

Pauline Johnson Collegiate & Vocational School

Arts Magazine



The Shades of Life—2024

**Life isn't about finding yourself.
Life is about creating yourself.**

- George Bernard Shaw

Cover art by Hayden Mitchell

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A Garden of Shadows and Secrets

By Billie MacDonald-Moore

Once upon a time there was a goddess named Elena; she was the goddess of life. Elena had a very busy life. She had to help life evolve, help flowers grow, but her most important job was to attend meetings with other gods and goddesses to keep the peace... or at least try. Elena was a young goddess, around 20,021 years-of-age while most gods are in their 100 or even 200 thousand years. The other gods had very little trust if any at all towards her due to the act of the god before her. The gods and goddesses often compared her to the previous god of life, saying, "history is going to repeat itself," "No hope for that," and "Why even try, you're just like him." She had stayed calm, after hundreds of years of this pressure, and these words got easier to hear, but they still hurt to hear.

When Elena arrived at the enchanted museum, she felt the day was going to be different. She did not know if that was a good or bad feeling. She walked through the halls filled with extraordinary and beautiful art from the floor continuing to the ceiling. Elena had no time to look at the art for she was too worried about this feeling... this bad feeling? Sitting down at the table she stared into the distance trying to forget that feeling. She imagined herself sitting surrounded by flowers of all kinds, Azalea, Chrysanthemums, Hyacinth, Hydrangea, Lavender, Peony, Roses, any flower she could imagine. Her favorite was the Spider Lily.

She snapped back to reality when the god of the sun and the goddess of flowers sat next to her. They were the only people that treated her like she wasn't the old god of life. She smiled and waved to them. The goddess of flowers, Bloom, waved back smiling. Bloom started to ramble, "I am so excited for today!" Her voice was clear and happy toned.

"Hmm? Why, what's going on today?" Elena's voice, was shy and quiet.

"I don't know, but the elders say they have some exciting news!" Bloom exclaimed with a smile on her face.

"Everyone settle down," a powerful voice echoed across the room with soaring ceilings.

It was an elder, one Elena recognized but had never seen before. His words shattered her heart while others smiled and were overjoyed. He spoke, "the first point of business is dealing with—" he looked her up and down—"that. She will be exiled from the city."

"WHAT!!" Bloom cried out. "Why?! She did NOTHING wrong!"

Elena sat there in shocked silence.

"Enough! unless you want to join her..."

The god of the sun, Cyrus, pulled Elena into a hug, as Bloom fell silent.

"Good, now—" He looked Elena dead into her eyes; his eyes felt they were piercing her heart. "You will continue your work, but you will be exiled, and you shall only be in one place for eternity. You should be lucky we are letting you pick a place."

Elena stayed silent, not moving, her eyes slowly filling with tears.

"Well? Speak," he said in a sharp tone.

"Th-he gar-rden, pl-eas-e." Her voice was shaking along with her body, other gods snickering in the background.

He stared at Bloom and Cyrus. "You will walk her there then leave. Say your goodbyes. You may visit, but it is not in your best interest to do so after this day," the elder said with a cold tone, sending a shiver down Cyrus' spine.

After the meeting, Bloom threw the doors open in anger. Cyrus walked slowly with Elena, trying to comfort her. "Hey, hey, it's okay dear, take a deep breath."

Bloom walked beside Elena, holding her hand saying, "I will come visit you every day I promise. You can still do what you love, and we will come visit, right Cyrus?" He nodded.

Elena's mind was running, filling with questions.

“I don’t understand why you’re being punished; you didn’t make those things the past god of life did!” Cyrus said, almost shouting.

Her voice quiet, “Why,” she whispered. “Why did he make those? Those, Monsters!” she cried out.

Bloom’s face and voice softened. “I don’t know why he made those. What I do know is those monsters hurt a lot of people and animals.”

Elena looked down. “We’re here....”

Cyrus hugged Elena until she couldn't breathe. “I will visit you whenever I can.”

They watched her walk through the gate of the garden. The doors locked behind her, startling her. Elena stared into the garden. There was a part of it she had never been in... now she was stuck here she could check it out.

A voice broke the silence pulling her out of the trance of fear she was stuck in. She blinked back to reality.

“Bloom and I are going to get some supplies for you. We will be back in two to three hours, promise.” Cyrus’ voice was heavy, worried. Elena nodded.

After Bloom and Cyrus left, Elena sat down on a rock facing the mystery of what lay in the part she had not explored. To pass the time, Elena started to pick the flowers, slowly weaving them together to make a flower crown out of Azaleas while she stared at the darkness of the part of the garden. It seemed to grow. She wanted to, didn’t want to, needed to, check it out.

Elena stood. Walking to the edge, she felt drawn to go into the darkness. She tried to fight her curiosity. A voice! It was so calming. “Why do I know you?” Elena thought to herself. It sounded like a whisper in the wind at first, but it kept talking, quiet enough she could not understand what it was saying, trying to lure her into the darkness.

Why can she hear it...? She didn’t know. Where was it coming from...? Everywhere.

“Who are you!” Elena cried out, the voice hurting her head, “Where are you!?” She held her head in her hands, the voice calling again. It got worse and worse until Elena dropped to her knees, hunched over, her hands and arms trying to cover her ears. She looked up at the sky, as a figure form looking down at her reached out a hand.

Elena took the hand, timidly, her vision blurry due to the tears formed from the pain of that voice. That beautiful...? No, scary...? No, just that voice... Elena stood as the figure dragged her deeper into the darkness. Everything went dark. She woke with the figure standing before her.

“ELENA!? ELENA, WHERE ARE YOU?!” Bloom cried out trying to break the lock of the garden gate.

“Stand back Bloom,” Cyrus said as he tried to kick the gate, worried of where she was, scared something had happened. After a few tries, the gate finally broke, the lock fell to the ground and the gates opened. Bloom and Cyrus ran, search, yelled. Neither of them even went close to the darkness.

Little did they know the person they were searching for was watching them, from a place they dared not get close to.

“Who are they talking about?” a voice said no louder than a whisper. “Why are they yelling at her?” She tilted her head. A figure standing behind her placed a hand on ‘Elena’s’ shoulder. “Why are they so angry?” She covered her ears. The figure pulled her hands off her ears and that voice came back, hurting her head. ‘Elena’ shook her head, her tears forming.

After her head felt better, she went back to watching, staring at them. “Who are they...?” Cyrus yelled, getting close to the darkness. His face looked disoriented through ‘Elena’s’ eyes.

Bloom grabbed his arm, pulling him away from the dark, ‘Elena’ reached out to them but hesitated, placing her hand beside her head tilted down. The last time. The last time she would see them. Who are they...? Why do I know them...? Why do I care about them...? Who are they...?! she thinks to herself. The figure stands tall behind her. Who are they!? she thinks. Her body shakes as she drops to her knees.

Bloom and Cyrus walk away... forever.



By Anabelle Woodard



By Keira Dubecky

Laurier-Stedman Prize — PJCVS Contestant

Escape

By **Kayleigh McDonald**

Rosalie was tired of the carriage. The horse ahead of her had proven many times that it had no regard for her comfort, she was sore and annoyed, and the autumn breeze sent a shiver through her. She had shed her hat ages ago and dawned a shawl to protect her arms from the cold she was not so used to in her London home. Despite her protest, her mother and father had shipped her off to Coventry whilst they were away on business. Rosalie had dared to question her parents' wits. The mere thought of having to live with her grandfather was demented, especially because the whole family knew that he was as mad as a March hare. The excursion was luckily ending, which was fantastic news because Rosalie Madden was one jolt away from opening the carriage door and launching herself onto the road. Being trampled by horses and dragged through the mud sounded better than a month with her grandfather.

Coventry's town centre bustled with noise, windows were open, women hung linens over the sills, shouting across the road at children playing ball too close to the carriages. Grandfather's house was at the top of a hill; it looked over the small city. The house was large with a dim exterior that had fallen into disrepair. The gate was rusted and creaked when it opened allowing the coach to pass through. She was appreciative when the wheels rolled to a halt, and the carriage door opened. She found herself scoffing upon realizing that not a soul had come to fetch her. The coachman, being as helpful as he was able, helped Rosalie fetch her bags, and carried them up to the door before bidding her farewell. Her travelling boots clicked upon the marble floor as she entered, shutting the old creaky door behind her. She heaved, tossing her baggage to the side.

"Grandfather!" she called out, with no answer. It seemed to Rosalie that every person in the old mansion had gone off and hidden from her. Annoyed, she picked up her main bag and began to climb the grand staircase. At the top of the stairs, there was a long hall, chandeliers hung above her head, and a rich navy carpet lined the hardwood floors. Rosalie noticed that each door she passed remained closed and silent until she reached the one at the end of the hall. She could already see the lamp lit from where she stood. Coming from the room was what sounded like a hum. The voice was low, but not low enough to be her grandfather's. It was a joyous voice, youthful even. With all the pride in the world and zero regard for privacy, Rosalie Madden stopped at the door and cleared her throat loudly in an attempt to gain the attention of the gentleman who sat at a wooden desk with papers thrown in each direction. With his back to her, all she could hear was the aggressive keys of the typewriter, and the annoyed groans the boy made.

"Hello?" she spoke shyly, realizing that clearing her throat had done nothing to release the boy from his trance.

"No! Mrs. Harris, I would not like some tea! Please stop disturbing me," the boy irritably shouted, whipping his head around to face the door.

A wash of embarrassment spread across his freckled face. "You're not Mrs. —" he realized, growing red.

"I'm not," the girl agreed. She had not suffered all morning for such a lack of welcome. The boy stood from his chair, he was tall, and lean, with dishevelled dark hair that fell into his tired hazel eyes. He stood with poor posture; Rosalie could imagine her father whipping him in the back to encourage him to stand straight.

"Are you the Master's granddaughter?" the boy asked, examining her, taking note of the dirty blond curls that fell loose from their intricate style, or the furrowed brow plastered on her porcelain face. She almost laughed at the idea that anyone could consider her old fool of a grandfather anyone's "master."

"Rosalie Madden, and I would be pleased to know where it is I will be staying if you wouldn't mind."

The boy chuckled.

...

“I’m Edwin,” he introduced, as he gathered all his papers and threw his waistcoat on that had been hanging over his chair. “I’m an apprentice. Mr. Madden’s apprentice,” he explained, ushering Rosalie out the door and back into the hallway.

“Apprentice for what?” she asked, confused.

“Well literature, of course, I want to be a writer,” he answered joyfully, taking her bag from her hand.

Rosalie’s grandfather was the founder of Madden Typewriting. He had started as a young gentleman and made a fortune. He had been a lover of novels, and he had written a few popularized ones himself. It was not until later that he went crazy, spewing all kinds of crazy ideas about alternate worlds and magic to anyone who would listen. Rosalie believed that it was his money that kept him so well respected. Otherwise, her whole family would have thrown him into an institution long ago.

“This is your room. If you need anything, you know where I am. I believe you will have a fantastic stay here,” Edwin told her. He dropped her bag in front of a large, ornate, wood door.

“And why is that,” she asked, unimpressed by his enthusiasm.

“This place is full of wonder if you only know where to look,” he answered, as if it had been painstakingly obvious.

“It is just a house, an old and dingy house at that,” she argued, wondering if he was mad as well.

The boy laughed. “If you’d like to see for yourself, I invite you to explore the master’s library with me. You might just be surprised.” He grinned widely.

Rosalie could see this sort of bewilderment in his eyes. He was loony.

“I think I shall pass; I would prefer my mind not be polluted with daft ideas from my grandfather’s poorly written, cast-away novels or his deranged tall tales.”

Shocked, Edwin’s eyes widened. “Stories can take us anywhere, you know, and pardon my manners, but you seem like this life isn’t giving you anything astonishing.”

Shocked by his forwardness, she scoffed, “And you think that library will?” He smiled before bowing his head and heading off back the way he came.

Dreading to admit it, Rosalie’s days *were* less than astonishing. The only thing that filled her hours was her needlework and the dreadful sound of Edwin clicking away at typewriter keys in every room she entered. Agitated and longing for escape, Rosalie thought, surely, she could not go mad like the rest of those she surrounded herself with. Admittedly, she was curious as to why Edwin thought too highly of her grandfather and his works.

Quietly, once the rest of the house had gone to sleep, Rosalie crawled out of bed and into the hallway. She carried an oil lamp down the hall into the east wing of the house where her grandfather’s study and personal library were. Years ago, William Madden proposed the idea that the concept of escapism through novelization was more than just words on a page, as readers could enter other worlds, transport into stories of enchanting and impossible ideas. Everyone laughed, and reasonably so. Nobody was ever going to look at paper and be anywhere but where they were sitting. It seemed to Rosalie that this idea was what Edwin was implying when he spoke of wonder.

