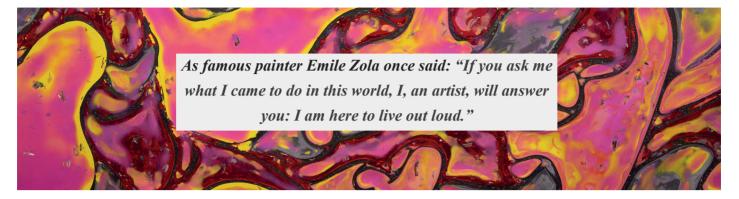


"Society exists only as a mental concept; in the real world there are only individuals."

- Oscar Wilde, 19th century English writer

The (Ab)/(Es)sence of Art

By Anastasia Giannoulatou



"Art is too important not to share." These wise words belong to Brazilian artist Romero Britto, and they are words that should be heeded today. From the eloquent creations of antiquity to the masterpieces of Michelangelo and Da Vinci in the Renaissance to the artistic movements that thrived in the 19th century, art has inspired, formed, and cultivated humankind. Many would argue that art should continue to thrive in the 21st century, a time characterized by the rise of humanitarian movements, which strive to gain freedom for all. Unfortunately, though, in recent decades, art has been neglected because of the rise of technology and humans' materialistic approach. However, art is much more than just something aesthetically pleasing; it is a necessity. Some may question to what extent art is needed in the world and argue that other disciplines are more vital. Nevertheless, it should become clear that art is a means for surviving in today's world.

Nowadays, people are separated from one another by a metaphorical wall built by those very same people. Each brick in that wall represents a different feeling: apathy, anger, misery, desperation, and alienation. The wall stands strong, and no matter how hard people try to knock it down, it remains standing strong. Eventually, people give up and accept the wall, which continues to grow taller

and taller as apathy and alienation continue to grow in the world. This is the world we live in. However. this wall does not need to continue to rise because art is a way of pulling out its bricks. By looking at a painting, reading a book, or listening to a piece of music, there is a possibility for connections between people to be fostered. People share the same feelings: happiness, sadness, anger, love. They experience the same problems, hold the same beliefs, and even aspire to the same goals, hopes, and dreams. These feelings are expressed in art in ways that can and do touch everyone. Realizing that they have so much in common can create a bond of unity between people. As American painter and artist Thomas Kinkade pointed out, "[a]rt transcends cultural boundaries."

In a world characterized by apathy, greed, and lack of interpersonal relationships, art is the only thing that can help us connect with each other, across and within cultures and nations.

In addition, art makes it possible to understand and connect with the past. Indeed, art has the power to unite across time. The painting of a lady with a parasol enjoying her tea in the garden, an

actor showing his full potential on the big screen, and the voice of a singer forever recorded all stand as testaments to those who came before us and can help us feel more grounded in the world today. Time may pass, and people may come and go, but art is constant. Some say that a piece of the artist's soul remains forever engraved in time, giving future generations the opportunity to connect with their ancestors. What Spanish painter, sculptor, and ceramicist Joan Miró believed was that "[a] simple line painted with a brush can lead to freedom and happiness." That is a truth about art that people often forget.

Art can also help reintroduce moral and ethical values in today's society. French author Andre Maurois believed that "[a]rt is an effort to create, beside the real world, a more humane world." This is essential because in the world today, the desire for more profit causes some of the moral values of society to crumble; beliefs that largely prevailed in the past, such as solidarity, humanism, and dignity, are often neglected. Art can and does help with this by carrying the message of hope and reminding us of the importance of moral and ethical values. By exploring the meaning of a painting or reflecting on the lyrics of a song, humans can strengthen their critical and creative thinking and appreciate the value of philanthropy, liberty, and sincerity, connecting with emotions like empathy and compassion.

Art has always been a catalytic factor in the formation of civilizations, and its essence has allowed for people not only to express themselves,



In his 1875 oil-on-canvas painting *Woman with a Parasol*, Claude Monet depicts his wife and son, allowing us to experience a moment from the past.

but also to spread their beliefs and ideas to secure a brighter future, a means of connecting across time and cultures to better unify humankind. At the beginning of the 21st century, art has been demeaned, seen as a hobby or a pastime, not as the tool it truly is, can, and should be. It is important that this generation fight for art to remain an integral part of our educational systems, and, in fact, our lives because the absence of art has allowed brick after brick of sorrow, apathy, and misunderstanding to be added to the walls that divide us. However, through art, we have the means to pull down that wall, create unity, and live life "out loud" as Emile Zola was determined to.



Diversity Is Key

By Eva Angelou

Many people believe that by contributing to a community, by expressing their opinion on political matters, volunteering, or recycling, they immediately become part of it. However, there are others who think that they cannot truly adapt to the community they live in because they cannot connect with its people. They may think they are different and end up feeling completely isolated due to a lack of communication. For instance, they may shy away from people who are sometimes so eager to welcome new members to the community that they come across as pushy or nosey. New members to a community may also think that all is set and cannot change to accommodate new personalities and their needs. In other cases, they may feel that their opinion will not be valued. This way of thinking is discouraging for new members of a society and should be abandoned as each person is different and, indeed, it is disparate personalities that should form a community.

Firstly, humans are distinct. Every single person has his or her own personality and special characteristics. If everyone were the same, life would be dull. Every person is unique and different, so it is often difficult to find people with whom you have the same point of view, interests, and hobbies, and to form a community where each and every human has the same manners, feelings, likes, and dislikes. It is also widely known that, when people in a community are different, it is challenging to cooperate and live a peaceful and productive life. For example, there could be many confrontations be-

cause of some people's need to satisfy their ego, which would lead them to adopt competitive behavior. As a result, they cannot work together and combine their talents to reach a productive outcome.

Secondly, history has shown us that when different personalities come together, two things may happen. One is total disaster where no one gets to express their feelings because they are scared of being judged and, thus, overpowered by the dominance or prevalence of those who are "louder" or in a position of power. This leads to people feeling anxious and discouraged and prevents them from enjoying a productive life. The other scenario, the fortunate one, is a beautiful combination of different expressions, personalities, and beliefs. In this case, the outcome is far more interesting and creative. Although the members of the community may be as different as one can imagine, they still learn to appreciate what is 'different.' Similarly, in the workplace, one often sees employees or volunteers of a group arguing and negotiating with each other and, in the end, achieving a successful outcome.

Seeking to genuinely like each member of a community is not only stressful but also pointless. On the contrary, people should appreciate how everyone is different and has his or her own values and beliefs on a practical level. Communities that will thrive in the future will be composed of people who will have learnt to allow for different points of views and show respect and empathy. These communities will be composed of productive, openminded, and tolerant people.



What Do Avatars Say About Our Identity?

By George Bakoulas

"One of the wonderful things about the information highway is that virtual equity is far easier to achieve than real-world equity. We are all created equal in the virtual world," Bill Gates once said. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 95% of American teenagers "have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they 'are online almost constantly." Teenagers figure quite high in all the statistics regarding Internet usage. Therefore, to paraphrase a question posed by British author J.K. Rowling, has the Internet

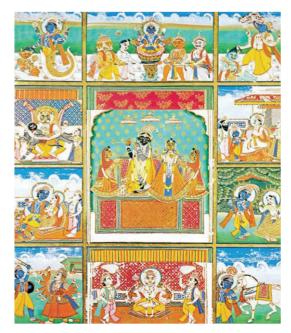


Teenagers and internet use

indeed been a benefit or has it been a curse for teenagers? Are we more equal and happier in our virtual worlds? More importantly, are we ourselves in our virtual worlds? Among the numerous ways in which frequent Internet use affects teenagers, its impact on identity development is of vital importance. The way adolescents choose to represent themselves on the Internet can be perceived as part of the exploration process necessary in building one's identity, as well as an expression of each user's multidimensional personality.

Identity development, which is the formation of a strong sense of self, is one of the main processes which take place during adolescence. The way we perceive ourselves evolves in response to the environment: our family, peers, school, and the various other social communities we belong to. This process is not new; however, it has changed significantly in recent years because of the broad use of Internet and the rapid increase in virtual world activity among teenagers for a wide range of uses, including studies, socialization, and play.

Virtual worlds, like online games and social virtual worlds, are computer-generated platforms, which take the form of a specific environment or community; in these worlds, the users select a character, the graphical representation, which is called an avatar, to interact with other users and with the virtual space around them. The word "avatar" derives from the Sanskrit word "avatâra," meaning "descent," and refers to the human manifestation of a Hindu god. Avatars offer users a way to depict different sides of their



God Vishnu with his 10 avatars. Painting from Jaipur, India, 19th century; in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

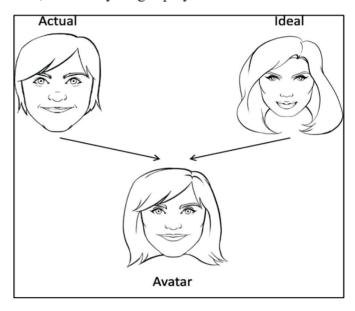
identity, explore aspects of identities they wish they had, and even change identities in a way that is not possible in the real world. Through avatars, users have the opportunity to experiment with the way they represent themselves, by adopting, for example, a different sex, selves, by adopting, for example, a different sex, a different race, or a different height and weight. They may have nothing in common with the super-human warrior they pretend to be online, but they may be using him to express their subconscious wish to be braver or more heroic. Additionally, they can use their avatar to express a group affiliation, by dressing up their avatar in their soccer team colours, or an interest, by picking an avatar dressed in a costume of their choice. Avatars can, therefore, function not only as a means for representing one's sense of self but also as way to express one's sense of belonging. Depending on the nature of the virtual world, users are sometimes limited to specific choices of avatars while on other occasions, they can create their avatar themselves from head to toe. Based on the level of contribution they have in building their avatar and depending on how much time they spend using it, users often develop a strong bond with their avatar.

While the process of choosing an avatar for use in an online game may feel spontaneous or natural for the gamer, it has been an area of interest for psychology and sociology researchers, who



Classic Second Life avatars

have conducted several research projects with interesting and sometimes contradictory results. In one project called "SCRIBE" ("Social and Cultural Research in Bounded Environments"), researchers developed a mini-game within the multiplayer games 'World of Warcraft' and 'Second Life' so that they could investigate how users select their avatars. They found that there were only a few ways to tell who was behind the avatar on the screen; for example, men used fewer smile emoticons, whereas younger players tended to use fewer



Users create avatars with minor changes compared to their real selves.

conventions like "hello" and "thank you" and opted to use more punctuation in contrast to the older players. Another study, published in the Journal of Business Research, showed that when creating their avatar, people only make minor changes compared to their real selves and that these changes are mainly associated with body type, hair, and clothing. Indeed, there seems to be a great variation in findings, with some studies concluding that avatars look like their users, imitating or slightly improving the user's characteristics, while others suggest that avatars differ greatly from the users.

The question is how frequent online games users actually pick their avatars. Those of us who

have played online games know that we mostly choose different avatars depending on the online game we play, and then we focus on a particular characteristic we feel is relevant to the situation by picking, for example, a warrior when we want to demonstrate an aggressive attitude during a game which requires violence and strategy or a more athletic figure when we use a sports related platform.

Participation in these digital platforms increased dramatically during the pandemic, when they served a need for socialization, which could not be fulfilled in any other way. However, it has continued as life has returned to 'normal.' It is clear that there is more to it than a teenager spending Friday evening playing NBA 2k instead of going out to meet friends. As the concept of the "Metaverse," the centralised virtual world, becomes more mainstream day-by-day, there is great anticipation of the new and improved Metaverse Avatars, which will be the users' identities throughout the digital universe. If many aspects of real life are transferred to the Metaverse, as it is thought will happen, the online identities will be-

come more and more important, to the point that losing your online identity would be like losing your real-world identity.

Overall, it looks like we choose to remain ourselves in the virtual words; we may, however, be what we think is an improved version of ourselves or possibly a slightly different version of ourselves, depending on the virtual world we have entered. This is, in a way, similar to the different identities we adopt in real life depending on different situations and environments, the student identity, for example, when we are at school, or the more cool, relaxed self when we are with our friends; we assume a multitude of personalities in the real world, so why wouldn't we in the virtual world as well? Identity development has always been an important process of adolescence and exploration is one of the processes through which it is achieved. Experimentation through avatar choice allows people more scope for exploration; hopefully, this will contribute to our building stronger identities, not only in the virtual but also in the real world.



User avatars in the Metaverse

Show Me Your Clothes, and I'll Tell You Who You Are

By Nephele Athanasiou

Getting dressed in the morning – it is a mundane task we do. We choose to wear formal clothes for work, casual clothes for meeting friends and family, and we dress up for dates. Each outfit we wear communicates – whether we do it intentionally or not – certain aspects of our personality to the outside world.

Humans have tried to cover themselves with clothes since the beginning of time to be protected from the weather, and, even though that purpose has not changed, multiple new ones have been added. Clothes and fashion vary based on one's culture, gender, age, religion, profession, or even the country and time period they live in. In addition to their practical purpose, clothes now also serve an aesthetic purpose since they affect how others perceive us, but also how we perceive ourselves.

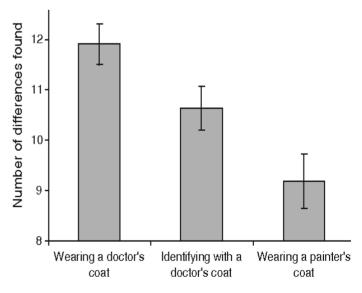
"Enclothed cognition" is a less-known term used to refer to a person's connection to his or her clothes. The term is connected to "the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes" based on "the symbolic meaning of the clothes and the physical experience of wearing them" (Adam and Galinsky). In a study that used lab coats, which are, in general, associated with caution, attention, and professionalism, people who wore the coats exhibited those exact qualities to a greater extent than those who just wore their everyday clothes, therefore proving the basic principle of enclothed cognition.

Indeed, it is interesting how an item or a whole outfit can change the way we feel about ourselves. Clothes have the power to make us hold our head high and let our inner self glow. For example,

formal attire makes people get in the right mindset for business. One feels more powerful and confident because the hormones needed for displaying dominance are elevated. Wearing this type of power-clothes also helps one become better at negotiating and think in a more abstract way which promotes creativity and readiness to face any challenge that comes one's way!

Another way one can feel powerful and authoritative at work is by wearing black. Black is a color that represents power and sophistication. By dressing in black, one evokes an air of superiority and integrity that gives one the power to influence others in the workplace more easily.

Although wearing formal or black attire can sometimes give one the confidence one needs, one



Wearing a lab coat described as a doctor's coat increased sustained attention compared to wearing a lab coat described as a painter's coat.

should never forget that comfort is key. In order to feel strong and in control, one needs to be comfortable first. Uncomfortable clothes make one feel uneasy and are a distraction from work, resulting in



This Venn diagram helps us understand the concept of "Enclothed Cognition."

losing one's confidence.

Formal wear is not recommended when going out with friends either. In such a case, one also has to apply one's critical thinking skills. If one is casually going out with friends or visiting family members, it is better to wear softer colors and more casual clothes to appear friendlier and more sociable. In the same vein, wearing gym clothes will eventually give one the right motivation to exercise. That

is because clothes are used as a reminder in those scenarios.

First impressions take about eight seconds to form, and they are greatly based on the way one is dressed, thanks to the symbolic meaning society attributes to different types of clothes. It is our responsibility to learn what attire is more suitable for each occasion and use that type of knowledge to our advantage.

The tough part nowadays is actually finding our personal style while understanding the power of fashion. Thankfully, there are tons of fashion trends, actors, musicians, and films from which we can draw inspiration.

At the end of the day, no matter the occasion, the dress code, or anything else that can limit our wardrobe choices for the day, we should never forget about our personal style as a way to express our individuality. Clothes are an extension of ourselves, and we dress to fit our persona. We need to integrate our own personal touch in each of our looks so that we dress in a way that expresses our uniqueness!



We are what we wear: different attire can alter our perceptions of ourselves.

A Child's Brain on Music

by Elena Betrosian



"Music probably does something unique...it stimulates the brain in a very powerful way because of our emotional connection with it."

-Neuropsychologist Catherine Loveday

A person's childhood is one of the most important periods in their life. During childhood, people make their first friendships, unlock experiences, and start discovering their passions or talents when engaging in extracurricular activities. One particularly enriching activity is learning to play a musical instrument. Many parents are skeptical about adding this to their children's schedule, either because of their own negative experience with instrument learning or because their children do not seem to be willing to commit to studying and practicing this early in their life. Besides, should all children be



Music seems to accelerate brain development, which is why music is important in elementary education.

exposed to music lessons from a young age? In my opinion, they should be because music, comprehension of musical notation, learning to play an instrument, and even just listening to quality music has many positive effects on children.

Music seems to accelerate brain development. Recent brain scans comparing musicians and nonmusicians have shown concrete proof that the left side of the brain, the side involved in reasoning and processing language, is more developed when the person has had musical training. In addition, according to various studies, children with 14 months of training proved to have had significant structural and functional improvement. Thus, musical training really benefits a child's overall mental development, for it is a rich and complex experience that connects all their senses: hearing, vision, and touch. As neuropsychologist Catherine Loveday points out, "music probably does something unique...it stimulates the brain in a very powerful way because of our emotional connection with it" (qtd. in Rampton).

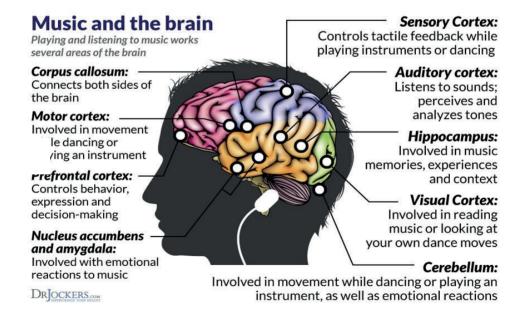
However, it is important to also explore the

other ways in which music affects us. Other than the influence that it has on our brain development, it also impacts our stress levels and well-being. Music builds self-discipline. It is not easy to focus on learning an instrument, and it requires patience and dedication; thus, people who successfully learn to play music become disciplined and hard-working in the process. In addition, numerous scientific experiments have shown that music works as a stress relieving tool that can help calm the mind, through an increase in the production of dopamine, the "feel good hormone." Indeed, engaging with music is therapeutic irrespective of whether one listens to it, plays it, or sings it.

I have been playing the piano for eight years, and ever since I started, it has been my "comfort zone." Whenever I'm anxious, it helps me relax; whenever I'm upset, it calms me down; whenever I'm sad, it helps me get through the sadness. It is a form of self-expression. Sitting in front of the piano and powerfully hitting all the lower notes is the way I have always dealt with anger. Now, I mostly use it as a soothing tool, but I know for a fact that it helped me manage my feelings better when I was a

young child, and it can help all children express theirs. Music helps children to better control their emotions by communicating them through this special language as it gives them the chance to externalize emotions through the instrument they are playing. Emotional communication is something that all people should learn early on in their lives as it is difficult for children to show how they feel without crying, having meltdowns, or throwing tantrums if they have not discovered another way of doing so. Musical expression is a great alternative through which children can learn how to manage their emotions and express them in a healthy, creative way. When we are engaged in music making, we are present in the moment and in direct contact with our inner selves. That is why music works as a distraction while allowing us to discover our individuality by bringing back memories, too.

Music has as many benefits as a piano has keys. Therefore, just like the player controls the volume, the rhythm, and the pitch, children can learn how to control their thoughts and emotions and turn them into something beautiful and special, something that is theirs.



The effects of music on the human brain

Stress: The Student's Enemy

By Andreas Pavlopoulos

School stress is a well-known subject, widely discussed, yet the majority of teenagers cannot handle it, especially in the past two years with the added burden placed on our physical and emotional health caused by the Coronavirus and the ensuing lockdowns, health measures, and uncertainty. Stress is an enemy that cannot be easily dealt with, as proven by the fact that 45 percent of high school students in the US express that they feel stressed all the time. This might be because, to a certain extent, we are unaware of the causes of stress, or we do not know how to communicate the impact of stress on our lives; therefore, we are unable to tackle the problem effectively. A good start to face this issue would be to analyze what brings about stress in our school lives, how it affects us, and how we can deal with it.

Causes of Stress



An obvious root of stress is the overload of schoolwork, projects, and extracurricular activities. Each day, we must face countless deadlines and study for tests, all while trying to find time for ourselves, time to relax and engage in activities we enjoy. This means we must create a perfect time plan, which will allow us to

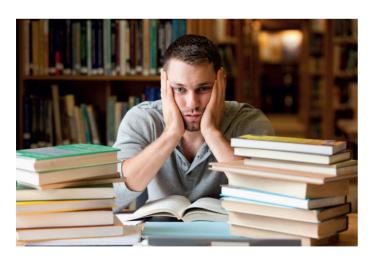
accomplish all these tasks. School usually takes up eight hours of our day. Besides the time we spend in school or preparing for school, there is also the factor of the pressure it puts on students. The tests, pop quizzes, and projects, which make up our grades, all take a toll on any student's mental health.

In fact, school does not only last the eight hours we are there physically, but it also includes the hours we spend at home studying. When we return home, we cannot just sit and relax until the next day when we will have to go back to school. On the contrary, we must study. The average homework takes at least 2.7 hours for a student. Taking into consideration that we must also sleep for at least eight hours a day, we are left with quite a small amount of time for leisure. This full schedule of everyday life is not ideal for battling stress and often it can be the cause of more anxiety.

Another major factor of anxiety, especially for high-school students, is the fact that the preparation for our entry into universities has started. All students, whether we are going to take the Panhellenic Exams, the SATs, or the IB exams, must now focus on these goals which will determine the path to our futures. We all have to study more, take preparatory exams and mock tests, and revise. It is a process that requires a great deal of time. All this puts even more pressure on us students, and this has consequences on our mental health. This pressure we endure when preparing for exams is undoubtedly a cause of anxiety that sometimes prohibits us from studying and can even take motivation away.

Besides, studying is not the only thing a student must do. We must satisfy other needs as well, including wanting to enjoy our last years in school, spending time with our friends, and in general socializing, which makes it hard for most of us to balance our lives. High school is not all about preparing for college. High school is our last years as school students and as teenagers. This means that we have to enjoy those years to the fullest. We all want to spend time with our friends during the weekend, but our workload largely limits our options and can lead us to spending at best two hours with them. This naturally upsets us in the sense that we cannot satisfy all our needs and at the same time study for school, which is of course a priority. This problem of balancing our social relationships, whether they are friendships or romantic relationships, with school, homework, and other activities we participate in daily is a major cause of anxiety. Our inability to find good balance between our social and school life leads to an increase of levels of stress.

