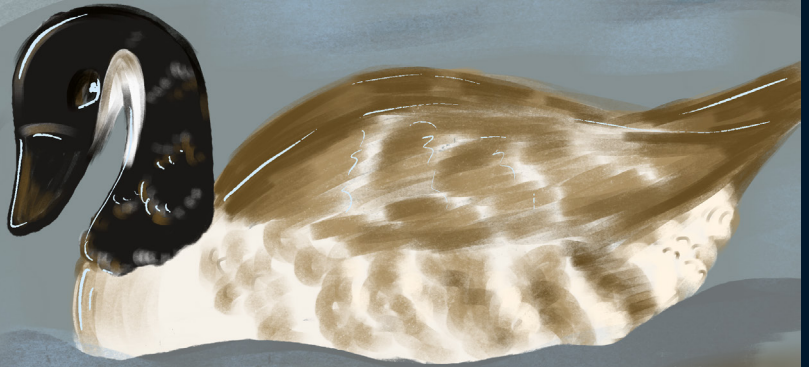


The Goose



Perpich Arts High School
Literary Magazine

Dedicated to Keylah Kendrick



Table of Contents

<i>Twelve on the Team</i> (Lemetrius Harper)	7
<i>The Emerald Lake</i> (Destiny Jay)	8
<i>Are You Even Trying?</i> (Emily Blankenship)	9-12
<i>The Goddess Kharonytha</i> (Genevieve Mattevi)	13-14
<i>Where Have You Gone</i> (Genevieve Mattevi)	15-16
<i>Friends? Friend.</i> (Melanie Cheng)	17-20
<i>If I Did It Before, I Could Do It Again</i> (Keravina Moua)	21-26
<i>Being Your Authentic Self</i> (Evelyn Thao)	27-30
<i>Sunny</i> (Nathen Vang)	31-34
<i>Gray Clouds in a Beautiful Sunrise</i> (Liana Xiong)	35-40
<i>To be set free</i> (Samara Vang)	41-42
<i>Haunting</i> (Ana Catalina Martínez)	43-44
<i>The Trapped Flower</i> (Johanna Babalola)	45-46
<i>Winter's Ice</i> (Efrain Delgadillo Reyes)	47
<i>A Soldier's Surroundings</i> (Jayla Gamache)	48
<i>Sorrow Feathers</i> (Jayla Gamache)	49-50
<i>The Living Fossil</i> (Gelmin Hernandez Polio)	51-56
<i>Last Words of an Eclipse</i> (Sophie Jensen)	57-58
<i>The Rugged Path of Life</i> (Zocorro Rico)	59-60
<i>Frozen Are The Remains</i> (Holly Johnson)	61-62
<i>Why Don't You Care</i> (Keylah Kendrick)	63-64
<i>INTERMISSARY</i> (Jack Phillip Holm)	65-68
<i>Haystacks (Monet Series)</i> (Maria Rohlfen)	69
<i>all natural dairy sweetener</i> (Jo Treuenfels)	70
<i>Painted Flames</i> (LeeAnn Wynn)	71-72

Twelve on the Team

Lemetrius Harper

Grade 7, Brooklyn Center Secondary

I was twelve in a jersey way too wide,
Standing with players older on every side.
The list went up and somehow my name was there,
I made the team just barely, but fair.

Most games I sat on the bench in a line,
Watching the starters run play after play just fine.
I clapped and cheered, though I rarely got in,
Learning the game while the clock grew thin.

But in my first game coach called my name,
My heart beat loud like a roaring flame.
I caught the ball and shot from three
Nothing but net, the crowd saw me.

Later I pulled up mid-range and let it fly,
Another shot dropped clean through the sky.
Soon I was back on the bench once more,

The crowd can't believe what just happened.
A twelve-year-old kid on a high school floor.

I didn't play much, that part is true,
But I proved for a moment what I could do.
And even if my minutes were small and few,
At twelve years old, I still broke through.

The Emerald Lake

Destiny Jay

Grade 9, Isle High School

As the sun shines upon the smooth surface,
The trees sway in the wind.
The sun's falling slowly in the sky,
The fish fly through the water in the search for food.

As the gold hour sun arose the birds chirp all around.
The clouds cover the sky in a light texture.
The mountains hide the sun from the emerald lake.
As the birds and animals head for home,
They talk and talk to each other,
As the golden hour fades.

As travelers show up to look at the glass water,
They look at their reflection, shocked to see every detail.
As they step into the nice cool water they grab nice rocks,
They stuff the rocks for souvenirs.

As the travelers walk down the lakeside,
Watching the fish fly through the water,
The fish decide to put on a show.
They fly through the air jumping and diving,
Swaying and splashing as the sun slowly fades behind the mountains.

Are You Even Trying?

Emily Blankenship

Grade 9, Pine River-Backus High School

“I trust you can do this assignment, Alaric.”

Those were his mentor’s last words before handing him the letter and practically pushing him out the door to start his assignment.

Well, as it turns out, this assignment is not as easy as he made it out to be. Pretty much the opposite, actually. You see, from what Alaric had read in his Guardian 101 textbooks, the job is usually just to keep the person safe and alive to complete their prophecy. Usually, said person can keep themselves alive perfectly fine.

This assignment was not even close to that.

It had been three months now, and Alaric was still wondering how this absolute buffoon could possibly be worth keeping alive. There was no way he could do anything meaningful with his life. No offense, of course.

So far, within these three months, Alaric had shut off the car, left running in a closed garage; unplugged the hairdryer teetering on the edge of the bathtub twice; poured out the gallon of expired milk before Sam could drink it; and tipped a box of baking soda into a grease fire on the stove, which his supposed “prophecy holder” was two steps away from dumping water on.

Safe to say, Alaric was not keen on seeing how much more danger the man could get into. If he was being honest, Sam’s ignorance was kind of terrifying. Alaric watched him run to sign a lease immediately after touring the most heinous-looking studio apartment, not because he didn’t have money to afford a nicer one, but because he just didn’t care. Even the apartment seemed to want to protect Sam from his own obliviousness: the light crackled and sparked when he first turned it on. This time, it wasn’t even a desperate attempt by Alaric to showcase the obvious danger that Sam had once again gotten himself into.

9 After the toils of the difficult weeks gone by, The Day had final-

ly arrived. This was the day that Alaric was to take a step back and let nature take its course. By that, he meant his protection over Sam would be terminated for good, with Alaric only staying to observe the last day, as customary.

That day was rather eventful, but the most surprising part was that Sam didn't start the fire. It had started on his floor, faulty wiring mixed with an extremely flammable building. Really, it surprised no one except those who expected it to come way earlier than it ever did.

Alaric watched as Sam went about trying to escape, and for a moment, he almost worried before forcing that thought away. Whatever, not his problem anymore, he thought. He was just here to observe, finally get this assignment over with, and move on to someone more interesting.

Suddenly, there was a shriek from the apartment next door. Right, the neighbors. A young girl and her mother. Alaric frowned at the thought of them. Poor family, they really don't deserve that kind of fate. He looks over to his charge, who was...

Wait, what was he doing?

Alaric's eyes widened in shock as he watched Sam grab the fire extinguisher and rush out of his apartment, who was pivoting quickly to face the massive wall of flames blocking the apartment next to his. He sprayed the fire extinguisher until the flames died down enough for him to burst through the door, coming face to face with the mother and daughter huddled close on the other side.

Alaric stood there completely frozen, watching Sam charge into the room. Sam quickly scooped up the little girl, helped her mom out of the apartment, and led them down the stairs, away from the scorching flames.

Alaric made his way to the ground floor, watching as firefighters rushed in and paramedics took the tenants under their care.

He watched the little girl sitting next to Sam ask various questions to the medic treating her as Sam conversed with the still-shaking mother, who turned over his hands to look at the burns. He'd never felt so hopeful before in his entire existence.

The next day, Alaric arrived at the office and headed straight to 10

his mentor's office for his debrief, anxiously stepping inside the plain room.

"Ah, Alaric, welcome back," his mentor greeted him. "Did you enjoy your first assignment?" Alaric cleared his throat as he sat down in the chair across from him.

"It was... interesting," he admitted, "but more fulfilling than I had assumed. How are things going now? Did Samuel complete his prophecy?"

The mentor smiled and opened up a small manila folder, glancing over the contents quickly before setting it back down. "He did, thanks to your help. After the fire, Samuel found a passion for helping others in unfortunate situations, started volunteering around his city, and eventually founded his own charity organization to help others."

