

the dreamcatcher



james i. o'neill
2022 - 2023

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SHANNON FAINT

MADelyn BOURNE

ISABELLA INGALLS





MADELYN BOURNE

I hate flowers.
Yes, they are pretty.
Of course they smell very good.
They represent love and commitment.
All good things in retrospect.

But how long can a flower truly last once ripped from the ground?
How long before its petals wrinkle and begin to fall?
How long before its fragrance fades and its stem begins to slouch?
How long before the flower dies?

How can something that's said to represent love and commitment die in less than a week?
And what message does that send about love?
About commitment?

So,
I say again,
I hate flowers.

SOPHIA FARINA

WHAT CLOUDS THINK OF US

I see you. Very carefully encroaching on your territory. Everyone else you hate when they come to your secret spot, but my particles hope to see you. I become entranced in your blurry figures, trying to make out some features or other shapes I'm able to recognize. A fun little game for me in my lonesome togetherness. The other side is empty and cold, devoid of your reflections. But this is why I prefer to face front. Every so often I get lost, broken from the place I was before. I join with something different, something new, seemingly without my own volition. But even so after the thousands of gusts and currents that trod me along. There you are. I can't exactly tell who you are, but the confusion is still there. So many of you, some apart and some crowded, so many different equally as beautiful shades. And the rare events that I get to witness from the bizarre and dreamlike top of your appearance. If I'd not had you to lose myself in, I don't think I would be as high up as I am now, my beautifully mystifying friend.

TYLER DEHM



THUNDERSTORMS - PHELAN WALDRON



PHELAN WALDRON

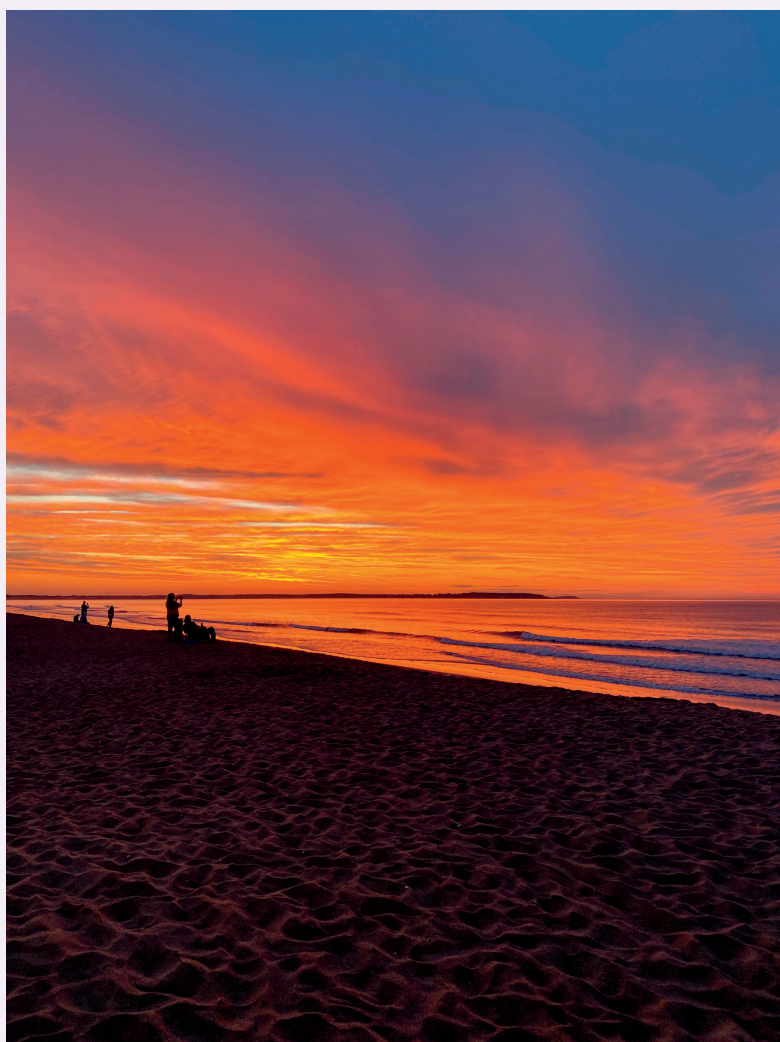
THE BEAUTY OF BOOKS

Late at night when there is nothing but quiet sounds of my house accompanying me I often gravitate towards my bookshelf. In my world of clutter and chaos my bookshelf is perfect and beautiful: It is consistent when nothing else around me seems to be; The bookshelf is home to parts of myself I am hesitant to share with the world. It holds not only my interests but also my fears, morals, and understanding of the world around me. On these nights I stand in front of my shelf and find the stories that meant so much, I flip through the quotes I saved and use my past thoughts as a way to come to terms with my current ones. The words between aging pages become more than just stories, they become an introspection of my own thoughts.

Reading has not always been simple for me; it certainly hasn't always been something I enjoyed. When I was young I could not read; I wrote backwards and had to work harder to keep up with those around me. Books then were a wall, a barrier between me and everyone else. My young self associated books with something to dread; they represented a part of myself that was wrong. When you can't do something, you appreciate it more when you finally do succeed. You cherish it and make sure that you never take that ability for granted. Once I learned to read, books changed from a burden to a safe haven, somewhere I could go when I needed to escape or needed help to make sense of the world. I never had stability in my life, there was never a safe place for me to rely on, a life with the military doesn't allow for that. Books are the closest thing to that stability I had. Familiar stories offered comfort, that feeling of being home with every reread. They offered consistently, which my life so greatly lacked. As I've gotten older books only became more vital to my life. With every home I lost while moving, I found a new one between the pages of a well loved paperback. When nobody seems to understand how I feel, I always find a book ready to help me make sense of my feelings, to help me feel less different and to realize I'm not alone. When I'm scared a book can make me laugh. When I'm feeling hopeless there is a story teaching me to believe all over again. To believe in good, in love, or even in myself. When it seems like my world is falling apart and there is nothing I can hold on to to keep it together I've always had a book to help me through it. Sometimes what you need when everything is wrong is something that will make you laugh, or even cry. It's nice to feel a range of emotions over something that has nothing to do with yourself, especially when everything that you are feeling has left you broken.

Reading keeps me connected, not only to myself but to those around me. If I have something I want to tell someone but I have a hard time expressing it, I will recommend a book. Offering recommendations to others is not abnormal, but when I am giving someone a book I am extending them an olive branch. I share a piece of myself that cannot be expressed through words. My relationship with books makes me a greater person, without reading there are experiences I could never know about, things I could never learn and skills I would have never gained. Without my ability to read I would not be half the student, leader, or person I am today. My view of the world would be far, far smaller. I am indebted to those nights alone with my bookshelf because in the silence I remember who I am.

ELEANOR SULLIVAN



ELLIE BROWN



ELEANOR SULLIVAN



KAYLENE HEYMAN

ISABELLA INGALLS



"The aisles of the market are very narrow and stocked full of goods. You could get everything you wanted or needed right here in this derisory, virtually endless store. Soon after wandering all over, I grabbed a basket and just started filling it with stuff: canned goods, fruits, candies, vegetables... I stopped to look at some wafers as an old woman came over to me. She was a plump thing, with the most marvelous purple dress on.

