

PhiladelphiaStoriesJR.

a community of young writers and artists from the Delaware Valley



SPRING 2023

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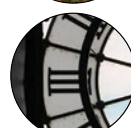
by Chloe Zhou
Chloe Zhou is in ninth grade (Germantown Academy) and likes to read and write. She lives with her family in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Her pieces in this issue are collectively called "JIGSAW", as each represents different parts of her life.



3 by Chloe Zhou



8 by Chloe Zhou



11 by Chloe Zhou



13 by Monte Troup
Monte Troup is seven years old and lives in Philadelphia. He loves math and wants to be a train conductor!



14 by Monte Troup



The Anonymous Artist

One of the writers in this magazine, who prefers to remain anonymous, is also an artist! There are ten written pieces in this issue....can you guess which writer it is?



EVERYONE WEARS RED

by *Nakeya Holmes*

I'm hoping that this festival will be worth the two-hour drive with the person I hate the most. I know I shouldn't use the word hate, but she almost cost me getting kicked out of Westwood University. Bee looks into the rearview mirror and fixes her lipstick while keeping her knee on the wheel to steer.

"Can you please keep your eyes on the road Bee," I yell over the music.

The bass of the music is high, and the windows are down. I pull down the sun visor and I try to fix my messy hair from the wind. I tuck back my curls behind my ears, and I see my scar on the right temple of my head. I trace it with my fingers, remembering the trauma. The roads seem to get smaller as I stare into the abyss but then I see something red.

"Bee, did you see that red thing?" I question.

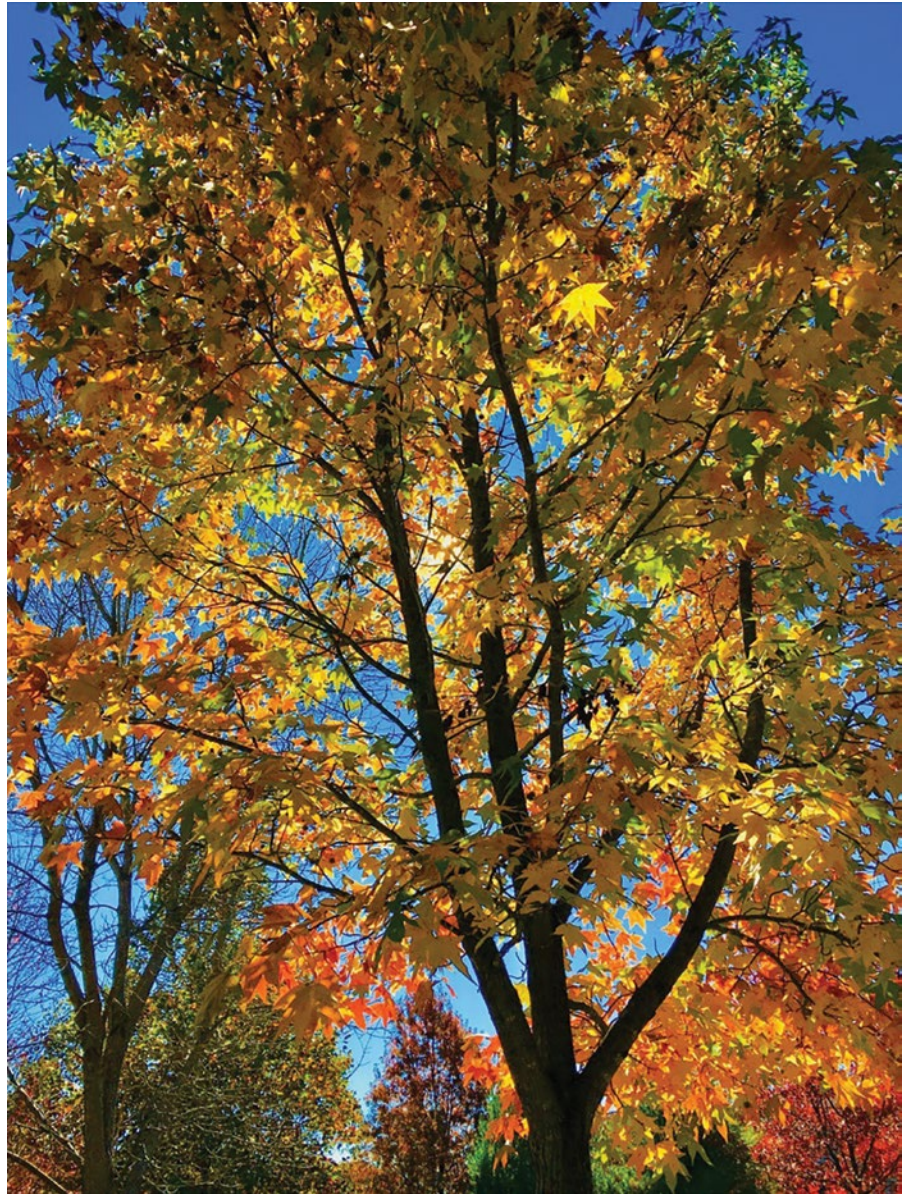
"Yeah, I think we should check it out."

The red blob from afar begins to enlarge as we drive closer.

"Is that a dead deer?" Bee screams.

Bee starts to slow down, and I look outside of my passenger window. The animal lays there lifeless and is covered in blood. I turn around to Bee squeezing her eyes shut hoping that the deer will magically disappear. I stare blankly but I wish I was able to feel the fear crawl through my skin and the anxiety rush through my blood. But I can't. Ever since my parents died in the car crash, I haven't been able to feel anything.

"It doesn't even look like it was hit by anything, almost like it was eaten," I state.



