

INTERTEXT

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Intertext is a publication of the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at Syracuse University. It features the work of undergraduate students and represents the quality and variety of writing produced in its courses.

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The Louise Wetherbee Phelps Award
recognizes excellence in writing in depart-
ment courses. Submissions are evaluated on
depth, complexity, technical control, emo-
tional and intellectual appeal, and how well
they reflect the goals of the department. The
2017 winners are "Lighthouse" by Cameron
Vazquez and "Moving Across Spaces" by
Hasmik Djoulakian.



INTRODUCTION

“I look around me: An African girl. A white girl. A teacher. Probably a Mexican man. A freshman. A Muslim lady in her hijab.

“Show me what democracy looks like!” screamed a young man on the loudspeaker.

“This is what democracy looks like!” the crowd screamed back.

This is what democracy looks like, I agreed.” —Anuradha Desai

Welcome to the 2017 edition of *Intertext*. This year’s editors and contributing authors have collaborated with the hope of bringing diverse and dynamic stories to the campus community. Influenced by the current political climate and social atmosphere, the themes presented represent life lessons, the circulation of meaning, and the politics of belonging. These contributions reflect our present circumstances and the responses they’ve conjured. Our first class met on the day of President Trump’s inauguration, and here’s what the editors have to say:

“I always felt like students were not part of the ‘real world,’ as if that didn’t start until we moved our tassel to the other side of our caps. However, being a Syracuse student, I



have realized that we are an integral part of the ‘real world.’ Now, more than ever, I feel like I have a voice. Our campus is passionate and inclusive, and as students, we have a real chance at making a difference in our society.” —**Jessica Bowden**

“A portion of the nation was finally filled with the hope that they had seemingly lost on the way, but a majority of the nation was filled with grief and fear. We spent most of the day reading the bold-faced headlines and turning the president into a casual meme, but there was already an air of unease that had been hovering for two years.” —**Alice Chen**

“To say nothing is to stand with Trump. The only way to defeat his fascist government is to make a commitment to being politically informed, protesting, and speaking out against discrimination. A portion of America has spoken, but that doesn’t mean our voices can’t yell louder.” —**Sarah Crawford**

“Regardless of the recent and recurring events taking place in the country I call home, I am not bitter. I am not vengeful. I am aware—aware of the power that you and I possess to make the changes we want to see in our country. In 2017, my eyes are open, my ears are listening, and my heart is set on contributing to a society of equality, tolerance, and justice.” —**Doris Dorval**

"I look to the leader of our country and I disagree with what he represents. In a rhetorical battle of ethics, he shows me exactly what a leader should not look like. I am ready to stand up and let my voice be heard. I can only hope my peers are also ready for this battle." —**Kathryn Kawasoe**

"Since the inauguration, I've told myself to stand strong in who I am. My Blackness, my womanhood, my sense of being.. In addition to hoping for a more just and equitable future, we must put action behind our words, or else 'hope' for a better future is a dream." —**Ibi Lagundoye**

"As I complete my final semester at Syracuse University, I find myself tossed into the world as a Black man with a president who reeks of incompetence and possesses a financial plan that almost assures a bigger wealth disparity gap, a vice president on the wrong side of civil rights and the LGBTQ movement, and a Senate that has historically and continually disenfranchised anyone who isn't a white male. I hope for equality but would gladly settle for sanity." —**Brandon Mixson**

"This campus is made up of so many different people, but we still stand together in good times and in bad. With Donald Trump's presidency, I hope that as a community, we continue to uphold the foundation of diversity Syracuse has built." —**Destiny Reyes**

"Diversity, justice, and freedom. These are liberties that we all hope for. After President Trump's inauguration, I doubted America's credibility. I questioned the status of our country on a moral scale and was quick to lose hope. But then I remembered: Even while doubting the intelligence and integrity of our new president, America still cries 'land of the free.'" —**Vanessa Rojas-Castillo**

"As a child of Japanese immigrants and the first person in my family to graduate college, I am constantly trying to reconcile the expectation to 'be American' with the desire to value and celebrate my Japanese heritage. I hope neither I nor anyone else will have to compromise just to assimilate into a single way of thinking." —**Sakura Tomizawa**

"I am a proud Latina. I am a proud female. I am a proud first-generation college student. But above all else, I am a proud humanitarian. The value of compassion, kindness, inclusivity, and understanding is something that feels very overlooked in our present political situation." —**Molly Velázquez-Brown**

"An intolerant society lives within the sheltered domain of a single truth, unable to cope with contrasting narratives that challenge a subjective reality. Students studying within

the Syracuse community are equipped with the courage and articulation to raise their words against wrongful aggressions and victimization.” —**Abigail Welles**

“Now, more than ever, we need compassion. We need empathy. We need inclusivity. The election and inauguration of our 45th president has created an indisputable divide. If we let this divergence widen, we will only let in more corruption, more deceit, and more prejudice.” —**Rachel Young**

We are a group of editors from all walks of life who have found our way to this class at Syracuse University. We wanted this issue to display not only talented artists and writers, but also diversity, conflict, voices of minorities, and hope. All voices matter and deserve to be heard. We hope that in these trying times, *Intertext* becomes a space for all our contributors and readers to feel accepted and free to express themselves.

...

We would like to thank our professor, Patrick W. Berry, without whom this publication would not be possible. He facilitated the production of each piece and consistently offered guidance, support, insight, and coffee to all the editors as we tirelessly worked to create this issue. Professor Berry never faltered in kindness or wisdom while our editors asked countless questions, debated creative differences, and learned to produce a magazine using tools and programs that some of us had never used before.

We are truly grateful to Professor Lois Agnew, the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition, and the College of Arts and Sciences, including its iLEARN program, for supporting this project. We give endless thanks to Benay Bubar, Wendy Mansfield, and Atoosa Rubenstein for providing us with professional guidance, knowledge, and encouragement in a field most of our editors have just begun to explore. We also want to thank the Louise Wetherbee Phelps Awards judges—Benjamin Erwin, Santee Fraser, Tamara Issak, and Krista Kennedy—for putting their valuable time and consideration into choosing the most exemplary upper- and lower-division pieces.

Finally, we must give our thanks to the writers and artists who contributed their work to the publication; without these creators, none of this would have been possible. *Intertext* is brought to life every year by the creativity, excitement, and willingness of students to share their work with the Syracuse University community and beyond.

—**Molly Velázquez-Brown, Ibi Lagundoye, and Doris Dorval**

CONTRIBUTORS



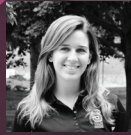
Hasmik Djoulakian

Moving Across Spaces | HNR 340

Women's & Gender Studies and
Citizenship & Civic Engagement

This piece has to do with my relationship with diaspora, family, and coming to terms with the messiness of both.

I'm happiest when I can ride my bicycle, stargaze, or read dystopian novels.



Casey Burke

The Courage to Speak | WRT 205

Health & Exercise Science

An expository piece about how universities and colleges across the United States handle sexual assaults on campus.

I am able to share my passion for health and fitness by spending time outside of school coaching fitness classes.



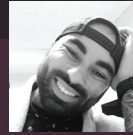
Julie Hikari Mebane

"Okay, Sorry," with Dr. L'Preé | WRT 114

International Relations

Story of the ongoing protest in front of classrooms for women of color in academia.

Wanna-be poet with pierced septum, hair dyed an "unnatural color," and tongue always ready to point out how that statement was "problematic."



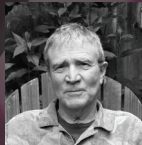
Zach Barlow

Virality & Consumption | WRT 426

Writing & Rhetoric

A theory on consumption that defines what drives human behavior.

Young and woke, dreamer with no excuses.

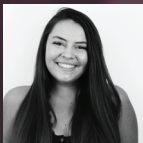


Robert Marcuson
Rage Quit

Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group

In this piece, Bob sees himself as less the focus, more as a participating observer in a larger story of gaming and compulsion.

A memoir writer and shy person who prefers to not always be talking and writing about himself.



Rafy Evans

Don't Forget Where You Belong | WRT 422

Writing & Rhetoric

I would not be who I am today without One Direction, the fandom that supported them, and the love of writing they gave me.

I am an overcommitted writer who aspires to become a #girlboss one day.



Ashley Kasha

A String of Saliva: A Series of Poor Choices Resulting in Mono... | HNR 340

Management and Marketing

This piece is about my contraction of mononucleosis and my attempt to retrace my steps as to how I became sick.

I love nothing more than dogs and shopping, and my hobbies include making poor life choices.



Charlotte Oestrich

The Scientist: Hero or Villain? | WRT 426

Writing & Rhetoric and Political Science

I often wondered why fictional scientists were portrayed with a Manichean view until I understood society's apprehension with technology. Then, it all made sense.

I plan to pursue graduate study in Rhetoric, but meanwhile, I volunteer with NYPIRG.



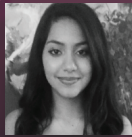
Aqilah Elshabazz-Palmer

Scientific Racism | WRT 205

Health & Exercise Science

My piece discusses the racist effects of Eurocentrism on African Americans in regards to scientific research.

When I graduate, I plan on going to school for chiropractic practices and acupuncture, combining my love for sociology and fitness.



Valerie Torres

Tip Jar Girl | WRT 114

Mathematics

This piece is written to show how a confident young woman deals with adversity in her life, living through all of its effects, both good and bad.

I am from Staten Island with a passion for music and arts.



Ginger Star Peterman

Ignore Me

Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group

My piece is a letter to the public from my service dog, Puma.

I was deployed to Iraq as a truck driver in the US Army.



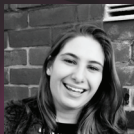
Cameron Vazquez

Lighthouse | WRT 114

Undeclared

This piece details my experience of living in a town that was faced with a great and well-known tragedy.

I am a prospective Spanish major with a love for dogs, language, and singing.

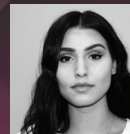


Richelle Gewertz

Speak Out for Gender Neutrality in the English Language | WRT 440

Architecture '16

My poster series examines both language regulation and the construction of identity through language variation by illustrating the implications of gender specificity in the English Language.



Zoey Leigh Woldman

A Letter to E | WRT 422

Writing & Rhetoric

My piece explores the struggles, love, and history that you find in a long-distance relationship.

I am a bunny-loving, artichoke-obsessed, ChapStick-addicted, self-proclaimed fashionista.



ANGLES

Too often we listen to a class lecture, participate in a conversation, or watch the news without ever asking whose voices are missing. We are so invested in our private lives and our own personal issues, we sometimes forget about the obstacles that people around us face. The authors in this section remind us how important perspective is by encouraging us to take a step back and see the world from a different angle.

The pieces present topics and perspectives that we may not normally consider. They challenge problematic ways of understanding the world in which we live.

In the aftermath of the most recent election, our country is currently in the midst of change. There is a greater need to acknowledge differing opinions and cultures comprising our country. The message in these pieces is to embrace new perspectives so that

we may create a stronger societal foundation on which to stand.

In the opening piece, “‘Okay, Sorry,’ with Dr. L’Pree,” Julie Hikari Mebane interviews Syracuse University Newhouse professor Dr. Charisse L’Pree about her experience teaching in higher education as a woman of color. Through the interview, Dr. L’Pree demonstrates what protest looks like in a non-traditional way. Activism isn’t necessarily something people go out and do on particular days, but instead it’s something that can happen as soon as the alarm clock goes off in the morning.

Charlotte Oestrich inspires us to reflect on our intentions before jumping to conclusions. In “The Scientist: Hero or Villain?” she contemplates the scientist as a rhetorical being, instead of seeing him or her as the crazed and white-coated fanatic often de-



Adopting New Perspectives

picted in popular culture.

In “Scientific Racism: The Exploitation of African Americans,” Aqilah Elshabazz-Palmer, exposes us to a dark side of scientific research driven by racist ideology. She encourages us to dig deeper and remain curious about issues that are largely ignored.

In her contribution, Richelle Gewertz challenges the strict gender binaries and teaches us the need for an inclusive gender neutral pronoun in the English language through a series of advertisements. Without correct language, people are excluded from dialogue, hindering those whose voices need to be heard.

Finally, the section ends with “Ignore Me,” a thought-provoking piece by veteran Ginger Star Peterman. Writing from the perspective of her service dog, Puma, Peterman exposes us to the daily life of a service

animal, reminding us that Puma should not be treated in the same way as a house pet.

While in the midst of change in our country, it’s important to think about those around us. It doesn’t matter if they share similar opinions, beliefs, customs, or ideas. Differences over policy, immigration, race, class, and gender differentiate us and yet, we all just want to find our place, a place to call home. This isn’t a call to action. It’s a call to empathy.

Whether it’s learning to step outside the box or approaching the world from a new angle, these contributors shed light on issues that are often misunderstood. In stepping out of our comfort zone, we allow others to step a little closer to their own.

—Kathryn Kawasoe, Brandon Mixson,
Sakura Tomizawa, and Abigail Welles

“Okay, Sorry,” with Dr. L’Pree

Julie Hikari Mebane

As I listen intently to Dr. L’Pree, a professor at the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, speak on a panel, it does not cross my mind that her presence is revolutionary until she remarks, “I’ve never protested on the streets because I protest in the classroom every single day. Professors do not look like me.” She says this even though she exudes *educator* with every sentence she speaks. Weeks later, when I enter her office to better understand her experience as a professor and woman of color, I leave with a portrait of what a professor can be. As a college freshman, I find myself shrinking in classrooms and hesitating to even raise my hand. The thought of interviewing a professor brings a migration of butterflies to my stomach. I enter her office with an apology already formed on my lips: “Okay, sorry.”

I have prepared a list of questions to ask, but “Okay, sorry” ends up evoking the best response. Dr. L’Pree smoothly asks me, “What are you apologizing for?” I was in Dr. L’Pree’s office, but her presence makes it feel like a classroom, as she is already giving me bullet points to take note of. “First step, don’t apologize if you haven’t done anything wrong.”

It was only two weeks prior when an older, much wiser senior told me the issues perpetuated with women apologizing. Dr. L’Pree’s authority stops the apology I am about to stutter; I am sorry for forgetting to not be sorry. Her authority does not only stop me, but Dr. L’Pree also does not hesitate to stop her classes

to teach the same lesson she tells me.

She recounts that the first phenomenon of teaching as a woman of color is noticing the patterns of her female students apologizing before speaking their ideas. “Sometimes boys do it, too,” she notes, “But most of the time, it’s girls trained to be apologetic for saying what we think or having an idea.” Then, she matter-of-factly states, “If you have a comment, there’s no apology with that.” I have found that the best teachers explain the most difficult concepts with a simplicity that makes you wonder why you were ever confused.

Dr. L’Pree talks with an expertise that comes from experience, which includes five degrees and fifteen years of higher education. She began as a biology major at MIT in 1998,



Dr. Charisse L’Pree

with the intention of becoming a geneticist, but organic chemistry took the fun out of biology, leading her to pursue a double-major in neuroscience and media studies. Dr. L'Pree headed to school at the University of Southern California and earned her masters at the film school where she also obtained her PhD.

Dr. L'Pree says, "As a woman of color, you are kind of at the bottom of the hierarchy. At any given point, you have to be three or four times as good for people to believe you." The more I listen to Dr. L'Pree speak, the more I understand her readiness to prevent my "Okay, sorry" mentality. This is a woman who realized that she wouldn't be heard if she constantly apologized for speaking up.

Dr. L'Pree did not have the luxury of being perceived as equally educated. Even in her own classroom, where she is by far the most educated, she is still challenged. She tells me about a time when a student raised his hand and said, "I don't believe you." I see the scene unfolding. I feel as if I am watching my younger sibling question our mother's authority. Dr. L'Pree responds to the student, "Had you been following the social media feed for this class, you would have seen that I posted this two days ago." For my sake, Dr. L'Pree poses a rhetorical question, "At what point do you think that the university, and your parents, and you—if you are paying your own bills—have decided that I am qualified to teach this class, but [now] you have decided that I am not?" She later adds, "And that is the protest every single day in the classroom." Listening to Dr. L'Pree pose this makes me relate to the students in her classroom who react to other students using the word *colored*. She tells me, "It's really sweet because I see my students. One student will say *colored*...and faces turn

like, 'She said *colored*,' and I let it go." I feel my neck turning around, hoping someone else just heard what I did. After addressing how the word *colored* is problematic, she lets it go. After addressing an unbelievably disrespectful student, she lets it go. Like the expert protester Dr. L'Pree is, she marches on.

Anyone who has shared a sentence with Dr. L'Pree must also see the absurdity, almost to the point of amusement, that she is challenged based on the intersectionality of her gender and race. She tells me, "It's funny, I was talking to [a] colleague and it's like, 'Man, everyone thinks I'm a student. Nobody believes what I say.' She's like, 'That must change when you open your mouth right?'" I am asking that same question. Dr. L'Pree has a direct and loud voice; she mentions this too, noting the struggles her softer-spoken colleagues face that her "twenty years of smoking cigarettes voice" shields her from. She also takes this time to acknowledge her light skin and the privilege it carries. "My girlfriends who are darker are constantly dealing with this. So I have a unique privilege even though I am a woman of color. I am light skinned.... I am tall. I am able to carry myself in a space that I know is unique and not the experience of my other fellow women of color in academia." Her fellow women of color in academia make up a shockingly small club. According to Catalyst, "Black women hold 3.7% of tenure-track positions and 2.2% of tenured positions; Asian women hold 4.8% of tenure-track positions and 2.6% of tenured positions; Hispanic women hold 2.5% of tenure-track positions and 2.3% of tenured positions."

Dr. L'Pree's protest and struggle lies in her experiences and facts, which are enough for

me to begin to realize how deep the color line flows. But for the skeptics she says, “Look at the numbers.” The chances of women of color receiving tenure are significantly less than men. “Facts, and science, and statistics exist whether or not you believe them,” she says.

The percentages of women of color in academia shock me. In this case, seeing is not believing. Women are simply not seen at the front of the classroom. Dr. L’Pree recalls being upset about never seeing a woman lead a classroom for a long time and then realizing, “Wait no! I watched my mother teach college when I was five.” Dr. L’Pree’s mother is mostly Chinese, but besides differences in hair texture—Dr. L’Pree with her curly hair and her mother with straight hair—it is a classic tale of like mother, like daughter, at least as far as their professions go. It is just as I had suspected; teaching flows through Dr. L’Pree’s veins. Throughout the interview, I am jotting down articles and concepts she mentions for me to look at later ooon. “You should look into why women of color go cold in the classroom. This idea that you have to [remain] stoic...because they already see you as their mother or [their] sister and, when you’re young, ‘Oh, you’re my best friend.’ So you have to try twice as hard.” The questions I ask are a little awkward and do not always flow, but Dr. L’Pree is a fountain of information. Great teachers provide the answers to questions I did not know needed to be asked.

Her voice leads the conversation. Dr. L’Pree has been routinely questioned and challenged, but this seems to be just another learning tool for her. She says, “You could teach from the textbook that talks about all the formality of how race, gender, and so forth are taught, but there are very few people [who] look like me in the front of the class-

room. Therefore, I’m going to teach students how I learned about these materials [as opposed to] how they think they need to learn.”

This is Dr. L’Pree’s mission. She tells her students about the missing white woman syndrome and how, “We value missing white women like nobody’s business.” She educates in hopes that her students can stop and think, “Is [this] the fifth white woman I’ve covered and none of them are the Black and Brown girls who have gone missing in the Bronx? I think I’m going to try to cover one of those tomorrow.” Her confidence and unapologetic attitude to announce her goals inspires me. Without hesitation she says, “My goal was always to make media better by educating the audience, and right now, I’m making media better by educating the producers. I think I’m making it better.”

Dr. L’Pree doesn’t look like your average professor based on statistics but, in spirit, she embodies everything I believe an educator should be. Her presence is revolutionary, not because of her skin color or hair texture, but because of her defiance against a white and straight structure. She tells me, “We have to remember I’m going to rock the boat today. Period. I’m going to make the conscious choice to rock the boat today. We say sorry because we think we’re rocking the boat as opposed to saying, ‘I’m going to rock this boat.’” I am grateful to have entered her office with an apology on my lips. I am happy to leave with her wise words stuck in my head: “Don’t apologize and do what you want to do and make sure you do well and don’t make excuses.”

Works Cited

Catalyst. “Women In Academia,” 9 July 2015. Web.

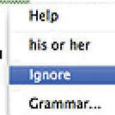
Language commentators have unsuccessfully tried to coin entirely new epicene words through the transformation of existing pronouns. The best-known neologism is probably *thon*, a blend formed from “that one.” Other examples include *ip* from “it” and

The option of a gender-neutral pronoun in our language can be very useful, from making it easier to refer to a person whose gender

A new gender-neutral pronoun would improve our language greatly. It is time that we find a word to fill this gap in the system.

**SPEAK OUT FOR
GENDER
NEUTRALITY
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Carol ate their burger medium rare.



The notion that *they* or *their* can only be plural is based not upon some scientific principle, but to an eighteenth century grammarian who decided one day to make it a rule. Despite long-standing historical use in literature, such as in the well-regarded works of Chaucer and Shakespeare, the use of the plural pronoun with singular antecedents became widely objected on the basis that it violated the rules of number concord.

We believe there is a “correct” standard and that we should avoid using the singular *they* in our formal

academic writing, and yet we frequently employ it in our everyday speech. For example, you might say, “*Each student was talking about how hard their homework was.*” We know it’s grammatically wrong. We know that *they* and *their* are plural, so they can’t possibly refer back to each student, which is singular. But saying “he or she” is just too cumbersome.

Even so, the real difficulty occurs when the antecedent is a specific, named person rather than an unnamed member of a class of persons. You probably felt

uncomfortable with Carol’s chosen pronoun choice. Strange, right? Well, get used to it. The singular *they* is becoming increasingly more common as a personal pronoun for those who refuse to be referred to as either a *he* or *she*. Accept gender neutrality. It’s here and queer. It’s not going anywhere.