The woman was trying to reach a box early but I paid no mind to her, I was too enthralled by the branding on some of these candies.

"Hi? Oh hello girl. Could you please help me reach this pudding? Some of my grandbabies are coming into town, and I wanted to make my "special" for them." She flashed a gummy smile at me and motioned to the plum pudding package right above my head. I had read not long ago that plums were probably the most ancient fruit here. I hope that my teacher is proud of me for remembering this pivotal piece of information.

I reached up and handed it to her with a blank stare, "You kind of look like a plum Ms", and walked off. "

SOPHIA MITCHELL

EXCERPT



KAYLENE HEYMAN

The power of knowledge,
Is that a good or a bad thing?
Knowledge has the power to make your day,
But also can just as easily ruin it.
It is something that can positively,
Or negatively affect an entire perspective on basically anything.
School,
Work,
People,
Life.
Knowledge has an unidentifiable amount of power,
However you are still in control.
So the questions that arise are,
How will you let the power of knowledge affect you?
Will you let it change you for the better or for the worse?

SOPHIA FARINA



GRACE LINDBERGH

I've always been a single child. My parents work long hours, so it's not like I had anyone to go home to or wait for. Growing up, I watched neighborhood siblings playing outside and teasing each other from my bedroom window. Jealousy feels like a pretty strong word to use but that is what it was. I would lash out and get angry at my parents because I was one of the few kids in the neighborhood without a sibling or a pet; I was all alone. Years later, I am now a junior in college. I haven't really kept in touch with my parents, although I occasionally visit them for Christmas. But this year was different.

My parents went on a trip to Hawaii for the holidays, so it would just be me home alone. I was basically house-sitting for them. It was lonely and raining hard outside for hours. I was about to go to bed when I heard a bang. I thought that it was a tree branch falling or hitting the house, but it happened again. I got up and walked downstairs to the front door when I saw a silhouette of a man who seemed to be around my height standing outside.

I tried to check our camera, but it was too dark to see who it was. I posed the question through the camera, and the person looked up a bit stunned.

A familiar voice answered, sounding a bit like my dad. "This is going to be hard to explain to you," the person replied, voice muffled by the heavy rain.

Again I asked, "Who is it?"

"Please open the door." The person pleaded.

Just in case, I put the weight of my body behind the door so he couldn't try to rush in. I opened the door a little bit and saw every detail of the man's face. It was my face. This man had my face down to every exact detail. It was like looking into a mirror.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"My name is Milo," he said, "I am your tw-, We are identical twins."

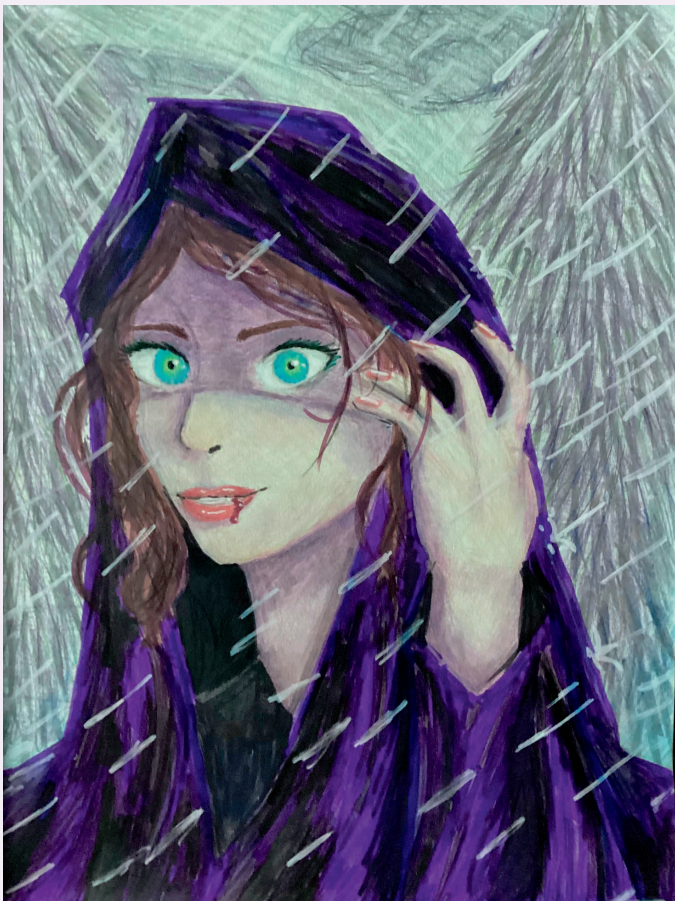
MICHAEL STEWART



ISABELLA INGALLS



KATHRYN LAIRD



ISABELLA INGALLS



MADELYN BOURNE

Tears brimmed in Clara's eyes as she pushed through the crowds of people gathered in the stuffy ballroom. As she hurried past, gasping for air, nobody bothered to look her way. As was often the case, the lords and ladies throughout the room were too self absorbed to spare her even a second glance. They were too busy mingling and fawning over each other, desperate for attention, hoping to be the next jewel of the Ton. Had Clara been in her usual state of mind she would have had a sarcastic comment or quip ready to entertain herself, but in her anger she drew a blank. With a few deep breaths, she stopped in her tracks and began wiping the tears away in an attempt to look composed. Clara turned back briefly, hoping that she wasn't being followed, and to her relief it seemed like nobody was in her pursuit. She paused and took another deep breath before plowing forward through the sea of cravats and ribbons. The festering anger in her chest began to grow once again as she neared the large double doors. All her life Clara had hated parties; she hated everything about them, from the people, to the food, to the fake politeness. It made her skin crawl, and tonight was no different.

Clara had been very young when she first realized that polite society was meant for a particular breed of person. To the gentry of England the perfect lady had to have a certain set of qualities: she had to be beautiful, meek, polite, and graceful. A good lady spoke only when spoken to, she laughed at gentlemen's jokes, she treated those with a higher rank with disciplined respect. She was, in almost every sense of the word, perfect.

Clara was none of the above. With drab brown hair and an overly tall figure she was passably pretty at best and plain at worst. She absolutely never humored herself with words like beautiful. However Clara was very self aware and knew that her absence of beauty was the least of her lacking qualities.

Over the years, much to her family's chagrin, Clara had gained something of a reputation. It was due to this notoriety that nobody in the Ton would even joke about Clara being meek, or polite, and most especially not graceful. Everyone who knew of Clara knew she spoke far too much, she shamelessly shared her opinion on anything and anyone, and she had a blatant disregard for the rules of society. No, they would all agree that Clara Burton, second born daughter of the Earl of Eastwood, was anything but perfect. In fact, she was the very opposite of perfect: she was a dreadful, overly opinionated bluestocking. Clara really didn't mind this title she had been so graciously given; often it was more convenient than hurtful and on occasion it came as a relief.

After her first season out in the world, people began to lose any humor that Clara was a good match; even with her connections, there came a point where someone just wasn't worth it. The dashing bachelors and the scheming mamas of the Ton had given up on trying to pursue her, so the only suitors she had to deal with were the occasional fortune hunters or the wide-eyed green boys who simply didn't know better. Clara had no issue with this; instead of spending her mornings greeting guests who she didn't want, she could read, or go on a walk in the garden or through town.