Chloe Zhou © 2023

"Lucia, let's go," Bee says as she rushes toward the car.

Bee presses her foot on the gas, and we began to head towards our destination again.

"Take a left turn and then your desti-

nation is less than 6 miles away", The GPS speaks to us.

Bee takes a right turn.

"Bee, where are you going, it says left?"

Carrot on a Stick

By Alanna Stein

"Perfect is the enemy of good." –Voltaire
Ha — isn't that ironic?
That something so desirable,
something so encouraged,
is the "something" hindering my success?
Perfection is glorified.
Society deems her the diamond of the season
or the pearl of the oyster,
But not in the eyes of Voltaire,
No —
Instead, he deems her the antonym of exceptional
or the opponent of marvelous.
She is the enemy.
But, Voltaire is blind,
his eyes replaced by lemons
with maggots crawling from the sockets.
And, honestly,
I fail to be fluent in his language
for Perfection is my carrot on a stick.
Perfection motivates me,
galvanizes me,
inspires me.
Yet somehow, she debilitates me, too.
Though, I ignored the enfeebling traits of Perfection.
For 16.333 years, I pretended that Perfection was not
"the most notable social construct,"
rather a beautiful woman — posed on Vogue,
propped adjacent to Marilyn Monroe,
unthreatened by Kim Kardashian's pursed lips.
I never wanted to be on Vogue,
but I wanted to be her.
I did and I do.
Except, I also want to be human,
with no carrot in view.
I want to balance a glass of water on the middle of a seesaw —
perfect sitting on the left
and good sitting on the right.

Alanna Stein is a word-obsessed junior at Eastern Regional High School in Voorhees, New Jersey. She is the Editor-in-Chief of her school's magazine, The Voyager, and enjoys writing creative or opinion pieces. In addition to writing, Alanna loves theater; she is both an actress and audience member! If Alanna is not writing or performing, you can find her on the tennis courts. Alanna is thankful for all prior writing experiences and looks forward to future opportunities to showcase her pieces!

"Don't worry, It's a shortcut!"

The road seems abandoned and cold. The trees seemed to move less with the wind and the road turned to gravel. Bee speeds down the road but something jumps in front of us.

"Bee watch out!" I panic.

She swerves to the right hoping to not hit what was running across the gravel road until I feel my ears ring and an airbag pops out in front of me. I can't open my eyes, but I hear nothing but the animals in the forest. My right leg feels compressed and the left side of my brain feels pressure. I try to open my eyes, but this felt like a permanent nap. Is this how it ends for me?

I feel something warm hit my face, making me flutter my eyes open. The sun smiles at me with a group of people in white nightgowns. I turn to my right and see Bee next to me. She still looks like she's asleep. My body is too afraid to make any sudden movements due to the many people surrounding us.

Am I stuck in some kind of dream or is this some kind of hell that I am in?

I shut my eyes hoping to wake up from this nightmare, but I don't feel the sun on me anymore. I peek and they are much closer than before.

"Where am I?" I'm too afraid to ask anything else.

I turn to Bee and nudge her a little hoping she wakes up. I see her eyes flutter open, and fear gets plastered on her face. She shrieks and tears start to form in the corner of her eyes.

Three girls rush over to Bee, trying to calm her down. She freaks out even more but before I could blink, she starts running. The grass is high, and the flowers are bright.

I see her dark brown hair flow in the wind until she goes down with the grass.

She stands up with her arms locked around two other girls. They drag her through the grass and flowers, her body looks a bit limp. I don't know whether to run and help her or stay where I'm at. I don't want to end up like Bee.

"We want to welcome you," an older

blonde-haired, blue eyed lady speaks.

She puts out her hand to help me stand up. I turn to my right and see a small child running over to a giant bell.

"Look, it's time for Middag," The woman says.

"What is Middag?"

"Dinner," I look up and the sun is still bright.

"What time is it?" I question.

"Oh, we don't use clocks here."

She grabs my hand and walks me over to a giant round table where everyone is seated. It's draped in white cloth and has flowers sitting on top. I would say there's around forty people that are seated. The two girls bring Bee back over and we get seated next to each other. Her rosy cheeks are now covered in dirt, and she looks tired.

"Hey Bee, are you okay?" Her eyes look dilated and low.

"Yeah, I'm fine, why wouldn't I be," she gives me a slanted smile.

Before I could say anything, the elderly woman rings a small bell to quiet everyone down.

"Today, let us welcome these two young beautiful girls into our community."

The Cracks Of The Sidewalk

By Jada Owens

Imagine. A young child sits in the backseat of a Honda Civic. Maybe they have a curve, sharpness, or bump on their nose, or not. Maybe they are someone else entirely each time you see them, and that's fine too, But for the time being, let's say this child is me, and the car I sit in is old. The gas light coughs whenever it hits a pothole, and the seats have to recline for anyone to fold themselves into the back, but that's no problem for such a young child. Imagine. The parents are in the front seat—or the parent—whoever you're imagining, And they are fiddling with the radio, slamming their palm into the heater, Cursing softly as they glance towards the young child in the backseat. Imagine. The rubber to the stone, parked along the street, Breathing softly, the chill filling the car as the parent opens the door, unbuckling the young child: The parent who is vaguely aware they are awake, and the child who is pretending to be asleep, Nestled in the crook of the arm.

