



# THE MILL

MAGRUDER HIGH SCHOOL  
LITERARY MAGAZINE  
NONFICTION FALL 2016



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*“In the end  
only three things matter:  
how much you loved,  
how gently you lived,  
and how gracefully you let go  
of things not meant for you.”*

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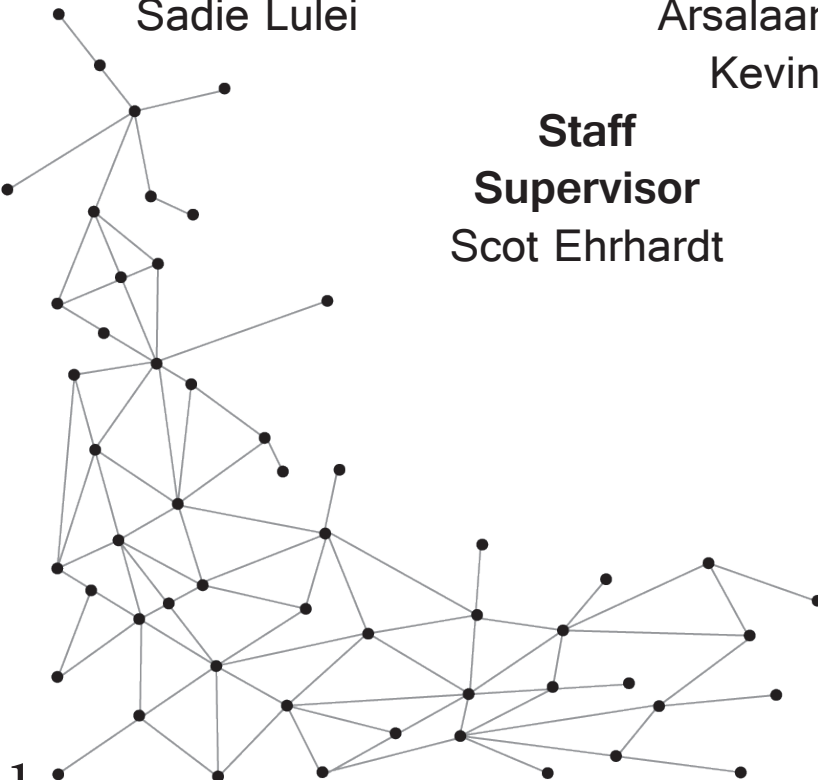
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# 031316: Apprehension

## Faith Aranaga-Hill

I'm standing here in front of the board thinking about not what's on my mind, but what's on yours.

I'm standing here thinking about the words trying to crawl from my mouth to your ears, but instead they hang onto my lips tightly. I practice them over and over and wait for them to fall. With eyes staring at me blankly, my hands tremble and my mouth shuts, just knowing whatever I say or whatever I think, whatever I do will be wrong. The looks I receive are what makes my words crawl down my throat and hide tight in my chest and then I freeze.

I sweat. I shake. The whispers of people with eyes on me skip from ear to ear. I can only imagine the worst possible things that they might speak, nothing less. I can only imagine that this time has left a permanent seal on you that I am different, and not in a good way. And I hate to think that you're judging me on my inability to speak the words screaming and pounding in my head, "Let us out! Let us out!" while I just sit here in silence with absolutely no control. It's as if the world stops time for the millions of thoughts to wail in my mind one after another begging for freedom, the freedom that I can't possibly give them.

I'll tear my eyes away from you and glance to the door, and with no direction given, not even a thought about it, my feet follow my eyes and I'm out of the room, and once again I can breathe.

# Last Moments I Don't Remember

Kambria Reddick

- The last time my mom tucked me in-- her soothing voice sending me to sleep
- When I lost my first tooth-- I looked at myself in the mirror for hours examining my mouth, rolling my tongue over the void where my tooth used to be
- My first day of school
- The last time I read a book with only pictures-- I would spend hours analyzing each page
- My last pair of light-up shoes-- I would be super excited every time I got a pair, fascinated with the flashing colors
- My best friend from first grade's name-- her birthday party was the first and only sleepover I've been to
- The last time I genuinely played on a playground-- I would always fall off the monkey bars but never cried
- When Silly Bands and Heelys were cool
- The first time I stood at the bus stop by myself-- my mom was probably still parked behind me waiting in the car but I still loved the independence
- The first time my teachers brought up college-- it seemed so far away back then
- The combination to my first locker-- it took me months to memorize it and a second to forget
- Middle School-- I think I blocked most of it out
- What happened during freshmen orientation-- I just recall a lot of papers and a much bigger school
- What I wore to my first concert-- I just remember spending days planning my outfit
- My first night home alone-- I was probably scared to death
- My first rated R movie-- I'm not sure what it was, but I'm pretty sure my mom didn't know I watched it
- The last time I didn't think about graduation-- becoming free from the chains of the school system
- When hearing "SAT" didn't make me cringe-- and I didn't think about how long I was going to have to study
- The last time college wasn't looming over my head-- and my mom's friends didn't ask, "So where are you going after graduation?"
- When colleges didn't send me generic emails, enticing me to get myself into thousands of dollars of debt for a "beautiful campus" and "friendly staff"



# Students Receive Help and Comfort for Mental Health Issues

Rebecca Harris and Nashare Butts

Mental illness is a subject that's more frequently talked about with the increasing diagnoses among adolescents. Twenty percent suffer from at least one mental illnesses. Most adolescents go undiagnosed, which leads to their illnesses getting worse in adulthood. Almost fifty percent of all lifetime mental health cases begin at age fourteen. Warning signs are being talked about, in health classes run by teachers such as Ms. Talbert.

Being at school when symptoms occur can happen; Magruder has a program that can be used to use if they show signs during class. They offer flash passes for people that need to take a break from their class.

If there's an insurance issue, the school offers a therapist for students that need it. The school allows for personal therapists to come in for the students that set it up as well. The flash passes are a half slip of paper that give students permission to leave and go to the counselor's office. It's allowed to be used whenever a student needs to leave the classroom without being questioned by the teacher. "I use it all the time," said Grace Eshbaugh, a senior, who suffers from anxiety. "Usually for emergencies."

No one is required to talk to the counselor after using the pass. They're there to talk if a student needs it, but it can also be used as a place to sit, take a breather, and calm down. "Sometimes Ms. Gudnitz just lets me sit in her room so I don't have to be around anyone," said Eshbaugh.

Flash passes allow students to speak to their counselors, so teachers won't refuse to let them leave the room. Counselors won't refuse to give a student a flash pass; if a student really needs one, they will receive one.