Even if Clara had wanted to be courted, she knew that it simply would never happen in the traditional sense. She had never been socially adept and too often would she be grasped by panic when she encountered crowds or people she simply did not know. It was for that reason that Clara's mother and brother would often let her cry off social gatherings and stay home instead; they too had begun to give up on any hope of Clara finding her place in society and making an acceptable marriage, so they had stopped trying. They were content to let Clara go quietly into spinsterhood.

That was at least the case until her mama decided to throw her own gathering, a ball to honor Clara's sister, Elizabeth, and her upcoming nuptials. From the moment the guest list was drafted it had been made clear: Clara would be attending and she would at least pretend to enjoy it. While Clara was unhappy about the circumstance, she couldn't help but feel overjoyed for Elizabeth. Her future husband, the Viscount Worland, was a good man, and as far as Clara could tell he truly loved her sister. Her predicament was also helped by the fact that her brother Richard, the 9th Earl of Eastwood, seemed to feel somewhat sympathetic towards her as he relayed the order on their mothers behalf. So that evening, after what felt like hours of hot rod curls and lacing up garments, Clara had found herself in the center of her family's ballroom, standing next to Richard, her mama, and Elizabeth, ready to greet guests.

As Clara stared off into the distance waiting for this all to be over she felt someone kick the back of her heels. With a glare she turned around to face her brother.

"I thought you were supposed to be a gentleman, Richard," she drawled as her brother just grinned at her.

"So I've been told dear sister, though I could say the same of you; I thought you were supposed to be a lady?"

With a huff Clara tried to turn around again but her brother grabbed her shoulder.

"Listen, I hate these things just as much as you do, but you could at least try to make the best of it. I think you would find that this doesn't have to be so dreadful; Mother and I really don't ask much of you." Clara looked at him incredulously, but her brother just kept going,

"Truly Clara, I am happy to let you sit alone with the other wallflowers, but we both know you are better than that."

Clara glared up at him, trying not to shrink under his sympathetic gaze

"It's not like you try to lead by example," she whispered, and despite the flash of hurt in her brother's eye she kept going. "You are almost nine and twenty brother, why is it that you still haven't done your duty and found a wife? It's not as if you don't have girls fawning over your every step. Are you too busy with your courtesans? Truly Richard, we both know you are better than-" Her brother cut her off.

"Hush you," he bit out, "we are in public,"

There was a long pause for a moment before anyone spoke again.

"I don't know where you learned about mistresses Clara, but we will be discussing this in the-"

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Sounding haggard, the Viscount spoke.

“I would like to introduce Lord Andrew Barker, the recently titled Marquess of Angerfell.” He turned to his friend. “My lord, I would like to formally introduce my betrothed Miss Elizabeth Burton, her mother Lady Eastwood, and her younger sister Miss Clara Burton.”

The man nodded before adding, “It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” He turned to Elizabeth. “I’ve been wondering when I would finally get to meet the woman who got old Worland to want to settle down, you are as lovely as I could have imagined”.

Elizabeth smiled shyly before once again drawing towards her beloved. Clara expected for that to be that and for Lord Angerfell to retreat from where he came, but he instead turned to her.

“Miss Clara, I assume you have been given a dance card for the evening?” Clara began to nod as she watched her brother shoot daggers into Angerfell’s direction. The gentleman just smiled and held out his hand for the card that she withdrew.

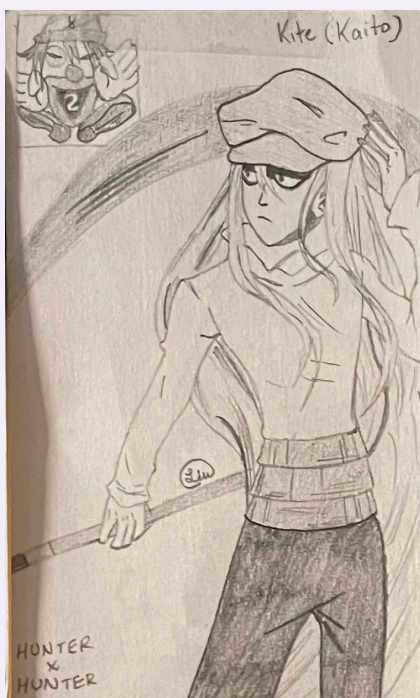
“The waltz is mine,” he murmured as he wrote on the card tied with a pale ribbon against her wrist. Addressing her family again he nodded to each in farewell.

“Miss Burton, Lady Eastwood, Lord Eastwood.”

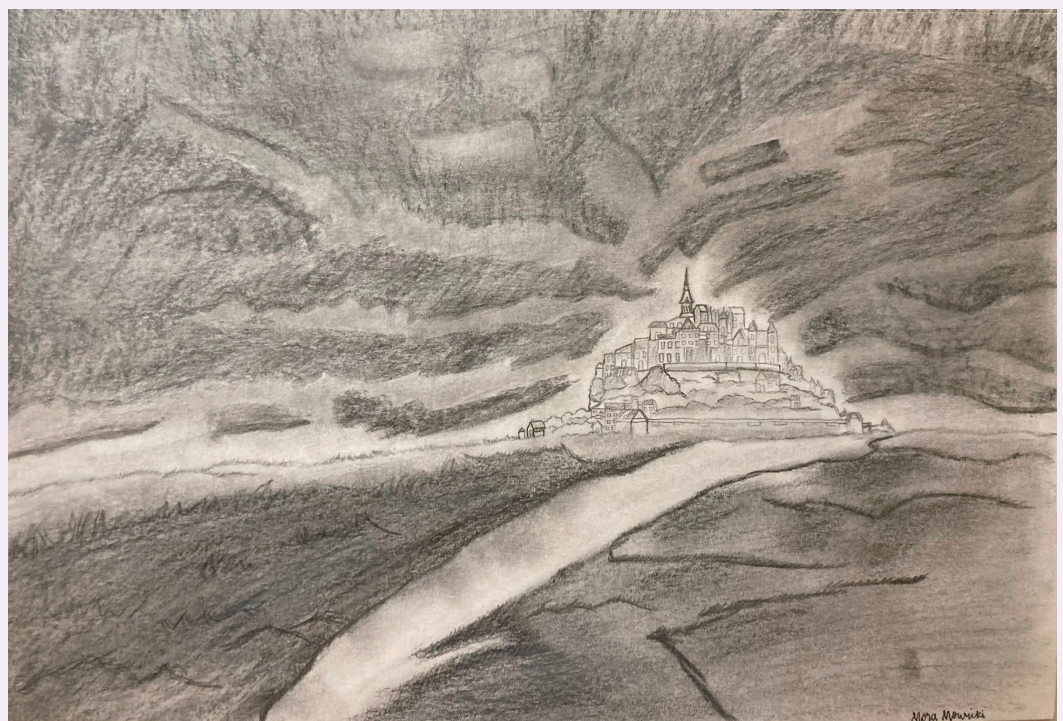
With that he turned to leave, completely ignoring Clara, despite his forwardness just moments before. She tried to ignore the disappointment building in her chest. Just as he was about to step away he turned around one last time and gently took Clara’s gloved hand, brushing his lips to it in a kiss. “Until tonight Miss Clara.”