And now, you shouldn't have to imagine this. The same child, but older now. It's only fair that the teen's, I mean—that my limbs would now be pleated, creased, and crimped, with joints bending at uncomfortable angles in the backseat of the car. And it is much too cramped to sleep in that spot anymore, and it is much too cold to slump over. And so, their feet jut out from the backseat of the Honda Civic, white tip of the shoes pointing up and towards the first snow of December, Standing tall—or short—as the bitter cold licks at the exposed flesh that has peeled away to reveal Years of experience, and now, I like to imagine that the teen can take the first steps, even if they're shuffles, Walking on the cracks of the sidewalk without having to look down, without having to worry about the backs of others. And I like to imagine that the teen can find some image of warmth, In the view of their younger self, still sitting there in the car, head pressed against the glass, Forever waiting, half-asleep, to be carried inside.

Jada Owens is a senior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. In her junior year, she discovered a love for poetry and decided to try her hand at it. She loves to doodle cats on walls, whiteboards, and notebooks. Jada can be found taking walks aimlessly around the city of Philadelphia, and hides out on the 3rd floor of Barnes & Noble in Rittenhouse Square, PA.

Everyone stares at us in such a way I can't explain. I feel so outcasted yet welcomed. Three small children start to hand out plates of food to us. A little girl sits the plate in front of me but giggles while walking away. I look down at what looks like stew with carrots. I don't know how sure I am about eating the food until I turn my head to the left to see Bee devouring her plate. The only thing that is left on her plate is the brown gravy. I stick my fork into the meat but when I pull it out it's fully raw.

As much as I don't mind blood, I have a feeling this isn't an animal I've ever eaten before.

"You must try it," a young boy leans over to whisper in my ear.

I look up from my plate and the elder-

ly woman is staring at me, waiting for me to try this meal. I look back down, and I take a piece of the raw meat. I try to chew but it stays the same form as it was on the plate. I can taste the blood that it consists of. Its bitter but sweet taste tingles my tongue. I look back up and the woman seems to be satisfied.

"Let's go girls, It's time for bed." The elderly woman speaks.

"What's your name?"

"Greata Aalberg."

We start to walk over to an abandoned-looking barn. The inside was full of beds with white sheets and cobwebs in the corner of the walls.

"We want to welcome you by allowing you to learn our history and by spending this night with us," Greata says while walking over to a drawer.

"Here you go," she turns around and pauses waiting for me to speak.

"Lucia."

She hands me what looks like a white sheer blanket but as I hold it up it is the same thing that everyone is wearing. A white nightgown that goes down to the ankles. She hands one to Bee too. Bee has been awfully quiet ever since dinner. I turn to her, and her face is pale, and she seems cold.

"Come on Bee, Let's go lay down." I put my arm around her and walk her over to the bed. I help her get changed

I Am...

By Anthony Wallace

I am from Pennsylvania Hospital born 5 pounds 4 ounces
From Cherokee and Delaware River tribes.
I am from hard workers and perseveres
I am from plantations (with racists slaves owners that beat and raped my ancestors)
I am from the beautiful noise of early morning birds singing loudly at the break of night to day.
From grandma's Cinnamon Apple Pancakes and eggs for breakfast

I am from the long flights to Disney World
And Floating Water Hotels (Cruises)

I'm from keeping your head held high
No matter the circumstances or their outcomes,
And "Sticks and stones might break my bones but words will never hurt me"

Even Now,
All these years later

I am from the love of girls and basketball,
Escaping into the yard at 5 am to shoot 500 shots,
Not caring if I wake the neighbors
But caring about the impact these shots have on me 10 years from now.
Because I am from "hard work beats talent every time talent doesn't work hard enough".

Anthony Wallace is 15 years old with a wide variety of interests. Along with writing, his interests include reading, aerospace engineering, playing basketball and "being the best me that I can be".

and lay her down. I go lay on the bed right next to her to make sure she's okay.

"Get up, you do not sleep before nightly prayer," A girl lashes out at me.

I jump up and wake up Bee as fast as I can.

"Bee, I know you're not feeling well but you need to wake up." I shake her.

I turn around and they are all sitting in a circle on the floor, waiting for us. Bee stands up and I walk her over to the circle. They grab our hands as we're sitting down and shut their eyes. They start to speak in a language I rarely ever hear, it sounds Swedish almost. I open one eye, peeking to see if anyone has their eyes open. I look around and a girl across from us stares at me in disgust. I shut my eyes as quickly as I can. The prayer is finally over, and we all go to our beds.

I go over to Bee and whisper, "We need to get out of here."

"I feel too sick to move, Lucia."

"It's okay, I'm going to get us out of here."

I wait till everyone is asleep so I can create an escape plan for us to go. The air grows cool and its pitch black in the barn. I slowly stand up and creep over to the barn doors, opening them slowly while hoping that no one hears me. I tiptoe my way out and the darkness consumed the blue sky. The moon shined enough to give me a little light. The tall grass engulfed my legs and the white lilies whimpered when I stepped on them. Moving through the grass swiftly, I see red flames and smoke. I run over to see people holding hands and walking in a circle around the fire while chanting. I crouch behind an apple tree in hopes that I'm not in their view.

"Let's thank the spirits for bringing our dinner to us and allowing us to be worthy of having not only one but two to feast upon," Greata shouts.

My heart plummets to the bottom

of my stomach and the chanting got drowned out by fear. I try to get up, but the bottom of my nightgown gets stuck on the tree. I pull and tug until I hear a snap. The tree branch breaks, and everyone's head turns. Their eyes grow big, waiting for whoever made the noise to reveal itself.

"I need to get Bee and I out of here," I whisper to myself.

I get up and sprint back to the barn, praying that they aren't chasing me. I make it back to the barn but noticed something different this time.

Candles were lit.

I step in and the sheets are messed up and there's candle wax on the floor.

"Where is everyone?" I question.