This program gives students who use them relief. "Even if I don't use it," Eshbaugh continued, "It's comforting knowing that I have it in my backpack."

Some students don't get a flash pass even though they require one. "I needed one last year," said Abby Dicken, another senior who also suffers from anxiety, "because last year I would have a panic attack in the middle of class and I couldn't just go up to the teacher and tell them."

The school offers this program, but some students who need them aren't getting them. "I was just too uncomfortable to get one," said Dicken with a sheepish smile. "I mean, it's there for people that want it," said Mrs. Spicer, a counselor at Magruder High School. "Some people use it and others don't."



**Untitled**  
Aja Cajthaml

# Things I Am Trying to Run Away From

Sadie Lulei

her,  
the word “grades,”  
the nights i cannot forget,  
how much i have come to love a place i swore i hated,  
how exhilarating it feels to not be at school on a school day.  
my inability to let go and my obligation to forgive,  
the smell of her perfume,  
mindless doodles,  
everything  
and yet, nothing.  
i know how many letters are in her name  
(i’ve written it down maybe a thousand times).  
the inevitable way i fall: for a passion, an idea, a sense of mortality.  
the feeling that i am climbing a mountain everyone else has already reached the peak of.  
my loved ones’ tendency to rip everything i’ve come to love apart  
(including, at times, themselves).  
my love for fast food,  
my addiction to long drives,  
those who don’t, and can’t, understand.  
it took three seconds to call you and years to hang up.  
my fears may change but one remains the same: i will be here forever.  
how hard it is for me to accept that i am an artist, without need of comparison.  
the gentle creak in my closet: i swear it’s a ghost.

i’ve only ever needed a few pairs of clothes.  
i know what i really need in life,  
and i know what i don’t.  
a backpack,  
some food, some water,  
a car that can last for miles,  
or at least a plane ticket.  
i never needed a destination, only a theory of what may come.  
she told me that she needed me and i left.  
i told her that i needed her  
and she stayed.  
god,  
i wish i stayed.  
if words were fruit  
i’d have a stand by the road



and i'd sell just enough to make ends meet.  
the rest i would give away, and the rest i would eat.  
i was never good at poems;  
i was never good at you.



# The Procession of Nobles

Cecilia Ford

Nonfiction Edition

# Giraffe Seeking Prom Date: Chad Michael Murrays Accepted

Kate Rempe

As far as I'm aware, we're all suckers. Voluntary suckers, yes, but suckers nonetheless. We're suckers for believing in things that aren't real. I don't mean this in the supernatural sense involving ghosts, or vampires, or other various monsters that go bump in the night. I mean in the sense that we have a belief, reliance, and tendency towards unrealistic expectations.

There was a period of time in which I used to tell people I hated chick flicks. The idea of being a stereotypical teenage girl was repulsive to me and I did my best to avoid it. During the same time period however, I would text my friends at about two in the morning, and get a response the next day asking why I was becoming nocturnal. My go to response of course was "I couldn't sleep." A more truthful response however would have been more along the lines of "I was crying over Cat's poem in *10 Things I Hate About You*," which is one of the sappiest, most unrealistic, chick flicks of the late 90s, maybe even of all time. Pretty soon I began to understand that secretly being a stereotype didn't mean I was any less of one.

I remember talking to my friend Holden one day, ranting about some now insignificant part of my life-- probably my hair, or a movie, or wishing I could date some fictional character from *One Tree Hill*-- and stopping in the middle of my incessant complaints, to ask him a question. The conversation that followed went like this:

Me: Oh no.

Holden: What?

Me: Am I a cliché?

Holden: I mean...

Me: Oh My GOD I'm a cliché teenage girl, aren't I?! That's disgusting.

Holden: The only thing missing is a Starbucks cup.

Me: Craaap.

Holden: Kate. Need I remind you that you are, in fact, a teenage girl, so acting like a teenage girl is not that far fetched.

Me: ...shut up.

Shortly after this conversation, I was asked to and attended my high school prom. Right off the bat I fantasized the princess dress that would fit me just right. I pictured my date gazing at me as I would descend from the stair case in all my fairytale beauty. I pictured watching his jaw drop, and imagined hearing him say Wren McCormick's awe-struck "You look beautiful" from *Footloose*. Once that had begun, I proceeded to relentlessly piece together moments of every chick flick I'd ever seen until I had constructed the perfect prom night in my head.

Going to prom with my then boyfriend--and being the epitome of a cliché teenage girl as I now know I am--naturally, I assumed the slow dance would be the romantic pinnacle of my high school career. In my head, it played out like in the movies. My head resting on his chest, his arms wrapped around my waist. The world melting away as we

would sway back and forth in perfect harmony. It would be peaceful. Graceful. Romantic. And, when prom night came, it totally would not happen that way at all.

My date and I were dancing very close to each other. Romantically speaking however, that means nothing considering the fact that being more than two inches away from anyone around me was physically impossible. The rhythmic sway I imagined, was less of a sway and more of a one inch shuffle from right to left. This shuffle resulted in a lot of “oh was that your foot? I’m sorry!” and other various grunts, exclamations, and jumps of surprise as we bumped into every couple around us. Pretty soon the one inch shuffle, turned into simply shifting our weight from one foot, to the other and an avoidance of large movements completely. Our feet snagged on tulle trains of girls’ dresses, and we ended up staring, not deeply into each other’s eyes, but instead, vigilantly at the floor to avoid as best we could stepping on our friends’ (very expensive) dresses, and shiny shoes. In reality, there was no cuddly nestling my head into my date’s neck. Even though I had deliberately worn flats, and his shoes gave him another half-inch of height, I was still taller than him, and so, my head nestling would have felt something similar to how I would imagine a giraffe would feel if it got stuck ducking its head under a door frame.

The thing is, all of this struggling and shuffling, and readjusting, and attempting to still look endearing as I repeatedly bumped into the people around me, felt like an eternity. I began to wish the slow dance would just end already. Albert Einstein has a quote, stating that putting your hand on a hot plate for two seconds can feel like two hours, while talking to a pretty girl for two hours can feel like two seconds. The slow dance was my hot plate.

I re-watched *A Cinderella Story* recently. There’s a magical scene in which Austin (Chad Michael Murray) and Sam (Hilary Duff) share their own romantic slow dance. Austin and Sam decide to go on a romantic stroll. They happen to stumble upon a white gazebo, illuminated with soft glowing fairy lights and adorned with white roses climbing its walls. Austin, offers his hand to Sam and asks her to dance. Sam, ever the realist, reminds him that there is no music. He shrugs, and suddenly, a string quartet that just happens to be passing by, without even being asked, begins to play The Goo Goo Dolls’ “I’ll Be.” The couple laughs, and they dance, a beautiful ballroom waltz that they both just happen to know. Austin twirls Sam around like a princess, and offers her a pristine white rose from the walls of the gazebo.