Effects of Stress



Stress can have negative consequences on health.

When anxiety levels are elevated, then it surely has negative consequences on our health. It can cause us to become easily agitated. Sometimes



Balancing work, school, and social life

it makes it difficult for us to relax and quiet our mind. Disorganization and inability to focus are also common symptoms of stress. In addition, there are of course physical symptoms of stress, such as low energy, headaches, and often insomnia, which is a disorder in which one has trouble falling and/or staying asleep. These symptoms of high stress levels are all caused due to the chemicals or hormones that are released during the "fight or flight response" of the human organism, which, according to Harvard Medical School, is a combination of reactions to a stressful situation.

Stress, though, can have positive effects. When stress levels are regulated, it can help increase creativity and motivation. Many of us may even perform better under stress and pressure when we put all our effort into accomplishing a single task within a specific time frame. For instance, when we are taking an exam, most of the times we are stressed, but under the condition that we have prepared for it, we usually do well. Stress can also build resilience and encourage growth because we are forced to problem-solve under pressure. Hence, we develop skills that are very important in the long term, as it has been stated by experts, including the professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington, the School of

Medicine, Peter Vitaliano. Subsequently, anxiety can have both negative and positive effects on our health, depending on whether we know how to effectively deal with it.



Exercise is an effective way of managing stress.

Dealing with Stress

I think it is now evident why we all experience stress during the school year. The factors that may cause it are numerous, but that does not mean that we cannot deal with it. Exercise is important for dealing with stress. Exercise releases endorphins, which make you feel better. Exercising does not have to include grueling gym sessions. Even something as basic as going for a stroll can be beneficial as it helps deepen breathing and relieve muscle tension.

Furthermore, getting enough sleep also helps reduce stress levels. It is a fact that most of us do not sleep enough every night. Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics has shown approximately 73% of high school students do not get enough sleep on a regular basis.

We should always take some breaks, whether that is a small break from what we are doing or even a longer break, during which we stop

an extra activity or focus on only one thing. During these breaks, we can even try to talk to some friends or family, as it has been proven that social support is an effective way to counter chronic stress and crisis. Through these pauses, we can allow our brain and body to relax, or to escape for once from the problems of everyday life and vent all our anxiety. The Harvard Medical School even suggests we practice the relaxation response. This is a method that helps counter the stress response through deep abdominal breathing and by being tranquil. This helps as it reduces levels of blood pressure and therefore helps significantly with our health overall, besides helping with combatting stress.

Stress is normal to have when having to engage in various activities and wishing to achieve many goals. However, we must not let it influence us negatively. I find that a little stress can be good in terms of motivating us to be organized, but when we feel overwhelmed, we should take a step back because excessive stress is debilitating and even dangerous at times.



Find the ideal way to manage your stress!

Has Technology Brought Us Together or Isolated Us?

by Christianna Tricha



The emergence of communities is traced back to pre-historic times. People would form groups to ensure their survival. As time passed, the concept of community became more specialized. The word "community" originates from the old French communaute and the Latin word communitas, which stand for "common." Nowadays, the main function of communities is to bring people with similar characteristics together, whether it is the land they inhabit, their beliefs, or their interests.

Technology changed has lives tremendously - in some ways, for the better and in some ways, for the worse. On the one hand, it is believed that, during this age of vast technological advances, we have lost our sense of community. To begin with, people from older generations feel like mobile phones have taken away the joy of meeting and spending time with other people in person. American computer scientist and professor Vicki Hanson has stated that "[t]he efficiency gained by conducting online interactions is not a powerful motivator for technology adoption by older adults who may be experiencing loneliness

isolation" (qtd. in Lancaster University). In contrast, today's youth would rather stay at home and spend a lot of time creating, experimenting with, and shaping and reshaping their "online" identities or playing video games than socialize in person. Adults perceive this lack of connection on a human level as alarming and feel the need to promote different ways of communication to their children.

On the other hand, technology has opened up

During this age of vast technological advances, we have lost our sense of community.

a whole new world where billions of people have the opportunity to reach out to new friends and form communities. Social networks are far more accessible, which is a characteristic that makes meeting people through them more appealing than meeting them in person. More specifically, whether you live in Greece or at the other end of the world, you have access to social media. What is more, teenagers have created chatrooms on the Internet where their interests and issues that matter to them can be discussed and shared. As teenagers have a difficult time fitting in, such chatrooms and social forums enable them to find communities they feel they belong to and are not scared to open up to,

Technology has opened up a whole new world where billions of people have the opportunity to reach out to new friends and form communities.

making their life more meaningful.

In addition, in the past two years, people have had to deal with a pandemic that caused the whole world to shut down, making face-to-face interaction impossible to achieve. It was believed by many that any sense of community that had been left up to that point would be gone, too. Nevertheless, these tumultuous times foregrounded charity and the significance of helping in a community. For instance, in Wuhan, China, people volunteered to work to provide lifts for care workers who found it difficult to reach the hospitals they worked in. Also, the Cambridge

Health Alliance (CHA) in Cambridge, MA organized online sessions, where people were given the opportunity to share their worries and fears with others. This enabled them to connect with people even from afar and overcome their feelings of loneliness together. Liz D., a participant in those sessions, stated: "[These] online programs have been life changing for me during quarantine and I am eternally grateful" (Center for Mindfulness & Compassion – Boston).

All in all, technology has proven to be quite helpful when it comes to social interaction, especially in the last two years. However, this does not mean that online communication should be the only way to fulfil our social needs. The primary means of communication is meeting in person, and it should remain that way. Technology can enhance communication when face-to-face interaction is otherwise hard to obtain, but it cannot fully replace in-person interaction. Feeling overwhelmed? Do not hesitate to back away from technology and try to reconnect on a human level. The key is to maintain a balance between your online and real-life relationships.



People from all walks of life can connect with communities online.

Online Learning: Considering the Disadvantages

by Mariza Kalampaliki



"The future of e-Learning is wide open! Learning doesn't just happen during business hours in the office or in the classroom. It happens everywhere through a number of different channels," Technology Solutions Engineer Eric Schuermann has stated (Singh). And so it is. Since the beginning of the pandemic, online learning has become a significant part of our lives. Today, the world needs technology more than ever, and it is used for both educational and work purposes. However, does this innovation only have advantages? It is important that we also reflect on the disadvantages of online learning.

To begin with, not everyone has reliable Internet access or can afford to buy a computer. Nowadays, more and more families are facing financial difficulties, and it is obvious that such expenses would mean having to do without other, more important goods. Therefore, buying expensive devices or software is not a priority for them. What's more, technical problems are a common disadvantage of online learning. A poor internet connection, which leads to audio or camera issues, can ruin the flow of a lesson and not allow a student to focus and properly attend a class.

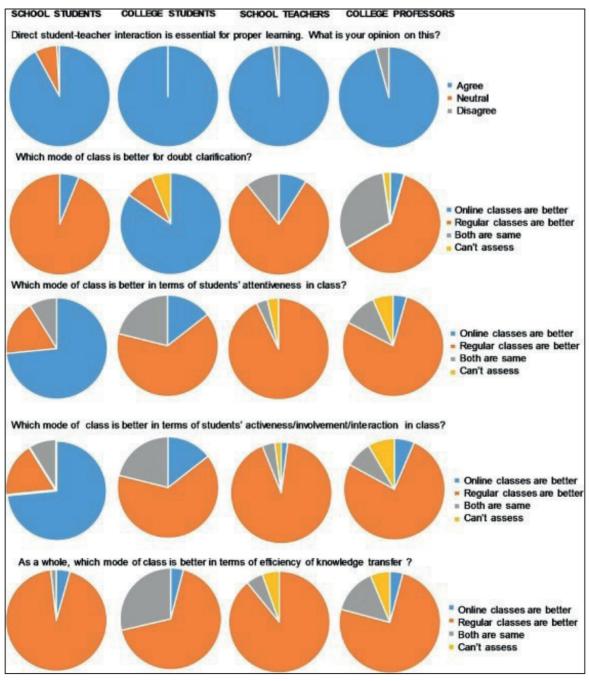
Lack of motivation and time-management skills is another drawback that could make elearning seem less successful than traditional education. In the setting of a home, there are many factors to get distracted by and perhaps not enough to push one to perform well. Students are often left to their own devices, forced to figure out what they are taught, away from the classroom. They often do not have the chance to get as much feedback as they would if they were at school, and thus the learning process becomes less effective. Also, managing one's time is really difficult, especially for young learners, since they often end up using their much-needed free time to complete school assignments.

Yet, the most important disadvantage of online learning is probably the social isolation among students and the lack of interaction between students and teachers. It affects their socialisation and their sense of belonging. Children really need to interact and to express their feelings. Face-to-face contact helps them be mentally healthy and fulfill their need for socialisation. Every child needs a variety of stimuli in order to grow into a healthy and well-rounded human being.

As regards students around the world, opinions over the impact of online learning vary. However, there is evidence that children have been negatively affected. Children are more than ever able to understand that even if e-learning is a promising novelty, it is less effective than traditional education. Furthermore, children from all over the world claim that the lack of communication with their peers is a really important factor for not staying focused or motivated. Worldwide surveys showed that the vast majority of children looked forward to returning to the school environment, and the most important reason seemed to be

their need to not feel isolated and to interact with their friends and classmates. It is therefore obvious that neglecting the communicational skills of students for a long time will inevitably lead to the development of antisocial human beings with an acquired fear of others.

Without a doubt, it seems that online learning is a novelty, which, however, carries an important number of disadvantages. We should reflect on these points as education is fundamental for our future and for our economy but most importantly for the mental health and self—improvement of children.



Online Learning: Rebranding Education

by Aggeliki Dapsi

Over the past few years, the world has been subjected to many changes, the greatest by far being staying at home, studying away from the traditional school community. Educational systems had to become accustomed to a new reality: tasks to upload, meetings to join, e-quizzes to complete. As the pandemic abates and normality resumes in daily life, one thing is certain: online learning saved education and has proven to be a powerful tool in a learner's toolbox.

"Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."

-Socrates

First of all, remote learning is not a particularly difficult process in terms of technological equipment since it can create a generation of virtually literate citizens by urging students to broaden their academic technological horizons. Students who take online courses have the option to learn through synchronous education via videoconferencing applications asynchronous education at their own pace, or even to combine the two. They can experience an educational methodology which is a perfect fit for them. When it is pointed out that low-income or disadvantaged families are underrepresented in online education, it is important to remember that countries all over the world issued grants or funds to support them during the pandemic. In Greece, more than 500,000 students received vouchers that allowed them to obtain the necessary equipment for online learning in 2021.

Furthermore, online learning can be important in incentivizing students to conduct

personal research, to learn how to learn. As Socrates once said, "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel," and online education offers precisely that. Distance learning gave students from all over the world the opportunity to explore digital databases and resources to further their knowledge on various educational topics, providing them with the necessary stepping stones to ensure lifelong selflearning. The disputants of online learning allege that it has very little to offer in terms of learning gain. However, a 2021 research study conducted by members of the Office of Academic Affairs at Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry revealed that a cohort attending online courses during the 2020 summer quarter of the academic year were "equally likely to receive an A grade" as the faceto-face students of the 2019 summer quarter. The assessment procedure was similar in both years, digital in both cases, making the level of exam difficulty similar. Thus, there is no evidence that online learning actually hinders learners' abilities to perform well in a course. In contrast, it offers well-designed software and procedures that facilitate learning and help students remain stable or improve their grades during demanding time



Students can explore digital databases and expand their knowledge on various topics.



Digital schooling is the ideal way for some students to achieve their educational goals.

periods, like the pandemic.

Schooling in a digital environment can also be proven beneficial for students who feel anxious or uncomfortable when participating in a face-toface class. This is because they can contribute to the lesson without directly exposing themselves to their classmates since they are separated from them by a screen. Indeed, a shy student often refuses to participate in a real classroom, despite the teacher's efforts and words of encouragement, causing his or her grades to suffer. However, in online school, since such a student feels he/she is in a less stressful environment, he/she writes questions in the chat, raises his/her virtual hand, and turns his/her microphone and camera off if permitted. Not only that, but most likely, his/her grades will improve thanks to this newly established participation in class. Thus, through virtual education, students who face difficulties when participating in the lesson have a chance to improve their academic results and progress.

In addition, the platforms used for online learning can greatly contribute to the relationship and communication between teachers and students. Athens College was the first school in Greece to temporarily move to distance learning because of the health emergency, ensuring that students and teachers went on with their lessons through Microsoft Teams, and that the material was

effectively covered. Platforms like MS Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom, and Cisco Webex connected students with their teachers using the "chat" or "meet" functions. This technological innovation permitted students to contact their teachers via e-mail, to request clarifications regarding assignments, or to share their schoolwork for feedback. Regarding the overall student-teacher relationship, online learning seems to reflect a consistency when compared to in-person classes. In fact, last February, assistant professor Lénia Carvalhais and senior lecturer Paula Vagos of the Universidade Portucalense, published a report detailing that there has been no significant difference in the closeness of students with their teachers; it was also reported that conflict was more prominent in face-to-face school settings. These findings further prove that an online learning environment facilitate and accelerate can communication methods, while maintaining the significant relationship between students and their teachers.

"One must consider that remote learning is not a substitute for in-person learning. It cannot replicate the unique characteristics that make school what it is:

a small-scale
fully functioning society."

In conclusion, online learning is a significant new method of learning that has drastically changed the way the world views education. It is imperative that the school community use it to its advantage and appreciate its merits in continuing the educational process in precarious situations or health emergencies. However, one must consider that remote learning is not a substitute for in-person learning. It cannot replicate the unique characteristics that make school what it is: a smallscale fully functioning society.

You Are Beautiful!

by Leonidas Vournas



The Wicked Queen questions the mirror, but we should reflect on the beauty standards society has set for us.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of us all?" asked the Evil Queen. That is not only a question encountered in the fairy-tale of Snow White, but it is also a reality. We keep looking at ourselves in the mirror, wondering if we are pretty enough. However, we fail to reflect on what beauty really is and what the so-called "beauty standards" that society has set are.

When we think of beauty, our mind envisions a typical 90-60-90 body, a perfectly formed oval face, big blue eyes, thick blond hair, long legs, athletic bodies, and perfect skin. But why is that? Beauty in our modern world is defined by what we see in the media or by common culture, trends, and celebrities. The perception of beauty differs from culture to culture, while it also changes through time. For example, for the Kayan people in Thailand, very long necks are the ultimate symbol of beauty. Also, full lips and skinny bodies are now "trending" because of the huge impact celebrities and models have on people.

False ideas of beauty are formed in our mind when we tend to compare ourselves to the cult of beauty that dominates our society today. We, as humans, have flaws, and that is normal. Our different features are the ones that distinguish us from the rest, making us special. On a personal level, I have struggled a lot with my skin as I started having severe acne when I was thirteen years old. Since then, I have been to dozens of doctors and tried different pills and numerous creams. I have wished for my skin to get better so that I would feel accepted and secure in knowing that I am following society's norms and conforming to its standards of beauty. Now that my skin is clear, all I am left with are the scars reminding me of the journey which has made me stronger.

My mantra in life is "you are beautiful, and beauty is you." If you accept yourself the way you are, then you will be able to love every single piece of your unique appearance. You cannot be good enough for yourself if you are trying to become better for someone else. It is important to find your own definition of beauty. Beauty for me comes from within and is the ability to accept yourself with your perceived flaws and to realise that they are a part of what makes you *you*!

Loving and accepting yourself is not an easy process, but it is an essential one. It is perfectly normal to be different and to have flaws because, after all, we are all human too. I believe that all people are beautiful no matter what they look like. Let's find our own definition of beauty and embrace diversity.

Part II: Short Stories



"Let every man judge by what he has himself read."

- Albert Einstein, 20th century German physicist

Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

FANTASY



"Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It's a way of understanding it."

—Lloyd Alexander, American fantasy author



about the house beside the docks. Not until the boy with limbs like sticks arrives, his rosy face glued to the carriage window. With quick movements, the boy runs towards his new house and sets off to explore this newfound playground. Climbing the large staircase under the steady watch of a candle, he arrives at the highest and most isolated part of the house, the attic. His gaze ignores the musty wooden walls and the round windows, and instead focuses on the large trunk in the middle of the room.

Small hands trembling, he lifts the top to discover an old book. It is strange; it looks as if it has been picked up a thousand times, golden letters faded, yet, surprisingly, the spine is unbroken and unmarred. The boy kneels before the chest and lifts the book in his delicate hands, observing it in the dim light of his candle. He slowly runs his palm over it, softly caressing it.

He mutters the title. His soft lips gently form

the words in a prayer, a litany: *Extraordinary Travels*. The boy has never seen anything like this before. His crafty and brilliant gaze scans it, again and again.

"Extraordinary," he repeats. "How could voyages be that extraordinary?"

Holding his breath, he opens to the first page, and a pandemonium of scenes erupts in his mind. Busy gray London streets, the mysterious seas and merchant ships, the luscious and lively Indian forests, and the intriguing American trade all flash before his eyes, with the boy desperately trying to keep up with the noble adventurer and his trusted inner circle.

When he finally closes the book, his gaze wanders around the room. Noticing a change in the book's weight, he opens it again only to find a new story scribbling itself in elegant strokes. He places the open book on the floor and stands up, rushing to the circular window. He rubs the glass surface only to observe exotic fish and whales swimming

by. The sun's rays reflect on the warm waves like a million sapphires, and bubbles slowly rise beside his window as if to say, "Hello!" Oh, to be under the waves... In the distance, he can hear well-oiled machines turning, propelling him and the attic away from reality.

The boy is stunned into retreating towards the trunk as pieces of hot, molten volcanic rock reach for his shoes, and blocks of granite tumble from the majestic mountains beside him.

"Extraordinary," the boy repeats. "How could voyages be that extraordinary?"

He sits down and closes his eyes. Colors are swirling around him, and the not-so-natural miracles unfold right before him. The little boy remains motionless, observing the awe-inspiring scenery with reverence. He tries to paint a picture of the small attic transformed through his senses, to mentally record every single detail that makes this experience extraordinary. In that moment, he is left alone, not lonely, in a world of wonders. A tear trickles down his chubby cheek, but it never reaches the ground, for a slender finger wipes it away.

While another might be repulsed, the boy simply opens his eyes, revealing robin-egg-blue orbs looking straight at a tall, smiling man, dressed as if he were ready to sail the seas. The boy could swear that he could see his soul reflected in the stranger's eyes.

"All this is yours," the man says, pointing to the magic surrounding them.

"What do you mean? Who are you?"

"My name is Captain Nemo, and I believe that you are on my ship, the Nautilus. Correct me, sir, your ship."

"But I have never been on any ship, much

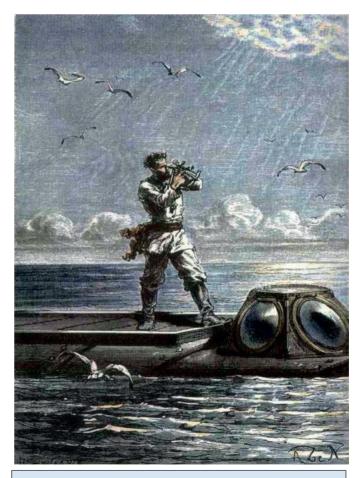
less owned one..."

"That is a story for another time, young man, but for now, leave the ship to me, and focus on getting settled in your new home. We will meet again soon; of that, I am certain."

The boy lowers his face as if in acceptance, and when he looks up again, the questions on the tip of his tongue are gone, Nemo is gone, and so is his ship. The attic's acacia walls are bare again, no mountain in sight. The windows have lost their shine, and instead of the marvelous sea, they showcase the view of the docks again. The book has vanished into thin air, leaving old family trinkets in its place. The trunk now looks dull, drained of everything remotely magical.

"Jules! Time for dinner!" Nana's distant voice calls.

"Coming!" he says, his extraordinary adventure still dancing through his mind.



Captain Nemo

A Coffin Full of Thoughts

By Daphne Papapoliti

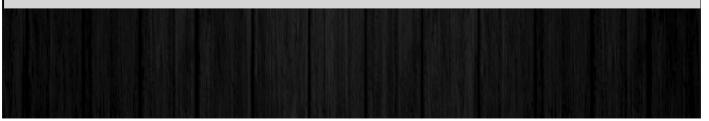
e stared at the inside of his coffin. He was conscious. Why was he conscious? Was he still alive? No, he couldn't be. He was certainly dead, he decided. But he was conscious. He couldn't feel his body, but he could think and hear and see. There wasn't much to see either way, other than the dull wood out of which his coffin was made, which was hardly visible in the dark. Where was he if not in his own skin? What was he if not his own body? Was he his soul? He definitely existed, in one form or another, and he definitely could think. Would that mean that he was to remain like this until the end of time? Because, apparently, there was nothing after death; nothing but him, a coffin, and a million thoughts.

It was a pill hard to swallow, the fact that he was destined to be stuck with his thoughts forever. He sat reluctantly with that idea for a moment and felt that he would cry had he the eyes to do so. He listened to the soft rain hitting the cold, hard ground and wished he had a body to dance in it. He felt liberated from all the burdens life carries and stripped of all the restrictions that come with it. It

made him uncomfortable, though. He was more free than ever, yet he'd never felt more trapped.

And suddenly, he remembered his mother. In a moment of such carelessness, the thought of his mother sitting in her bedroom and drowning her tears in a handkerchief broke into the coffin and sat there with him, taking up all the space and squeezing him to the side. It even shouted in his ear, like a dog barking to be fed. And feed it he did, by taking a deeper dive into his mind, the only problem being that a heavy rock was tied to his leg as he swam between memories that were slowly destroying what was left of him. They were memories of his mother singing to him next to the piano, as he accompanied her, playing the simplest of melodies with his right hand. They were also memories of her reading him bedtime stories under a weak light when he couldn't sleep at night. And memories of them, running together in their garden or playing a game of hideand-seek.

By that time, the thought of his mother had given up a bit of its space, but instead of taking it, a different thought snuck in through the small cracks in the side of the casket. It was the thought of his



sister. Anne was a wonderful girl, fifteen-years-old, three years older than he was. He remembered her big, brown, curious eyes looking up from the huge books she was always reading, just to check that he was alright. Occasionally, she'd sit down and explain parts of the book she found interesting, and although he would only understand half of what she was saying, he listened every time. And at that moment, he would have given anything to listen to one of her incomprehensible explanations, instead of suffocating in the mere memories of them.