SPEAK OUT FOR
GENDER
NEUTRALITY
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE



~~man~~
~~woman~~
person

*"Being transgendered is constantly struggling to use the word 'man' rather than 'person' to define yourself." —Zach Ellis, *Being**

In his memoir, Ellis suggests the pressure he feels to identify with a certain gender. He struggles to accept the unfortunate reality that he can't be neutral. He chooses the male gender solely because he does not want to associate with the female gender. But why must he be either one or the other? Can't he just call himself a *person*?

The gender specificity of our language is most easily explained

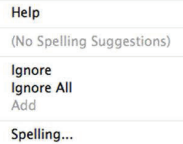
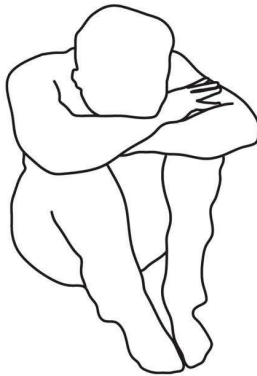
by the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun. In terms of what is considered correct grammar, there is no option but to refer to someone in terms of his or her gender, since we are limited to the use of either the male or the female pronoun.

The current promotion of singular they as a gender-neutral pronoun is an effort by transgender individuals to modify, or perhaps update, the English language so that it can be more inclusive of those who do not conform to the conventional notions of male or female gender. In terms of linguistic identity, they

have created a variation on the standard that more accurately reflects the realities and values true to themselves.

Should we not be free to construct our own identities without the influence of gender expectations? Forget whether someone's a "he" or a "she." Let them be who they want to be.

SPEAK OUT FOR
**GENDER
NEUTRALITY**
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE



"Being transgendered is typing transgendered into your computer and seeing a red line underneath it which means it's an unrecognized word and you look beneath you to see if there is a red line too..."

— Zach Ellis, *Being*

In his statement of "being," Ellis effectively explains a feeling of incorrectness. If transgendered isn't a word, then is his understanding of himself as a transgender illegitimate, not real? Is there no such thing as being transgendered? Is he incorrect?

Whether it means to or not, our language discriminates against those who do not conform to either the male or female gender. Our bias toward a gender binary has unfortunately led to the misidentification of transgender or nonconforming individuals. By enforcing classification as either male or female, our discourse dictates that this is the only way of being. For the transgendered person who does not conform to this notion, the discrimination against their so-called "norm-breaking" leads them to question their validity as a person, a human being.

The red line Ellis describes is symbolic of the prescriptive nature of the Microsoft Word processing program, dictating what is "right." But should we debase variations, norm-breaking individuals, as substandard, or in other words, wrong? The consequence of conforming to the standard is a lack of recognition for their being.

SPEAK OUT FOR
GENDER
NEUTRALITY
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The Scientist: Hero or Villain?

Charlotte Øestrich



As prevalent as the scientist is in modern cinema and culture, depictions of the character have not changed much since its earliest introduction. Sometimes good, but usually portrayed as “mad,” scientists work to uncover the unknown and are not afraid to accept the consequences of their theories. As Christopher Frayling writes, the scientist is usually depicted as a “very intelligent [person]—a genius or almost a genius... [They know their] subject... [They are] prepared to work for years without getting results and face the possibility of failure with-

out discouragement; [They] will try again” (12). When we are asked to describe a scientist, our minds often move to stereotypical depictions gathered from films; rarely do we consider how the nature of scientists’ experiments and knowledge shapes their core identity. Many times, the public cannot explain the discoveries of scientists, but it appreciates the work nonetheless. Our understanding of scientists is socially constructed, often depending on the knowledge they advance and the value or threat we see in it. While the gap in knowledge between the public and the scientific community can create anxieties regarding the impact of technology, it can also lead scientists to be viewed as potential heroes or villains depending on the nature of their knowledge.

As the character of the scientist remains constant across time, anxieties about their seemingly God-like understanding of the universe raise questions of whether they will use this knowledge for good or evil, and what will happen if their findings fall into the wrong hands. In *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema*, Christopher Frayling explores the presence of the scientist as the “unworldly saint” or “dotty sinner,” attributing this divergence to a gap in knowledge between the public and the scientific community:

The gap between specialized knowledge and public understanding lies at the root of most fictional cinematic representations of the scientist—specialized knowledge in the restricted sense of technical data, and in the broader sense of specialized ways of thinking and specialized scientific communities that legitimate the thinking as well: bod-

ies of knowledge and styles of knowledge. The gap has usually been filled by stereotypical representations of one kind or another. (11)

This gap between different types of knowledge results in problematic representations of the scientist as the public attempts to make sense of what it does not understand.

Put another way, the public makes up for the knowledge it lacks with varying depictions—often stereotypes—of scientists that characterize their intentions in various ways. Whether a contemplative natural philosopher, a potential hero, or a villain with an “obsessive desire to tamper with things that are best left alone,” a scientist, or at least our notion of one, can be explained by understanding different conceptions of knowledge: explanatory and exploratory (Frayling 36). The anxieties associated with exploring scientific discoveries rather than explaining scientific knowledge have become prominent through the portrayal of the scientist in media. The characterization of the scientist as a trustworthy hero or a threatening villain can be attributed to the public misconception of science and the subsequent marking of explanatory knowledge. While explanatory knowledge is perceived as positive because it cannot be read as potentially harmful, exploratory knowledge is vilified because it can lead to unknown consequences.

Scientists are held on a high moral ground because of their above-average intelligence. They possess the ability to understand concepts beyond the capacities of the average individual, and they are therefore assumed to hold an ethical responsibility to ensure that knowledge is not used for acts of evil. In *Screams of Reason*, David Skal explains the

infamous stereotypical characteristics of the scientist as a means of commenting on universal "themes and social issues," which speak to the social and cultural concerns of intelligence (3). He contends that the scientist has "served as a lightning rod for otherwise unbearable anxieties about the meaning of scientific thinking and the uses and consequences of modern technology" (18).

Most anxieties regarding scientific thinking derive from a form of discovery knowledge—knowledge that arises out of sheer human curiosity, usually revolving around themes of changing humanity, breaking the boundaries of the human body, going against the laws of nature, and even potentially destroying mankind. The difference between a scientist's explaining the laws of the universe and exploring the capabilities of the universe tends to lead the public to view that scientist in a positive or negative light, differing between potential hero or potential villain. Public acceptance of and perspective on scientists depend greatly on understanding what they are trying to accomplish with their experiments, which is a difficult notion to grasp considering the gap between public knowledge and that of the scientific community.

The differences between explanatory and exploratory knowledge are most prevalent when we examine the differing attitudes toward the work of Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer on atoms. The public has accepted Einstein's intelligence largely because of the complicated and seemingly harmless nature of his work. The equation $E=mc^2$ became a trademark of Einstein's work with atoms, though not many can explain what it means or how it can be utilized

in daily life. It is difficult for many people to understand how these theories work, but that is part of the reason why the public viewed the knowledge Einstein discovered positively. When explanatory knowledge is released to the public, the public uses what it doesn't understand to form a positive attitude toward the scientist, assuming the work must be good if so few can understand it and even fewer can make use of it.

However, questions regarding how the scientific community expands its knowledge have raised concerns in regard to who should have access to that specialized knowledge and for what reasons it can be utilized. During the Cold War era, an untold number of people feared the atom bomb and the risk of nuclear war. During this time, many fictional portrayals of the scientist played up the fear of nuclear war. For example, Dr. Strangelove and Dr. No represented scientists as villains who had lost touch with humanity. More important, such anxieties are reflected in discussions of J. Robert Oppenheimer, head of the Manhattan Project. Oppenheimer, credited with creating the atomic bomb, will forever hold a moral and technological burden due to his achieving scientific fame by "selling his soul to the devil" in return for the ability to play God and use the power of the stars to produce nuclear fission (Knust 129). During the early part of the twentieth century, nuclear energy was a field not many scientists were comfortable exploring because of the unprecedented harm that could be done if something went wrong. It was also misunderstood by the public because of its complicated and secret nature, and little was done to bridge the gap between the scientific

community and the public.

Since nuclear knowledge has often been villainized since its creation, Oppenheimer's "character" is that of a villain, primarily because he fulfills the role of the helpless scientist who has "lost control either over [a] discovery...or, as frequently happens in war times, over the direction of its implementation" (Holderman 219). Rather than exploring the relations between atoms as Einstein did, Oppenheimer explored the tangible application of this knowledge and, as a result, cost over two hundred thousand people their lives and lost the public's confidence (Frayling 13). Although Oppenheimer would not have used his discoveries to attack others, as the fictional Dr. Strangelove or Dr. No would, he is nonetheless a villain due to his desire to toy with dangerous knowledge and his lack of help during its devastating utilization. Even though his work stemmed from Einstein's, the innate differences in the tangible application of the knowledge fed into the cultural and societal fear of intellectual discoveries being used for purposes other than for the undeniable good of society. Despite the fact that the public could not understand the knowledge of Oppenheimer or Einstein, they could visually see the physical effects of using Oppenheimer's knowledge and punished his personal character. Einstein, in contrast, remained sheltered by his hero status, and little attention was drawn to the similarities of the two.

The possibility of everlasting fame is enough to lead many scientists to seek a God-like status, so they continue to pursue complicated, questionable work that is not always welcomed. Often, the public falls victim to the impression that the scientist must

have had devious intentions related to the pursuit of scientific discovery. Such anxieties have been reflected and amplified across media because scientists are often portrayed as having a nefarious curiosity and a taste for disaster (Frayling 12). The quintessential mad scientist, Victor Frankenstein, has been misunderstood and vilified because of his exploration into breaking the barriers of the human body and blurring the lines between life and death, both topics that foster unease.

In her 1818 novel, Mary Shelley introduces Dr. Victor Frankenstein as a prominent and respectable young scientist who develops an obsession with finding the knowledge to animate matter. Dr. Frankenstein embodies the scientist as an idealist "engaged in conflict with a technology-based system that fails to provide for individual human values" (Haynes 219). In *Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel*, Robert Hume re-examines the classic novel and ponders the relationship between knowledge, discovery, and the effect of such actions:

As the novel advances[,] we recognize that [Frankenstein] has a half-mad understanding that the monster is enacting in objective form the implications of his own inhumanity.... Senseless butchery by an inhumane monster would be frightening, but no more; here it is not senseless, but all too reasonable. (286)

In saying this, Hume relates the havoc caused by Frankenstein's monster, objectifying his own inadequacies along with the underlying fears and anxieties of society. The society in the novel condemns Dr. Frankenstein because it does not understand how,

or why, such a being would be created. Dr. Frankenstein has no reason to explore such knowledge other than to break through the ideal bonds and “pour a torrent of light into our dark world,” seeking fame and recognition in place of humility and purpose (286). The greatest anxieties of his society arose from Dr. Frankenstein’s obsessively trying to discover reanimation, toying with knowledge “not properly belonging to man” for the sake of a scientific breakthrough (286). As with Oppenheimer’s work, the effects of Frankenstein’s were visible and explored the limitations of humankind rather than explaining human functionality.

At first, Dr. Frankenstein can be seen as a potential hero—he is warm, dedicated, and working for reasons other than glory—but he soon becomes a “brain,” spending most of his time alone in his laboratory seeking knowledge not understood or accepted by many others. He begins to seek knowledge not for “theory and understanding” but for “heightened sensory experience,” exploring life and death rather than working to explain it (Frayling 37). Although knowledge explaining the human body is encouraged and primarily viewed in a positive light, its limitations and boundaries are rarely questioned. Because of all the faults in his experiment, the knowledge that allowed Dr. Frankenstein to create artificial life does not have an explicitly positive impact on public knowledge, nor does it bridge the gap between the public and the scientific community, unlike the work of Einstein.

Knowledge is extremely subjective; the way in which scientists advance knowledge is the basis for how they will be viewed by the public. Those who use knowledge to explain

the mechanisms of the universe—explanations without negative implications for mankind, often too specialized for the public to understand—are viewed as heroes because of the potential good offered by their discoveries. On the contrary, those who pursue knowledge without an explicit good purpose are viewed as villains. While Einstein was awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics for his contribution to the understanding of energy, Oppenheimer has been criticized because of his utilization and application of energy-related knowledge. Scientists may always carry the stigma of being detached from society and hell-bent on finding solutions regardless of ethics, but they shape their own character based on whether they choose to explain or explore and the value the public places on what they do.

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SCIENTIFIC RACISM:

AQILAH ELSHABAZZ-PALMER



THE EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Layout by Jessica Bowden. "Hallway of Doors" by Flickr user olavXO, CC
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During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, experimentation on human subjects was widespread. Minorities were more frequently used for experimentation than others. The treatment of African Americans, in particular, was deplorable. Not only were they used for experimentation, but they suffered from the segregation of schools, restaurants, and other public facilities. There are several examples in American history that exemplify the exploitation of minority subjects in scientific experimental research, including the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the conditions and experiments conducted at the Hospital for the Negro Insane. In such cases, African Americans were exploited for the “progression

of science," which consequently jeopardized their health and safety. The subjugation of one race using scientific explanation or the exploitation of a race for scientific means constitutes scientific racism. I wonder why these topics are not better known. Why is it so difficult to find information on hospitals like Crownsville? And lastly, why was this type of mistreatment so widespread?

It was not until my third year in college that I learned about scientific racism in biomedical research after reading Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. It took me until the age of twenty to learn about this disturbing and lesser-known practice in our history. In her book, Skloot discusses the life of Henrietta Lacks, whose cells helped initiate many scientific advancements, ranging from the polio vaccine to observing how human cells react to conditions in space. Although these are positive advancements, the scientists at the hospital stole and used Lacks' cells for research without her consent. And this is, amazingly, a milder example of exploitation discussed in Skloot's book. Later, Skloot briefly mentions the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the conditions at Crownsville State Hospital, which intensified my curiosity.

At Crownsville State Hospital, formerly known as the Hospital for the Negro Insane, many experiments were conducted on African-American patients—or "inmates" as they were sometimes referred. In Tom Marquardt's "Tragic Chapter of Crownsville State Hospital's Legacy," he writes that an estimated 100 epileptic patients received "insulin shock treatments." During treatment, patients were administered large doses of insulin to reduce their blood sugar, causing them to

fall into a coma. The patient would then be injected intravenously with glucose, or have a warm salt solution distributed into their system through a tube connecting to their stomach, which often resulted in memory loss ("Shock Therapy"). Scientists also performed lobotomies on "feeble minded" patients, in which parts of lobes in the brain were removed, or hydrotherapy, in which patients were submerged in hot and then cold water repeatedly (Marquardt).

In addition to the aforementioned treatments, another common documented procedure at Crownsville State Hospital was pneumoencephalography. This procedure required scientists to drill holes into the skulls of patients, causing the fluid surrounding the brain to drain out of the skull. Scientists would then puff air or helium into the empty spaces surrounding the brain to take an x-ray. This was due to a belief that, without that protective fluid, scientists could receive better images from the x-rays. Unfortunately, allowing the fluid to drain led to several side effects ranging from nausea and dizziness to seizures (Skloot 276).

Syphilitic patients were also among those who underwent procedures at Crownsville State Hospital. In order to rid these patients of syphilis, doctors injected them with the malaria virus, leading patients to become unmanageable, resulting in their having to be forcefully restrained during the procedure. Doctors would attempt to counteract the malaria by injecting the restrained patient with the substance bismuth (Goering et al.). Although it is one of the less toxic metals, high dosages of bismuth can lead to kidney failure, anemia, or depression (Lenn Tech BV). However, these procedures were not successful, and patients' original symp-

toms returned after 48 hours (Goering et al.).

According to Marquardt, African-American patients were subjected to inhumane living conditions at Crownsville State Hospital. He highlights a photograph of a malnourished girl with her arms tied down to a chair, an occurrence not uncommon at Crownsville. The hospital was severely overcrowded, which often led to patients being abandoned without adequate treatment. By 1957, Crownsville had reached over 250% of its capacity, which in turn created more issues (Stern). The hospital became extremely understaffed with a 208:1 patient to doctor ratio, and for every 230 patients at Crownsville, there were just seventy attendants (Coole). Due to this imbalance, patients were not getting the rehabilitation and attention they needed to improve.

Many of the patients came into Crownsville

inducted into the Hospital for the Negro Insane was because of their race, not their mental state (Marquardt).

Though information about patient treatment and experimentation at Crownsville exists, it is quite difficult to find. Some groups have tried contacting influential individuals in the state of Maryland for more information on the history of Crownsville State Hospital. Three different organizations—the NAACP, the ACLU of Maryland, and the Maryland Disability Law Center (MDLC)—came together and wrote a letter to Martin O'Malley, the former governor of Maryland. In their letter, they wrote about the experimentations and terrible conditions at Crownsville State Hospital. One of the main issues that these three groups wanted rectified was the unorganized and incomplete

...the reason people were inducted into the Hospital for the Negro Insane was because of their race, not their mental state.

ville with minor difficulties such as nervousness or lack of self-confidence, but due to the isolation in windowless rooms and limited outside contact, their mild ailments developed into serious mental illnesses. Those who did come into Crownsville as chronic cases only became worse. Even the doctors working at the hospital knew the effects such conditions had on patients.

Dr. Ward, one of the medical professionals at Crownsville argues that isolating patients is one of the worst things you can do at a mental health facility (Stern). George Phelps, one of the county's first Black deputy sheriffs, noted that the reason people were

compilation of death records.

Crownsville also donated bodies to colleges and universities for research purposes without the consent of the family of the deceased; the bodies were used as cadavers and unceremoniously incinerated. Many of the bodies were also buried without burial markers. An approximate 1,800 graves are unmarked at Crownsville State Hospital—more than any other psychiatric hospital. The patients subjected to experimentation have never been acknowledged, and neither have the individual bodies used for research. These three groups concluded that, after appropriate research, the state of Maryland

should create a museum honoring their contributions to science.

In their letter, they mention that Janice Hayes-Williams and Paul Lurz's research could be the foundation for the museum (Goering et al.). Born in Annapolis, Maryland, approximately eight miles from Crownsville State Hospital, Hayes-Williams has been committed to preserving Black history. She determined that the death certificates appeared intentionally vague, in order to hide the actual causes of death (Marquardt). The contributions she makes come from her work of identifying over 1,500 patient bodies buried on a former tobacco farm near the hospital. Lurz, a local historian, went to Crownsville in the mid-1960s as a student social worker and stayed there for 40 years before he retired. He located a collection of records and gave them to the Maryland State Archives (Marquardt).

Crownsville's treatments and experiments would be abominable today, but during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, medical theories existed to justify the mistreatment of African Americans; there were also different types of scientific thought justifying racial segregation. Such understandings boil down to "scientific racism," a view that leads to the promotion of European superiority and ethnic inferiority. This concept is one of the main contributors to the normalization of mistreating African Americans for biomedical research.

In "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," Cornel West elaborates on the workings of scientific racism. Specifically, he discusses Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper, who used his measurements and studies of the human cranium to justify the segregation of races

(104). As West notes, Camper based his studies on different races in comparison to the Greeks, whom he viewed as the highest level of beauty. He measured the angle of the top of the head to the nose in order to compare Europeans, Blacks, and orangutans to Greek statues. He noted that Europeans had an angle closer to that of the Greek statues, while Blacks had facial angles more similar to the orangutans. Thus, Camper concluded that Blacks were lower on the social hierarchy. This study is a clear indication of the interplay between ideas of Eurocentrism and science.

Another influential philosopher, Christoph Meiners, also supported racial hierarchy and classified Eurocentric beauty based on what he perceived to be "good looking" and "ugly" races. He referenced head shape when establishing his racial hierarchy, but not with angles like Camper; instead, he used the size of the jaw. He explained that Blacks had more savage and primitive traits, such as a large and strong jaw, in comparison to Europeans. He compared Blacks to "wild beasts" and stated they were less sensitive than other races because they had thicker nerves, thus they could feel less pain or no pain at all (Jahoda 67). These medical ideologies validated the preexisting idea that African Americans were inferior to white Americans and it was believed that they could tolerate pain better than their white counterparts.

These examples only scratch the surface of biomedical research conducted on African Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time, African Americans were exploited for the progression of science without recognition. Fortunately, individuals such as Paul Lurz and Janice Hayes-Williams, as well as groups

like the NAACP, ACLU, and MDLC, have made valiant efforts to uncover more about Crownsville's history. Their collective efforts have led to the retrieval of records, the identification of over 1,000 bodies, and the support of former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley to hire researchers to investigate Crownsville's history in 2013 (Wood).

It is important to pay tribute to those who were used in the different research studies and shed light on the issue of scientific racism and the exploitation of African Americans throughout history. Despite the disturbing details of these experiments, they need to be acknowledged and discussed. This part of history cannot simply disappear. If we keep searching for answers, as Paul Lurz states in Marquardt's article, who knows what we will find out?



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IGNORE ME:

A LETTER TO THE PUBLIC ABOUT SERVICE DOG ETIQUETTE

Ginger Star Peterman



You may have noticed me prancing down the Syracuse University quad, moving through the university's hallways and public spaces. There are so many of you and so few of us. Compared to you, we're short; we have a lot more hair and bad breath. My name is Puma. My job is to take care of my human, Ginger. We are an inseparable team.

Please don't approach or stare at me. I can see you. My ancestors, the wolves, taught me that eye contact is a considerable threat. I can sense awkwardness in your foreign emotion, whether fear or infatuation. I must alert my handler that someone is attempting to invade our personal space, "Woof! Woof!" [Ginger, I don't feel safe right now, you must not feel safe either.]

Ginger needs me to stay by her side and watch her back. For good reason, she is never alone. She maintains an uncomfortable situational awareness. When I bark, Ginger is actively triggered—she feels terrible, literally nauseous that I scared away a likely curious and friendly person.

To maintain control of me in public is a difficult task for Ginger because public knowledge of service dog etiquette is lacking. To accomplish it, we are going to need to ask a favor of you. Please, share our story with members of your community to encourage growth of public spaces that are more welcoming to service animals and our handlers.

Basic rules of etiquette:

1. Ignore me. Don't stare at me; you are a stranger.
2. Keep your distance.
3. Approach my handler, the one I'm tethered to with a leather lead

wrapped around her torso.

