ink & feather

Literary and Arts Journal

August 2019 - Issue Two
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Editor’s Note

“An artist’s duty, as far as I am concerned, is to reflect the times.”
-Nina Simone

Over the past couple of months, I had the honor of meeting and working with some incredible students while teaching writing classes in Arizona. These teens approached material in unique and complex ways. They saw unique patterns and parallels in literature. They made deep connections. In short, these teens possessed a depth and maturity far beyond their tender years.

After reading the essays, stories, and poems for this edition of Ink and Feather, I’ve spent a good amount of time reflecting on the world in which these teens live. Today’s youth is more connected than ever before in the wake of large social media platforms and technological advances. With access to mass communication technologies, teens are more exposed to the current political, economic, and social climate. They stand witness—not just to what is happening within our borders—but beyond. They don’t hide—they show up. They don’t sit back—they stand up for what is right with confidence and integrity. They don’t stay silent—they speak out when there is injustice in the world.

The last issue of Ink and Feather was about creating a platform for teen writers and artists to share their stories, art, and voice. This issue is more about truly listening to what these emerging writers and artists are saying. I am honored and blessed to be able to include some amazing young adult writers and artists that accurately and poignantly “reflect the times” in which they live.

It’s with great pleasure that I present the August 2019 edition of Ink and Feather Literary and Arts Journal!

Best Regards,
Lysette Cohen
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The coat was soaked and ruddy through the sides, the blue wool the perfect material to sponge up the thick mud David laid in. His jacket was worn in all the right places, moth eaten at the shoulders and elbows, scuffed and bloody at the collar, his cuffs frayed and split. But as I looked over at him, I could see the truth underneath, the truth I sometimes forgot; I could see the layers of mud new and old overlapping each other from where he had fallen in the dirt in the exact same spot before. I scanned him frozen as the past and present blended, and the lie I lived in everyday slapped me in the face.

But the golden buttons on his antique army jacket were what truly revealed the charade for what it was. Each button sparkled bright in the Sunday morning light- glowing like the rays of a star, a diamond plated in gold. They told the story of a wife’s soft hands and late evenings spent polishing them each with pride-filled care Those cared for buttons reminded me of the mundane world that constantly compressed into the bubble filled with grime and sweat that I find solace in.

The bubble popped.

I could hear all the sights and sounds that I didn’t want to: all the sights and sounds that took me out of the moment; that acted as a bridge from the present to the past. Children’s pristine laughter instead of canon-fire, cotton-candy instead of gunpowder, light and joy instead of a smoke covered sky.

Then my mind played its dirty trick on me. It took the lovely and quiet, the moments that weren’t adrenaline filled- and twisted them to something dark and wicked. The men pretending to lie still around me- too still like the effort not to twitch was excruciating- they were suddenly limp and lifeless around me, the perfect feast for a fly. Fire ran hot overhead, my eardrums bled from the crashes of the death and destruction raining down all around me, the smell pressed in hot in my nostrils, like blood that was brewed overnight and filled with slick tar.

Sulfuric.

I gripped the metal tight in my hand— there was something comforting in its weight— something horrific in its warmth. I stepped carefully over constantly shifting ground, my eyes searching for any sign of dreaded movement. Tension thrummed through me; my neck was held tight in the concentration not to snap.

I took a deep breath.

A shadow flickered in the corner of my vision.
I spun on the heel of my boot.

Something shook my shoulder.

Suddenly I was back to lying in the mud, the ground solid beneath me, I looked over at David. His hand was gentle on my shoulder and his gaze was unwavering a question resting in their depth.

Something was tight in my chest. “She asked me one day why I do the reenactments.”

My voice was gruff, almost a whisper. “She was watering a plant. I remember her hand was shaking and I... I just stared at her; I couldn’t answer.” I shut my eyes tightly and listened to the sounds of the battlefield around me. “I should have told her it grounded me. That the quiet scared me more than anything else.”

He nodded once. “We’re supposed to sneak into the medical tent.” Was all he said in reply— still in character. Then I glanced down at the garnished dog-tags tucked into his wool jacket.

©2019
Our Oak Tree
by
Alina Husain

The scent of rosemary spreads through the land,
I feel at ease only when you hold my hand,
We sit by the trunk of an old oak tree,
And dream about what it would be like to finally feel free,
Reminiscing about the past and shining onto our future,
We watch the tree grow grander and grander
©2019
The Everlasting Melody
By
Alina Husain

I still hear your words in the flutters of my mind,
If only I had known you and I were two melodies that could never combine.
I didn’t know.
I didn’t know that even after I left, you’d be in every page of my soul,
I didn’t know that until after I left you had already broken my mold.
I didn’t know the damage to my music could not be reversed,
but it was only soon when I learned.
Now I live with the high and low notes.
The only thing I have left is hope.

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Heaven
by
Alina Husain

the smell of rose water comes from above,
I hope you're happy in the kingdom of silk,
with a drink sweeter than honey, whiter than milk,
when I miss you I cry tears of love.
©2019
An American Disgrace
by
Isabella Ferrero

Immigrants
Dying from famine and illness
Threatened by murder and corruption
Held back by walls all surrounding
And not accepted when seeking refuge

“Build a wall”, they scream, “keep them out”
They call us rapists, murderers, drug dealers
They call us horrid hijos de puta to our face

At first silence
Then whispers turn into a roar as we reply
We are the foundation of your nation
The backs on which you’ve built your now polluted skies
We have helped you reach the stars
And we accepted no payment

Why?
To see you achieve greatness
To found a wonderful nation
That would accept our children
And liberate those held by chains
Not build walls around them

The reason your home had four walls
The reason you can travel from coast to coast
The reason you’re not divided in two
Is because our proud ancestors fought for you

Isn’t it a disgrace
To laugh in our face
The children of the warriors
You hold so dear
So before you chant “build a wall”
Maybe think of us, think of all we’ve done
To help you get to where you are
©2019
Catcalls
by
Isabella Ferrero

Before we weren’t called women
Who were always searching for a man
Before we were just called girls
Trying their best to manage their curls
Before we were just children
Playing in the sand and staying hidden

And now we’re called girls looking for boyfriends
A girl who can never live without her friends
Woman who can’t walk around alone
Without a man acting like a dog finding a bonexa

We’re never seen as independent
Rather we are just dependent
On how a man acts
Towards us as we walk past

Which is why we walk with friends
In groups of ten
To ensure each and every one of us
Arrives home safely

This is the reality we live
In a world where men believe we like
Being called out for our bodies
©2019
Revenge
by
Isabella Ferrero

I watched her eyes close
She was sleeping for the first time today
They had to give her a heavy dose
Of medicine to help her ignore the pain

Looking into her eyes when she had been shot
Was something I’d never forget
Seeing the way the pain reached her face so quickly
And it surprised her, feeling something again

She was numb now
Sleeping to recovery
I was numb now
Watching for an escape

To find those who shot her
To make them pay
For what they did
To her, and the rest of us that day
©2019
A First-generation American Pledge
by
Isabella Ferrero

We, the children of immigrants, are ready to see our parents’ homes
We, the children of immigrants, are ready for the liberation of our families
We, the children of immigrants, are ready to hug and kiss our cousins for the first time
We, the children of immigrants, are ready to walk the streets of our stolen hometowns

We, the children of immigrants, are ready to fight the evil that gets in the way
  Of us seeing the sunrise over the prettiest nature of today
  Because we are young, wild, and free
  And we want the same for our families

We are ready to steal back the homes taken from us
And walk the streets, allowing our cousins to hold hands with us

We are the faces of tomorrow
But the warriors of today
Wanting to have
The sense of family we’ve been lacking since our first day
©2019
Speaking Out
By
Jillian Bartz

“I raise up my voice not so I can shout,
but so that those without a voice can be heard.
We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.”
-Malala Yousafzai

When I was 13 years old, I realized that not all men were good. I grew up in an environment where my father, grandfather, and uncles demonstrated respect towards women. But one trip out with my friends changed all of that. It was the first time I felt silenced—that I felt victimized and ashamed of my body—or how others view my body. I couldn't speak out on that day. Now I want every woman know that she has a voice, and it should be heard.