The door to her grandfather’s office was different than the rest. It had vines and florals etched into the wood, and the handle was golden and cold to the touch. Hesitantly, she turned it with a creak. Rosalie was not sure what she was expecting to see, but it was not a massive room lined wall-to-wall with novels. She was not sure where in the mansion this room resided. A space this big had to be seen from outside, but she had never seen it. Every novel had gilded edges and seemed to glow with a lust that made you want to go and reach for it. Upon closer inspection, Rosalie realized that written along every spine, was the name William Madden. This was his life work, the work Edwin idolized so much, hidden behind typewriters and closed doors.

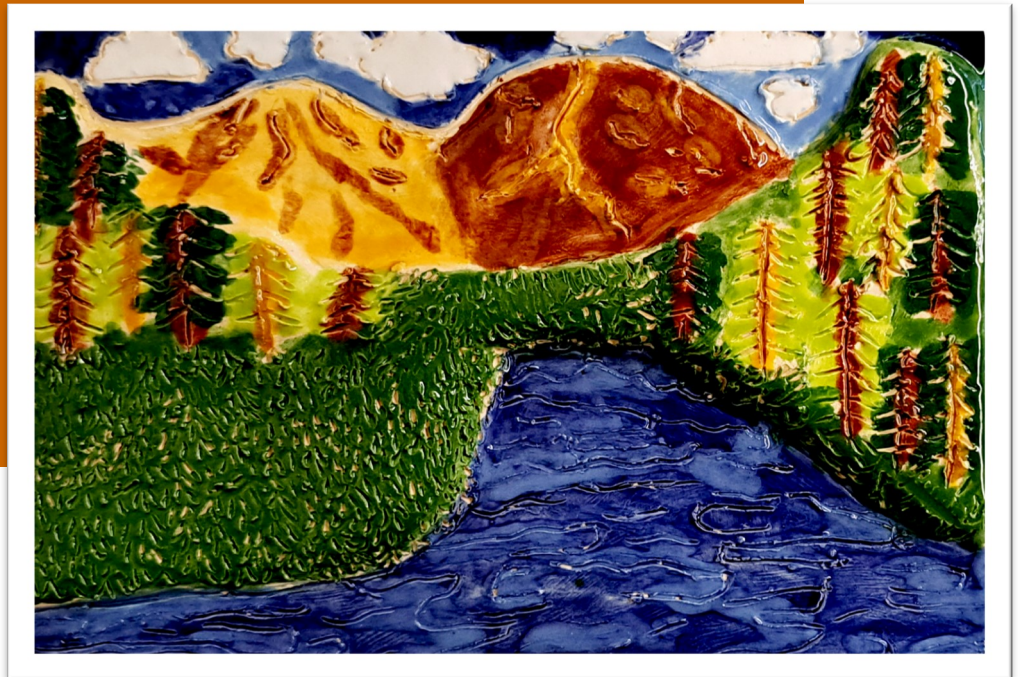
Hesitantly Rosalie reached for a novel; it was bluish and seemed to buzz. Gold sprayed the edges of the old pages, a voice inside her urged her to open it, and she did. Before Rosalie could understand what was happening, a light burst from the pages, engulfing the stillness of the room, a saltwater breeze washed over her, and she realized that she was not in Coventry anymore.

“Are you alright, princess?” a voice called. She turned to see a glittering beach and a familiar, dark-haired, freckled boy standing against the morning, the sun reflecting off silver armour.

“Pardon me?”



By Ashlynn Hess



By Donovyn LaForme-Smoke

Heading Home

By Kaydence Lickers

Growing up, my family worked and lived on many farms. My mom was a tobacco worker while my dad looked after us. Around 25, he had a heart attack and couldn't work so it had to be my mom who supported us financially. When I was in grade school we moved to the city. I was a very nervous and shy kid who didn't make friends easily (unless you were a cow or my siblings). I had two brothers, Brian and Rick, and then two sisters, Luann and Bev. Luann and I were the closest, but I loved them all the same and they all encouraged me to try and make at least one friend in our new home. That is where I found my Edward.

I walked into class and there he was, making the class laugh over something he had said. When we locked eyes, I knew he was going to be my one friend. By the time the day was over, we were best friends walking home together.

"So- new girl, where are you from?" He made sure to extend the 'so' to make me laugh.

"A whole bunch of different places, but to sum it up, the countryside. My mom was a tobacco worker, so we lived on whatever farms we worked on. What about you? Have you lived here your whole life?"

"Kind of. My siblings and I went to the mushhole for a while, but after that and my mom dying, I've lived here and went to school here."

"The mushhole? What the heck is that?"

"The Indian school? I am an Indian you know?"

"I figured that, but I didn't know the schools were called that."

"Not all the schools, just the one we went to"

"Oh"

"It's okay though, I've made peace with my past. Well, this is my stop, New Girl. See you tomorrow?"

"See you tomorrow. My name is Marie in case you were wondering."

"Edward. Bye Marie." I didn't realize it then, but in that moment my future was carved.

—Ten years later—

It wasn't long after that walk home that Edward and I confessed our feelings for each other. My parents weren't happy with our relationship at first because Edward was a "no-good Indian." But after they got to know him, they realized their faults and that not all Indians are bad. Every Friday night he would come over and play me songs off my father's guitar and watch hockey.

This tradition continued throughout our lives. He even began to play for more than just me. That wasn't our only tradition. Every Sunday after church, we would take all eleven of Edward's siblings and we would visit all their elders. Aunt Bert and Aunt Ada were always their favorites. Edward loved his family so we always made it a point to take them everywhere we went. He was beaming when I told him he was going to be a father.

September 9th, 1969, Edward and I vowed our lives together and it wasn't long after we had our first kid. Tammy was born November 17th, 1971. Edward was over the moon and showed her off to everyone he knew. So, when Wendy was born three years later, he was the happiest man alive. We went to all their school events, sports games and supported them in anything they wanted to try. My favorite memories came from our annual camping trips. Edward's brother worked at a carnival so every August the whole family would reserve camping grounds at the campsite down the way from the carnival, to spend time together and relax. It was the biggest event of the year, as everyone and their neighbor showed up. But life goes on and the fun never lasts. Our family was no different.

Edward got sick and was in the hospital for five months before he lost his battle in February 2013. I was so devastated about his passing, but I knew he wouldn't want me to stop my life. So, I kept going. I continued to provide daycare for the families Edward and I cared for. I even kept watching hockey in secret as my family thinks I hated the sport, but it reminds me of him. I think I was more upset with how the family reacted. Instead of pulling together to be there for one another, they all drifted away and stopped coming together. Our two girls could never get along and all the traditions came to a stop. I was so full of grief that I started to forget the simplest of things. I would go for a walk to the store and forget my home. I would never remember where I kept my purse, and I hate to admit it, but I probably forgot to feed the dog breakfast a couple times.

With Edward not there I spent my free time knitting blankets to keep me warm, and I started writing this story so our grandchildren will never forget about the amazing man Edward was. Plus, I will always be able to look back on all our great times. I truly hope Edward knows the huge impact he left on the world and all the souls he touched. He made, not just my life, but the world a better place and his mom is very lucky to have him up in heaven. I cannot wait to be reunited with my one true friend.

“The end. Did you like the story, Grandma?”

“Mhm, it sounds familiar. I'm sorry but do I know you? I am waiting for my husband. He should be here any minute now.”

“It's me grandma, Alex. Grandpa isn't coming. He died twelve years ago, remember, and that story sounds familiar because it's your story.”

“I'm not sure what you are talking about dear. Edward said he was on his way to take me home. I would like to go home now.”

“Marie this is your home. It has been for a long time now.”

“I'm thirsty, could you be a sweetheart and fetch me some water?”

“Yes Grandma, I'll be right back, don't go anywhere!” I trudge down to the nurse's station to grab her water. She's been talking about Grandpa and going home for a while now, but the reality is she can't go anywhere. The disease has progressed so far, she is bed bound. I make sure to come visit her at least once a week as she doesn't have much time left and barely anyone in the family has the heart to come visit. I walk back into the room after taking a big breath to find her staring blankly at the ceiling.

“Grandma, you okay?” No response.

“Marie?” Nothing. I put the water down on her table and put my two fingers against her neck. Nothing. No pulse, no shallow, wheezy breaths, nothing.

“Oh Grandma. It's okay now. You go home, we'll be okay.” I kiss her forehead and walk back to the nurse's station to let them know.

“Hey Janet, she's gone.”

“What? I just walked past her room like ten minutes ago and she was telling me how she was heading home.”

“She asked me to get her water and when I came back, she wasn't responding and had no pulse. I already said my goodbyes so you can do what you need to do. The time was 17:55 when I checked her pulse.”

“I am so sorry Alex. I know you and your grandma were close.”

“We knew this day was coming. It sucks I have to be the one to tell the family though.”

“Do you want to stay for a bit and pack her things now, so you won't have to come back?”

“No thank you. I'm heading home.”

A Father's Heartfelt Adventure for His Daughter

By Dee Peterson

Journal Entry: May 28th

"Lyla, it has been two years since you died my love, and our daughter Rebekah is still taking your death hard. I will find the Lifebloomwarner River for our daughter. It is a magical place that helps people who have lost someone they have loved in their life and makes it easier for those to continue living without their loved ones. I will do anything for our daughter, even if it means I must search for the magic river," I said.

The way to the river is a little bit dangerous. It is surrounded by a dark and mysterious forest, near an old town that is said to be guarded by monsters. Before I set off to find the magical river, Rebekah gives me a big hug and goes inside.

"Dylan, be careful on your journey" says Willow, sister of Lyla, "and may Viperix protect you along the way." Willow will be taking care of Rebekah for me as I embark on this adventure for our daughter.

"Thank you, Willow, for watching Rebekah for me," I say.

"Dad here is a good luck charm," Rebekah says, as she hands me a green, red, yellow, and blue heart charm.

"Thank you, sweetheart," I say as I take the charm from her.

As I head out on my adventure towards the old town where the magical river is hopefully near, I wonder to myself how long this journey might last. The journey was not an easy task. A lot of bumps in the road and harsh weather at random times made this trek almost unbearable.

After several months of worrying weather and agonizing walking, I finally find the old town nestled beside a steep hill. As I cautiously walk into town, I notice that the town looks abandoned. While looking for any sign of life, I hear a horse running in my direction.

"Hello human," said the headless horseman as he rode his horse close to me.

"Oh — uh — hi," I said nervously, thinking the headless horseman was like the grim reaper, who might kill anyone who he meets.

"You come here to look for the Lifebloomwarner River? Would you like me to help you there?" he asks through his neck.

I was surprised this headless horseman wanted to help me find what I was looking for, but I accepted his help, thinking that without it, I may never find this river.

"I'm a little confused about why you want to help me," I said to the horseman. "I thought you were going to kill anyone you met," I said carefully, but in a polite tone.

"Viperix, God of dragons, said that I am to help anyone who is looking for the Lifebloomwarner River," he said as he turned around to lead the way.

"Ok," I said as I followed him to the river.

As we got to the river The Headless Horseman said, "You can only come here one time and you can only take a cup of river water with you."

"OK, I was planning to take only a cup with me," I said.

I took a small water bottle the size of a cup out of my bag, and I filled the bottle from the river. I went home to my daughter who was happy to see me back and ran to hug me.

As I hug Rebekah, Willow puts a hand on my shoulder and asks, "How was your adventure, Dylan?"

"It went well, I am just happy to be back home now," I say.

...

“Dad, it's good to have you back home now, I missed you so much,” Rebekah says as I hug her.

“I missed you too, sweetheart,” I say. Rebekah seems more like herself again and then I realized that I didn't need to go find the Lifebloomwarner River. It takes time to be yourself after big things happen to you, like losing someone dear to you.

“Looks like you went on that adventure for nothing,” Willow said.