"That's wonderful... and the little girl? The neighbor?"

"A trauma surgeon. She went into med school because she was so inspired by the paramedics who helped her and the others in the building. In fact, she recently pioneered a new surgical technique for limb reattachment, if I remember correctly."

Alaric couldn't help but smile at that.

"You know, Alaric," his mentor began, "I'm proud of how far you've come. I'm glad to see you were able to overcome your bias so quickly."

"Bias? They train us out of that, sir. I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"Well, of course, those biases. But every Guardian holds one deeply ingrained one. When you first met Samuel, you questioned how he could be a prophecy holder, yes? You believed he was inferior to what you would expect, and therefore you treated him differently."

"Yes, well..."

"Don't fret—it's completely normal for a novice," he reassured Alaric.

"What's important was that you eventually saw the error of your

ways. That's the mark of a true Guardian."

His mentor stands from his quaint desk and slides the folder into a box labeled Complete.

"That will be all, Alaric. Come meet me when you are ready for your next assignment." Alaric paused just as he was about to leave, before turning around to face his mentor.

"Actually, sir," he began.

"Hm?"

"I'd like to start my next assignment today."

The Goddess Kharonytha

Genevieve Mattevi

Grade 9, Esko High School

Long before the beginning, before the mountains and the rivers, Inanna gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. She was unlike any other child she had seen before. A darkness loomed over her. She named her Kharonytha, for she knew that her daughter would do great, horrible things.

As Kharonytha grew older, Inanna realized that she looked at things at a different angle. Instead of seeing the flowers in a field, she saw the bugs beneath. Instead of seeing the sun shining, she saw the clouds scattered throughout the sky.

“Kharonytha, dear,” Inanna called as she ran through the woods. “Don’t go far!”

Kharonytha ignored her mother, and ran through the trees without looking back. She loved to stay until the sun went to sleep and the moon called all of the stars to life.

She skipped through the trees while humming her mother’s song, the song of blessings, but the words didn’t sit right with Kharonytha. They felt wrong on her tongue; so she instead wrote her own.

“There lies a monster beneath the world. A girl who once loved to spin and twirl. She draws people closer with her song. Hauntingly beautiful, yet so wrong. Listen to the sound of her humming. And the low, deep beat of drumming.” she hummed the melody as the sky went dark.

“Mother!” she yelled while running back home. “I have a song to show you!”

She then performed her song to her mother. Inanna clasped a hand over Kharonytha’s mouth in shock.

13 “Where did you learn that song?” she asked her urgently.

“I didn’t,” Kharonytha said. “I made it.”

“No, no you didn’t,” was all her mother said before walking away, her feet unsteady. “Don’t sing that ever again.”

Puzzled, Kharonytha went to her bed, and fell asleep. She couldn’t help but feel like her song meant more than what she intended...

In her dream, she ran through the woods, laughing joyfully. She hummed her song over and over again, letting the melody seep into her bones. Her smile fell as she saw the sun set rapidly, the air turned cold.

She spun around in confusion, searching the woods desperately for an answer. When she saw nothing, she began running through the woods, trying to find a way out. She was lost.

“Mother?” she cried, but no one answered.

As she continued running, she tripped on a tree root. Expecting the ground to catch her, she braced herself for impact, but nothing did. She kept falling, and falling, and falling. That is, until she hit the hard ground beneath the crust of the earth.

Shakily, she peeled her body off of the floor, her eyes wide. Her eyes opened wider still at what she saw. A river of blood.

Somehow, the river didn’t scare her. She took a few steps towards it, and a smile spread across her lips. She had found where she belonged. Beneath the world and the people. Stupid, stupid people.

She began singing her cursed song, and something clicked in her. She suddenly understood the words. The weight they carried, and she soon realized that this wasn’t a dream.

Inanna never saw her daughter again, but her legend lives on. She is known as the goddess of song, nightmares, and death. She sings her song to draw people to her through their nightmares, where they face the same fate she did, but worse. They will fall into the river of blood, and drown.

I warn you, if you ever hear her song in your dreams, don’t go searching.

Where Have You Gone

Genevieve Mattevi

Grade 9, Esko High School

Where have you gone, beloved child?
You may have been lost but never exiled.
Your loving soul now haunts my dreams,
Dreams so perfectly sewn, seam by seam.
Where have you gone, where have you gone?

Your ashes spread beneath the tree,
Your weary soul can now be free.
Let your troubles vanish like snow—
Bittersweet, like raw cocoa.
Where have you gone, where have you gone?

The wind blows through the peaceful meadow I wish you'd lain.
But then again your soul was too wild a thing in a casket to stay.
Your last breath's the last time I took a breath of fresh air,
But alas, you were too far gone to care.
Where have you gone, where have you gone?

Curse that balcony from whence you jumped that night—
You took the devil's bark, but we all took his bite.
In peaceful meadows I know you now lie,
By the side of the one who gave you life.
Where have you gone, where have you gone?

Friends? Friend.

Melanie Cheng

Grade 9, Hmong College Prep Academy

Lia and Emma were friends, best friends. From kindergarten all the way to eighth grade they had always been best friends. That is until summer break of highschool, Lia had been walking with Emma, hanging out till the subject landed on their schoolmates. Specifically on a boy in their class which, admittedly, Emma had liked to Lia's dismay.

"Gross? Him? You do know he is a manipulator and a horrible guy right?" Lia speaks with dismay on her tongue.

Emma scoffs and argues back "What? No he isn't, you don't know what you're talking about. You're just jealous because I like someone and you don't."

Lia was shocked by Emma, she had never taken anything this seriously and had never used that tone before, at least with her. Lia didn't know how to feel at first. I mean what was she even supposed to feel?

Rage built at that moment. Well, rage or sadness? She couldn't even tell herself what she was feeling. All she knew is that ever since they turned twelve Emma had been slowly changing and getting an emotional distance from her. She couldn't understand why she felt so strongly towards this. Sure it was normal for you to be sad when your closest friend suddenly grew distant, but she only felt a pain aching feeling in her chest and heat in her ears from anger, sadness, turmoil and all sorts of brand new emotions.

"What is your issue?! I'm just saying he's bad! What, suddenly you're all buddy buddy with everyone else but me? YOUR BEST FRIEND? Honestly you have been changing lately. You have been insufferable and- And I HATE YOU!" Lia clamps her mouth shut, slapping

herself.

Emma stares and suddenly tears up. Before Lia could utter another word, she ran away, leaving Lia standing there confused and overstimulated.

The entire summer they didn't speak. Not until the first day of school. The moment Lia stepped in she felt dread wash over her as Emma was standing a few yards in front of her with new friends and a new look. Lia stared, glancing over her new look, her pretty pastel pink hair, her bright tinted lips and that same smile on her lips. One she knew all too well from their years together. A wave of a sinking stomach feeling washed over her and she felt herself yearn to have that connection they once had. She sighed and finally decided enough was enough, she was going to address the situation and make amends.

Her feet felt heavy stepping towards her, and before she could even open her mouth, Emma had poured water on her shirt.

"Oops! Sorry maybe you should watch where you're going next time," She sneered making it painfully obvious that she had done it on purpose.

"It's fine, can we talk?" Lia bit her tongue, ignoring her wet shirt.

"Oh sorry! I'm busy, talking to losers is hard work and I have about 50 million others to talk to," She mocked, her voice bitter as she spoke to her.

Lia almost screamed, and was thinking about grabbing her shoulders and screaming out to her, shaking her violently to stress how much she wanted her back. Lia could feel it in her gut more than anything else that Emma wanted her back too.

Vanessa, Emma's "friend" stepped in before Lia could utter anything more, grabbing Emma's hand and leading her away claiming they

needed to go, leaving Lia standing there once more alone.

The rest of the year wasn't any different. Lia couldn't bring herself to even get up in the morning, the painful feeling of getting bullied by her own ex best friend was too unbearable. She even spread rumors about her being gross and disgusting, going so far as to spray her with deodorant spray.

Of course Emma didn't really hate her even with all the stuff she does. After the day Lia had asked to talk she couldn't stop thinking about it. As much as she hated it, she wished she could have her back. It terrorized her at night to think about it. To picture Lia's face that day, so much so her mental health was diminishing along with Lia's, unbeknownst to her. They truly were intertwined in a sense.