I run over to Bee's bed, but nothing is there.

My heart started to sink when I realized where Bee is, and I run back over to where the fire was. My mouth becomes dry, and my heart starts to beat faster. The chanting grows louder, and the fire gets bigger.

"Bee," I scream.

I drop down to my knees and try to catch my breath. Everyone turns their

head in unison, waiting for me to speak. The crickets talk louder, and the breeze of the wind seems to be speechless.

"Where is Bee?" tears start to form in the corner of my eyes.

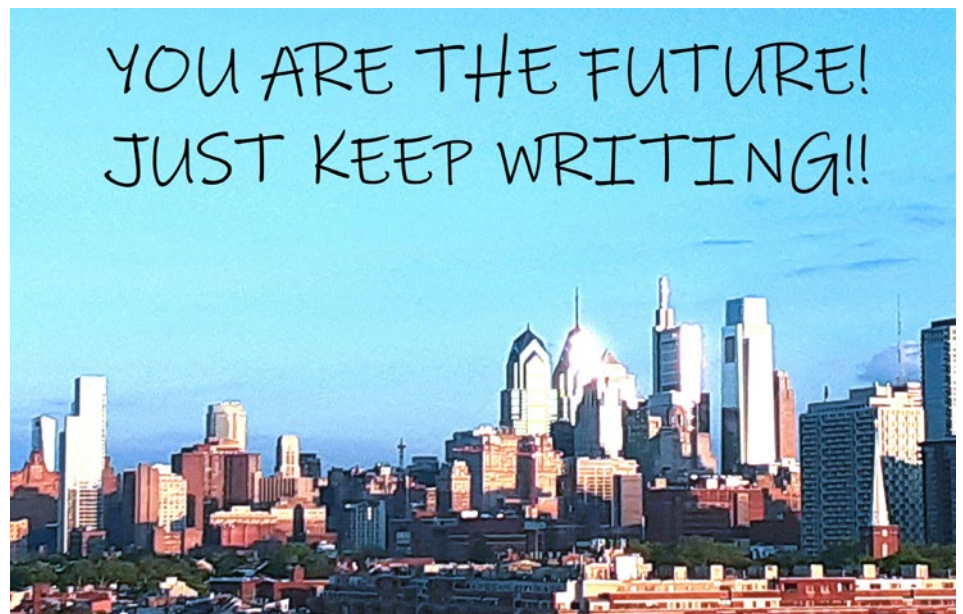
They all look behind them and towards the fire.

That numb feeling comes back again. It's the same feeling I felt when my parents died and it's the same feeling I felt when I saw the animal corpse. I know what my fate is already. I walk closer to them.

"You made a great sacrifice by helping our community," Greata smiles.

The fire becomes a flashlight for me. I look closer at her sinister smile, but I see a dark color at the corner of her mouth. I look down at her nightgown, now red. I turn, and everyone else has red marks across their nightgowns. Everyone is wearing red. Wearing my friend that was once here and is now gone.

Nakeya Holmes is a senior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. Currently living in Philadelphia, she enjoys writing short stories and poetry.



UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

by Abigail Pennisi



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The green grass danced in the breeze. The branches of the willow tree swayed with the grass and wind. A small child, about 10 years old, and a dog ran up the small hill; a young lady trailed behind them. The young boy ran around with the dog in the tall grass and flowers. Among those flowers

was a small patch of shorter grass right under the tree. The woman caught up to the boy and laid out a blanket. She set down the basket she was holding and pulled out two sandwiches and a bowl. She called for the boy and dog that were playing in the meadow. The boy came running; the dog came after

him. The boy sat down to eat as the woman poured water for the dog. The family of three ate and drank in peaceful silence. The woman basked in the sunlight shining on her. Once the boy was done, he ran off to play again. As she watched the boy play, she turned to the tree. She sighed and ran her hand along the carvings of a flower and sun in the trunk. The words *TOGETHER FOREVER* carved right above it. A gust of wind whispered in her ears and sent her brown hair into a flurry. A small tear ran down her face, but she wiped it away before more could escape. She packed up the basket and called for the boy and dog. They walked all the way back to the small house a few blocks away.

A year later the tall grass and trees still danced in the wind as the same family of three walked up the hill. The woman set up the blanket and basket the same as the year before. The now bigger boy and dog played just the same. She called for them in the same tone as before and they ate in comfortable silence just as before. When they finished eating the boy ran off again with the dog. The woman turned to the tree and ran her fingertips gently over the carvings once again. And once again a tear escaped her eye, only this time another one escaped before she could collect herself. She then gathered the dishes and blanket before calling the boy and dog and leaving once again.

A couple of years later the grass was shorter, and the tree did not sway as much. The family, once again, walked up the hill, except this time the dog was nowhere to be seen. The woman still carried the same worn-out basket. The boy did not run around and play like he used to, he only sat with his mother under the tree. The woman tried starting

a conversation as she pulled the food from the basket, but the boy only gave one-word answers as he stared at the screen. Once again, they ate, and the woman ran her hand over the carving

once more only this time no tears left her eyes. The woman collected the blanket and dishes into the basket. They got up and walked that same route back to the house.

Years later the grass was still dull, so dull it almost looked brown and the tree no longer had enough leaves to sway in the wind that seemed to constantly blow. The woman carried a now handle-less basket in her arms. The boy, now almost 16 years old, trailed behind her, his attention glued to the now bigger screen in front of him. She laid out the same worn blanket as before and pulled out the same meal they had eaten every year since their first visit. The woman did not try to talk to the boy, she knew she would fail at trying to start a conversation, so she ate in awkward silence. The only sound that could be heard was the sound resonating from the video playing on the electronic device in the boy's hand. The boy began asking his mother to leave and go home, wanting instead to be with his friends. She agreed with a sigh. The boy practically pulled his mother away from the field, but not before she was able to brush her hand over the very faded carving. They got to the edge of the field and left, with the woman feeling nothing but sadness inside.