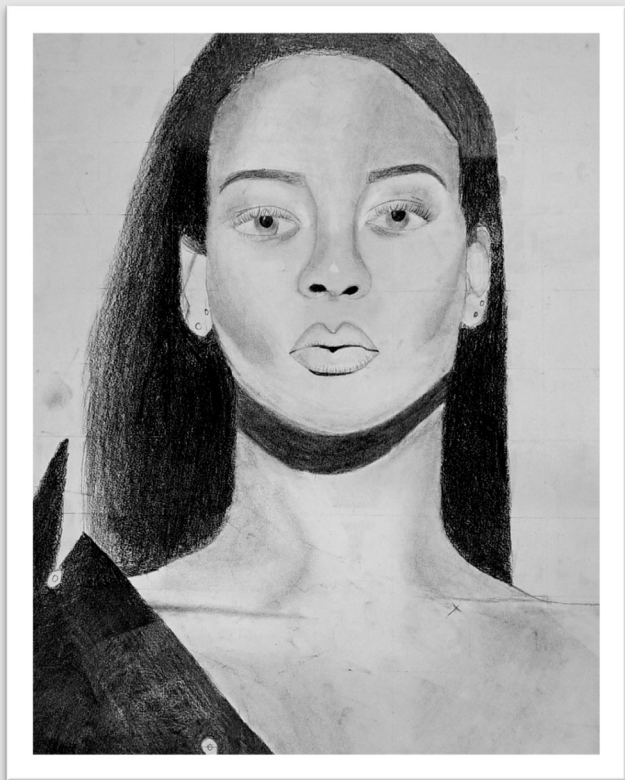
I sigh. “It seems you are right Willow.”



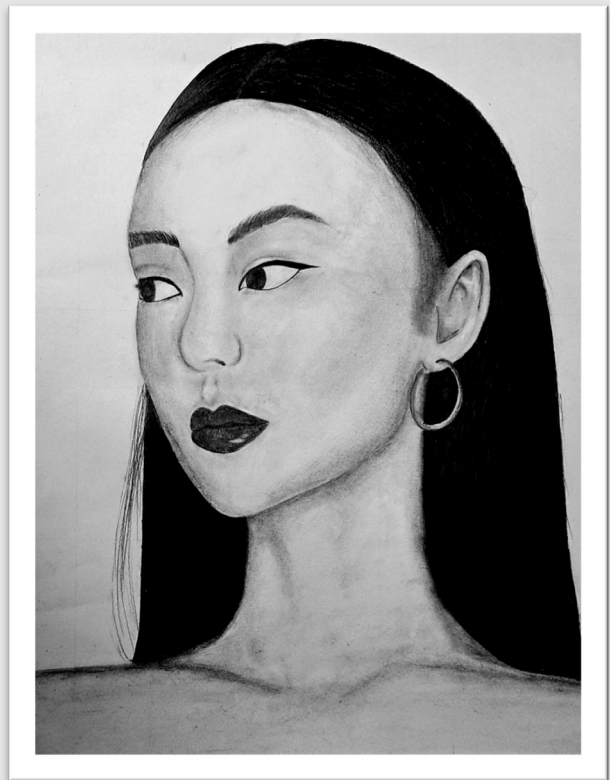
By Kaitlin McKenzie



By Bonham Newton-Brennan



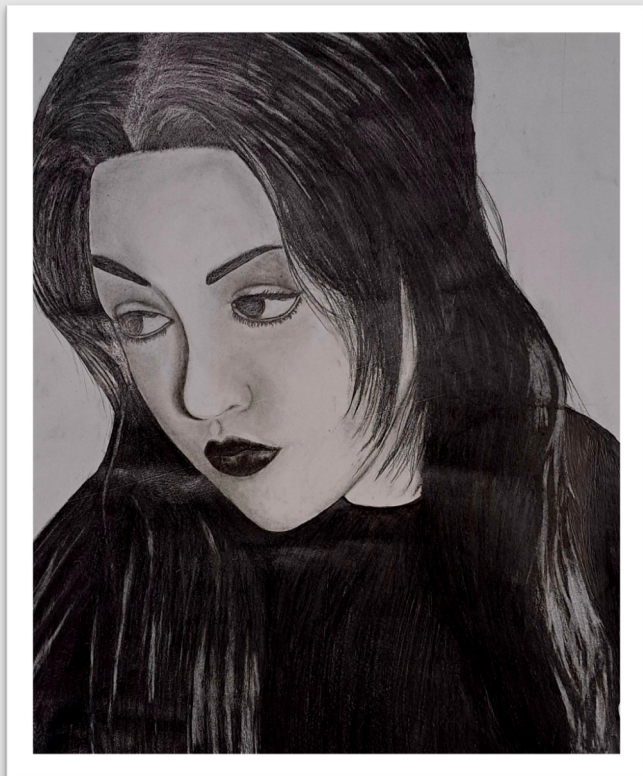
By Ashlynn Hess



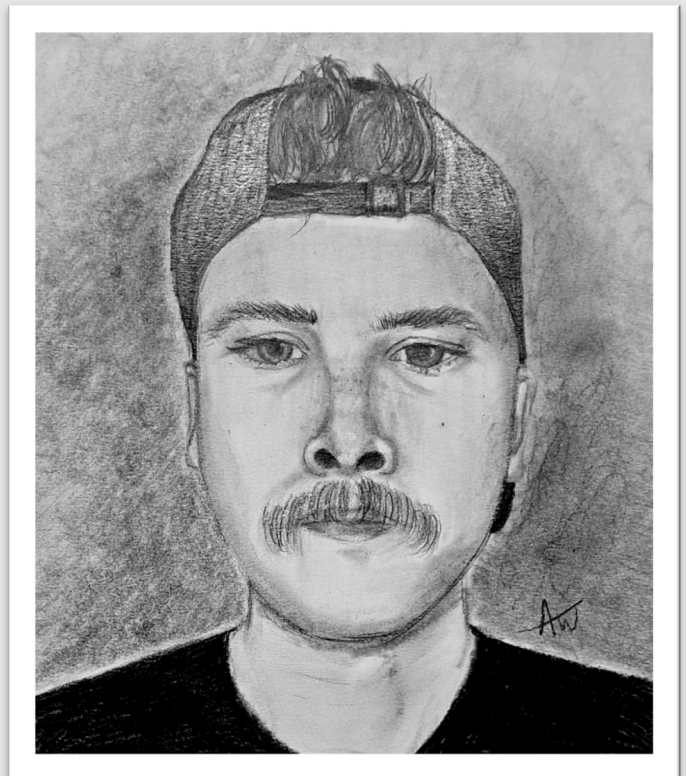
By Keira Dubecky

A close-up can say all a song can.

- Stephen Sondheim



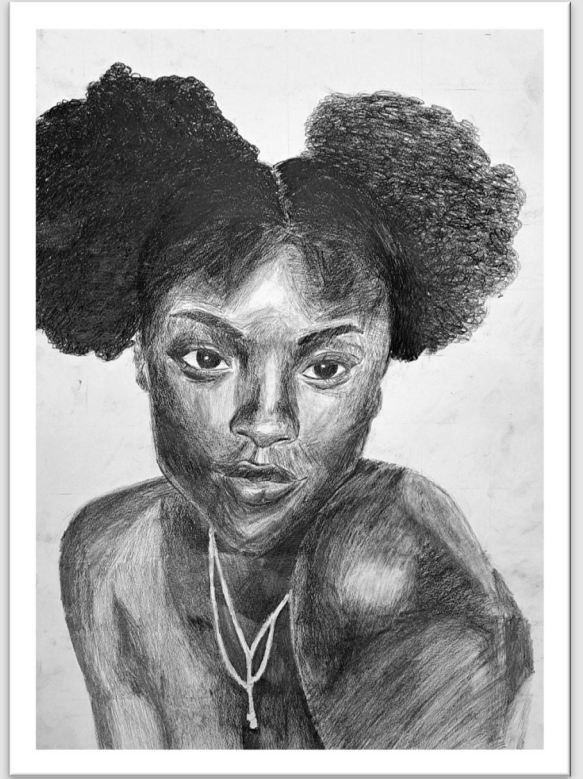
By Keira Dubecky



By Anabelle Woodard



By Taqwa Taslim



By Rama Adesokan



By Michael Bailey



By Raya Woods

Fate

By Gabriella Garant

The thought of love never crossed Laura's mind. She was one of those teenagers that always had to have high grades, could never be late, or skip school. When she missed even a day of school, she had so much anxiety throughout the whole time she would have been there and felt guilty about not going that day. What Laura did not know was that she was going to meet a guy and her whole life would change because of him. Now let us start this story from where everything started off.

When Laura walked into her Grade 9 math class she saw him, the guy who would alter her life. She did not think much of it though, because she was with a guy who she thought would be the one. Then a couple of months went by, and Grade 10 math class came around and there he was, the same guy from her Grade 9 one. He was just sitting there and since she was now out of her past relationship, she asked around about him. Laura found out that he was not a good person, so she stopped trying.

Multiple months later though, she saw the guy in her friend's story who she has been pining after since her Grade 9 math class. At this point, it was like fate, so she broke her number one rule, took her shot and added him. This is when the anticipation began, waiting for Snapchat to give her that notification that he added her back. Days passed and Laura just wanted to give up, but she did not. Which was the best thing she could have ever done because he added her back. He snapped her first by making small talk.

"Hey," he texted.

"Hi," she texted back.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen, what about you?"

"Sixteen, seventeen in June. What classes are you taking?"

Science, history, gym, and green industries. How about you?"

"Nice. I have English, science, welding, and construction."

"Thats cool!"

"Yea"

"What are you planning on doing for your future job?"

"I was thinking about construction, but I really do not know yet. How about you?"

"Construction interesting, never pegged you as the type to do construction lol. I have not actually decided yet. Still choosing between photography and hairstyling."

"Yea, I do not know just an idea, I guess. Those are both fairly good options."

"Yea."

Then the conversation ended, and they were just sending pictures back and forth to each other. This went on until March. Little conversations would happen and then they would start snapping face pictures until one day Laura decided she wanted to be bold and ask him if he would like to hangout.

"Hey," she texted.

"Hey what's up?" he texted back.

"Nothing much just watching Netflix. What about you?"

"Same, what are you watching?"

"Suits, how about you?"

"Nice that's a pretty good show and Outerbanks."

"I love Outerbanks. I wanted to ask you a question."

“Go for it.”

“Well, I was wondering if you wanted to hang out at school during lunch?”

“Sure. We can meet by the front doors?”

“Yea I am good with that.”

They spent time together that next day during lunch for a solid 20 minutes. It was extremely weird and made things awkward with them, which made them fall into an unfortunate phase where things became unnatural for them. He stopped answering her quickly. If Laura tried to start a conversation, he quickly shut it down. So, she just stopped trying with him and moved on with her life. Which was hard to do for her because she liked this kid a lot and was hoping that he would have been the one.

June came around and he snapped her, no words, just a picture of his face. Things did not seem unusual, but he seemed out of it. Laura felt bad and asked him what was up. He explained that he and his friends got into an argument, but he did not go into much detail. She tried to be there for him the best she could. Laura had so many questions for him, but just left it alone. Laura decided it was best to change the topic, so she asked him about how he had been doing and what he had been up to since they stopped talking. A couple of days went by, and she decided to ask what happened.

“Hi,” she texted.

“Hey,” he texted back.

“You don’t have to tell me, but I was wondering what happened that night?”

“The night of my birthday? Well, basically my friends threw me a party, things got out of hand, and this girl that I had a thing with I guess confronted me about talking to other girls. Which was wild because I was not seeing anyone else, we were not exclusive or anything, and she was seeing other guys. I got mad, it turned into this whole big thing, and I left.”

“I am so sorry. She had no right to accuse you of something like that without knowing if it was true or not.”

“It’s whatever.”

Weeks went on and they kept getting closer and closer. They started facetimeing, having genuine conversations, they even tried hanging out a couple of times. It just never worked out though.

August came around and they finally got to hangout. It was awkward at first and he did not think she would show up, but they both had an amazing time. It was like they had been friends for years, though they were not friends because that day he kissed her. That following weekend they hung out again and she was extremely nervous. They were in his room, and he just spontaneously asked her out. She obviously said yes but just never expected it considering they had only hung out twice. Months went by and things were going great. Until suddenly, Laura’s friend came up to her at school and told her that he was cheating on her.

“What do you mean he cheated on me?” Laura asked, confused.

“Well one of my friends told me that he texted her friend, Mariana, and asked if they wanted to meet up.”

“Is there any proof to this?”

“No, she didn’t get any.”

“Then I don’t believe you.”

After that conversation she walked away and called her boyfriend because she wanted the truth and trusted that he would give it to her. Which he did. She called him crying, explained to him what just happened, and he told her it never happened. Plus, Laura went home and investigated this girl and she did not even exist. Things just went back to normal, and they proceeded to just live their lives.

Years have gone by now, they are engaged, and have one little boy named Zah—the nickname her fiancé had growing up. They are happier than ever, and she is living with him at his dad's house until she has finished her last year of college. Laura is so incredibly grateful that he came into her life because she honestly did not think she would make it to this point in her life, so she thanks him every day for it.