After a particularly hard day, Emma laid in bed at night thinking about Lia once again. She rolled to her side where a picture was flipped over on her desk picking it up; it was a picture of Lia and her. She had flipped over the day they got into the fight. She could never bring herself to throw it away or store it somewhere she couldn't see. Emma stared for a long while. Thinking about all they had been through, before finally deciding on an important decision to finally talk to Lia.

The next day Emma bolted straight for Lia. Ignoring Vanessa's attempt to speak with her. Her heart quickened and her blood shot up when she approached her.

"Lia," Emma trembled her name out from her lips. Lia looked back and saw her. Lia hadn't realized it before, but Emma had looked just as messy and strained as her.

"What?" She spoke, her voice trying to be cold and uncaring, but Emma could see it in her eyes that she did care.

"Let's talk? Please." Her voice sounded more desperate than she

meant it to, but she couldn't care at this point. Lia hesitated after everything she came back? To what? To torture her even more? Despite her bitter judgement, she agreed.

"Make it quick," she sighed.

Emma grabbed Lia by the waist and hugged her tightly like she was going to leave forever if she let go. Pouring all her pent up emotions into the hug squeezing her with a deathly grip.

"E-Emma?" Lia's hands instinctively went to Emma's back and Emma cried, spilling out everything from the fight, from the crying to the guilt and the coping with all the things she ached to say..

"I'm so so sorry, I let my pride get in the way of our relationship! I miss you! I miss everything about you! I miss you so much it hurts," Emma cried.

Lia stared in disbelief and felt herself break down along with her. Despite her worry, she found herself speaking before she thought.

"I- I'm sorry too I should've never ever said I hated you," Lia trembled.

The two finally had made up after the whole summer, and instead of going to class, they sat there outside on the school steps relaying their emotions, their experiences and their sorrows with one another.

"Hey you know what?" Emma said.

"What?" Lia responded.

"We should start an anti-bullying program," Emma spoke, and Lia smiled at the thought and nodded her head.

"Yeah.. sounds amazing" she sighed.

The two went on to start a program for bullying awareness, sharing their stories and experiences, helping many others who are stuck in a bad place mentally, and teaching them to heal and learn and feel with each other to make sure everyone belongs.

If I Did It Before, I Could Do It Again

Keravina Moua

Grade 9, Hmong College Prep Academy

It was still morning, around 10:00 AM, when the bell rang and second period ended. The sunlight's brightness beamed through the school's windows, however, it didn't provide Harper with any motivation. Instead, the fate of her poem presentation in her ELA 9 class made her heart pound; her inner turmoil was a mixture of tension and nervousness. She hid her tense state by engaging in a friendly conversation with her friend, Sydney, as they walked through the hallway towards their shared third period, ELA 9.

The bell rang as third period started. Harper and her classmates were in their seats, listening to the English teacher explaining the instructions, participation, and rubric segments of the poem presentation. The assignment was about taking an emotion or inanimate object and relating, connecting, or comparing yourself to it.

Afterwards, the presentation began. A first student came to the front of the class, then another, and a next student's turn. A student sitting next to Sydney went up, and Harper's anxiety grew, awaiting her turn right after Sydney's. The sound of her own heart beating distracted her from her classmate's reading, and she struggled to focus on the student in the front of the class when her heartbeat pounded in her ears.

Now, she found herself thinking of worse-case scenarios when her turn came: stumbling over a word and hesitating, speaking in soft mumbles, or feeling frozen by the paranoia of students' judging eyes. These thoughts began to make her feel anxious of the horrible impression she might make. She wasn't just unsure about her own impression, but also about her poem's topic about peace. She knew her topic was connected to her, but she doubted herself, thinking it seemed cliché and boring to the

ears of her classmates.

“Hey, Harp, are you alright?” The voice, filled with worriedness, snapped Harper away from her anxiety and back to reality. However, that question she had always heard before didn’t fully blow away her clouded mind.

“Yeah, I’m alright.” Harper lied, cursing silently under her breath as her uncertainty betrayed her.

By the look of Sydney’s face, she was obviously unconvinced with Harper’s response.

“You seem nervous,” Sydney pointed out quietly, careful to not draw attention to herself and disrupt the presentation. Right then and there, Harper wanted to dismiss it, but her friend continued.

“It’s alright to be nervous.”

Harper blinked, hearing a hint of empathy in the tones of Sydney’s low voice, but her anxiety still haunted her senses.

“But what if I stutter? What if my voice is too hard to hear? I’ll just mess up.”

“Hey, you don’t have to make an excellent impression, as long as you participate and read your poem,” Sydney reassured her. Sydney’s words were something Harper had already heard multiple times, and it didn’t cease her anxiety.

“I don’t know.... I’m still doubting myself.”

Sydney was quiet for a moment, and then acknowledged Harper’s concerns.

“You know, despite your nerves when it came to past assignments like this one, you managed to pass all those unpleasant presentations.”

Sydney recalled Harper’s past presentations. The thing was, Sydney wasn’t wrong: Harper did it many times in her life, presenting—even with her flaws. However, even recalling these successful presentations didn’t seem to tone down Harper’s anxiety, or ease her self-doubt.

“I mean... of course that’s true, but that’s in the past. Presentations are different depending on the subject,” she said.

“Past or not, you still made it out. Think about it,” Sydney guided kindly.

“You did it before, you could do it again. Undoubtedly, you’ll succeed in the end, even if it’s uncomfortable.”

Harper sighed dismissively.

“You’re making it sound easy.”

“It’s not always easy, Harp, I know that.” Sydney differed gently.

“Everybody goes through that. It’s fine to feel anxious about presenting your project. Everyone feels a little nervous on presentation day, no matter how many presentations they’ve given.”

Their quiet talking was interrupted by the English teacher clearing his voice and staring sternly, directly at them. Instantly and sheepishly, Harper and Sydney stopped talking and paid attention to the student at the front of the room, but not before exchanging a glance at each other.

Something in Sydney’s advice tugged at Harper’s heart. *You did it before, you could do it again*, she replayed in her head. It was true, she did presentations in the past, and always succeeded in her closure despite being nervous. She had full scores in her gradebook from those classes, even if she paused or stuttered at a word. She always imagined the worst scenarios during those times, but the results were just the same. It wasn’t just that piece of advice that eased Harper’s nerves. Sydney mentioned how anyone and everyone went through presentation anxiety.

After the student finished their presentation, it was Sydney’s turn. Her friend stood up and motioned towards the front of the class, holding her paper in front of her, and introduced her poem about hydrangeas.

Sydney then read her poem as Harper listened, and she noticed that Sydney’s voice was slightly mumbly, yet audible. At one point, Sydney paused mid-word, but proceeded to continue. Sydney’s voice level,

her slight hesitation, and the fact that her eyes clung firmly towards the direction of her paper reminded Harper that not everything could be an excellent impression. Harper's mind began dozing off, still processing Sydney's advice.

Anyone struggles with their anxiety, with an imminent presentation— including herself in this current situation, she thought. But who knows, it'll just be the same end: a presentation's closure is like the final page of a book after a long and stressful story. The majority of presentations, Sydney had said, involved a repetition of anxiety and relief. Perhaps Sydney went through this anxiety as well, Harper thought. Not to mention, the way she's presenting is not without effort. If Sydney faced this obstacle, then Harper could do it too. She fixated her attention on the front of the room again, having processed her friend's advice.

Sydney finished reading her poem as the class clapped, and she returned back to her seat next to Harper. Now, it was Harper's turn.

Harper felt her heart pounding, and the realization that she would be all the way in front of the class began to sink in. She got up from her seat, but not before Sydney whispered to her: "Break a leg."

Harper stood there in front of the classroom, eyeing her classmates who looked at her and waited for her to start. She stood there frozen, nerves activated by the stares of her classmates, feeling like a mortal who got petrified by Medusa.

Harper exhaled before she finally introduced her poem: "My name is Harper Bloomdon," she began.

"My poem I wrote about is peace." As she introduced her poem, she heard a mumble from one of her classmates.

"Peace..."

That comment was silent and non-judgemental, yet it still made

her heart race. She mentally reminded herself to do it like she did it before, which redirected her from the mumble. She finished introducing her poem, and began to read it.

Her voice was so mumbly in her ears, but hopefully her classmates and Sydney could hear it— she thought it was still audible. She was surprised that she didn't stutter a word yet, but after all, she had rehearsed it to herself multiple times.