Spring in Phoenix has always been a roulette wheel of weather. Some days it is so hot you can cook an egg on the sidewalk, and others it is so cold that you have to bundle up in a jacket. On this day, we were blessed with a cool breeze and puffy white clouds. It was cool outside as my friends and I walked into Pita Jungle on a sunny, March afternoon. Going out to eat with my friends was still a new experience, one that I had worked hard to get my mom to agree to. She considered going out to eat a privilege, so it had taken a lot of begging to get her to agree to. She knew how I felt before, but now she knew how I felt. She knew how I felt.

As my friends and I walked up to the hostess stand after being dropped off by our anxious parents, I breathed in the scent of grilling food-- it smelled like freedom. My friends were laughing at a funny comment I said about school as the breeze from the open door ruffled through our hair. Quiet jazz drifted through the room. A waitress in an oversized apron greeted us with a wide, friendly smile. I returned her smile, then glanced to my left, distracted by two middle aged men.

Years on, I could swear they were wearing stained shirts and dirty baseball caps. Whether this is accurate, or just mental recreation by my brain to align their actions to their dress, I am no longer sure. What I am crystal clear about is how they made me feel. How for the first time in my life, I wanted to hide behind a baggy sweatshirt and long pants. Usually I would not have given them a second thought, but there was something about these men that made me uncomfortable. I stared for a moment longer, then dropped my gaze. That’s when I noticed the screens of their cell phones. My hands began to shake as I realized that the picture I was looking at was of me and my friends. These men had taken pictures of us without our permission. And now they were pointing to various parts of our bodies in the picture and laughing.
I didn’t need a mirror to know that my face was red with anger. “Did you see that guy?” I asked my friends as I continued to watch the men discussing us. I hated that I couldn’t control the feelings of humiliation and anger that made my hands shake and my heart race.

“What guy?” Karly asked, shrugging her shoulders. I had learned through many years of friendship that this was an indication that she was more focused on her own phone than my fear. It wasn’t that she didn’t care, but rather that she just didn’t notice.

“The guys at that table, I think they’re taking pictures of us,” I said, glancing over at the men. Straining my weary vision trying to observe their phone screens.

“Oh my god yeah I saw it on their phones!” Alex said bursting out loudly as if a plate fell from a building. I gasped, Alex was usually quieter than a mouse.

“Should we do something?” I asked looking for validation from my friends. I doubted myself, hoping their words would give me courage to speak up.

“I mean, if you saw something sure,” Karly said while sitting down. I sat there, staring blindly at the menu. Did I see them taking photos or was it all an illusion? I wanted to tell someone: the waitress, the manager, my mom. I continued to doubt myself, my paranoia made me believe I would somehow get in trouble for the accusation. Everyone would think I was crazy. But deep down, I knew what I had seen.

Ever since that day, I have learned to trust what I see and speak out if something is not right. I learned that men are not always safe. I warily observe men everywhere I go in public. I watch their eyes, their phones, their hands. I watch if they are taking advantage of someone, because I never want someone to feel the way I felt at that restaurant. I have become extremely cautious with boys my age. I have had times where I was photographed by boys my age at my own house while I was wearing a bathing suit. I remembered how quiet I was the first time, so now I speak up. I feel empowered, using my voice to say what is right.

If anyone feels uncomfortable, they need to speak up. Verification from friends is not necessary, it does not matter what anyone else thinks, sees, or agrees with. If you see something that is not right, speaking out about it should not require anything but your own will.

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National Sexual Assault Hotline:
800.656.HOPE(4673)
A Moment Suspended in Time

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Nothing’s Meaning
By
Ryan Chang

A person that leaves a remnant might be selfish, for they don’t want time to steal their identity,
   I want the world to remember what I did in my life
For future generations to uncover and appreciate my works is what I wish
   I understand our time here is finite, yet time is infinite
I understand the big green hill with a tree on top is an illusion
   I understand life’s like a lie, because I feel like some of my actions weren’t truthful
Hearing the gunfire and bombings on a desolate country, I wish for peace
   Peace is what drives progress yet also our own doom
I want to be a someone that is remembered but also a none
   People without identities are enviable, as they live an uninterrupted life
I am a kind of person that wishes to keep learning, that way I’ll never have an end goal
   I am one who believes what I do is right
But still, nothing will matter if I obtain absolute nothingness
   I hear a voice past the land of the rising sun, telling me to come home
It speaks, saying the world will never be peaceful,
And life on Earth is too miniscule to care about, yet it can’t hear what I say
And yet, I can see the ever-expanding space opening around me,
   Showing a future where no life will exist ever again.
©2019
He ran down the street, feet bare against the unforgiving asphalt, away from the man with the knife. In the red glare of the setting sun he saw the glint of the man’s weapon, blinding and deadly sharp.

A swerve right. The sign at the crosswalk flashed red, *stop, stop*, but he couldn’t stop and he wouldn’t stop, not even for the car coming towards him from his right, because there was still somebody else behind him and one way or another he was going to die. He made it, hurtling through the traffic with the sound of the knife scraping against his skin echoing all around him.

A quick left. Another right.

Red light, green light. There was a Wal-Mart ahead--surely that meant there would people. His phone lay somewhere behind him, screen irrevocably cracked and utterly useless. A glance around. The man was gone, but that didn’t take away from the impending sense of doom closing in around him, and when he finally spotted the stupid, yellow star and the “save money, live better” slogan underneath he nearly gasped in relief.

The store doors slid open, shudderingly loud. An advertisement for fresh celery, 25% off, fluttered to the ground, and he nearly slipped on it when he barreled in. A lady at the cashier register was standing there, tap-tap-tapping away at her phone and barely looked up at his entrance.

“Phone,” he said, nearly shouted, loud and desperate in an impossibly empty store. The woman shook her head, confused, clutching said object tighter to the *hi my name is* sticker on her chest as she looked him up and down.

“Let me use your phone,” he said again, slightly more coherent. *I need a man who’ll take a chance* Whitney Houston was singing on the overhead, but that wasn’t helpful--he didn’t want to dance with somebody, he just wanted to get the fuck out.

“Our phones are over there,” she said, making a vague gesture behind her. “They’re 15% off if you’re a member of our executive membership program.”

“I don’t want to buy a phone, I’m trying to call the police!” Another glance around, but there was
nobody there but the two of them and an elderly grandmother ambling along holding a bag of carrots.

“Sir, if you cannot remain civil I will have to ask security to escort you out of the premises. Ma’am, I can help you here,” she waved towards the old woman.

“No, you don’t get it, there’s somebody out there chasing after me right now.”

“Sir, if you’ll just wait for me to finish helping this customer I can help you find a nice pair of brand new running shoes to help you outrun them. Oh hello,” she said mildly, turning to the sliding doors again as she bagged the carrots and waved goodbye to the old hobbling woman.

He stiffened, turning around in horror as his grinning, masked assailant walked in, the doors closing behind him with a terrible sense of finality.

“Our membership program is 10% off today,” the cashier lady said, having opened her phone again. “This offer expires today though, so I would highly recommend signing up now if you would like to join. We offer better rates and faster deliveries, as well as a free thirty-day trial.”

The man with the knife gave her a dismissive wave, advancing on him while he edged towards the produce aisle slowly, calculating the distance and whether or not he’d be able to rush past the other man to the door.

Call the police he mouthed at the damned cashier, eyes wild, hoping against hope that even she would see the knife in the man’s hand.