By Dana Blackman



By Alex Green



By Eliesha Watson



By Hayden Mitchell

Drive Me Home

By Sara Conway

It was cold. The pure white snow drifted down from the dark sky. It would have been a beautiful night for stargazing, but unfortunately, the stars were hidden by the bright city lights. The area smelled like fresh, sweet bread due to Mr. Mojo's bakery doors which had been wide open awaiting hungry customers. About three small buildings down, was Titan Tavern, the largest bar in town. The massive building had color-changing LED signs and a large door with a silver frame. The inside of the bar had matching LEDs with the sign outside, but these ones were set to pink and blue.

At the counter, with his face buried in his arms, was DS, drunk, tired, and completely out of it. He spent the night drowning out his negative thoughts with alcohol despite knowing these thoughts would return in the morning. The bartender approached him and tapped the table.

"Hey, DS, I hate to kick you out but we're closing buddy," he said softly. DS grunted and lifted his head.

"Don't worry about it. I understand," DS replied.

He forced himself to stand up and dragged himself out of the building. Once outside, he began to dig through his pockets for his keys. He never tried to drive while intoxicated, but his head was not in the right place. DS lightly grabbed the handle of his shiny black and pink car only to feel a familiar hand on top of his. He looked to see who would be grabbing his hand out of nowhere. It was a close friend of his, Marble.

"What're you doing?" Marble asked while raising an eyebrow.

"Marbz? What are you doing here mate?" DS questioned, trying to dodge Marble's concerns.

"You left at around six and its now midnight. Saber told me you were drinking, and I assumed you would need a ride home. I didn't wait for you to call because you are as stubborn as a mule when you're drunk," Marble replied while crossing his arms. "You weren't going to drive home like this were you?"

DS stumbled over his own words in an attempt to come up with some lame excuse. His voice was slurred, and he was a little dizzy but he tried to keep it together. "I— I haven't drank that much. I figured it would be fine."

"You saying that proves to me you have been drinking more than usual. You normally understand how easily that can cause you or someone else to get hurt. I'm a little disappointed DS," Marble explained with a sad look in his beautiful amber eyes.

DS looked down and scratched the back of his head, feeling a tad guilty. He was not thinking. He did not know what to tell Marble, so he just let out a sigh and nodded. Marble could tell something was off with DS, especially since even though DS typically was a heavy drinker he never got himself so tipsy he could not even think straight. However, Marble did feel lucky for how easy it was to communicate with DS. His eyes scanned the area and swiftly rested upon Mr. Mojo's.

"Hey, would you like to go to Mojo's before I drive you home?" Marble asked.

DS shifted his attention to the lovely bakery and nodded. He loved Mojo's, so it might help to lift his spirits. He turned his gaze back to his friend and nodded.

"That sounds really nice actually, sure."

Marble smiled and took DS's arm. The two went inside and the smell of cookies, sweetbread, cupcakes, and more baked goods became somewhat overwhelming. DS purchased two cupcakes and Marble bought two dozen donuts of assorted flavors since he and DS had a large home with many roommates. The two quickly trotted back to DS's car, DS stumbling quite a few times due to the alcohol on the way there. This time Marble slid into the hot pink leather driver's seat. DS sat next to him in the front and placed Marble's donuts in the back. They were going to come back for Marble's car in the morning since it was less likely to get stolen. The hum of the car started, and the lights came on, The two were now safely on their way home. ...

“So... What’s wrong?” Marble asked while peeking over to DS.

“Nothing,” he replied, sounding very muffled with a mouth full of icing and chocolate.

“We know something has been bothering you DS. Saber, Me, Eodum, Livz, we’re all worried about you. You haven’t been yourself. If you need to talk about it, I am always here. If it’s too much to say, then I understand. I just want you to know how much we love you,” Marble explained with a concerned tone.

“Yeah, I guess it could help. It’s difficult, I don’t even know where to start. I don’t think you’ll understand.”

“Start from the middle, the end, the beginning, anywhere, and if I don’t understand I will still try my best. I will always be here to listen.”

“Okay... I just miss them. And I blame myself for what happened. I feel like if I had done something different, they would still be here. All of them. I miss them, Marble. It breaks my heart more and more every day to wake up knowing I’ll never see their faces again. I try to make myself feel better but it’s only ever temporary. Sometimes I can’t help but wonder, what would they think if they saw their father like this? A sad, drunk, loser. I’ve always been such a lousy parent,” DS explained, not even realizing the glistening tears that ran from his cheeks, falling into his lap.

Marble tried to focus on the road while he spoke. When he stopped, Marble gave him a troubled look. “You were never a lousy father. They loved you with all their hearts. It’s not your fault and it never was. It was an accident. I can only imagine the pain in your heart, the tears you’ve shed. I’m so sorry for your loss and despite never experiencing the loss of a child myself I know one thing for sure, you are not going to find the answer at the bottom of a bottle. I know you can never just move on from this, but it may help to get these things off your chest more. Having a few drinks is fine but bottling up your feelings and then trying to forget them with another bottle is only a temporary solution.” Marble attempted to give his input as best as possible. Of course he did not have a problem with people drinking, but if it got to the point where it may cause someone harm, he felt he must put his foot down.

DS nodded to what he said and wiped his eyes. “Yeah. I guess so. It just becomes increasingly difficult every day to live with it.”

“I can imagine. But please, if you need help don’t be afraid to reach out no matter who it is, me, Eodum, Saber, anyone. We care about you. Even if we don’t know what to say, it might help to just let it out, right? Just as well, if you decide to drink until you can barely stand, please call me so I can drive you home,” Marble said and looked at DS with a dorky half-smile.

DS chuckled and nodded. “Yeah. I’ll do that. You know, Marble,” he was interrupted by a yawn and slumped into his seat so that his head was resting on Marble’s lap.

“Yes DS?” Marble replied curiously.

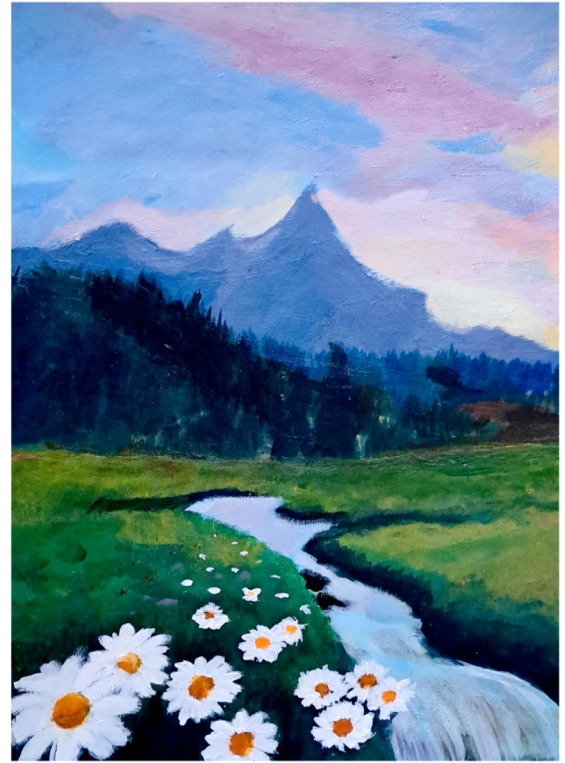
“I love you.”



By Stephanie Hazlett



By Shae Gale



By Rama Adesokan



By Raya Woods

Laurier-Stedman Prize — PJCVS Contestant

Eve

By Sophie Vandenbrink

The first time she jumped, she was five. With her sparkly pink lifejacket scrunched around her shoulders and hips, she peeped over the edge of the rock.

“Come on, Eve,” her dad called from the water. “I’ll catch you.”

“Yeah, Evie!” whooped her brothers and sister as they splashed and dunked under one of the higher cliffs.

It had felt like a much better idea when she’d watched them jump – but if she didn’t, she’d be *Silly Little Evie* all over again.

She closed her eyes and jumped.

At six years old, Evie didn’t need anyone to catch her anymore. Her new lifejacket fit properly, even if her bathing suit was a little big – yet another hand-me-down from her older sister, Kennedy.

“Kenney, watch me jump, watch me jump!” Evie yelled before pitching herself off the side of the ledge. She shrieked as she hit the water, but her lifejacket bobbed her right back up. Rolling onto her back, she kicked her way over to her sister. “Did you see me? Did you see me?”

“You did great!” Kennedy ruffled her younger sister’s hair with a smile. “Let’s go again.”

Lucky number seven brought Eve all the superiority and unearned confidence of the average second grader.

“Eves, it’s time to get out now,” her dad called, hauling blankets and toys over to the little red wagon that used to hold *her*.

“But I *can’t*,” she sighed. “I need a prince to save me so I can have legs again!”

“Aren’t you supposed to be trying to get your voice back?” Kennedy asked, toweling her hair off.

“No.”

“...Like Ariel?”

“Of course not, Kenney. She doesn’t need a voice. But she does need legs.” Evie wiggled her toes and giggled.

Kennedy laughed and dove back in, careful not to get her hair wet again. Standing in the shallows, she scooped Eve up and carried her over the rocks to their father. “Here’s one princess, sir,” she bowed. “Will the royal wagon do for milady?”

Kennedy plopped Eve in the wagon and made trumpeting noises as their father dragged the wagon home.

So far, Evie’s lofty expectations of being eight weren’t quite measuring up.

Visually, eight was an appealing number – two round circles stacked on top of each other like a vertically challenged snowman. Tip it over and it kept its even structure, resembling an infinity sign – another good thing.

Eve took this to mean that eight meant an *infinite* number of possibilities... though after a few months of consideration and mild disappointment, she could concede that perhaps *eighteen* had those possibilities instead.

She dangled her toes in the water at the bottom of the cliff and sighed, feeling the hazy evening glow of midsummer wash over her. Eight wasn’t much better than seven.

“Bored?” Kennedy climbed down beside her.

“Being eight sucks. All it means is more chores.”

“Well, I was eight when you were born.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It gets more exciting. I promise.”

Eve crouched behind a bush at the top of the cliff, watching Kennedy and her friends jump from the highest one. After all, what nine-year-old didn't spy on her big sister's seventeenth birthday party?

Evie deeply admired Kennedy – long hair, a job, *dimples* – and desperately wished to be her sister's best friend. *It wasn't fair* – Eve wasn't allowed to go off the top cliff yet, and definitely not without a grown-up. She was barely allowed to go outside by herself, but Kennedy was allowed to do everything?

She rolled onto her back with a sigh.

“Evie?”

Eve opened her eyes. Kennedy stood, dripping and silhouetted by the sun, with her hands on her hips. “Sup?”

Kennedy raised her eyebrows. “Are you going to lie in the dirt all day or do you want to come swimming?”

Evie beamed and scrambled to her feet. “Sorry.”

“No, you're not,” but she smiled anyway.

Eve giggled and climbed down the rocks to jump in.

Eve liked being ten. If eight had been a disappointment, ten made up for it – she could walk to the convenience store by herself, she was allowed to try jumping off the second-highest jumping rock, and now that Kennedy was away at school, she even got her own room.

Not during the summer, though, Eve learned, if the second mattress on the floor of her bedroom was any indication.

“You can't come in!” Kennedy yelled as Eve banged on the door.

“No fair! It's my room now!”

“Give me five minutes.”

“No! Let me in!” Eve demanded, rattling the knob as hard as she could.

“Three minutes.”

“No!” Eve pulled off her watch and stuck the edge of the clasp in the lock.

“Eve...”

She wiggled it around and the lock gave. Eve swung the door open and slammed it as hard as she could.

“Eve!”

Eve ran outside and hid down on the rocks until suppertime. Maybe ten wasn't perfect after all.

“Okay, so when you're jumping, you need to make sure you point your toes and keep your hands close to your sides, right?”

Eve was doing an excellent job of pretending to listen to her sister. Now twelve, she was finally allowed to jump off the highest cliff (if she felt up to it), but she had no interest in listening to the ‘hard-learned advice’ spilling out of her sister’s mouth at a rapid rate. ...

“I understand.” Eve had learned a long time ago that saying ‘this is boring’ only ended up with more listening. “Can I jump now?”

Kennedy shrugged, “Sure.”

Eve backed up as far as she could and raced off the edge. It felt like flying, and she spread her arms and soaked up the sun –.

The cold water, normally so soft and gentle, slapped her with brutal, stinging force. She inadvertently let out her breath of air and made to scramble for the surface, lungs burning. She gasped for air, breaking the surface, and heaved herself over to the side.

“You okay? That sounded bad.” Eve wheezed a thumbs up.