But it wasn't his mother or his sister he was the saddest about. It was himself. He felt like he had wasted his life doing anything but becoming someone. He wanted to miss himself when he was alive, but he couldn't, and that made him mad. He felt like there was nothing to miss. But whatever happened in the living world happened, he thought, and there was nothing he could do about it. The problem was now. How could he possibly spend the rest of time alone with himself? That was the thing that terrified him the most. Wind was breaking in through the same cracks that the thoughts of his sister had created, dissolving every last bit of hope, every feeling of safety he had left.

He was stuck. He was trapped. He was imprisoned. He didn't even have a body, but he felt like someone had strapped him down. The coffin hugged him and held him tight, not letting him go. It felt like it would explode from holding all those thoughts bouncing around in his head. His mind spun and made him dizzy to the point that he couldn't breathe, but he did his best to catch his breath. He felt like he would faint when...

"Johnny," said his mother softly. "Johnny," she repeated, a little bit louder this time. "Wake up, darling, it's almost noon."

Anne poked her head through the door, and Johnny saw her big, brown, curious eyes once more. He choked in a breath. Without saying a word, he got out of bed and ran outside and spun around until he fell to his knees and hurt himself, but it didn't matter because that was the best kind of pain. His clothes were covered in mud and Johnny looked up into the sky again and let the soft rain caress his face because he was alive.



The Hand—The Meaning of Life—Painting by Galeria Eva-Sas, revealing the need we have as individuals to connect to one another.

The Masters of the Wars

By Marialena Kamoudi

Troy, 12th century B.C.

ve been running towards war for longer than I can remember. It's all repetitive, it has all happened before, it's happening now, and it will happen again. There is a pattern they follow, they are smart, they are strategic, tactical; they calculate everything, and every time, they win. We cannot escape this fate. They are the players, and my name is Knight g1.

I don't remember myself growing up. I have no recollection of my family, what I did before this started, or even if there was a 'before.' I've always been the same age – five years old, the best of my kind, but I'm ageless, as is everyone here. At first, I thought it was all a dream, but I have a scar to remind me it is all real: my scarred left eye carries my past. I don't fully understand how this world functions. I have seen warriors and civilizations fall, places cease to exist, I have felt myself die, but I'm still here. All these soldiers, they are still here, but so is the destruction. These wars, they leave ruins behind, the ravages are distinct and clear as day, how could someone say it's just an illusion?

"Faster!" my rider snaps me back to reality. The wind is blowing authoritatively, waving my mane, and dirt stains my white fur as I run. In a matter of seconds, I've reached the enemy walls, and all hell breaks loose. The familiar screams fill my ears despite my attempts to block them. The memories are too painful. Only one thought terrifies me: the world is doomed, humans don't remember, and horses are too tired to try anymore. I'm all alone in this. It seems the players don't

think too highly of us horses; otherwise, they'd erase our memories, as well. I have to make them open their eyes, make them see, realize what has been happening. There must be a way out of this hellish loop. I have never had enough time, but now I know what I must do, I know my task, I know how to go through with it, so I will try with all my heart. And so I stop.

"Move!" my rider shouts, nearly falling off because of the sudden stop. "Do you want us to die? Move!"

"You have to listen to me! Stop this madness! This isn't our doing! You have no recollection of the previous times, I know, but you have to believe me! These wars, we don't cause them; it's their fault, the players'! It's a twisted game of theirs! ..." I say as urgently as I can.

"Didn't you hear me? I said move!" he continues, ignoring me. "We'll get hit! Move!"

He doesn't understand. Realization hits me: he doesn't understand. He doesn't understand what I'm saying. I have to show him, but how, I don't...

My thoughts are interrupted by an unexpected, sudden sense of pain paralyzing my right leg. I turn my head, realizing I can't do anything but watch my rider fall to the ground, his green eyes now darkened, filled with horror and pain, a blood-stain across his chest. My head is buzzing, the adrenaline is too high for me to fall just yet, but the pain spreads throughout my body rapidly, my sight blurs. Out of instinct, I act as quickly as I can, bending down, I bite onto his cape and, somehow, I manage to drag my rider onto my back and, in spite of my injured leg, I gallop towards the camp medics...

As I wake up, my sight slowly stabilizes. I don't remember what happened after I reached the camp. I think I passed out. My leg doesn't hurt anymore; it's bandaged. My rider? I look anxiously around. I try to stand...

"Hey! Hey, calm down. Everything's fine, you're okay," a medic with a soothing voice tries to stop me from standing up.

"Where is he?" I ask urgently. I have to find him; I have to make sure he's all right. It's my fault. He got hurt because of me. He might be dead because of me. I should have listened to him. I won't know what to do if he's gone; I won't be able to live with myself... A tall figure enters the tent.

"Is he all right?" I hear his voice. My rider! He's alive! The medic cannot hold me down or back as I leap to my rider.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I should have listened to your orders, it's all my fault," I blurt out even though I know he doesn't understand me.

"Don't worry about it, I understand, I would have done the same," he answers to my surprise.

"You understand what I'm saying?" I ask curiously.

"I do now. I remember what you said to me in the field. I was told my heart stopped but was restarted. The medics back there brought me back to life. That must have changed something in the rules of wherever we are." "So, you believe me?"

"Indeed. All the memories are back. Somehow, I can understand you now..." he explains, and I have no time to react before he continues, "It is time to make things right. You and I, we must put a stop to this. We must go to the King," he says, and he stands by me to help me trot to the King's tent...

"My sons, I've been waiting for you," the King says the moment we step inside. "You don't have to say anything. I know what you're thinking, I understand you, and I know everything you've done and will do," he continues with a note of wisdom in his voice. "This is my curse, to know everything but not be able to act against the players. There is no way out. There is no before or after this. This is history, our past, present, and future, and history cannot be changed. It will play out as it's written, and, unfortunately, we have no power over it." His eyes are devoid of emotion, inspiring a sense of fear. It's like he can't feel anymore, as if he is tired of living, because this isn't living, this is simply existing.

"It's all going to be over soon. Over... no... regenerated." He speaks calmly. I turn my head to my left where my rider is standing, and I notice the worried look on his face. The moment I turn back to face the King, he collapses, and the loud clatter from outside signals our surrender.

The King has fallen, Troy has surrendered, and the players shake hands.



DRAMA

"Drama is life with the dull bits cut out."

-Alfred Hitchcock



Photograph by Andreas Papanastasiou

LIFE OUT OF A BLUE WINDOW

By Andreas Papanastasiou

HE FERRY BOAT that brought me all the way here has already left the port, moving on to its next destination. I'm taking my first steps back on the soil that carries my soul's weight. The port has mostly stayed the same: the small fishing boats, splashed with the sea's blue paint. The coffee shops, the open market. Nothing has truly changed. I start walking towards the Chora, the town of my youth.

I look up the hill, to the top. There is nothing but a lone windmill, immobilized by time. I have to climb the hill to go back home. Already from the first few steps, I can see our Chora, unfolding before me. No man can understand the way my eyes travel from one blue window to another. It's like an abnormal dance. Every cross on the top of every small church, every bell, makes me feel like I never left. As the red August sun bakes my skin and lights my heart on fire, I hear the whistle of the wind, the music of my childhood intermingles with my thoughts. My eyes continue dancing between the blue domes and the eyes of the passing people. Bouzoukis and guitars scratch their chords in my mind.

Night has fallen. I continue walking. Then, my long walk ends at the blue door. Its purity has been transformed to its darkest version. The only source of light is the small bulb illuminating the room where I used to write my songs. Sapfo may be there. My heartbeat increases. It's been years since I last saw her. I wonder if I still have my keys. They're not in my bag. I have no option but

to knock on the door. I see someone coming over. It's a girl, but darkness obscures her face. Her figure reminds me of someone. It just might be my daughter.

"Good Afterno...Grandpa? Is that you?"

I don't know what to say. In the madness that overtakes my mind I manage, "Yes, my Sapfo! It's been years!"

"Exactly. It's been years..." she replies. I recognize that look in her eyes. It's the same look that her grandmother gave me every time I forgot to buy bread from the bakery nearby.

"I know. And I'm truly sorry. It's just..." I sigh. I know, she has every right to be mad at me. I would be mad at me, too. I left about three years ago. I never talked to her or to Konstantina, her mother, once. It's not that I didn't love them or that I didn't want to talk to them. I didn't feel strong enough.

"Ever since your grandma died, Sapfo, I've not been the same." She moves her lips to answer, but I interrupt her: "And I know that doesn't justify my actions. You have every right to be mad at me. But I didn't leave because I didn't want to be with you or because I stopped loving you."

"You abandoned us, though."

"I know, my love. But you must know a day hasn't gone by when I haven't thought of you both."

She is the one to sigh this time. She looks a lot like her mother with her long black hair and the lively look in her. She is taller than me. I can only admire her, but my heart sinks with a sense of emptiness. I truly abandoned them. My family. Everything I had.

"I should be going now," I mumble.

"No! Come in, Pappou," she says.

I take my first steps in. It has only been three years, yet I feel as if it's been three decades. I

head to my old bedroom only to see that it's occupied.

"Oh...that's my room now. You're sleeping on the couch." That's the last thing she says to me before she goes to bed.

In the next few days, I readjust myself back to life on the island. God, did I miss my home. I don't see Sapfo for a few days. She works to save money for her studies, and she sometimes reads her books. She truly loves them. She hardly has any time for friends. I watch her. I wait and hope. I might be wrong, but I think her anger over my disappearance is lessening. She is a smart girl. And probably, way more kind-hearted than I am.

Slowly, our rhythms begin to mesh. One afternoon, we find ourselves leaving the house together, walking together, like we had once done when she was just a young girl. I remember those walks as if they happened yesterday. To be honest,



The simplicity of island life. Photo by Andreas Papanastasiou.

I think that some of these walks may be my happiest memories. I wish I had told her that. The sea is near, and we head there. We are talking about nothing, about life on the island. Then, as we reach the beach, Sapfo confides in me something that completely changes our relationship.

"Grandpa, I have something to tell you." I am glad she trusts me, but at the same time, I worry.

"Anything, my sunshine."

"I'm really tired. I feel overwhelmed." I sympathize with her. I know how it feels.

"What is the problem? Is it some boy? Maybe school?"

"No, my problem is..." She stops for a bit. I wait patiently. Finally, she answers. "It's just that I have been under a lot of pressure lately. Pressure from myself. And it has been holding me back from being truly happy. And..." I am left with no answer. My worry grows.

This time, she needs a push: "What is it?"

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid of my emotions. I don't trust myself. I'm afraid of...myself." I am caught by surprise. I stand silent for some time, gazing at the sea. After a while, calmed by the rhythm of the waves, I am able to speak again.

"Come. I want to show you something," I say as I walk towards the water. "This is where I



The beauty of Tinos.

Photo by Andreas Papanastasiou.

used to come with your grandmother. Back then, this beach was empty, not a single umbrella. It was just the two of us. But that was all we needed. Nothing will ever replace that feeling. Even now, the beach is full of people, yet to me it seems that it has never been so empty." I pour my heart out. I've never told anyone this.

"She's not here though. And that hurts. So does love," she whispers. She is wise even though her youth obscures her view of things.

"She may not be here. But I still see her every day. I hear her songs in the waves that hit the sand. I see her eyes as I fall asleep. I see her smile in the stars. And I know she's watching me, too. I love her. And that is why she's still with me. With all of us." I walk towards the sea, and the waves kiss my feet. I take a moment to truly appreciate their caressing touch. The sun is sinking.

"The perfect example of love is not hidden within us," I say, our eyes meeting, her eyes pleading for an answer to all her questions that I cannot answer.

"Where is it, Pappou?" she asks.

"Right in front of you. And all around you. The sun and the sea. They could not be more different. Yet they still love each other. They're hundreds of millions of miles apart, yet they are together every day. There are couples who live under the same roof but are never going to know what love is. There are couples who are on the two opposite sides of the world, but they know what true love is. Love has no distance." Sapfo is left speechless.

"Yes, but..." she stutters.

"Love is what everyone needs. Love is in the core of our souls. One who doesn't love doesn't feel, and the ones who don't feel... don't truly live. Emotion is what makes us different. What defines us as a species. What makes life interesting. Our only light in times of darkness. Love is what brought me back here. What forced me to realize my mistakes. What made me willing to face every possible danger, just to come to see you again. And even though emotions may be scary sometimes, you don't need to be afraid or blame yourself for them. Your emotions are who you are. It's what makes you Sapfo. Hope and Love. The sun and the sea. It's what everything is about." She gazes out to sea. We both do. The waves gently caress the sand. As I look out to sea, I remember who I was. Who I still try to be. After all, the journey back home is a war I fight against guilt and agony every day.

Nearby is the small church of Agia Irini. I don't know if she has been told, but she was baptized in that little church. The sun is setting. We wander down the hill, and Sapfo goes through the church door and closes it behind her. I can only see her figure through the blurry, old glass of the blue window. My whole life flashes before my eyes. My daughter, her mother, she used to come with me into that little church. My little girl. And I don't even know where she is now. Our whole lives —

those of myself, my brother, my sister, my daughter – are scribbled inside the carvings and the paintings of this church. And now, I'm watching her life, from outside of the same blue window. Her head bows, and her hands meet each other in prayer. Perhaps I helped her find the way. I just hope she will be okay. I don't have much time left to help her. But I can't tell her that. Not now, at least. She comes out.

"Grandpa."

"Yes, my love?"

"S'agapo."

Suddenly I hear childish voices.

"Sapfo! Sapfo!" There's a lot of them. She hugs her friends. I feel tears leak from my eyes.

"We're going to Chora! Do you want to come? We'll have lots of fun! Please say yes, we've missed you so much!" She looks at me.

"Go, go, have fun!" I say.

She walks away. An unexpected happiness fills my heart.



Ordinary Extraordinary

By Alexandros Vourexakis

It was a cold winter night; the sun had given way gracefully as the soft moonlight touched the old cottage. The kids were tired after a long day of playing, and they sat with their grandfather next to the fireplace, warming themselves. The blaze gave the room a cozy ambiance. The crackling of the wood and the warmth of the fire made the old man recall his youth.

"Tell us a story, Grandpa!" the kids excitedly pleaded.

The old man could not resist such temptation. His storytelling abilities had been put to the test before, and they had prevailed spectacularly.

"Fine," he laughed good-naturedly.

"We want to hear about the Great War!" they exclaimed.

A shadow fell across the old man's eyes. The Great War was not a pleasant chapter in the history of the city. It was a time filled with pain and suffering.

"Very well then," the grandfather agreed. He frowned as if trying to grasp something old and perplexing. "This story starts nearly 60 years ago..."

"They were dark times, really dark," whispered the old man. A trace of fear and resentment filled his eyes. They seemed too small and poignant as if an invisible ghost were haunting them, the ghost of the past.

And so, the grandfather began his narration of the gripping story...

"The city was under relentless siege by the

army of the Eastlings, wicked men thirsty for power, merciless and brutal in their ways. The only way the city could hope to be saved was by requesting aid from their allies behind the Grey Mountain. It was set for the next day at daybreak, and a small company of men set off on an expedition far bigger than themselves and far more crucial for the fate of their city than they could possibly imagine. Among this small company was the hero of our story, Elias.

"His companions were his dearest of friends. The company was able to pass unseen by the Eastlings, and they were heading north to the Grey Mountain. Or so they thought," added the old man in a solemn tone.

"Unfortunately, the Eastlings had indeed seen them and had already sent one of the most barbaric and vile of them all—Heydrich. A brute with a heart of stone and a tongue as poisonous as a snake."

The children voiced an audible gasp. They had heard this story before, but still, the mere mention of his name struck fear into their hearts.

"It was not long before the two parties had their first encounter," the grandfather continued, agitated, as if ready to fight a lion. He straightened up, and his heart quickened as he relived the danger.

"I," he coughed loudly in a concealing manner to correct his error, "I mean, Elias had little time, for he and his companions were the city's last hope out of this dire situation.

"It was nearly midday when the two parties had their first engagement. Elias and his fellow warriors were about to set up camp on the top of a narrow ravine in the foothold of the Gray Mountain when they noticed shadows moving towards them. Black and foul they seemed, and soon enough their assumptions were proven correct. There was only one choice—to stand their ground, ferociously defending their positions. And so they did."

Now the grandfather's eyes shone with fire as if he were witnessing the fight firsthand. "But it mattered not. The company was far outnumbered and found itself being pushed towards the ravine. The fury of the enemy was too great to be held at bay," continued the grandfather in a tense tone. He sighed deeply and discretely brushed a tear forming in his eyes.

"Elias was the only one who survived. His friends were taken prisoners and brought back to the city. But the perils Elias would face were not over. Heartbreak overcame him. At the sight of his friends being wrenched away from him, he realized now how great their sacrifice had been!

"But another realization immediately followed. He and only he could now save his community; it was him against the world, and this thought gave him strength and hope.

"And so with his strength replenished, he began to climb the Gray Mountain, ready to avenge the lives of people of his city which had suffered long enough under siege.

"For seven days, he marched through marshes and woodlands before, finally, the only thing separating him from his goal was the monstrous figure of Heidrich, towering before him. The terrible brute was hell-bent on foiling his plans, and so the fight commenced.

"Filled with fury and grief over the fate of his friends, Elias charged against his enemy, who only narrowly escaped his ferocious strike. The battle was fierce and immensely strenuous for both. The birds stopped chirping, the branches of the trees stopped swaying: it was as if nature understood the seriousness of this conflict. The victor of this battle would shape the fates of thousands of people. They both knew that.

"Suddenly, however, Elias suffered a critical blow from his foe and fell to the ground dazed. His vision began to blur until he only saw a small, dim ray of sunlight in pitch darkness. He dreamt that his city had been saved, and he was carried through the gates like a hero. He wanted that dearly. His enemy was preparing his final strike. In this moment when all hope was lost, Elias considered giving up. Oh, how much he wanted to just surrender, how easy it would be. But he chose otherwise. Heroes are ordinary people who make themselves extraordinary! This thought awakened something inside him, and, with a final sweeping motion, the body of his foe dropped to the ground motionless. Elias had defeated his enemy.

"His city was saved, and his noble deed became legendary."

The children clapped enthusiastically. "It was a great story, Grandpa! Did you ever meet him, the hero? What was he like?"

"Oh well, I cannot say that I have ever met him," said the grandpa smiling to himself. "But I do know that he always preferred to spend time with his family... especially his grandchildren."

Elias, the Great Hero of their city, hugged his grandchildren close to his chest. To them, he was a hero just because he was their grandpa who told wonderful stories, and that was all he needed.

Heroes are ordinary people who make themselves extraordinary!





The Stampling By Ioanna-Johnia Perroti



here was a peculiar silence in Hallow Forest this day of 2020; slim-tall lodges stood still and firmly on the muddy soil, and their colorful leaves fell peacefully to the ground just like feathers landing from the sky. It was autumn, yet there was no movement, no sound, no surprises. The most exciting thing about Hallow Forest was the "S-T-A-M -P-L-I-N-G," the name engraved on the wooden sign pointing out what most visitors came for, the highest point of the forest. "Breathtaking" was just the perfect word to describe it. It was as if it was the most idyllic part of nature, the most peaceful but paradoxically the most daring colors to ever exist were combined into a perfect piece of art.

Samantha was standing before the Stampling, the most wondrous and mesmerizing view ever, but

suddenly, a strong wind disturbed the peaceful balance of the Stampling. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and shivered in the cold breeze. Her snow-white cheeks slowly took on a rosy color, and her golden wavy hair was thrown back. Despite the disturbance, Samantha did not move. She wanted to belong here, to feel the beauty, to appreciate the colorful sky. Here in the Stampling, she felt as if she were the most fortunate person in the world. She could forget any problem that she had ever had; in the Stampling, she had all she needed from life. Every goal she had ever set would be fulfilled just by the sight of the beautiful sky.

For years, Samantha had believed she would find happiness through money, success, glory, and through her social status and marriage with the 'right' man, but what she had failed to realize for a long time was that happiness was far more elusive than that. The view of the Stampling today was even more beautiful than it had been five years earlier when she and Simon had come to see it on their honeymoon. For some reason, back then, Samantha had felt the sun rays on her skin stronger, the breeze far rougher, and the colors had been too bright for her eyes to handle. She could not appreciate the Stampling then as she did now...

May 2015

beep *beep* *beep*

"Ugh," Samantha sighed and shut off the alarm in annoyance. She got out of bed, showered, ate breakfast, brushed her teeth, packed her lunch, organized her bag, got dressed, did her hair and make-up, got in her car, left home, and now at work she was. At the office, she talked to her boss, took a phone call, had a meeting with Mr. Rogers, emailed a customer, went to Limberg Street to pay Mrs. Wilson, fixed coffee for her colleagues, emailed another customer, took another phone call, and that made up a decent day at work. This was how she

was going to reach the top hard work, which would lead to success and money - to the happiness she always dreamed of.

"Samantha, where are you? You said you would be home and that dinner would be

prepared by 18:00; it's now 18:30, and you're still not home," complained Simon. Marriage, in Samantha's eyes, was the prerequisite for social acceptance; at least that was what her mother had taught her from the age of...whenever she had started considering her future, anyways. And social status was essential to the life she wanted. Simon was perfect: a successful man, CEO of NTCAI, the National Technological Company of Artificial Intelligence, and, thus, a member of the highest socioeconomic class. He and Samantha seemed, from the outside, the perfect couple. Both thrived professionally, stood high in society's eyes, and were truly 'loving.' Reality, though, did not even come close to this utopian scenario, which seemed all too much like a Disney fairytale. Simon was possessive, commanding, emotionless, disrespectful, and had a heart stiffer than the stiffest metal in the world.

"I am sorry, Simon, really, I am. I had this meeting with the president of the company and I..." She heard his annoyed sigh. "I will make it up to you with a nice dinner; I will cook spicy curry with rice ... your favorite."

Late at night, always after making the perfect dinner for Simon and after she was sure that he was deep asleep, Samantha let her free-spirited nature take hold of her. She would creep noiselessly out of bed and climb the stairs to the little attic. In this hidden space, she had the power to act as she wished and, most certainly, not under the supervision and control of any man. Writing was not just a hobby for Samantha; it was more of a way of life for her.

She would think now and

then of the Stampling, the

promise it offered, but the

beauty of the forest she had

once visited as a newly wed

seemed elusive to her...

It was the sweetener which made up for the bitterness of the day; it was a cure for when she felt pain; it was survival. When everything seemed dark, Samantha grabbed her pen or opened her laptop and just wrote, exploring topics as im-

portant as the global environmental crisis and as banal as what she had done that day. It didn't matter to Samantha what the topic was; she only cared about expressing herself and her thoughts, which otherwise would have remained locked in her heart and her head. As soon as she finished writing, she would make sure to conceal any evidence because this could only lead to an argument between her and Simon. If Simon ever witnessed her committing such an act, he would chide her for wasting her time.