And then he was gone.

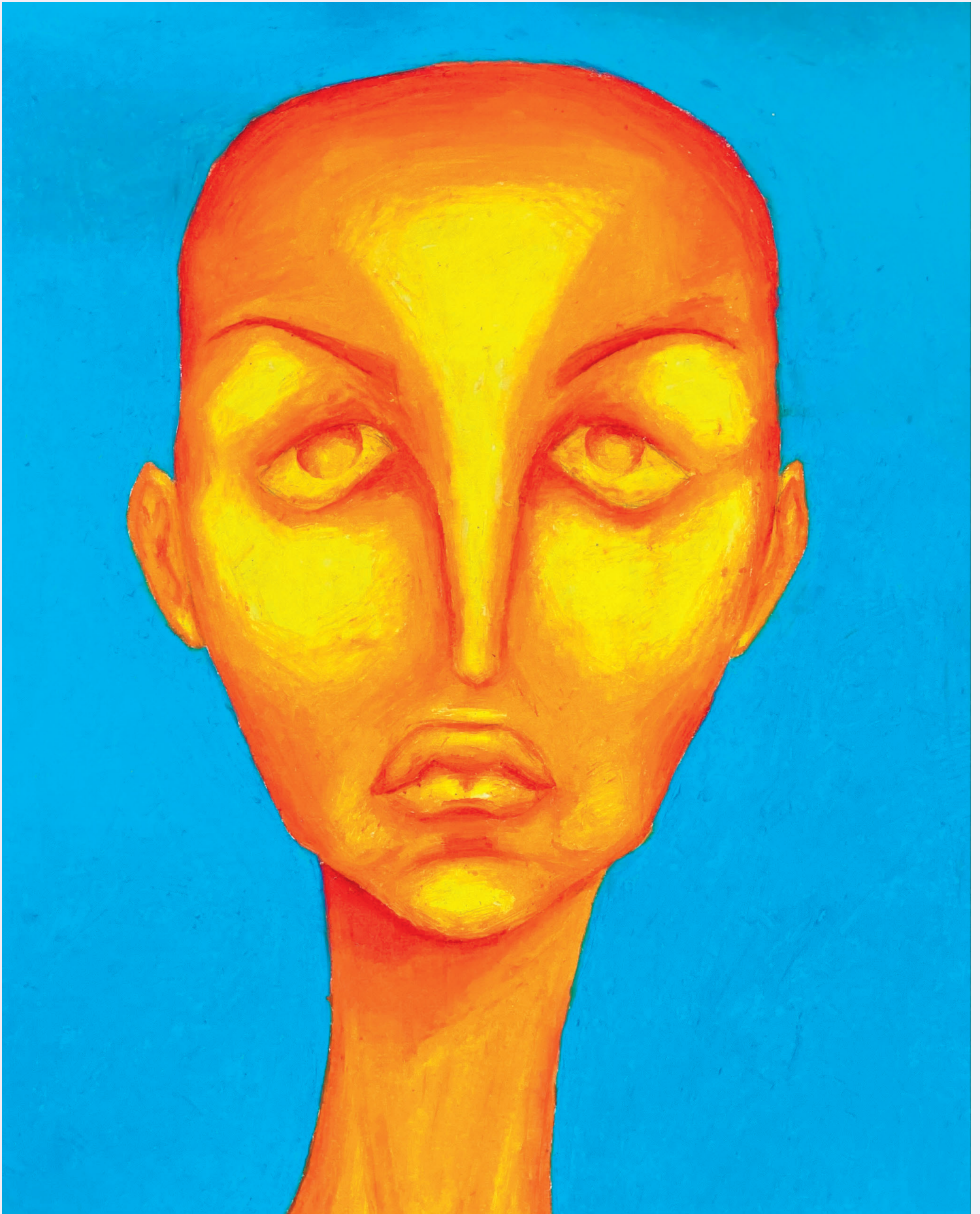
ELEANOR SULLIVAN



KAYLA MULHOLLAND



NORA NOWICKI



LILIAN BENTLEY



MADELYN BOURNE

TRUE LOVE

For true love

The other person needs to see all of you,
And that means you have to see all of yourself,
And that scares me.

All of me is a big thing,
Emotions and memories and all.

All of me is a labyrinth,
A rabbit hole,
It goes on and on,
It twists and turns,
It is complex.

But for true love,
You need to see all of them,
And you need to take their big,
And their twisty complex self,
And you need to learn the way through,
And you need to love the big thing that they are.

For true love you do not need to be perfect,
You need to be you,
And the person that loves you,
Needs to love you.

KRIS PETAL



SOPHIA MITCHELL



PEOPLE

I hate and love all people,
They are ugly, and yet gorgeous,
Everybody is a mosaic.

They have learned from others,
Took the shards making themselves up from others.

That can be beautiful and ugly,
They can be gorgeous mixes,
Or hideous shards,
But I love and hate them all.

I hate and love all people,
They are ugly, and yet gorgeous,
Everybody is a mix of paint.

They mix and mix,
Using what they see to make themselves a new color.

That can be beautiful and ugly,
They can be gorgeous mixes,
Or hideous shades,
But I love and hate them all.

I hate and love myself,
I am ugly, and yet gorgeous,
I am a mosaic,
I am a mix of paint,
I am a work of art of all I have seen,
and all the cracks that I gained.

Everybody is a mosaic,
Everybody is paint.

We are all art,
And we all tell a story.

KRIS PETAL

UTTERLY TERRIFYING

As the sweet bliss of another world separates from my mind, I am cast by a feeling of quiet where there once were warm melodies. I am covered and shrouded in a bone-deep cold that causes quakes across my skin despite the soft weight that pulls me down, this cold demands my attention, my action.

As slow as the crawl of the moon I move, not even opening my eyes as the feelings of tiny daggers make their presence known in the corners of my eyes. I am wrought with woe as I brush them away while the wind brushes away what my mindscape has created. Like a sloth, my body shuffles toward my door and to the hallway, lit with a dim nightlight in the corner, put there so those who haunt the halls at night.

Slow, I look to my right into the shadows of the bathroom, dreading the approach of the day when in front of me sitting crouched and glaring, a silhouette appears.

I startle, my hands raise in the air, caught between trying to steady myself on the frame or wall and trying to protect myself. My body turns in preparation to run, my eyes close as if anticipating a hit and then.

And then... I realize it was my mother sitting on the toilet, using the bathroom in the middle of the night without the lights on, because she couldn't be bothered to flick the switch.

Oh how I love her so, so dearly.