Kennedy poked her head over the side, saw the red bruises from the water, and shrugged again. “I told you so.”

Sixteen meant driving. Eve and Kennedy were sitting on the edge of the car’s trunk, eating ice cream and watching the sunset.

“School starts soon.”

“Yeah.” Eve wasn’t thrilled. “For you too.”

Kennedy smiled, “I’m almost done. Two more years and you can call me Doctor Kennedy.”

They both laughed softly and turned back to their ice creams.

Kennedy looked up at her younger sister, suddenly serious. “We should name our kids after each other.”

“What?”

“When you have a little girl, name her Kennedy. I’ll name mine Evie, and then if anything happens, we’ll always have each other.”

“...Okay. Kenney, are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Kennedy smiled again. “Promise?”

“Promise.”

Eve had come back home from second year university to an unpleasant surprise. “It’s so beautiful outside,” Kennedy mused. A perfectly ordinary observation, but Kennedy was looking anything but ordinary – her face was gaunt, and her skin was pale.

“Kennedy, what the hell?” Eve was angry, but she was also concerned – it was a confusing combination.

“I’m sick, Eve. And I didn’t tell you because you needed to finish your year up.”

“What kind of sick?”

“Sick-sick. But it’s not a big deal.”

“Not a big deal? Kennedy!” Eve stopped walking.

“It’s not! I’m going to be fine.”

“What if you’re not?”

Kennedy’s eyes filled with tears. It broke Eve’s heart to watch her try to blink them away. “Then you’ll keep going. You always do. Evie, I love you so much-” Kennedy doubled over, coughing.

“Kennedy!” Eve helped Kennedy walk back to the house, but her heart stayed at the rocks.

Eve didn't go to the rocks again.

“Mama!” A little girl, pudgy with baby fat and decorated with angelic little curls, toddled over to Evie.

She pressed a kiss to her daughter's forehead and scooped her up. Eve was twenty-six now, with a husband and baby girl. She had finally caved, now that the little girl was old enough to swim in the lake, to come stay with her father at the house by the cliffs.

“You doing okay, Eves?” her husband asked.

Eve smiled tightly. “I'm always okay. Come on, baby girl, let's go swim.” Eve carefully set her down at the water's edge.

Eve eased herself into the water. It had been six years since Kennedy had passed, and Eve still felt the lack of her presence every day. She hadn't come to see her father at his house at all after Kennedy had gone – their childhood bedroom sat untouched with stuffed animals and old lip-glosses decorating the desks.

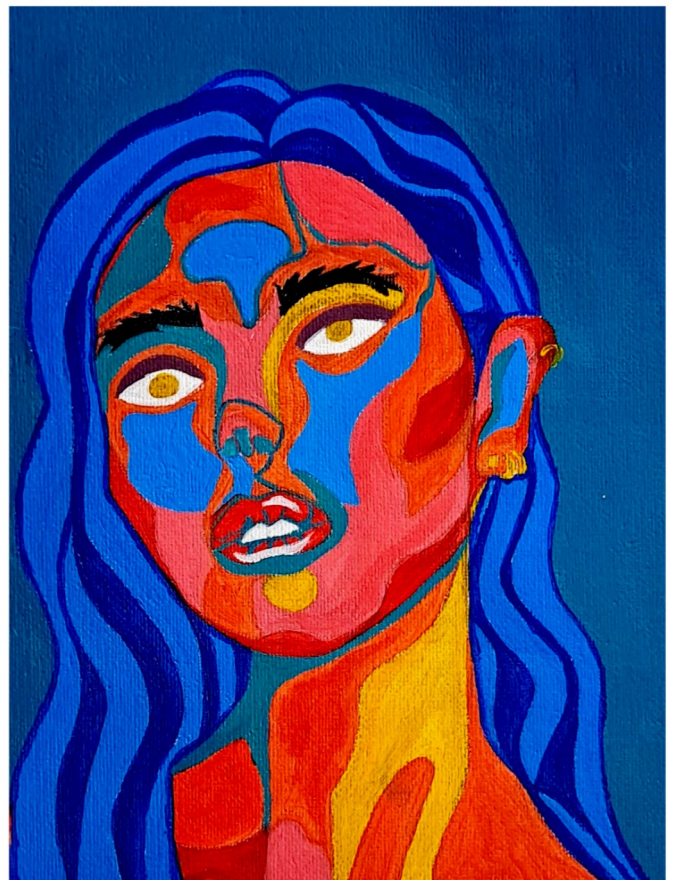
“Ready to jump?”

The little girl beamed. Eve's heart broke at the familiar smile – it had once decorated her namesake's face. “Have me, Mama?”

Eve held out her arms. “I promise.” And she always kept her promises. “I'll always have you, Kenney.”



By Keira Dubecky



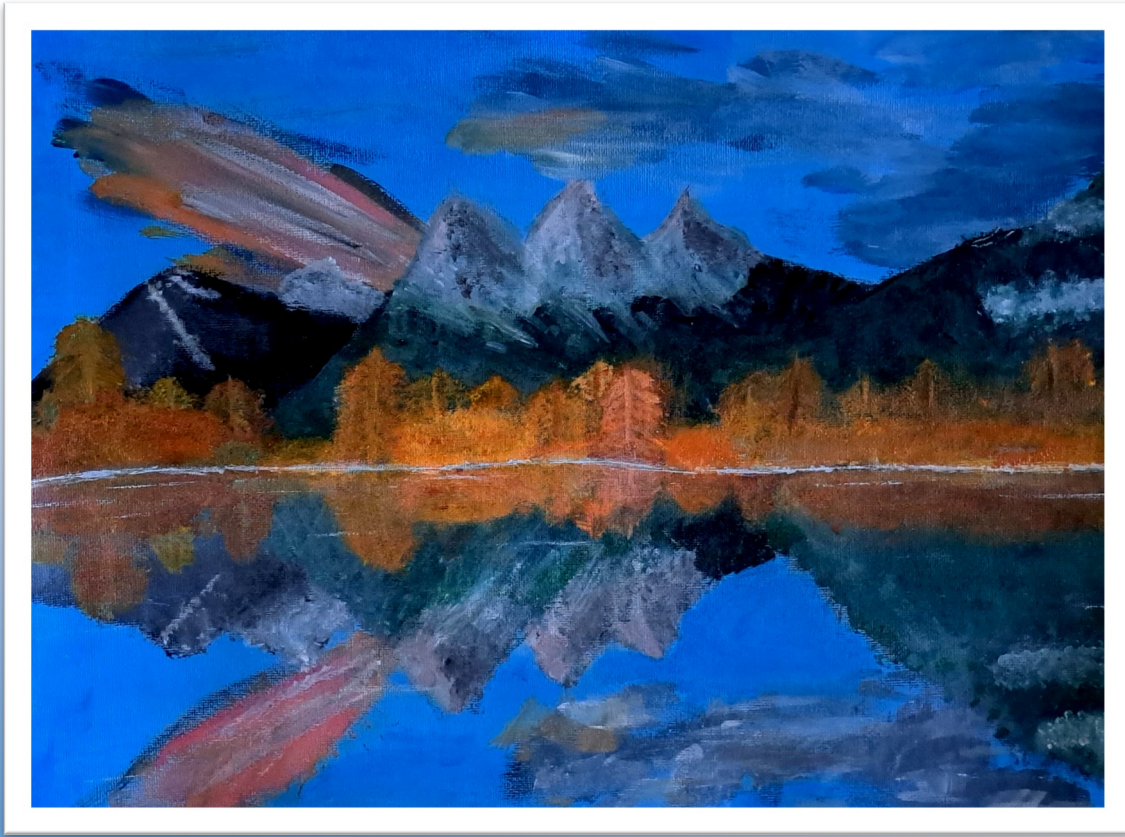
By Shae Gale



By Annabelle Woodard



By Keira Dubecky



By Sammanpreet Ghag



By Wafaa Briman

I Don't Know (How to Love) You

By Evelyn Waldron

The sun is already low on the horizon by the time I make it home, the hot summer breeze blowing against my cheeks and harsh rays of light hitting my skin as I hurry through the bustling city towards my apartment building. I push through the front doors and take the elevator up to the thirteenth floor. The doors on the elevator slide open and I scramble to get my keys out of my pocket as I get closer to my apartment. The lock opens with a satisfying *snick*, and I push the door open. The lights are off, and the curtains are flung open, letting the light cast dramatic shadows around the room. I catch a glimpse of a silhouette on the balcony outside and let my bag fall to the ground.

I head over to the door and push it open, stepping outside and absorbing the sight in front of me. (It takes a second, or maybe an eternity, to take it in.) She's leaning against the balcony railing, staring out at the city. The rays of sun are kinder to her, casting soft shadows and turning the edges of her gold in a way that would scald my skin. She doesn't say anything at first and neither do I, waiting for her to find the words. She slowly turns around to face me, propping her elbows up on the railing.

"You missed dinner," she remarks lightly, though I can hear the sharp edge in her voice. "You missed the last three dinners."

The wind blows a little colder and I shiver. She sighs and brushes a strand of hair behind her ear. "Do you even notice anymore?" she asks.

"I notice," I say quietly. (I notice everything, I just don't know what to do about it.)

"Is it just that you don't care then?" she asks, hurt apparent in every word.

"I care," I answer, even quieter this time.

"God," she pushes past me and heads inside and I follow her. (I don't like where we're going.) "I feel like I'm the only one who wants this anymore!"

"I-I had work." I say, though I know it will do nothing to defuse the tension. Sometimes conversations are quizzes and I've just given the wrong answer.

"You *always* have work," she replies, scathingly. "You can't constantly put work first and me last." Those words are a planned jab, right in the weakest part of my armour.

She doesn't understand the way work is compulsive for me. It's a need that itches and burns under my skin to *get things done*. It's a constant in my life when everything else is unsteady. (She used to be steady). It's not that I even like working, it's that if I'm not working, I feel like things are going to crash and burn, and that *I'm* going to crash and burn. (I'm going to drag her down with me.) Work is easy, there are rules, ways you're supposed to act, and talk, and dress. Life is harder, there's no code of conduct for life. I thought she got that (she used to get it), and agreed to be my safe space, the place where it didn't matter if I messed up. It feels like the rules are being rewritten in front of my eyes. And I'm angry, I realize. I'm angry.

"You can't expect that I'll always have time for you! You're not always the most important thing!" I yell in frustration. Every bit of my outrage leaves in a burst and the reality of what I've said crashes over me. "I-I didn't mean..."

"Save it," she says hollowly, "I'm going for a walk." I watch her storm towards the door, and the following slam leaves me with a pile of rocks in my stomach.

I remember meeting her in the leaf-blown chill of autumn; she was wearing a cable knit sweater. It was like an adrenaline rush back then, every second a new high, every touch a match being lit in the dark. And then came winter and the darkness fell over me the same way it does every year. I thought she would leave (people usually do), but she didn't, she was my candle in the shadows. And then came spring and joy sprung up with every new flower. I felt safe. (Why is it so hard to feel safe?) Now it's summer. Now it's summer and the heat is dragging me down, pulling at my skin. The light that used to feel comforting has turned blistering and angry and... I just... she can't be my candle when the very thing that scares me is its glow.

So, I hide in work. Work is stable no matter the time of year. It's consistent, reliable. How can you give that up for a person? A person can let you down. A person is temperamental and changing. A person has feelings of their own, feelings you can't understand.

But I know that there has to be a choice. I can't play tug of war with her for my time, it's not fair for her (it's not fair for me). What is more important to me? The draining force: feeding me accomplishment and anxiety at the same time. Or is it her? The one who makes me feel okay when all I want to do is hide, but who can rip that feeling away whenever she wants. She's been putting in the effort, but I don't think I know how to give to a person anymore. It almost shocks me, because I *used* to know how to give to her, but sometime in the scorching summer months, we changed. I realize I don't know what TV shows she likes, what she does when she's not at work, her favourite board game or candy. I've lost her in the mess, two cars speeding past each other on a dark, empty highway.

I feel unsteady when the door opens, my head swimming with half-finished thoughts and an aching want.

"Hey," she says, slipping off her shoes and padding towards me. She doesn't look angry anymore. (I can't tell whether that's a good thing or not.)

"I'm sorry," I say, offering the olive branch.

"I know," she replies, neither denying nor accepting it.

"So?"

"We need to talk about this," is what she says.

"Okay," I say, and though we've both agreed to speak our minds, the room is quiet for a long time.

"What do you want?" she asks suddenly. "What?"