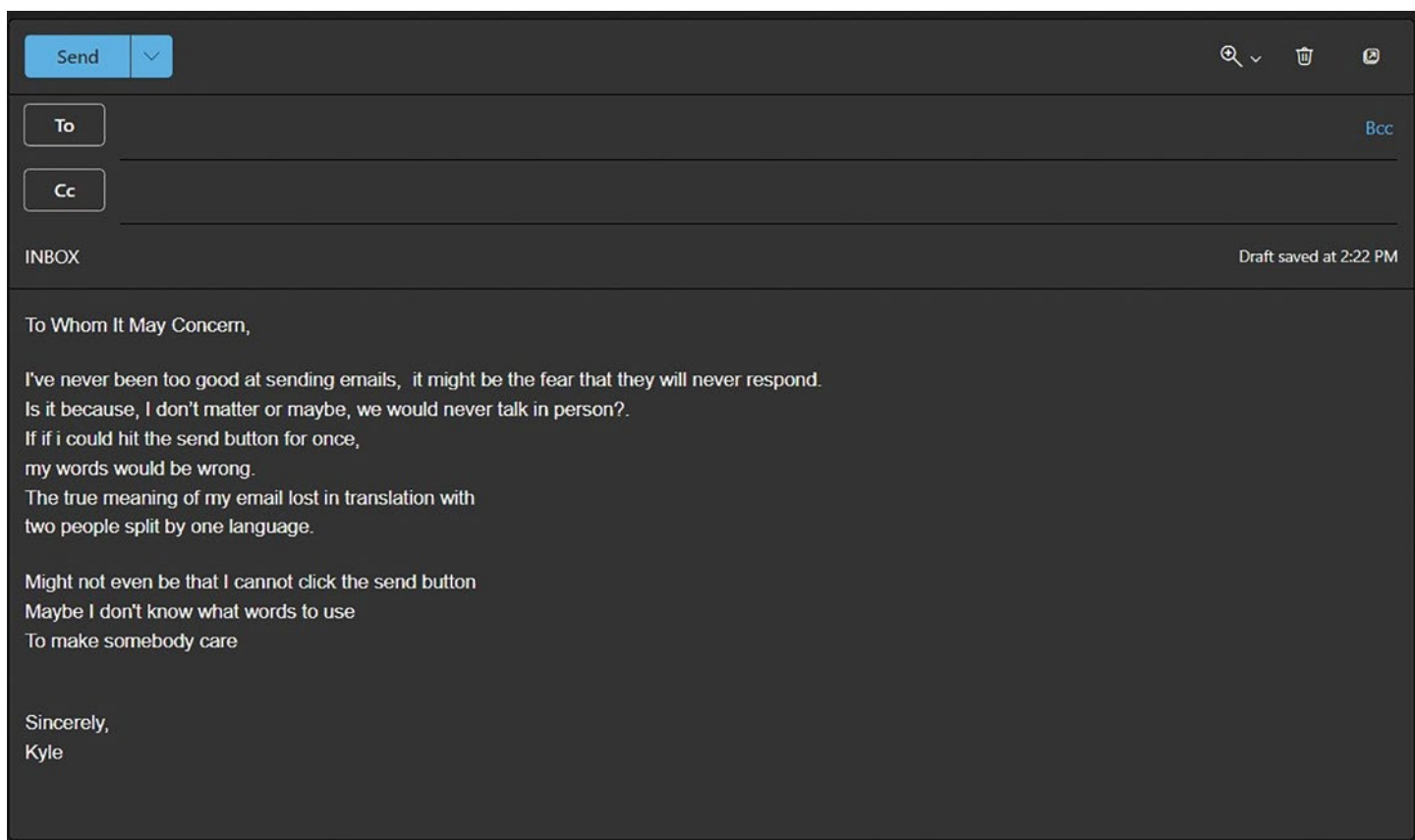
A few years later, the woman returned once again with the reluctant boy walking next to her. His attention never left the screen in his hands. The woman carried the same basket in her arms. She laid out the same checkered blanket and pulled out the same sandwiches and drinks as the years before. As the woman and boy were eating the boy's device rang. He answered with a smile that he had not shown for the whole time they had been at the tree. His voice filled with excitement as he agreed to plans with friends. Sometime later, no more than 30 minutes, an unknown car pulled up to the edge of the grass. The boy got up and made to leave. The woman grabbed his arm and asked where he was going. He removed his arm from her grasp and walked without answering. She once again tried to ask him not to leave; and what

The Fence in the Alleyway

By Jada Owens

i imagine the view outside most homes
would be one of comfort
a field of green, grass rolling gently in the wind
a backyard, a lawn with pinwheels spinning frantically along the walkway
and then i imagine the view from outside the kitchen window
a wooden fence my grandmother put up to blanket
a smaller gated one, strongly linked together with years of decay
originally made to separate the alley that we share with our neighbors.
occasionally, when you walk past the view of the kitchen window.
the next-door neighbor's suspiciously-placed security light
will blare into our house, triangles of white sent scattering against the walls
and when it flicks off, sputtering out the last breath of light
it leaves you with one large rectangle of orange
and a clear view into their messy kitchen from along the way.
i like to imagine standing in the house opposite my kitchen window
another long line of row home none of which have space to fit its belongings
so the objects gradually climb up and on one another, sitting,
creating small pyramids of junk that teeters and jolts whenever people pass by
and i imagine looking into my house from theirs
the sharp corners of our button table scraping our yellowed wall
a hunched over, sleep-deprived girl, staring back at me
from the gap created in between our alleyways.
i like to think she walks around her kitchen, roaring out complaints of
teenage life in a row home
but then i think that late at night, she stares
fondly at the neighbors' window opposite to hers
thinking about how easy to sleep it will be that night,
with all the noises resounding from the
house next door. and then i am her.
and i realize
that i would choose to stare out of my kitchen window at night,
at a rotting, waving piece of wood that seems to glow in the dark of night
standing between two houses in an alleyway
over that of any other rolling field filled home in the city.