ALE'ANA ORTIZ



ELEANOR SULLIVAN



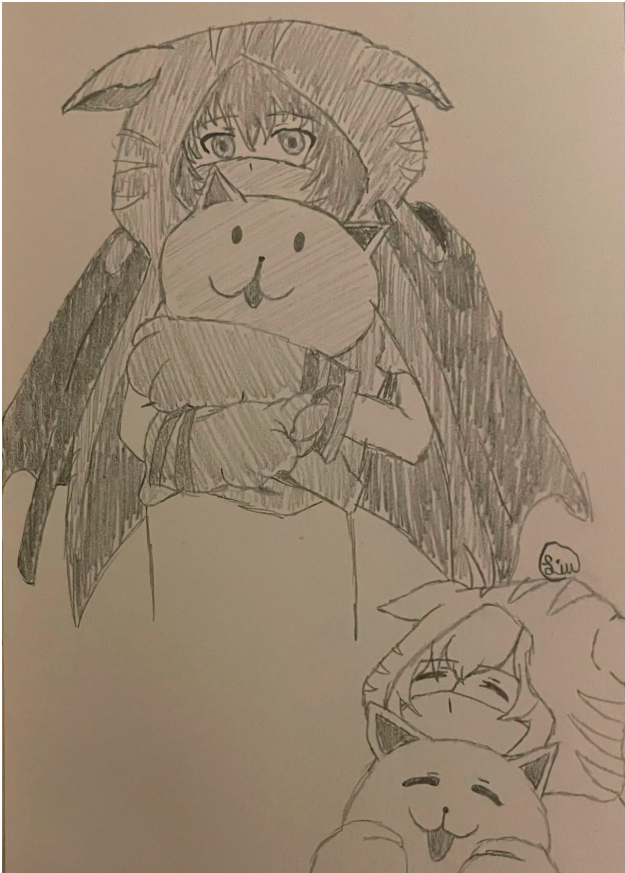
NORA NOWICKI



GRACE LINDBERGH



KAYLA MULHOLLAND



KAYLA MULHOLLAND



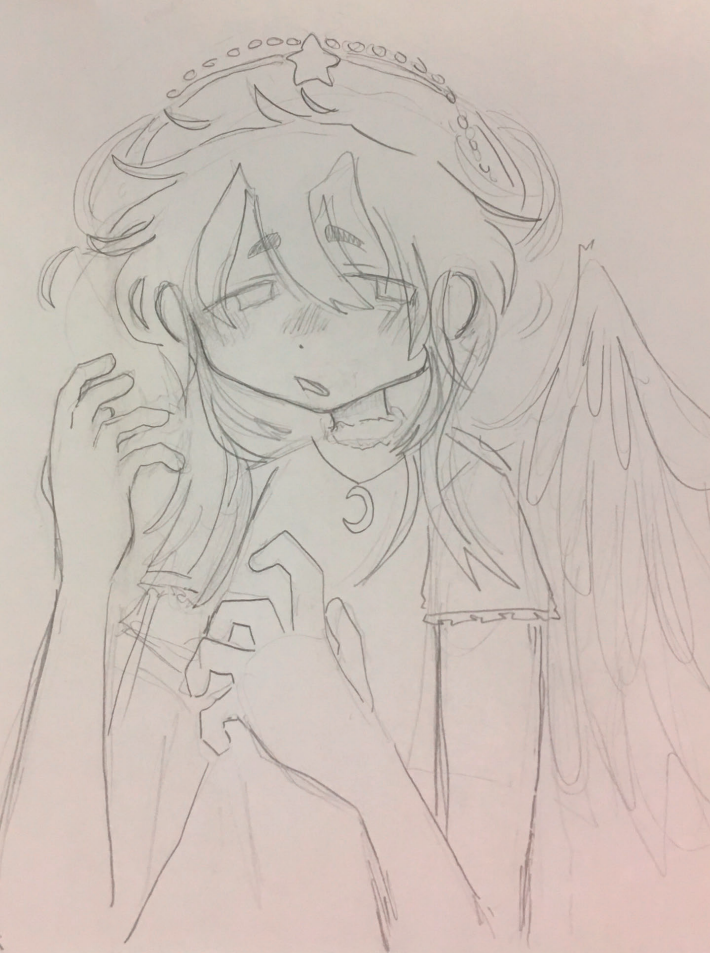
ISABELLA INGALLS



MADELYN BOURNE

The brief gust of dry breeze felt like heaven against her hair as she stared off into the distance. With every gust the almost silent sound of sand rustling against her clothes and hair left her alert of her surroundings. Sweat glistened against her skin as it dripped down her face, making her all too aware of the sun that beat down on her, its beams burning against her tanned skin. As she briefly wiped her brow, she raised her hand and pushed the dry hair out of her face, squinting, trying to catch a glimpse of the town she was hoping was ahead. She held carefully to the reins of her saddle. The leather felt rough against her skin, an unfamiliar feeling compared to the worn leather of her previous mount that she had gotten so used to. Satisfied with what she saw, she adjusted her hat, pushing it down to offer her some shade. She pulled her sand-filled hair out of a ponytail and refastened it into a bun. Finally, she reached down to her side and put her hand to her hip, relaxing at the cold feel of metal, becoming aware of the faint smell of gunpowder that clung to her clothing. The familiarity gave her a sense of comfort, a sense of home. She looked up once again and smiled before clucking her tongue, signaling to her stallion to ride forth into the evening sun.

ELEANOR SULLIVAN



KAYLA MULHOLLAND



ANGER

Anger turned to tears.

Anger turned to silence.

Anger turned to longing.

Anger turned to desperation.

Anger turned to comfort.

Anger turned to apology.

I think anger is our mind's way of making excuses. It is simply our brain's facade. Why would anyone want to figure out what they are feeling when they could just feel anger?

Anger towards you.

Anger towards the world.

Anger towards your situation.

Anger towards yourself.

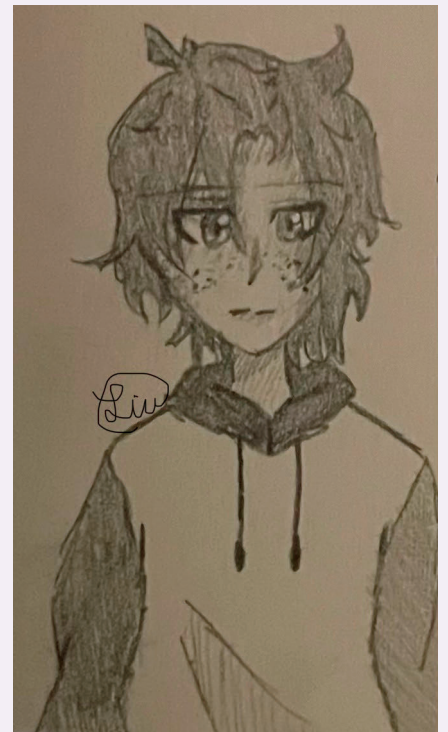
I do think there is a certain sense of resolution when the anger diminishes and the true feelings are exposed though. The vulnerability that emerges has a strange sense of comfort associated with it. The resolution of anger is vital, it is difficult, but most importantly, it is freeing.

Anger turned to freedom.

PHOEBE SPARROW



KAYLA MULHOLLAND



MADELYN BOURNE



What makes you, you?

It's actually a quite difficult question to fully answer.

I mean,

What if you don't really know who you are?

Seriously.

What if you don't know what makes you, you because you don't know who you are.

What if you're lost,

Desperately trying to discover who exactly you are.

So before trying to answer that question, Think about this one.

Who are you?

SOPHIA FARINA

What is love?

Is it a feeling or is it more like a mindset?

How is love identified?

How do you know if what you're feeling is love or if it's just that you care?

Does caring for someone and loving them go hand in hand?