She continued reading her poem, with her gaze fixated on her paper, once again feeling like a mortal avoiding eye contact from Medusa. Her quiet voice resembled a silent wind. She stumbled a few words, the mistake almost causing her to hesitate, but then proceeded to resume. She didn't try to attempt an outstanding impression. Not everyone has that ability, because they possess anxiety, she reassured herself.

Finally, she reached her last stanza, concluding the last words of the poem without stuttering. She looked up from her paper to meet the gaze of her classmates. A brief silent moment followed, but the class clapped as they did with the others who had read their poems. The sound of clapping relieved Harper, easing her anxiety. Her presentation was over.

Harper made her way back to her seat next to her friend, who gave her a proud smile.

“See? Told you. As always, you will succeed in the end,” Sydney whispered with a grin. Harper simply responded with a smile, and glanced at her poem paper again as the next student went up to present.

Earlier, the sound of clapping had relieved Harper, but she realized it wasn't just relief. The clapping was always the response of a school presentation closure. It was a reminder that the cycle did repeat; a reminder that she did it again and again, both before and right now.

It wasn't just her who was anxious; everyone who had done a presentation in their lives was too. Whether they might be doing one currently again, like her classmates who presented their poems in ELA 9, or whether they were anxious or relieved—anyone could feel nervous when it came to presenting. Beyond just her or Sydney, everyone was united by the repeating cycle of presentations, which would cause an individual's mind to be clouded with anxiety before the feeling of relief when it's over. In fact, all of Harper's thinking led her to come to a particular thought: in this feeling, she felt belonging, because everyone dealt with anxiety as a "flaw," yet faced this experience.

Although the uneasiness didn't fully leave her as she reflected back on her presentation experience, she reassured herself that it was also normal, especially an uncomfortable project like her presentation. This affected her: she felt it was okay to have anxiety, because it was a human experience.

And undoubtedly, if Harper did it before, she could do it again in the future.

Being Your Authentic Self

Evelyn Thao

Grade 9, Hmong College Prep Academy

Violet Moore, a young teen photographer who loves art, arrived with her camera. Looking out the window in her parents car, passing by these crazy art sculptures around. Poking her head out the window, feeling her fresh start. Touring her new school, surprised by the details and artistic people with talent. Talking to the teachers and getting to know them, she sees this group of people, they are called the Art Collective's.

Looking at a poster she notices it says "Art Collective, full of different types of arts."

"Miss Norberry, I was just wondering, but what's Art Collective?" Violet asked politely.

"Oh! This is an afterschool program. You do all kinds of art like, painting or drawing, photography, and sculptures. If you're interested, I could ask to sign you up", Miss Norberry said.

"Yes, I would love to sign up. This is gonna be my fresh start and make new friends", Violet said excitedly.

"Great! I'll sign you up and I'll tell you everything you need to know tomorrow on the first day of school. Oh and bring a portfolio of the kind of art you do." Miss Norberry said.

"Thank you so much, have a great day!" Violet said happily.

As it was now the first day of school, Violet was called down to the office. As she goes down to the office, she sees these teachers, they were the leaders of the Art Collective afterschool program. "Hi Violet, My name is Mrs. Johnson, I started the afterschool program. These are my assistants Mr. Kilby and Ms. Willy ", she introduced herself.

"Hi, nice to meet you guys!" Violet said.

"We are just gonna do a quick interview and then you can go right

back to class”, Mrs. Johnson explained

“Okay, sounds good!” she replied. After they interviewed Violet, she was so excited she couldn’t wait to stay after school and meet everyone.

A couple hours had gone by and the bell finally rang to dismiss everybody to go home. Violet packed up her things and went straight into the art room. As she went in, she was surprised by all these paintings and sculptures, she was amazed.

As everyone is still coming inside, Mrs. Johnson told Violet to share her portfolio. As she does, Mrs. Johnson and the others were making some comments about her portfolio. One member gave her some advice and told her to make it a more stronger reaction. Violet was really nervous and she started to doubt herself, questioning herself if she is even good enough. She had a desire to fit in so she used the advice she was given by Mrs. Johnson and the members.

While they were doing a small short project, some of the members gave a weird look at her project. They told her that she didn’t get the “real” art. They told her that she was being very boring and needed something a bit cooler. She realized that they weren’t welcoming to her, but she didn’t think much of it because she wanted people to talk to.

The next day Violet stayed after school again, Mrs. Johnson and the others were planning the installation. They wanted everyone’s advice on what they could do to make it better. During the installation plan, Violet suggested that they incorporate elements of nature and beauty to balance the shock value. The teachers immediately shot down her idea as being “too soft” and not impactful enough. Her ideas weren’t being heard by the teachers, Violet felt that her voice wasn’t valued enough for any of them. She wanted to speak up for herself, but didn’t have the courage to.

She kept trying to be heard, upset and frustrated that nobody cared about her creative ideas, she burst. She finally speaks up for herself. It didn't turn out well, instead they all turned on her, accusing her of false things. After being humiliated, she left the room and decided that she should go home.

Later, she goes into her room and replays what had just happened earlier. She realized that they weren't nice to her at the start. They didn't make her feel welcomed, where she was comfortable. She made her decision to leave the group. As she leaves the group, she grows into this person, a person who embraces their unique artistic vision and seeks out connections with those who appreciate who she is.

Violet's time with the Art Collective taught her a big lesson about being herself. At first, she wanted to fit in and be accepted, but realized that trying to be someone she wasn't, made her unhappy. When the group constantly denied her ideas, it hurt, but it pushed her to be who she is now and find her own way.

Leaving the Art Collective was scary, but it was the best thing she could have done. It gave her freedom to explore what she really loved about art, without worrying what others thought. She started making art that felt true to her, and that's when she really started to shine.

Sunny

Nathen Vang

Grade 9, Hmong College Prep Academy

Sunny found himself sitting alone at his table. He'd stare at his food, feeling insanely bored. He's always had trouble fitting in, as people believed he enjoyed being alone.

After lunch, his 5th period class started. Immediately, Ms. Dot told everyone to get into groups of 4 and work on a research paper about anything. Sunny hated the idea of group projects. He muttered to himself, *'what's the point of group projects? It's not like my teammates actually ever put in any effort.'*

Knowing Sunny's personality, Ms. Dot walked over to him, and told him, "If you don't have anyone to work with, you should work with them." She pointed over at the corner of the class. At the corner he spotted three of his classmates. Sunny had forgotten their names. Was it Blake, Dahlia, and Johnny? He couldn't remember.

Sunny walked over to them.

"Hello, Ms. Dot told me to work with you guys, are you guys alright with that?"

"Yeah that's alright." Said the blond hair guy. Sunny could tell just how awkward that exchange of words was.

"I'll just take a seat over here." Sunny deliberately chose the chair farthest away from the group.

The blond guy began by saying, "All right. I'll work on the intro and outro slides. Dahlia, you work on body paragraph number one. Johnny, work on number two. And you, uhh you can just do whatever's left."

Dahlia immediately cut in, “Hey, who made you the leader! You can’t just decide our work for us. And he has a name you know.”

Sunny found this situation quite amusing and chuckled a bit. It was loud enough for them to hear. When he looked at them they looked shocked. As if they thought he was a robot unable to laugh.

The blond guy chimed in saying, “So you can smile.” As if saying he had thought it impossible for Sunny to smile.

Dahlia immediately started apologizing, “Sorry about this guy, he’s really insensitive. We’re just surprised because you rarely ever smile in class. You have a nice smile.”

Sunny didn’t know if he should feel shy or insulted.

“Thanks, I guess?”

“By the way, what’s your name?” he said while staring at the blond guy.

He looked shocked, “Dude, we’ve had this class together for six months now, and you don’t know my name? Well it’s Blake.”

Class was over and Sunny began heading to his favorite subject art. When he walked in he realized Dahlia also attended this class. Class was over and Sunny thought to himself, *‘This day was pretty eventful.’*

Sunny returned home via bus. He entered his house and immediately headed straight for his room, knowing it didn’t matter whether or not his family knew he was home. He completed his share of the group work. Afterwards he started on a new painting, the only thing that grants him joy in this lonely world of his.

Sunny headed to lunch as normal. When out of nowhere his classmates from the group project joined him.

“Man you’re such a lonely guy.” said Blake.

“Cut it out, that’s rude.” protested Dahlia.