"Mom, I want to become an author when I'm older," she said at the age of 10.

"Oh, sweetie...Authors are just those who have failed to become doctors or lawyers or technicians or some other worthy profession. Is that what you really want?" Her tone may have been sweet, but her words shattered Samantha's dreams...

She realized that writing would remain an unaccomplished dream, detached from her actual life, a life built based on others' perceptions of her.

And so, her life went on. She would think now and then of the Stampling, the promise it offered, but the beauty of the forest she had once visited as a newly wed seemed elusive to her. And so, she continued with her routine, another casual Tuesday in Samantha's life: She got out of bed, showered, ate breakfast, brushed her teeth, packed her lunch, organized her bag, got dressed, did her hair and make-up, got in her car. As she was driving, Simon called her, complaining about his way-too-crispy toast... "Simon, I can't do anything right now, I promise not to burn your toast tomor..."

beep *beep* *beep* Samantha opened her eyes in confusion.

"She's awake!" cried her mother. Her last memory was that of a loud crash after an agonizing three seconds of that red truck skidding out of control towards her at the traffic light on Main Street and Sunset Highway, Simon's complaints ringing in her ears....

She was in the hospital in the intensive care ward. The light hurt her eyes as if she had forgotten how to see, but at the same time, the pain gave her great joy because she was alive. She felt thankful that she had the chance to live once again. That's when it struck her that the most valuable thing in life was to actually live, to pursue and experience what gave her joy and fulfillment, away from the constraints set by her family or by society. At that moment, all she could think of was the Stampling.

She shook away the memories and breathed deeply as the breeze caressed her, her hand warmly nestled in her new husband's – how had these five years passed so quickly? How much happier she was now with a man like Nick by her side, a man who supported her dreams and who laughed through the days, even when his toast was burnt. How much happier she was now as a full-time author, not running around doing meaningless jobs but writing her first novel, building stories with her words. Now, she felt worthy and deserving of the Stampling.



This beautiful forest setting could be the setting for the Stampling.

Till Life Do Us Part

By Maria Kantidaki

clamber over a pile of debris with ease. I'm at the top. Finally. Just a few more steps, and I'm out for good. I turn around to take one last look at my hometown. Or, well, whatever's left of it.

For over five years now, the entire city has been in ruins. Skyscrapers have toppled over, crushing coffee shops and residential areas alike the way an angry toddler would wreck a Lego set. The roads are all mostly blocked up, either with a car pile-up or some building or other that has been destroyed. You can't really see any people from up here, but I know they're there. Gangs have overrun the streets since the beginning. They seem to have made it their personal mission to halt any attempts at restoring order. Luckily, I'll never have to deal with them again.

Without another thought, I scramble over a pile of broken cement and slide down the hill. Once I'm down, I take in my surroundings. The

landscape is barren, but then again, I didn't expect much else.

I need to get going. Not exactly sure where, but I'll get there all right. Anywhere is better than here.

The third day is when I notice: someone's following me.

I stop behind a tree and wait for them to pass. As I wait, I feel my panic rising. I know my heart rate is increasing - I can hear it. It's so loud I just know they're going to hear it, too.

How long has it been? I look up at the glaring sun. Its rays burn my skin. I should get moving. Maybe they're gone.

"How long 'ave you been waitin' there?"

I jump at the voice and whip around to face the speaker. It must be them.

"You've been following me...Why?"
They shrug nonchalantly. "Was curious."
"About—?"



War images remind us of the destruction conflict brings.

"Where you're plannin' on goin'," they say and nod at the landscape. "It's all like this, ya know."

I scoff, "It can't be. It isn't. Who are you?"

I keep my hand on my knife as they step closer.

"Name's Enyo. You?" they ask with a smirk.

"Amara..."

"Pleasure."

I roll my eyes. "Yeah, well, leave me alone."

"Ugh, why? You don't even know where you're goin', let alone what you're gonna do there."

Well, they're not wrong... but still, no.

They persist, "I've, uh, I've been around here a while. I know how to work this terrain. Let me help you!" They give a little hop for emphasis.

They're easy to laugh with. It's nice, laughing with someone again. It's been a long time since I've had a friend.

I frown. I don't know this person. They could stab me in the back at any given moment. Then again, they have a point. I don't know what I'm doing...not to mention...

I look at them. Their eyes are almost black, but there's a playful light in them. Their nose does this little twitch whenever they smile that smile that seems to be permanently stuck on their face. They don't exactly seem like a killer...

"Why would you help me?"

A shadow passes over their face. "Bad job. 'Sides, seems like fun."

I'm going to regret this. I pick up my stuff and head off. From behind me, I hear them laugh and start running to catch up. Against my will, I feel a smile tugging at my lips.

I've been travelling with them for about two weeks now, and I have to admit, they have their uses. They somehow know where every good source of food or clean water is. It's rather impressive. Then again, they're still annoying.

"I'm tellin' ya, you're not gonna find anything," they say for the thousandth time.

"You said yourself there are people."

"There were people at your home, too," they mutter, their voice suddenly an octave lower.

I decide not to say anything. Instead, I just roll my eyes and move on.

With no warning, they grab my bag. I turn to them and hold my hand out.

"Give it back."

Their eyes twinkle mischievously. They shake their head. I've got to get it back, but they jump away. Seriously? I try again with the same result.

"Come on, just give it back!"

"Oh, come on! Don't be a spoilsport!" they pout and half-heartedly hold out my bag.

I reach for it, but, at the last second, they throw it in my face. I bark out a laugh.

"Idiot!"

Enyo just laughs, and I find myself joining in. They're easy to laugh with. It's nice, laughing with someone again. It's been a long time since I've had a friend.

BANG!

I startle, my head turning in the direction of the sound. Enyo's face darkens instantly. I see a figure in the distance, along with—is that...? Yes! It's—it's a town! I run in that direction. I hear Enyo protest, but I ignore them.

The figure turns out to be a man. I breathlessly approach him. If this place isn't safe, perhaps he knows where to go. In the distance, I can hear the all-too-familiar sound of gunshots. There has to be safety somewhere.

"Naw, kid. This is it. War's still goin', and we all gotta do our part," he says.

I feel my stomach drop. From my right, Enyo silently approaches. I look to them for reassurance, but all I see is a sad look directed at the man.

"In fact..." he starts, an unsettling gleam in his eyes.

I pick up the gun like it's a bomb, which, in all fairness, it kind of is.

I don't want to do this. Where's Enyo?

It's been a month. I shoot blindly. The man from a month ago gets down beside me. He might be dead. I miss my friend. Where are they?

Enyo was right; there's no safe haven. I silently watch the grenade explode. I don't think they're coming back.

I'm on the ground. I can't hear anything anymore. Finally. Enyo never returned. I wouldn't've either if I were them. I hope they're OK. Safe. BANG! It all goes dark.

"Hi."

"Enyo? You're OK?" It comes out more as a breathy whisper.

"Yeah... you're not." They point at one of my new scars.

"Hm? Yeah, I..." I look at the wound in my side.

"I can see that." They take a shuddering breath. "Mmm, sorry I left, I—I had to—had a job to do."

"Where are we..." I notice we're on a hill overlooking the battlefield. How did we get here?

"So much pain, so much death..." whispers Enyo.

I touch their shoulder, and suddenly, I notice how much darker they look. It's like they're cloaked in an all-encompassing shadow. They turn to face me. I stifle a gasp. Their eyes are fully, completely black. The playful, mischievous light I had gotten so used to is gone.

"Enyo?" I whisper.

"I hate it, Amara! I so hate it! And I—" Their voice cracks. "I have to witness all of it. Every time. ME! 'S not fair." They push their hair out of their eyes.

A cold feeling runs through me.

"You're... you're—"

Death looks at me sadly. "Yeah, would told ya, but, um, people don't tend to react great..."

"Did you know I'd die? Is that why—?"

"What? No! No, no, no! I mean, of course I knew you'd die. Everyone does, but—no! You're my friend."

I'm friends with Death. I need an Advil.

Death pushes their hair out of their face again as if annoyed at its new length. "Which, um, brings me to my offer. If you want, only if you want obviously, you could stay with me. Forever? Friends forever. Literally."

I stare at them. What? How? Forever? What? I'd be with them forever. I'd be safe with them. They'd never have to face the horrors of the world alone again because I'd be there with them. Friends Forever.

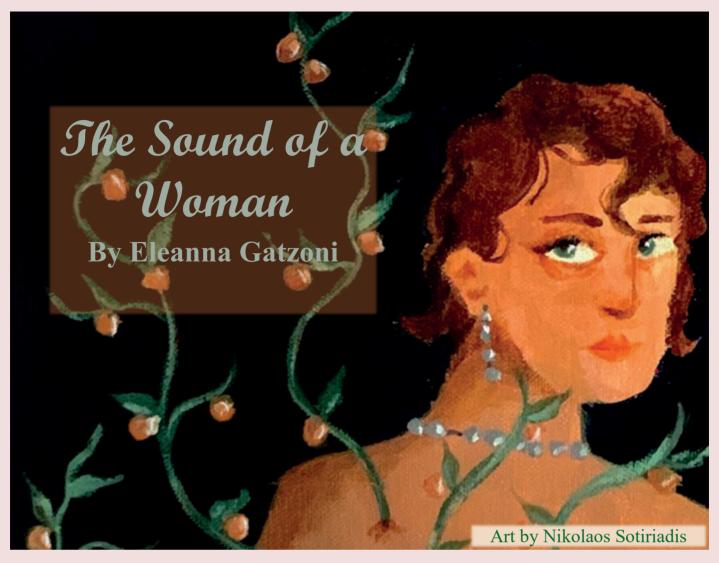
I nod. Hesitantly at first and then more enthusiastically.

They break into a smile, and a hint of that familiar light returns to their eyes. Before I have time to react, they wrap me in a tight hug. They're freezing cold, but I don't mind. A soft smile spreads across my face as I hug back.

We're finally safe.



Companionship is a vital part of being human.



"Are you ready?"

"Almost, I am trying to find my Walkman," Frieda shouted.

Her mother hovered over the pile of bags, looking at the empty house.

"Wow, I am really going to college, aren't I! she shouted from the attic.

Blair couldn't say a thing. She didn't want to overload her daughter with her thoughts. After all, they were hers. Only hers. And as she looked at her daughter's possessions, she couldn't help but recall that day, 25 years ago...

It was pouring with rain, and there was fog as far as the eye could see. The misty taxi window prevented Blair from taking in the wonderful view of Boston she had been longing to see. Ohio was good, but it was no Boston. She couldn't stop thinking of her prospective days as a wizard of math. She laughed again. The driver could see her restlessness from his rearview mirror.

"Where you headin'?"

"Oh, em, Saint Bononio University."

"You 're meeting your brother, huh?"

"No, it's my first day of college."

"Really? You are going to college?" he chuckled.

She turned to face him.

"Yes, I'm starting today."

Awkwardness was followed by silence. When the car stopped, she got out, and cast a final look at the taxi driver.

"Good luck, baby doll. Something tells me I am driving you home earlier than you think!" And with that, he left. Later that day, Blair stood on the sidewalk outside her dorm laden with books, staring at her frail feet, while the wind buffered her dark hair. A slight, quivering girl her age wandered past, also struggling with an armful of books. She looked like a juggler as she swung her hands to keep her balance.

"Excuse me, do you know where statistics class is?" she groaned.

Blair examined the flustered girl.

"No clue, but that is where I am going, too."

"Blair," she extended her hand.

"Charlotte. Nice to meet you!"

They forged ahead, and finally discovered the hall they were seeking. They entered the building and searched the maze-like corridors to find the lecture hall.

As she grew older, she found herself lost in that class, but even now she could still remember the first time she set foot in it.

It was an impressive lecture hall. From the entrance, Blair could admire the electric-blue colored chairs that seemed to stare at her, inviting her in. Wooden bars separated each quarter, and a wide, gray corridor played the referee. A few white desks disrupted the monotony of the fine, gray line, like boats trapped in a stormy sea. And up front? The dream. She could almost smell a subtle flavor of ambition, brightness, and chlorine. Just a whiff. The projector screen covered almost the whole front wall, and jealousy got the best of the old chalk board below it. In front of it, a podium stood with pride. She disliked its attitude. So cocky and possessive; it stole all the glory from the room.

She sat next to Charlotte in the middle, the only females in the room. A stream of young boys made their way into the lecture hall excitedly, and finally, there he was: Mr. Morrison. She had heard about him. She had read about him. And there he was, the god himself.

In hindsight, Blair laughed at her old self. So innocent. So pure...

He stormed in and without dallying, he pulled out a list of names and started calling them.

"Jack, William, Benjamin, Blair..."

As he read the name, he looked up puzzled, surely wondering why there was a girl's name on his list.

"Who is Blair Jonathan Lambert?" he glowered.

Blair stood up confident and raised her hand. Mr. Morrison was wary of addressing her.

"Blair Jonathan? You are a girl, aren't you? What's with Jonathan?" he sneered.

"In honor of my grandfather," she lied.

She guessed that would please him. The truth was that her father wasn't anticipating a daughter. After three sons, he thought he would be lucky enough to be granted a fourth one, so when Blair came along, he was devastated, ashamed that he had given life to her, so Jonathan it was...

The lesson began.

"Let's see where we are now, shall we?" He didn't wait for a response. The professor wrote something on the board. An equation. Chalk chips spewed out as he wrote.

"Who knows what this is?"



Charlotte started to panic and inadvertently knocked her pens off the desk as if the sound of the metal abruptly hitting the floor would somehow whisper the answer to her. This was the sound of a woman. A desperate one.

The noise of the pens meant that Blair didn't hear him, so she raised her hand.

"What's wrong, Miss Lambert?"

"I am sorry, could you repeat the question?"

"Why am I not surprised," he murmured without answering.

But before he could repeat the question, Blair looked at the equation on the board; she recognized it. Oh, yes, yes, she knew it.

"Excuse me, sir, I-"

"Oh, come on, miss, let the boys figure it out; don't try to draw attention to yourself!"

"I would just like to-"

"Enough!" He slammed his hand on the podium. He was officially annoyed.

"Let someone more schooled explain! Or just sit and smile if that's too hard for you!"

She sighed, trying to contain her fury.

"This applies to all of you...girls."

That was it. Her dark eyes burned, and she felt a flame flaring up, scorching her from the inside. She laughed, she laughed hysterically as if she were having a seizure. Then, suddenly, she stood up.

"To all of us GIRLS?" Her voice echoed like a church bell, and it felt like red sparks pelted from her eyes.

He turned to face her with the strictest, cold expression, like he was expecting her to back down.

"Your being here is a joke!"

"Oh, you think I can't keep up with you because I'm a woman?"

"Don't misunderstand me, Miss Lambert. You are quite adept at other activities, I am sure. But you will never be a Jonathan, no matter how hard you try. You are no Jonathan."

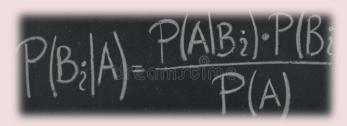
Charlotte lowered her head, and choked back a cry. This was not the sound that she wanted to make as a woman. She felt like a sheep among a pack of lions. But she had worked too hard to get here, given up too much, endured enough shame from her father. She took one step forward, and the Professor scoffed as she descended the stairs, head bowed in

defeat. But his superior smirk was replaced with confusion as she turned towards him rather than continuing to the door. She advanced to the front of the room and tore the chalk from his hand and approached the board.

"Miss Lambert, you will leave this lecture hall at once!"

She ignored him, and decisively drew a P. The chalk crumbled under the pressure of the strokes she made.

She turned to face the lecture hall of men staring at her, shock registering on their faces. She grinned.



"Bayes," she announced confidently, belying her fear, "wrote it with a P."

The class gasped. She turned to the professor, whose mouth gaped open in shock, "But of course, you are no Bayes," she added in the sweetest of tones. This was the sound of the woman Blair wanted to be and was.

She walked towards the door, deftly depositing the chalk in the stunned man's hands, all the while smiling demurely.

The laughter of the students proving her power, the power of a woman, followed her out into the sun.

As they drove away from the house, Blair turned to her daughter and said, "Frieda, have I ever told you about the first lecture I attended at uni?"

"Mom...really?"

"Frieda, I want to tell you about the importance of the sound of a woman...."

Neverforget...

By Fragkiskos Emmanouil-Kefalogiannis

the sun rose once again over Tokyo, it revealed the gray-colored sky, forming a perfectly symmetrical dome as high and far as the eye could see. Clouds were few and far between; even so, it was as if light refused to reach the city, a premonition of what was to come.

Yoshie walked down the street adjacent to the imperial palace; the pagodas surrounding it as well as the palace itself were dressed in gold leaf, creating a far-too-perfect image of Japan, aiming to hide the damage, death, and destruction brought on by the war. This reminded Yoshie of the years before the war, the years in which he had been living a dream. The years that, when he thought about them, gave him a warm, fuzzy feeling, like being wrapped in a blanket. The years that his most significant worry was whether he would go fishing with his father. Now, there he was, unrecognizable, guided only by his instincts and not thought. Struggling to get food on the table, struggling to survive.

All dreams, though, come to end, and it was in 1941 that his life was turned upside-down. Called to serve in The Imperial Army, he fought in Hong Kong. A glorious victory for his nation. At least, that's what Japanese propaganda stated. Yoshie knew better, though. He witnessed first-hand the horrors committed in the name of his Emperor, against civilians and soldiers alike. He realized that, in this war, everyone could find themselves at the wrong end of a rifle at any time. They just had to be

brave enough to speak the truth, and that was not hard at all.

Despite all his prayers to Hachiman, the protector God, he did not come home 'intact' as the army had promised. In this war, you were nothing but an expendable resource, a perishable good; most certainly, though, you were not an individual, not a human. He received a nasty scar on his face, which looked as if a wild animal had used its claws from the top left corner of his face, down his nose, over his right eye, ending right on the edge of his right cheek. When curiosity got the better of people, they would ask how he acquired such a distinctive scar. To that, he would calmly reply, "It took only the finest British bayonet." After this misfortune, however, he was exempt from military service, and he returned home to Tokyo.

Going further back, he remembered the days when his late father would take him fishing in a small bay in Yokohama. He was a great fisherman. "Just like me," his father would say full of pride and excitement. Most fathers and sons have something that they find more enjoyable when doing it together. For Yoshie and his father, that something was fishing. And what splendid fish they caught!

"Only the finest tuna, salmon, and Hamachi dare approach our rod!" Yoshie's father said mockingly. After catching a handful of fish, they would take them home, and Yoshie would watch his father masterfully navigate his knife through the fish to prepare it and later cook it, a duty usually performed by the lady of the house, but seeing as their beloved Yui had sadly passed while giving birth to their only child, the task fell to his father.

His reminiscing about the old days was abruptly halted as swiftly as it had begun by the palace guards, who were now in the middle of changing shifts. In peace time, this would happen every five hours. For the last four years, though, it happened every hour-and-a-half to mainly demonstrate

Japan's combat-readiness even now, when the glorious Empire was in shambles.

As he made his way across the city, the differences between the wealthy and impoverished became more evident. Almost at once, there were no sizable homes with majestic gardens, but only small wooden 'coffins' as Yoshie would call them, the home of the starving, and average Japanese citizen at the time. The image was only amplified by a touch of filthy and dreadful factories scattered across the city.

Finally arriving in his neighborhood, he noticed a small, famished child on the street dressed in rudimentary clothing, begging for a small sum of money. His flesh stuck to his bones, and his abdomen protruded from his small body. The only thing that everyone could give the child was a pitiful glance. There was no coin to spare.

This was the grim reality of war. There was no room for compassion and empathy. Those two would only bring a slow death. It was better to die for your country.

Not ten minutes passed, and the general alarm was sounding throughout the city.

"This was the grim reality of war. There was no room for compassion and empathy. Those two would only bring a slow death. It was better to die for your country."

"Take cover!" soldiers shouted. But everyone knew that there was nowhere to hide. Air-raid shelters were few and far between in Tokyo, and



March 1945
Tokyo after the firebombing

even if you could make it to one, there was rarely enough room.

Instead of causing further chaos in the streets, in a moment of defiance, people all around the city just sat down where they were and started praying. They prayed for loved ones, if they had any, or for a good life after this one. Among them was Yoshie, thinking, reminiscing, hoping. The vast majority of people were calm and collected. They had already accepted their fate. They recognized that this was the end, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Sure enough, the bombs of two-hundredand-eighty American aircrafts poured down, and the agonizing screams echoed around the city. In a moment it was all over. Tokyo had been transformed into a blazing inferno. Yoshie found himself severely wounded and buried under a pile of rubble. He could feel his strength slipping away. It was almost time.

"Remember me... Never forget,"

he said with all his remaining strength. Then, his eyes closed one final time as the last rays of the sun dipped below the horizon.

A STORY BASED ON REAL EVENTS.

Tokyo was bombed by the Allied Forces from 1942 up until 1945. The most destructive bombing raid in the city was carried out from the 9th to the 10th of March 1945. Casualties are estimated at over 100,000 civilians. One million more were left homeless. This is considered the most destructive bombing raid in history. For perspective on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two cities where the atomic bombs were dropped on August 6th and August 8th respectively, the death toll is estimated to be just over 100,000. Sadly, it one of the lesser-known events of the war. We must remember these events to prevent history from repeating itself.



"The beauty of dystopia is that it lets us vicariously experience future worlds - but we still have the power to change our own."

—Ally Condie, American fiction author



In a world dominated by totalitarian control, one doctor fights back. Inspired by William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and George Orwell's 1984.

Monday, January 30th, 2057

t was a particularly cold night, and I can see the remnants of the snow rapidly evaporating in the scorching sun. By mid-day, it will reach 45 degrees Celsius. I prepare breakfast, don my protective gear to shield me from the heat and my mask to defend me from the viruses and start down the stairs since the lift is a bit too fast for me at this time of day. I live on the 52nd floor.

As I am walking to the underground, I notice big posters at the bus stops, advertising the reality game, Own the Atoll, which will air at nine o'clock tonight. My colleagues at the hospital and I are watching it together during our shift. Hopefully, we won't be interrupted by any emergency surgery! I would hate to have to operate and miss out on all the gory details...Once home, I will enter my blog to write comments. I know it is dangerous to operate a blog. It is against the laws set by our illustrious leader, "Big Mama." If I am caught, I will be declared an 'Enemy of the State' and exiled for life. But I also know that as a

doctor, I have an obligation to speak out, and by the traffic on my blog, it would seem that the world has a thirst for the truth!