Are they basically the same thing?

These questions are certainly not for me to answer,

But for anyone who understands and is willing to do so.

Because quite frankly,

I haven't quite figured them out just yet.

So again i ask,

What

Is

Love?

SOPHIA FARINA



MADELYN BOURNE

THE ARCHER - EXCERPT

Comfort is a dangerous thing. Comfort leads to bliss, and bliss leads to carelessness, and carelessness almost always ends in tragedy. No matter your walk of life this is a lesson you will learn. It does not matter if you are a merchant or a beggar, a man or a woman, a mortal or a god. The story will always be the same. I am often reminded of this lesson on warm spring and summer days, when I take the time to walk through vast open fields and come across a patch of flowers. When you lead a life as long as mine, nature becomes insignificant, but that changed for me a long time ago. When I see a glint of purple, I stumble and take a step back and I take a moment to truly admire my own beautiful creation: hyacinths. The sight of them makes me happy but they also reopen a wound I like to pretend I have long forgotten.

My story isn't happy or sad, it's hardly a story, it is a history that grows and changes over the millenia. Like any life there are happy parts and there are sad parts. There is tragedy and there is bliss. There is love and there is loss. This anecdote is just a part of my history, but this part is a tragedy. Some say you can call it a love story but really it is a tale of two fools and the one who got caught in the crossfire. It is the story of a kindhearted, gentle, clever boy and two gods who couldn't get over their own qualms for long enough to appreciate that. It is a tale of regret.

This story begins as many stories do: with a song. As far as my ballads go this one was quite drab, nothing memorable except for the fact that it came from the mouth of a god. A message from the divine. The song was nothing more than a second thought, It was just a pretty jumble of sounds hummed under my breath as I pushed my chariot through the sky. Over the years life has fallen into a routine, immortality doesn't cure boredom with day to day life, it doesn't give you the gift of contentment so, like anyone, you have to work through it.

Most days I basked in the morning glow, gazing down below to judge the day to day life of the silly mortals. That day was no different. It was in every sense of the word utterly normal, no better or worse than any day had ever been. The day was entirely unmemorable, so I continued my humming and intended to leave to continue my routine trek around the earth, that was at least the case until I saw him. The moment he caught my eye my tune stopped.

In my time many mortals had caught my sights. As anyone does I enjoyed a fun tumble from time to time, but he- he was different.

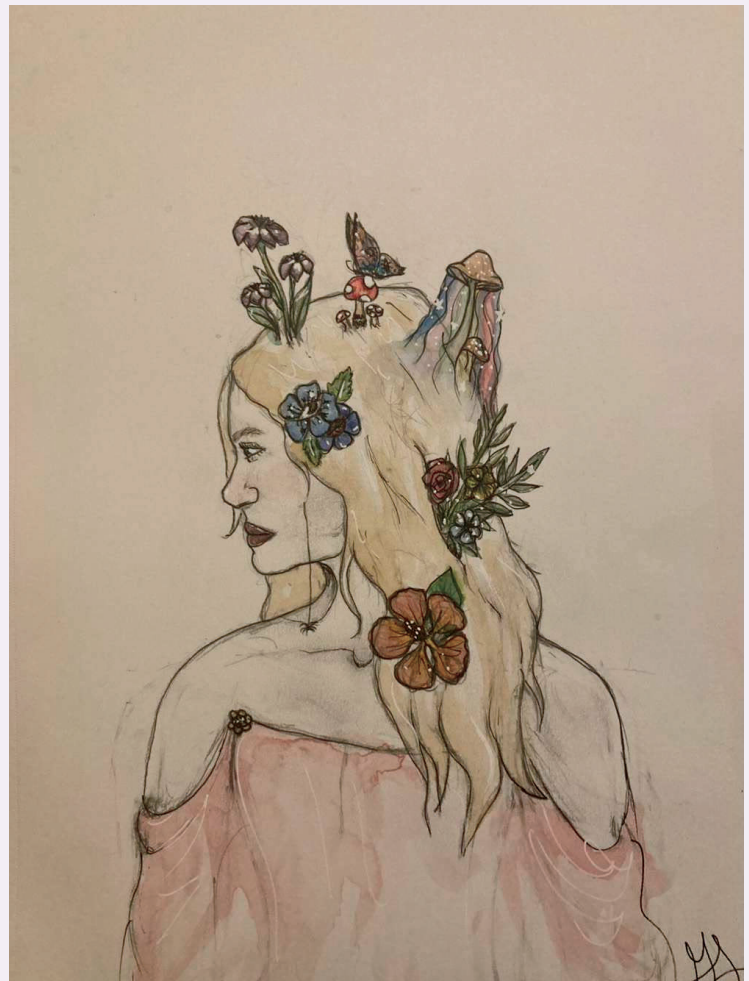
I later learned his name: Hycinthus, but I could have sung his praises through description alone. He was tall and well tanned, his brown curly hair blew through the wind as if it were strokes of paint on a labored over painting. He was muscular from years of harsh military training (he was spartan so that was to be expected). But none of that mattered, what really drew me in were his eyes. I know it's cliché but despite having the build and demeanor of a soldier, his eyes were something totally different, they were soft, and despite their piercing gaze, I could tell from the squint of his smile that there was a kindness behind them, a gentleness so rare to find in any living creature.

Almost in a trance I came down from my place above, I needed to talk to him, I knew it deep in my bones, I had to know this man. As I descended from the sky I was able to see more details of his looks: He was wearing a drab brown tunic, the old fabric a blemish on his otherwise ethereal beauty, he held himself with an air of uncertainty that gave him a sense of boyish charm. I didn't stop to think, I didn't stop to consider the fact that my attractions might not be reciprocated. All I knew was I needed to know this man.

ELEANOR SULLIVAN



GRACE LINDBERGH





ELEANOR SULLIVAN



ISABELLA INGALLS

MY NAME ISN'T

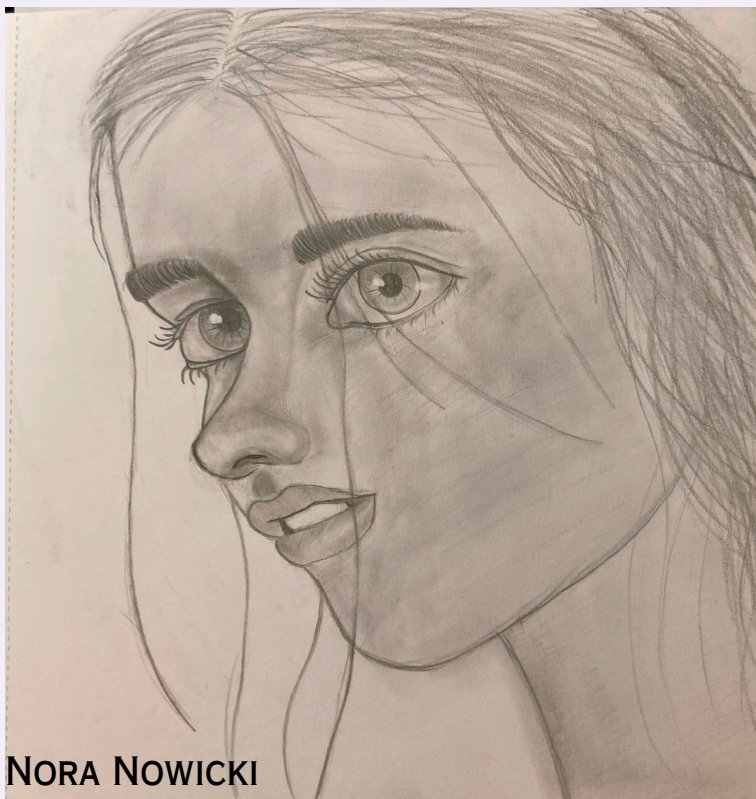
Hi my name isn't what you know
I know a shock upon every scale to be told a lie
That isn't a lie, a fib of safety but not for my own but yours
I am tired of the name that holds too much symbolism being butchered
Being hacked by accent
I am simple now
Easy to say
It doesn't matter
At this point I can't even say my own name
It carries baggage on my tongue that slows the syllables
And causes the flow to be stemmed
And paused so don't say my name
Not first not middle not last
Middle is simple but mother would say it was dramatic
Last is of a culture that has disconnected
Now I am simple, without culture, without drama
Without difficulty