It’s absurd, and ridiculous, and something that genuinely only happens in the movies. As I watch it, however, I can’t help but feel warm inside. A sort of happy glow overcomes me, and I catch myself, once again thinking about my slow dance. Decidedly, I realize it didn’t live up to my expectations, because I did not ask Chad Michael Murray to be my prom date, and that was its only flaw. Okay maybe not the only flaw, but Chad Michael Murray would have changed the situation entirely, I have no doubts. Instead, I think about why I let my expectations get so high. Obviously people in the real world don’t just stumble upon enchanting white gazebos. They don’t get Chad Michael Murray to be their prom date. They don’t get a personal string quartet, and they certainly don’t do choreographed ballroom dances, or at least not anymore. I know this. We all know this. And yet, we still watch these cheesy chick flicks, or read romantic scenes in novels and we wish for these broad romantic gestures that will never happen. We vie for these wonderful, spontaneous moments, and allow our minds to wander, and fabricate perfection. I can’t



count how many times I have thought out perfect scenarios in my head. Not once has one of these scenarios come to fruition, and as time passes, the movies I make in my head drift and are forgotten. In the end, these imagined episodes and movie moments are not what is real, and they are not what is important. They might be heartwarming, and comforting, but they do not tell the truth. My “truth” is in my friends and I doing the wrong dance move to a line dance, cramming everyone into the photobooth and somehow managing not to cut anyone off, taking a wrong turn on the way to the dance, but getting time to hear our favorite song play on the radio and sing along before we had to get out of the car. These jumbled clumsy experiences are what I remember most. The important thing, is not to cling to the idea of perfection, but to pay attention to the imperfect. In the end I’ve found that it’s the moments that don’t go quite according to plan that I cherish the most; not the things that were orchestrated to perfection. So I’ll keep being a sucker, wishing for white gazebos and roses, but I will smile back at my cramped, unscripted slow dances just the same.



## **The Face of Procrastination**

Feriel Friloux

# A Sweetz Secret

## Jumping into the World of Cheesecake

Susan Chen

Situated in a small suburban area, most people wouldn't expect to find a local shop selling homemade, high class artisan sweets. Being just a few miles away from Magruder high school, Sweetz Cheesecake is the very definition of a hidden gem.

More of a dessert company than a bakery, Sweetz Cheesecake has been in operation for 27 years now. Their retail storefront did not open until 24 years ago, back in 1992; they had been working in rental kitchens prior to that. The interior of the store is very open, with a small sitting area by the window and a clear view of the large kitchen that makes up the majority of the shop. Company owner Craig Barsi has been changing up the look of the store over the 24 years it's been open. "[The store]'s a little more commercial looking right now, since there's more business," said Barsi. "The retail used to be larger, but as we needed more kitchen space it got smaller and smaller."

The industry primarily focuses on hosting, so they produce the cheesecakes in-store and then have them shipped off to other businesses, such as hotels and restaurants, for them to sell. As a result, the storefront never gets too busy, but there are still customers who come in to get their cheesecakes directly. The store, located on Snouffer School road in Gaithersburg, is open every day but Mondays and Sundays, and each cheesecake can be purchased for 26 dollars.

Barsi and his wife Andrea Barsi came up with the idea for the company following a visit to New Jersey in 1989. "We saw a little cheesecake shop in New Jersey. We weren't really happy with our jobs, so we were looking for something to do," Barsi said. Following their love for food, Barsi and his wife saved up money, alongside the generosity from their families, and in '92 were able to open up their own store. "We had our own take," Barsi said in regards to the New Jersey shop, "We have lots of flavors and they only did plain. We focus on hosting but they did more retail."

While the retail is not the main focus of this company, it still attracts good business for them as most people who go once have a tendency to go again. Magruder senior Fawziyah Banavai is one of those frequent customers. "My family and I go there a lot to get cheesecakes for someone's birthday," Banavai said. "I think the service is nice because the people talk to you while you're getting your order. Plus, the cheesecakes are just good."

On their menu, they have twenty seven different unique cheesecake flavors, including amaretto, chocolate chip kahlua, and Italian frangelico. Each cheesecake starts with the same base of cream cheese, sugar, eggs, sour cream, and vanilla. From that point on, the bakers add anything from fruits, nuts, and even liquors to give them their various flavors.

"We mainly get our ideas from ice cream flavors," said Barsi. In terms of the success with new flavors, there really is no way to predict how successful something will be according to the staff. "It's just a hit or [a] miss. Sometimes there are flavors we think will do really well, and they don't. Or things we think will be a flop, and end up being really liked."

Aside from hosting, Sweetz Cheesecake also does catering for large-scale events,

such as parties and weddings. Despite the smaller staff, they have not run into complications with catering orders. “We usually have a lot of time,” Barsi said. In addition, unlike other baked goods such as bread, cheesecakes can be made ahead of time and stored in freezers. “It’s one of the few things that freezes well,” said Barsi. A batch of cheesecake takes about 30 minutes to put together, and 50 minutes in the oven. After that, they get stored in the freezer until needed. “We do a lot in this little kitchen,” said Barsi.

In 2000, Sweetz Cheesecake added a fundraising program for schools and non-profit organizations. In the past, they have worked with Magruder’s football team and helped raise money for them. They do fundraisers for a lot of high schools in the area, and they also help raise money for churches, bands, orchestras, choruses, and other groups in need of financial assistance.

“There are people who will try some of our cheesecakes at a fundraiser, and that’s good advertising for us,” said Barsi.