4. I'm not a pet, nor am I your pet.

Please don't even ask to pet me.


When you meet someone's pet, these rules do not apply. In fact, these behaviors may be welcomed, or even encouraged, in American pet culture. However, these same behaviors create a major disturbance for a service dog team, sometimes prohibiting us from performing our invisible tasks together.

When I am unable to perform, I get corrected by a very activated version of Ginger. I feel ashamed for misbehaving, and it's not my fault that my attention was taken by you in ignorance. I have one job: to be attentively focused by staying attached to Ginger, within a three-foot radius, every second of every day for my entire life—to help Ginger achieve her local and global maximums of capability.

If you haven't yet visited our home, then you might not be part of the pack (another thing I picked up from my ancestors). In this case, I will physically "block" you from approaching Ginger. Furthermore, if she is unaware of your presence, or otherwise engaged, I will audibly warn her—"Bark, Bark!"—that there is a potential danger approaching. At least, to me there is.

Since we are in a public setting, as when most encounters with service dogs occur, Ginger is likely busy. So, please consider leaving us to our business with one less upset to the already "Ruff!" day. You see, service dogs are never separated from our handlers. Not in a restaurant. Not on a plane. Not in a hotel.

We work to perform functions for individuals with disabilities. In some cases, we are, quite literally, a person's eyes. Some



service dog's daily tasks may include guiding their handler safely through doors, across streets, and away from steep cliffs or random ledges near bodies of water—preventing disorientation, injury, or death. In other cases, a service dog can be trained to smell when their handler's blood sugar is off and alert them to check their levels and administer insulin or intake sugar—a life-saving situation for a Type I diabetic. I come from a family of medical service dogs from K9s For Warriors who are trained to block, cover, and brace for military veterans. In reality though, I do so much more than perform these simple tasks. I enable Ginger to get out of bed every morning by waking her with my ritualistic, slobbery kisses. I empower her to traverse the Syracuse University campus and sit in her own backyard without her getting the desire to run back inside and lock herself in, where it is safe, where there is order, where there is no possibility of public interaction.

For people, like my Ginger, who suffer non-obvious disabilities, like epilepsy or Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) as a result of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), a service dog's purpose may be misunderstood or even worse—questioned.

Let me ask you something: Would you be willing to explain your personal and medical history to each person you walk past without first engaging in a proper introduction? Would you even be so inclined to introduce yourself to Ginger had you not first noticed

me attached to her? Probably not. So, despite your curiosity, it is not polite to ask Ginger why she needs me, tell Ginger that she looks great for being disabled, or explain to us that your cousin's step-sister's best friend has a Chihuahua who looks just like me, but smaller.

If you are unsure whether or not you are encountering a service dog, there are a few tells: We are allowed in public places where pets are prohibited from entering; we usually wear a vest (I have one with patches which reads "SERVICE DOG, DO NOT PET," but a lot of people must not be able to read. "Grrrrr!") And we behave so well that you may not immediately notice us. At times, I surprise servers as I get up from under the restaurant dining table because they have no idea I'm there. Furthermore, if a service dog-identifying patch is visible, the dog is not in training, so there is no need to ask the handler if he or she is training their service dog for a real disabled person.

With your assistance, we can encourage post-traumatic growth away from the disorder by knowing our rules of service dog etiquette before we approach Ginger with a handshake in the Syracuse Orange community, where she is a doctoral candidate pursuing multidisciplinary development of Solo, a medical device to aid veterans with PTSD.

Respectfully,
Puma (and Ginger,
the human)





Fighting For Hope

With life come many different types of struggles. We all have and will experience hardship in different ways. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, the struggle to fight for what's right, or the need to hope against hope—these experiences impact us in ways we might never imagine. These experiences can lead us to take action. They challenge us to be strong, to overcome. They can change the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. They can completely throw our lives off balance in the most jarring of ways, leaving us scrambling to pick up the pieces of a life that seemed so normal yesterday, but so foreign now. It's not an easy thing to imagine, but deep down inside, while we cope with shock and sadness, a part of us is learning how to be strong through it all—a part of us is learning how to persist, to fight for hope. No matter what we have been put through, we survived.

The contributors in this section demonstrate incredible skill, but it's the message of hope, determination, and perseverance that makes them so extraordinary. We hope readers will feel the strength each author embodies. Whether these stories are relatable to a situation you have been through, or help you understand a struggle you've never experienced, they encourage readers to see the power of hope and the need to fight for it.

Although these four stories—"The Courage to Speak," "Tip Jar Girl," "Lighthouse," and "A Letter To E,"—are vastly different, they shed light on an unfortunate fact of life: tragedy and loss happen. Still, we persevere. In "The Courage to Speak," Casey Burke shines a bright light on the epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses and the need for all of us to fight for greater accountability and safety. Tip Jar Girl," by Valerie Torres, highlights the struggle of fighting against the stigma attached to children with parents in prison. "Lighthouse," by Cameron Vazquez, is an emotionally-compelling series of vignettes surrounding the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. And in "A Letter to E," Zoey Leigh Woldman takes readers on her journey in which she recounts her story of being separated from her love and her tireless efforts to make the distance work. "

These authors were able to find something within them that pushed them to keep going, no matter how devastated they were. There are no guarantees in life. We are not all dealt the same cards; therefore, it is sometimes difficult to imagine what a person has been through. We are honored to present a variety of stories that convey the importance of finding strength and hope in our struggles.

—Jessica Bowden, Destiny Reyes, Vanessa Rojas-Castillo



THE COURAGE TO SPEAK

CASEY BURKE

Erica Kinsman spent the first eighteen years of her life preparing to attend her dream school. She endured countless AP and honors classes, graduated high school at the top of her class, and went on to attend Florida State University, a dream of hers since she was a young girl. On a pre-med track, Erica did not often have the time to party or go out with friends. However, one evening, she decided to celebrate with some friends at a local bar.

Jameis Winston was (and still is) a football prodigy. Born and raised in Alabama, he led his high school football team to a state championship before being recruited to play football for Florida State University. He would go on to win the 2013 Heisman Trophy, and become the overall number one draft pick for the NFL in 2015. Erica Kinsman never graduated from Florida State University. After January 2013, she began a battle against depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because on December 7, 2012, Jameis Winston raped her (*The Hunting Ground*).

After three grueling years, Florida State University paid Kinsman \$950,000, one of the biggest settlements for a sexual as-

sault crime in United States history (Tracy). However, this money does not even begin to compensate for what happened to Kinsman. Both the Tallahassee Police Department and Florida State University Police Department mishandled the investigation of Kinsman's rape. Winston was never tested for DNA, nor was he charged or convicted; the legendary athlete was let off the hook with no repercussions and no punishment. He is now living his dream as quarterback of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

According to Barbara Booth, one in four women will be sexually assaulted or raped during college. After being assaulted, these women are subject to endure depression, anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, self-imposed injury—and suicide; 95 percent of those women will never report their sexual assault (Booth). Even those who are brave enough to report it may never get the proper investigation or justice they deserve. In some cases, universities and colleges in America are being found guilty of not only failing to properly investigate sexual violence, but also of under reporting the statistics of sexual assaults and not properly executing punishment for those students who

are found guilty.

After her assault, Kinsman received a medical examination and a rape kit procedure, meaning that the police department had the DNA of her assailant the night she was raped. Still, Winston was never tested for DNA. He was never even interviewed by police. The few assaults that are reported are often handled poorly. The investigations are done haphazardly, and police do not always follow through as expected. Kinsman's experience is not unique. When she identified Winston as her rapist, the detective in charge of her case said, "You really should think long and hard about whether you want to press charges or not" (*The Hunting Ground*). His response suggested that he knew the difficulty she would face in a case against Winston. Even though Kinsman would receive a monetary settlement, she remained resolved in her fight for justice.

The victims of sexual assault crimes who report what happened to them are often faced with substantial victim blaming. Victims are often asked, "How much did you have to drink?" or "What were you wearing?" In this way, universities subtly shift the blame to victims, essentially encouraging them to not report or follow through with pressing charges (Yoffe). Kinsman was attacked with accusations of falsely claiming rape, while Winston was shown sympathy from the public. Police did not act on the charge for ten months and never bothered to question Winston (*The Hunting Ground*). This case is a perfect example of how universities and colleges protect the perpetrator and fail to act appropriately because of financial incentives (*The Hunting Ground*).

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus

Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (or the Clery Act) was created in 1990 so that schools could report crime statistics, including rape and sexual assault. However, some universities and colleges are not taking this act as seriously as is necessary and are falsely reporting the exact statistics of rape and sexual assault in order to maintain a more positive public image. One way universities get around the Clery Act is by mislabeling the statistics of rape as "personal injuries," thereby misleading prospective students and parents (Culp-Ressler).

Universities that receive federal funding are charged \$35,000 for every case of sexual assault that is not logged and properly reported. Unfortunately, \$35,000 is not intimidating enough to make universities submit the reports. After a seven-year investigation, beginning in 2004, Yale University was fined \$165,000 for under-reporting sexual assault crimes (Culp-Ressler).

While universities and colleges in the United States underreport sexual assault crimes, they are also neglecting to appropriately punish the students found guilty. "Most face little to no consequences—perhaps just a book report, suspension for the summer semester, or probation from leadership activities" (Heldman). Many victims of sexual assault are left to walk around their campus having to face their perpetrator due to the administration failing to give their case the appropriate attention it deserves. Of the 200 reported sexual assault crimes that occurred at the University of Virginia during a time span of 10 years, no student that committed an assault had been expelled. "A 2010 Center for Public Integrity report showed that only 10 to 25 percent of



students found responsible for campus sexual assault are expelled” (Heldman). Comparably, during the same time period, the University of Virginia had expelled well over 200 students for infractions like plagiarism.

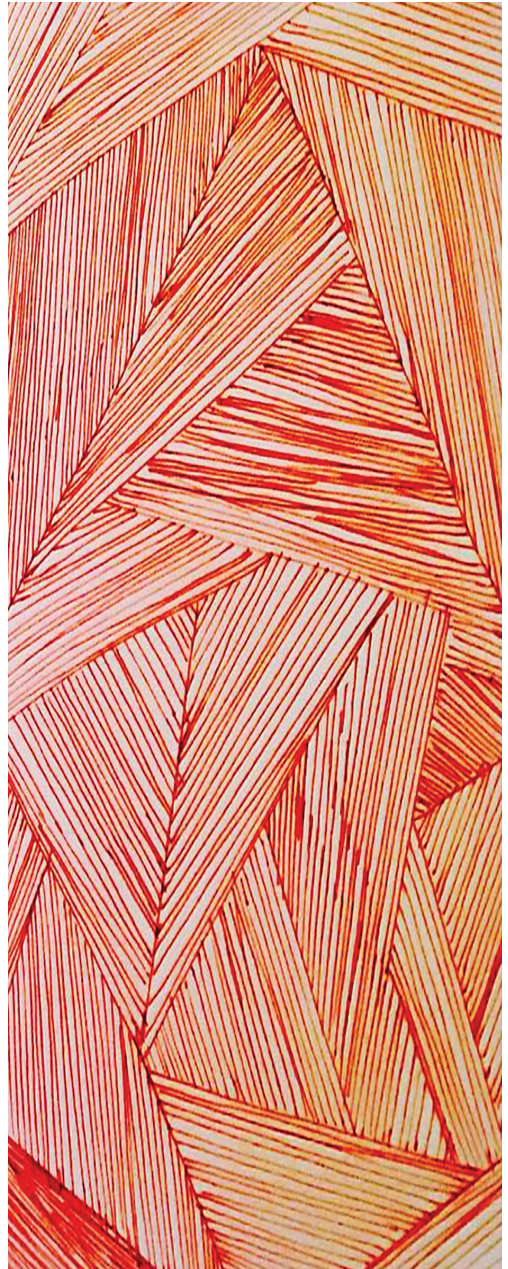
The University of Virginia is just one of the hundreds of American universities that have proven its intentions to protect its name and brand before protecting its students (*The Hunting Ground*). These reports are exhibiting a “rape tolerant campus culture” in the United States by failing to deploy the necessary repercussions (Heldman). Universities and colleges are allowing the opportunity for rapists to commit multiple offenses, without ever getting caught. This notion of a “rape tolerant campus culture” is also enhanced because of legal rules and regulations in place. For example, police are not allowed to contact athletes regarding incidents of crime (*The Hunting Ground*). Schools are also allowing sexual assault to be hidden behind the idea of a “campus party culture,” insinuating to victims that if alcohol is at play, then the rape or sexual assault may be their own fault. Universities are also falsely convincing victims that if they knew their perpetrator and if alcohol was involved, it was more than likely not rape, but rather drunken promiscuity.

The film, *The Hunting Ground*, documents true accounts of students who have been raped or sexually assaulted during their college education. *The Hunting Ground* also exposes the lack of knowledge college students in the United States have on what qualifies as rape or sexual assault. The definition of sexual assault is so broad that it becomes difficult for some students to fully understand it. The phrase “sexual assault” is defined by United Educators, a liability insur-

ance group, as “sexual coercion, nonconsensual touching (i.e., fondling and kissing),” as well as “nonconsensual sexual intercourse including vaginal, oral, and anal penetration” (Yoffe). Sexual assault has been defined as “unwanted sexual activity that may include kissing, exhibitionism, groping, and rape” (Realities of Sexual Assault). These definitions are ambiguous and require that universities further educate their students in order to prevent future attacks. It has been shown that the “absence of affirmative consent” is often understood by students to mean that sexual contact is wanted. It implies that if the victim does not provide a blatant “no,” they are somehow consenting (“Is There a Rape Culture?”).

In addition, universities and colleges are not explicitly telling students what its sexual assault policies are. Students are often unaware of how to report a sexually violent crime and are often put through onerous reporting processes. Counselors and administrators are known to doubt the credibility of the victim’s claim by asking questions such as, “Are you sure it was rape?” (Heldman). As long as students are not aware of their rights when it comes to reporting sexually violent crimes, schools will continue to benefit monetarily. Students who do report the crime are often put through controversial procedures, including having to recount the assault multiple times to different officers and counselors, undergoing multiple examinations and medical procedures. To go through all of this and still face the risk of the perpetrator not receiving a conviction is a danger many victims are not willing to take.

Moving forward, universities and colleges need to introduce clear policies of punishment for students committing sexual



assault. The terminology “consent” and “sexual assault” need to be well defined. Our goal must be to reduce the incidence of sexual assault. We have a moral obligation of understanding what rape is, regardless of its legal definition.

Educational institutions need to begin campus-wide programs and support systems to address the severity of this issue in order to educate and protect the students. After we have begun to properly teach students what sexual assault is and the punishments attached to committing such crimes, universities and colleges will have no choice but to communicate these reports to the public (Earp).

President Barack Obama, being the first president in U.S. history to acknowledge the necessity to end sexual assault on college campuses, released a comforting statement to survivors across the nation: “And perhaps most important, we need to keep saying to anyone out there who has ever been assaulted, you are not alone. You will never be alone. We have your back. I’ve got your back.” President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden established the “It’s On Us” Campaign, which is working across the country to end and prevent future sexual assault on college campuses. Political figures like these continue to exact policies to prevent sexual assault.

Student and government activists are finally coming together to create movements and organizations to end this epidemic. As university students, we uphold a responsibility to require universities and colleges to properly report and cite crime statistics of every nature, especially rape. Survivors, students, activists, and governments need to come together to guarantee the proper punishment for assailants

and the proper investigation and justice that all victims deserve. President Obama said it best—“one is too many”—and it is time for this age-old fight to end.

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TIP JAR GIRL

Valerie Torres

If you walk into Frozen Planet, a frozen yogurt shop in South Brooklyn, you're likely to see a four-foot-ten young woman who walks with impressively great posture and her head held high. Her pretty, pin-straight

brown hair and thin face draw you in. If you get yogurt, she'll probably smile at you, ask you how your day is going, or maybe she'll compliment your hair. After just a few seconds of conversation, you may be tempted to

tip the jar that is located on her right because she charmed the heck out of you. But don't worry, I fell for it, too.

At the age of five, this same girl, also known as Cassidy Lino, walked into the Danbury Correctional Center in Connecticut with excitement. She looked up to see her mother being patted down and her black purse being searched. Although this caused a weird feeling in her stomach, Cassidy understood that this had to be done. Once past security, the excitement returned immediately. Her hazel eyes were bright as she walked past the blue peeling walls. She was about to see her father.


In 1998, Cassidy was born into a Brooklyn Italian home on East 13th Street, between Avenue N and O, to two happily married parents. At the age of three, she was told that her father "had to go away." He was sentenced to 27 years in prison. For what exactly? She does not know the details, but it involved organized crime. Her mother couldn't afford the house anymore, so Cassidy and her mother packed their bags and made their way to the home of her grandparents in another neighborhood. She has lived there ever since. She lives with seven people, which include her mother, her grandparents, her aunt and uncle, and their two children. "We live on top of each other," she says, "so our relationship is really close. They look out for me."

Cassidy visits her father every month, but only if he is located within driving distance. She speaks to him on the phone every day. Her phone lights up with the words "UNKNOWN CALLER," yet she knows exactly who it is. Putting her ear to the phone, she hears that she is "receiving a call from an inmate at the Danbury Correctional Center,"

and she then proceeds to press "1" where she is finally greeted by her father's scratchy, low-pitched voice.

Only eighteen, Cassidy has lived without her dad for fifteen years, during which she has dealt with harsh criticism. Second grade was when she started to realize that her father was in prison. Her mother bought her a book called *My Dad is in Jail*, but there was one problem: Cassidy hated the word "jail." Her mom decided that she'd replace the word "jail" with "a facility," revising her book title to *My Dad is in a Facility*. The first time she felt the grief of having her father away was also in the second grade. She and her best friend at the time had gotten into a dispute over something she cannot remember. "This girl and I were very close. She and her mother came over for Sunday dinner all the time, but sometimes we argued," Cassidy said. She felt her face become warm and red, and her heart drop when she heard her small brunette friend say, "Well, that's why I have a dad and you don't." Though naturally loquacious, she had nothing to say to that statement. Intense confusion consumed her. She did have a father. She spoke to him every day and saw him once a month—in prison.

In middle school, she faced a lot of aggression from the staff. The teachers and the higher-ups expected less of her and associated anything she did wrong with her father being away. "Because they knew where my father was," she explained, "it already set the stage for my attitude, or whenever I got into trouble, it was like, 'Oh, well, she's acting out. That's all she knows.'" In one instance, she recalls a time when she yelled at another girl in her grade who was antagonizing her. She was reprimanded by



the assistant principal who looked down on her while saying, “This is school, get rid of this mob mentality of yours.” Tears immediately rushed down Cassidy’s face. Children of incarcerated parents often face isolation because of this stigma. Our society tends to dehumanize prisoners and frowns upon their family members.

These experiences made Cassidy enter a “dark time,” from the age of thirteen to sixteen. She spent a lot of time alone because her mother worked a lot (and still does). “I wouldn’t even do my homework because I wasn’t very motivated to do it. I would sit there and dwell on the fact that I wasn’t doing my homework, and dwell on the fact that I was so sad, and dwell on the fact that I didn’t have a dad, just dwell on the fact that I was just alone in my thoughts all the time,” she explained, choking up.

During this time, her father was transferred to a prison in South Carolina, making her visits less frequent. According to the U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections, most facilities have the power to transfer their inmates to other locations and will occasionally make use of it. As a result, families like Cassidy’s often suffer. Transfers occur due to overcrowdedness and for inmate protection. Cassidy and her mother found themselves on flights to South Carolina every six months. He returned to the Danbury Correctional Center after two years.

The stigma that Cassidy endured made her more cautious in who she told about her father. She explained, “That’s never the first thing [I] would say to a person, like ‘Hey, my dad’s in federal prison for twenty-seven

years.’ You kind of have to feel out the person first.” She knows the judgment that follows after telling people, but as she’s gotten older, she has become more open about it because it’s such an important part of her life and who she is. Nonetheless, she shrugged when saying, “My dad’s my hero, which is kind of ironic because when you think about it, my hero is a prisoner, so what does that really say about me?”

She has spent a five-hour period every month visiting her father. Cassidy explains that she maintains a sense of courtesy around other prisoners while acknowledging that there is an unspoken tension in her thoughts of *what did he do to be here?* “Even though there is a prisoner of some sort next to me, I’ll still say excuse me, or say hello to them, or ask them if they wanna sit in my seat,” she says. She developed the ability to see past the image American citizens often have when someone thinks of a prisoner.

Her face became serious when we spoke about inmates and convicted felons not having the right to vote. “That’s something that I really thought about this year, especially with the election that just passed.” According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, there are two states in America that allow their incarcerated population to vote. Two out of fifty, which are Maine and Vermont. The rest of the state’s inmates receive a “civil death” and too often, it is extremely difficult to register to vote once labeled a felon, even after a completed sentence. Cassidy feels extremely frustrated by this. “My dad has so many opinions and just because he did something wrong doesn’t mean that his opinions aren’t valid... I feel like

people won't give that population the time of day," she said, annoyed.

Her mother was a big help in molding the relationship between Cassidy and her father, and she was there to keep Cassidy busy from the absence of her father even though she was dealing with the absence of her husband. "She's the glue that holds my dad and [me] together, because without her, I wouldn't have [had] a relationship with him. Without her, I wouldn't go see him. The way I feel is because my mom has helped me feel that way. She has almost forced me to go see him and sit next to him, talk to him, and answer his phone calls."

Cassidy's parents officially divorced when she was nine, and although her mom dated, she never remarried. "Now, she's not dating anymore, and they're closer than they've ever been. They're in love and there's nothing that can get between that, even if it's a matter of him being imprisoned. That's their relationship," she explained. When they visit, Cassidy sees the affection between her parents: her mom beside her father, their hands crossed together, while her mom stares at him with big starry eyes as he speaks. She lays her head on his shoulder and a smile persists. Cassidy laughs when she says, "It's like they are teenagers, that's the only time I've seen my mom act that way."