ALE'ANA ORTIZ



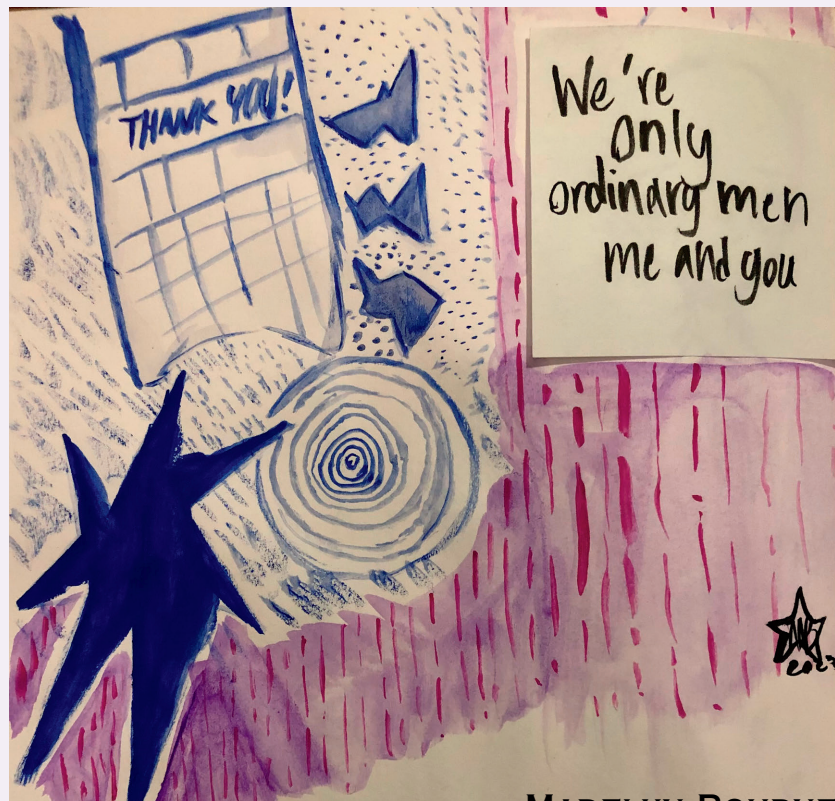
"I had become entranced by the movie within the first thirty minutes. It reminded me of all the movies my dad and I used to watch. We would stay up to ungodly hours on school nights just binge watching all our favorites after a long day. On weekends it would be just the two of us going on drives instead of movie nights. As soon as the sun went down it's like the world revolved around us, throwing the rest off balance while we remained in equilibrium."

SOPHIA MITCHELL





ISABELLA INGALLS



MADelyn BOURNE

VOICE

What is the point of my voice?

I can never speak and my words are as hollow as the cavern that Echo calls out of,
and everytime I try to talk they get caught in my throat
and well and swell to collect into the dried ball that has formed to the size of a to pierce and bleed me out
dry of my tears.

The gross ball of wet anger, of dried tears, of poisoned excitement, these cut off words that have had
their letters strung out in front of me, my words, the bodies of my fake family (their images of warmth
giving love when a human's heart is too cold)

Their bodies that have been laid over grayscale memories that over time have lost their sadness and
have become stale.

The time of their significance has passed and now it is too late for them to be honored.

Too late to be avenged

Too late to be impassioned

Too late to have been heard

Too late to makes sense

Too late to be alive.

I'm sorry teacher that I don't participate in class

I want to

But when everyone else turns right my answers all turn left and find a white rabbit leading me to a land
of wonder.

I am sorry teacher

That I think and speak in analogies while everyone else can get their ideas out in clear structures. Their
sentences and ideas are ordered in nice rows and columns, alphabetized while mine are not chronological
and jump from point to irrelevant point and graze the true concept in turn for every microexpression
given meaning that only I seem to have interest in.

I wanna talk

I wanna speak the way you all do

With eloquence with all words clear and crisp

No stuttering and fumbling

All words flowing from the tip of your tongue to the air in front you

So people may bask in their grace

Five dollar words of sophistication when I can barely afford a penny

Why can I not

Why do I run out of breath and turn red and

Have my throat still when asked a question

I do not wish to stare blankly

I wish to speak.

ALE'ANA ORTIZ

A lean fox dances in the pallid light of the moon
I disregarded the many patches of muddled fur
Ears fastened to the head with some bright pink sellotape
This cunning creature seems to have evaded my scrutiny
Tared at my senses
Blinded my eyes
Aesop should have warned me in his tales
This fox has no emotions
Just the moon and the fox

SOPHIA MITCHELL



ISABELLA INGALLS

PLACEHOLDER

There is an abundance of beings separate from humans that most of the human population is unaware of, some of them are, but they must keep their mouth shut under any and all circumstances regardless of the outcome of such actions. To keep those in the know not spreading they are routinely surveyed and dealt with in time.

The placeholder in human communities takes the form of the most common shape and looks of the community, for better chances of blending to said community depending on continent, language, race, age, gender, and etc. The amorphous shape of the placeholder provides the basic necessities and skills to perform their role in the community, these abilities have often been found to be present in the placeholder within 3-4 weeks of the placeholder's introduction to the community and will be closest to the average skill level of the area.

The placeholder can take the place of many people and they do not only fulfill the role of the average citizen, in many cases they are the servant, the murderer, the victim, the farmer, the stranger, the pedestrian. They are the placeholders of people who should be there but aren't for extenuating reasons, their minds are static devoid of consciously formed thoughts, their emotions are numb, the placeholder is not yet advanced enough to replicate complex human emotions and instead they are to attempt reflections of a human's feelings, there are measures taken to otherwise have them fit if this is not satisfactory, they exist in the unnoticed and unknown and they have no opinions of their own.

The vacuum of their presence can occur, for example as the lone stranger on a bench, an average coffee order, a one dead body on a statistic of thousands, a cleaner that goes behind the rush of everyone else to return everything to the way it was before, the kid that sits away from everyone else that an empathetic part of your brain says to talk to but then you decide against it. This is one of the many measures taken to ensure the secrecy of placeholders.