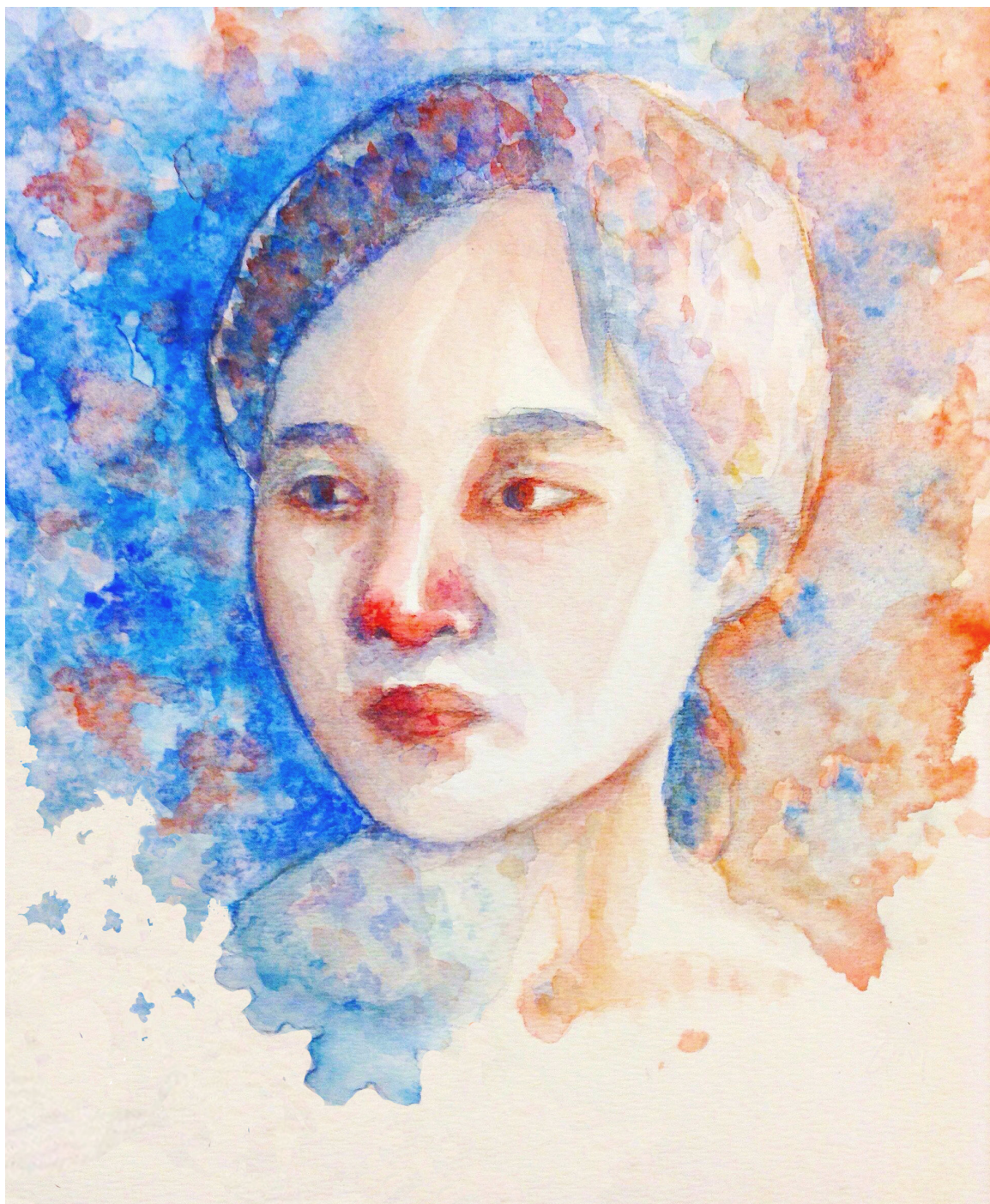
In addition to the advertisement from fundraisers, in 2011 the industry went mobile and added a food truck. Currently, the truck travels to locations all around DC, Maryland, and Virginia. The food truck service is also available for catering events. On Sweetz Mobile, they sell 4 inch individual cheesecakes, cheesecake dippers - which are cheesecake slices on a stick - and cheesecake minis. They refer to the truck as “Big Blue.”

“I like the idea of bringing food to people, and it’s like a billboard for us. It’s gotten us fundraisers and wholesale business,” Barsi said. “Usually, people come in and take out the cakes, and we send off the cakes to other restaurants and stores, so we don’t typically get to see people’s reactions. But with the food truck, we get to see the reactions of the people eating. It helps with the gratification of seeing people enjoying our cakes.”

Due to the fact Sweetz Cheesecake is more of a hosting company than they are a retail store, most of the products they make get sold at different stores. Their biggest client is Nando’s, and they sell not only to the shop in Rio, but also to Nando’s restaurants in different areas outside of Maryland. They also work with department stores with cafeterias like Nordstrom. Once they have their cheesecakes and other products made, they have a food distributor who gets them out to the different restaurants.

In the 27 years Sweetz Cheesecake has been in business, the staff’s love for what they do has not diminished at all. “The gratification of making something someone wants to buy is still a nice feeling,” said Barsi. “After 25 years I still love the work. I love the people, and I’ve had good people under me. Just to have something like this for 25 years, it’s hard to come by.”





**Duality**  
Joella Huynh



# Coping

Andrey Slivin



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“She was 13 when she passed away. Julia. My little Julie. She was the sweetest little sister in the whole world, so innocent, so beautiful-- and one peaceful March afternoon, out of the blue, I got a call from the hospital stating that she had died.

“I knew she was in a critical state, but I prayed so, so, so hard that a miracle would happen. It didn’t make sense to me. I mean, how could someone so innocent and so sweet just... die?

“She had cancer, you see, and cancer doesn’t give a damn about who you are. It just doesn’t. You can have the biggest heart in the world, you can have the loveliest smile there is, you can have a voice that sounds like rose petals drifting in an autumn breeze, so soft and gentle-- and yet cancer will come along, and say, ‘You. You’re next.’

“I miss her. I know it’s obvious, but trust me, that void you feel after losing someone is infinitely deep. Nothing can replace that gaping hole. You keep thinking, ‘I miss you. I miss you. I miss you.’-- and no one answers. It’s like you’re speaking to the wind. She had these eyes, these big, gentle eyes where if you looked long enough, you wanted to say sorry-- even if you did nothing wrong. I miss those eyes so much.

“Sometimes I’ll stay up late at night, gazing at the stars, and wondering if she can see me. Every now and then, I sing to her-- something soft, something delicate-- something that carries a quiet love within it. We used to sing together, her and I. We would perform in massive theatres, and receive endless rounds of applause. She had a voice of gold, believe me, and people cried when they heard her.

“A few nights ago, I had a dream that she was singing with me. It was so real that I woke up with a wide smile, ready to run into her room and give her a big bear hug. It was only when I was running down the stairs that it hit me that I wasn’t living at home anymore, that I was all alone-- and worst of all, that she wasn’t alive. It’s moments like those where you feel your life spiraling out of control, and you just give up on everything, and you collapse. Nothing matters. You’re completely numb.

“I’m doing alright now. I’ve been slowly getting better, sleeping and eating a bit more, focusing on positive things, and trying my best to climb out of the void I let myself fall into. I’m going to improve, I promised myself that. I just need to stop smoking these damn cigarettes.”