"What do you *want*?" she repeats, and I know I'm not getting any more than that. I think about it. What do I want? A safety net or a person. Something simple or something complicated. Something blank or something full of messy colour. And the scary thing is that I don't know. I don't know if I want to try anymore. I've been treading water for a long time and after a while you start to wonder if it's worth it. (*Is it worth it? What do I want?*) I love her. I know that. I don't love work. I know that too. But does that really matter? I may love her, but I don't know her anymore, and it may be my own fault, but she doesn't know me either. It suddenly feels so unbearably tragic - loving without knowing. Do I want to know? Or do I want to cut the strings and drift away. I can't live on the line anymore.

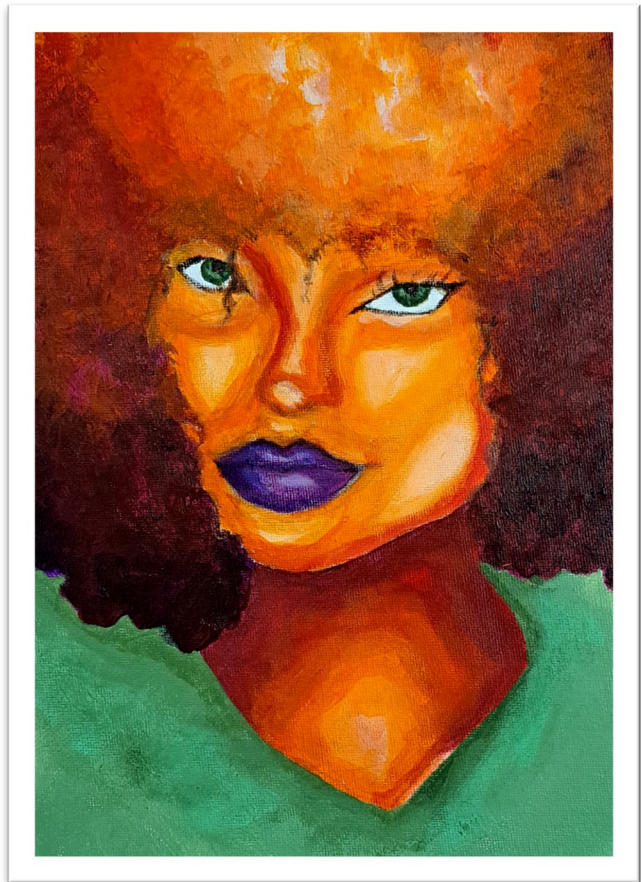
I take a breath in, and I let it out. And I know. It may not be the right choice, I may regret it later, but I'm choosing, and it feels like progress. So, I tell her, I tell her everything that fills my head, I tell her every thought that comes to the surface, and I think she knows me a little better now. She nods.

"Okay," she says. And that's that. I thought she might have had more to say, more protests or conditions or agreements. *Okay*. It's shockingly simple.

She sits down beside me and my breath comes a little easier. We rest there in silence and I stare out at the moon, soft and pale in the darkness.



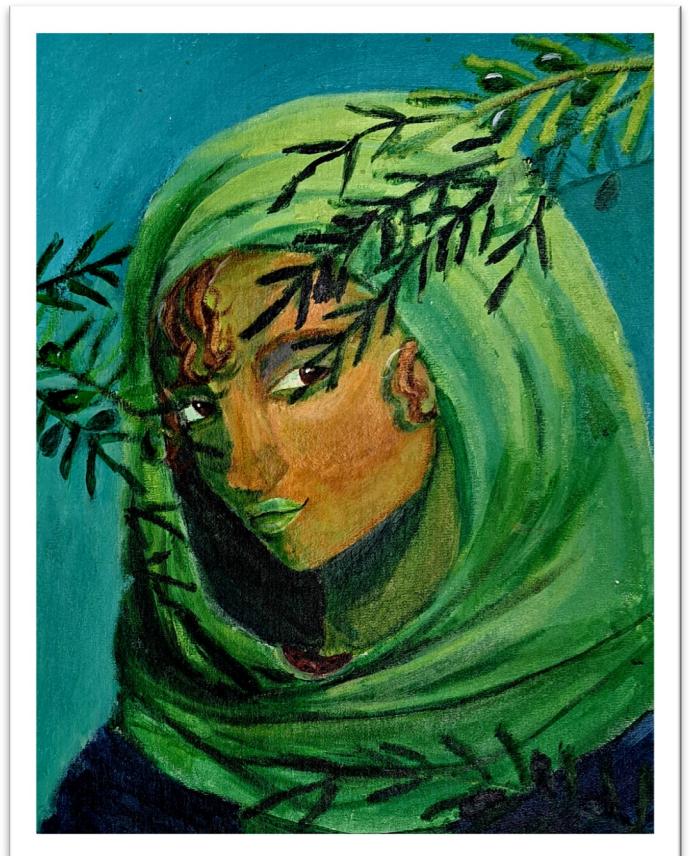
By Bonham Newton-Brennan



By Kylie Moulton



By Rama Adesokan



By Rama Adesokan

Life Is Too Short

By David Stephens

There once was a boy who didn't always have the best clothes, the best shoes, the best house, but no matter what happened to him he always had the best heart. When he went to school he saw a group of boys and girls that always had the newest stuff, but they were terrible people on the inside. They would constantly make fun of him but he didn't care, until one day somebody made a joke that went too far.

He would always be the quiet kid, and people would say that until you got to know him. "He's awesome." At least that is what his mom always used to say about him. He always believed in a quote that he tried to live by: "If you have a good mind, you will always have a good heart, and if people don't see the importance in life then don't force them to see it."

His brother had always had a tough life as far as he could remember. He was constantly picked on because he was always the shortest kid in the class. The fact that he was the shortest kid in the class didn't help much with the bullying. It got so bad that his brother tried taking his own life when he was 15 on 15/5/14, but luckily the boy's mom was able to save him after she found him. She rushed his brother to the hospital and after two grueling days they finally got confirmation that he would live. It was the best news that they had ever gotten.

His brother lived for volleyball. He was always playing and the boy remembered that his brother would get into trouble from their dad for hitting the ball against the wall. The boys had always had a bit of a rocky relationship with each other until the day that their mom saved his brother. He didn't really understand how empty life was when one of your siblings wasn't there.

When he got back to school after what happened with his brother almost taking his own life, one of the kids named Josh made a joke that went too far. The boy could usually handle jokes, but this one almost made the boy seriously hurt him. Josh said, "You should be like your brother and kill yourself." The moment the boy heard the words come out of Josh's mouth he snapped. All of the anger that he had boiling up in him for three years was taken out on Josh. The boy started fighting with Josh and he felt like it could have gone on for hours if the teacher hadn't separated them.

The boy realized that he had made a bad choice and remembered his quote to live by. He was never in a fight again and did his best to stay away from the bullies. He also did his best to spend fun time with his brother and do things that were positive and made them happy.

By Stephanie Hazlett



Laurier-Stedman Prize — PJCVS Contestant

No Way Out

Sasha Antoszewski

It was a chilly winter morning when Wyatt Jenkins stepped off the bus that led him away from the city of Greenwood. He should've been headed to school to complete the final test he had in his science class. However, Wyatt deemed that less important than what he was going to search for today.

A few of his friends had told him about an old cathedral that was only an hour or two away from his home. These were online friends; Wyatt didn't have the energy for socializing with people face to face. However, they were friends, and Wyatt trusted them more than his own parents. If they wanted him to check out some old and possibly haunted building, why wouldn't he? It sounded like a lot more fun than a science test did.

Wyatt fixed his black winter jacket, zipping up the front of it and walking down the large winding path ahead. The stones it was made of were withering away, only a shadow of what they had been so many years ago. There was a huge dark building looming over the property that had supposedly once been sacred to the people of Greenwood. The bushes out front were nothing more than shriveled up sticks poking out of the ground like spikes on display as a warning to potential visitors. "Turn back," they said, but Wyatt was never fond of listening. Snow covered the roof of the building, and surely piled into the attic of the old place. It appeared as though sections of the roof had begun caving in, naturally cracking open a capsule that nobody dared to open themselves. The Cathedral was cold, dark and empty- nothing like the comfortable and safe atmosphere the rest of Greenwood had.

Despite the threatening aura around the property and the lack of company, Wyatt entered the Cathedral. He pushed through the grand oak doors which had begun to crumble apart with age, turning on the flashlight on his phone in order to see everything around him.

He was almost shocked by how well preserved the inside of the building was. The pews were faded, and some of them were missing entirely, but they still framed the aisle to the front of the space perfectly. If he held his breath, Wyatt swore he could hear whispers carried on the wind, even though the air was stale and lifeless. Wyatt chose not to linger in this area for very long, only taking a few photos of the intricately made stained-glass windows before continuing his adventure into the depths of the large building. He couldn't shake off a feeling of uneasiness building in the pit of his stomach as he came to a long corridor just beyond the main hall. It felt like something was standing there with him—a final warning to turn back. Wyatt wouldn't listen. How could he? The sight before him was one any boy would pay thousands for.

The corridor was massive, decorated by dead vines and potted plants that had been neglected over the years. Wyatt had to step over quite a few tipped pots and fallen beams from the ceiling, although it didn't bother him. What did bother him was that the quiet whispers had stopped, leaving behind a silence loud enough to make his ears ring.

Wyatt turned off his flashlight to get an idea of how much light flooded into this corridor, but it was almost completely dark all around him. The windows were too dirty to let in any light, and the holes in the walls brought in more snow than sun. Wyatt's flashlight was the only thing he had to fight against the darkness that suddenly felt overwhelming. There was no way Wyatt was going to risk walking around this place in the dark. He turned the light back on with an audible click and continued on his way.

At the end of the large corridor, there was a staircase which led down into the lower levels of the Cathedral. Or at least that's what Wyatt assumed. He had never gone to church, but he did know that this sort of place was meant to be big. There could be a basement or something. A place to store chairs and tables after big events.

The spiraled staircase was longer than Wyatt had anticipated. The stairs, unlike the rest of the Cathedral, seemed to be almost entirely intact. No step was incomplete, though dead weeds were wedged between the cracks of the old concrete. It took over two minutes to get down to the bottom of the steps, and by that point Wyatt's phone had no service. He turned off his flashlight once again as his eyes adjusted to what he was seeing. It was a narrow hallway which clearly had not been explored in a long time. A thick layer of dust was scattered over everything, and if Wyatt looked closely, he could see more particles floating in the air. There were dim lights hanging from the ceiling, evenly placed so that there was only a small amount of darkness from one light to the next. The entire place smelled of mold and wet concrete, but Wyatt decided he wanted to explore further anyways. As his boots hit the ground, he set off down the tunnel to his left, stuffing his hands into his pockets so they wouldn't touch the walls that seemed to be closing in on him.

At a right turn, Wyatt discovered that the hallways also happened to be filled with doors. Each door seemed exactly like the one before it. Dented and dirtied in the same places, with nameplates blacked out and handles rusted beyond repair. Wyatt tried a few of these doors, though none of the handles would turn. His weak attempts left his hands smeared with dirt and dust, though the doorhandles seemed unchanged. Even when Wyatt tried to kick in a door or two, no dents were made. The entire place seemed resistant to his influence—unwilling to bend against the pressure he was applying.

The phone screen indicated what time it was for him. It was only noon... if he wanted to make it home on time, to ensure his mother didn't ask any questions, Wyatt would have to be out of the Cathedral before one. He still wanted to explore more of the upper Cathedral before he left, and so Wyatt chose to turn back the way he came.

Ten minutes of walking, and nothing seemed to be changing. There was a distant dripping sound somewhere behind him, but Wyatt couldn't see any indicators that anything else was going on. At some point the moldy stale air gained a metallic scent though, and the lights began to flicker. Some of them even went out entirely as he passed beneath them. Wyatt searched for any sign that he was going the right way. He swore he took a right turn at some point, but the option to turn left never came. Did he take a wrong turn somewhere? Surely not... Wyatt was certain only an hour had passed. When he pulled out his phone to make sure he was right, his heart sank. In bright bold numbers, the screen showed a time... a time four hours later than it should have been. Wyatt's school ended an hour ago... he should have been home by now. Wyatt began running through the halls as if it would help him find the exit sooner. He checked his phone for the time periodically, but after the fifth hour had passed the screen went black.

Wyatt set a slower pace for himself now, doing his best to ignore the fear tugging at his stomach. Perhaps he'd gotten lucky, or Wyatt had finally turned around enough times to find what he was looking for. The stairs were in view, though noticeably more damaged than they had been when he first entered the endless hallways. He rushed to those stairs he'd been hunting for... only for the lights to go out entirely. The air went cold, and the voice spoke directly behind him.