Wednesday, February 14th, 2057

Well, I haven't received any flowers or heart-shaped, velvet boxes of chocolates on Valentine's Day, how I long for the past! I remember the huge box of chocolates I got in 2020 (and ate in one sitting)! Sadly, today, instead of love, we will celebrate and worship violence since, on tonight's episode of Own the Atoll 2057, the boys will battle the girls for survival on their atoll, which is rapidly sinking into the Pacific Ocean. I have become very fond of the fair-haired girl and her chubby friend with the glasses; maybe I will place my bet on them?

Another pizza night at the hospital, with lots of emergencies since everybody seems to have respiratory problems these days. Everyone is talking about my blog, but the funny thing is that they have no idea I am the author. It gives me something to look forward to. On the other hand,

what does make me nervous is that I have received a message: I have been summoned to headquarters next week. I fear I know what this means, but it will not deter me from blogging today.

"I have an obligation to resist them because I want to live free!"

Friday, February 23rd, 2057

Well, there is some good news and some bad news. The good news is that the New Year celebrations are finally over, so we can all go back to our normal lives. The bad news is that I have been given one hour to take my blog down and make a public apology for satirizing certain members of the parliament after the fiasco with the mission to Mars and the vaccines they sent to the colonies on other planets. How do they plan on stopping this universal pandemic unless they properly vaccinate everybody? If I don't adhere to orders, though, they will fine me with an excruciating amount of Bigmama Bitcoin, which they know I do not have. The result? I will go to jail. "Big Mama" definitely has her eye on me! They want me to conform, but I can't – I have an obligation to resist them because I want to live free!

Saturday, February 23rd, 2058

Here I am again, with a pen and paper since they have taken all electronic devices away from me. Yes, I am in a high security jail in the outer Sahara of planet Jupiter. They are trying to break me; they have given me books like The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism. By the end of my prison time, I will have to pass a written examination to make sure that I have reverted to being a 'good' citizen and a loyal

member of the party. But, they have no idea who they are dealing with...

Monday, February 30th, 2058

The team of psychologists has decided they are wasting their time trying to revert me, so they have 'offered' me the opportunity to take part in this year's reality game. Needless to say, I 'accepted!' I have to focus on the upside of the situation: It is a way out! It could mean death... but it could also mean freedom.

To be honest, I am tired and terrified, but at least my spirit will be free. I am trying to remember all the games I have watched to create tactics and make a survivor plan. I think the first thing I have to do is create a society, have elections so that there can be a leader-maybe if we all work together, we can all survive. At least that is what I will make the others think, and if they do, who knows? Maybe I will be the winner of the 2058 Game.

The Government announcement blared from the hospital televisions in every patient ward, waiting room and examining room

"Good afternoon citizens Today is Saturday, December 14^h, 2058. Remember to reduce your energy consumption today! Excitement for all tonight, thanks to Big Mama. At the start, she was the underdog, the slight doctor from Earth, promising a society where all could live peacefully, but she cunningly picked off those she tricked into following her one by one. He is the five-time Olympic Champion from Mars, who saw through her from the start and set off on his own. Tonight, our final two competitors battle! Who will emerge the victor and Own the Atoll 2058? Join us at nine o'clock!"



DRAMATURGY

By Nireas Avlonas

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts."
-William Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act 2.7

he city looked just as it always did; its tall buildings looming over the streets as if they were watching the people passing by, street lights barely visible as the rain poured down from the dark, grey clouds. The streets were filled with people, each wearing similar dark trench coats or jackets, black bowler hats, and all carrying black umbrellas. Their most distinct feature was the masks they wore, each slightly different; a serious expression on the workers and businessmen, a cheerful expression on the cashiers. However much the expressions on the masks might

shift in different situations, they were never truly sincere.

At first glance, he was a young man, similar to every other man on the street that day: the same black clothing and umbrella, the same black hat on his head. Or so it would seem. But if you looked a little bit closer, you would notice the slightest hint of color in the hair carefully tucked between his collar and his hat.

"Hey you! Move!"

The young man turned in the direction of the

voice, as his mask instinctively changed, to see an angry citizen shouting at him from a vehicle. He had been lost in his own thoughts and had lost touch with his surroundings. As he moved to the sidewalk, he turned back to see the person who had just shouted at him, talking to a child in the back seat, a completely different expression on his mask.

"Why do people wear these masks? I wonder if we could function without them – stop pretending," he mused.

Still lost in his thoughts, the young man made his way down the street to his usual coffee place. Everything seemed normal at first: the customers placed their orders, the people forming a line that extended all the way to the door. It was rush hour, after all. As he was waiting in line, he noticed one of his coworkers being served coffee. She took a sip from her cup, immediately spat it out, and shouted at the cashier. Her mask revealed an angry expression as she faced the cashier who hurried to change her order. New coffee in hand, she turned to leave. She noticed the young man standing in line and greeted him cheerfully, her mask assuming her usual kind expression.

"Who is she really behind that mask?" the young man asked himself as he nodded to her. "Do I even know who I truly am behind my mask? How can we ever know a person's true colors?"

Back on the street, his thoughts started spiralling as he tried to comprehend the events of the morning. As he reached the city's buzzing main square with its usual rivers of people flowing in every direction, a ball rolled to his foot. He picked it up and looked around for its owner. A group of young children flocked to his side, eager faces looking into his mask. As they grabbed their ball and ran away, he remembered his younger self playing with other children. How happy they used to feel before they were forced to hide behind a mask, how carefree....How fast they had disap-

peared behind the mask.

The man was lost in his reveries: his younger self was alone in the park, a tall man in black clothing approached, and presented the boy with a mask. The young man remembered feeling enchanted, privileged, and suddenly grown up. As he recalled the boy reaching for the mask, the young man wanted to reach out and stop his younger self, but to no avail. His hands passed through the vision, and he found himself back in reality. He had had enough of this. He did not want to be prisoner to the masks any more.

He reached up to his face with a bit of hesitation and removed his mask.

His black bowler rolled to the ground to reveal his wavy green hair. His face was pale, with a pointed chin, thin lips tilted upwards in a faint smile. His lush, green eyes matched his hair and seemed to shine like a beacon in the colorless city.

Those walking around him paused to look at the oddity among them. His friends and coworkers in the crowd turned their backs on him as if he were

"Why do people wear these masks?

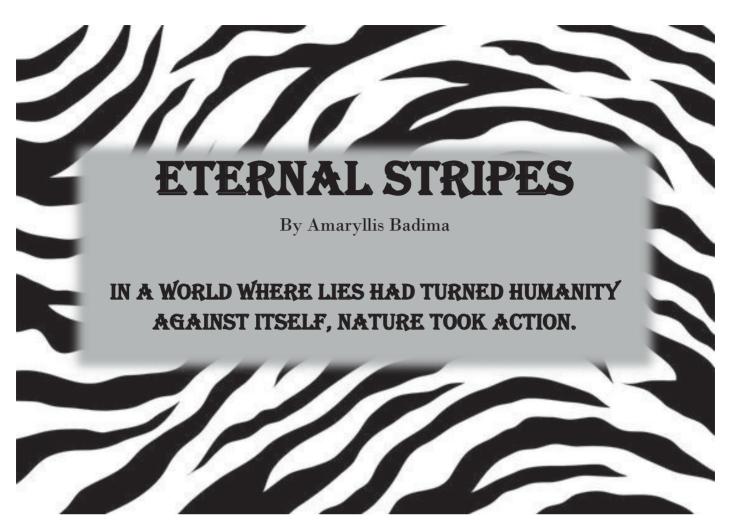
I wonder if we could function
without them – stop pretending."

a stranger. Nobody looked him in the eye. He stood there defiantly, proud of himself for the first time in ages, his heart aching for their acceptance.

"Why? Why is everyone staring at me? This is who I truly am, so why is everyone treating me like a stranger?" the young man wondered.

From the corner, there appeared two policemen who approached him with quick steps. The expressions on their masks were stern as they took the young man away.

The curtains closed.



don't want you to go!" She launched herself at me, digging her nails into my forearm. I took a deep breath and forcefully ripped her white-knuckled grasp from my skin. She sure had a lot of a strength for a five-year-old.

"Rowan," I replicated mom's scowl, making my voice as stern as a twelve-year-old could. "I have to go..." I picked up my school bag, softening my face.

"It's no fun when you're not here..." she pouted. I knelt down to her level and sighed. Pouting should be illegal.

"Hey... next year you'll be at school with me, and we can take the bus together every morning. That cool?" I offered.

"Next year, you'll go to the big building," she shook her head disapprovingly. Right. Middle school is in a whole other area...

"Chris, would you hurry?" I heard a voice behind me. Mom was rushing around, as per usual.

I glanced outside. Any minute now, the bus would pull up. Rowan was almost in tears.

"How about we play all day when I get home? And the day after, and all next year too?" I watched her little face light up.

"Every day?" Her eyes sparkled. Adorable.

I nodded, grinning at her hopeful stare.

"Like best friends?" She clapped her hands together, making my heart melt.

"I promise we'll be best friends forever," I smiled.

"Forever?" She raised an eyebrow, as if she were evaluating my honesty. That kid can act so grown up sometimes.

"Forever. Not even death will part us," I ruffled her hair and stepped outside, proud of myself for putting her at ease.

"Chris!" Mom raced for the door just as it was shutting behind me. Backpack? Check. Water bottle? Check. Lunch? I haven't forgotten anything...

"What exactly did you just say to Rowan?" She cupped my face, concern painted over her features. I stared back at her blankly.

"You promised her something just now, didn't you? Chris, you know what happens when you make a promise..." Oh, right. That, I thought.

I nodded, tilting my head. Was I wrong to reassure my sister?

"Whatever it was, you have to stick to it." By that point, she was almost shaking me, yet no other words were spoken; the bus had arrived.

I opened my eyes, cringing in shame. I mouthed an apology to the teacher, snapping back to my work.

High school has been hell so far; come in, keep your head low, and wait for the sound of the bell to ring through the halls to release you. Every stare seemed to make the stripe across my cheek darken—the stripe nature had punished me with.

The last decade changed for humanity. It seemed to happen overnight. At first, people were scared. But then everything became simple. The words were everywhere, on the news, on posters, in the mouths of our parents: "If you can't keep a promise, don't make it."

So here I was, a walking target for people's disapproval—the black stripe telling my story. Things people say when they see me: "You'll never find a job... People don't like liars..." The worst was the silent disapproval, the stares, as if they knew me.

"You have 10 minutes for this quiz," the teacher interrupted my train of thought, passing printouts around. Delightful.

"Hey..." I whispered to the girl in front of

me. I have hardly ever talked to her, but I suppose the less one knows, the better.

"Hey, Ava," I tried again.

"Hm?" She turned back to me, surprised. Her stare pierced me, wondering why I was talking to her.

"May I borrow a pen?" I smiled awkwardly at her. It shouldn't have surprised me that she merely kept staring back uneasily. Still, it hurt.

"Please?" I mouthed quietly as the teacher passed by, depositing one of the quizzes on my desk.

"I'll give it back?" I pleaded in a cringing tone.

Her eyes grew in disbelief, which was quickly replaced with... with fury.

"You promise? You sure?" she sneered, taking me aback.

Of course. I felt the urge to slap my hand over the black line on my cheek, feeling the need to deny its existence.

"Never mind..." I sat back in my seat, crestfallen. I would have forgotten the lined paper in front of me had the sound of a pen being dropped on my desk not stopped me from dissociating once more.

"Just this once – and you had better give it back." She scoffed and turned around, starting on

"If you can't keep a promise, don't make it."

her own quiz. I started filling in the blanks in front of me, one by one.

The timer went off, leading to groans and whines throughout the classroom. I had just finished my answers, reluctantly setting the borrowed pen down. Another lovely day. From the back to the front of the classroom, the rows passed their papers forward, allowing for chaotic noise to erupt

between the students, desperate for reassurance on their answers. I gently tapped Ava on the shoulder.

As she turned, I offered her the pen, muttering something along the lines of a 'thank you.'

She did not reply but gave me a disapproving look. I glanced at the clock. The day was coming to an end, and so was my patience. I started packing my things, carelessly throwing them into my backpack.

"People just...don't make promises. Can't break something that was never whole."

I stood up, throwing my backpack across my shoulder, ready to make a speedy retreat.

"Wait... Chris," Ava's voice halted me in my steps. I turned around slowly, unsure that she was speaking to me. "You kept your promise, so... why is everyone..." She looked around guiltily, not eager to complete her sentence.

"Avoiding me as if I were contagious?" I stared forward. Surprise, surprise, I can indeed return a pen to its rightful owner within a class period. I restrained myself from grimacing at my own thoughts.

"I was going to say cautious of your presence...?" she smiled. Or so I thought. I kept gazing away, counting seconds for the bell.

"Look around. See anyone with a huge black stripe plastered across their cheek for all eternity?" I huffed.

"People just...don't make promises. Can't break something that was never whole. Doesn't give anyone the right to act like that, though." Ava shook her head. Ironic.

"And yet they do. And so did you. And here we are having this awkward conversation. If you

have anything to say, please..." I brushed past her, heading towards the door. I could feel her eyes burning holes in my back.

I paused but didn't turn to look at her. "Honestly, I did not know any better. I thought I could keep it. Satisfied?" She gave no answer, so I turned to face her. Not many people paid me much interest, not here anyway. I couldn't deny enjoying the attention.

"Promised to give back a toy? Not eat a cookie?" She chuckled. Was this her being friendly? Had she been making fun of me all along?

"I promised to be friends with someone."

She picked up her bag and walked towards the door. I stayed in place. She stopped right next to me, close enough that I could read her face. Her frowning face. I really was bad at reading people.

"Can't you fix it? I can help you look them up." She pulled her phone out, anticipating my response.

"Why do you care?" Insecurities invaded my thoughts. "Ever since I came to this school, I haven't been anyone but 'the promise-breaker.' Thousands of rumors following my name. I am the one who did all sorts of devious things. Why?" The piled-up emotions from the previous weeks ignited, feeling real; the numbness subsided, and I could feel tears welling in my eyes. I hadn't been able to cry in so long, I felt as if I were about to drown.

"I'm so sorry..." I looked back up at her. I had not even realized that we had started walking, almost exiting the school. Her own eyes held sadness, honest sadness. I was sorry, too, but I couldn't talk.

"You don't need to do that," I put my hand on her wrist and lowered the arm she held the phone with. Walking out of school with someone by my side... my heart clenched tighter with every step. "Why don't you want my help?" She looked at me as if I were some peculiar, exotic bird. I could not blame her, for I must've been seconds away from taking flight.

"It's... complicated." I smiled, wiping away the moisture from my eyes. I didn't know why I felt so calm, not when I could not remember her name an hour ago. For all I could recall, she was the perfect example of an average high-schooler. She had friends, she joked around, she smiled... She was everything I was not. So why was I so eager to open up to her?

"Maybe I could help?" She motioned for me to go on.

"I don't..." Suddenly, I could not speak. Nothing came out.

I turned and started to walk in the opposite direction as fast as I could. Ava though, apparently, was not one to give up.

"Wait, Chris!" She sped up next to me. Persistent.

"Just..." I motioned her to follow me, avoiding her gaze. I was scared. I felt less alone than I had in ages, but scared, nevertheless.

I hadn't had much time to gather my thoughts. I'd probably walked this distance so many times it felt no longer than a two-minute walk.

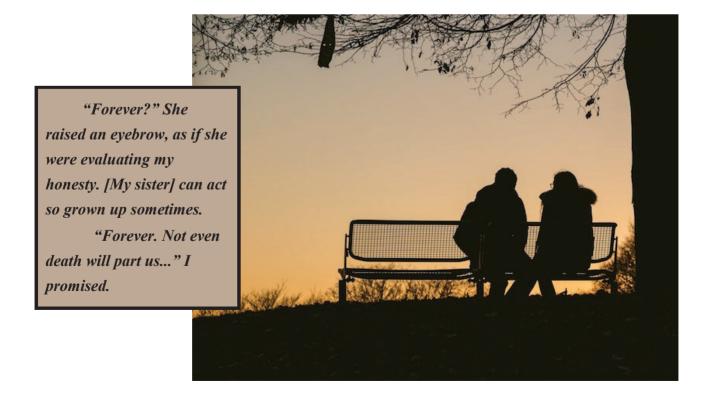
We reached a black, iron gate and started walking uphill.

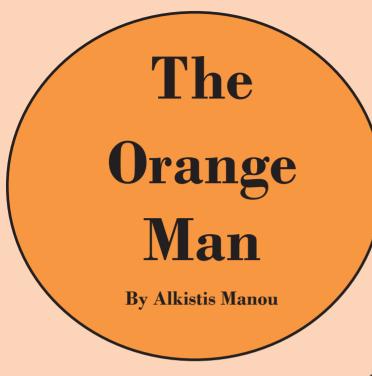
"Chris..." Her voice was small and trembling, lacking its previous confidence. "Chris, what are we doing here?" She was so close to me now that I could feel her breathing. Our speed-walking aside, she was breathing sharply, obviously trying to compress all sounds. In her defense, this place was anything but welcoming to new 'visitors.'

I placed my hand on my cheek, only this time I sought comfort in the black stripe, rather than shame. The tension from my shoulders, the anxiety of the day, everything seemed to be lifted from me. I reached for her hand reassuringly.

"Hey... I've brought someone with me, someone who wanted to meet you. I hope that's all right," I whispered, leading her up next to me.

"Ava, this is my best friend, Rowan." I gestured, carefully sitting beside the grave of my little sister, my best friend.





very day I see him. The Orange Man. Every day, we pass him on the way to school. I ask my mum, "Who is he? And why so many oranges?" She only smiles and shakes her head, like what I've said is absurd.

But why, I ask you, was he filling up so many crates? What madman needs that many oranges every day? Does he eat them plain? Juice them? Make them into pastries? What is their purpose?

The crates of oranges are large. At least three of me fit in each one. Three of me in the shape of oranges. Two, three of me in the shape of oranges. Six mes in the shape of oranges.

My friends all laugh when I mention him. They think I'm joking. But I'm not. The Orange Man haunts me.

One day, I managed to speak to the Orange Man. "Why so many oranges?" I asked.

He did not reply. Only stared at me, puzzled.

My mum pulled me away before I could ask

again. As we walked away, the Orange Man went back to his job of filling the crates with oranges.

The store did not sell just oranges. There were apples and pears in the winter; strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries in the spring; peaches, apricots, and watermelon in the summer; mandarins, and apples again, in the autumn, but the oranges never left. They were all I ever saw the Orange Man handle at that grocery store. They were always there, no matter the season.

One day, I was at home. I was looking for an old book of mine. Perhaps it's in the basement, I thought to myself. While I was going down the steps, I thought of the book. It was on mysteries. It was how I was going to discover the secret of the Orange Man.

I reached the door and jiggled the handle. Nothing stirred. Not even the dust that should have accumulated on the door. I jiggled it some more. I pushed and pulled until eventually the door burst open.

My confusion bubbling, I stepped into the room and stared in shock. Oranges. Oranges on every surface. Oranges on the floor, oranges on the walls. Oranges hanging from the ceiling, oranges sitting on tables. Piles of oranges in pyramids, some taller than me.

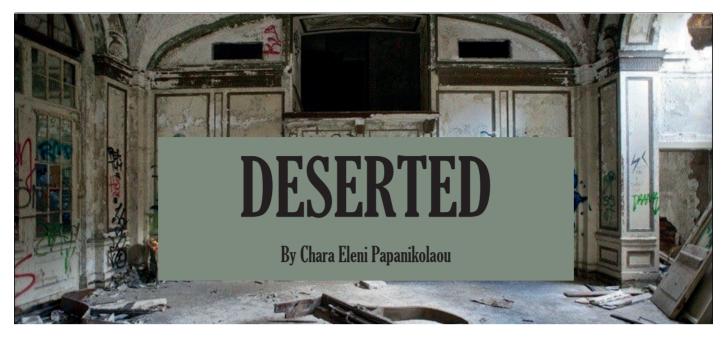
I turned around and behind me I saw my mother. She smiled. These were all hers.

"From the Orange Man?" I asked.

"Yes," she said and showed me her collection with a manic smile. Three different subspecies, juices, cakes, and biscuits. I nodded politely and ignored my fear.

Later that night, I stole down to the kitchen and dialed a number.

It was the police. Not my problem anymore.



My name is Aaron Chase, I'm 17 years old, and I'm the last person alive on Earth.

It's been almost two months since the end of the world happened. Honestly, I've lost track of time. It's hard to keep up and understand how time passes down here. By down here, I mean the Bunker. The Bunker is what I call it now. It used to be our old warehouse. But who builds a warehouse 250 feet underground? Anyway, no member of my family ever visited the warehouse, so I decided to make it my place. For the past seven years, I have spent most of my free time down here reading books about mechanics and building stuff. I have always wanted to be a mechanic or an engineer. I'm pretty good at fixing things.

As I was saying before, it's almost impossible to tell whether it's night or day when you haven't seen the sun for sixty days, more or less. I have a small notebook where I try to keep track of time, and if my calculations are right, the date today is June the 15th, 2045.

The world ended on April the 13th. It all began when Spatha started threatening the governments of all countries that they would release radioactive bombs all around the world. Spatha was a secret organization – more like a cult – created by people who believed that the human race should be eradicated. They wanted to give the Earth a chance

to recreate itself, by ridding it of humanity and allowing it to regenerate life from the beginning. And that's what happened. Threats were turned into actions, and, from one moment to the next, life as I knew it was over.

I should've been dead. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I mean, I always loved being alone and spending creative time by myself, but it's frightening to realize that's all you have left. I'm out of supplies, so I'm leaving the Bunker. I'm going to the surface in search of Lake Merced. Lake Merced is the nearest lake to San Francisco, so I hope that I'll find supplies there. If not....

"Mother Earth gave us the gift of life, and what did we do in exchange?"

It's going to be my second time going to the surface after the destruction. I last saw the surface two days after it was destroyed. I was trying to leave the Bunker to look for other survivors, but once I opened the door, my skin started burning because of the radiation. If I'm right, radiation levels haven't been critical for a couple of weeks now, so my skin should be able to absorb it.

Wow. It feels weird and strange being up here again. Thank God I was right about the radiation not affecting me. I need to make it to Lake Merced by the day after tomorrow. Based on my estimates, that's how long I'll last without water.

I'm afraid of the landscape that I'll come across as I go through the hills of San Francisco. Lands that were once filled with long areas of green are now as dry and inaccessible as the Sahara Desert. I search through my memories and try to picture what it used to be like: old and mighty trees all around, flowers that bloomed, bringing the feeling of hope and certainty, and the sound of birds chirping their melody, contributing in their own way to nature's beauty.