“Sir, if you’re looking for a new kitchen knife, we have some in that aisle over there,” she said mildly. This time she didn’t even bother to point, more focused on the screen of her phone than anything.

The misting systems turned on suddenly, snapping him out of the stupor of frozen terror he had fallen under, and when the first stab came he hollered for the cashier to run, call the police goddamn it.

And the last thing he heard before he collapsed was the cashier lady’s quiet, “Oh, we have Clorox wipes in aisle five for four ninety-nine to clean up this mess.”

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Plague of the Past
by
Keegan Diaz

PROLOGUE

2000 years in the future, there lived humans, just like us- except different. They had more knowledge about the world, had discovered new species of plants and animals, and had even built an artificial atmosphere to protect all life and especially earth itself from incoming objects from space. However, the people didn’t live on different continents: Africa, Asia, or even the Americas. No, they lived on a supercontinent called Kyro Maximus. This supercontinent was culturally diverse, had a population of 7 billion people, and a total of 200,000 cities that benefited the continent through trade and transportation between people and goods. However, death came upon the continent as a plague arose from its coffin. After 3700 years passed to the crowded city after people thought it was gone for good.

In a city called Alfa Yatari, there lived a sixteen year old orphan boy named Ronin. When Ronin was two years old, his parents suffered a severe cranial injury in a car crash. After his parents recovered, they both lost memory of Ronin and weren't able to take care of him anymore. Ronin wasn’t just a normal boy though. He had a very high IQ status of 328, 160 points higher than the average population of Kyro Maximus. He won hundreds of science fair contests; when he was five, he created the first functional light that didn’t require any chemical or electric current. In fact, he was one of the inventors of the artificial atmosphere. One of the aspects of the atmosphere was that it could control the climate to spread evenly throughout the continent.

On the morning his life irrevocably changed, Ronin woke up one morning and walked over to his hologram television, and turned on the news.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ronin watched his dog chew on a bone that he had given to him the day before, he pulled up a flash back from many years ago. Ronin’s dog came into his life when he was only 5 years old. Ronin had stress issues and had to walk in the alley between the orphanage and the butchers shop to relieve himself. One day in alleyway, he found a little Husky pup chewing on scraps of meat of the butcher’s scrapped bones. He took him home and named him “Haiku”. Ronin’s disability often gave him panic attacks, but Haiku, his new therapy dog, helped him calm down and control his stress. Thus, the orphanage allowed Haiku to stay and Ronin got better over time.

The news anchor’s voice forced him back to the present with the most shocking story that he had
ever heard.

CHAPTER 1: SPREADING NEWS

“Breaking news!” said the reporter. “A man uncovers a glass jar of ash from the Hedari gold mines. After being exposed to the substance for too long, the man showed severe symptoms including; horrible coughing, endless pain in the heart, and sudden death of brain cells. He was rushed to the Jebalta hospital but died two hours after arrival. The substance is now under research in a containment lab and currently under superior containment protocol to make sure that absolutely no one is exposed to this substance ever again.”

Ronin turned off his hologram television then walked over to his window in his dorm, and stared into the distance. Ronin was worried, and didn’t trust that the substance was safe. He knew that the world did have many crazy people out there that would be able to somehow obtain the substance. His dog looked at Ronin if he had understood what he was thinking.

“I-I don’t understand,” Ronin said to Haiku. “How does a powder end up killing a person in less than 12 hours?”

Haiku cocked his head as if he were listening.

“Well, it can’t reach us here. It’s already contained in an area far from here.”

Ronin picked up his bag and headed out to his new job at the medical center to make new medicine for the sick. Since the Ronin was learned so quickly, he had mastered all of his education by the time he was a teenager and didn’t need schooling anymore, so he was able to start working at a young age. News had spread about the death of the man that touched the powder. In Kryo Maximus the news was very important to watch, so many people had already been talking about the fatality and they started worrying.

“When there be more substances that we would find that could kill us? Where did it come from?”

When he was walking home from work after listing out gene patterns in viruses, he saw a secret meeting between the Elders. They are a suspicious group consisting of a variety of religions at least over one hundred years old. They were all talking in their secret language when Ronin heard the Elder in the black robe say the word “virus”. Ronin felt his heart stutter and prayed that the word “virus” in their secret language meant something else.

At night, Ronin had a hard time sleeping. He kept moving around trying to get comfortable, but
he couldn’t. He was still thinking of the word virus that the Elder said right before they ended the meeting. He sat up in bed and turned on his light next to his nightstand. It was 12:35, just after midnight. He picked up his tablet and pulled up an online book about dogs to keep his mind off of the things he heard that day. He stared reading and kept reading. Then, he slept.

The next morning, again, Ronin pulled up the news. He was terrified after hearing what the reporter said.

CHAPTER 2: STAY INSIDE

“Breaking new! More deaths due to the black powder,” said the news reporter as she looked sternly at the camera, but this time she had a slight look of fear as she shuddered and fiddled with her paper in her hands. “The first responders who helped the man all died with the same symptoms at the same time. This could mean that the new substance is contagious, experts say that it might be a disease. Authorities are already on the scene and containing the area before it could spread.”

Ronin looked at his dog, and his dog looked at him with the same amount of fear in their eyes. Haiku paced around the room and shook with fear. He turned off the news immediately and called his workplace to tell them that he was going to skip work.

“I’m not able to go to work today, boss,” Ronin said over the phone.

“Why?” his boss asked suspiciously as he sat up from his seat.

“I-I don’t feel good enough to come today.” Ronin stuttered.

“Good answer. I hope you get better,” said his boss.

That day, Ronin didn’t go out at all, afraid that he might catch the illness. His dorm was like his blanket that isolated him from the outside world and the only thing that could protect him from the disease. He was afraid to go out, not did he even want to open his window to get a nice breath of fresh air. He was in his own prison.

Days when by one by one. Then this one day changed not only Ronin’s life, but the whole world’s. Ronin, for the last time turned on the news. He was shocked to hear these words that came out of the news reporter’s mouth.
CHAPTER 3: A HERO’S CALLING

“Alert to all people of Earth! The substance that killed the man and first responders were all exposed to a devastating plague. This maybe the end of the world and the whole population. There are only a few people that can be exposed to the plague that can’t die. Their names are Ronin Nobunaga, Richard Khan, and-. Ronin clearly didn’t listen to all the names the reporter called out, but he was supersized that there were very few people immune to the plague. Through an IQ test that he has taken, it shows that he has an IQ of 3028. He may be smart enough to create an antivirus. If Ronin Nobunaga is watching this right now, our lives are depending on you,” announced the news reporter.

Ronin shut off the news and immediately got a call from his boss at the medical center.

“We have all watched the news today,” said Ronin’s boss. “There is only one last question for you before we end this call. Are you in?”

“Yes sir!” Ronin said in a clear and powerful voice. He imagined himself finally finding the cure to the plague and behind him would be a crowd of cheering people idling him as a savior. Then, he realized something: what if he didn’t find the cure? Everybody would hate him. He tried to keep the bad thoughts away from his mind, but he couldn’t.

“I accepted the agreement,” said Ronin, “The only option to put forth all I have, all my money, all of my knowledge.”

His dog whimpered as it was trying to tell him not to leave.

“My people need me,” he said to his dog.

He packed his bag and headed down to the medical center. He felt honored to take on such a big duty like this. Then he stepped outside.

“Look! It’s Ronin Nobunaga! My dad works with him!” shouted a little boy as he pointed him out.

Everybody’s eyes were locked on him as he walked down the street. He would occasionally hear a “good luck” or a “we are depending on you” as he walked. When he got to the entrance of the medical center, there were hundreds of people cheering for him. There were lots of news reporters all asking him questions at the same time, and photographers flashing their cameras in
his face that he felt dizzy.