Now at eighteen, Cassidy has a boyfriend of two years, Frankie, who has yet to meet her father. She says, "I'm kind of nervous for them to meet so I've held it off, and I probably will for another year or two. Frankie doesn't know that, but I do." When she brought him home, she realized that her

father's absence was talked about more than ever before. Her uncle, who lives two floors above her, approached Frankie with his chest held high, as if to intimidate her boyfriend and make it ever so clear that he did not approve of him—and this was prior to knowing anything about him. After several months of teasing and constantly excluding him, Cassidy had had enough. All four-foot-ten of her made her way to her uncle to figure out why he was being so unfair to her boyfriend. He explained that he was just looking out for her, taking the place of her father and that her father would do the same "if he were home." She smiled while analyzing the words and replied, "But I don't think that that's how my dad would act if he were home."

Cassidy's father does become a bit taciturn whenever she mentions Frankie, which is unlike him. Her brown eyes brightened when she said, "I feel like he gets kind of jealous, like really overprotective, and I kind of like that." Cassidy, her mother, and her boyfriend do everything together. He helps out as much as possible, pumping the gas and even changing tires when needed.

Cassidy currently attends a local community college and works at a frozen yogurt shop. For the first time, Cassidy feels the drive to do well in school. She is maintaining all A's. She realized that working at the yogurt shop has inspired her to pursue a career in sales. There is nothing that is more exciting than her tip jar. With her witty remarks and smiles, she is thrilled when her small talk is the reason for a tip. "I'm on top of my game, doing what I'm supposed to do."

LIGHTHOUSE

Cameron Vazquez



Headlines for the impending apocalypse dominated every major newspaper headline in the United States—"The Mayan Calendar Ends. Does That Mean The World Does Too?" According to the Mayans, the world began approximately 5,125 years ago, on August 11, 3114 BC. The calendar of this ancient civilization worked in rotations. It was discovered through the incredibly rough translations of a single, damaged stone tablet, that if the calendar

made a full cycle it would reset as opposed to continuing on. After doing some calculations, researchers found out that the date after one full revolution would be December 21, 2012, the day the world was supposed to reset, or as the global populous interpreted it, the day the world was supposed to end. A final smiting from the Mayan gods. The end of our lives as we know them.

However, for some people, that end came a little sooner. That day was May 30, 2012,

for 5 people when a man went on a shooting spree in Café Racer in Seattle, Washington. It was also on July 20, 2012, for 12 people when an armed man opened fire at a movie theater during a midnight premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora, Colorado. And again on August 5, 2012, for 6 people when a gunman opened fire in a Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. That day was also October 21, 2012, for 3 people when a man wielded his gun in Azana Spa in Brookfield, Wisconsin. That day was one week before the so-called end of the world, on December 14, 2012, the day of the nation's second largest mass school shooting that happened in a town called Newtown, Connecticut. 26 dead. In my town.

• • •

From a mathematical standpoint, the number 26 is a relatively average number. It's even. Its multiples are 1, 2, 13, and 26. The sum of its digits equals 8. Its properties are unremarkable. However, where I come from, that number holds a much deeper meaning. 26 will forever haunt us. It's an inescapable reminder to say "I love you" more to the ones I care about, for parents to hug their children just a little more tightly, to tell our teachers to have a good day. It's a slap in the face, a flutter in the heart, a pounding in the brain. For us, we don't care about its mathematical properties. We care about what it means to us, the people in a small town in Connecticut.



26 stars were drilled into the roof of the firehouse in front of the school.

26 bells ring out during the moments of silence.

26 names overtook the local news segments.

26 bodies were found splayed throughout an elementary school.

26 angels escaped the perils of Earth and soared upwards into the sky.

• • •

It's the beginning of a bad joke. Two nuns walk into a school. Except the punchline isn't actually funny. THIS JUST IN: Two guys dressed as nuns walk into an elementary school, semi-automatic weapons concealed in their hateful habits. We all chuckled at the idea of the nuns; a ridiculous news story that some journalists somewhere managed to conjure up through the chaos of reports. It's okay to laugh, right? Wrong. BREAKING NEWS. SCHOOL SHOOTING IN ~~NEWTON~~. ~~NEWINGTON~~. ~~NEWTOWN~~. Right down the road, if the reports are accurate. Nuns? No. The name of the suspect—yes one, not two—litters headlines. Correction. Not him. His brother. We stop laughing.

• • •

The real story. There was one man. He was 20-years-old. This man was disturbed or just confused or sad or lonely or unsatisfied or lost. This man, for some reason on the seemingly random day of December 14, 2012, decided to go out with his semiautomatic rifle and pistols. This man walked into an elementary school down the road from

where he lived. He was let in because the principal recognized him. He was a familiar face since his mother had once worked at the school. The guns belonged to his mother.

He must have taken aim. Or, maybe he didn't. He could have just shot the gun whenever he wanted without a specific target in mind. With a semiautomatic, did he really need good aim? He was bound to hit something. Either way, he managed to align himself with 26 targets—6 teachers, the principal included. The other 20 were children, ages 5 to 10.

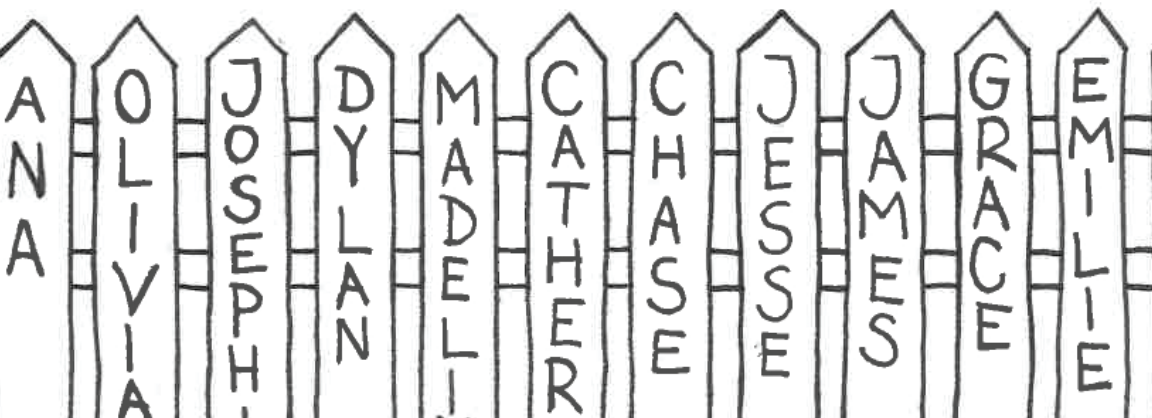
He killed himself. The news doesn't call him a victim. It turns out he had killed his mother beforehand, too, probably to get the guns. She barely makes it into the news. Probably because she wasn't in the school. She was in her house. He killed 26 others. No one knows why. He just did.

...

We are hiding for hours, left in the dark, no idea what's going on in the outside world. The lights remain off. Luckily it is the middle of the day so the beaming yellow rays of the sun pour into the room. The light is cheerful; however, I can't say the same for our moods. We're anxious. *This is not a drill.* Those were the words bellowing out of the loudspeaker earlier today. *I repeat: This is*

not a drill. My heart in my throat, pounding away, threatening to burst through. *Not. A. Drill.* My stomach lurches trying to escape, but now's not the time. It's time to hide. We all scramble up from our desks. So far, no one is truly freaking out. Composure is key here. We maneuver our way around the tan tops of desks and through the maze of metal bars that hold them at the seams. We position ourselves in formation on the cold, unfriendly tile. It's just like the drills. Only it's not. No phones. They are taken hostage in the mounds of backpacks scattered about the room, an accessory to each desk. There's no connection to the outside world. No way of knowing what's happening. Nothing. We sit. We wait. We shuffle. We stifle coughs and sneezes. We make faces at each other. We stare at the floor. We think. Inhale. Exhale. Twitch. Wonder. Listen. The school sounds abandoned. It's unnatural for a school to be this quiet. It's a heavy silence, weighing down the air, making it harder to breathe through the panic swarming inside.

Thundering helicopters rip through the silence an hour or so later, straight down the middle, tearing it to shreds with the rotation of their blades. My teacher, Mrs. Meyer, gives up and breaks protocol. By now she knows that our parents have seen something



on the news and just need to know that we're okay. We retrieve our phones. Mrs. Meyer goes from being my tall, inviting teacher with billowing skirts and glasses that match her medium brown, chin-length hair with side swept bangs into someone else. A protector. A concerned parent. Suddenly, we're all on the same level as we crouch in the corner of a classroom-turned-shelter, the labels of teacher and students dissipating into oblivion. Here we're just people, people who are scared. How can I ever look at those whiteboards that span the entirety of the front of the room the same? Or the rows upon rows of desks that supported our pencils, pens, papers, textbooks, elbows, heads, feet? This is no longer a school. It's a war zone.

...

Following the words proclaiming that this is *not a drill*, everyone proceeds, almost robotically, into formation. But while everyone else follows the school's procedure, I follow my own. I let everyone sit before me so they are furthest out of view of the window by the door. I sit on the outer ring of students. After waiting for hours, I see a figure walk down the hall. I alert my teacher. She tells me to keep watch. I scoot closer out of safety to keep vigilant and scan the hallway.

I don't know why I decided to take up this

role, but I did. That day, I made a choice to protect. So did the faculty members at Sandy Hook. Only, their sacrifice was greater. I tried to protect my classmates and lived. They tried to protect their students and died.

...

Once, I was at my friend's house for a sleepover. We had some mutual friends, but some of the people she invited I wasn't very close with. There was this one girl who I didn't know, but once we started talking, I ended up really liking her by the end of the night. We kind of formed a bond after she confided in me about the problems she was having with her family. No one listened to her. Her siblings—a younger sister and even younger brother—were annoying. She wasn't getting any attention. I understood. She needed to vent. I listened and supported her. A few years later, Sandy Hook happened and she lost her little brother. I wonder if she remembers our conversation. Does it haunt her the way it haunts me?

...

Some of my teachers, who have been teaching at Newtown High School longer than most, had him as a student. They exchange whispers about him. *I taught him. I remember him. He used to sit right there. He was a quiet kid. Didn't talk much. Didn't have many*



friends. Definitely more awkward than most. But he wasn't a bad kid. He was weird, but not bad. How could this happen? How could I not have seen it? Their eyes were full of fear, astonishment, shock, pain, guilt. How could this be? How could we not have known? How could he have done this?

If only we knew.

• • •

During the weeks after the shooting, the town was in a period of healing. The times of sitting in traffic as the mourners packed the streets around the funeral home was over. A strange closure enveloped the town as the last body was laid to rest. 25 preceded the last. The town was festooned with green and white, a method of remembrance. It was a vow to never forget. Bracelets, shirts, scarves, prayer shawls, earrings. The news focused on exposing the truth, letting the public hear the phone calls made to local police, discussing the credibility of conspiracies thought up by some loon in a basement somewhere. We ignored it. No one watched TV for a while. We needed to focus on love, commemoration, and resilience instead.

• • •

Lighthouses. So many lighthouses. Not near the sea though. Here, in a church, forty minutes away from the ocean. Figurines sit majestically on shelves; drawings, inside the lines and out, coat the walls end to end. Ben would have liked this. I didn't know him, but I knew he would have. The place is packed as people weave in and out of the pews in remembrance of the little boy who loved lighthouses. A victim. One of 26. I wonder how many times I passed by him unknowingly when I occasionally attended services with my friends. Did I ever actually see him in person, or is his familiarity just a result of

seeing his picture mounted everywhere? I gaze at the lighthouses embellishing the inside of the church one last time, then resume my position outside. Underneath a white canopy lies a cheap, gray table with a bumpy surface, bordered by church-budget folding chairs, situated on an awkward slant of pavement. The set up looks awfully pathetic next to the majesty of the looming stone church next to it, a building that I have become strangely attached to in my limited time as a youth group participant.

We volunteers are armed with our vibrant green shirts that read "Ben's Lighthouse" in white lettering, eagerly awaiting the arrival of kids seeking to have their cheeks embellished with butterflies or puppies. As I wait, I start to notice that the canopy cannot protect me from the relentless summer sun; it is the cause of half of my sweat. The other half is caused by nerves. I'm worried. I'm not an artist. What if they aren't satisfied with my painting abilities? What if I make a kid unhappy at an already somber event? There was already one incident of a little girl crying at the sounds of sirens, a sound that must have triggered some violent memories. I cannot handle any more tears. Well now is the moment of truth. My first customer.

Later, I will not remember what exactly I drew, but I do remember taking shallow breaths to steady my shaky hand and how the brush felt smooth as I swirled it around. Surprisingly, my work is a hit. My customer takes one look in the mirror, smiles, and goes on their merry way. Suddenly, swarms of small children mob the table, eyebrows furrowed as they decide which designs they should get. I get more creative, looking up easy-to-draw designs on my phone and prac-

ting them on my bare legs. I expand my list from butterflies and smiley faces to elephants, dinosaurs, Captain America shields, the bat symbol, and more. The most popular choices are the anchors and lighthouses. I don't know if the children requesting these hearts, lighthouses, and superhero logos understand their significance, that their faces are being painted in remembrance of a fallen classmate, but it's a nice gesture anyway.

The hordes of eager children eventually start dwindling down—the paints are running low, the brushes are sitting in murky water, my hands are cramping from my steely grip and tense muscles. As I'm cleaning off a brush, an adorable little girl, pig-tails and all, waddles her way up to the face painting stand, requesting a lighthouse. Good choice. I gladly take her, patting the seat next to me. As I begin painting, the young girl strikes up a conversation with me. Most kids remain silent so this is new to me. I play along and follow her cues until she says, *So did you know Ben?* I pull back and stare at her. I maintain eye contact, but can see through my peripherals the widening eyes of my fellow face painters, their mouths threatening to fall open into dark abysses. Still, I don't take my eyes off the girl.

I am stunned. She is so direct, in a way that only a child is capable of. She doesn't tiptoe around it. There are no cavities from the sugarcoating that adults pile on. She looks at me, awaiting an answer. I give her a small, sad smile and a quick shake of my head. *No, no I didn't.* She looks up at me with these big, round, curious eyes. She tells me how she did. That they were friends, that they would play together sometimes. That she misses him. She continues to tell me about their adventures together until I put

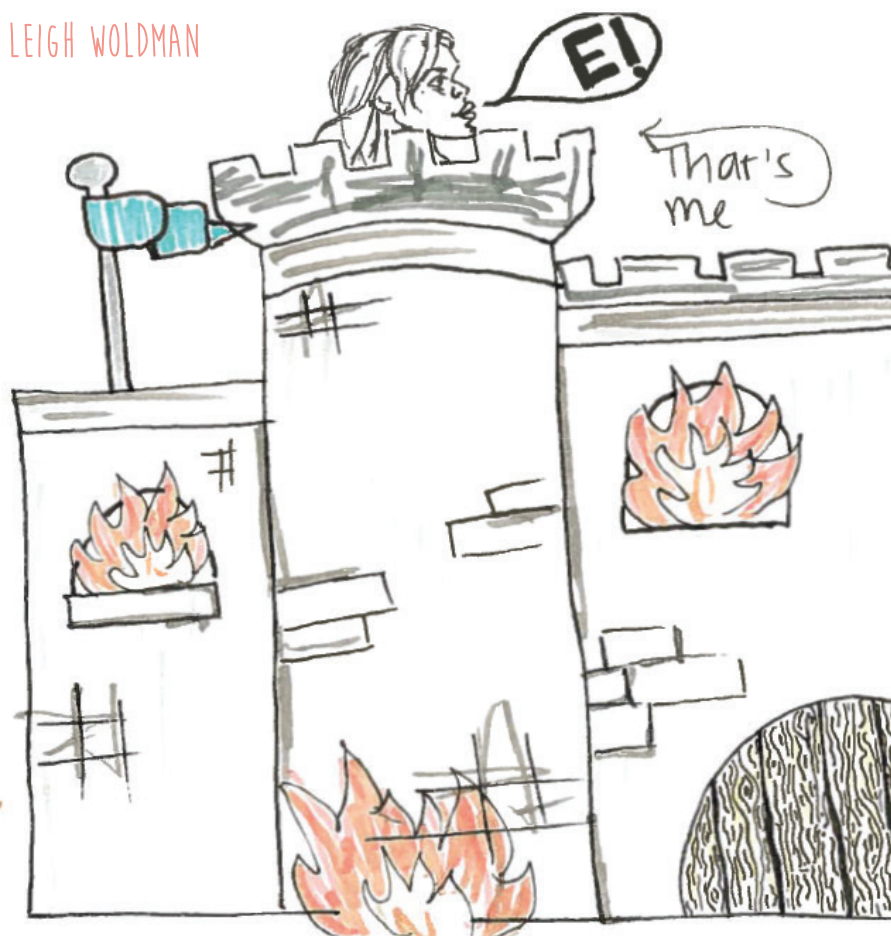
the final touches on her lighthouse. We say our goodbyes, and she walks away with a wave and a smile, hand-in-hand with her father. I watch her go. This is the first time I have heard someone actually talk about Ben since I have gotten here. After the little girl leaves, I am commended for my composure. Everyone keeps saying that they don't know how they would have reacted, or if they could have kept their cool like I did.

To this day I can't believe I was able to hold it together. Amongst the whispers and awkward avoidances as adults try not to think of the complicated reality of it, there stood a young girl who only sees the simplicity of it: she lost a friend. In that instant, I looked up to her. She said what was on her mind. She said what everyone else was terrified to talk about. I wish we all didn't hide. We should all take away something from this young girl. People die. We focus too much on the how and why. She deserved to be able to talk about her friend in the open, to speak freely, acknowledge that he is gone. We all deserve that because like my principal said on that rueful day: *this is not a drill*. Death is not a drill. But that doesn't mean we have to shroud ourselves in darkness in its wake. In this case, I think we all could benefit from Ben and his lighthouses. Lighthouses are guides. They're a symbol of safety and home and hope. Ben was on to something. We all need a lighthouse. And on that day, the little girl, whose name I never learned, was mine. She still is.



A LETTER TO E

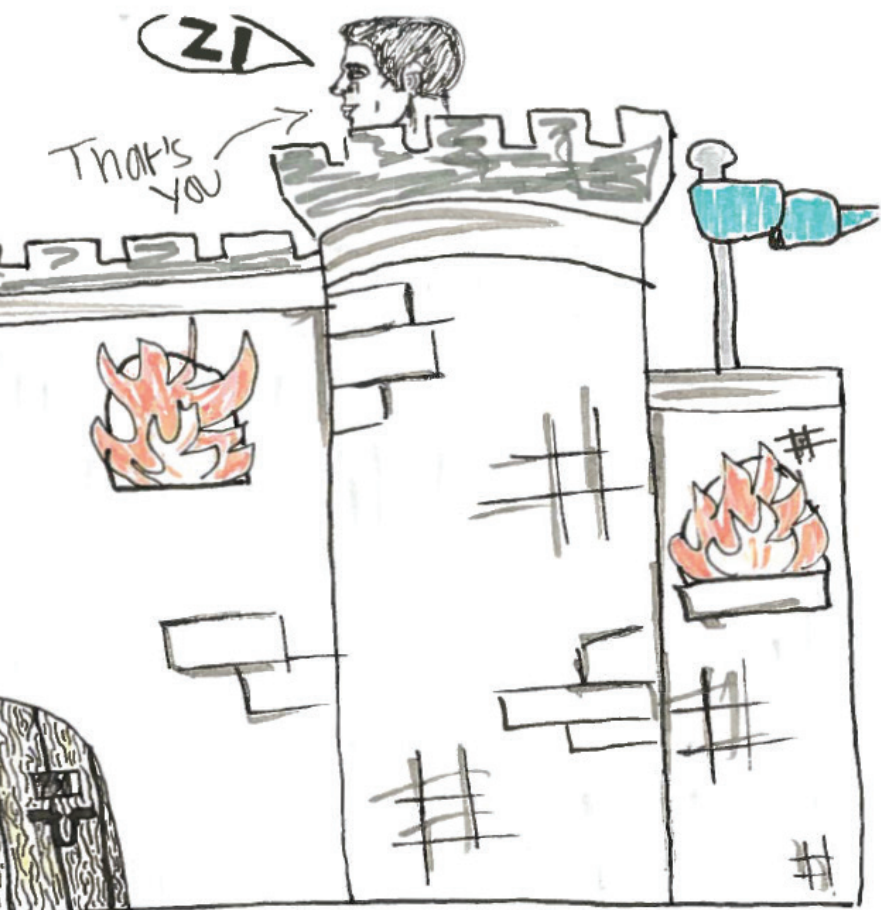
ZOEY LEIGH WOLDMAN



Dear E,

After a five-hour Trailways bus ride from Syracuse to Port Authority, an hour long cab ride from Port Authority to JFK, six hours staring at Gate 35 and an eight-hour flight sitting next to Trevor from Arkansas, I was

finally in the same building as you for the first time in over three months. Trevor and I talked while we waited for our bags to come around on the carousel. Of course mine was the last one out, as if the anticipation wasn't already releasing enough wild butterflies in



my stomach. I wasn't sure if I had butterflies because we fought the week before my arrival and I was nervous to see you, or if they were flying freely because I was actually excited. As soon as I wrestled my monstrous suitcase off the belt, I texted you to let

you know that I was one step closer. Trevor waited for me. He had never been to Madrid either and was just as confused by the outrageously high-tech, futuristic airport as I was. We approached the exit doors and as they slid open, I searched for your face. Instead, I

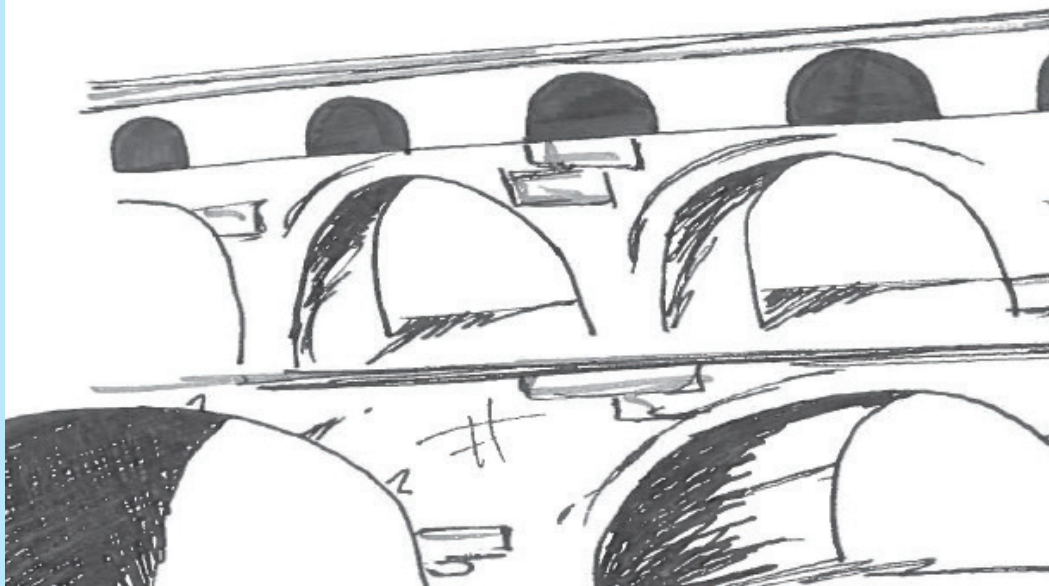
found the top of your head. I walked straight up to you and stared at your curls, waiting for you to look up. You didn't even notice me until I poked you and said "Hey." You looked up, hid your phone away in your pocket, and unrolled the poster-sized paper in your hand. *Welcome to Madrid, Zoey!* I giggled as I looked at the hand-sketched unicorn and kissed you before the moment had the chance to get any more awkward.