I've made it this far. I'm standing next to the Golden Gate Bridge, and I have a panoramic view of San Francisco, my city. All I see is the wreckage of humanity. The world is as ruined as



the people who destroyed it. Mother Earth gave us the gift of life, and what did we do in exchange? We destroyed it and left it unhabitable for everyone. How could anyone do such an inhumane thing? I sometimes wonder what the man who pulled the final switch that sent the bombs flying was thinking.

I'm out here, suffering all alone. I lost everything. My parents, my sister, my friends, my whole life. It was all ruined. Just like that. We all paid the price for the selfishness of a few.

Now, I'm walking past all the places that my life – my old life – was based on. It's like seeing my whole existence unfold in front of my eyes. Memories flash before me from everywhere. Familiar places seem foreign and unknown. It's like I never happened. It's like no one ever happened.

But I'm still here, all alone. What's the point of living when you have no one to share life with? No one to share memories, experiences, and adventures with? Life is all about feeling and experiencing all the emotions that totally consume you, fill you, and give you meaning. Emotions like passion, love, excitement are the purpose of living and "being alive." So maybe I'm dead too. I'm a living body with a dead and hopeless soul.

My thoughts come and go, rushing through my brain, like the prey being hunted by an insistent predator. Lake Merced is just one mile from here. But just like my soul, my body is exhausted. I've been walking for two days straight, without a drop of water or food. I'm near the end. My legs are like lead, and my vision is beginning to blur. Suddenly, without even realizing it, I find myself face to face with the ground. Is it just me hallucinating, or do I hear voices and footsteps approaching? Darkness begins to close in around me. Has Death come for me, too?

My name is Aaron Chase, I'm alive, and I'm not the only person alive on Earth. I thought I was doomed. But just when I accepted the fact that my end had come, I was saved by three people. Yes, people, real people. They are some of the other remaining survivors. Just like me, they found themselves in an underground space and survived the bombs. I was found half dead just a mile from Lake Merced, by Annie, Charlie, and Franklyn. Annie and Charlie are my age, and Franklyn is in his mid-forties. It turns out there's a whole community of survivors. They treated my wounds and gave me food and water. I've been here for only a week, and I've heard the craziest survival stories.

I'm already best friends with Charlie. Annie annoys me a little, but she has the prettiest eyes I've ever seen. Maybe there is hope after all.

From today, a new adventure begins, and I call it life.

MYSTERY



"LET MY HEART BE STILL A MOMENT AND
THIS MYSTERY EXPLORE..."

-EDGAR ALLAN POE

Web of Lies

By Martha Alevra



alking through the school entrance, I had never been more excited in my life. The once empty and miserable corridors were now decorated with terrifying masks and illuminating pumpkins. To every other student, today was a living nightmare, but, to me, this was the best day ever. There was something about the gloomy atmosphere surrounding Halloween that always made my heart beat faster. I wanted something unusual to happen.

"Agatha, wait up!"

The voice brought me back to reality, and I turned to face my best friend, Charlotte, who was panting, trying to catch up to me. Even in her exhausted state, Charlotte looked as elegant as always. Her uniform was neatly ironed to perfection, her shoes were polished to the point they could blind anyone who looked in their direction for too long, and her hair was tied tightly back in a perfect ponytail with the same red ribbon she always wore.

"Where are you going? Our class is all the way back there," she pointed towards the entrance.

"I know, I know, but I just have to see the

fountain before class starts."

It was no secret that the fountain in the school yard was my own personal paradise. Everyone found it strange how one insignificant fountain could fascinate me this much, but I just ignored them, knowing they were blind to its beauty, to its magic. I loved that fountain so much that when the school announced it would be decorated for Halloween, I was over the moon.

I ran through the corridors, dragging Charlotte by the hand; I made my way to the yard only to find a small crowd, blocking my view. I was momentarily baffled but quickly re-focused on my mission. Just as I was pushing through, someone bumped into me, forcing me to take a few steps back to regain my balance. When I realized who it was, I blushed a crimson red.

"Ughh...Ben! Why can't you watch where you are going for once?"

"Whatever," he grunted while dusting himself off before running quickly to his class. I hated him. Ben Marslow has gotten on my nerves from the first moment I saw him. He was the most annoying and selfish person I had ever encountered, not to mention a bully since the 1st grade. Just the

mere thought of him ruined my day, and I was now filled with disgust and fury. Fortunately, I knew just the place to go for a distraction. I elbowed and inched my way to the front of the crowd only to be met with a sight that would haunt me for the rest of my life. Instead of a decorated, magnificent fountain, I was faced with the remains of the fountain, damaged beyond repair. The pieces were scattered across the cement like broken glass, while water threatened to flood the entire yard.

Why would anyone do this? Tears threatened to roll down my cheeks, but I immediately stopped them, not wanting anyone to see me cry. Approaching one of the teachers, I demanded to know what had happened.

"I'm sorry, Agatha, but I'm not allowed to talk to you about it. Why don't you go to class, and we will inform you as soon as possible?"

That was a lie. Nobody would bother informing me. Nobody cared enough. Taking matters into my own hands, I marched to the principal's office, to get some explanation...

The whole conversation was a blur. While he was certain that a student was, most likely, responsible, there weren't enough clues, nor was there enough motive to investigate since there was now an opportunity to replace the fountain with something newer, fancier. Furious, I sought out Charlotte, the only person who understood how devastated I was.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing really. Up for an investigation?"

"Agatha...you are not implying what I think you are, are you?"

"Yes, Charlotte, I am. Since no one is going to do anything about it, I have taken it upon myself to find the culprit. I owe the fountain that much," I almost whispered the last part.

"But..."

"Are you going to help me or not?"

She stammered, "I'm sorry, but I can't; I don't want to risk getting into trouble again."

Disappointed, I slowly headed towards class determined more than ever to find the culprit.

I decided that the investigation should begin with an examination of the fountain. After school, I looked around for clues. Unfortunately, the only thing I discovered was extreme back pain and additional disappointment and despair. Exhausted and annoyed, I made my way home, trying not to think about all the time I had wasted. Unfortunately, it seemed my principal was right after all.

Days went by, but not a single clue surfaced. At school, everyone forgot all about the fountain, and I found it enraging that I was the only one still grieving. What's worse, Ben had found out about the school's plans to remove the fountain and was now reminding me every chance he got. Apparently, he overheard the principal ordering a statue to replace my beautiful, broken fountain.

A week after Halloween, I decided that the situation had gone on long enough. Even Charlotte, who was always supportive, had grown tired of my awful mood and encouraged me to move on and forget about it. So, two weeks after the incident, when I found out the fountain would be removed from the yard and replaced the next day, I made my way to the yard to say my final goodbye.

It was difficult to face the fountain, looking so wrecked and lifeless as mounds of dry dust were forming around its base. Sitting on a bench, I studied it, taking everything in one last time. I was almost ready to leave when a strong wind blew the paper I was holding out of my grasp. Bending down to pick it, I caught a glimpse of something, stuck between two of the broken pieces. This was odd. How could I have missed it? Pulling the torn fabric out, the air was knocked out of my lungs.

Holding the red ribbon in both hands I knew; I knew who had destroyed my fountain...

A Blue Story

By Yannos Myridis

Most people are familiar with the game played among groups of friends during late summer nights spent in the Greek countryside. Gathered around a beach bonfire, or even sitting on the porch of a summer house, a narrator presents the "blue story" as the other players try to uncover the whole picture by asking yes-or-no questions. The following was inspired by one of these stories I remember from when I was a kid, but the mystery is yours to solve...

alter had always been aware of everything going on around him. He always knew when the other kids talked behind his back, or which of his classmates threw parties even though he was never invited. He always knew when people made fun of him, and he was always aware of who his real friends were. People underestimated Walter simply because they considered his inability to see as a weakness. Walter did not see his blindness as a weakness, but he did long to see; he hoped for some miracle—something to give him the capability of finally experiencing one of those rainbows he always heard so much about, or perhaps the ocean, the sky, the trees, or the grass.

From a young age, Walter had grown accustomed to being in and out of hospitals. His condition troubled doctors from the day he was born, so he had been through myriad procedures, all attempting to partly restore his eyesight, yet all had been unsuccessful. This is why, upon hearing the news from his doctor about qualifying for yet another complex surgery, he could no longer pretend to expect a different outcome.

"You know, if this one does not work—," he left the rest hanging in the air.

Walter's glass was not half empty; he felt as

if it had been drained. Regardless, even if he wouldn't admit it, he was still hopeful the surgery would be successful, however farfetched it may have seemed at the time.

After a restless night, early in the morning of his surgery Walter was up and moving. He got ready, deliberately skipping his favourite part of the morning, breakfast, grabbed his trusty cane, and out the door he went. The route from his building to the metro station and back was now muscle memory for Walter, for he had followed this exact path more times than he could recall.

Upon arriving at the hospital, he was greeted with a few forms that had to be completed and pre-op checks; then, he was then moved to another room where he changed into a hospital gown. When a nurse came over and asked, he proudly announced he had not had a meal since the previous day. At least it would be over soon.

He was pushed into the OR where he was asked to switch from his bed onto the operating table. This was the part he despised the most, lying there like a cold turkey. But a few minutes later, the anesthesiologist greeted him, and she slowly pushed the anesthetic into his veins.

The next thing he could remember, he could feel his face all bandaged, tightly wrapped

over his eyes. He moved with assistance from the table to the bed. From there, it seemed his bed moved the same course to get him back to the preop room. He nodded off before they even got there, waking up later in yet another room; from the way sounds echoed off the walls, he could tell it was bigger than the previous one. It was also in a significantly quieter part of the hospital. All he could hear were distant ECG machines and the sounds of nurses industriously walking around. He knew from his previous experience that he would probably spend the next four days in this room.

On the fourth and final day of his stay, Walter at last got his bandages removed.

"Now slowly open your eyes. Try to adjust to the light." The doctor must have seen Walter struggling and instantly dimmed the lights.

"That should be better. Now tell me, what do you see?" Walter could hear the uncertainty in his voice. Not that he could blame him.

Attempting to blink, he could feel his eyeballs ache, and he even thought of rubbing his eyes to soothe them. Yet, upon opening them, he was presented with a much unexpected image: the outline of a window in the back of the room dispersing a foggy and unclear light which helped him outline the silhouettes of the doctor and nurses.

"Doc, I-," he could not have found the right words to describe what was going through his head. All of his emotions were fighting for prevalence, bottle-necked inside his mind which immediately caused tears to rush down Walter's cheek. "-I think I can see you!"

"Congratulations on a successful operation." He never knew how much he needed to hear these words up to this moment.

The silhouettes then proceeded to applaud and congratulate him. Walter had never received an ovation before in his life, let alone for something he was not to be given credit for. Still, it did not seem to bother him in the least. So what if they were clapping for the doctor? It was Walter's victory as much as it was his. Perhaps even more so. He could see: nothing else mattered in the world to him.

Walter was discharged from the hospital later that same day, as expected, sometime in the afternoon. The sky was painted beautiful orange and red colours as the sun was approaching the horizon. The leaves on the trees produced all sorts of different colours that time of day, from blond highlights in the sunned areas, to dark brown and even purple complexions in the shade. All this seemed like a dance of colours all around Walter, which indeed astounded him.

He walked from the hospital to the train station, still using his walking cane, from where he would take the same train that had brought him there to return to his house. He calculated about an hour to get back as this was the time it had taken to get to the hospital four days prior. He entered a completely empty compartment in the back of the train and took a seat right next to a wide window.

As the train departed, his face moved closer and closer to the glass, and by the time they were out of the city, he was practically one with the window. Walter had never felt more alive, and ironically, more exhausted in his life. He could only see so many fields and hills, streams, lakes, and distant woodlands, before he drifted off to sleep as the white noise of the train soothed him, the way listening to music did.

Sometime later, the train entered a large dark tunnel. A little bit of dirt must have accumulated on the surface of the rail beneath the passing train, as it caused the waggon to make a sound loud enough to wake Walter up, and in fact, anyone living in the vicinity.

And yet, as the train exited the pitch-black tunnel, Walter's now lifeless eyes were staring yet again outside the window, not able to appreciate, however, the beauty that lay in front of him.



CRIME SCENE REPORT

CRIME: Missing Person
NAME: Matthew Dunne

GENDER: Male

AGE: 17

LAST SEEN: Paramount High School

November 7th, 2022 (15:46 PM)

Investigated by: Isabel Drew & August Lewis

Sunday, November 9th, 22:39 PM.

"Do you know what's the most frustrating thing about this?" he says, taking a sip of his hot coffee. "They went on with the tournament. Can you believe it? A child has been missing for more than 48 hours, and the school board still went on with a Mathletes tournament? Unbelievable..."

The precinct is almost empty. We have interviewed most of the students present at the time of the disappearance. Only two remain: Vivian Stewart and Nicholas Davis. Gus is going to take Nicholas in for questioning, Vivian would be with me. I look down at my notes.

Witnesses: Vivian Stewart

So far cooperative.

Multiple classmates said she had a bitter rivalry with the missing person.

Last known individual to come into contact with the missing person before disappearance.

"The fact that she was the last person to see him is not doing her any favors," he admits.

I look up at him. "Everyone's innocent until proven guilty." I close the thick folder and

step into the interrogation room.

The door opens with a slight crack. I enter the room; settled at the table is Vivian. She is sitting extremely upright for a teenager, her shoulders are stiff, her feet are together, her head faces rigidly forward, her shiny, brown hair is slicked back in a tight bun, and she is still in her tournament clothes: a light-blue Paramount high school shirt, Gloria Vanderbilt jeans, a black coat, and expensive dress shoes, Prada, to be exact.

"Hello, Ms. Stewart. I'm Detective Drew. I'm going to be asking you a few questions about what happened on the day of Matthew Dunne's disappearance, okay?"

She nods politely.

"Right – so, you were present on Friday, the first day of the tournament?"

Her voice is loud and clear; she seems very sure of herself. "Yes, I was."

"And did you come into contact with Mr. Dunne before the competition started?"

"No..." She hesitates, "He was actually captain of the opposition, so we shouldn't really talk before the competition." Her posture changes she slouches for a second, then realizes it, and sits back up. She still looks awfully sure of her answer.

"But you went to the same school – how is that possible?"

"I'd rather not talk about it."

I instantly become more suspicious of her. "Alright then, moving on. What kind of relationship did you and Mr. Dunne have? Were you friends?"

She's quiet for a few moments. Then she spits, "I wouldn't exactly say that."

I raise my eyebrow. "So what would you say was the type of relationship you had?"

For a few seconds, she doesn't utter a word. She becomes somewhat uncomfortable,

shifting in her chair and looking at the exit in panic, as if she's trying to find an escape route.

I take a look at the notes Gus gave me. "It says here that you and Mr. Dunne did a lot of activities together."

She is now visibly uneasy, starting to sweat. "I guess you could say that."

"I mean, Math club, Student Government, Debate...You even applied to virtually all the same universities... All Ivy League, too." I look into her cold, gray eyes. "That ought to make you at least a tiny bit competitive."

She looks down at the floor like a child who has just been reprimanded. She's about to crack, I can feel it.

"Did the fact that Mr. Dunne was a scholarship kid ever bother you?" I take a long pause, waiting for a response. "I mean, you had numerous academic prospects readily available to you, yet he was clearly a worthy opponent, a threat, if you will."

"Miss Stewart, you won the tournament, and all the evidence points to your having something to do with the disappearance, so you can understand what kind of position that puts me in."

I anticipate a reaction, any kind of reaction, the slightest slip up, the tiniest frown. Her face is frozen, her eyes glued to her expensive shoes.

I look directly at her. "Ms. Stewart, I didn't want to bring this up, but you leave me no choice." I flip through the case folder and find the testimony I was looking for. "Can you tell me what happened when question number 13 was announced?"

She finally looks up at me. Her face remains firm, yet shocked.

I start reciting directly from the chairper-

son's testimony, "Question number 13 was announced, the tiebreaker for this round. Ms. Stewart did not respond, I'm guessing she didn't know the answer, but proceeded to run off the stage, obviously frustrated. Mr. Dunne followed, shouting, 'Come back here, and finish what you started!' Both students ran into the corridor and were no longer visible to the rest of the room. The round was postponed, but Ms. Stewart was the only one who returned."

I look at her stunned, gray eyes. "What happened after you both ran off?"

She looks at the floor again, then at me. She stands up, agitated and fuming.

"Look, I don't know what you're trying to do, but it's not working. I didn't have anything to do with Matthew's disappearance, and if you think I did, you're wrong. I mean, were we competitive with each other? Yes, but that doesn't make me a kidnapper or a murderer or whatever it is that you're trying to accuse me of."

"Miss Stewart, you won the tournament, and all the evidence points to your having something to do with the disappearance, so you can understand what kind of position that puts me in."

She slaps both her palms on the fragile table, upsetting my mug which falls off and shatters into a million pieces on the interrogation room floor, splattering light-brown coffee everywhere.

Shocked by the crashing sound the mug makes, she drops heavily back into her chair.

"It's illegal to interview me like this, you know? I want a lawyer. Again, he ran off, I don't know where he went. I had nothing to do with it, and I don't have any information about his whereabouts because I...AM...SIMPLY...NOT...A... PSYCHO..."

Gus runs into the interrogation room, out of breath, cutting her off.

He stops to catch his breath. "Detective

Drew. We found him...we found Matthew."

Gus pulls out a chair and sits to collect himself. We wait in shocked silence.

"He's fine, no physical damage... we found him at a gas station, 80 kilometers from here... He won't cooperate with the police or tell us how he ended up at the gas station and won't talk to anyone but you."

He points at Vivian.

Vivian looks at me, then at Gus, like she is weighing her options. Finally, she turns to me and says, "Thank God."

She finally tells us the truth, "I didn't know the answer, so I ran out of the room. What else could I do - he had won. He was just better, and I couldn't accept that. I sat there crying in the girl's bathroom, but Matthew found me. I had heard him coming after me. In an attempt to console me I guess, he told me that he didn't get into his first choice of university, which absurdly enraged me. I don't even know why he told me, like that would make my losing the tournament better. And that is when I started yelling at him. Our rivalry was such a waste of time; we had both wasted all of our talent competing when we could have helped each other. But he didn't get mad. Instead, he said we should be friends. And what did I say? I told him to get lost!" At this point, she breaks down into tears. "I didn't know he would actually take me so literally and disappear. I really thought that he had done something terrible and that it was all my fault."

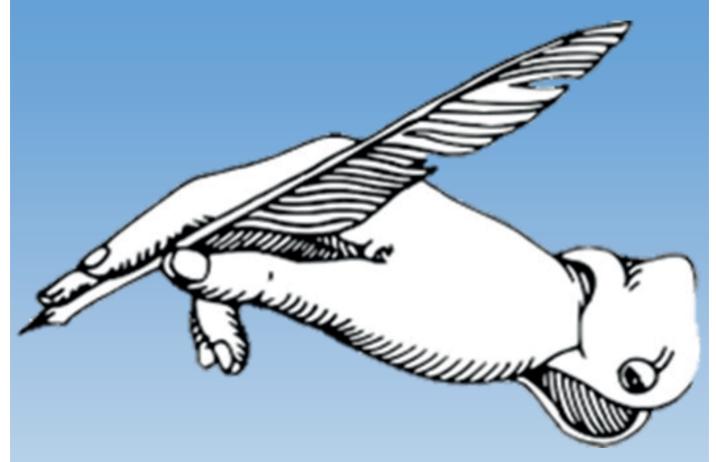
To be fair, she didn't know he was actually going to disappear. I guess all's well that ends well. I still don't know what the answer to question 13 was, but I do think about this case from time to time, not because it was particularly gruesome or complicated, but because it resulted in the destruction of my favorite mug, which I believe is the true tragedy of this scenario.

Part III: Poetry



"No man is an island"
- John Donne, 17th century English poet

Haikus



A traditional form of Japanese poetry.

Haiku poems consist of 3 lines.

The first and last lines of a Haiku
have 5 syllables,
and the middle line has 7 syllables.

The lines rarely rhyme.

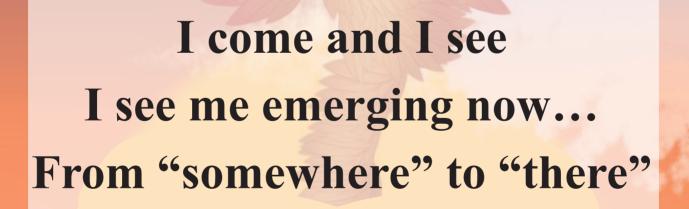
Adjusting

by Dimitra Zacharaki

Never letting go, Processing the siren's song, We are all here now.



Emergingby Eleni Kousiounelou



Art by Domna Mavrikaki

Heavenly Lilies

by Anastasia Giannoulatou



The black veil of Nyx.

Stars: The lilies of the sky!

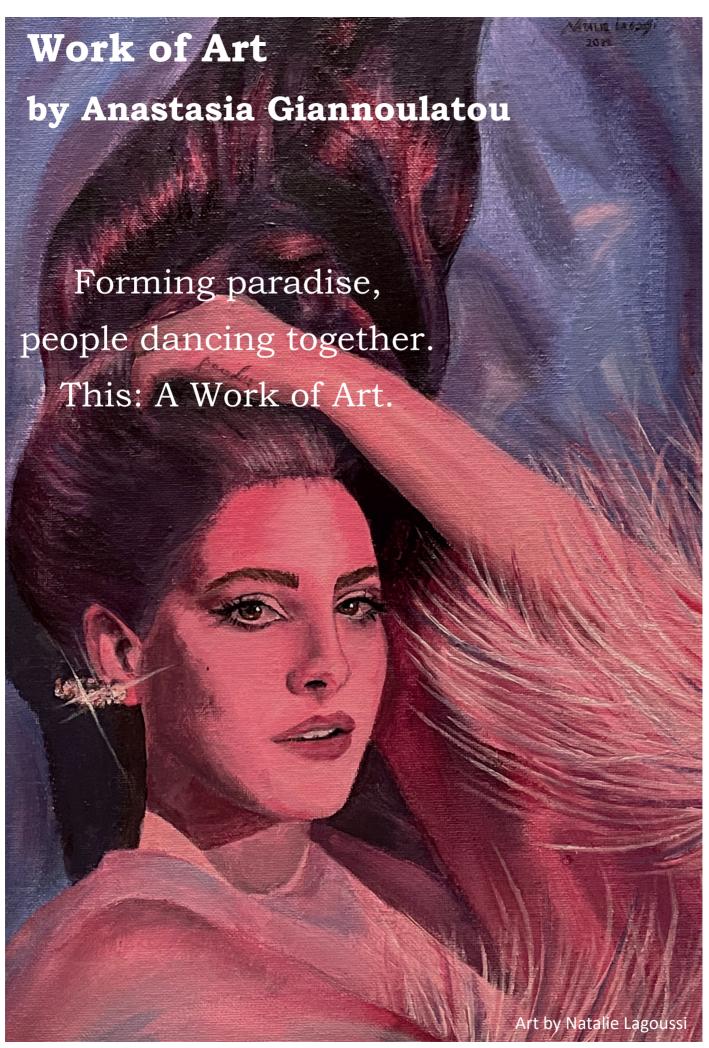
It is quiet here.