Jada Owens is a senior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. In her junior year, she discovered a love for poetry and decided to try her hand at it. She loves to doodle cats on walls, whiteboards, and notebooks. Jada can be found taking walks aimlessly around the city of Philadelphia, and hides out on the 3rd floor of Barnes & Noble in Rittenhouse Square, PA.



Kyle Wodehouse is a current student at the Governor Mifflin Senior High School, a medium sized school just outside Reading, Pennsylvania. In his free time he reads, takes part in music, and enjoys time with friends. Kyle, born in Reading, has lived in Pennsylvania his entire life along with most of his family.

started out as a pleading woman and quiet boy ended up as a screaming boy and frightened woman. The boy left, leaving his mother to break down and cry. The last remaining leaves fell from the tree as if it were weeping with her. As she cried, she, once again, brushed her hand over the faded carving. She did not finish eating, she simply packed up the basket and made her way to the house alone.

For the next many years, she returns alone, without any companions. Every year she makes her way to the tree, sets up the blanket and basket, and she eats alone as she takes in the dying beauty of the field surrounding her. Every year she runs her hand over the faded carving in the tree and every year she leaves alone, holding in tears.

Years later she once again returns and follows the same routine, only this

time a car pulls up as she was eating. In confusion, she stands and watches as a young man hops out of the car from a far distance. The young man makes his way up the hill meeting the now elderly woman under the tree. The woman lets many tears well up in her eye as she almost falls to her knees, but the man catches her, and they embrace each other. The young man and woman talk and laugh as they catch up with each other. Although they leave the hill separately, they reach the same destination. From that moment the young man tries to join the elderly woman whenever he has the chance. They take in the returning beauty of the field as the dead flowers are revived and the trees' leaves return.

However, one year the young man returns alone, he carries an urn in his hands. The wind is blowing quickly and forcefully. He reaches the top of the hill and opens the urn. He lets the wind

carry the ashes away into the fields surrounding the tree. The young man turns to look at the tree. He kneels and brushes his hand over the carving. A bittersweet smile graces the young man's face. The woman had told him stories about his father; the person she called her one and only love. She would tell him about how his father craved the picture into the tree. His smile grew peaceful knowing that she would finally be reunited with her one true love. With that, he stood and walked home, smiling the whole way.

Abigail Pennisi is 17 years-old and a junior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. Living with their Mom and Dad in Philadelphia, PA, along with their older sister Erin and a cat named Mae, Abigail loves to read and write fantasy and realistic fiction stories.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE VIDEO GAME

by Gabe Medley

It all started when I got home from school one day and had a sudden urge to play the Xbox. So I went upstairs and plugged in the console. I turned it on and clicked on one of my favorite games, NBA 2K22. I was so excited to play and my friends wanted me to play with them. Once I had loaded into the game, I was running to find one of my friends. When out of nowhere my body started to tingle, I was getting nervous so I called my mom but she didn't answer. Then I passed out. When I woke up I couldn't believe where I was. I was in the game, probably because I sat too close to the console. I didn't know what to do!

I heard a voice, a familiar one. I turned around and saw my friend Noah's avatars standing right behind me, talking to me. Somehow I was com-

municating with my friend through the game and I told him that somehow I was transported into the video game. At first he didn't believe me, but when I showed him that I could do human-like things such as run faster than the game allowed, he was amazed. He was worried because he had never seen anything like this. I was scared when I really thought about actually being in the Xbox. He had to find a way to get me out. He looked it up trying to find an answer. He found out that if you beat all the games you own on your console, you would be transported back to the real world.

Once he told me that, I was happy that I had a way out, but I knew that it wouldn't be easy. So I started with the game that I was already in on the same team as Noah. First I went into

the game lobby and loaded into the game. Next I picked up the basketball and started dribbling, I passed the defender and dunked the ball for two points. Then my friend, Thomas, who is also on our team, got the steal and ran down the court and made a three pointer to put us up five to two. Towards the middle of the game we were up by ten, but the other team was making a comeback. I knew that I had to focus to win this game, then I realized that I had my special power which was a result of my progress during the game

As soon as I turned on my powers, I couldn't miss a shot. I knew we were going to win the game, until I lost the ball and the other team took it and scored. The game was tied 19 to 19 and we needed two more points to win. I had the ball, I passed it to my teammate, he passed it back to me, I did a crossover, broke my defender's ankles (to make the defender fall or stumble) and made the game winning shot. I felt a sense of relief as I faded out of the game and into the next.

Suddenly, I had spawned into a game called Fortnite, a game that I had been playing for quite some time now. I knew this game was going to give me a challenge because I had to defeat an entire lobby of up to 100 people. But I had faith in myself because I had experience in the game.