Settled in our taxi, you placed your hand on my thigh so I could feel the outline of your hand on my skin. I forgot what it felt like to be touched. Your fingers felt heavy through my pants. I didn't know why I felt uncomfortable. You had been my boyfriend for over a year. If anyone should have the right to touch me, it is you, but for some reason it left me uneasy. It felt like you were a stranger to my body, a mind that I did not know. I thought that maybe you would look

different or that your voice would sound different. You posted tons of Snapchat stories revealing your newfound love for churros and chocolate and sent me endless snaps of potato salad and various meats in rice.

I thought you would be fat; well, not fat. You could never be fat, but I thought you would be fatter. I know that's horrible that I would even think of you that way, but I did. Maybe it was a defense mechanism: that if you were fat, my lost feelings for you wouldn't be unjustified. God, I'm so shallow. You weren't fatter. You were perfect, just as I knew you before.

I knew that I hadn't actually lost any feelings for you, but I was scared. I was scared by the fact that I was completely okay while you were gone, that I wasn't crying every day and skipping meals from depression. I kept telling you that I felt the same, but I think I was just repeating it over and over again to try to



convince myself that it was true. My week in Madrid with you solidified the fact that no feelings were lost. Actually, I think they were stronger than ever.

• • •

FUCKING. So abrasive against your eyes, I thrust toward you in an attempt to convince you of my love. Ironical, like the initiation of a war seeking peace. I wanted to break down the walls and make you understand where I was coming from. Instead the bricks were laid and the mortar filled the cracks, making it impossible to reach you. I never use that word, at least not directed toward you. It was used in agony as I stub my pinky toe on the corner of my bed, or at the world for falling apart around me, but never at you. The anger built up inside of me, the result of a quiet darkness surrounding my heart like the amniotic fluid protecting the fetus in a womb.

Was this silence my body's way of protecting my heart, or was it the unwanted message relaying to my mind loud and clear? The message: you are not the one. *Do you still think you're going to marry him?* My mom probed the uncharted territory. *I DON'T KNOW...* *Fuck.* Tally, fuck: 3, other profanities: 2.

Yeah, come on, Zoey. Figure it out. Get it together. You didn't deserve that, any of it. I'm sorry for letting my anger boil to the brim, for succumbing to the power of the f-word. We were perfect before, only arguing about who's more badass, Drake or Rihanna. Rihanna, of course. Beautiful, strong, independent. I was confused about the fact that my heart didn't feel anything at all, the darkness keeping everything out, afraid to enter. Do I really miss you? Or, does this mean that I am independent? That I don't need you? I was afraid.





• • •

The Alcázar, the Muslim-ruled fortress, was overthrown by the kings of Castile during the 16th century, and the Spanish Royal Court was moved to Madrid. In 1734 on Christmas Eve, the entire castle was burnt to the ground. The fire that came out of nowhere destroyed hundreds of paintings and treasures. The castle was not repaired until King Philip V built a palace—the palace that is standing today—in the same spot as the original Alcázar.

Together we visited the palace, Palacio Real de Madrid, and roamed its halls pretending to be the royal couple. I quizzed myself by reading the Spanish copies of the tour checkpoints. You corrected me when I was wrong, which wasn't very often. We snuck up behind a guided tour and pretended to be

part of the crowd, tucking our hands behind our backs and nodding astutely. We giggled at the ugly portraits of past royalty, imagining what it was like to be them, to have a “ceramic room” (the entire room, walls, and ceiling were covered in intricate ceramic tiles). *Imagine if a piece of ceramic fell off and hit us in the head. We would die.* The marble floors, tapestries, and polished rubies were astonishing. The most astonishing of all was that as soon as we soaked in all of the beauty, the memories of the crumbling walls beneath the fierce fires suddenly diminished.

• • •

I couldn't believe how thoughtful you had been. Not only did you create a week-long itinerary for me, but you also planned an evening getaway, Airbnb and all. We even got to take one of those high speed

train rides that you so kindly let me sit in the window seat for. I wanted to soak in all of the views and see everything. Instead, I watched the inside of my eyelids. After only thirty minutes, we were in Segovia, the land of suckling pig. Looking in one direction, we gazed at snow-dusted mountains and in the other, an ancient aqueduct protecting its city. After we dropped our bags off at our house for the night, we made our way toward the aqueduct. The aqueduct, originally built by the Romans, helped transport water from the Rio Frio into Segovia. We followed its arches up stone stairs and began weaving through the city past churches and homes.

The entire day was spent along the cobblestone roads, noshing on traditional Spanish food and climbing 150 spiral stairs. We found ourselves on top of the tower in the Alcázar de Segovia. We bonded over the fact that we couldn't breathe and quickly regretted the extra three euros we paid for the hike. We had the roof to ourselves, so obviously we carved our initials into the stones. We peered out over the rolling hills and sighed over the fact that we had to walk twenty-five minutes back through the mist and cobblestone to get back to our Airbnb. We rewarded our labor by napping. *Can we please go to one nice dinner while I'm there, so I can get dressed up and look pretty?*

It was my only request for the entire week. It turns out Spain's idea of a nice, fancy restaurant is very, very different from the U.S. A "nice restaurant" means that it is old and serves traditional dishes, not that there is mood lighting and candles on every table. I wore a long, black lace dress that fell mid-shin where my fur boots met the hem, with my red lipstick breaking up the monochrome.

You wore jeans. We sipped on a glass of wine and crunched through our suckling pig, a dish my dad told me about after watching an episode of Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations*. We made funny faces at each other from across the table and commented on our waiter's rude behavior. I shuffled around in my seat trying to rid the itch from my tights. We, or rather, you, paid the bill and we made our way back to the Airbnb for the night.

We have a tradition. It entails basically chugging cheap wine and being drunk together. That's it. Well, there's more, but you already know the rest. We hadn't had a wine night in months, and I was planning to make this one special. Underneath my lace dress was more lace. You started a fire and I tried to get ahead of you on the drinking. We cuddled and talked and cuddled some more. It was supposed to be a romantic night and it was, just not exactly according to plan. I drank too fast and filled my belly with poison. My stomach was full, so full that any movement could induce regurgitation. So much for our romantic night. We knocked out on the futon—not the bed, the futon—and I spent the dark hours wrestling your body to win over space and sheets. Maybe it wasn't exactly a romantic night, but it was a night to remember.

"You're my PIC. Do you know what that stands for?"

"Partner-in-Crime! Of course, I know what that stands for."

Fingertips interlocked and gripping tighter, I swept my gaze across the *uno número de personas necesarias para cambiar el mundo*. The white tiled walls settled on your mint chocolate chip eyes. You leaned in and planted your love onto my ChapStick varnished lips. *Only*

2% of the world's population has green eyes. Those words were engrained in my mind like the ABCs from the echoes of your voice, even though you always say that they aren't that great. Those mint green eyes, even though they are on your body, are mine. Not physically of course, because mine are shit brown, but they are my whole heart. My whole world. You are the one person who has changed my world. As cheesy as those words sounded slipping from my lips as I practiced my Spanish, mimicked the cliché message, dancing across my keyboard beneath my fingertips, I have you in mind.

I can't stop looking at you. No matter how hard I try, my eyes wander until they find you before them. Three and a half months went by and not once was I able to settle my eyes on you. I never thought being in a long distance relationship would be this hard. I thought that we would be okay, perfect as we always were. But I was not prepared, not even the slightest. *This whole thing sucks. This long distance thing. It is so hard, and I miss you.*

"Hey, you can't do that. You are the one who chose to leave. It was not my decision to be left behind."

"I know, but I had to."

"Obvi I support your dreams, and I always will... unless your dreams happen to be moving to Japan."

We stepped onto the escalator and pushed our bodies up against each other. There was no such thing as being too close. Something, somehow, changed from the moment we were in the taxi. You no longer felt like a stranger to my body. I had not touched you or been touched in three and a half months and I was taking advantage of every second. It was amazing how fast things had changed.

Just a couple days had gone by, several train rides and escalators under our feet.

We exited the metro station into the mist. You took my owl-covered umbrella from my hand and opened it above our heads. We strolled down the tree-lined street, Retiro Park to our right. On the first day of my trip, you took me here. We got lost in the maze of trees and bushes, explored a beautiful rose garden and paddle boated on the lake. The park, originally belonging to the Spanish Monarchy, was enlarged by King Phillip II, making it one of the largest parks in Madrid. The park was made public during the late 19th century and eerily resembles Central Park. We spent the whole summer together in Manhattan, two blocks away from Central Park, but never managed to go there. Somehow being in Retiro made up for that. It made up for all of the broken promises and the sights unseen.

I looped my arm under yours and leaned in close to be near you and to also avoid being spit on by the clouds. We continued to linger, making our way toward the Prado. The entire night before, I bugged you about making sure to take your student ID so we could get discounts on our museum tickets. As soon as we approached the ticket window, I opened my purse and my fingers fumbled around for my student ID. Of course it wasn't in there. I had been preaching to the choir. I felt horrible that I made such a big deal about it and then didn't even come prepared myself. The worst part was that you wouldn't let me pay for my own. In fact, you wouldn't let me pay for anything while I was there. It irked me, but I was grateful. If I did not already say it, thank you, E.

The Prado is home to the paintings and sculptures of artists like Goya, Velázquez,





VIRALITY & Belonging

The human experience is about exploring the world, cultivating new ideas, and forming relationships with others to share life's adventures. With the proliferation of products, ideas, and technology, we can often feel lost amidst the chaos. Hence, finding a place where we are comfortable, where we feel that we belong and matter, becomes crucial. The stories in this section grapple with the challenge of making sense of the world and our place in it. In a society that obsesses over our online presence, trying to fit in when the screens are turned off can feel impossible.

In "Virality and Consumption," Zach Barlow helps us make sense of our role in the virtual world. He places virality and consumption side by side and considers their differences, as well as their composition, to grasp what it truly means to "go viral."

Ashley Kasha's captivating and humorous "A String of Saliva: A series of poor choices resulting in mono, a trip to the hospital, and an attempt to determine how the hell this happened" tackles a different kind of virus, one that led her down a path of self-reflection.

From there, we turn to a story about gaming, compulsion, and identity. Robert Marcuson's "Rage Quit" captures the

uncanny way that video games connect and compel players through virtual worlds.

Rafy Evans looks at obsession in a different context. "Don't Forget Where You Belong" describes her deep connection to the boy band One Direction and how she found herself through the experience of following them. Evans shows us that the relationships we form in life are often sudden, unplanned, and networked across time and space.

In her depiction of her relationship to home and diaspora, Hasmik Djoulakian's "Moving Across Spaces" addresses the struggle of walking the line between multiple cultures. As an Armenian woman in the United States, she recounts specific moments from her childhood and describes how they connect, as she puts it, to "the spaces [her] body has occupied since then."

These authors show us the complexities of belonging and existing, whether on or off the screen. Our human experience is evolving, contingent, and sometimes viral. But we're not in it alone. These pieces remind us how we may be more connected than we think.

—Alice Chen, Sarah Crawford
Anuradha Desai, and Rachel Young

Virality &

The word “virality,” I would argue, has both a primary and a secondary meaning within American society. The primary meaning, of course, would be the first thing most people think of when they hear the word “viral”: something widely known, whose popularity has seemingly come about overnight. The secondary and less-spoken meaning is “mystery.” No one really talks about how something goes viral and what it means after it has reached a certain level of Internet fame. It seems society has an unspoken agreement that the hows and whys of virality are beyond us and it simply is what it is: unexplainable. I have ventured to dream of a mechanism through which the mystery of the viral is solved. Through this mechanism, the hows and whys of not only any Internet sensation, but also any successful consumable medium, could be explained. What exactly is it about a novel that makes it a *New York Times* best seller? What separates timeless paintings from high school art projects? What is the difference between an award-winning four-star dish at a restaurant, the kind you don’t forget, and an ordinary dish you do forget? Why are some musical artists able to pump out number one hit after number one hit, while other artists with a similar talent level have a hard time even getting local gigs?

In order to begin to answer these questions, we must first revisit the way of thinking of one of history’s most famous ancient philosophers. Socrates believed that in almost every major issue, humanity should strive for its ideal. He be-

lieved in ideals of justice, love, and even death. To Socrates, the ideal of anything was represented by its purest, most perfect form. Take the circle, for example. When I asked my peers whether they could imagine what the ideal of a circle looked like, there was a unanimously positive response. Almost everybody can close their eyes and, in their mind, see a perfect circle, despite the fact that a perfect circle does not actually exist. In contrast, when I asked my peers if they could imagine the ideal of virality, the response was unanimously negative. They couldn’t imagine what it might look like; the very idea of being able to perfectly predict the level of popularity of anything on the Internet before it is published seemed preposterous.

However, I will argue that such a theory or approach is not preposterous, but could be applied to any consumable medium, whether on the Internet or in physical space. Because I am arguing that this process can work for any consumable medium, not just things on the Internet, I will cease to use the term “virality” and replace it with “consumption.” The concept of an ideal of human consumption may seem foreign now, just as I’m sure the ideal of justice seemed foreign to the disciples of Socrates thousands of years ago. It is my hope, however, that by the end of this piece, despite the fact that this approach doesn’t yet exist, when the ideal of consumption is mentioned, you and I will be able to close our eyes and imagine it the same way we can imagine a perfect circle.

Consumption

Zach Barlow

In his 2013 book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, Jonah Berger uses the acronym STEPPS to explain why he believes things gain popularity. STEPPS stands for: Social currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical value, and Stories. Berger argues that these categories can comprise a checklist, and if an item meets one or more of the checklist's requirements, then it has a higher chance of gaining popularity. Following this logic, any item that meets all the requirements on the checklist has the highest possible chance of gaining popularity in any specific market. I believe that while this list is not perfect, it has value and can serve as the basic framework of the ideal of consumption. Having said that, I will briefly summarize each item from Berger's STEPPS to emphasize the theme of moving away from pure Internet success and into the realm of the more general idea of consumption.

For **Social Currency**, the idea is that the sharing of specific things creates a type of currency. For example, if someone tells you a secret and asks you not to tell anyone, you may tell someone, and the reason you do is that your knowing that secret and telling it to those who do not makes them think more highly of you. Berger argues that one of the keys to any item's becoming viral is its containing a high level of social currency, which indirectly persuades people who discover it to share it because they believe sharing it with others will increase their own social standing. Put simply, sharing makes you cool.

Triggers are centered on the concept that sights, smells, and sounds can trigger related thoughts and ideas. Certain physical stimuli can lead to specific thoughts, like little environmental cues for related concepts. The thoughts and ideas that frequent our minds the most have a higher chance of leading to action, which in this case would be the buying or sharing of an item.

Emotion means that when we care, we share. If any piece of material can garner a strong enough emotional response, in any direction, it is more likely to be shared. Fear, anger, amusement, happiness, awe, disgust: It doesn't matter which emotion, as long as there is a strong emotional effect.

Public indicates that making something more observable makes it easier to imitate. If it's hard to see what others are doing, it's hard to imitate them, and thus a key factor in driving products to catch on is public visibility. If something is built to show, it's built to grow.

Practical value means that if something is useful for a large demographic, it is more likely to be consumed.

Stories are important because it is easy to reach people through narratives. If people get sucked in early, they'll stay for the conclusion. Stories carry lessons or information that is not so readily apparent on the surface. Stories provide proof through analogy. For example, Subway was able to build a successful advertising campaign through Jared Fogle's weight-loss story.

This list provides a good start in the quest to identify the ideal of consumption; however, as mentioned earlier, it is not perfect. By definition, anything that is flawed or incomplete cannot be considered an ideal. I don't think it would be possible to say that any item containing every aspect of Berger's STEPPS would be guaranteed to be highly consumed, and thus I would argue that the list is either flawed or incomplete. So, what is it that can be added to the list to close the gap or finish the circle? In interviewing a select group of peers who had already familiarized themselves with Berger's STEPPS, I asked them that question. The answer was that humans are unpredictable. In other words, there are too many moving parts and too much subjectivity to allow us to quantify the failure or success of any consumable using only Berger's STEPPS. For the sake of this argument, I will call that unpredictability or overwhelming subjectivity the "human X factor."

On the surface, the human X factor, represents the seeming unpredictability of human behavior, especially when measured on a macro level. Admittedly, the term "human X factor" is quite ambiguous; it has been argued that because of that ambiguity, even if the human X factor existed within Berger's STEPPS, it would be impossible to define, rendering it useless. However, if the human X factor could be quantified, then I would argue that along with the framework Berger's STEPPS provide, the ideal of consumption would be achieved. Surely, if any item contained every aspect of the STEPPS along with the human X factor, it would be widely consumed. But how in the world could we logically define or predict human X factor? The answer lies in the existence of patterns.

In *The Bestseller Code*, Jodie Archer and Matthew L. Jockers have created an algorithm that they argue can accurately predict whether or not a novel will be a *New York Times* best seller. The way it works is quite simple. They have programmed a computer to "read" massive amounts of past literary works. By feeding in novels that have been *New York Times* best sellers, they have found that the computer has been able to pick up on seemingly inconsequential patterns within these works, consisting of obscure factors such as the frequency of the word "the" in every hundred pages or the use of an adverb in conjunction with a pronoun. For a human, these patterns would be impossible to pick up on, and they would seem meaningless at best. But using such patterns, this algorithm has been able to correctly indicate, 90% of the time, whether or not any manuscript has been a best seller, and it can predict with the same level of accuracy whether or not a manuscript that has not yet been published will be a best seller. It's worth noting that when a manuscript is "read" by this program, the program has no idea who wrote it, when it was written, or how much money the publishing company spent on marketing. This would suggest that there is a deeper logic to the manner in which people consume literature, in contrast to the belief that literature sells only because the author is popular or because commercials for the book appear on television. This algorithm of pattern recognition is an important step in defining the human X factor, but predicting whether a novel will be a best seller is not enough; for our understanding of the human X factor to be able to serve our purpose, we must expand this idea.

Because the technology to predict a best seller exists, I propose that to define the human X factor, we must apply that same technology to

everything. This is where my theory has met the most skepticism. For the best-seller algorithm to achieve its goal, it must first “read” through thousands and thousands of manuscripts to pick up on minute patterns, and even before that there must exist at least an idea of what the program should be looking for in the first place. This was an arduous task even when it encompassed only novels, so it could be argued that to apply this to every consumable medium would be impossible. However, there was a time when the idea of being able to predict a best seller seemed impossible.

data analysis to pattern-recognition programs for various media, but applying this technology does not complete the circle on its own. There is still more work to be done.

Have you ever wondered why it is so easy to finish a bag of potato chips only moments after opening it? How can we lose ourselves in certain foods and struggle to eat others? Why are some companies able to generate millions of dollars a year while others struggle to stay in business? As you may have guessed by now, the answer has been determined through data mining and pattern recognition. At the Frito-

**...the manner in which the best-seller algorithm
can make its predictions so accurately is not
through a new or groundbreaking
technological method.**

In the process of applying what I will now call the “consumption algorithm” to different media, history will serve as our best teacher. Take music, for example: Using songs that have spent time at the top of the charts in the past, scientists are able to analyze what these hit songs have in common through similar data-reading and pattern-recognition technology as used in Jockers and Archer’s *The Best-seller Code*. The results have highlighted factors such as song length, danceability, beats per minute, key, and time signature that separate a number one hit from a GarageBand experiment. The truth is, the manner in which the best-seller algorithm can make its predictions so accurately is not through a new or groundbreaking technological method. Scientists and psychologists have already employed massive

Lay research facility in Dallas, a team of over 500 chemists, psychologists, and technicians have been looking for patterns in the consumption of their products for years, with an average annual research budget of \$30 million. Paramount to a successful product, they have determined, are things that may have never crossed the mind of the general consumer: how people like a chip to snap at right around four pounds of pressure per square inch, or how if a food melts quickly in your mouth, it tricks your brain into thinking there is no caloric value in it, which keeps your body wanting more. Qualities like color, smell, and shape are also mentioned as important aspects of food items that can differentiate what flies off supermarket shelves from what ends up on clearance racks (Moss). As you can see, there

exist similarities to the method in which data is accrued in the three examples I have given; though the information requires years of preparation and teams of experts to produce, in each example, there exists the possibility of accurately predicting whether a product will be successful based on the patterns that exist for samples already proven to be successful.