Sunny was confused, asking, “Why are you guys here?”

“Obviously because we’re friends.” Blake had told him. This shocked Sunny to his core. The idea of having friends brought Sunny indescribable comfort.

They walked with each other all the way to English. They gathered and submitted their group project. Blake was beaming with excitement, saying, “Yes, we got a B+!” Seeing Blake so hyped up about it made Sunny smile a bit.

Class ended and Sunny went to Art. Sunny brought his art book, and was ecstatic knowing he finally had a friend he could show his art to. As soon as class started, Sunny flashed Dahlia with his drawings. She was shocked seeing how beautiful his art was, and about how desperate he was to show someone his art.

“With skills like that, you should join the upcoming art competition. I’m like one hundred percent sure you could win.”

Sunny had always doubted his skills, ideas, feelings, etc. So for someone to tell Sunny this, it inspired him.

“Yeah, I think I will.”

Five days later, Sunny submitted the art piece he was working on earlier that week and won. For the first time, his parents actually looked proud of him. This was everything Sunny had wanted. To have friends, to have his family finally start to understand him, and to belong somewhere.

Gray Cloud in a Beautiful Sunrise

Liana Xiong

Grade 9, Hmong College Prep Academy

A couple days ago, we converted to Christianity. I was honestly pretty scared, because I didn't want to change anything. Change is a very scary thing, and we were changing our whole lives. I grew up in a shaman family, and I was so comfortable with being a shaman family. I wasn't willing to change. But we had church in 2 days, and I still hadn't made any friends yet. I didn't wanna be Christian or allow God to come into my life.

The day I was dreading came, Sunday... not because school was the next day, but it was the day we started church. I got up at 7am to get ready and by 8:30 we left the house and made our way to church. Every second we got closer to the building, I was thinking about what could happen. What if I don't make any friends? What if I'm a loner? What if people don't like me? All those thoughts filled my head, so many "what ifs".

Soon we got to the parking lot, and I saw so many older kids, kids my age, grown ups, and little kids as well, all excited for church and all dressed well. I was literally in a t-shirt and jeans. What if people think I'm not dressed up nicely? What if I make no friends because of what I'm wearing? WHAT IF THE WHOLE CHURCH HATES ME?? Oh my gosh, it was a little too late to turn back now.

My family and I soon walked up to the door and as soon as we walked through we got hit with "Hello! Good morning!" and a couple "Hi, are you guys new? If you guys are, please help yourself to the snacks!" This doesn't seem so bad so far. Soon they had an announce-

ment that worship was gonna start in 2-3 minutes once they start working the speakers. So me and my family went inside the auditorium and found our seats. Worship started and I really liked the songs they played. But after me and my sisters had to go into Youth Group. Youth was basically an area where kids all around the same ages got to be together and learn about God together as a group.

Being new, I didn't talk to anyone. I was like a spider hiding in the corner of their web. I turned around for one second to talk to my sisters and as soon as I turned back, a couple approached me.

"Hey guys, I'm pastor Sam and this is my wife Destiny, we run Youth together and we noticed that you guys are new. And we wanted to come up and say hi." Me and my sisters all said our names and they gave us a set of games to play. The game that stood out to us the most was the game called "Hues and Cues". We basically had to describe a color and whoever got the closet and had the most points won. I was actually super good at this game and I was winning each round, then all of a sudden a guy came up to me.

"Hey, I'm Tatum, what's your name?"

"Um, hi, I'm Lainey."

"Can I play against you in Hues and Cues? I really like that game."

"Yeah, but I'm gonna warn you, I'm pretty good at it." I replied.

As we were playing Hues and Cues, I noticed a group of girls just staring at me and Tatum. I wasn't really sure why, but I just shrugged it off. I was too focused on Hues and Cues to care. I kept noticing how they were constantly giving me weird looks and making rude faces at me.

"Why are they looking at us like that?" I said to Tatum.

“I’m not sure, but who cares? Church is supposed to be peaceful and if they have a problem with it then let them have a problem with it.” Tatum replied.

“Yeah, you’re right, this is my first time at church and if they have a problem with a new person then that’s just dumb.”

Soon after church we went home but I couldn’t take my head off of those girls giving me weird looks. Like I couldn’t have done anything to make them mad right? I’m literally new to this church. I don’t know how I’m already making people mad and dislike me. But I shouldn’t worry too much about it.

The next day at school, I saw someone familiar. “Is that who I think it is?” I thought in my head. I squinted my eyes at the person and leaned my head more forward.

“TATUM?!”

“Hi Lainey, I didn’t know you went to this school too.” Tatum said, surprised.

“Anyways, do you have Ms. Lincoln for math? I’m failing her class and I need help,” he asked.

“Yeah, I have her for the third hour, and I have 98.4% in her class,” I replied. And again, like yesterday, I saw that group of girls again.

“Do you know those three girls? They’re always giving me dirty looks whenever they see us talking.” I asked.

“Oh yeah, those girls are Megan, Emma and Ava. Ava and I used to date, but she still likes me even though she has a boyfriend. But don’t let them bother you too much, they’re weird.” Tatum said. I just shrugged it off and walked to class.

At the end of the day, Tatum had asked for my number so we

could do homework together for math because I mean, he clearly needed help and I was willing to help. Besides, I could finally use my love for math.

That night we called and did homework together. He needed help with math and I needed help with English. The whole night on call we just talked and laughed. We barely even did the work, but in the end we did end up studying because we had a math test.

The next day came sooner or later than I thought and that night, we had youth Bible study. I could not tell you how excited I was for it. Like, yes, I know it was my first time. But Tatum had talked to me about being Christian could be and how many hangouts there are and how letting God come into your life could be.

At school I walked to get breakfast, and as I sat down I felt someone's presence behind me.

"Um ew, loser alert. Look, you're sitting where we sit, and let me tell you this honey. We CANNOT be seen with somebody that looks and dresses like you."

"I don't see your names on the seats. And plus, can't you just go sit somewhere else? There are no other seats taken." I replied.

"Lainey! I'm over here. Come sit with me so we can do some last minute studying!" Tatum yelled to me. I shoved past those girls and walked over to Tatum.

"What's their problem? Like, I'm literally just existing over here!" I exclaimed.

"You'll be okay, just don't acknowledge them," Tatum replied. We studied for a little bit until breakfast was over.

I was walking to class until my notebooks got slapped out of my hands.

“Hey! Why’d you do that?!” I yelled.

I bent down and quickly grabbed my stuff, pushing past the person who slapped my school work. I quickly walked away, and from behind me I heard loud laughing and cackling. I quickly walked to math class as I had Ms. Lincoln for the third hour.

As I walked into her class, I saw that Tatum was still in there. I sat down and checked to see if all my papers and notes were still in my folders as they got knocked down earlier. Tatum saw me rampaging through my work and walked up to me, wondering what I was doing in such a hurry.

“Hey Lainey, whatcha doing? Why do you look so freaked out and mad? Did someone do something to you?” Tatum said.

I looked up at him and replied: “I’m not even sure, Tatum, someone bumped into me and it caused me to drop all of my things. Do you know how embarrassing that was? I feel like I’m gonna die of embarrassment!”

“Calm down Lainey, you’re not gonna die of embarrassment. Now let me help you clean up your papers.” Tatum said to me.

To be set free

Samara Vang

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

Cast that bottle aside along its pile Your tangle of limbs stumble in the abyss
 prolonged rancor -blinds you
Perceive the clatter of shackles trailing heaving
 behind you
Your withered bones cry for rest Your heart weighs heavier than chains

Rattle- Cold Coarse Chains
They appear to your fiery orbs Recollections echo
You gaze with grey With clamped fists
 behind closed doors reverberating wrath
Each sight makes it augment
But you create your own agony.

See this repeating rhythm you bring upon yourself
The flow of the current is unknown to you -What has come is like gravity
You lack the spark It flies across the landscape
 Yet you can't enter
Your cold grip bends the rusty metal
You create your own torment.

You retch the recollections You ail your reflection
Do you realize your objective? your anguish?
The path to relinquish is to your own volition
Or will you add a shaft to your protruding arrows?

Rise See the divine gleam that awaits you
One step another It's time to let go.