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# To Bear Away the Bell

Morgan Ross

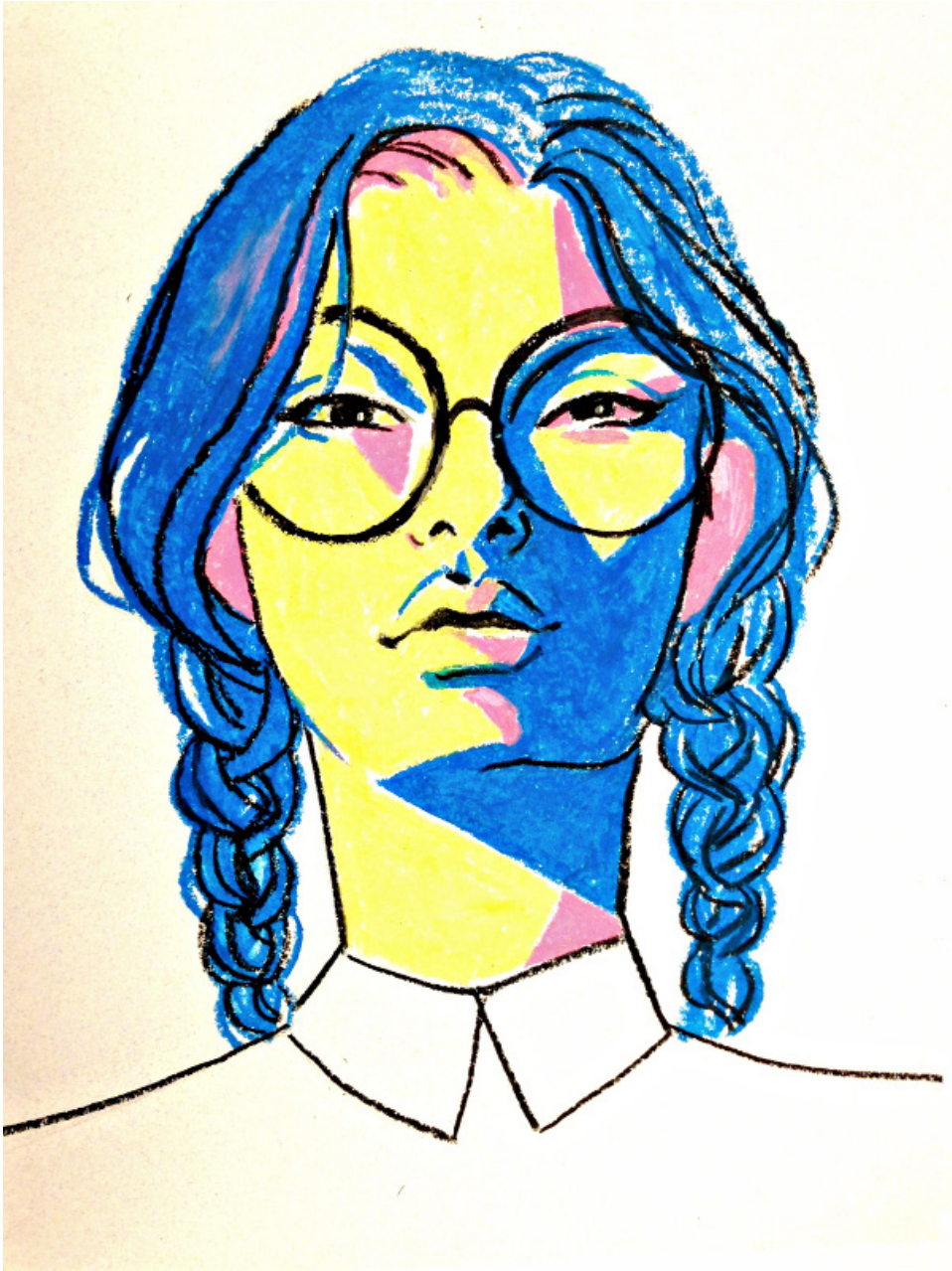
One foot and then the other, taking in wafts of fresh crayons, and breaking in my new backpack, this was the first day of school. My mother trailed closely behind, I often forgot she was there in the haze of an easily overwhelmed 5 year old. We found the classroom after what felt like a marathon, and were immediately greeted with the radiant smile of my kindergarten teacher; I was brimming with excitement. That excitement dampened when the first thing she said was a question, asking if I was adopted. My mother wrapped her arms around me, holding me in a tight embrace, when she lovingly replied, “Nope, she’s my baby and all mine.” The moment passed and we continued exploring the classroom. Another parent, warmly welcomed us exclaiming to my mother that, “You’re so lucky to have adopted such a beautiful little girl.” I took the compliment while what was once excitement shifted into confusion. The question was asked so many times that my mother had to reassure me I was in fact her biological daughter. Moments like this repeated through my childhood; they were the incessant ringing that made my ears ache and my self-image quake.

Acceptance was the goal and I had been looking to be accepted into the wrong crowd. Switching schools changed the colors of the faces around me. A magnet program meant new demographics, granting new hope. Entering a diverse class of, deemed to be, mathematically and scientifically gifted, middle students made different the new normal. This was the mentality of the program, the predominantly male program. Cultural differences were accepted but gender differences crossed the line. Being one of the few females in a science class, I was chosen last for a review game, only to carry the team to victory. In computer programming my success was offensive to my peers, math classmates rang the same bell.

The halls of Magruder High were initially a labyrinth, but two years later I was the personal topographer to any freshman in distress. These acts were in longing to the simpler days, one AP, a backpack less than 20 pounds, and pouch full of freshly sharpened Ticonderoga pencils. Junior year was a challenge that I couldn’t wait to scale. Upon becoming one of my teacher’s most trusted students, I gleamed. She was a fountain of science knowledge and I noted every lecture to perfection. The class was discussing college options, and as the only African American in the room, my opinion was trying to be hushed because I was the only one who knew affirmative action wouldn’t make the admission process any easier for myself. The professor said she backed my argument, silencing my classmates and attracting every gaze. She proceeded to tell me that I would be better off in the process if I bleached my skin and only bubbled in my white ethnicity, then flashed a smile.

I was shocked into a trance and since then her words have rang hollow. Self-confidence was never a problem. Self-image was always a problem. I was told that I was too black to be white but too white to be black. As a scientist and a woman, I was constantly put in the situation to choose between the two, and I did. My skin was the cause of prejudice and my gender was offensive to the people around me. It took 14 years to rub the denial out of my eyes and wake up to the reality of myself and the societal tension that I cause. It took 17 years to stop apologizing for it and start embracing it. My individuality is my superpower, and I am a black woman in science.