So far I have been working to build a framework by which anyone can imagine the existence of the ideal of consumption. I have argued that through Berger's STEPPS and the human X factor, we can accurately predict whether any consumable item will be popular. The technology required to logistically define the human X factor, I have argued, already exists and has been used in several markets. The use of that technology in individual markets alone, however, will not be good enough to define the human X factor. To do that, I believe we must focus less on how people consume within categories and more on how humans consume in general.

This theory is centered on the idea of patterns. Technology has proven that there exist in any consumable market patterns intrinsically connected to human behavior. Almost all market titans have known this and have used this information to continually push the buttons they know humans need to have pushed in order to make them continue to buy specific products. However, there has never been a dedicated search for patterns that clarify the way humans consume in general.

This is the part where we close the circle and hone in on what we will need in order to accurately define what the human X factor is and, in doing so, fully elucidate the ideal of human consumption. The key is in the ability to cross-reference. Imagine a world, not too far from reality, in which there exist a plethora of

recognizable patterns in every imaginable consumable market. These patterns, by definition, can tell us not only what has separated success from failures in the past, but also what will succeed or fail in the future. Now, imagine that we zoom out one layer and begin to look for patterns and overlaps amongst the patterns we've already found. In other words, we take the data we've cultivated in every imaginable consumable market and begin to run it through the same process we used to cultivate those patterns in the first place. Once running the patterns, we may be able to start to see similarities in what makes something popular that exist in different media. These cross-referenced patterns wouldn't simply tell a story of why a particular chip is everyone's favorite or why we can't stop talking about a certain book, but would tell the story of why we consume, period. At this point, it would not be about plot, or taste, or sound, or marketability, or public opinion. These patterns paint a picture of human behavior, of humanistic rhythm, and of how and why humans both create and destroy as we do; when cross-referenced, they would begin to scientifically answer the age-old question of what drives us.

In researching and working on clearly laying out the details of this theory, I have come across what could potentially be argued to be holes in my thinking. The first of these relates to the sheer scale of the project. It has been proven that we can use data mining and pattern-recognition technology to accurately predict the success or failure of a novel or a song, but the idea of applying that technology to every consumable medium is daunting, to say the least. It would mean we must first identify each category of consumable medium, a task made even more improbable with the emergence of the Internet, especially if we consider things like a physical book and a digital book or a physi-

cal photograph and a digital photograph as being in different categories. Grouping all items related to photography or literature into one category would itself pose a problem of scale, and although separating the physical and the digital would present its own issues, creating a separation between the physical and the digital may be a necessary step in order to produce accurate data.

The second and maybe most troubling issue with my theory is the fact that at its core, it is centered around a question of “if.” There is truly no way of knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that after we were able to mine an appropriate amount of data from every consumable medium, we would find any overlap in the patterns. In other words, if we did not find overlap or recurring themes in the patterns from each category of consumable medium, then we would have failed to discern anything that might hint at an existence of an ideal of consumption, which could prove devastating considering the money, time, and work it would take to reach the level of assessing overlap. Essentially, it would be similar to launching a spacecraft toward Mars without being completely sure that Mars existed.

Having said that, if this process was undertaken and we did reach the level of assessing overlap and we did find evidence of pattern overlap, I believe the world would be forever changed. Imagine what it would mean for a company to be able to use this method to know before it released a product that it would sell well, because not only did it hit all of Berger’s STEPPS, but it was also proven to fall in line with why humans buy things. Imagine a young musical artist’s having the power to know the song she just released on her blog would go viral. Imagine a restaurant’s knowing that the new dish on its menu would

change the way the business operated. This is the type of mechanism I have proposed. It may seem farfetched on the surface, but the technology does exist to make something like it entirely possible. There would be challenges, of course, and also quite a bit of risk if no overlapping patterns materialized, but if the patterns did appear, the impact on society would be significant. We’re essentially talking about a mechanism that, through technology and data, offers the ability to accurately look into the future of any product and come away with a conclusion regarding its eventual success or failure in any given market.

Think back to what my peers agreed about the human X factor in the beginning: that it was too ambiguous, that there were too many moving parts, that there was too much subjectivity to make it possible to define. Using the method laid out here, I have worked to eliminate the ambiguity, I have attempted to define the most important moving parts, and I hope I have erased any notion of subjectivity. Now, close your eyes and try to imagine with me, if you will, what the ideal of human consumption might look like. Can you see it now?


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A String of Saliva

A series of poor choices resulting in mono,
a trip to the hospital, and an attempt to
determine how the hell this happened

Ashley Kasha



I can't breathe. My eyes dart open, and I attempt to sit up in sheer terror, but my limbs are paralyzed. The little strength I have drains from my body; my nose is completely stuffed up. My mouth feels like sandpaper, and every time I make an effort to swallow, hundreds of swords poke me. Saliva is nonexistent. I tear up uncontrollably and try to call the nurse, yet barely a whisper is released. The nurse runs in and explains that she is going to put a fast-acting steroid in my IV to open my throat again. She inserts it and everything begins to blur. I close my eyes and my consciousness fades.



Layout by Doris Dorval.

I know I did this to myself. It started when I lost my voice, my nose became stuffed, I coughed constantly, my throat ached, and my lymph nodes started to swell. When I finally decided to go to the doctor, they broke the news that I had mononucleosis, popularly known as the kissing disease. Caused by the Epstein Bar virus, it is passed from person to person by saliva from kissing, sharing food, sharing drinks, or even sipping from the same straw. In my case, I got it from kissing. Before college, I only had one boyfriend and kissed a total of maybe four people. But once I got here, I spiraled out of control. Honestly, I don't even know why I

did what I did. I made a mistake. Well technically, I made eleven mistakes that led me to Crouse Hospital. I just wish I knew which guy gave me mono.

...

Number 7:

This is by far the sweatiest party I have ever been to. I feel a bead of sweat drip from my upper brow and onto my arm. A wall of people encases me in the corner of the room, and there is no way I can get out of here at this point. A really tall guy in a Rastafarian sweatshirt stumbles over to me and pulls me in to dance. I'm drunk, so I decide to let him kiss me. His kiss tastes like weed and vodka. He is so drunk that he stumbles and almost drags me down. My friends keep asking me if I'm alright and I say yes. After a few minutes, I decide I've had enough; I weave my way through the crowd to the other side of the house, hoping to never see him again.

...

"Yep, you have mono," the doctor says as I sit in an office at Health Services on campus.

Sitting in complete shock, I am unable to move any part of my body. I thought mono was supposed to feel like death, but I'm still a functional human being.

"You've had it for a while. That's why the test came back positive," the doctor continues. "Do you want a pass to get out of classes?"

I shake my head no. *I need to power through this.* The doctor hands me a sheet that reads, "HEALTH FAX: Mononucleosis." She also tosses me a ginger ale and some crackers as if it's a consolation.

Walking back to the atrium, I am com-

pletely disheveled. My next class is in half an hour and an exam awaits me. I have mono and a fever of 102. My phone buzzes. The group chat with my friends blows up with texts reading, "PARTY THIS WEEK-END?" and "WHEN ARE WE GETTING DRINKS?" I turn off the notifications and shove the phone back into my pocket. My mind wanders to the numerous papers I have to write, the novel I need to finish reading, and the PowerPoint presentation I am supposed to give in two days. My eyes begin to fill up with tears that I refuse to let fall. *What will people think of me?*

I walk to the corner where I see my friend from stats, Number 4. His bright blue eyes are looking down at his laptop, and his wavy brown hair is hidden underneath a backwards baseball cap.

"Oh my God, what's wrong with you?" he says after seeing the distress drawn on my face.

"I just found out that I have mono," I croak.

I sit down and rustle through my ratty purple backpack to find my stats notebook.

"Hey, it's going to be okay. You're going to get through this," Number 4 comforts. *Why is he even being like this?* He hasn't been this friendly to me in over a month since we hooked up. I could have given it to him! *Oh my God, I could have given it to him.* After a few minutes, Number 4 finally succeeds in calming me down and helps me cram for stats.

"Well, hopefully I didn't give you mono," I grimace.

"It's been like a month. I think I'll be fine," he chuckles.

...

Number 4:

I sit on the bed in my dorm, side by side with my friend from stats. We laugh at our stupid mistakes, and I playfully yell at him for leading me astray on the last problem. I admit this is flirty banter; we see each other almost every day, and I need him to teach me stats. *Nothing will happen.* I will not let anything happen.

We finish our homework and lean back against the wall. He starts leaning closer to me. *This is fine.* Friends do that. He rests his leg on mine. *This is fine.* We're just pals. He rests his head on my shoulder. *This is fine.* Maybe he's tired? Oh no, he is leaning his head in. *Do not do this. I repeat, do not do this.* I look into his eyes. *Oh God, they're blue. I've never noticed that before.* Their crisp color is piercing, and his wavy brown hair is tousled so effortlessly. *I can't do this.* He continues to lean in, and finally I can't take it. I turn my head and kiss him.

We have only made out for a few seconds before I realize what we have done. I have ruined everything. No more flirty banter. Now it's going to be weird. *Why can't I just be friends with a boy and leave it at that?* I pull back.

"Wait! We can't do this. We see each other three times a week for hours. We sit next to each other in two classes. We can't make this weird!" I exclaim.

"That's okay. Let's just keep it simple. Can you do that?" Number 4 asks.

"Okay. Yes, I can," I agree mostly because I really want to kiss him again now that I know what I'm missing.

I'm not really sure what "keep it simple" means but I go along with it. We continue making out. I know I've made a bad decision, but I've run out of rationales. *This is fine.*

...

I lie in my bed unable to move. My mouth is dry, and I am so thirsty. I want juice, but can't get it because it is in the fridge located just five feet away. I can't do it. I won't make it. My bed is too tall, and I am too weak. *I need help.* Going to the hospital may be necessary. My family can afford it; it's no big deal.

Health Services arranges for me to be picked up at my dorm and driven to urgent care. I stay in my pajamas and take my phone at just 8%. *I won't need a charger because I won't be gone long.* After slowly crawling out of my bed, I decide that I am strong enough to walk down the stairs to the lobby. I must look ridiculous hugging the walls to stay upright while wearing my blue shorts with white dogs and an oversized white T-shirt. I just need to make it downstairs to get some help.

Before I know it, I'm sitting in an uncomfortable plastic chair in a crowded waiting room. I slump against my seat and almost fall over. *I think I'm going to pass out.* I don't understand why I have to wait. *Can't they tell this is serious?*

...

Number 8:

"You girls look like you could use a drink," Number 8 says to me and my friends.

His facial features are barely visible in the very dark and crowded DJ's, a local bar.

"I need a drink," I announce.

I leave my friends and follow him to the bar. We stand there as drunken hordes push their way to the front of the line. He stands behind me, crossing his arms in front of me and around my waist. Eventually, the bartender agrees to help us. We move through the sweaty sea of people, back to my friends,

where I'm now obligated to dance with him.

Number 8 leans his head to the side, and I know he wants to kiss me. I give in. Within three seconds it becomes incredibly clear that Number 8 does not understand how to make out with someone. I feel like a puppy is drooling on me, so I pull away to wipe a chunk of saliva off my lip.

Looking over at my friends, I call, "Hey guys, do you need to go to the bathroom?"

They take the hint and follow. I promise him that I'll be right back, but I have no intention of returning.

I know I didn't want to kiss him, yet I still did it. Alcohol could not have been my only motivator. *Why do I do this? What am I seeking?* Do I need the approval of guys to heighten my own image of myself, even guys I have no intention of ever dating?

• • •

"We've reviewed your blood work. Your liver is severely inflamed and you are extremely dehydrated. We are transferring you to the ER to be observed overnight," the doctor tells me in a tiny examination room.

"What?" I barely muster. *I can't be this sick.*

The nurse comes in and says it's time to go, pushing me in a wheelchair with my IV through the hospital to my new room in the ER. *This place is massive.* The walls and floors are a worn down blue and little snippets of color peep out here and there in the form of children's drawings and flyers. An old man passes by me on a stretcher as he mumbles something in a foreign language. A young couple in ratty jeans and ripped sweaters hold hands with a young girl and tell her everything is going to be okay.

The nurse pushing my wheelchair mentions that they were low on beds, and I

could be getting the last one. *Do I even deserve it?* It's becoming clearer that there are so many people around me that could use the bed more. I look down at the floor and refuse to make eye contact with any of the other patients.

• • •

Numbers 9 and 10:

After walking around for nearly an hour and fearing that we will never find a party, we finally find success at a frat on Euclid. I grab a drink and look around the party. For now, I'm just going to dance with my friends and have a boy-free night.

I am not very good with that promise. Within minutes, Number 9 is dancing with me. Looking around anxiously, I fear my friends will be mad at me for going for a guy when I previously made a big deal about being independent. Number 9 wants to kiss me but I can't mess things up. I'm way too drunk for this though, and I give in to swapping saliva with him. Within minutes I realize this is a bad idea. I move away to dance with my friends and decide to try this whole "boy-free" thing again.

Number 10 comes over and dances with me. He can't keep rhythm to save his life, but he's attractive enough. He leans in to kiss me. I pull away and look to my left only to see my friends staring directly at me.

"Let's get out of here," he says. "Wanna come back to my room?"

"No, I don't know you. I can't do that."

Going to sleep will help me forget this whole night happened.

• • •

I finally decide it's time to go to sleep, and I lean back. The IV inserted in my left arm means I can't move too much. *I'll be able to get*

comfortable soon. Every time I lean my head back further, I am met by an unwelcome cough attack. I shut my eyes again, genuinely thinking I've forgotten how to fall asleep. I let my cough attack come and close my eyes yet again.

When they open, I'm greeted by a frantic nurse who starts asking me if I need anything. She fiddles with my IV; I begin to tell her to stop when I blink my eyes a few times and realize that she isn't there. *But it felt so real.* I force my eyes closed again, and this time my group from my business class is sitting on my bed yelling at me for not showing up to my presentation. *How did they get here?* I blink rapidly again, and all of a sudden, they vanish as well. I am alone in this room with my cousin Jessica, who drove all the way from Albany. No one else is here. I get a few more coughs out of my system and force my eyelids closed yet again, knowing all too well that trying to sleep is futile.

• • •

Numbers 5 and 6:

I get in line for the bar and am greeted with a cup of jungle juice. Its bright red color is appealing, yet I am not fooled. I know this is filled with an obscene amount of alcohol, but I do not care. *This is fine.* To say I'm just buzzed is an understatement, which is why I do not reject a guy when he comes over to dance with me. His face hides behind a red baseball cap. I glance over to my friends, hoping they'll give me a signal that he's cute. They nod and smile, so he must be attractive. I continue dancing with a drink in one hand and not a care in the world.

"What's your name?" I finally ask him after the song ends.

Number 5 somehow takes this as the go ahead to kiss me because next thing I know

we're swapping saliva. After just a moment, I turn around and my friends are signaling me to leave. Number 5 and his friends decide to tag along.

We finally arrive at the very familiar hockey house. I walk inside the enclosed porch and sit on the windowsill. After a few moments, a very attractive guy makes his way over to me with his friend. I look up and see my friend Katie standing in front of me. Her eyes are gaping and her smile is uncontrollably wide. She wants to get another drink, so I get up and walk with her to the bar, as Number 6 follows.

A bit later, we walk back to the windowsill, but somewhere in the ten feet between the bar and porch he stops, and looks into my eyes. I move my head towards him and we make out. This may be the jungle juice talking, but he is honestly the best kisser I have ever welcomed saliva from. I retreat for just a second and look up only to see Number 5 standing near the doorway looking straight at me. *Whoops. Sorry, pal.* I close my eyes again and continue kissing Number 6.

• • •

All the steroids must be going to my head. Everything is blurring around me, and I don't even notice that they've switched my room until the nurse points it out. Apparently my cousin left early in the morning only to be replaced by my dad. He sits in the corner, brown eyes intent on me. I finally awaken after a coughing attack I had this morning. After fluttering my eyes open, I make eye contact with him. *He must be hungry.*

"Do you want some Swedish Fish?" I ask him, looking over at the leftover candies on the table that I am no longer able to eat.

"That's the first thing you say to me?" he



laughs. After a beat, his smile curls inward and his eyes begin to narrow. “You know, they almost put a breathing tube down your throat this morning. They are going to keep you here a few days to monitor that, and they still may have to do it.”

“Oooh, that’s not good,” I chuckle and close my eyes.

...

“You can go home,” the nurse says.

I’m free. I’m finally free after four painful days. My dad comes over to help me out of bed, and we walk down the halls and out of the building, where I see the world carrying on without me. We hop into the car and begin to drive away. Rain drops patter on the windshield, and I lean my head against the window. The rearview mirror reflects my image, a very pale, emaciated face, with brown glassy eyes locked in a haze.

As we leave, I can’t help but think about

how I screwed up. I put a strain on my parents by needing them to fly three thousand miles to take care of me for twelve days and pay my hospital bills. I put a strain on my friendships by burdening them to babysit me when I couldn’t do ordinary things on my own. I think of all the parties I attended, the drinks I downed, the boys I kissed, and all the saliva that was exchanged. *Why did I even do this?* I shake my head. It’s time to own up to my mistakes and make a fresh start. Take 3 of the “boy-free” thing starts now.

...

Number 1:

My friends and I enter the lacrosse house. With this being my first college house party, I don’t know what to expect. Nearby, a tall blonde woman with a nose piercing is grinding on some short guy. Another couple is making out painfully close to me. *I could never imagine doing that with someone I just met.* I’ve never been the hookup type. The music gets louder, or at least I get drunker. All of a sudden, I feel a guy dancing against me. *Do I turn around and see what he looks like? Or do I just continue dancing?* Thankfully I’m drunk enough to let the paranoia fade away.

Suddenly, he begins to turn his head towards mine and lean downwards. *Does this mean he wants to kiss me?* I have never kissed a stranger, and my stomach begins to churn. *I don’t know if I can go through with this.* As I turn around, I spot my roommate making out with some guy. Two of my other friends are taking turns making out with some lacrosse guy in the corner. *Screw it, I’m going to kiss him.* I turn my body towards him, and lean in. What’s the worst that could happen from just one kiss?

Illustration by Tori Thomas.



ROBERT MARCUSON

Call me addict. Call me computer game junkie. I'm not talking about those fast-action games, shooters spattering pixelated blood. Those are just dumb. I have in mind slower and more thoughtful games requiring planning and strategic thinking, where you might actually pause and think before the next move. You don't need fast-action to be an addict. Board games and real people are more fun than computers, but nowadays, computers seem to be how it's done. To incite rage, a computer may be best. Maybe because it's so hard to talk back to a computer.

My addiction began long before computers. Mr. Mead brought a stack of mimeographed papers to his fifth grade class and a supply of those little kid scissors. Alternating dark and light squares were printed on each mimeo sheet, and 32 circles about the size of nickels were printed with symbols for rooks and pawns and all the rest. Mr. Mead drew

diagrams on the blackboard, and we kids cut out the paper boards and little circles. Then Mr. Mead used his last period class to show us all how to play chess.

Novices are stymied just setting up the game, all those different pieces, moving differently, each set up on their different squares. Like the black queen on the black square stands opposite the white queen on the white square. But after one period a day for five days, we would have it down, as Mr. Mead told us.

I didn't finish my game at school that day, but after school I walked with my friend to his house. They say strong memories are created by strong emotions. I don't remember my friend's name now or much about him—it was so long ago—except seeing him sitting across the table from me in his mother's kitchen. The sun is bright through the windows behind him. It's my move. Still, my

first day of chess, I didn't know the queens were set up incorrectly. But the center pawns were already captured and gone. I saw my queen sitting exactly opposite his king across the board, so I captured it. This is how I won my first chess game.

A few years later, my favorite was an Avalon Hill game called *Tactics II*. The game board was shared by two warring countries, each with their half-dozen cities. Dozens of cardboard squares comprised the Red and Blue armies, infantry, armor, even nukes moved over roads, rivers, mountains, woods, and beaches. Army engineers built bridges across rivers. Mountain infantry specialized in rugged terrain. Dice produced weather. Paratroopers never flew in snow, and heavy rains slowed you down. And you had to be careful with the nukes. They only fired once.

It's my mother's kitchen table this time. Middle school, maybe early high school. My cousin Doug moved first as it was my game, and I was more experienced. We skirmished cautiously, neither wanting to commit. Reserves marched up from the rear. Mountain divisions deployed to guard the rugged passes. Early skirmish victory might be easy, but early victors might be slaughtered during the next turn, the retaliation.

My cousin can be forgiven. The nuke rule had never been used before, and his two-year age deficiency was no advantage. Poor Doug probably had never heard of a first strike. He was not watching how I maneuvered my limited-range nukes, and when he finished his next move doing nothing to defend, I struck. All my tactical nukes moved their maximum distance and launched. All at once, Doug lost six of his seven nukes, including his ICBM missile and clusters of

infantry and armor that he had failed to disperse. Doug was demoralized. But it was not a game like chess that encourages resignation once the situation was hopeless. We played it out. Doug's remaining tactical nuke took out an infantry division. It was all he could reach as my armor was tucked safely in the rear. A move or two later, my armor rolled into his capital. I don't recall that Doug and I ever played *Tactics II* again.

With later friends and college students, I played *Risk*. We expanded the rules to allow more time for bargaining strategies to play out. Strategies mostly in the form of, "You attack Sue in Quebec and Greenland. I will attack her from Alberta, and then we divide up North America!" Or, "I agree to let you have Ukraine, and even all of Europe if you want it. You just let me have those little purple countries down around Micronesia and Australia." Anybody who thought Ukraine was a good place to own property really hadn't played much. My strategy was usually the same: Hole up in easily defended Australia until enough power was accumulated and sufficient mistakes made, then pow! Blitzkrieg! Come to think of it, that's what happened to poor cousin Doug.