“Is there security anywhere?” Ronin asked. Soon enough, there were security guards that closed in all around him, and guided him to the lab.

As Ronin and the guards walked through the hall, there was a man that breached the barriers, went up to Ronin, grabbed his shirt and suspended him up into the air, choking Ronin.

“You better save us or else-,” said the man, but he couldn’t finish. One of the guards punched him right in the head and knocked him out. Ronin dropped to the floor, but got back up again.

“This way, Mr. Nobunaga,” said the guard casually as he pointed over to the doorway. All of the guards left after they arrived to the room that had a sign that read Authorized personnel only! At the entrance, his boss met up with him.

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Before You Lie

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Conversation
by
Ava Kim

Glen and I sat on top of the red-tiled roof, enjoying the day. I watched the clouds drift by through the bright blue ceiling of the world. Today felt like a rather sentimental day, although I hated being sentimental. It was a feeling I couldn’t help, considering that Glen was sitting next to me. She was staring at me rather expectantly for a conversation, and the implicit demand was not lost on me. I couldn’t help but sigh and look down from the sky to meet her gaze.

Her black hair was cut short and her bangs reached her cheekbones. She had a wicked smile of someone who didn’t listen to anyone and laughed at the misery of others. A red headband, which I gave her, was perennially worn. She even laughed like a jackal, all white teeth and sharp canines.

“I think I’d be miserable if we had to reincarnate into humans again.” Glen said toothily, swinging her legs back and forth like a child. A little child, yes, that’d fit her personality well. Yet there was something broken about it. Dark. Twisted. It was hard to describe and I never had a way with words in the first place. “Imagine, going through school over and over again, but not knowing that you did. All that endless suffering never knowing when it’ll stop, and worst of it each time you think it’ll be the last. Whoever thought of that was certainly a miserable little sod, if not depressed.”

“Is that so,” I replied. She was in her thoughtful moods, a strange whiplash from her often maniacal carelessness bordering on insanity. “I wouldn’t mind trying to live again you know, even if I didn’t know that I was doing so.”

“You’re so strange!” she exclaimed loudly and brightly, staring at me curiously; as if I were the insane one. “I’d hate it so much. I want a singular life, knowing that my uselessness is rather final. That I would never have to suffer the indignity of failure once more. School is terrible and you can’t choose your parents. What if I end up in a terrible household?”
Glen was from a normal family. Or at least I think she was. Her parents seemed normal, caring and worrying about their daughter. The house was decorated with expensive furniture and stylish ornaments. Whenever I visited they’d insist on feeding me and would engage in pleasant conversations. It felt like a normal happy family, similar to my own.

Even before we became good friends, I knew that Glen plays the facade of a happy person. She never talks about her worries or problems. The lack of mention would lead to the assumption of a happy family and a life, but recently I’ve thought otherwise. Once I remarked how close I was to my mother and father, she had muttered under breath about being jealous. Another time I mentioned Silvia, the top-ranked student, and Glen would have the sourest expression on her face. Envy, I suppose. It was vague sideways replies, never upfront admittance about her negative feelings and problems. Those were how Glen talked about her problems.

“You can’t choose your children either,” I replied, looking at the distant blue sky. The emptiness in my head was churning slowly once more. When I was with Glen, I thought of things I usually didn’t need to think about. I took amusement in the peculiar things I came up with, allowing it to distract me from my studies and the everpressing need to do more. Yes, Glen was my amusement, and a singular one apart from music. “It’s all rather random. I wonder why people get children, knowing how at some point they won’t listen or turn out to be disobedient. Some children, I dare say, don’t even know how to love.”

Glen didn’t say anything and blinked owlishly at me. I had stunned her, a rare occurrence. I smiled back at her pleasantly, resting my elbows on my folded legs, and my chin on my hands. It was a smug little grin, something I don’t do often. Swaying slightly, Glen tilted her head to one side and clicked her tongue.

“Do your parents tell you that?” asked Glen, something indescribable and profound in her gaze.

I shook my head, feeling my long black hair whipping back and forth in the calm air. “I’m a good child, you see- I do as they tell me.”

Glen laughed at that, wildly and almost bitterly. Her eyes narrowed to slits and one side of her lip...
tilted upward. It was a posture of clear defiance but I didn't understand why she’d be so defensive to my response. So, I waited for some more pleasant entertainment.

“You’re twisted like a pretzel bun, I like it!” she declared and I hummed slightly to her declaration. Was I twisted? Probably. More twisted than Glen? I’d laugh until I choke on my own spit at that. She then raised a hand and pointed her index finger into her temples, deep through her bangs. “They say the inner voices you hear are what your parents say to you. The nasty little commentaries? That’s from your parents shouting at you, calling you failure or what-not.”

“Well, what do you hear?” I asked cordially. Glen flashes another toothy smile and leans inward. I get a close-up her face, we’re a few inches apart. The girl had a fine face, although her features were rather sharp. Her chin and cheekbones were far more prominent than her soft and low nose, making a strange contrast. Her lips were cracked, and she had acne bubbling on her forehead.

“I’d rather know what goes on your head, Rey,” Redirecting away from herself and towards me. We both know what Glen was doing, but I wasn’t going to push it. I was being sentimental right now. Instead I sit up and let my legs lie flat on the warm red-tiles, brushing my long hair behind me. Glen wrinkles her nose at the sudden movement, but resumes a more respectful distance.

“What? Not going to answer?”

I tap on my chin, rapidly looking for a way to distract or answer Glen without giving away anything too personal. It was a game between us, trying to get straight answers from the other and both shirking away from blunt replies unless it was for a greater ploy of the overall game.

I remember an old conversation I had with another girl. It wouldn’t hurt to bring that up instead.

“There’s a difference from listening when your parents are worried or when they’re being just plain mad.” I told her instead, watching as Glen took the information carefully. Before she could make a retaliation, I plowed forward hoping for her to drop the line of questioning. Glen wasn’t good at that, being somewhat demanding and forceful in garnering information, but she was being thoughtful today, like I was being sentimental. “When they’re mad they say things that have a grain of truth but are intended to hurt. You see, the intent is different from when they’re
worried; the words are different even when they’re both screaming things with a rather negative tone.”

Without any reservation Glen digests the information and moves on, uninterested about debating the meaning of what parents do or mean. They do seem rather distant from her, like most things in life were to her. She was rather detached in a large manner of things.

“You like hearing yourself talk, don’t you?” There’s no smile on her face but rather a calm expression devoid of everything.

“Not at all, quite the opposite. I’d say all the chattiness is your influence.” I laugh politely instead, running a hand above my nape, under the hair, and then flicking it away. Glen looks like she didn’t believe me at all. “Why, got a bone to pick?”

“Why do you think that people were made?” she asks instead, and I took it as a challenge to how I didn’t answer directly earlier. There’s a mild grin on her face, and she starts rocking back and forth once more, slightly drumming her knuckles against the roof. “Come on, the smartest of us must know!”

“What a heavy title.” I murmur, neither accepting or rejecting the title. There wasn’t much I could say without revealing how I felt about other people.

It felt like a shallow conversation that lead nowhere and was going nowhere. Any amusement I had felt died a short and painful death. Even Glen’s once exhilarating childishness felt trite and useless. Was this how adults felt? How droll. “I suppose people are made to fulfill roles in society and move all of humanity forward. Humans originally were just beings that had gotten more intelligence than needed and continued forward with it. Like everything else, it was a mutation, or really, an accident.”

“How depressing!” a remark akin to someone commenting on the weather, I expected no less from Glen. “You wanted to become a literature professor right? That’s what you said.”
No. I wanted to become an astronaut or join some space program. Or something to do with the beyond and the dark reaches of the universe, where everything is so far and new. I want to look deep into the abyss of stars and clouds, and try and understand how brief human life was in comparison to giants of Milena's. Instead, “I can’t believe you remember that. I wanted to teach.”