“There is no way out.”

The deep and menacing voice caused Wyatt to freeze. He dared to look back, but nothing seemed to return his stare. After regaining enough courage to move again, Wyatt took another step forward. He swore the stairs had been right in front of him... but when he reached out with a trembling hand, all he found was cold, unforgiving metal. Another door with another blank nameplate and a handle that wouldn't turn. The whispers had become loud voices that spoke to Wyatt directly. This time there were no warnings... only taunts. Wyatt had chosen to ignore them, and now he would pay the price.

Quiet Aria

By Tanisha Tushi

In the bustling city of Blackwood, there was a little girl named Aria. Aria was an introverted girl who became quieter after her parents' death. Aria was in Grade 5 when her parents died in a car accident. At the age of nine, she lost her parents. She became an orphan. When Aria used to go to school, she used to stay quiet. Her classmates used to play together but she never joined them.

Aria used to feel bad because other parents used to come to pick their children up, but no one used to come to pick her up from school except her Nanny. Aria used to have a Nanny who took care of her. Aria's parents were coming from a business meeting when they died. After that, Aria was given to her uncle and aunty. But they did not want Aria because they used to think of Aria as a burden, so they sent her to the orphanage.

In the orphanage, Aria used to stay as quiet as possible. People in the orphanage tried to find people for Aria who could adopt her, but she never showed any interest, and she used to hide when someone came to see her for adoption. That is why she never got adopted. Aria used to miss her parents a lot. She always used to play with that single doll which was her birthday gift from her dad.

Slowly, people at the orphanage discovered that Aria was interested in fantasy books and painting. Aria used to spend hours reading books where introverted heroes found strength in their quietness. She never used to spend her time on playing. But deep-down Aria was looking for a connection, for someone who would understand her silence.

In the orphanage, they used to hold a painting competition. But Aria never participated because in the competition there used to be a lot of people and Aria used to get scared when she saw a lot of people.

That 9-year-old Aria, turned 17-year-old Aria, still has the same habit and nature. One rainy afternoon, a new caretaker named Ms. Lily came inside the room giving a sweet smile to Aria. That day the painting competition was held again, and Ms. Lily was there to ask her to join the competition. At first, she said no but then after Ms. Lily had encouraged her so many times, she finally said yes.

In the competition Aria won first prize. After winning the first prize, she was happy that day, and brave enough to stay in the middle of people. After that day, Aria used to talk with Ms. Lily, who spent hours talking about her interest in books, and they both used to make paintings together. Aria told her that she missed her parents. Her parents used to make her favorite food every Sunday and they used to watch movies together. Now that was only a memory and she used to feel like crying, but she stopped her tears in front of others.

After seeing that, Ms. Lily told her that she knew what it was like to lose someone you loved, and that you did not get past something like that, you got through it. Most of the time Aria used to draw animation cartoons. Her room was filled with animation paintings and books. Aria also has the habit of writing a diary. In that diary she used to write her own story and some drawings to help others understand her animation story more. She used to show them to Ms. Lily who used to read them, and she also helped to write them.

One day Ms. Lily suggested to Aria that she should give her story for publication, but Aria said that no one was going to like her story, and everyone was going to laugh at her. Ms. Lily told her that no one was going to laugh at her but Aria still said no to her. But Ms. Lily never stopped asking. She used to ask her every day and every moment and because of that Aria used to get annoyed. She asked her when she would stop asking her, and Ms. Lily replied that she would stop when Aria listened to her and published her story.

This time Aria listened because she did not want to hurt Ms. Lily. She did publish her story and after some days she saw that kids started to like her story. They used to buy her books and read them.

From that day, Aria began to write more books for kids and publish them. She got famous for her books and kids started to like her a lot. She used to hold book signings and she always used to take Ms. Lily with her. Ms. Lily was also happy because she saw that the introverted and timid little Aria who used to get scared after seeing people was now comfortable around people.



By Kylin Galasso



By Michael Bailey



By Caoimhe Hanna

The Conman

By Nathaniel Brinks

“Trust must be earned,” I, Cam Torrence say to the FBI agent who is sitting across from me. His nametag reads Mike Davis. He gladly gives me a deal which will let me be on house arrest if I tell him what I was doing the past week since I escaped from prison and how I evaded the police until now. I believe him, as I have the papers for the deal in front of my eyes. I agree because no way am I going to jail again to deal with strong, egotistical maniacs. Now I am asking for a coffee from Mike, as this story he wants will be a long one.

It started one long week ago, when I escaped the simplistic security of an NYPD holding cell. I first bumped into a guard and swiped his key as I was being brought in. I waited until the guards were distracted and opened the cold cell door. Immediately an alarm started blaring like an amber alert on steroids. I planned for this and bolted into the bathroom. Luckily, an officer was in there. I do not like violence, but it is occasionally required in my line of work. I gave him two knuckles to the head, and he fell as if he were a rock being thrown off a bridge. I switched his clothes for my bright orange jumper, and I found a knife in his belt to cut my long hair and bushy beard. I swiftly moved out of the bathroom and walked calmly and confidently out of the station. I blended in due to the chaos of the alarm and my disguise.

I quickly analyzed my surroundings and saw a fancy hotel not too far away. I proceeded to walk to a nearby department store I also saw. I bought a change of clothes and an orange construction vest with money I nabbed from two pedestrians. I walked towards the hotel after changing awkwardly in an alley way. I then reached the fancy and quite busy Four Seasons, and I hunted down an arriving rich-looking guy in an 85’ Mustang as I posed as the valet driver. He got out, handed me his keys and tipped me a Benjamin. I got in his car and went off to my apartment to see if cops were still there. As I suspected the place was crawling with them.

I drove to the drop site to meet my brother and partner, Henry. We were running a con to make a quick \$20k. The con was a classic pigeon drop. We had set up an ad claiming we had 10kg of gold bars we wanted to sell. We lined up a buyer and told them to meet us at the drop to pay the deposit of \$20,000 for us to get the gold bars. Now I waited at the drop for the mark while my brother was in a car a block over.

The mark arrived with a duffel bag and asked, “So, when will I be receiving the product?”

I confidently and seriously responded with, “My partner and I will be retrieving the product tomorrow evening; you have my number so we can arrange a drop site moving forward.”

She seemed hesitant, which is when I decided to eradicate that doubt before it sprouted. Keeping my composure I remarked, “You know the price, if you can get a better price by yourself, I urge you to do so.” I knew this would either seal the deal or scare her off. It was a risk, but I was rusty after my hold up in jail. I saw her expression and knew I had to get out of there. I walked away empty handed, and she got back in her car. I immediately threw out the burner phone so she wouldn’t be able to contact me.

This is when Henry and I drove to his apartment. As we arrived at this sketchy apartment, I felt terrible. How did I, Cam Torrence, screw up one of the easiest cons? Henry tried to make me feel better by saying “Criminals are criminals and naturally have a distrust of everything.” However, that is exactly what we are too. It is not our fault really that we are criminals; it is all Henry and I have ever known. Our dad was a conman too.

Anyway, Henry and I were now desperate for a score. Henry seriously now asked me, “Cam, I have a big deal I just found. If we succeed, we won’t need to work another day in our lives.”

Henry explained the details. It was a tricky two-man robbery. We were going to steal the “Portrait of Wilhelm Uhde” by Pablo Picasso worth an estimated 100 million dollars. The painting was privately owned by the Vulcano family. The Vulcanos were the head of an Italian mob. So, this meant we could not let them know who we were. Henry and I stayed up all night perfecting our plan as we were going to proceed with the plan the next night. Henry was going to cut the electricity to the entire house which would give me a 30-second window to get inside undetected before the generator turned on. Next, I would avoid the cameras and retrieve the painting. There were two problems, the first being how to get out with the painting, and the second being we were unsure if the painting itself had its own security. We fell asleep shortly after figuring this out.

It was a dark and wet morning, and I saw the heavy fog outside. Henry, aggressively loud for a morning, ordered me: “Cam, come on and get ready! Then he entirely switched his voice to a mischievous tone and said, “We are going to see what kind of security the Vulcanos have.”

I groggily walked out the door towards the elevator downstairs and responded: “Henry! How are we going to test it? The Vulcanos will be on high alert the rest of the day if something suspicious happens in the morning.”

As we slowly made our way to the car we continued to idiotically banter and argue the entire agonizing hour and a half drive to the Vulcano’s mansion. It looked like an old castle situated on the beach. It had matching tall, stone watchtowers on either end. It appeared as a dated, small Taj Mahal without the round circular top. We drove past the house a few times and located an angle where we could see the painting from an outside window. We drove to a nearby forest where we could set up our TAC-50 sniper. It was like carrying a bag of bricks as we moved it. Henry set it up and found his test shot through the dark morning and thick fog.

Once he shot right beside the painting, we watched the enormous house and painting through the scope and with a pair of binoculars we had in the car. We painstakingly waited for 5 minutes, nothing, 10 minutes nothing, after 30 we lugged it all up and drove by the house. No sirens, no security, no people. After arguing in the car like brothers do, we got out and entered the property in hopes of nabbing the painting right then.

Henry led us while I covered our backs. We crept to the edge of the house where the broken glass was from our bullet. I peeked over the edge and saw a cold deserted house, except the painting. I thought what we both were thinking: was this a setup? Me and Henry, blinded by the \$100 million dollar painting and glory that would come with stealing something like this, climbed in and sneaked over to the painting and snatched it off the wall. I handed the painting to Henry and told him, “You go put it in the car, I’m going to stay here a while.”

Henry replied, worried, “Are you sure?”

Confidently I said, “Yeh, I’ll be fine. I need some time alone.” I was planning on staying a couple nights here as I wanted to reflect on why my previous con failed so miserably, and this was the perfect place to do so.

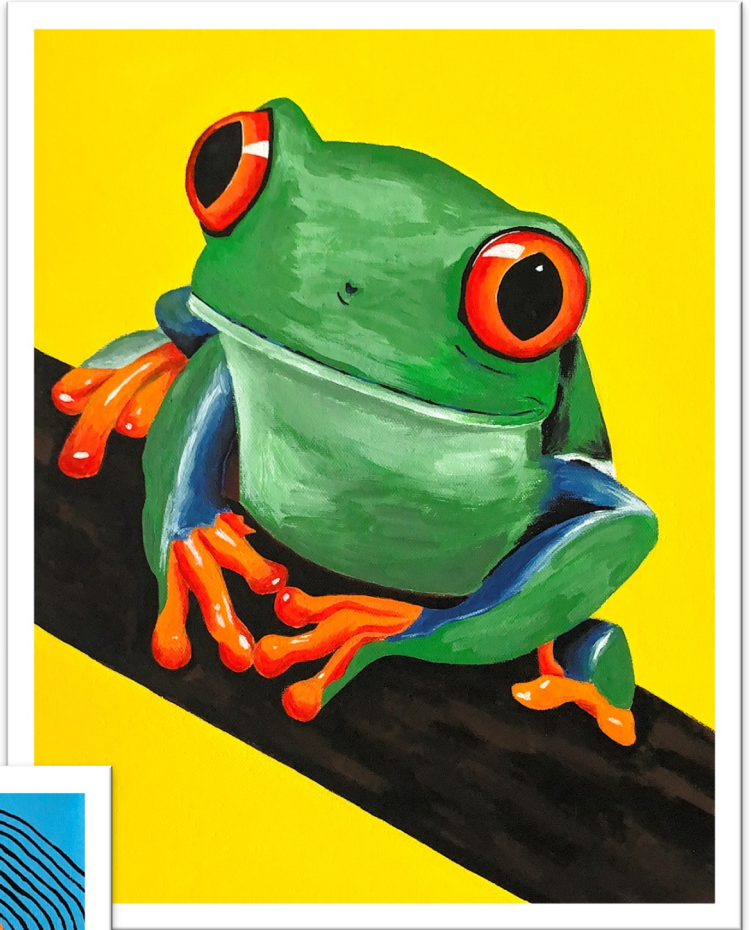
As Henry walked out, I reflected on all the ways I hurt people doing this con thing. All the money some hardworking people may have needed that I took without question. I also thought about how most people earn money for work, and I earn money for trust. My thoughts were interrupted suddenly when I heard a lone voice yelling, “Cam Torrence! You are under arrest!”

I whipped around to a nametag that read Mike Davis. I knew I had been duped. The life of crime I believed in my entire life, and this time it crushed my trust. This is the moment I learned trust must be earned to break it.