See the sprouting radiance that pierces your shutting eyes
Feel the burden lift from your shoulders
Tear the bounds of bitterness that binds your neck
Hear the clatter of chains as light's glare engulfs you

Open your eyes -you see a sea of viridescent
You wordlessly stare into the verdant dawn
The free wind sweeps the pasture - It decides its fate
The crystal river flowing swaying meandering
The sky stretched into infinity Cerulean soars and intertwines
along amber strokes

A drop of gold calls to you
Pull the arrows from your shadow -It will wound -yes
Await in the interlude with fortitude
Just as the grooves the waters make

All one needs is oneself to
forgive such
to spread their wings
to be set free.

Haunting

Ana Catalina Martínez

Grade 10, Shattuck-St. Mary's School

Wondering if I dwell in your thoughts;
nine whole years I was always there.
Do I haunt you? Well,
you haunt me—it's sickening.

The flowers wilted before they could bloom again.
Silence that made knots in my chest,
only for you to cast me out when I finally broke—
my voice, powerless
against your perfect soul.

Play the memories back,
from before the ties unraveled.
Say you do it just as I do.
I keep asking, Am I the fool? If I can't move on,
why should you?
It's selfish, I know—it's a fierce desire
until you stop haunting me.
Say you've wondered what I'm doing.
Please say I haunted you, too.

The Trapped Flower

Johanna Babalola

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

5 A free flower lifts
 its face to the sun
 and sways with the wind
 till the daylight is done
 and dips its petals
 in the golden rays
 and dares to claim the sky.

10 But a flower that waits
 inside a narrow jar
 can seldom see beyond
 the glass that scars,
 its roots bound,
 its soil dry
 so it bends its stem to sigh.

15 The trapped flower sighs
 with a silent plea
 of fields unknown
 but longed for still,
 and its breath is felt,
20 on the distant hill,
 for the trapped flower
 dreams of freedom.

25 The free flower thinks of another dawn,
 and the soft rains falling on the meadow wide,
 and the rich earth waiting beneath the open sky,
45 and it names the field its own.

But the trapped flower stands
on the grave of seasons,
its shadows wilts
30 on a nightmare hush,
its roots are bound,
its soil is dry,
so it bends its stem to sigh.

The trapped flower sighs
35 with a silent plea of fields unknown,
yet it still dreams of freedom.
Its petals ache for the wind's embrace,
and its roots whisper of journeys never begun.

Winter's Ice

Efrain Delgadillo Reyes

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

You hear the ice crack beneath your feet
Each careful step, each whispered creak
A fragile ground we learn to tread
Afraid of what life has ahead

We stand and wait for ice to melt
For proof that wounds can still be felt
Separation of what shouldn't be separated
These actions have longed for to be outdated

Lives weighed down by quiet sorrow
Borrowed hope for each tomorrow
Questions linger: will this last?
Or fade away like winter's past?

The silent screams that fill the air
With words and actions all unfair
Some voices shake, some never rise
Many truths buried behind lies

A Soldier's Surroundings

Jayla Gamache

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

Broken,
are the dreams ahead.
Running,
is the blood of red.
Fragile,
is the ego of man.
Shattered,
is the loving hand.
Violence,
is the bloodshed of the night.
War,
is the burning of the fight.
New,
is the country that surrounds.
Old,
is the sound of firing rounds.
Comrades,
arm in arm.
Weapons,
of great harm.
Trauma,
is the stain that remains.
Lives are lost,
No lives are gained.

Sorrow Feathers

Jayla Gamache

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

For why doth the dove mourn?
Woe is the creature of forlorn
Thy feathers are less unadorned

How must the Chickadee beckon?
Calls heard by none I reckon
Frigid loneliness of kinship abandoned

Whom doth thy Magpie glow for?
Illuminating a space with sheer beauty adored
One crescendos with a sight one does not abhor

What makes thy swan so majestic?
Imprints a figure of porcelain- acrylic
Confined they are not, but gathered rather domestic

For why must one perish?
When creatures of flight
We must cherish.
How doth thy feathers of flight
Wish thee a goodnight?

The Living Fossil

Gelmin Hernández Polio

Grade 10, Tartan Senior High School

“Here we lie apart
Eroded, one with our previous kin
Our rest, eternal”

It’s one of ‘em fancy poems I made during my slumber. Always felt like something was off with it. It couldn’t be bothered to revise, despite having nothing else to do but lie here...

Whatever. Perhaps English wasn’t my first language; perhaps my mind has slowly eroded, like my body has.

...

Strange.

I feel more articulate than usual

Crack.

What was that?

Stones rumble as I emerge from my tomb, a coat of stone baked over my cooked, flaking flesh.

I have no idea how long I’ve lain here.

Does it matter?

Not really. Never really has.

All I know is that these ‘ol legs work once more.

Time passed.

I stumble in the dark, bumping into all sorts of things I can’t identify. Obvious why.

Somehow, some way—I see daybreak. A rush of light hits my

weary eyes, causing me to flinch. I carve a way out with my bare hands, warm rays gently caressing my decayed skin. It's truly a wonder how I live, but I do.

It's only after I rub my eyes that I see it in the distance
Civilization.

Soon, I made my way to its towering gates, an enormous line of foreigners stretched out as far as summits in the distance.

Absurd

It's only a matter of time until these pilgrims and immigrants will lie in the soil as meager bones, just as I once did.

Nevertheless, I cut in front. People complain, whine and cry as I take their precious place in line

Maybe it's wrong. Perhaps it's not. Perhaps it's the system's fault?

How would such a demanding thing respond to my deviance?

Then again, how can I just lie here, like the rest of these people?

I should go straight to the front.

And so I did.

Weaving past the odd aerial creatures made from tin, buzzing a broken symphony of beeps and crackles.

The guards are just as imposing as I'd expect. As mean as they get. Many shove me back, barking orders like "Stay in line!" or "Don't budge!"

But I didn't listen.

I recede into the bunching of people, sandwiched between their cushy forms.

I finally reach the receptionist.

"Good evening... sir?" She tries to maintain her harmonic voice,

a hint of trepidation rising instead. I don't blame her. I likely appear grotesque.

"Hi." I said.

"Do you have your birth certificate, your ID, your secondary education diploma, a declaration of entry, a passport, a document of your genetic ancestry, a ticket from the immigration lottery, and 500,000 credits up front, and an additional 13.4% in interest for thirty years?" She said.

"No."

"Then why are you in line, sir?"

"... Because I want to go inside?"

"Everybody does, sir." She does some odd motion with her hand, guards pushing through the crowds, and towards me.

I emerge from the dumpster.

This was certainly far from what I expected. Nonetheless, I notice a group of people in the distance attempt to scale the walls. Many are shot, few reach the top... then die.

I climb alongside them, collapsing prematurely

I hadn't been struck. A rather melodramatic display by definition

But the guards are fooled.

Covered in mysterious fluids and debris, I flop into another dumpster below.

I'm in.

The city was certainly complex, tall buildings penetrating the clouds, the streets crowded with a diverse populace of people.

I follow the flow of traffic, looking up at the overwhelming stimulus to my eyes.

There's some commonality, aside from the deluge of adverts, and

propaganda regarding social harmony displayed

They were sections.

Some are divided by color

Colors of the rainbow

Others, by traits.

Like the divine being in the sky

Or who's promises sound greater.

I followed the large sign to one of the various sections.

It was the executive section.

I was denied entry.

Next was the 'Christian' section.

Denied.

Alongside the other major monotheistic... I even tried my hand at
the latter

Denied.

I look at my skin

Bruised, blistered, and brutish

Certainly wasn't white

Neither was it brown, nor black

It was kinda... purple? Like a really dark prune.

...

Guess I don't fit in those either.

I look up at the projected image as big as a bus

"All are represented"

"All belong"

"All prosper"

They sure do love that word.

“All.”

So why do people still wait? Why are people all denied when they have a place here?

Another projection.

It sang praise for “legal” immigrants

They’ve so graciously raised the lottery count from 100,000 a year...

To 100,010 a year.

There’s certainly more than that

Then came the “Illegals.”

They address them a bit callously

As if they don’t belong

All are branded as criminals

None refugees or workers.

All those fore(wo)men I budged in line

All looking for a place to live

Only to find nothing left for them

What a strange place!

To sing of unity and equal opportunity, only for the vast majority to be excluded.

Including I.

The only home we’ll only have is in the soil, after we pass.

Just as I did

Must I return?

No.

I can form my own group

One of those underrepresented.

Those who don't refuse to conform to this absurd status quo.

...

Yeah.

That sounds good.