A rage event did occur one day during *Risk*. Not me. RB jumped up clenched fistful. I forget now why he wanted to punch me. Probably because I invaded Asia. You learn a lot about people playing *Risk*—who is trustworthy, who is not; who is engaged, and who is just going through the motions. Categories get named like the Irrational Man (IM). It must be coincidence that the IM who I have in mind was studying pre-law, and I once caught him making up facts in a living-room debate. An IM might start the game

by stating, “Whoever attacks me first, I vow to spend all my energies attacking only him for the rest of the game.” This type of deterrence does not work. One cannot play with this giver of ultimatums. So everybody just gangs up while he is still weak and eliminates him. Then we get on with the game. Another category was named by my eventual wife Deale when she called David F. my Attack Puppy. She claimed my Attack Puppy would do anything I asked. This is not true. I only offered David fair and reasonable deals. But next game, Deale and her girlfriends made a

guage. Smedley was Colorado College’s very first computer and my access was as a student employee. Every Friday, I watched the payroll lady. Before Smedley, she typed checks in her office. Now she sat at the computer room’s best printer watching each check being printed, verifying Smedley made no mistakes. Even words like “word processing” were so new that they made little sense. You mean like food processing? When I turned in a dot matrix printout to a professor, she got mad at me. I hastily explained that Smedley had not actually written the paper for me.

Any game worth playing is a system of rules and potentials. You must care enough to figure out the system, or else be one of those people who claims he or she never liked games.

secret alliance to wipe me out, else I would just hole up in Australia until I won. Well, maybe, but I was still hurt. Once, playing backgammon, she threw a dice cup at me.

It’s not smarts that makes a winner at games. More important is strong desire to win. Any game worth playing is a system of rules and potentials. You must care enough to figure out the system, or else be one of those people who claims he or she never liked games.

Primitive computer gaming came along for me about 1973. Smedley was a brand-new HP mainframe about five feet tall, two to three feet deep, maybe eight feet long counting the memory storage unit, six disks stacked like large cake platters, 25 megabytes all together. There was even a panel of toggle switches for programming machine lan-

Early computer history is all very interesting. I know, but my important point is that Smedley came equipped with *Star Trek* elements. A grid of Xs and Os represented Klingon and Federation starships. Fire phasers and photon torpedoes, type new starship coordinates on the keyboard, and all results were calculated and printed out on the cathode ray tube screen one qwerty character at a time. Sounds pretty dull now, but this was my introduction to Basic programming code. I learned to tweak the program for more shield and phaser energy, and lots more photon torpedoes. There was also the *Lunar Lander* game which always crashed until I figured out how to give myself more fuel.

Star Trek and *Lunar Lander* were not like the board games I loved. The difference is not so much style or even whether actual people

play. The difference is that computers never get tired nor do they get bored. Computers never go home for dinner nor do they get drunk.

For example: *Railroad Tycoon*, a newer technology on 3 1/2 inch floppy disks, is a game that has no opponent, no Internet, nor does it have much of a standard for winning or losing. Make-believe money bought the trains, tracks, stations and factories. The trains crawled around the screen between stations, and factories doing their own thing, pretty much ignoring me as I was off building even more trains, tracks, stations, and factories.

One day, Deale went away for a weekend conference and left me home alone. The computer was already booting up as she backed out the driveway early one Friday morning. I played *Railroad Tycoon* all that day Friday into the night and into Saturday. I stopped occasionally, I guess. I must have, to snack on whatever was in the house. I went to bed late Saturday night like a normal man, but I was up early Sunday morning still building trains, tracks, stations, and factories when Deale returned home Sunday evening. True story. No exaggeration. I lost 5 pounds.

A few weeks, months later, I grabbed pliers and tore the metal end from *Railroad Tycoon's* disc cassette. I did not know the term yet, but I was experiencing Rage Quit. A flash of sanity joins whatever vexation the game is provoking that instant—hence the rage. That sane moment is your opportunity to destroy the game. Tapering-off compromises don't work. So cold turkey, like cigarettes.

Years earlier when I had rage quit *Empire: Wargame of the Century*, I failed to destroy the

discs. I thought throwing away the manual was good enough. The manual was needed to log on. The computer prompted with a page number and a second number each time I wanted to play. I'd find that page and return the required word. Three tries and you're out. There was a long dawdle time waiting for the game to reload. So when I decided to play the game again—and of course I did—there was much guessing for that code word. Some guesses were easy, words like “the,” “and,” “army,” as well as rarer ones such as “battleship,” “attack,” and the like. I kept a notebook to track the pages from one to however many. I recorded each bad guess until I hit the right one. No sense repeating myself. I might need an hour at first to log on, if at all. But over weeks and months, dawdle time shortened. Eventually, I'd collected enough passwords to start play with only one or two reboots, sometimes none at all.

I rage quit *Empire* a second time—properly—and even gave my obsolete *Tandy 1000* away. But better games were available. *Beyond Railroad Tycoon* came *Civilization III* for my Macintosh. *Civilization III* would have been another all-nighter weekend if Deale had ever left me home alone again. I won't bore you with the details of this game for which I still pine. When the moment came, my rage quit was final. I hit the eject button and just as quickly snapped the disk in two. At \$60 a pop, I wasn't going to buy another game anytime soon. By the time I did start looking for it, a new generation of computers and games had come along and I couldn't find it.

Internet computer games are the most insidious, chatting with other players online, running quests and adventures. Online

people are not imaginary. On the other side of the keyboard are real people you've built relationships with. And now there is Skype and virtual reality. I have never gone that far and don't even want to think about it.

I won't name the game. Much more addictive games exist, but I don't want to be responsible for anybody accidentally getting hooked. Or worse, see how really dumb it is. The game chatroom is where I learned the term "rage quit." Somebody would write, "So-and-So rage quit and gave all his stuff away." One cannot destroy the Internet, and email doesn't allow you to irrevocably forget the password. So giving all your stuff away is rage quitting. My rage quit began when I tuned in to the last few minutes of an NPR call-in show about computer-game addiction. Had I caught the show earlier, I might have called in myself. I knew more than any of those guys. I was playing my game and listening to the radio, and saying to myself, "Yeah, I know that, and I already know that, too." The last straw fell when the radio guy said to write down the time spent on the game each session and add it up. Well, I didn't have to do that. Sitting at the keyboard, I already knew. Instantly, I began destroying the city I had spent too close to four years building, every day a few minutes here, a few hours there, never a day missed. I clicked and destroyed random buildings at first, then went for the expensive ones, level six swordsmiths and bow makers and steel mills. Then I announced my rage quit by in-game email, and did anybody want anything? And I did give some stuff away, but it was taking too long because I had so much stuff, so I logged off.

I'm 27 days clean as I write this. I know

because I just logged on to check. I also checked some stats and saw that in April, I was 7th in the United States player-against-player (PvP) efficiency category, 115th in the world. I have no idea how many people play this game, but the U.S. has two servers, Germany a dozen or more. As I was wandering around destroying stuff anew, I noticed Lukeys had kicked me out of the guild. I'm a little annoyed at that. Lukeys once abandoned the game for nearly a year and nobody kicked him out. He's still on my friends list, and I noticed he is still only level 54. He wasn't logged on and neither was Bigdaddybucks. I destroyed more buildings, especially storehouses with all their stuff, but the stuff just went into star menu. I destroyed my very expensive marble pit. But much of the stuff still exists among the rubble, and the deeds are still all there. I could rebuild. It would take a long time. The gold towers still produce 112 gold coins per day as long as the wheat holds out. So I destroyed my expensive improved silos. I almost destroyed my water castle. The water castle represents my 7th and 155th rankings. My finger hovered over the delete button, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. That's not a good omen. So I should be grateful to Lukeys for kicking me out of the guild.

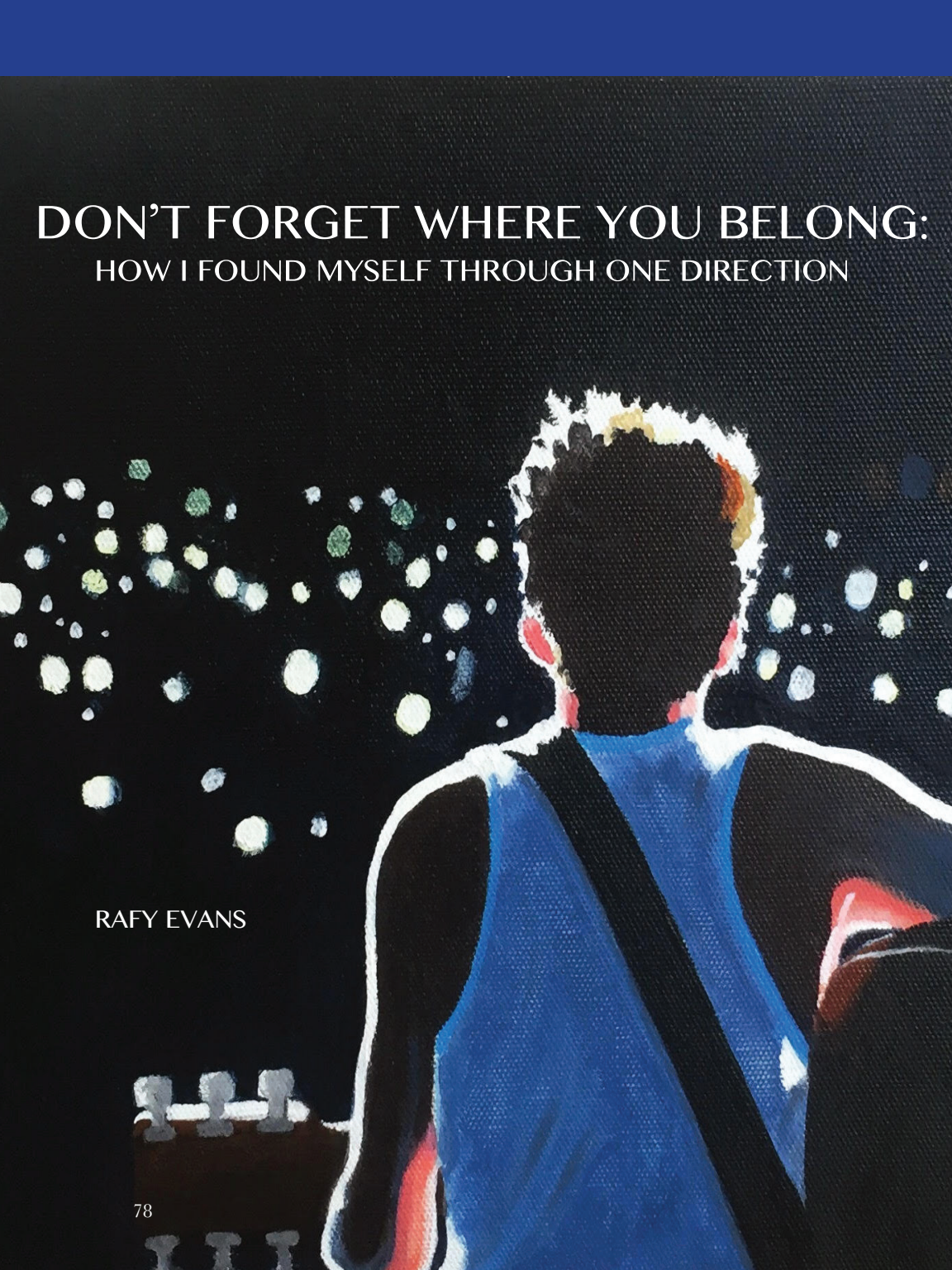
So what am I going to do with this surge of time suddenly entering my life? The long term is still out there, but for now I notice the lawn is shorter, the tomatoes are taller, and baby maple trees and poison ivy no longer grow in the gutters. Oh yeah, and I've written this essay.

—September 2016

DON'T FORGET WHERE YOU BELONG:

HOW I FOUND MYSELF THROUGH ONE DIRECTION

RAFY EVANS



Before high school, I wasn't known for any distinct characteristic. Most people are known for being great at a sport, or being a great musician, or for an obsession. But not me. I wasn't particularly above-average at anything.

I was making the jump back to public school after three years of plaid skirts and white button-up blouses, and the freedoms of a public high school were overwhelming. The only area in which I thought I excelled was writing, but I had spent my time in Catholic school writing about censored topics in English class and about my parents' recent divorce in private. At the Catholic academy I attended, I had been the only new student amongst two hundred kids who had been inseparable since preschool. In times of middle school exile, I turned to my diaries to write about my daily struggles and the secret truths about my peers. But eventually that turned into filling journal after journal with stories of my unrequited love of my eighth grade crush, Casey, so I decided to stop my traditional nonfiction approach and switched to writing from my imagination.

Right around that time, I had stopped listening to Top 40 pop hits on my local radio station. My suburb's airwaves were controlled by what parents wanted—until the repeat of the British invasion by One Direction. The emergence of a new boy band halted my dreams of writing the second coming of teenage memoirs when I discovered the much more popular sub-genre of fan fiction.

Within the pages of a Sharpie-colored, wide-ruled, 180-page composition book, my high school popularity rose and fell. At the time, I was fourteen, in love with a boy band,

and had yet to understand the components of award-winning fiction. And when you're fourteen, in love with a boy band, and believe you're meant to be a modern-day, best-selling author, you think it's a great idea to create a concoction of the three.

One day after JV volleyball practice, in my high school's pungent locker room, my friend Veronica timidly asked me if I had seen the band on the blogging site Tumblr. When I told her I had seen them on the site, I tested the waters to see if she was about to start a rampage.

"Do you...like them?" I remember asking.

We were both nervous talking about One Direction at first, as if the band were a taboo subject. She cautiously admitted that she had spent the past few nights looking at everything she could find about them online. From then on, Veronica and I became the One Direction-crazed freshmen of Lake Brantley High.

Every morning, we would meet in the back corner of that locker room to discuss anything One Direction-related. We'd scroll through our phones to find the latest photos, swoon over how good the boys looked, and dream of the day when they would tour in the United States. The group consisted of four English boys and one Irish boy, all three to four years older than we were. They sang textbook bubblegum pop and were cuter than any boys I had encountered in high school. Much of my infatuation with them was the true and honest belief that I would date one of them. Realistically, I hadn't yet been involved in any interaction, let alone romance, with a boy when I was fourteen, but somehow I imagined that my love life would all change if I met the band.

In the meantime, Veronica and I created

fan Twitter accounts to help us keep up to date with our boys—their entire fan base called them “the boys.” We had blog names based on them, things like “week-knees-for-1D” or “i-m-t-0-r-n”; I couldn’t have gotten more middle school if I’d tried, considering that the letter “O” was a zero. We had Twitter usernames that were based on them, too; my first Twitter username was @spyin-gonstyles, after my favorite band member from day one, Harry Styles. We had certain themed days on which we would dress like One Direction members did, Malik Mondays and Tomlinson Tuesdays (which involved wearing stripes and cuffed jeans because Louis Tomlinson wore them). In the mind of a fourteen-year-old fangirl, none of this seemed ridiculous.

In January 2012, I had an unwavering motivation to start the new year by combining my love for One Direction with my new quest to write fiction, creating the Frankenstein product of *Butterflies for Harry*. Fan fiction seemed like a logical place to start my fiction career. According to the rules of fanfiction.net, I was allowed to use real people as my starting characters and build plots around them. What that meant for me was I was going to write every aspect of my fantasy relationship with the dream boy of my teen years, Harry Styles.

It’s no coincidence that the main female character in my story had the same middle name as I did, or that I named her after my favorite poem by Edgar Allan Poe, the dreadfully morbid “Annabel Lee.” I was clearly the most creative writer out there, as I used my best friend, Veronica, as the model for my Annabelle’s best friend, Veronica. Things that were occurring in my real teenage life

were subconsciously affecting my fictional life. My story line didn’t contain a father character, probably because my relationship with my dad was at a standstill, though I did write in a role for my mom. But the difference between writing about my real life and writing about my fake one was I didn’t have to know Harry Styles personally to write an entire novel about him. That was the point of the project. I was able to make up a completely false character based on a person that actually existed. My Harry was romantic, compassionate, caring, and much less busy than the real Harry. (I’d like to think that my version of him was similar to the real version of him, but unfortunately I haven’t been given the opportunity to test that hypothesis.) And along with my version of Harry, I created the best version of myself in that story. I wasn’t the awkward and shy teen trying to fit in at a major public school. I was a confident, charismatic girl who had her life figured out.

Though there were lapses in time and one-dimensional characters in my story, none of that seemed to matter to my audience. Up to this point, I had never written publicly under my real name. I had used pseudonyms in order to write about my parents without getting in trouble. I was constantly worried that people would find what I wrote and poke fun at it or, worse, expose me based on things I was saying online. But One Direction fan fiction was what I chose to be my perfect writing debut. And the best part was that people loved it. I didn’t realize the response it was getting until one day at lunch in the cafeteria: My friends and I were discussing what my plans were for the next chapter when Homecoming-Court-but-Never-Queen Kendall approached my table. We had never had a conversation in our

brief history together, so I was thrown off by her visit.

“Hey, Rafy, do you think you could put me in your story? It’s early, and I think it’s the best thing I’ve ever read, so...I want to be in it.”

Me? Put Kendall in my story? Umm...no?

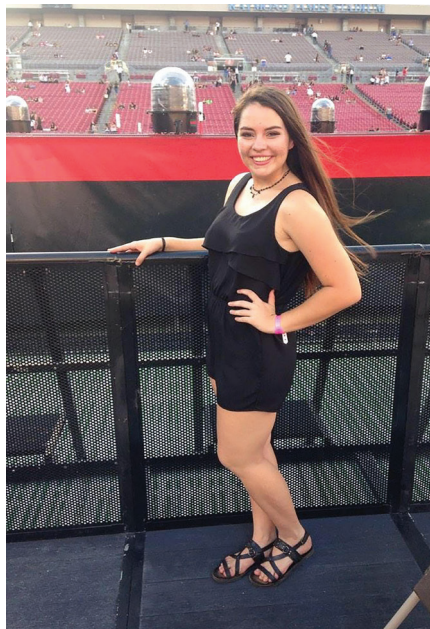
I think I said something along the lines of my having already written the next ten chapters and having no need to create another female character—which was a complete lie, considering the fact that I later wrote one of my other frenemies, Delaney, into the story when I desperately needed a mean girl character. I said thank you somewhere in there too.

The views on my website were hitting a couple of hundred for every chapter I posted. Because I was my own social media

and public relations manager, I would create hype by posting statuses that were teasers, and surprisingly it worked. In the year I was writing my fan fiction novel, I acquired over 250,000 loyal and loving readers. I had readers from all over the world following me on Twitter, letting me know they were constantly reading. I had a Facebook page on which people could comment after reading a new chapter, make predictions about what was going to happen, and meet other people.

Boys in my English class would make fun of me as I scribbled in my composition book, dreaming up situations to put Annabelle and Harry in. They’d call me insane and scary while saying that what I was doing was stupid. In one instance, my teacher, Mrs. Jucker, stepped in to say, “If a quarter of a million people are reading it, it’s not stupid.”

Most people thought my One Direction obsession had reached its peak during my writing of the story, but I hadn’t even seen the band live yet. Veronica and I had expanded our fangirl partnership to include one more key member, Jillian. The three of us had bought tickets almost six months in advance for the band’s Orlando tour date in June 2012. When the summer finally rolled around, we sat in section 110, row 5, seats 6-8, and we didn’t stop screaming the entire time the band was onstage. There was a revolutionary moment during their cover of “Use Somebody” by Kings of Leon when Harry decided to change one of the notes and I actually passed out, in the middle of making a recording on my phone. We piled into Veronica’s mom’s car after the show with no voices and fresh tears. Shortly thereafter, the three of us had our parents drive us two hours away to another venue just to see



Photograph on this page and the one on the following spread are courtesy of Rafy Evans.

the show again.

It became a summer tradition to see One Direction, no matter the distance. I would buy tickets over a year in advance, against my parents' will. The summer before my junior year, the three of us, along with seven new girls and two parents, drove four hours to Fort Lauderdale to see One Direction's 2013 Take Me Home Tour. My seat was in the last row of the stadium, and if I reached my hand straight up, I could touch the roof, but it didn't matter where I was standing in the building as long as I was breathing the same air as the boys. And just as we had the summer before, the other fans and I bought tickets for the next night in Miami, because seeing one show wasn't sufficient.

Arguably, One Direction's prime was during the tour for their third album, *Midnight Memories*, in the fall of 2014. It was no longer socially acceptable for a rising senior to like them. But instead of letting my love for them die as my age advanced, that October I decided to follow their tour again. My group of friends spent our time outside school planning how we would drive ourselves to their shows, pay for hotels and tickets with our own money, and meet up with friends we had made online through Twitter. Along with our own lodging information, we'd try to figure out what hotels the band members were staying in and what highways they'd take to get from show to show. The hardest part was actually getting into the hotels they were staying in once we figured them out: If there was a Ritz-Carlton in a given city, that was where they were staying.

I spent countless hours in lobbies of hotels I wasn't really staying in, telling only a handful of lies to hotel and security personnel

to execute my elaborate plans. Lying about room keys, room numbers, where my parents were, how old I was: all an intricate web of master-planned stories to achieve the goal of seeing the members of One Direction.

Those plans worked on one occasion, when my friends and I went back to Tampa for our first show in the Where We Are Tour. A lovely member of the touring crew gave my friend Soph and me free floor-catwalk tickets for letting her borrow Soph's charger while we creepily sat in the lobby of the hotel One Direction was staying in. Shortly thereafter, I was in front of the man himself, Harry Styles. My eyes brimmed with tears at the thought of how close we were to the stage and how incredibly lucky we had been that day. He waltzed down the 100-foot catwalk with carefree skips and hops. He had his hair French-braided into two braids, the first time he'd ever been on stage like that. He wore a loose white T-shirt, charcoal grey jeans, and brown Chelsea boots—a typical outfit for him. He sauntered and twirled down the runway, singing feel-good songs that made you forget how old you were and where you were in the world. I frantically started waving as he passed by, my hand making a peace sign after a few waves. He stopped when he saw the peace sign and gave me a thumbs-up followed by a peace sign and a smile. This was the first interaction between real-life Harry and real-life me.

Afterward, we made the familiar drive to Miami, following the band's bus on highways and through tollbooths on the small chance they'd stop for gas somewhere. We sang their songs in the car to stay awake and talked about the little interactions they'd had with us while they were onstage. And

though it could be argued that they never remembered us after those nights, we vividly remembered them.