**Untitled**  
So Hyeon Gwag



# Autumn

Hanna Bourcier

It's the most wonderful time of the year. It's the time of the year when the green leaves begin to decay to vivid reds and soft oranges. The temperature begins to drop at a rapid rate, with the exception of a few days when summer demands to have its last "hurrah". The taste of warm drinks and fresh pastries find it hard to leave my tastebuds. My weekends usually consist of outings to Georgetown and Downtown Frederick. These weekends spent away from home will always continue to be my favorite. During the fall season, I unfailingly seem to stumble across new music and books that keep me drowning in waves of inspiration all season long. Autumn will forever continue to be my favorite. The scent that infiltrates my lungs with hints of pumpkin and cider, and the warm hugs that the brisk wind offers never fail to make me feel right at home.



# Untitled

Zar Naz



# Untitled

Aja Cajthaml

Nonfiction Edition



# January

Kaci Gossard

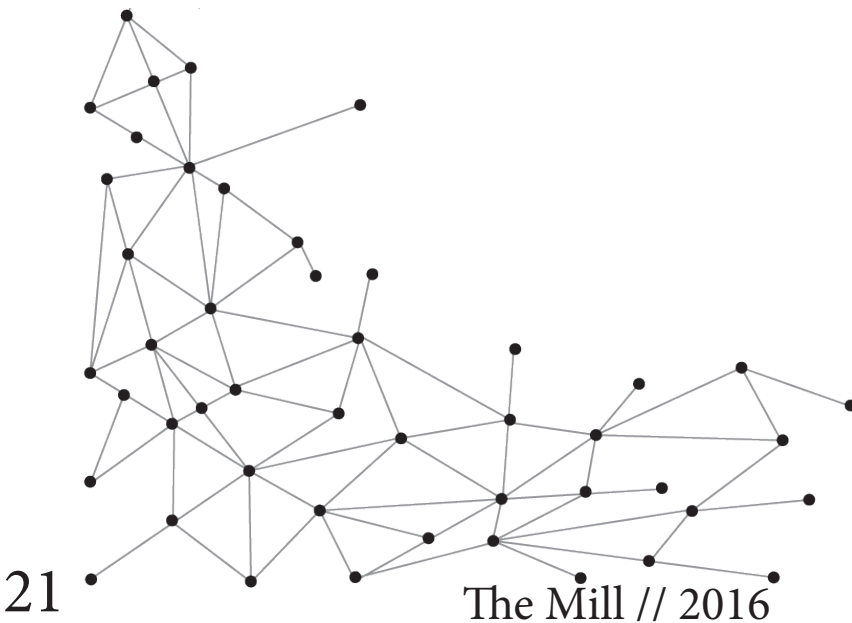
The far-off future is cutting closer and closer to the present-- and the fact remains that in a few short months, on a frigid January day, I'll turn 18. I'll be bombarded with a life-altering question "What do you want to do with the rest of your life?" What do I want to do? Up until this point the most difficult decision on my birthday has been what to wish for as I blew out those flickering little candles upon a perfectly iced cake.

What I want to be when I grow up is a question I've sat on for a long time, for as long as adults have been drilling it into our heads that we need to make a plan for our future. Like the miniscule decisions you make in fifth grade will forever alter your future. Our teacher asked us what we wanted to be at the beginning of that year, had us color in pictures of our future selves in whatever the profession may be. Fashion designer-- that had been my clear-cut answer for some time. I'd spent countless hours pouring over on-line dressing games and doodling pretty dresses, so clearly I was ready for a career in high fashion. At the end of that school year, for fifth grade graduation they had us do the same thing-- but this time a paragraph about what we wanted to be was hung up along with a current picture of ourselves. My answer has remained the same. Simple and without a thought of how I might accomplish it: Fashion designer.

I remember when 2017 was so far off, it was just the little number before the rest of our student ID; it wasn't a year, it didn't signify the rest of our lives. It was just an number, an insignificant collection of digits. The minute I entered high school it became a lifeline, a cherished date to look forward to. It was an escape from this hell. It was an escape until now. I didn't realize that 2017 meant being dropped hard into a cold adult world full of decisions I'm hardly qualified to make.

Honestly, I'm afraid.

I'm afraid for what comes next. I've lived up to the milestone of graduating, and turning 18. I've only thought this far.



# The Lesser Known Stories of Studying Abroad

Dannie McDaniel

They say it'll be the best year of your life. Often times when people share their stories of studying abroad, it's all positive. Students, volunteers, and families alike say that it's the best thing that ever happened to them. Many students make new friends and even gain new families during their studies abroad. They gain an understanding of a different culture, skills in a different language, and many other things by studying abroad.

However, studies abroad are rarely all positive. There are quite a few struggles that students face, such as culture shock and language barriers. Tasawar Drupak, a Bangladeshi student who studied in Virginia last year, said he struggled the most with adjusting to an all-English environment.

"It was a little difficult at first because I had a strong accent, but it got less noticeable over time," he said. For Bianca D'Agostaro, a college student who studied in Italy her Junior year, homesickness was also a major struggle. "Fall in the North East in the USA is my favorite season, and I didn't realize how much I would miss it. I really missed my family, my brothers, my baby cousin, and my friends," she said.

While the struggles of studying abroad are rarely heard about, even rarer are the stories of studies abroad that didn't go as planned. One of the more common problems is having to switch host families.

D'Agostaro's first host mother wouldn't include her in the family's life and would frequently verbally abuse her, even going so far as to locking her out of the apartment one evening. After a couple weeks, she went to her organization's support office and was able to get a transfer to a new host family which ultimately worked out. "I ended up having a wonderful homestay experience, but the first two weeks were extremely miserable for me with how I was being treated," she said. Drupak had a similar experience, having frequent arguments with his host father until he was able to switch host families after three months. Both students, though, had things that helped them through the rougher parts of their stay.

"It was soccer season so I was practicing a lot during the weekdays and had games on the weekends, and they were a lot of fun," said Drupak. D'Agostaro found a group of friends in other students studying abroad that helped each other through tough times.

Despite unforeseen challenges, many students who encounter difficulties still manage to have a good time, make friends, and learn things about the world and themselves. "Overall, my trip was truly life-changing. I have learnt more in 10 months than I would have in years. I have no regrets about going," said Drupak.