I spend my days gathering people outside the walls. Some through
tunnels

Others? Through parcels.

The works.

I gather those no longer in their own unique skin.

Those who adopted the surrounding practices rather than their
own

Rather than the ones that came before them

Strange how it feels so familiar.

Perhaps I lie with that desecrated group

Not even my very own name belonging to me

Merely borrowed—never to be owned

It's why I took a stand

A shame how it unfolded

My army amassed—dismantled in a heartbeat

Most died—some chained, others indoctrinated.

And I?

Shot into space.

Like an alien.

Last Words of an Eclipse

Sophie Jensen

Grade 10, Sauk Rapids Rice High School

*Peering at you from across a blue wall,
I watch as you awaken the world with your luscious call,
Your fingers weave molten threads through the heavens wide,
While I, shrouded in shadows and forced to abide.*

*Oh how I yearn to feel your searing touch,
To be bathed in your fire, to burn as such.
How I ache for a mere stolen glance,
To fall through the dying dusk, to steal my chance.*

*When you stir I must wither,
As you draw nearer, your ambrosial brilliance grows thinner;
Whenever I dare to emerge, you slip away,
A teasing dance we are fated to resume each day.*

*I, a pearl doomed to drift in distant velvet tides,
Bound to the hush where the lonely night resides.
You, an unyielding sovereign draped in fire,
Unreachable yet the object of my desire.*

*In a whisper I'd shatter our wretched divide,
Unravel the everlasting sky, cast our fates aside.
To collide into your blistering heart,
At the cost of being torn apart.*

*In a chase to the sea you leave honeyed kisses,
Reaching for you with trembling fingers,
Sinking into the waves that echo your gleams,
Drowning in embers, lost in a dream.
In an ephemeral moment I hold the contours of your face,
Feeling the warmth of your embrace,
Suddenly the ocean swallows me whole,
I dissolve into silver, surrendering my soul for my sol.*

*You remain, untethered and free,
Rising above the boundless sea.
I am dispersed, scattered in tide and foam,
But I smile, as I know you're still at home.*

The Rugged Path of Life

Zocorro Rico

Grade 11, Shattuck-St. Mary's School

12 years, that's all
Walls that have seen us grow
What we have learned
A paper we have earned.
Why am I feeling concerned?
It's as if I'm ready
The world awaits my coming
Steps that are numbing
Yet like a melody humming
I'm told,
"You have changed."
While barely managing,
I ask myself
Why now?
Reality changes us
Causing a fuss,
I'm yet not satisfied
I wish for a guide
One that knows what's right
like a heavy tide
I often fall at the rise of success
I'm ambitious, just too early
Too young to even understand
I'm alone
Like an adult, all grown
Yet not known what I own
Things that I owe just like that loan
Things that aren't shown

It's taken too much from me
Such as the one thing I cherish most, glee
I'm like a flea
Always at the peak
Never knowing what could go wrong
Like the second I got that paper
12 years, that's all
Why now?
What now?

Frozen Are The Remains

Holly Johnson

Grade 12, Upsala Area School

Snow and ice covered the dilapidated towers that once held civilization. Dead plants crawled across the concrete, spiked with frost, left with nothing to do but wither. I walked past streets and rusted cars, long abandoned. All color was slowly being choked out of the empty remains.

It was time to leave, to find life untouched by the approaching freeze, so I too could survive. My legs had long gone numb. Despite that, there was no stopping, not until I reached the outskirts of this concrete corpse, and wandered as far into the sunset as I could go. Where the cold had not touched. Where death had not yet claimed the world. The frost-ed road I walked led up a bridge, but I did not join it. Erosion and decay surrounded the bridge, and it would soon suffer the same fate if it hadn't already. I did not want to be on it when that happened.

I didn't really want to walk beside it from the ditch below either, but straying further from my chosen path wasn't an option. I let myself slide down the slope, and the grass beneath me prickled my skin like dull knives. The frosty blades progressed into stone halfway down, giving way to the snow-dusted rock of a dead river, so frozen at its source that it ceased to flow.

Pieces of civilization rest at the bottom of the riverbed: a rusted bike, a piece of a car, a couple bottles, what looked like a shoe. I stood for a moment as a forgotten piece of civilization not yet lost to the world. A moment neither wasted nor used wisely. I quickly treaded uphill towards the other side of the frozen cascade, going as fast as the smooth rocks and grass would let me. At the top of the lost river, I paused once

more. All the roads seemed to merge into one, like an arrow guiding me to relief. To life.

I continued forth, back onto the concrete, back on my decided path, towards the edge and beyond. All the buildings seemed to lean away from the road, square ribs opening to the sky and letting distant colors illuminate its spine. The sun shined like hope, staring me in the face as it slowly made its way to the horizon. I was close. I had to be. I climbed and weaved through dead cars and fallen signs, until the pathway grew empty of everything but repetitions of cracked tar and dying weeds. The bones of this place grew fewer.

Just as the sun hit the horizon, a patch of grass spotted with trees, made itself known. Orange hues started to fill my vision and gradually the world, and I ran. To color, to warmth, to survival. I could feel my legs growing heavier and heavier with each step. The bruising they held, the blood pumping through every vein.

I burst beyond the remains of a freezing city, and those trees in the distance became warm shadows, sharpened by blazing backlight. I was one of them, a shadow running on a dirtied road. Thawing out, chasing the sun, leaving the frozen remains to rest.

Why Don't You Care

Keylah Kendrick

Grade 12, Pine River-Backus High School

Why don't you care

Why don't you care about my interests

Why don't you care about my feelings

Why don't you care about how my day was

Why don't you care about how much or if I sleep at night

Why don't you care about if I'm in pain

Why don't you care about my struggles

Why don't you care about if I disappear or not

Why don't you care about what I do for you

Why don't you care about how long I'm gone

Why don't you care about what I'm going through

Why don't you care about what I do with my life

Why don't you care about whether or not I ever want to
see you again

Why don't you care about how I want nothing to do with
you

Why don't you care about how you're not a good person

Why don't you care about how your words affect me

Why don't you care about how I'm throwing my life away

Why don't you care about how much you hurt me

Why don't you care about anything that has to do with me
unless it benefits you

Why don't you care about my life

Why don't you care... about me?

INTERMISSARY: WHY WE YET LIVE

Jack Phillip Holm

Grade 12, Willmar Senior High School

HELL IS A VAST OCEAN within a limitless, sunless void. Bodies of man and beast alike thrown into it, flailing wildly, achieving little more than the attention of its inhabitants, which make deft work of ending its life.

When observed with the perspective that there is a divine overseer, this plane is a fluent system. Bodies succinctly shredded without order or button-pushing; blood, which is confirmed in a recent study (Jones, Life Essence) to be the ‘soul’ of the individual, leaks from mangled remains upon the ocean floor to seep into the ground, forever away from its source. Theory of divine oversight encourages us to not only view it as a machine in its function, but to nitpick its operation. We have observed yet one flaw: the bodies pile up.

Given an estimated 900 million years of operation, over time the mangled leftovers of automation accumulated so as to become hills and hills to become mountains, until eventually, hundreds or thousands of meters high, one breached the surface. Air-exposed remains began to rapidly rot and decompose, and piles grew ever-higher as more and more mounds escaped the depths, to become islands in unknowing seas. Seeds from the coats of animals, aided by what faint light is allotted from the sky above, took root upon these islands, polishing them with plantlife. Somewhere along the way? Someone fell near the shore, and was not stunned enough by the fall to retain common sense. Upon the shore, soaked, terrified and confused, would then stand the first man to defy GOD.

We are the dwellers of the INTERMISSARY, the frail islands which only serve to delay our final destination. By our breath do we spit in the face of order. It will not last.

RAPTURE STRIKES AGAIN, CULPRIT UNKNOWN
Creps, Centralistic Gossip, issue XXX

Several months ago, an estimated half of the population on Island Main disappeared in slumber. Just two cycles ago, it happened again. No evidence has yet been found at any scene save for sheets pulled aside, leading speculators to believe that the victims in question pulled back their own bedsheets in the moments leading up to their disappearance. No officials have spoken out on the subject. All are advised to continue to follow standard order procedure.

MEMO: more freaky stuff

Geralt, u know that cask raid? Went back to check if we missed sumthin in the hubbub and guess what. I found a weird thing in the trees. Looks like a room? Dunno but issa whole apartment, lookin like it was just yankt out of a building n plunked in the woods. C all the twobyfours and everything. Even the pipes sheard off. Dint go inside cause it might be haunted. You know how it is nowadays. also the door was locked.