When I loaded into the game I jumped out of the bus and immediately started to fly toward one of my favorite places to land, Tilted Towers. When I landed, a bunch of other players had also landed there with me so I knew that I had to take them out in order to try and win the game. So I grabbed a boom bow (which works like a bow



Chloe Zhou © 2023

and arrow but once launched the arrow explodes!), and aimed it at them. The effect of the boom bow was so powerful that it eliminated a few of them at once. I then saw another enemy, but I

was out of ammo, so I stayed hidden in a bush until the coast was clear. When the enemies finally left I hopped out of the bush and moved to the next zone. I was trying my best to get home.

When I made it to the next zone, I had received a lot of health (extra strength) from the Storm because I had taken damage from the previous battle. So I tried to heal up when out of nowhere, another player came behind me and eliminated me with the most powerful weapon in the game, the heavy sniper. I was so upset because not only did he eliminate me, but he also hit me with an almost impossible shot. So now I had to restart the game and try to win.

When I got into the next game, I landed at the same spot and eliminated most of the enemies. Before I knew it, I was among the top five and there were only four enemies left. So I quickly tried to find them so I could move on to the next game. Then one of the enemies dropped a special strike attack that eliminated everyone including himself but since I was a human inside a video game, the attack didn't have the same effect on me. So I won the game. I was so happy because that game was the most difficult game yet, but it was only going to get harder from there.

Meanwhile, as I was stuck in the game, my family was starting to worry about where I was. I knew, from the display on the console, that it had been two days. My friends in the game told me that my parents had even sent out a police search to try and find me but they didn't have any clue where I was. They started to think that I ran away for some reason and had all agreed to put out flyers to try and find me. I felt that maybe if they did that one of my friends could see it and tell them that I was stuck in the game. My sister agreed to put the flyers up around her school, and my parents put some around their jobs, as well as our neighborhood and around my school. My friend Noah, who knew I was stuck in the game, saw one of the flyers and decided to contact my parents. When he did, they thought it was some kind of joke he was playing and they didn't believe

Rock At The Bottom Of The Sea

By Carmi Vaughan

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
the last time you were touched was long ago.
An evil bewitched person; that acted like they loved you let you go.
Now you sit at the bottom of the ocean hiding your glow.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
you're worth your weight in gold you know,
don't let the tears you cried stop you from things others will help you bestow.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
they tell you that the hurt will make you the strongest rock to be.
Although that's not who you want to be,
you want to be kind, compassionate and free.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
you deserve the moon but you'd never ask.
Don't let the next destination be your last.

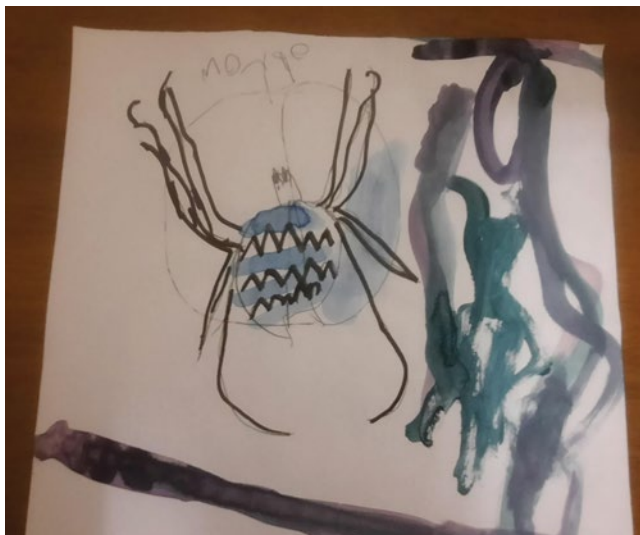
Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea, find the love within yourself
and the love around you will be foreseen.
Just like a plant the biggest trees grow from the smallest piece of green.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
when I look at you, I see a painting
where each stroke
and brush lines up to equal who you are.
You don't give up, when you've already made it this far.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
I need you to know that you'll be fine in the end.
Our past hides from us what the future is yet to show.

Dear rock, at the bottom of the sea,
don't strap yourself down.
SET YOURSELF FREE,
you'll make it to the top one day!

Carmi Vaughan resides in Philadelphia with his mom and brother. He loves playing the cello, violin and viola. Exceptionally talented, he says that, "I'm on my journey to be the best I can be and leave my impression of warmth on the world."



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him, but when he offered to show them they decided to give him a chance.

They went with Noah back to his house. When they got there they went up to his room and went on the game. He went to the game I was in and there I was, trying to win so I could move on. Then I heard my parents put on the headset and they began to talk to me. My mom was asking how I had got there and if I knew how to get out. As they kept talking she began to panic and then she passed the headset to my dad. He just told me to stay strong and win the games so I could get out. I was surprised that he wasn't that worried, but he had faith in me. They asked Noah to keep in touch so they could stay in contact with me. He agreed and my parents went home.

As this was happening, I had moved on. I had managed to survive both NBA 2k22 and Fortnite. The next challenge was Grand Theft Auto where I had to complete two missions to move on. The first was easy only requiring me to eliminate a couple of bodyguards but the second one was hard. I had to get rid of even more bodyguards and get into the vault in a limited amount of time. I eventually did both after a couple of tries but that took me about an hour to complete. Afterwards I was on to the next game, a soccer game called Fifa. I didn't play Fifa much but I knew how. The goal was to score five goals,