Art by Domna Mavrikaki

Life's Music by Jason Roussos-Papadatos



Mother nature's breath The spirit and soul of life
That joins us in one.



Cinquains

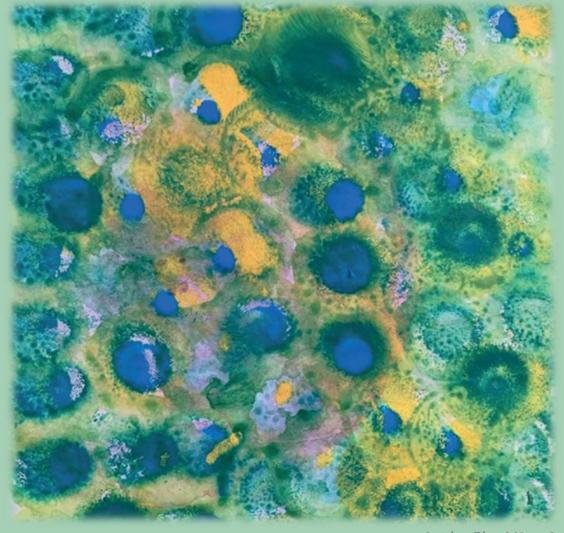


A five-line poem invented by Adelaide Crapsey, an American poet inspired by the Japanese haikus and tanka.

Always There

by Eva Konstantoulaki

My Friends:
Compassionate,
Accepting, and loyal.
Always there, through thick and thin. Like
Family



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

Athens College

by Anthony Kriezis



Our school

A family,

A great community

Of people, thoughts, and even dreams.

Our school.

Hopeless Romantics like Flowers by Zoi Mathiopoulou

Daisies,
one petal ripped
only one stays at last
do they love you? or do they not?
dream on...



Sonnets



Meaning "a little sound or song," it is a 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter. The most common type is the English or Shakespearean sonnet.

And This Is Life by Elina Panourgia

Childhood: Sweetest part of our story,

Almost feels like living our best daydream.

How nice – a child's innocent glory –

You're a child...beautiful this may seem.



First day of school, you're lonely and confused,
Endless evenings spent around the playground.

Jumping on the swings, feeling so amused,
You're a child, yes, happiness is found.

Following the raindrops on the window And hiding in a hug, scared of thunder.



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

As you're waiting for the magic rainbow, You're a child, yes, no need to wonder.

But now, as the nights are getting colder, Progressing our story, yes, we're older...

Common Uniqueness

by Stavros Vikentios Marinakis

One's authentic self is truly unique,
And individuality's needed,
Being yourself requires special technique.
Thus, very few have indeed succeeded.

In a dystopian community,
Where true uniqueness is so hard to find,
A child seizes an opportunity,
To begin a mentally testing grind.

This decision will leave him an outcast, Because the dull and sad world he lives in Will have the child consistently tested, While his true self he tries to believe in.

Take a seat and enjoy this flawless play, Which the future will attempt to portray.

Empty Hearts

by Marilena Vitalioti

The sky darkens and crawdads start to sing;
Their eyes just lock and all becomes extinct.
Feelings arise and suddenly it's spring;
The sun appears and life seems now succinct.

Marigolds bloom within their hearts at once;

And know that this is all they'll ever have.

Fearing emotions, longing for a glance,

Keeping a distance, hearing their own valve.

But this is an illusionary act;

For humans almost always crave restarts.

A lie, a hidden truth, an abstract fact;

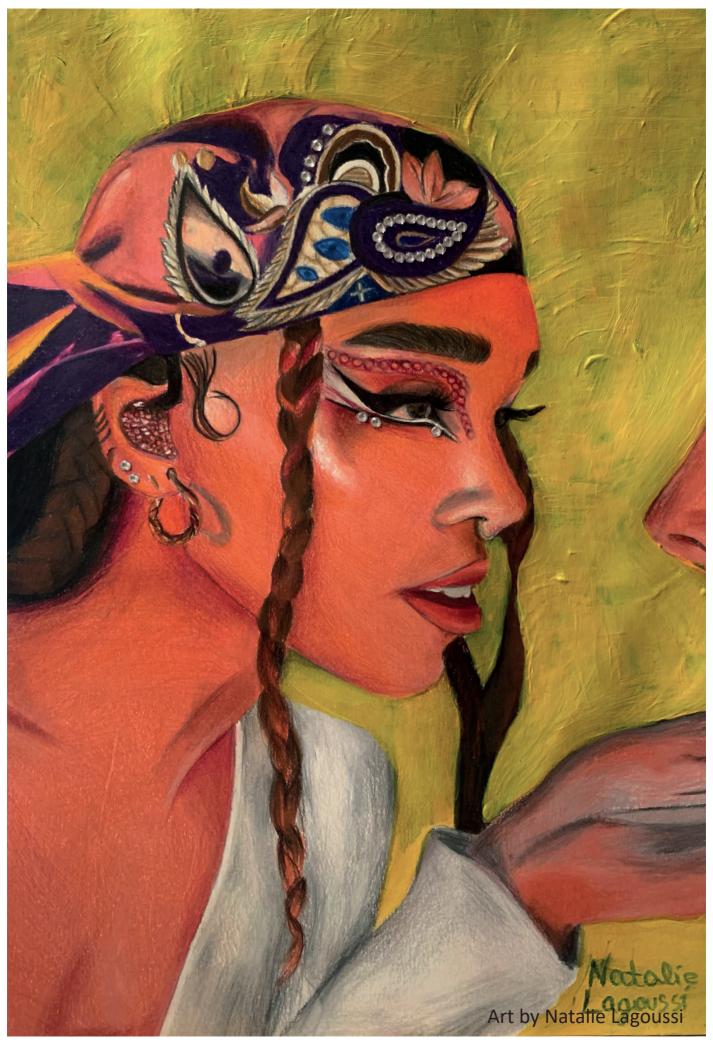
A fragile soul, conflicting empty hearts.

If only people cared a little more;
If only stars could speak and show what for.

Ecuador

by Georgia Papaioannou

How is my life running away from me? How can that be when I'm only fifteen? Would I just rather be a referee, Or would an attorney be ultra-keen? Still, I feel like I've hit a giant wall, There's just no point in running anymore, Yet I feel like that is not true at all; I might just run away to Ecuador. Indeed, it doesn't really seem so bad, Maybe I'll join a mariachi band. Is that better than doing undergrad? I guess I'll have to find out secondhand. Because education's more essential, Otherwise, I'll be "wasted potential".



Finally Free by Aliki Varela

When sadness conquered all, I reached for you.

To our spot I went, to cure this feeling,

But as the dusk came, your love turned black too.

My eyes grew gloomy, desperate for healing.

How I tried your betrayal to erase:
Always blaming myself for your mistake.
Was it my fault you left without a trace?
With that in mind, it's hard to stay awake.

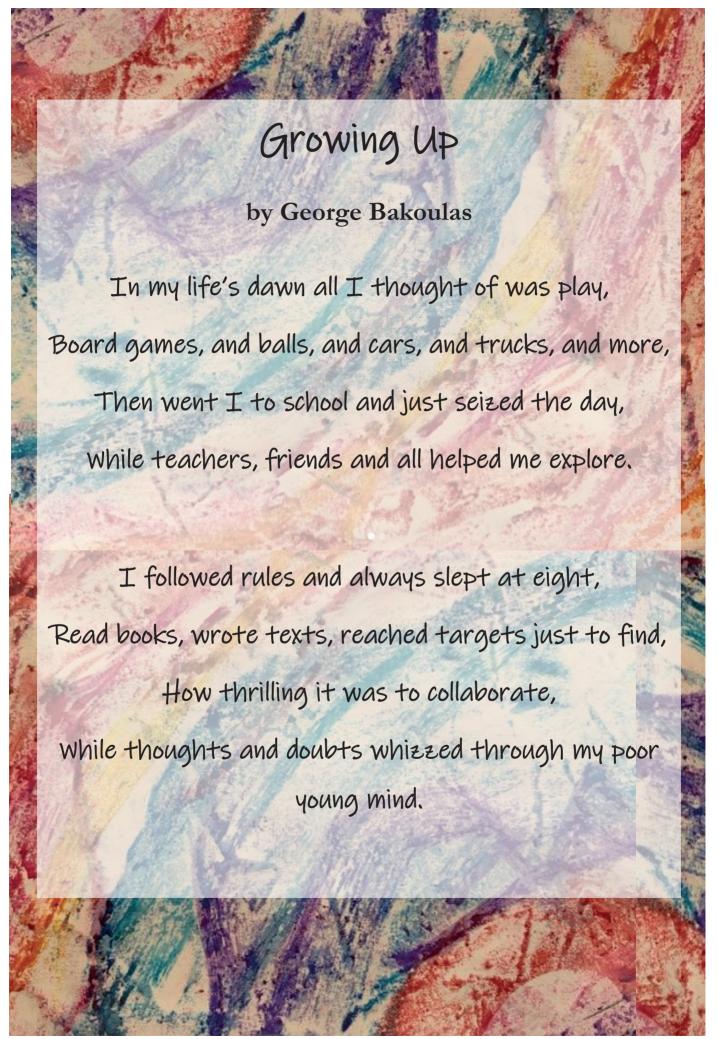


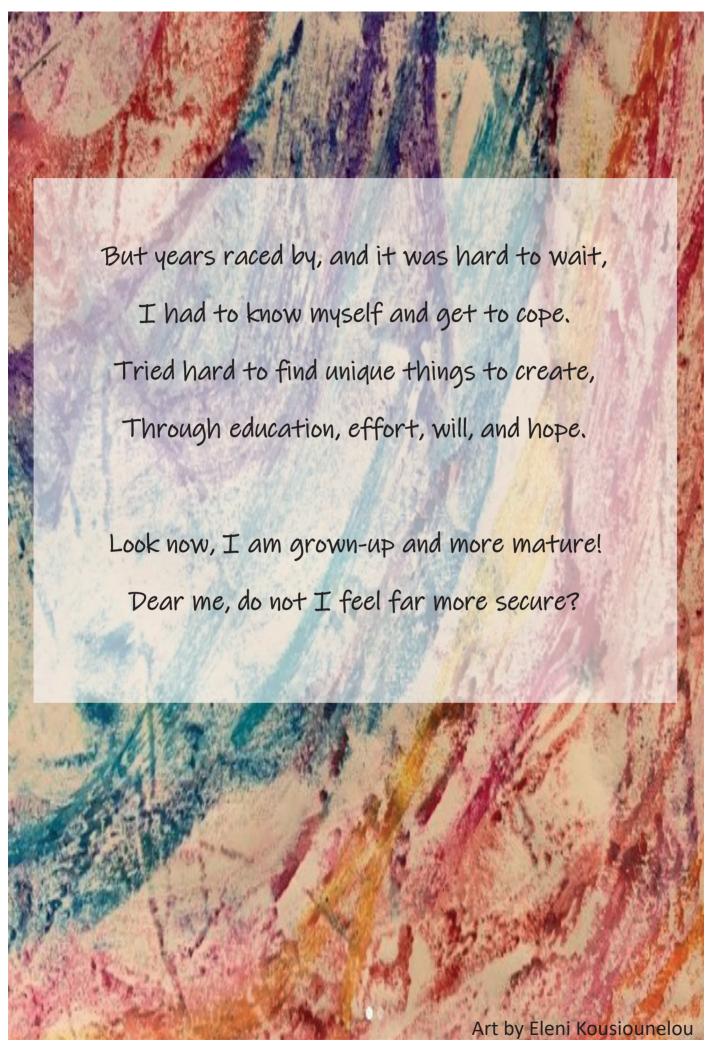
Yet you made me tougher and helped me grow,
Since I soon realized I can live alone.
I don't need your profound love or your glow,
Since I'm not like a dog without a bone.

Yes, our time together felt like a dream. Yes, I am looking for one more extreme.

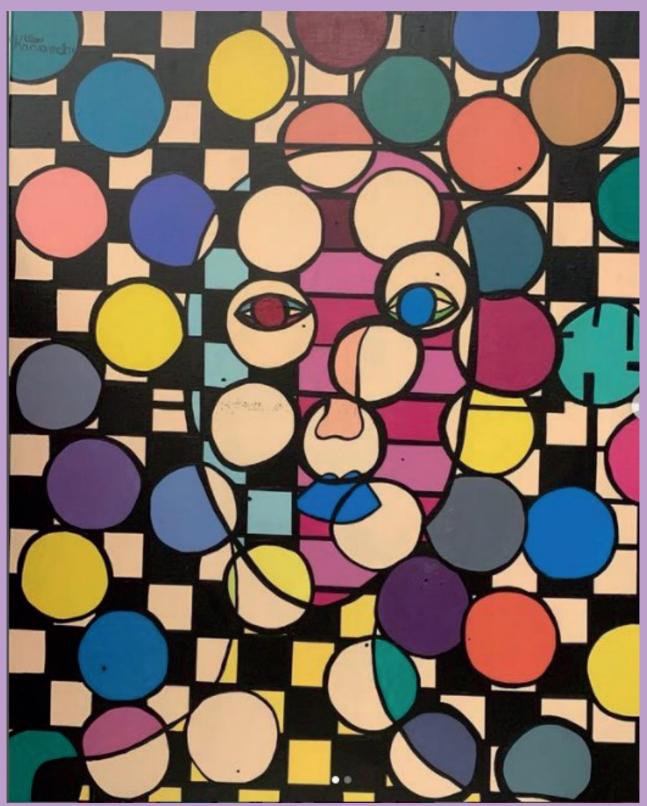


Art by Eleni Kousiounelou





Hardships by Eleanna Gatzoni



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

Who would ever dare such a reckless glance,
At thy troubled soul of obscure darkness?
The sea sighs, quits its howl, is there a chance,
Since the wind is to blame for its roughness?

From far away, the plash of waves is heard;

The wind messes up its silky surface.

And when it blows and pings, thou fill with dread,

Thy soul sears, wears out again, a furnace.

Yet hard wind and fuss accent sea's splendor,
And hardships come to feel the beat and dance
To its wail whose charm shall not surrender,
But will just bloom and flourish in a trance.

So the deep, stormy sea shall never rest,
Shall always beat and pound within thy chest.



Art by Nikolaos Sotiriadis

THE HASTY FLOWER

BY MELINA PAPASAKELLARIOU

The tale begins with a flower so small,
Rising from the soil the sun to see,
Dreaming of becoming ever so tall.
Of blooming it made a determined plea.

Once it had surpassed all the rest in grace,

Its beauty glowing in the peaceful day,

It got to working all day long with haste,

To feed the buzzing bees that came its way.

But suddenly the light began to fade,
Disappearing like worn, decaying art.
"Goodbye, dear sun," the weary flower bade,
And as it died, wished for a brand-new start.

Yet the rest still tell of their speedy friend,

Whose story came too early to an end.

The Stranger in the Reflection by Martha Alevra

I look at her and sadness consumes me,

The once beauty stripped of all her glory,

The memory of who she used to be,

Now replaced by dull eyes full of worry.

So I stretch my limbs, wanting to save her,



For she descends into a dark abyss,

Everything around me begins to blur;

I never thought she would end up like this.

Art by Domna Mavrikaki

With steady breaths I beg her not to cry,
I wipe the tears spilling out of her eyes,
Comforting her, I vow this isn't goodbye
"I'll see you, sooner than you realize."
I smile, no longer consumed with horror,
Strong enough to keep facing the mirror.



Art by Natalie Lagoussi

The Sun Never Chooses One Flower By Alice Dimitropoulou

The two of us sat under the night sky.

I asked you: Do you ever dream of dreams?

You said dreams are no more than a faint lie

Made for those who don't know what real life means.

You were the first who showed me how to love,

Who taught me it's not a matter of who.

It is why and how that breed the white dove,

And after it all, it comes down to two.

I wasn't your first choice, now or ever.

I devoted to you every hour.

But I don't blame you, and I will never,

The sun never chooses just one flower.

Despite my giving you my soul, my heart,

We looked up at the star-filled sky... apart.

Art by Natalie Lagoussi

Free Verse



A poetic form which does not have a meter or rhythm yet allow the poet to express his opinions and ideas

A Binary Form by Myrto Siozou

In communityTrue happiness is the goal,
Disaster is not...

In communityI am always included,
Somebody hears me...

In communityThe sick and the weak come first,
I feel supported...

Art by Domna Mavrikaki

In communityI offer and I receive,
An act of friendship...

In communityGuns and knives are forsaken,
I am protected...

Our community-This is its reality. A binary form.

The meaning of living together.

An End by Margarita Chouta



Art by Nikolaos Sotiriadis

I'm filled with fright about that dreadful night when I said that I could save you while I needed to be saved too.

I don't know how, and it doesn't even matter now, the way you saw the world so dark and expressed it through your art.

Outside, your grey sky has now turned blue

I wish that you could see it too.

Can't they see? by Ariadne Mihalou

They say she is smart

Funny

Pretty

But can't they see her struggling?



Can't they see?

Can't they see?

Can't they see?

Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

That she will never be enough? I don't see her.

But I hate it when she looks at me

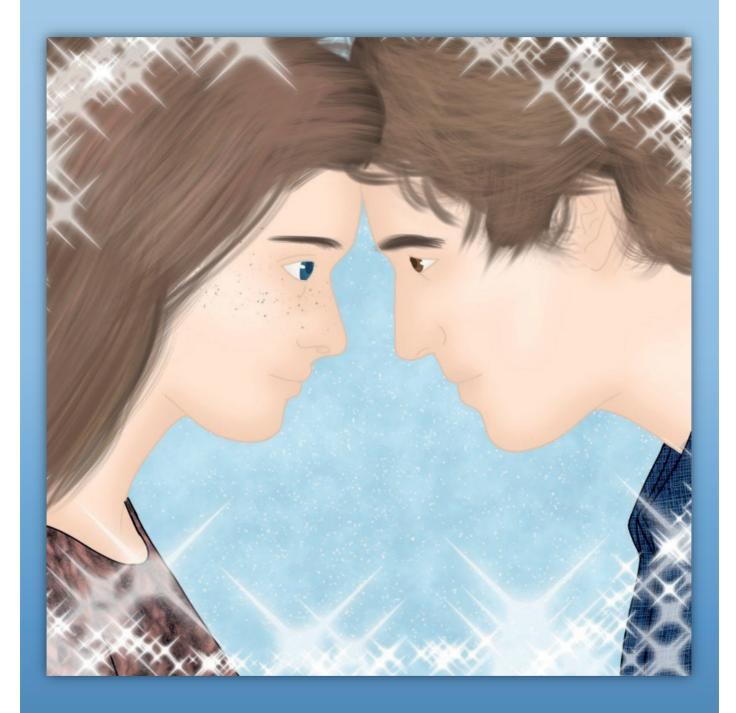
So, I walk away

From that mirror.



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

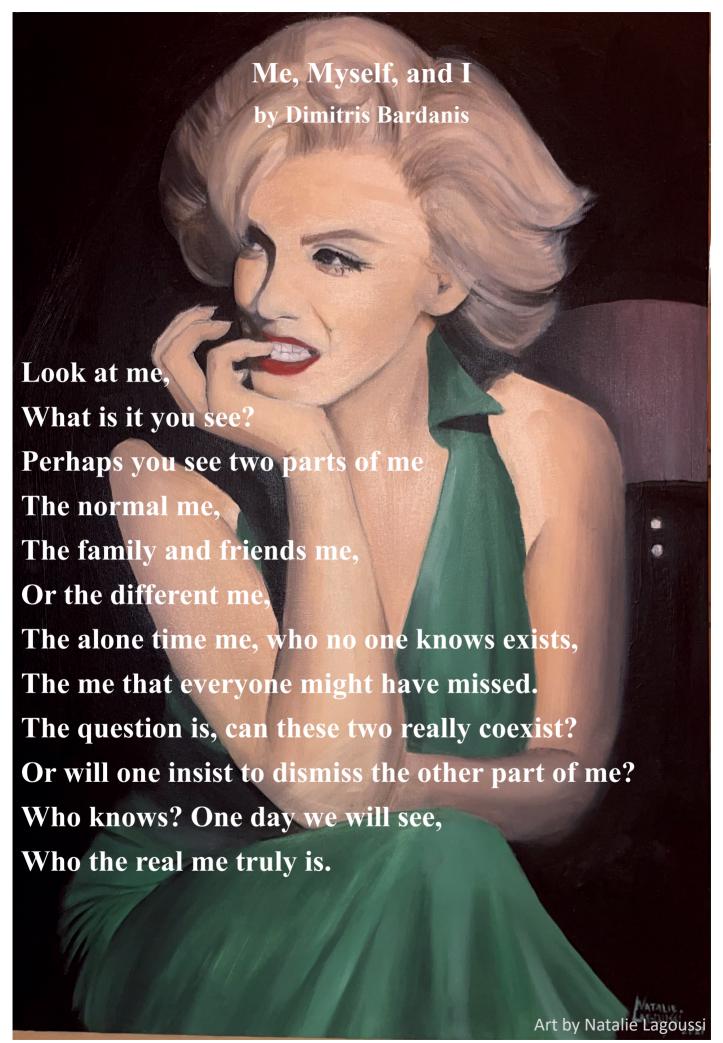
Empathy



by Myrto Jenny Macmillan

Art by Domna Mavrikaki

Empathy, a complex principle taking many shapes and found in simple acts: A smile to a stranger who appears lonely or lost, A steady reassuring gaze as a way of consolation, A shoulder to cry on when needed the most, A person to rely on in both hard and easy times, Communication with gestures when words do not form, Love as an international language that sees no boundaries. Empathy is a real treasure -A gift to be cherished by all...





Moonshadows

by Amaryllis Badima

Art by Domna Mavrikaki

Haunting as it may seem to others,
The pale-looking light,
A shadow, cast beside the willow
Was hope behind the small boy's eyes.