By
Ace Vellenga





By Georgia Johnson

The Maker

By Kayleigh McDonald

At the beginning of time, the sky was a fearful thing. Though the sun rose at the breaking of dawn, at dusk, the night and its darkness brought nothing but fear. It was a reasonable fear. Only fools were unafraid of scary things, and that which was unknown, such as the absence of light, was certainly frightening. She knew that. She knew most things; however, she did not understand how she had come to be. She had never not been, but even so, she had made everything.

She had risen islands out of the vast sea, toppled mountains she did not like, and pulled pure heat out of the earth's molten core in the creation of the sun. Auctora, she called herself, the maker, and the only thing she had yet to make was something that would bring hope in the night. She did not like the fear of the early civilizations who had begun to gather on the ground, but no matter how much power she mustered or how much thought she took, Auctora simply could not fill the space above their fearful heads. She wanted the night to be beautiful, something to be celebrated just as the day was. However, Auctora, as powerful as she was, could not make such a dream tangible.

She had tried, as her hopelessness was not without reason. Some time ago, she had stood upon a mountaintop at dusk and left the sun as it was, high in the sky during the night's hours. This seemed rational at the time; if Auctora could simply take away the object of fear, the problem would be solved. But that was human thinking. There was a reason the night existed in the first place, to cool the crops that grew in the field, to bring restfulness to the human beings of her world, and most of all, to bring balance.

The day needed the night, just as water needed fire and earth needed air. So, upon her experiment, the crops dried out, humans grew restless, and there was nothing but heat and drought. Discouraged as she was, Auctora was not done trying. The next night, she collected balls of fire in her divine hands and threw them into the sky. She willed the fire to stay there and light the sky like lanterns, but the moment they got high enough, the fire was extinguished in the wind.

She groaned. "I am the maker!" she thought angrily. "How is it that I cannot make things any longer. Have I become without use?" It was not in Auctora's nature to be angry at the world around her, because in turn, that meant she was angry at herself. She felt like a slave to the earth; she imagined that this was what it felt like to be human, and that was something that weighed heavily on her heart.

From the sky, on his bed of shadow where he always watched and stayed entertained by the maker, he had finally grown tired of her recent frowning. When his eyes opened for the very first time, she was the only light that he could find. She was his muse, a light in the everlasting dark, a glimmer of hope shimmering across the still sea. He had never left his purgatory above; for he knew that the dark had no business walking the ground. Even so, he was saddened by boredom and lack of companionship. He wondered if Auctora felt similarly. The boy wondered to himself what Auctora got out of being down there, with man. They did not appreciate her, not once did they honour her name, or credit her for the water they drank and the food they ate.

One night, descending from the dark sky Auctora could no longer look at, the man appeared in the field before her. He had driven himself mad with loneliness and seizing dark sorrow. Auctora noticed that he was made of pure darkness, with shadows swirling around his dark hair; he could have been made from the darkness he appeared out of.

Auctora stood defensively. She had not made this being, which made him a threat. When he spoke, his voice seemed to echo through all the land, filling up the air around her. "Fictorum" he introduced himself as, "the dreamer."

He was unnerving, to say the least, barely visible at the distance he stood, so Auctora, though weary of this newcomer, drew closer. She realized though, that with every bare-footed step towards the dreamer, he got ever

brighter. It was evident, that her light, which shrouded her always like a cloak, reflected off him like a beacon. She noticed this, all while he stood, chin raised in silence at her approach.

Fictorum, like Auctora, had never not been. As she roamed the earth, he remained shrouded in the night sky, a tangible manifestation of pure shadow. When Auctora stopped, planting her feet in the grass, Fictorum smiled. She had not yet realized what he already knew. Fictorum had watched Auctora for as long as time had allowed, and though she understood the demand for balance, she was hypocritical of that fact, because though there was a shadow on the ground, which Fictorum had always cast down, Auctora, had not yet come to the realization that she was needed in the sky.

He explained this to her. She could not simply create light, she was light, just as he was darkness. Mankind had no more need for her, they would develop in their own time, and she would be just as he was, someone who watched. Auctora frowned deeply. She understood this; she had stressed the fact that she was inhuman, and being inhuman meant that she was not to roam the ground with them in imitation of the race she had created. Despite this rational thought, she dared to admit that she too was afraid of the dark. He urged her, “Come with me and take your spot in the sky.”

Auctora, being the maker, did not need to take orders from this shadow man. He pleaded until daybreak when he would be forced away to hide within shadows and clouds, but Auctora did not relent. Each night he visited her, telling tales of the things he had seen. He watched humanity bloom to life, formed from the makings of the golden girl and her existence. He knew much of their worship and knew she was not the divine mercy they devoted themselves to. “You are needed elsewhere,” he said, words of incessant prayer. “Why should you remain bound to the land?”

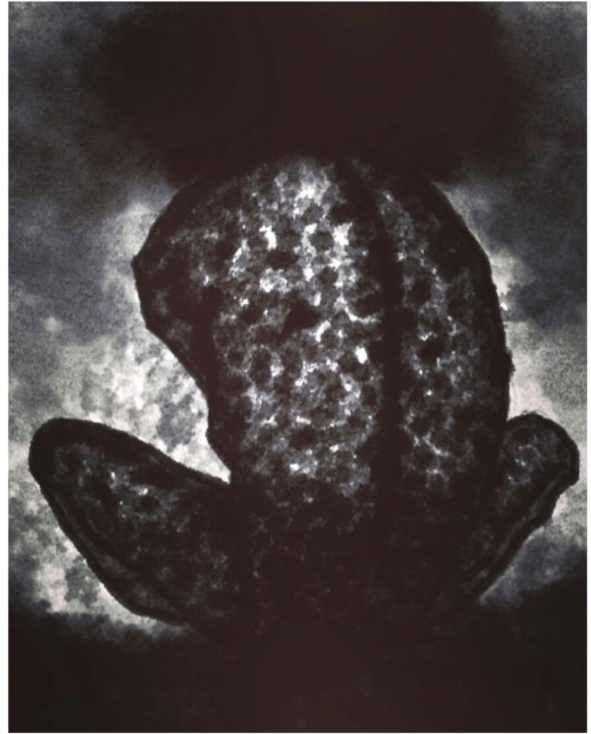
When days passed, and his whispers became all she had, Fictorum, the boy of shadows, stretched out his hand. Reluctantly, the ball of flame they called Auctora took it in hers, eager to bring light to the world, and joy to herself that she had never been able to grasp.

The next time the humans on the ground looked up into the heavens, they would be greeted by Auctora’s light, not only in the form of the great moon and the mighty sun she had manifested, but reflecting off the shadowy darkness into thousands of stars, wrapped in the companionship of her dear dreamer. Neither would ever be alone again, the balance would remain, and their sky would forever blanket mankind with the beauty of light and the wonder of what hides in the dark if you only dare to be unafraid.



By Mack Torell

Sisyphus



By Dylan Grainger

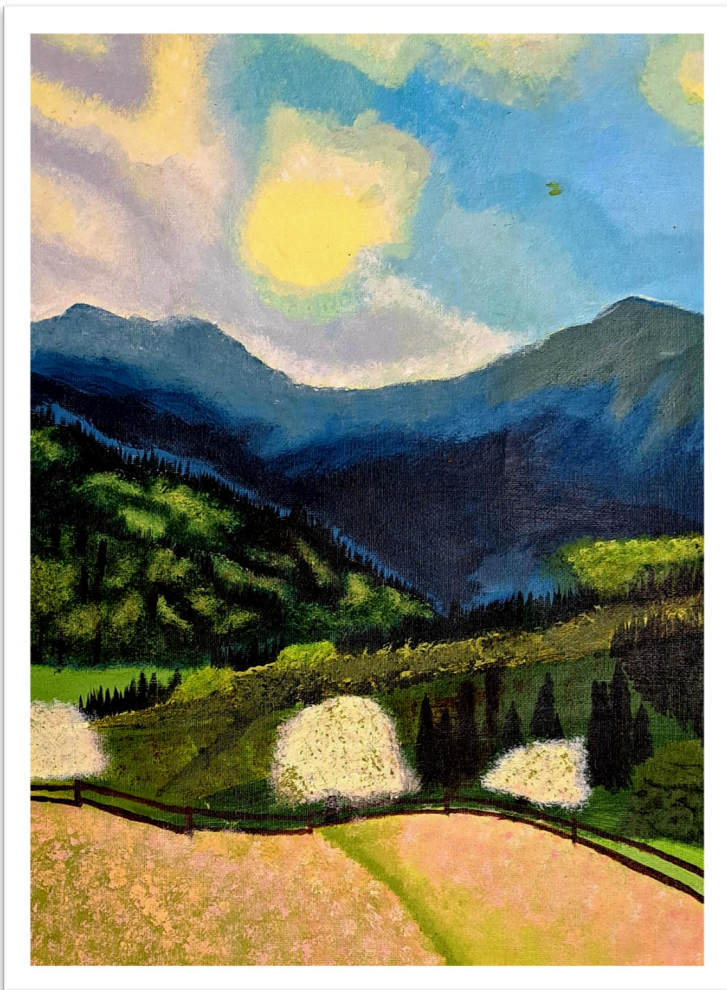
Acceptance



Survivor

By Zorawar Singh

My feet once walked on green grass, now the only thing they feel is the stone-cold concrete path,
Where once my fingers traced and learnt the grooves of the tree's bark, are the bricks of a building I do not know,
The coast where I once breathed the salt air is now a mere legend, a myth submerged under water,
The lake where I once boated with my family has now dried up and exists only in my memories,
The tree bark which held my precious swing as a child is now a piece of furniture in a stranger's house,
The fireworks now instead of bringing light leave the skies in a coat of darkness and despair,
The wildfires in the forests and jungles render its inhabitants homeless and those who cannot escape say their goodbyes there,
The air outside is not the same, it is now thick with the smell of guilt for it gives asthma to millions,
The water isn't safe anymore, its toxicity mimics humans',
The droughts leave the earth barren and parched, begging for a glass of water,
The grass is greener on the other side, what happens when there isn't any left?
Until an epiphany, which I surmise will not happen, it is up to us, to do our best, hoping to appease the earth,
How many more trees must lose their lives for us to start caring?
The icebergs are sobbing and bawling, crying for us to stop,
The changed world is no place to live, with brown skies and no fauna or flora,
We must act now, or the future is one where plants and animals are a subject of history.



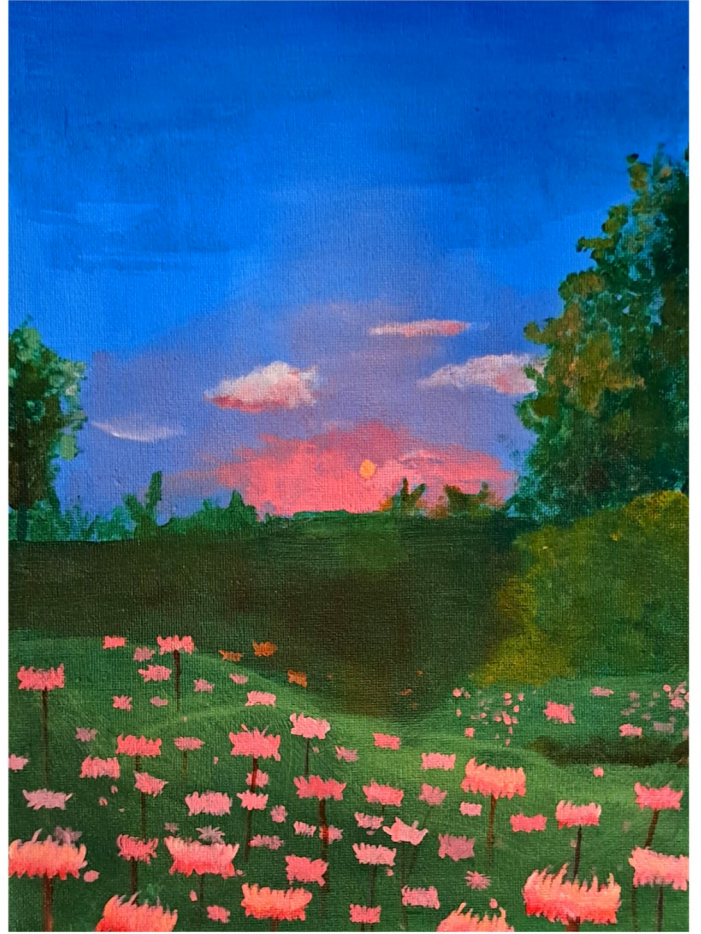
By Lilian Longboat



By Michael Bailey



By Annabelle Woodard



By Raya Woods



By Elizabeth Barber



By Kymariah Boatswain

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