“You?” The word was heavy with an incredulous tone, and rightfully so. Glen always read me the best even though her head was up in the clouds half the time. A small thought flickered by that I should push her off the roof and watch her flail down to the earth below. “You don’t like people.”

“Of course I do.” I reply instantly. Glen adored people. I knew that, we both knew that. So, it was obvious that I did not like people. She was dependent on them, needing them in a sort of addiction, changing completely in the presence of others. There was something frail and desperate in the way she talked with people, something dark and ominous whenever she asked for help. Was it pride? I could not tell. One of the clouds drifted under the sun, giving us both shade.

“Well, what does society ask of us?” Glen sings, having a penchant for the dramatics. I considered giving her a little push once more before just as quickly discarding the thought. It’d be terribly rude, and human bodies were so prone to breaking. I flip my hair once more, a bit thoughtlessly as I try and figure out a way to respond to Glen.

“To follow social norms, fit in, and get a job. For us girls, I suppose it would be to marry an American man and support the household. Get a few children to continue the lineage, die pleasantly and politely,” was my polite and normal response. Glen laughs at that while I stare at her, rather annoyed with the sudden outburst. It was her famous jackal laughter, all white teeth and sharp canines. Rather impolite in company. “That is the way for us females you know, if we don’t want to be considered strange.”

She continues to cackle, leaning inward as her body trembles from the force of the laughter. It’s the sharp and piercing sort of laugh that hurt the ears, but instead of getting irate at Glen as I oft
do, I watched her instead. *Did I adore Glen?* No, that wasn’t it either. There was something that I loved to watch in her, that wildness. On anyone else I would find it disrespectful and unfit for proper company, but not for Glen. I was rather lax on her. Perhaps I had studied too hard last night and all this useless sentimentality was turning my brain into something soft. But, I suppose it wasn’t too bad, for a little indulgence.

“I’d rather choke myself than live like that,” she declares once she was done laughing, her voice still holding the note of humor in it. Her dark eyes are watching the cloud as it drifts away, the bare slivers of sunlight peeking through.

“That’s only what a dreamer could say.” I close my eyes as the cloud passes by and the sun pours down bright light. Glen flashes me a bright smile, the golden light casting an amber hue on her hair. Suddenly she starts to clamber up on the roof startling me. “What are you doing?! You could get hurt, come back down here!”

She doesn’t listen to me and with deft movements, stands up on the roof. It’s a dangerous position, from falling off either side of the roof, a foot planted unsteadily on each side. With a sharp smile, she looks down and smiles at me, almost playfully. Something in my heart stutters at the smile, and something dark urges me to push one of her legs gently. Instinctively, I push the thought away..

“Are you thinking of pushing me off the roof?” It was almost as if she had read my mind, and I stared at her with the pretense of calm while my heart beat so rapidly I could feel it in my ears. Departing her gaze from me, she smiles dangerously into the distant blue sky and stretches her arms upward. A part of me quails at the prospect of doing such a thing. “Sometimes I think I’m the only one born without ambition. It’s a terrible feeling you know. Everyone wants to be something, but I can’t understand that. I can’t understand anything. I’m not smart like you, but I know that you being a polite literature professor isn’t what you want.”

“Will you please come down?” I ask instead, feeling strange watching her smile content in such a dangerous position. There was a thrill of excitement of watching someone else do something perilous, and it almost overwhelmed my ingrained response to convince her to get down from the
roof. Glen tilts her head and looks down at me as I slowly offer her my hand.

“It’s fine if you push me off this roof.” she says thoughtlessly, as remote as she has ever been in the past. I can’t suppress a flinch and her lip twitches at the move. Her recklessness and thoughtlessness was weapon sometimes, a weapon which I fell to if I was unprepared. I could almost hear a small chuckle dying in the cold air, and I felt shocked. Was she amused? I could hardly bite down the indignation of her being amusing.

“I think there’s something we need to do. The history project is due tomorrow you know. This is a rather untasteful joke.” That was the only thing I could say to such declaration. Ignore it. Glen wasn’t suicidal was she? The whole time I’ve known her, she’s never expressed such desires. As far as I was concerned, it was another one of her little antics. Although I was worried that she had gotten a glimpse of my darker more improper desires. But, I’d die, let Glen die, before I’d ever admit that to another breathing soul.

“Dreaming is so easy you know, waking up is the hardest part.” She takes my hand, with much relief to my beating heart. Slowly, she steps down to a much more safer part of the roof, and we clamber our way off to get started on the school project.

As I close the door to the attic, I watch as Glen merrily walks downstairs. I don’t understand at all. That was rather fun, if not dangerous. I would hate it so much if Glen dies to an accident, as much as she doesn’t want to become a proper lady. As much as I ignore everything in my life. Looking outside the window, I see the distant blue sky.

“Hurry up!” Glen shouts, clearly annoyed with how long I was taking. Tearing my gaze from the window, I walk downstairs to join Glen.

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Embarrassment
by
Siddharth Vaidyanathan

Every friend is part of someone's life
They each hold a piece of valuable memory.
   A moment of happiness then
   A chuckle at mockery now
But each of them persist with a dark cognizance
   A secret not to be told
A flashback they choose not to be touched upon.

These are their embarrassments,
In which they hold to the bottom of their heart.

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Feeding My Rumbly Tummy

By

Rachel Woosley

When I was younger, I couldn’t wait to have the freedom to go out on my own. By thirteen, all of my friends were able to walk down to the local Dairy Queen, but I didn’t get to share in their freedom. While they were eating ice cream cones and hanging out past dark, I could only join them if my family went too. Pretty soon I was fourteen and allowed the freedom to be out of the house without my parents with me— only by then, I didn’t want the freedom anymore. The expediency of DoorDash and GrubHub far encompassed the allure of teenage freedom, I no longer felt the need to venture out for ice cream. All I needed was a computer and solid internet connection— well, that and my mom’s credit card or money on my debit card. It was the epitome of laziness, and I loved it.

On one particular Saturday, I was curled up under my fuzzy covers. The only thing visible from my bed were blankets, pillows, and two eyeballs that watched the ceiling fan spin. I was hypnotized by my imagination and the shadow that flipped from my white popcorn ceiling to the wooden fan blades. It was in the middle of the afternoon and I was tucked away from the whole house— just where I liked to be. My stomach began to rumble and I knew my self-imposed time-out was over. It was time to find food.

I didn’t have my debit card to save me or my mother’s credit card, meaning no food delivery service for me. My face scrunched up at the idea of leaving my covers, let alone my house to venture out into the heat to find food. Slumping out of bed, my blankets still attached to me, I made my way out of my room, down the hall, past the kitchen and into the pantry. The only thing that I could come up with that didn't require looking up a recipe was noodles. I despised the fact that since I was alone, I would have to clean the pot. That would mean ending up drenched in water; no matter how many times I had done the dishes, I always end up soaked. Going back to bed drenched in cold soapy water was something I was not looking forward too.

That's when I saw the kettle on our empty stove unit.

It was a functioning red tea kettle, except no one made tea, so it was more of a decoration than anything else. But it boiled water, and it seemed like easy cleaning. I turned on the stove after pouring water into the kettle, then sat and waited until I heard the kettle crying as if telling me not to go through with this. It was a plaintive cry— one usually reserved for children who lost ice cream cones to gravity and pavement. I ignored it and started cracking the noodles in half and putting them in the kettle. Then, I proceeded to wait for the next round of the kettle crying.
Despite the crankiness of the kettle, the noodles turned out fantastic, despite the kettle being too small, so most of the noodles I could boil was less than half a bowl. But, that wasn't enough to stop my hunger. So, I ate the noodles. I thought about making more, but knowing my black hole of my stomach, I would keep getting hungrier the longer I waited. It would be an unending cycle of noodles until I ran out. It could be argued that I should have just started with a large pot to begin with, but you know, hindsight is 20/20 and all that.