Knox

P.S. Damascus cheats at cards. Also don't call me hard knox again or i'll put slugs in your socks. Not cool man.

11/18/20XX

I don't even know what the hell is going on anymore

One damn night. Every little thing that's damn good in life falls through the gutter. God. Blood all over the carpet. One dead, another doesn't even remember what happened. I try to do a favor and this what I get? God's left me.

I'm not sure if I'm gonna make it through the week. I keep seeing everything of his around the apartment and I'm filled with this nauseous feeling. I can't even mourn properly. One job let me go and the other's already stacking papers. Alcohol and manslaughter? It's all so wrong.

My clothes don't feel right. My head hurts. I haven't seen the sun in two days. My fingernails are too long but I've already trimmed them.

Being me feels itchy. Not like I have any other choice.

There's got to be a lesson in this. Don't let people too close? Never trust anyone with a record? None of it 'clicks' like some sappy wisdom quote would. I could say a billion wise things right now, and they'd sound way better than this philosopher vomit on motivational posters, but none of it would mean anything. That's it. None of it means anything. Your choices have no effect on the outcome.

My therapist managed to move my appointment up to Wednesday. I don't even know what the hell I'm gonna do in the meantime. Drink soda slowly in a dark room probably, like yesterday. It takes so little to tip someone over into the mud like this.

Abiel (new name pending)

Haystacks (Monet Series): *after Monet*

Maria Rohlf sen

Grade 12, Breck School

roof
made of hay
used to hold a harvest
created by full days of labor
yet repeatedly captured in hour bursts, at
the right time, lighting, season—
contentment. oh, let me breathe
in every early winter morning,
grasp the sun as it sets through
the summer trees' lush leaves;
just as he had, a capturer long
gone, though cherished by me.

all natural dairy sweetener

Jo Treuenfels

Grade 12, Irondale Senior High School

spiraling swirls of blonde bleached curls intersect at roots and overlap desire paths
twisting over turning under tripping through the thicket of twine
strands of spun straw form bushel tails with split ends snipped clean
whorls of dyed hair cling to cartilage covered shells of ears
whorls of iridescent nacre cling to calcium covered shells of earth
glassy eyes of loam peer dark and deep to reflect skin supple and soft
like soil soaked with seafoam dust or newborn velveteen calf on hooved bow legs
gazes lock when fingertips touch and knuckles tangle together
as stomach acid butterflies flutter and flounce and fuss and fumble
heat rises beneath pale skin and flesh flushes full of secondhand shame
born to sear soft hearts and boil blood vessels
and cook slow roasted over hot glowing coils of electric stovetops
sappy sonnets soaped with slick lye humble tumble from tooth and tongue
slipping past jaws and born from bovine muscle lapping at salt licks
curves and cuts of cattle mouths shape consistent captivating consonants
crystallized candies cover contours of gums like crushed confections
so count the grams of artificial milk and sugary sick syrup
consider the detriments of man-made caramels on lovesick teens
when you read the nutritional label on the back of the cardboard box
and it'll tell you if he'd ever taste as sweet as he seems

Painted Flames

LeeAnn Wynn

Grade 12, Pine River Backus High School

Hunters, surrounded by burning paintings, shouted at Elio, saying things that Elio chose not to hear. Hundreds of paintings covered in the blood of his beloved or up in flames.

Rosine was centuries upon centuries old. Elio was 23. One was immortal, the other was reborn thousands of times. Every lifetime, they were bound together by marriage. Elio, to commemorate all the years he has been with Rosine, painted her. Rosine never noticed the resemblance to her and the woman on the canvas, because she hadn't been able to see herself in years.

"Who's the lady you always paint?" She questioned.

Elio chuckled. "Why, it's you my dear."

Rosine paused, staring at the current painting Elio was working on "Me...? That's what I look like?"

Elio laughed and looked up at the thousands of other paintings. All were his beloved Rosine. Some in Renaissance gowns, such as one when they had gone to a masquerade ball. Others in Victorian gowns, one being the dress she has worn during the night of May Day. Another painted her in an Elizabethan gown, when they had seen Romeo & Juliet in The Rose Theatre. Each so different, but all beautiful. Rosine touched her face, trying to compare hers with the faces in the paintings.

"I must have always envied myself then," she laughed.

"Really?" Elio asked before blushing. "Well I suppose you have never been able to see yourself in a mirror." He said.

They laughed together. Once the laughter died down, Rosine looked at Elio thoughtfully.

“I always forget why you refuse to become my fledgling. I’d help you through the adjustment, you know.”

“Then I wouldn’t have an excuse to paint you, my love.”

“But then you wouldn’t have to search for me every lifetime. You could still paint me.” “I know...but I paint your face before I even remember your name. If I became your fledgling, that would take away my reason to paint you the way I do.”

Rosine sighed and looked down. It was a sensitive topic between the two. There was another reason for her desire for him to be her fledgling, though—Hunters. They were getting more organized, getting more modern weapons. With their advancements, Rosine might not be around for Elio to find anymore. It had reached the point where she couldn’t even relax in her safest space, her blood cellar, with the chance that Hunters might have contaminated the blood with silver before she had gotten it.

“Hey... You know I’ll always protect you, right? And if they ever get to you... I’ll burn the whole world.” This made Rosine smile.

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

Special thanks to everyone who contributed
such creative submissions this year!

Special thanks to Jalena Gumban

This year's edition of *The Goose* wouldn't exist without Perpich literary arts senior Jalena Gumban.

Jalena Gumban is a 2026 literary arts senior, who contributed organization and management as well as reading over the submitted pieces. Within their work they enjoy focusing on the human experience, quilting their reality into a cohesive vision. Outside of the literary arts world they enjoy sewing, painting, and bird watching. Working on the Goose has been an incredible learning opportunity and showed a vibrant image of young writers.

After taking a similar leadership role for Perpich's schoolwide fall literary magazine, the *Hallowzine*, Jalena was the editor-in-chief of *The Goose*. Jalena guided staff members through numerous tight deadlines. She led us through the process of reviewing submissions, collecting parent consent forms, editing, and so much more.

Thank you Jalena!!

Editor bios

Learn more about the people behind *The Goose*!

Anais

Hello, I'm Anais Froberg-Martinez, a 2027 junior in the Literary Arts department. I had the honor of creating the graphic design that accompanies all the beautiful submissions we received this year for *The Goose*. Graphic design is a big passion of mine, and I put together the Perpich newspaper as well. I love literary journalism, movies, and learning about historical/literary figures.

Ven

Hi! I'm Ven Estrada, and I'm a 2026 senior in the Literary Arts program. I love poetry, world mythology, classics, and have an overall fondness for birds. I have enjoyed with great pleasure the entire process that comes with working on *The Goose*, and I'm just so happy to have gotten to see everyone's creativity and passion this year!

Jonah

Hello! I'm Jonah Scherer, and I am a 2026 senior in Literary Arts. I love writing, history, video games, and any and every television sitcom. I've thoroughly enjoyed reading every piece that came through *The Goose* this year and I'm very grateful for this opportunity to get some hands-on experience in publishing!

Zach

Sup, My name is Zach Stegora. I am a 2026 senior in the Literary Arts program at Perpich. I love video games, Pokemon, and writing. I have had a lovely time being a part of this amazing crew of editors, and to have spent my last year of high school here.

Arthur

Hey! I'm Arthur Bleess, a senior in the Lit program (at Perpich). Should I get any free time, I enjoy spending it doing photography, making music, or reading. Of course, when that free time is denied I'm doing some version of this somewhere else (though that doesn't stop this from being lovely).

To learn more about the creation of the Goose, check out the document on our website titled "The Making of *The Goose*"

Dedicated to Keylah Kendrick

You've reached
the end

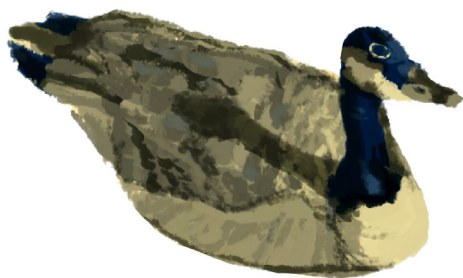


Illustration credits:

Ven Estrada (cover art)

Anais Froberg-Martinez (back page and table of contents)