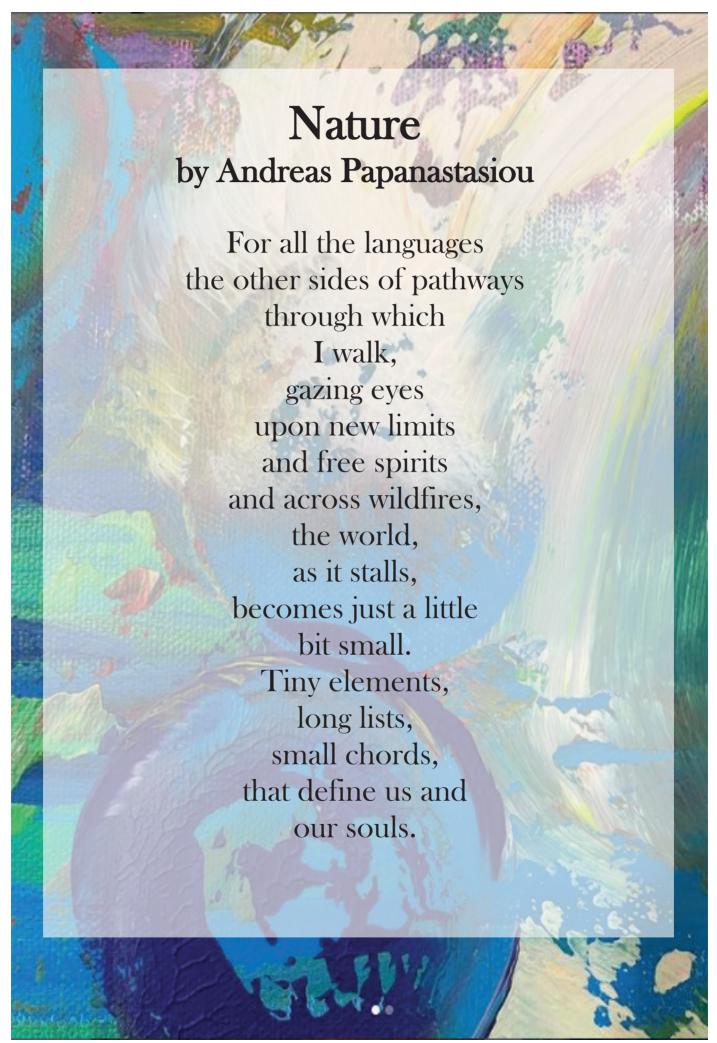
Hidden within the yellowing pages of a book,
A brain full of might,
Lost as he seemed, his spark was only growing
Camouflaged by the dim gleam of night.

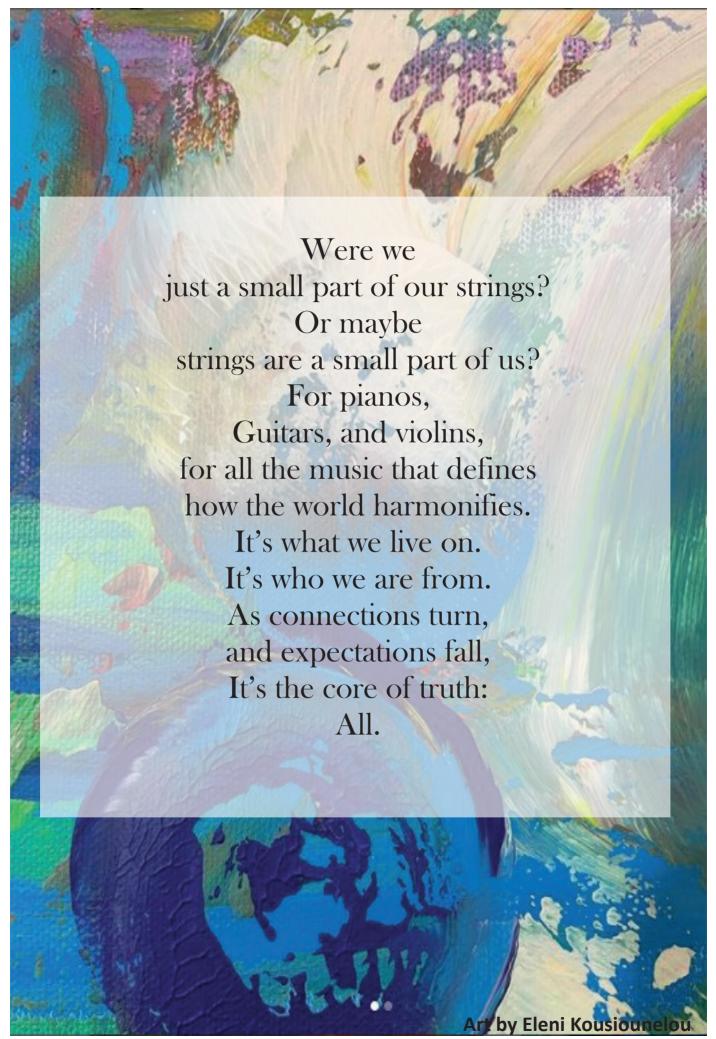
And as the moonlight weakly showered him with light,
The tree his back was resting on cast a dark shape
To cover him as he planned his fight A tug on his heart as sunlight was starting to expand.

Every time the bright giant would appear,
The boy could read no more, he couldn't think straight.
For every time the fire-fed body would appear,
The boy's orbs were quick to brim with tears.

More than a friend, more than a brother,
The embrace of the kind night,
The timed return of the moon-shadow,
Admiring the boy with a plotting mind.

And in the mix of moonlight cast over the willow,
The pale shadow, stained with a muffled cry
As the world turned brighter before the inky contour.
A new day...another fight.





Sound of Silence by Dimitris Kymionis

I pick up the phone and try to communicate

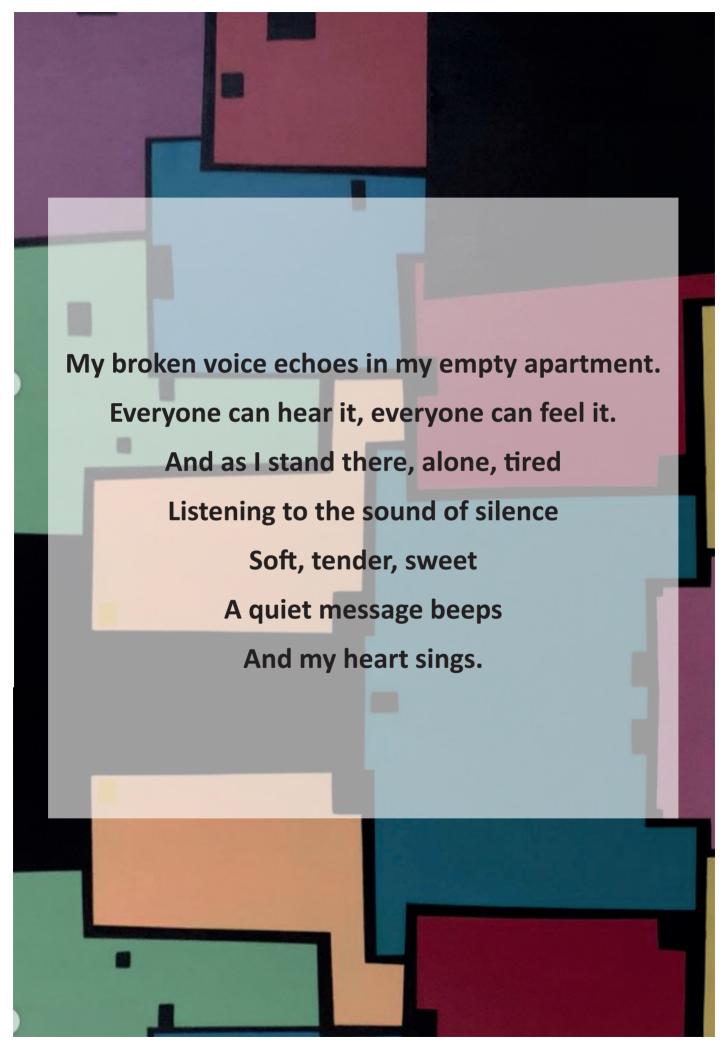
Desperately calling numbers with a broken voice.

I type text messages, with tears in my eyes

But my heart aches to the sound of silence.



I go outside, and everyone runs and laughs
I try to communicate, I try to breathe
I try to find my sense of community
And my heart aches to the sound of silence.

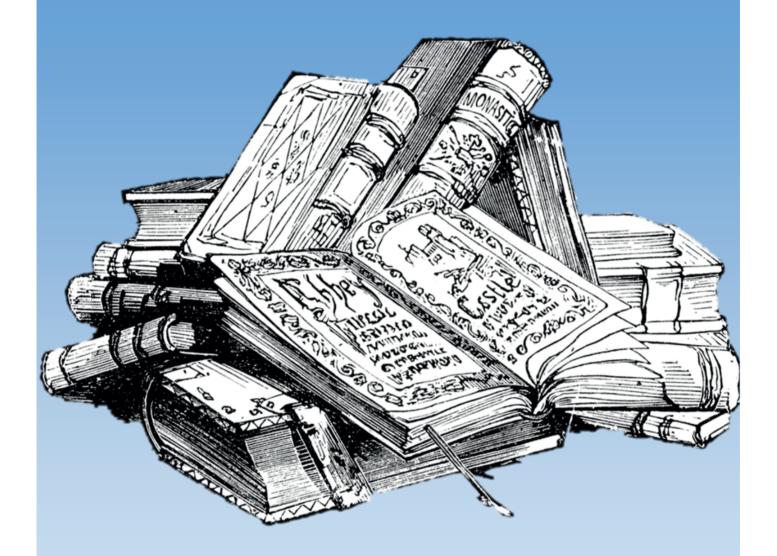


The Same Stars By Anna Stathopoulou

Behind the flesh lie the stars of a million skies. Lies down the courage of all people, Behind the flesh all people share the same stars All people are the same, All people are equal, What seems to make us different in flesh, Doesn't make us different in worth. Praise the soul, the stars, the skies, the mind, For all have intrinsic value Until equality excels, those little stars cannot be free, We cannot be free... We love not for color, not for money, not for what is native But for what's behind the flesh! We hug not the flesh, We hug equality, We love not for color, not for money, not for what is native, but for what's behind the flesh! We hug not the flesh, But what is behind the flesh, Under the same stars.

by Eleni Kousiounelou

Found Poems

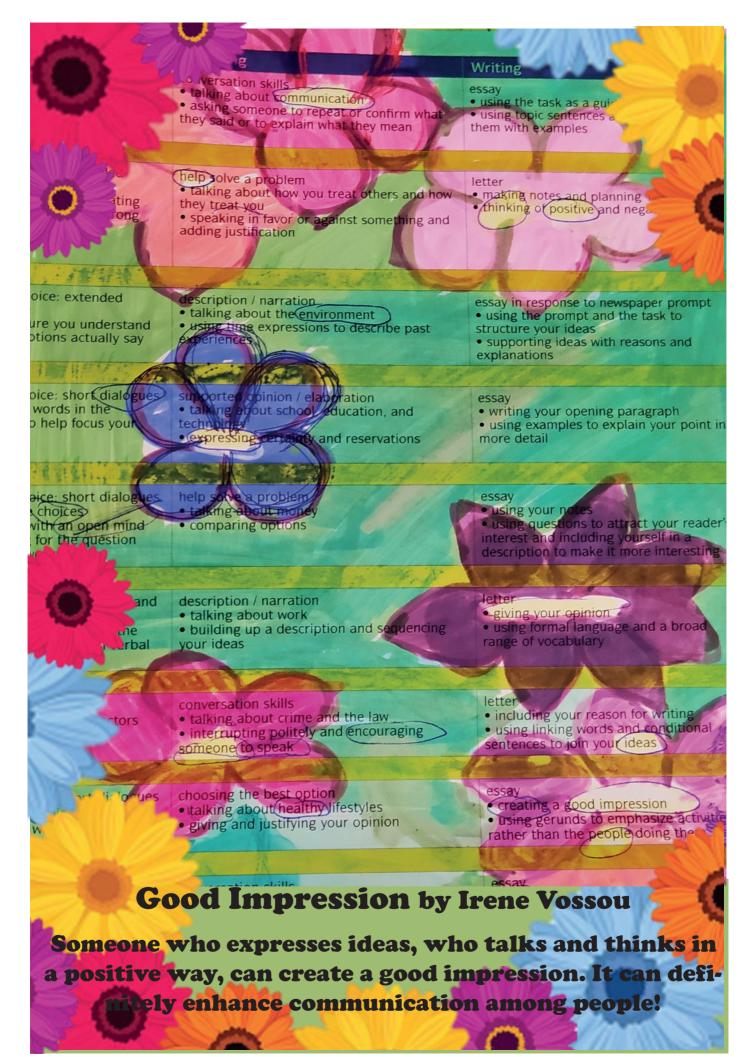


They say that one man's trash is another man's treasure. Likewise, just by reexamining everyday texts, we can turn one man's prose into our own poetry.

A Small Good Thing" by Natalie Roumania

This found poem by Natalie Roumania is a selection from Raymond Carver's "A Small Good Thing," which is a story about a family whose small child is hit by a car on his birthday, and their loss. This extract is from the beginning of the story, before the accident, when the reader is entwined in the beauty of the language and the happiness of the story, which heightens the sadness to come. The birthday cake is significant, and this conversation between the mother and the baker, two strangers, reveals the small, good thing that Natalie could see hidden in Carver's words.

Saturday	to the bakery in the shopping cer After looking traphs of cakes taped onto the
would be eight year	of red frosting at the other net. The baker, who was a thick neck, histeness as old next Monday. The nder his arms, went are his heavy waist. It is a spacesing and of red frosting at the other net. The baker, who was an she told him the child that looked like a see front again, where they have not she arms apron as he listened to her.
be remain	all night. her talk. He let her take her time. He'd just d he was in no real hurry would y that
afternoon. The bake minimum exchange and she didn't like studied his ca- be a baker. Was especially so who'd gone through	that. While he was bent over the counter what the pencil in his m. She tures and wondered if he'd ever done anything else with his life
between them, she trying to make fra heavy conta-	with him abrupt de, just abrupt. She gave up me bakery and could see a long, me pans stacked at one end; and beside the table a metal ass. There was an enormous oven. A radio was playing
the binder. He look	ed at her and said, "Monday morning." She thanked him and drove home. morning, the hirthday boy was walking to school with another boy. They



Hamlet and Mental Health

by Vasiliki Raphaela Serepa

This found poem is based on William Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, a play set in Denmark which depicts Prince Hamlet and his revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother. Inspired by this magnificent play, Vasiliki created her own poem which expresses her sensitivity and love of literature.

Hamlet Prince of Denmark.

tion? come, come, deal justly with me, come, come, nay speak.

Guil. What hould we fay, my Lord?
Ham. Any thing, but to th' purpose you were sent sor, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

Ro. To what end, my Lord?

Ham. (That you) must teach me: but let me conjure you by the rights of our fellowships, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever preferred love, and by what more dear a better proposer can charge you withal, be even and direct with me whether you were fent for or no.

Rof. What lay you?

Ham. Nay then I have an eye of you, if you love me hold not off.

Guil. My Lord, we were fent for.

Ham. I will tell you why, fo thall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrefic to the King and Queen moult no seather: I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of Exercises; "and indeed, it goes so heavily " with my disposition, "that this goodly frame the Earth seems to me a steril promontory; this most excellent canopy the Air, look you, this brave ore-hanged Firmament, this majestical Roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pe-stilent Congregation of vapors. What a piece of Work is man! how noble in reason ! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension, the beauty of the World, the paragon of Animals, and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Ros. My Lord, there was no such staff in my thoughts.

Ham. Why did ye laugh then, when I haid man delights not me? Ros. To think, my Lord, if you delight not in man, what Lenten entertainment the Players shall receive from you, we met them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service.

Ham. He that plays the King shall be welcome, his Majesty shall have tribute of me, the adventurous Knight shall use his foil and

target, the Lover shall not figh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace, [and the Lady hall fay her mind freely, or the blank Verse shall halt for't. What Players are they?

Rof. Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the Tragedians of the City.

Him. How chances it they travel? their relidence both in reputation and profit was better both ways.

4 James Baldwin

of the stormy southern sky, into the mist and rain of Paris Someone will offer to share a sandwich with me, someone will offer me a
sip of wine, someone will ask me for a match. People will be roaming the corridors outside, looking out of windows, looking in at us.

At each stop, recruits in their baggy brown uniforms and colored
hats will open the compartment door to ask Complete. We will all
nod resultive conspirators, smiling faintly at each other as they continue through the train. Two or three of them will end up before
our compartment door, shouting at each other in their heavy, ribald voices, smoking them at each other in their heavy, ribald voices, smoking them at each other in their heavy, ribing with her, who will be set on edge by the presence of the recruits.

It will all be the same, only I will be stiller.

And the countryside is still tonight, this countryside reflected through my image in the pane. This house is just ourside a small summer resort—which is still empty, the season has not yet begun. It is on a small hill, one can look down on the lights of the town and bear the thud of the sea. My girl, Hella, and I rented it in Paris, from photographs, some months ago. Now she has been gone a week. She is on the high seas now, on her way back to America.

I can see her, very elegant, tense, and glittering, surrounded by the light which fills the close for of the ocean liner; drinking rather too fast, and laughing, and watching the men. That was how I met her, in a bar in Saint-Germain des-Pres, she was drinking and watching and that was why I liked her. I thought she would be lun to have fun with. That was how it began that was all it meant to me; I am not sure now, in spite of everything, that it ever really meant more than that to me. And I don't think it ever really meant more than that to her—at least not until she made that trip to Spain and, finding her all thems closes began to wonder, perhaps, if a lifetime of

Into the Train of Paris

by Chrysanthi Magi

The found poem "Into the Train of Paris" expresses a feeling of nostalgia and longing. The narrator seems to reminiscent about his time in the European capital, describing his journey.

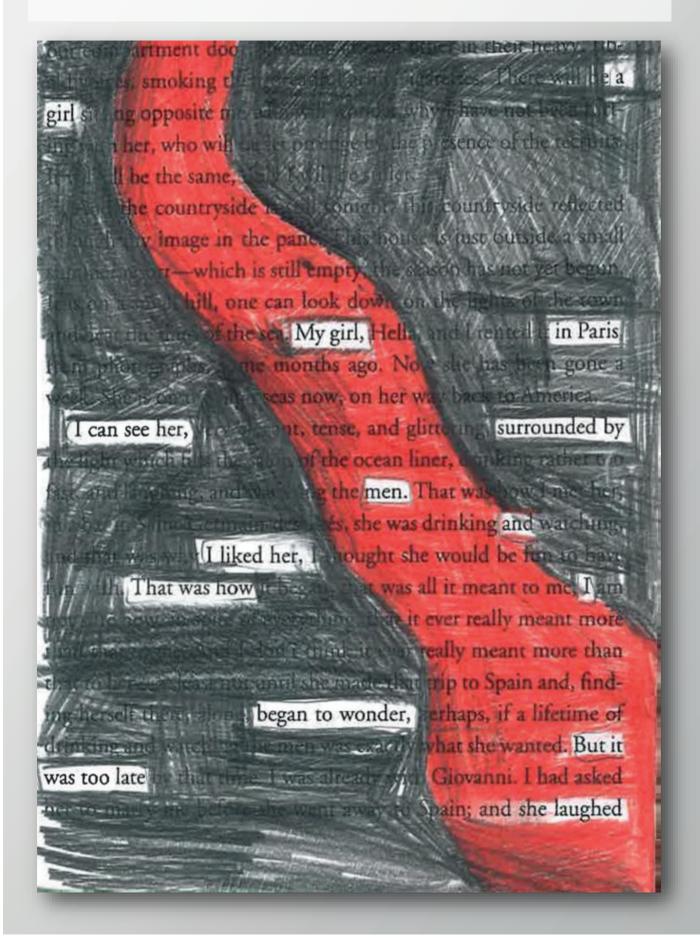
It was too Late

by Maria Samolada

A found poem about trying to find ones soulmate and being unable to reach them on time.

r why I have not been flirt girl sitting opposite me who w the presence of the recruits ng with her, who will be set or It will all be the same, only I v this country ide reflected And the countryside is sti ouse is just outside through my image in the pan Now she has been gone a from photographs, some mor way back to America. week one con the high seas r glittering, surrounded by I can see her vow elegant, liner, drinking rather too the hight which fills the salon o That was how I met her, fast, and laughing, and watchir as drinking and watching, in a bar in Saint-Germain-desshe would be fun to have and that was why I liked her, s all it meant to me; I am fun with. That was how it beg; it ever really meant more not sure now, in spite of every than that to me. And I don't really meant more than at trip to Spain and, findthat to her-at least not until s perhaps, if a lifetime of ng herself there, alone, began what she wan ed But i the ting and watching the men as too late by that time. I was h Giovanni. I h

My Girl by Natalie Lagoussi



Leaving You

By Efimia Apostolidou

This Found Poem by Efimia Apostolidou is from the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, in which racial roles and stereotypes are challenged by the protagonists. This excerpt if from a later part of the novel, in which two of the protagonists have what at first glance appears to be a humorous fight. As a graduating senior, Efimia chose this extract because it resonated with the idea of leaving behind.

on article a few weeks ago but the Senator said that Stuart moved his oil comproved who so New Orlean to that he can spend time out on the rigs.

on, the headlights aren't on.

I watch HER PARK the Oldsmobile in front of the house and turn off the engine, but she stays inside. Our front porch lights are on vellow and flickering with night bugs. She's leaning over her steering wheel like she's trying to see who's home. What the hell does she want? I watch a few seconds. Then I think, Get to her firm Get to her before she does whatever it is she's planning.

I walk quietly through the yard. Shalight a cigarette, throws the match out the open window into our drive.

I approach her car from behind, but she doesn't see me.

"Waiting for someone?" I say at the window,

Hilly jumps and drops her cigarette into the gravel. She scrambles out of the car and slams the door closed backing away from the.

"Don You et an inch closer," she says.

So I stop where I am and just look at her. Who wouldn't look at her? Her black hair is a mess. A cut a group of copies and long straight up. Half her blouse is untucked, her far stretching the buttons, and I can see she's gained more weight. And there's a... sore, It in the corner of her mouth, scabby and hot red. I haven't seen Hilly with one of those since Johnny broke up with her in college.

She looks me up and down. "What are you, some kind of hip le now?

of hilly, why are you heren.

"To tell you're contacted my lawyer, I was Coodman, who happens to be the number one expert on the libel laws in Wassissippi, and you are in big trouble, missy. You're going to jail, you know that?"

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"There are billions of people in this world, [...] none of them has the same identical character of your own uniqueness."

– D.L. Lewis, historian and academic

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The End



Art by Eleni Kousiounelou

"A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead."

-Graham Greene, English writer and journalist

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