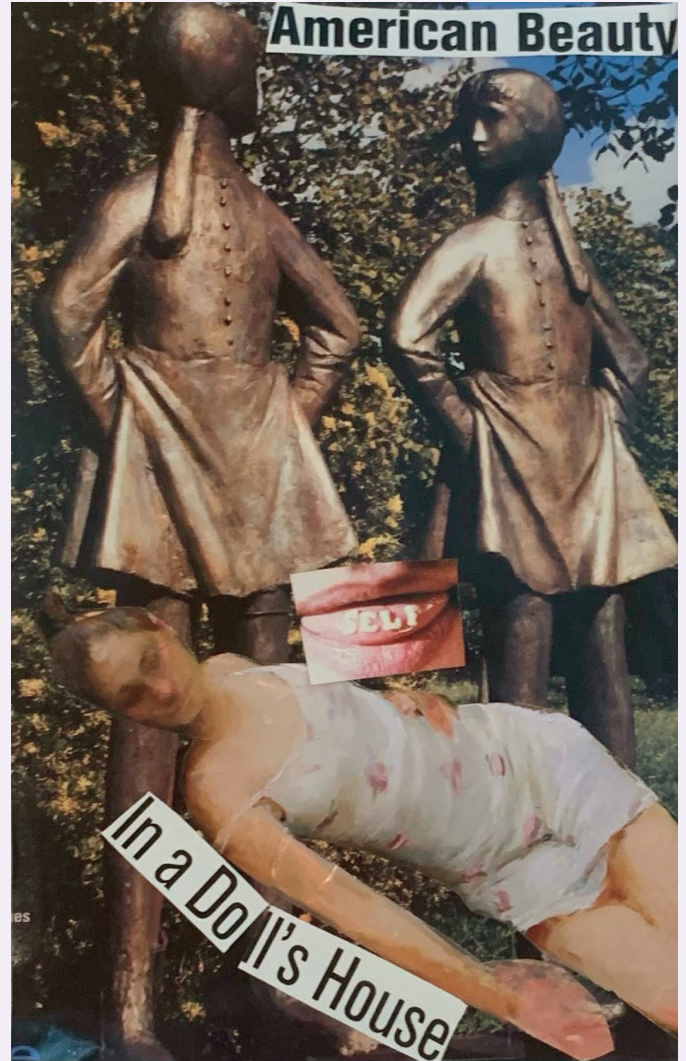
Humans on their own are too fragile and there are at times too little of them to function in a cohesive machine. They disgust too easily, break too easily, get driven to insanity at the drop of a body, which is why we have placeholders.

ALE'ANA ORTIZ

ELEANOR SULLIVAN



SOPHIA MITCHELL



Ow.

A flash and dash of pops dance into my head at the loud smiles and bright laughs that are created from the mocking of people and places with bodies of quiet laughs and loud looks and

Annoyances

AnNoYanCEs

ANNOYANCes.

So many annoyances of giggles and chuckles and snickers. While a brooding body stands in the corner, frowning and confused, sheltering and trying to drown the noise in snaps and claps, insults and reprimands, distracting from loud thoughts and quiet looks and stares, that linger so long that they burn ice cold.

So loud their laughs seem in the open land, spread before the people to echo in the air, the ears, and head, and bounce in the head. Their jumps marking the lines in the sand between the laughers of ramphy and the lone island with stakes protruding from the sand, the old messages that were there, hidden and forgotten. Landing on the point and coating them blue in their mockery.

Such loud ugly noises they have made.

ALE'ANA ORTIZ

The meadow was perfectly serene, if you ignored the boy bleeding to death by a tree.

He seemed to be fine, though.

Well, no. He was probably dying. He just looked peaceful doing it.

He lay amongst the wildflowers as the sun slipped away, looking out of place but somehow natural all at once. His eyes were closed and his breathing labored as a red river flowed from his chest.

Bumblebees danced casually around him, seemingly unaware of anything but their flowers. A soft breeze stirred the grass, and the birds gave one last call from the woods.

“What in the world...?” I whispered.

The boy was wearing strange metallic armor that I couldn’t seem to place, golden and glinting in the light. It must have been expensive, but its value was ruined by large slashes running the length of the chest plate. From my place behind a tree, I scanned the scene for whatever could have caused the mess, but the meadow was empty and undisturbed except for him.

I glanced back down the trail, wondering if anyone else would come along, but everything was quiet; no one would be out hiking this late except for me. There were too many bears — or at least, that’s what the locals thought.

I started to step forward, but then the boy attempted to move. He flinched and fell back against the tree trunk, his breathing growing faster, and his fists clenched in pain. I made up my mind then: I had to help him.

Slowly, I made my way towards the tall grass surrounding the area. Maybe I was misinterpreting this, but I wanted to be sure.

The boy’s face was hard to make out across the meadow, but I could tell he was running out of time. The flowers around him were starting to stain red, and the birdsong was falling silent. Night was on its way, and he wouldn’t survive it on his own.

He might not survive even if I helped him.

I hesitated before stepping out from the tall grass. I didn’t know him, and I didn’t want to be connected to this strange boy. But I couldn’t just leave him there.

“Hey,” I called, pushing through the wildflowers. He didn’t move, but one of his eyes opened, slitted through the pain. “Hey!” I repeated. “Are you okay? What happened?”

I reached him in four quick strides, catching him as he started to tip over. A sword covered in a strange golden material and a helmet lay next to him. “Who are you?” I whispered, crouching next to him.

To my surprise, he spoke. “An idiot,” he said in a hoarse voice, trying to crack a smile. “And probably a dead idiot, soon.” His hand fell from his chest, revealing a large, deep slash gushing blood. “See?”

He was delirious. Probably in shock. He needed a hospital.

“Oh my gosh. How did this happen?” I asked.

“Things,” he muttered, his speech slurred.

Which wasn’t helpful at all. I tried to remember what to do in such a situation.

“Pressure,” I said. “And bandages. I don’t have any bandages...” I looked down at my own T-shirt and decided to attempt to rip off a strip like they do in movies.

Unfortunately, I was not successful, and the boy was starting to lose consciousness. Then I spotted his sword, still drenched in that golden liquid. Without thinking, I grabbed it and turned my shirt into a crop top.

“Okay, I’m going to have to take off your armor,” I said as calmly as I could. I wasn’t exactly sure how to do it, and he didn’t seem to be in any state to help. I gingerly began turning him around, hoping to find a zipper or — well, something, anyway.

“The button,” he slurred.

“What button?” I asked. But then I saw a small, circular gemstone set into his chest plate, having barely avoided the large gash. I pressed it, and with a satisfying hiss the armor opened. (Which didn’t seem like something armor should be able to do, but at this point I just accepted it.)

As I tied the piece of cloth around the boy’s torso, he seemed to be losing consciousness. I was no medical professional, but I was pretty sure that wouldn’t be good. I shook him gently.

“Ow,” he complained in a too-loud voice. “You do realize that I’ve just survived a near-death experience?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I could tell from the huge wound.”

I looked up to see him watching me with a startling clarity. His eyes were mesmerizing — a stunning teal that gave way to a rich brown ring around the pupil.

“My name is Cato,” he said.

And then he passed out.

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