Instead I cleaned up my mess and had to face the fact that I had to leave the house in the middle of an Arizona summer to find food. Good fast food was awaiting me out there. I put normal clothes on, grabbed my wallet, phone, and keys. I locked up and set a course for the nearest fast food place that was about a mile away.

Setting out on my heroic adventure, I followed the twists and turns of the sidewalk out of my neighborhood and down the block. Music gently whispered in my ear as cars zoomed by me, buffeting me with a hot wind reminiscent of the heat from the open door of an oven. A loud pop, somewhere between a balloon and a gunshot, sent me skyward. My head whipped around just in time to see a car speeding past me, their back tire completely shredded. Calling it a mini 4th of July firework would be an understatement, and my heart banged about in my chest like the cannon explosions in Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture.

I reached the entrance of my fast food heaven, the concrete building and the golden arches welcoming me in their grease-soaked embrace. As I opened the door, the smell of hamburgers and salted fries filled the air. I practically drifted to the counter and ordered my usual hamburger, medium fries, and large soda—all priced at $5.17. I got a little receipt saying I had paid, and in minutes I had my tray of tasty food in hand. Every bite of my burger was like heaven in my mouth and the fries were even better. Soon enough, there were only crumbs left on my tray and the grumbling of my tummy was finally silenced.

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Hiraeth
by
Surabhi Sajith

The wind whispers to me
It’s been too long now
Come back home

In creeps the hiraeth
The past and future slip by me

I live in the present
I want to experience once again
The pain joy and sorrow
In creeps the hiraeth
As I am called home
©2019
Revive

©2019 Sahitha Vuddagiri
Escaping the Cult of Lucifera
by
Alina Chisti

*Leave with that impure beast growing inside your belly. Oh my daughter, you have committed a heinous sin. Get out.*

These words still rang in Rose’s head as she sat crouched against a brick wall next to a dim-lit street in the small town of Rockport, Maine. Her father’s icy words made her shiver as she pulled her hoodie over her jet-black hair and wrapped her jacket tightly around her small frame.

After the miserable scene that took place outside her house earlier, Rose gathered her belongings which her father had thrown on the sidewalk and kept on walking.

As she felt her large stomach, her attention was brought back to her baby; the term was still foreign to her. After all, Rose was only seventeen. She worried about her baby’s safety and health out in the streets. She couldn’t rely on the baby’s father for help, he had died of suicide weeks before. When she thought about his suicide, she felt a painful mix of extreme bitterness and sadness toward her former lover. Hot tears ran down her cheeks. She pushed the negative thoughts out of her head and told herself that she wanted to be there for her baby no matter what.

She felt a wave of exhaustion pass over her, and she gently put her head down on the damp concrete to get some rest before she continued with her trek. She watched strangers pass by, and she knew exactly what they were all thinking. They all looked at her with a sense of self-righteousness as if she had done something to choose the circumstances she was in, walking by her with a relief that they weren’t in her place.

The next morning, she opened her eyes to a vast gray sky. She then instantly wanted to close her eyes again so she could imagine she was still in the comfort of her own bed. That wasn’t her reality anymore though. She slowly got up, grabbed her backpack, and continued to walk. She lost track of her journey and ended up deep in the woods. As it started to rain, she searched for signs of civilization. She frantically screamed for help as the thunder and rain got heavier. There was no one to help her. A few hours later, she collapsed in a muddy ditch and passed out.

She woke up in a comfortable bed with soft sheets and pillows. She expected herself to wake up from the wonderful dream, but as she felt the fabric of her blanket, she realized it wasn’t a dream. She flung herself out of the bed in a state of panic, but she was stopped as a woman who looked like a nurse, who took her hand and lulled her back to sleep. She whispered, “It’s alright, dear, you are safe now.”

Rose groggily got up and asked, “Where am I? Is...is is my baby going to be okay?!” Rose could finally see the woman properly; the woman was dressed in a navy-blue robe from head to toe and had small pouch that held a black leather-bound booklet that was most likely some type of scripture. Wrinkles formed on her cheeks and forehead like ripples in water when she talked.
Rose thought she looked like a kind and genuine woman who cared about her well-being, but Rose could almost swear that when she mentioned the baby, a cloud of darkness passed through her eyes and her lips contorted into a wicked smirk, as if the devil himself was unleashed into a human host.

“Welcome Sister, I am the leader of this women’s home. My name is Lucifera Geneva. My duty is to take all women who are suffering under my wing. My sisters and I will provide them with all the essentials including a room, food, clothes, and medical aid. Since you, my dear, are pregnant, you must promise to stay with us until your child is born because we want to make sure you are cared for well and your child is receiving all of his or her essential nutrients,” said the old lady. Rose overlooked their previous moment and felt relieved that she was potentially going to get a place to stay until she gave birth, but the last sentence that Lucifera said almost sounded like a threat. Lucifera grabbed Rose’s arm with a grip almost too tight for Rose’s preference and said, “Here’s a change of clothes. Go get dressed, and come down to participate in the chant and meet your sisters.” Rose assumed it was a very religious woman’s home.

“Many young girls were lost before they come here. I just thank the Lord that I was able to find you before the nine months pas-” she abruptly stopped with a nervous chuckle.

Rose hesitantly lifted the article of clothing Lucifera left on her bed and set it on her lap. The woman’s random act of kindness left Rose nervous about her true intentions; she wondered what Lucifera wanted in return. But she decided not to be cynical of a woman who had clearly devoted her life to helping teen mothers. “Thank you so much for your compassion towards me, I was so lost before this. I appreciate everything you’ve offered to do for me,” replied Rose with a slight smile.

“One more thing dear, I will need your phone. It’s a rule in this house.” Lucifera said. Rose found this incredibly strange, but agreed nevertheless. “And, remind me to give you your room key sometime today, so I can go to my closet and retrieve it.” She then saw Lucifera walk down a dark corridor to the left of her room.

She changed out of her muddy top and put on the blue robe, and she walked downstairs to greet the sisterhood. They were all congregated in a room reciting chants in a foreign language from the black book that she saw earlier. She awkwardly stood in the back of the room and observed the women. All of them seemed very involved in their practice, except for a young woman in the corner. The young woman was staring at her, her eyes darting over to Rose’s swollen stomach every couple of seconds. At the end of the chant, she greeted the sisters and once again saw the peculiar woman sitting in the corner, glaring at Rose from the corner of her eye. To avoid further awkward tension, she walked up to the woman and kindly greeted her.

The woman was thin, pale, and had dark bags under her eyes that were poorly covered up with some concealer. Other than the hyper pigmentation under her eyes, she was quite beautiful. She had a thin nose, full lips, and intense eyes. Although her body looked young, her face looked old, as if it had seen too much in its years. Although her features were kind, her eyes were cold as if her experiences had stripped her of her innocence.
“Hi! My name is Rose. I’m new to this place, so I kinda sorta don’t really know how things work around here. Do you have any advice?” Rose said in a cheery manner. She wasn’t necessarily interested in the advice the woman had to offer, but she needed a conversation starter.

The woman seemed too lost in thought to acknowledge her presence, but after stuttering and stumbling on her words, she managed to say, “Uh, may I-?”

“Oh yeah, sure,” Rose said while looking down at her stomach. “If you touch the left side of my stomach, you might be able to feel a kick.”

The woman nervously put her hand on Rose’s belly, and smiled. As she stroked her belly, she let out a joyful chuckle and put her ear on Rose’s stomach. The amount that the woman seemed to be invested in her unborn baby made Rose tense up. Rose then stepped back and attempted to make an excuse to head to her room.