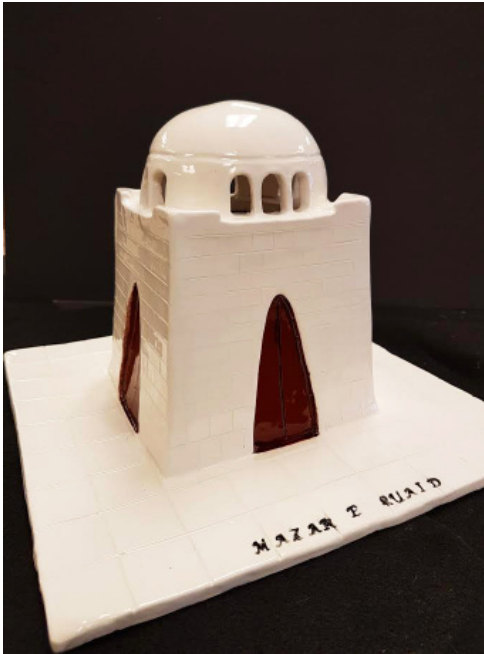
To anyone considering studying abroad, D'Agostaro says, "Study abroad. And don't treat it like a party semester. Use the time to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Do new things. Travel alone. Befriend people you typically wouldn't. Don't waste your time or take anything for granted when travelling for any amount of time, even if it's in the country."



# Mohammad Hamza Ali

## Mazar e Quaid

Mausoleum in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi



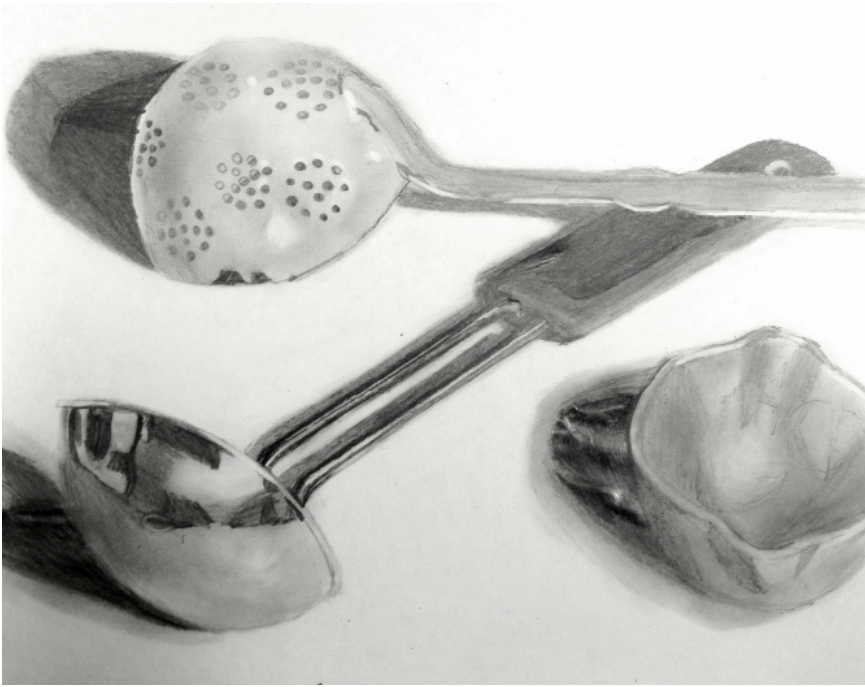
## Pakistan Monument

Monument in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad



## Faisal Masjid

Largest Mosque in Pakistan



# Spoons

Jose Valiente Ruano



# Scotland

Sanajana Kottapalli

Nonfiction Edition

# Summer of Firsts

Margo Sharp

Her bare feet slid over the splintering wood of the apartment complex that she lived in. The air was heavy with the nostalgia of the approaching end of summer and what had happened under its watch. She trembled as her feet hit the boardwalk, leading her back to the past. Reeds sliced at her open thighs as she raced, flew, screamed, cursed at the wind; hoping that it would react with rage. It didn't. It simply wrapped itself around her, drowning words that ripped layers of skin from her throat in its embrace trying to comfort her with the thoughts of Autumn and a new start. Breaking past it, she collapsed into the sand, ears filling with the noise of the ocean at night. It was a lulling, building, crashing sound of frustration as the waves clawed up the beach only to be dragged back into the never ending rhythm.

It had been the summer of firsts. Her first sunburn, her first jellyfish sting, her first sushi bar, her first kiss, her first funeral. The memories were all starting to wash away like sea foam on a windy day. What had his lips tasted like? Did he smell like sunshine or moonbeams? What color were his eyes? The little things that she knew would be taken away by the crisp grasp of autumn.