The summer before my freshman year of college, the boys didn't tour anywhere south of Maryland. Our summers of chasing One Direction on tour seemed over. But we didn't let that stop us. Four of us planned a road trip to Baltimore three days before the show there. I remember asking my dad if I could go. Usually I had planned my concerts on weekends and asked my mom, because she had been quite the concert junkie in her teen years. My dad, on the other hand, was the type to say no before I even asked to do something, but this was One Direction, so I had to build up the courage to ask. I originally lied and said that the show was in Washington, DC, because Baltimore was in the news every night due to riots and protests. I knew that if I told the truth, he'd say no, so I thought it would be better to lie: "Dad, One Direction is playing what

could be their last tour this summer, and I'll be in college if they tour after that...so can I go to Washington, DC, to see them this weekend?"

I had severely underestimated my 70-year-old father's ability to Google, and when he realized the show was in Baltimore, there were plenty of obstacles in my way. After he called the Baltimore Police Department and asked about the hotel we were planning on staying in, the neighborhood Ravens' Stadium was in, and where the best parking lot was, he finally agreed to let me go. I also had lied and told him that I had bought \$20 nosebleed seats and that I was completely unfazed by having bad seats, but the real truth was that the four of us were driving fourteen hours on the slim chance that there would still be tickets to buy.

August 8, 2015, was the last time I saw One Direction—they went on an indefinite hiatus after that tour, so who knows if they'll ever come back. In total, I saw them in concert eight times, in five cities, in venues from small arenas to football stadiums. I waited nine hours in front of the M&T Bank Stadium box office before the woman behind the glass handed me four catwalk tickets in exchange for my credit card. Five years ago, my writing career began, all with a love story about a boy band member. In the midst of planning my next road trip or flight to see a live show, I was finding my place as a writer and a teenager. My fangirl days were concluded as I held the hands of my best friends on the football field where the Baltimore Ravens played, singing the line, "If you ever feel alone, don't/You are never on your own, and the proof is in this song."



Moving across spaces
hasmik djoulakian



I clutch a quarter in my right fist and an overripe banana in my left. My palms are slick and sweaty from the heat, the salty moisture drawing out the sickly-sweet smell of copper from the coin. I raise the coin to my face and the smell hits my nose and coats the insides of my nostrils and throat. I stretch out my fingers and look down at the warm metal centered in my palm, feeling its weight, losing myself for a moment in its circular heartbeat. Holding it, I feel like there is potential and possibility—I can do something with it, transform it.

My mother stands at the register inside the liquor store. Several years later, the store will be renamed “Hammered Liquor”—complete with a large image of a hammer next to a heavysset font—but today, its tall gray letters indicate it is the community corner store. It is neighbored by a mechanic shop and a parking lot full of oil stains that I think of as lava puddles to hop over. My mother chides me if I step in them, but I am not good at doing what I am told. She does not want me to track the oil into the house, but I wonder what patterns and images I could make with the oil-soaked rubbery treads on the bottoms of my shoes.

Across the street are clothing shops and a sign with two stick figures holding each other that reads “Safe Place.” I wonder what makes a space safe—what makes this space safe? Is it having someone to hold you?



Inside the store, I stare at the columns of colorful, small rectangles dangling from long, flimsy pieces of string from the top of a metal rack behind the register. Each one has an image of a national flag or someone smiling while talking on the phone. They are decorative additions to the gray landscape of the liquor store, which sells everything from cigarettes to laundry detergent to less-than-fresh fruits. The grapes have fruit flies hovering above them, staking their claim to the sugary bounty. My mom will sometimes

buy last-minute items from here, such as flour, sponges, and milk, when she does not have the time for the mile-long walk to the grocery store.

“I’ll have that calling card,” my mother says as she points to the reddish-green one. Her Armenian pronunciation of the word stresses the *a* in *call* as an *o* and the *d* in *card* as a *t*. The cashier, who owns the shop with his son, is in his sixties and has fine blonde hair that is thinning from his forehead back. He is a short man with sun-darkened skin and two visible silver additions to his teeth. He has an easy, thin smile when he looks at me, which later makes me think he was fond of me because he may not have had any grandchildren of his own. Some weeks later, he offers me a swirly piece of black licorice. It is the first piece of licorice I have ever tried, and I nibble and lick it slowly, contemplating whether I like the taste. I am often not sure if I like the taste or feel of something, and the licorice feels cloyingly sweet, like medicine.

He hands my mother the calling card as she fishes in her purse for a purple coin pouch, bordered in lime green with an image of Tweety’s bright yellow face on either side. She unzips the pouch slowly—it is bulging and won’t open easily—and dumps dozens of dimes, quarters, and nickels into her palm, counting out five dollars’ worth and placing the coins in neat stacks on the glass counter.

The white inside of the coin pouch has grayed from years of holding coins. He waves my mother away when she tries to pay for my banana. I look at the banana nervously, worried that my possession of the freckly fruit has caused problems. I look for images in the brown spots as I slide away from beside my mother and place my sweaty quarter into a vending machine coin slot. I twist the cool metal handle to release a shiny, yellow rubber ball. I turn it over in my hands and trace my finger along the raised line around the middle of the ball, thinking about how it was made.



Kinetic energy stirs in her breath as she deftly dials the long strings of numbers she reads from the card. The first two combinations access the calling card system, and an automated voice instructs her to enter the number she is trying to contact. That one she has long committed to memory.

The noises of my mother and grandmother's conversation feel orange, bright and heavy with an aching desire to hear every dip and catch in each other's voice. Those lilt suggests laughter or sadness and are as close to images of each other as they can get. My mother begins to ask how my grandmother's students are behaving, which makes me think my grandma has been feeling frustrated with the first-graders' behavior. She has been an elementary school teacher for nearly thirty years, and her energy has begun to dwindle.

"Maybe you can have a card system—green, yellow, and red cards. The red is if they behave really badly. That's how they do it at Haso's school."

I perk up a bit upon hearing my name.

My mother cups her hand around her mouth as she speaks louder into the large gray phone. *Dora the Explorer* is playing quietly on the 12-inch television resting on a brown chair behind the door, next to my books and a Wile E. Coyote stuffed animal.

"Haso started first grade the other week. You got the photo I mailed to you? The one with her wearing the blue Scooby-Doo shirt and her hair in braids? I love that one, too."


I am sitting on my bed and watching the show absently while tossing my yellow ball from one hand to the other. I hold it in one hand for so long that I almost forget it is there and play a guessing game with myself, pretending I don't know which hand has the ball. It becomes part of me, its presence no longer felt. The heat from my hand seeps

into the ball, and it no longer feels like there is anything in my hand.

"Mom? Mom. Mom? Mom?"

She says the word as a question, a plea, as if her voice can force the connection to improve. It is ten o'clock in the evening, and my mother's back is pressed against the brown-and-black ornate rug draped on our bedroom wall. Her legs are stretched out in front of her, and she reaches down every few minutes to scratch them, because they itch from shaving. She scratches until her legs turn red, and tiny spots of blood appear against her pale skin. My mother's golden-red curls are wild around her face, some strands turning gray at the roots, and her forehead is creased. Her cheeks are flushed with rosacea and anxiety, and she is wearing the tangerine towel robe she brought with her from Armenia. Her tiny silver cross hangs just above her collarbone.

I have moved on to arranging and rearranging the stickers in one of my sticker books. The crescent moon does not belong with the tiger anymore, so I move it to the previous page next to the ballerina slippers that remind me of the ones I hope to have someday.



My mother wants so badly to hear her mother's voice, ask how her father is, or if her brother has found a job, but she can only discern every other word, and the calling card expires after an hour and a half. It is a countdown to silence. Later, I will wonder what it must have been like to keep track of the minutes she spent talking to her family, stopping a conversation short to say goodbye if she heard the ding that indicated the call would drop in one minute. Time is a privilege in diaspora.

But today, I think of what my grandmother might look like. I have seen photos of her, of course—my mother has a passport-size photo

in her purse and larger ones in the photo albums boxed up in the closet. I know my grandmother has silver hair that she pulls up into a neat bun. She wears light pink lipstick, soft traces of rouge, and mascara. She is not a wealthy woman by any means, as most people in Armenia are either extremely rich or extremely poor.

But I wonder what my grandmother looks like right at this instant, 10 a.m.—is she sitting at her kitchen corner, hair disheveled from bed, comfortable in her pajamas and ready to begin the day? I wonder if she is hopeful or if she wants to go back to bed.

There is no coherence when you live on the other side of the world from your loved ones. The longing between my mother and her family grows large and thickens. It becomes a weight in her voice and makes her shoulders sag. Time warps in strange ways. Days feel endlessly long, but years pass without her realizing it, because she has become accustomed to the heartache like someone might become accustomed to less oxygen in the air. They would take more shallow breaths and move around less in the thinner air. Eventually, they would forget what it felt like to fill their lungs completely.

I study the black numbers on the calling card resting in my mother's lap like they are a script with hidden meanings. She lowers her hand and anxiously bends the card, folding and unfolding it along its center until the numbers become frayed. She has a pile of similar, wrinkled calling cards hiding under the bed. They no longer seem decorative like they did when they were strung up in the liquor store. Now, they are a reminder of hastened and cut-short conversations. Sometimes, when she doesn't have enough money to purchase a new one, she calls those old numbers and asks the operator to activate the card for a few minutes. Sometimes they agree. They must hear the ache in her voice.

Static cuts in and out of her conversation. "So how are you, Mom? Are you doing well?"

Years later, I wonder how honest she was with my mother. Exchanging pleasantries is so much easier when there is so much distance and static clouding the conversation. At least my mother was able to remind herself later that her mother did, in fact, say she was doing well. The words crossed the space between them. It wasn't enough, but maybe she even believed her.

Years later, as an adult in college, I find myself regressing to pleasantries with my mother over the phone when the missing grows too large between us. It is not the same as living in diaspora, of course. That kind of disconnection is geopolitical, its physical borders creating layers of impenetrability. The emotional disconnection follows suit.

In some ways, it hurts more now, but at least I understand my body and its spatial and emotional dimensions better. In high school, when I did not fully know what "diaspora" meant, the sense of disattachment made me want to disconnect altogether.

My grandmother pulls a four-inch long, bulky silver recorder out of her cherry brown wardrobe. She shuts the door to the wardrobe tightly and with a sense of deliberation, like she wants everyone to know she found what she was looking for.

"Mm-hm," she says under her breath. This sound loosely means "there we go" or "I accomplished what I set out to do."

She shuffles over to where I sit on her bed, her open-toed slippers making soft noises as they graze against the carpet on her bedroom floor. There are carpets everywhere in the house, even some that sit on top of other carpets. They belonged to my great-

grandparents, or have at least been in the family for a few decades, maybe from when my grandfather had a good job as a food inspector during the Soviet Union. The cherry brown piano matches most of the furniture.

The comforter in my grandmother's room has beads woven into it, so my grandmother gave me a soft blanket to lay on top of it before I took my nap. She also gave me her hand fan, and I laid spread eagle on her bed waving it in front of my face, beads of sweat rolling down between my breasts. The air is so hot and stagnant that moving makes it harder to breathe. We usually sit or lie down, waiting for night to bring some cool relief. My grandfather is sitting in front of the television, his white hair, thick for a man in his 70s, rustles in the breeze from the black fan my mother bought days ago. The relentless laugh track from the television show makes my mind feel numb.

My grandmother scoots next to me on the bed and shows me the recorder.

"Your mother sent this to me when you were just three years old."

I look at the recorder and try to remember if I have any memory of the thing. I don't.

"She recorded you reciting a poem about bunnies. Do you remember that one? It's the one in Russian, and you get some of the words wrong in it because you were so little."

I did remember that poem. My grandmother fiddles with the recorder for a minute but can't get it to play. All we hear is a soft click and a moment of static.

"Can I try?"

I hold down the play button until we hear the recording of my cheery childhood voice.

We hear my three-year-old self recite a Russian poem about a hunter who thinks he killed a bunny, but later realizes it is still alive. My family has only one home video, so hearing the recording of myself from a young age stored in such a physical, tactile, and weighty object is a strange and nice feeling. It

is like that moment in time from so many years ago was captured and stored in the small gray machine. My mother recorded it, put it in a box, and shipped the box across the world, where it reached my grandmother, who played it over and over until the batteries died. She then replaced the batteries and tucked the recorder into her closet.

My voice traveled across spaces that I was unable to cross as a child. My mother sent part of herself—the sound of her child's voice—across spaces that she was barred from crossing, because of her undocumented status. This makes me sad—but also proud of my mother—that she was able to find ways to maintain her sense of hope, resistance, and connection with her family.

I stop the recording when I hear the sound of my cousin Becky playing outside. She has climbed the gray ladder next to the outdoor bathroom to peek inside through the small window.

"What are you doing in there, Auntie?" she asks my mother in Armenian with a giggle in her voice. My mom feigns shock and is rewarded with Becky's peppered laughter. She reminds me of myself at her age because I would climb the stair railing in our apartment from all angles, then jump down onto the couch, table, my mother—whatever or whoever stood below me. My grandmother thinks she looks like a wild child with her hair in disarray, tiny frame, shirtless, and dirty feet, shoeless. She scolds her for climbing the ladder, but I think she looks like a nimble sprite, her head nearly touching the green grapes hanging low from the lattice patchwork that goes across the backyard. Becky loves those grapes. She will lie on the couch, right leg swung over left knee, and eat them slowly, looking like a tiny queen with her jaw bones set squarely.

I hold my leap frog globe in my pudgy five-year-old hands, gripping the attached green pen harder than I need to, with four of my fingers wrapped around it like I might try to stab away at something. I like to spin the globe around as fast as I can, close my eyes, and stop its revolutions with my index finger. Wherever my finger points, I click there with the pen and learn its name, imagining what someone my age might be doing there at that very moment.

I spin the globe around slowly and stop near the giant land mass that is Russia. I tap on Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, and finally spot Armenia. I click on it with my pen, wondering what the country's name will sound like as pronounced with the disembodied voice of my leap frog globe.

"Please tap only one location," I hear the voice say. I try again, looking at the round metallic tip of the pen and aiming deliberately—slowly—at the tiny speck on the plastic surface.

"Please tap only one location," the voice repeats. I try once more, a staccato of a tap, only to hear the same message.

This was my first experience with disappearing, even if I didn't know it at the time.

Growing up, I did not feel any attachment to Armenia. I had no desire to develop the kind of gnawing missing my mother has carried with her for twenty-one years. It will be a continuous, lifelong process to see myself in relation to Armenia on my own terms.

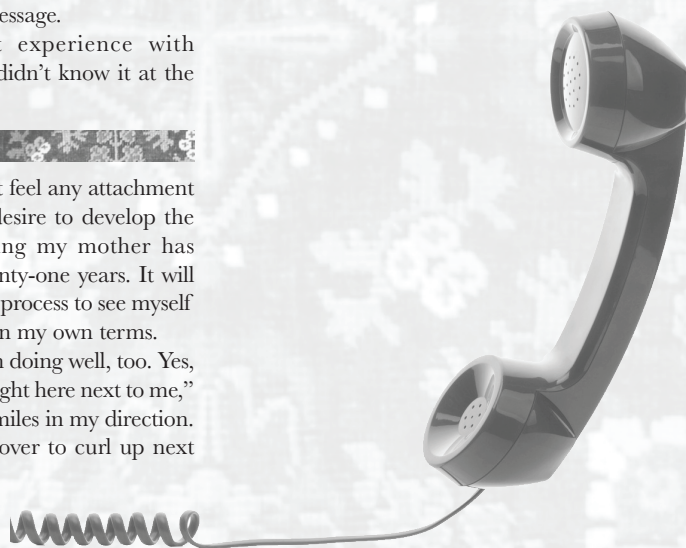
"That's good. Yes, I'm doing well, too. Yes, yes. Haso is great, she's right here next to me," my mother says as she smiles in my direction.

I smile back and go over to curl up next

to her. My mother hands me the phone, and I shyly say hello to my grandmother, whose voice rises sweetly. She and my mother speak a few times a month, and she is emotional over the changes in my voice. It feels strange to be so loved and recognized by someone I hardly know. I stare at the calling card, reading the numbers in my head and murmuring yes and no in response to her questions about school until she releases me.

I hand the phone back to my mother who assures my grandmother that she will take care of herself. She has always been good at doing what she is told, but I know she is lying. There are some things she cannot control, and her sadness is one of them.

She says goodbye. The moon glow shines through the open window from behind the neighboring apartment complex. I think to myself that, even if we can't see my grandmother, at least the three of us get to look at the same moon every night, and at least it always seems to be in the same place.





Kathryn Kawasoe

Writing & Rhetoric

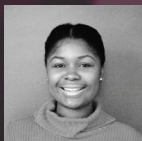
Kathryn “Katy” Kawasoe delights in bottomless cups of coffee, *Friends* re-runs, travel, and writing. She is interested in continuing a career path in areas such as digital writing and marketing/communications, while she is also bursting at the seams to get out and see more of the world.



Jessica Bowden

Writing & Rhetoric

Jessica loves animals, working with children, writing, and traveling to new places. After graduation, she will attend Boston College to earn her Masters in Secondary Education, with which she hopes to become an awesome student advocate and English teacher like the one she had in high school.



Ibi Lagundoye

Writing & Rhetoric

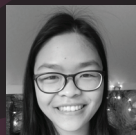
A participant in the Fashion and Beauty Milestone concentration, Ibi came to Cuse for its winters, so she could “build some character.” She hopes to work at an indie magazine publication and curate engaging content online.



Anuradha Desai

Architecture

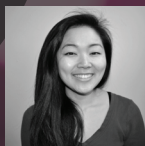
Enthusiastic about design, graphics, travel and writing, Anuradha is interested in pursuing a career in architecture and architectural journalism. Meanwhile, she is addicted to chai and is working on a children’s book featuring refugee kids in Syracuse.



Alice Chen

Writing & Rhetoric
and Food Studies

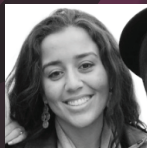
Alice hails from a town that was once mentioned in *Friends*. When she isn’t thinking of story ideas, she plays her violin, stargazes and practices the art of Japanese fencing. She aims to publish her stories and help others construct stories.



Sakura Tomizawa

Writing & Rhetoric

Enthusiast of doughnuts, bubble tea, and McDonald’s soft serve ice cream, Sakura hopes to work in her favorite city, Boston, and use her writing skills for any kind of public advocacy organization.



Vanessa Rojas-Castillo

Communication & Rhetorical
Studies

Vanessa credits her Chicago background for her edge as a writer. As a participant in the Fashion and Beauty Communication Milestone concentration, she dreams to work someday for a European *Vogue* magazine. She also wants to explore other cultural topics and transcend the borders of fashion.

Layout by Anuradha Desai.



Sarah Crawford

Writing & Rhetoric

Sarah is from York, Pennsylvania, a town most notable for its high quantity of cows and cornfields. Her greatest joys in life come from traveling, drinking copious amounts of caffeine and spending time with her dog, Annie. In the future, she hopes to create a successful career out of her love for writing and adventure.



Molly Velázquez-Brown

Writing & Rhetoric

Molly has a passion for visual art, writing, and social justice. She hopes to create opportunity for young people's voices to be heard through these mediums. She has yet to solidify plans for after her graduation this May, but is hopeful that artistry, change, and passion will lead her to where she needs to be.



Brandon Mixson

Writing & Rhetoric and Psychology

When he's not found studying in the library for hours, he enjoys reading, playing basketball, and blasting rap music. While he's unsure of what exactly comes next (maybe law school, maybe grad school, who knows?), he couldn't be more excited for the real world.



Rachel Young

Writing & Rhetoric and English & Textual Studies

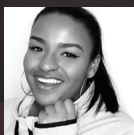
With hopes to better individuals, the community, and the environment, you can find her daydreaming about living in London again, purposefully crossing the street in the hopes of encountering a dog, or always eating more than the suggested serving size.



Abigail Welles

Writing & Rhetoric

Abigail enjoys long walks down the aisles at Trader Joe's, is a self-proclaimed kettle corn connoisseur, and loves writing songs to play on her guitar, Mr. Feeny. Abigail will be pursuing graduate programs in journalism or creative writing, and hopes to utilize her writing in civil and social rights advocacy.



Doris Dorval

Writing & Rhetoric

A New York City native, Doris enjoys the creative process of producing print and digital publications. After graduation in May 2018, she plans to attend graduate school and pursue a career as a Communications Designer.



Destiny Reyes

English & Textual Studies and Writing & Rhetoric

Destiny has a strong interest in studying different types of literature and enhancing her writing abilities. She has written pieces for both *What The Health* and the *Daily Orange*. After graduation, Destiny wants to pursue a career as an editor.

ARTISTS

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ARTISTS WHO ALLOWED US TO FEATURE THEIR WORK IN THE ISSUE

JOSHUA CHANG

Joshua Chang is a creative content strategist based out of the Bay Area in San Jose, California. His website can be found at www.thejoshuachang.com.

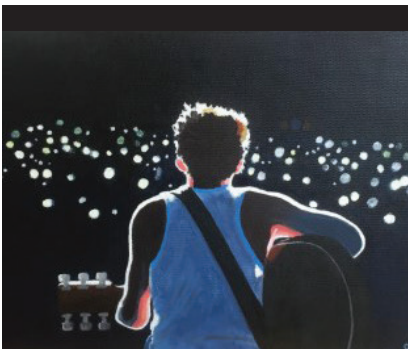


TORI THOMAS



Tori Thomas is a junior majoring in Illustration from Ramsey, New Jersey; her passion is capturing the unique features and emotions of people through illustration.

CHELSEA MATTA



Chelsea Matta is a freshman, Illustration major at Syracuse University. She works mainly with a digital, artistic platform and focuses specifically on character design. For more of Chelsea's art, please see:

<http://www.redbubble.com/people/crmatta>

WRSO



Our mission is to build community and share opportunities within the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition by connecting students to resources and fostering relationships between faculty, alumni, and each other.

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