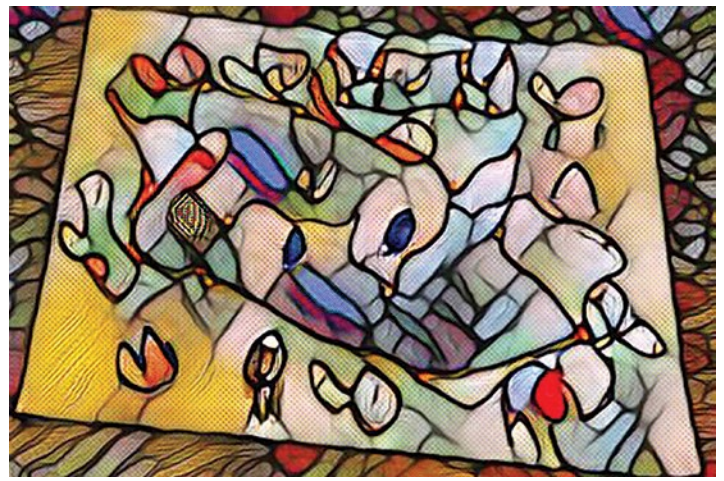
win MVP of the match and win the game. I went into the game with some confidence as I walked onto the field. The match started and I ran towards the ball. The player on the other team got to the ball first and kicked it really hard. It hit me in the shin and I was on the ground. But I knew that it was only going to be a matter of time before it happened again. So I got back up, prepared myself and kept running.

Before I knew it, it was the second half and I had not scored a goal yet! I began to worry because I didn't want to restart but I knew that I might have to. But then the other team turned over the ball and I began to dribble it down the field. I met the goalie at the goal and scored. I gained confidence and I started to get used to the game. I was getting better by the minute and the more time passed the more I scored. I ran down, stole the ball, rainbow flicked the ball in the air and kicked it in the net. The goalie was so surprised that he couldn't stop me. After a few minutes I didn't even realize the game was almost over. By then I already had my five goals and I was almost certain to win the MVP of the match. When the game ended I ran down the field in excitement because we had won by ten goals! Then I heard the announcer call my name and he told me to go to center field. I went and there was the MVP trophy. When he announced my name I felt so accomplished and it felt like I was the king of the world.

The next game I played was a single player game. It required me to complete a real life quest. This was the last quest and I was released from the game to complete it in the real world! I finally felt free but there was a timer on my chest. It was a timer for me to complete the quest. If I didn't complete the quest I would be stuck in the game for the rest of my life, so I got to work. The quest was to walk every dog in the neighborhood. I wanted to finish as fast as possible, so I walked every dog in the neighborhood at the same time! There were so many dogs that they were dragging me across the sidewalk. Some of the dogs didn't get along with each other either, but we made it. I returned all the dogs to their owners and ran home before the timer went off.

When the timer ran out I heard the sound of victory trumpets. I was relieved to be home again and so was my family. I didn't want to give up video games so, to prevent this from happening again, I made sure to not sit as close to the console as I used to.

Gabe Medley will be entering the 9th grade in September. He attends Our mother of Consolation Parish school and he is the vice president of the school. His favorite subject is math and he likes to play basketball. He enjoys spending time with his family and friends. He has two siblings and a pet cat.



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One Mighty Storm

By Lara Rosenbach

I'm not sure when it came, I don't remember: but we were out fishing, Grandpa Arnie, Dad and me, and we saw this dark cloud, and Arnold said "these winds are getting mighty strong, we best be heading back," and I remembered from Thursday's class, a word, a perfect word—"Hellacious"—"What did you say"—"Hellacious winds, Arnie; like when the sky gets like this, all big and stormy, that's hellacious," and the wind drowned out my voice, letting me know no one would hear my word, not unless I screamed at the top of my lungs, which I didn't, because my throat would be sore, and because I was scared, scared of the great big storm above us, scared that I would forget how to swim, and scared no one would rescue me, which was silly, of course Grandpa Arnie and Dad would save me, but there was something about the winds that cut to my bones, the rhythmic chopping of the waves, and the thundering noise that drowned out all the world, something about that scared me, and I didn't know what to do except stand still, still as I could...but of course, the boat would rock, and I would start breathing shallow again, and Dad and Arnie would be too focused on steering the boat to pay any attention to me, which made sense, but when all that was around me was storm, it was as though I was already adrift in the sea, emotionally, and then Dad hugged me tight and I wrapped my skinny arms around him and buried my head in his chest the whole way home, even as we got to shore, with his laughter vibrating in my ear as he walked, saying "It's okay, Lucy, we're fine, we're fine, we're on land, see," and stomping around for good measure, which reassured me...and so, I stepped onto the fluffy green grass and rolled around in it, getting all muddy, but not caring, because I was on land, away from the thunder and the waves and the wind, and everything was fine now, because Dad and Arnie had promised me apple pie when we got back home, and even though we only caught three and didn't fill all the bucket up, that was still one for each of us, which was enough—I wouldn't even complain about the scaly bits, no, I would be nice, since Dad and Grandpa Arnold did all the fishing anyway, and I just watched—it had made them smile when I told jokes, and Arnold flashing his rugged teeth and mussing my hair, even though Dad spent like five hours on it, and Dad punching Arnold's arm, but only teasing, and it was the perfect, perfect, day, even with the storm...and after I said that to Dad and Arnie, they smiled again, and Arnold laughed a hearty laugh, mussing my hair extra hard—"Rugged, huh...sounds hella cool, Luce"—and we all giggled, a small, secret giggle, and then shut the sea-green screen door behind us.

Lara Rosenbach is a junior in high school. She lives in Philadelphia, and writes mainly fiction and poetry. She also loves to read, and volunteers at her local library.

This poem is purely experimental. Lara wrote this piece in order to see how long one sentence could stretch, and if it could perhaps take the shape of a story. One Mighty Storm takes place in a single day, in a single sentence, with the single hope that readers will enjoy a childlike worldview, and hopefully enjoy the experimental feel of it as well.

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