“Wait!” the woman said, rather loudly. “Oh sorry, I didn’t mean to be so loud- I just realized I’d never asked you your name.”

“Rose.”

“I’m Liza, and I’m a hugger,” the woman said while faking an overly sociable smile. She then leaned in to hug Rose. She came rather close to her and stroked her stomach before completely wrapping her arms around her. The hug was quite intimate for two people that had just met. It then started to grow tighter, as Liza moved her fingers towards the back of her neck and tugged on the chain around Rose’s neck. As the chain tightened around her neck, Rose pulled away and gasped for air. “Oh, I’m so sorry. Your necklace must’ve caught on to my shirt sleeve or something.”

“It’s fine,” Rose replied slightly irritated. “It’s been a long day; I think I should head to my bedroom,” Rose said, backing away from Liza.

Rose went up to her bed and took the vitamin that Lucifera left on her nightstand. As she tossed and turned that night in her new room, she heard faint crying from somewhere below her. The noise wasn’t clear, so Rose quietly snuck out of her bed and went downstairs to the basement.

The basement was surrounded by chains and locks, but it looked like someone had opened it. She pushed the door open and what she saw made her sick. Every muscle in her body trembled, and she frantically gasped for air.

Rotten corpses of young women were piled on top of each other. Each of them had slashes and stab marks on their stomachs. The disgusting, pungent smell made Rose want to eject everything inside her stomach. Her whole entire body shook with fear and ugly tears spilled out of her eyes uncontrollably. Then, she saw the same peculiar woman that she saw at the chant. She was crying
over a jar of human parts. Rose then attempted to run up the stairs, but she tripped and fell. Her trembling hands then futilely attempted to grab the next step as she felt a cold hand grab her ankle and push her down the stairs. Rose started to scream and desperately grab the metal railing, but her attempts were in vain as she felt herself going down the stairs, her head slamming against each concrete step as everything became dark.

As she regained consciousness, Rose felt a wet liquid dripping down the side of her head and heard an incessant ringing sound in her head. She then opened up her eyes to see a tall figure peering over her. She tried to pull her arms up to defend herself but found that her arms and legs were tied to a chair. She could feel the roughness of the rope against her wrists and ankles. When she tilted her head, she suddenly felt a sudden surge of pain on the side of her head that the concrete hit against. Her breathing slowed and labored. Her vision was blurry, but she saw the figure’s hand creep toward her. Her heart was racing; she felt the figure’s icy hand against her tear stained-face. The figure’s hand moved down to her stomach. Rose screamed at the figure to get away from her. As her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, she recognized the woman; it was Liza.

“Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you. Why would I hurt the host of my child?” Liza said.

“ What is this place?! Why do you have me tied up?” Rose wanted to scream, but her voice came out as a raspy whisper.

“I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to cause you distress, sweetie. I just wanted to talk to you,” Liza said, while clutching to Rose’s arms as if in desperation. “I’m just so glad you’re here,” she continued while holding the jar. Rose stared in pure disgust as she felt the preservative solution drip onto her robe. “Oh, I’m sorry. You see, I wasn’t as lucky… I lost mine before I could give birth,” she said while pointing to the jar. “But you see, its ok. My lost baby has manifested itself in you. You’re the carrier of the baby that I have waited for years. And once you give birth, I’ll finally be reunited with my child,” she said while staring intently at Rose’s stomach.

“This is my child. You need to accept that your baby is dead. She did not take the form of my baby, and you have no right over this child. I don’t know what kind of horrific organization you and the sisters run here, but I’m leaving-”

Rose shivered at the woman’s loud cackle. “Are you really that naïve that you can’t even see what’s right in front of you!” the woman exclaimed. “ ‘I wanna run away from this place with my baby.’ Oh, that’s so adorable,” she mocked angrily. “You are sitting in a room of corpses, and you don’t realize that there is NO way out. If you try to escape, Sister Lucifera will ensure that you will end up just like one of these lovely women,” she said sarcastically while gesturing toward the corpses.

By the time the woman finished her sentence, Rose’s body was shaking uncontrollably as she screamed, “Why did she do that to them?” At that exact moment, Rose could see compassion and empathy visible in her eyes.
Liza replied rather quietly, “Because she thinks people like you and me are sinners for having children out of wedlock. She believes we need to be destroyed before their darkness further corrupts humanity. You see, those pills that she was giving you slowly kill the baby inside your belly. Once the dead babies are removed, she keeps them in her basement as representations of her servitude to the Lord. The mothers get to live only if they vow to spend the rest of their life repenting for their sins and serving her cause.”

Her voice faded to a soft whisper. “Lucifera believes that people like me and you, we’re stained forever. We’re the rotting carcasses of the women who were once pure. We’re the dirty creatures that aren’t allowed to step foot in any house of faith. We’re forever marked as the unwanted - the untouchables. The type of women that no man would desire and the type of women that God doesn’t have space for in the gardens of the afterlife. The pages of our deeds have been blackened. That’s why Sister Lucifera claims that our children must never be delivered because they will be the children that are born evil.” She then brought her thumb and index finger up to massage the bridge of her nose as a mechanism to cover her lips trembling with despair and sadness. She put the palm of her shaking hand on her face to subtly wipe away the tear that had escaped her eyes.

Rose clutched her stomach. She could feel the humid dampness of her robe from the sweat that seeped through the thin fabric. Panic filled her as she thought about the prospect of her baby getting killed and thrown into a dirty basement. She couldn’t comprehend the type of radical organization Lucifera ran, and the way she brainwashed women into believing her hyper fundamentalist interpretation of the religious scripture she carried around in the leather bound booklet. Lucifera degraded women and murdered their children. Rose could see the pain in the woman’s eyes as she described Lucifera's teachings.

The woman’s face contorted as her lips curved up into a cunning and satisfied smile. “Sister Lucifera is sending me away to the other side of the country to find more “lost souls.” I can escape during this time. Trust me when I say this: as long as you’re under this roof, Sister Lucifera will ensure that your baby is dead either through the pills or more direct measures if you are disobedient,” she said pointing toward the body of a woman with unstitched cuts around her belly. If you are a sensible woman who doesn’t want a baby to die, you’ll give me my daughter when she’s born.”

Rose started to contemplate her situation and her mind was racing with ideas about escapes and alternate plans. Rose knew that it was insane to execute the plan she thought of. She hesitated for a moment. “Am I being selfish?” she thought. “Am I putting my baby girl at risk by choosing my plan when she has a higher chance of surviving if I follow through with Liza’s plan because I can’t bare to lose her-or can I not bare the thought of my child gazing into the eyes of another woman?” she thought anxiously. At that immediate moment, Rose thought back to the words her father yelled as he threw her bags onto the street. Leave with that impure beast growing inside your belly. Her father had thrown her away as if a child was something you could dispose of.
when situations become inconvenient. Although it would be difficult, Rose knew she had to execute her escape plan; she couldn’t abandon her child.

When Liza untied her, she pulled away from her and ran up the stairs. She knew she had to get to the roof. She heard the woman running after her, screaming at her to come back. She thrusted her entire body toward the heavy wooden doors, pushing it open. With a pounding heart, she ran through the dim lit hallways. She then snuck into Sister Lucifera’s room because she knew the keys were in her closet. Rose could hear her heartbeat as she heard footsteps coming toward Sister’s Lucifera's room. She hid herself in the closet. As Liza searched the room, she could feel droplets of sweat form along her forehead. When Liza left the room, Rose went through the second hall to get to the second set of stairs. As she clambered up the stairs toward the rooftop, she could hear the loud creaking sound the aged wooden floorboards produced as she stepped on them, and she felt the small wooden shavings form splinters along her blistered feet. When she finally got to the locked door that led to the rooftop, she heard the woman running after her and screaming, “She’s trying to escape!” Rose’s hands were shaking as she quickly tested every key in the jumble of keys to find the right one. When she was about to put in the last one, she saw Lucifera behind her with a knife. The knife licked her silk robe as Rose twisted the key and the door flung open.

Rose ran outside and locked the door, locking Sister Lucifera out, and she ran to the edge of the rooftop. She heard the women angrily banging on the door while she contemplated how she would strategically position herself, so she would fall into the pool when she jumped off the roof. The door collapsed, and Sister Lucifera ran out with her dagger and as she threw the blade in her direction, Rose clutched her aching stomach and jumped off the roof. As she fell into the pool and the cold water stung her, she felt the most excruciating pain in her stomach. Due to the sudden jump, she forget she was in the water and inhaled the water. Her nose burned as she wildly tyled about the water until she reached the surface. She finally managed to pull herself out of the pool, and all she knew was that she had to keep running. She wrapped her arms around her throbbing and wet stomach and kept on running. As Rose ran, she knew nothing about her situation was ideal, but she knew that she was free. Rose had escaped a cult. The sense of freedom she felt was so intoxicating she had forgotten about all her pain.

Both Liza and Rose hoped to offer better lives to their children. Although Liza couldn’t escape the cult, Rose did escape. Rose was a seventeen year old homeless teen who knew nothing about raising a child, but the one thing she did know was that a parent should never abandon their children.

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Jillian Bartz

Jillian Bartz is a senior in high school. This year she is her school’s DECA president and French Club treasurer. She is also involved in Thunder Buddies, Link Crew Administration, and FBLA. When she is not studying or editing, she enjoys spending time with her two cats and sleeping—she really likes sleeping. After graduating from high school, she plans to visit Paris before entering college as a finance major.

Ryan Chang

Ryan Chang is a senior in high school. He enjoys studying languages, cultures and history. He is proficient in basketball and Kung Fu. In his free time, Ryan enjoys playing video games, especially those set before the modern era. When he graduates, Ryan wants to go to Barrett Honor’s College at ASU Barrett and study civil engineering or aerospace engineering.

Alina Chisti

Alina Chisti is a junior honors student in high school. She has been named student of the year for her class for the past two years. She founded her own non-profit tutoring organization called A+ Tutoring. In addition to tutoring, Alina also volunteers for Hospice of the Valley, Friends for Life Animal Rescue, Helping Hands, ICNA relief, FMSC, and Red Cross. When she is not studying or volunteering, she loves theatre and script writing. She has been actively involved in theatre for seven years. Alina’s other hobbies include archery, cooking, hiking, guitar, ukulele, listening to music, spending time with her family, creating unique looks with makeup, and playing with her two orange tabby cats.

Keegan Diaz

Keegan Diaz is a seventh grader. He plays the piano, French horn, and guitar. Keegan
loves to make people laugh, play guitar, and write. When he grows up, he wants to be an ophthalmologist.

Isabella Ferrero

Isabella Ferrero is a junior in high school. She participates in the symphonic wind ensemble as a trumpet player. As Vice President of the Tri-M Music Honor Society, she has helped create and run events that bring music to the community. In her spare time, she likes to play ukulele, spend time with her friends, and write. Isabella hopes to study creative writing in college to advance her dream of becoming an author.

Marie Grace

It was an insatiable love of reading that inspired thirteen year old Marie Grace to begin writing her first novel, Bound in Silver, which she self-published at the age of sixteen. "I wanted to create a world of characters and adventures that an avid YA fan like myself would love to read," Grace divulged. At that time, she also discovered a love for writing short stories and poems. She spends the rest of her time pursuing the creative and beautiful things in life such as photography and the culinary arts, as well as hanging out with her family and two adorably annoying Pomeranians in her hometown of Boise, Idaho. You can find out more about her, and her work by following her on social media:

   Instagram: @mariegracebooks

   Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/m.gracebooks/

Alina Husain

Alina Husain is a junior in high school. She has a keen interest in writing and reading poetry. Being on the quiet side, writing is her way to express herself. She hopes that
Ava Kim

Ava Kim is a junior in high school. She spends most of her time thinking in endless circles that lead nowhere. She also enjoys procrastinating, writing, and drawing. For her, the future seems very far, so she instead focuses on living today in the best way possible.

Surabhi Sajith

Surabhi Sajith is a junior in high school. She has been pursuing her passion for dance for past ten years and enjoys learning Carnatic music and writing. She participates in diverse events and had won the Phoenix Rotary 100 speech contest, the regional school bee, and several dance competitions. Surabhi has worked to raise money for many charity events, and continues to give back to the community through peer tutoring as Math Sprouts tutor in Tempe, Arizona, volunteering at Chinmaya mission and Maricopa Integrated Health, and teaching dance to younger children. At school, she is a Student Representative and is part of the Leadership Society, which plans school events.

Siddharth Vaidyanathan

Siddharth Vaidyanathan is a junior in high school. He participates in school clubs and sports such as Robotics, Track and Field, and Soccer. He also plays the western violin and Carnatic violin. He is the vice captain of the first under 19 Arizona Cricket Team. In his spare time, he likes to play video games, play outside, try new things, and spend time with his friends. He likes to live by the Latin aphorism of carpe diem translated to “seize the day.” After graduating high school, Sid plans to go to Barrett in W.P. Carey Business School to major in Finance.
Sahitha Vuddagiri

Sahitha Vuddagiri is a high school student at BASIS Chandler. Recently, she started an organization called Easel Arts Inc. that raises and donates money through art instruction, weekly classes, workshops and selling art. In 2017, she donated over $2000 and continues to do the same for 2018. She holds week-long workshops over fall and spring breaks, makes greeting cards and sells them, and teaches regular, private lessons to students of all ages. She’s been passionate about art from a very young age and realized that she could turn her hobby into a means of helping others. Her goal is to start an organization that would raise money through art education, with the proceeds donated to outreach programs assisting others locally and in other countries. She has been painting from an early age and over the years, she mastered a variety of techniques and mediums. Her goals this year are to expand her outreach and double the funds earned and donated last year, teach at community clubs, schools, and retirement homes on a regular basis. Please find her portfolio, and donation page, at https://www.easelarts.com/read-me/

Sherry Wang

Sherry Wang is a senior in high school. She is an active member of Quizbowl and Sciencebowl and spends time volunteering for the school as a member of Link Crew as well as other parts of the community. Outside of school, she likes to write, draw, read, and hang out with friends.

Rachel Woosley

Rachel Woosley is a junior in high school. She enjoys drawing, writing, and spending time with her friends. Her short stories and poems have been published in The Blue Guitar Literary and Arts Magazine, and Blue Guitar Jr.
Editor’s Bios

Lysette Cohen, Founder/Editor-in-Chief

Lysette Cohen holds a M.Ed. in Education from Northern Arizona University and a M.A. in English and Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University. She is currently working on a PhD in Education. She has been an educator for over 15 years teaching ABE/GED, English, Creative Writing, and American History. Lysette has traveled extensively, but currently makes her home in Phoenix, Arizona. Her nonfiction essays, short stories, and poems can be found in Page & Spine, The Penman Review, The Scarlet Leaf, Unstrung, and The Blue Guitar Literary and Arts Magazine.

Alina Chisti, Managing Editor

Alina Chisti is a junior honors student in high school. She has been named student of the year for her class for the past two years. She founded her own non-profit tutoring organization called A+ Tutoring. In addition to tutoring, Alina also volunteers for Hospice of the Valley, Friends for Life Animal Rescue, Helping Hands, ICNA relief, FMSC, and Red Cross. When she is not studying or volunteering, she loves theatre and script writing. She has been actively involved in theatre for seven years. Alina’s other hobbies include archery, cooking, hiking, guitar, ukulele, listening to music, spending time with her family, creating unique looks with makeup, and playing with her two orange tabby cats.

Editorial Staff

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