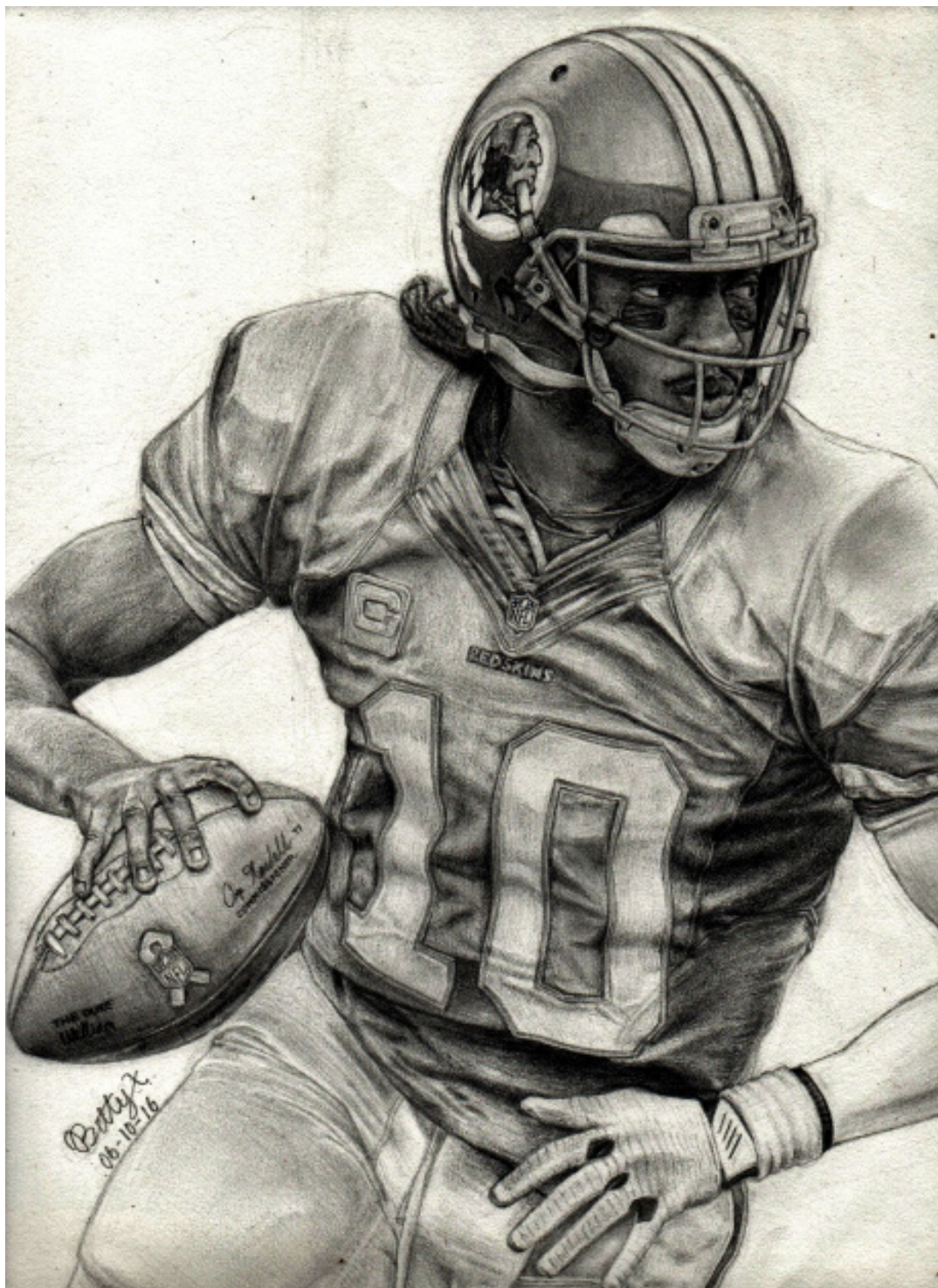
His name streamed out of her mouth, choking her with its rancid taste; like vomiting after a good meal. He had been the sun and she, the moon. The moon may not shine as brightly without the sun but it could still push and pull the ocean, and that was what she was going to do. She was going to shake the world until it screamed at her to stop. She was going to disrupt the peace until every single person knew she was the one responsible. She was going to make sure that the summer of firsts did not become the summer of lasts.





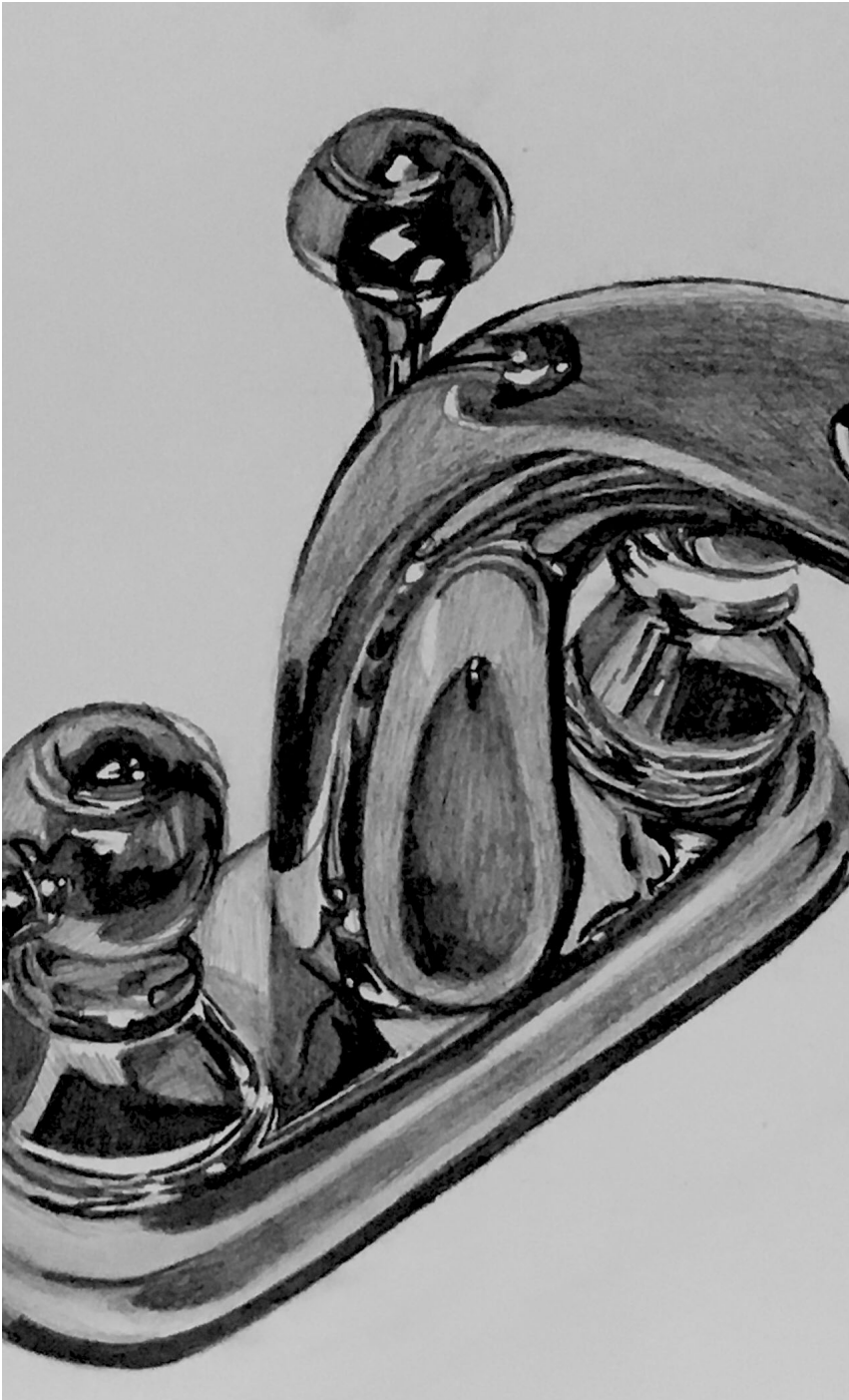
**Water**  
So Hyeon Gwag





# RGIII for Mrs. Prendable

Betty Xiong



# Faucet

Sarah Lozier

Nonfiction Edition

# Fr. Miracle

Andrey Slivin





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“I believe in miracles. I really do. Back in the 80s I was just another teen cruising around Brooklyn on an old skateboard, flipping trash cans, crashing parties, skipping school... you know, the usual renegade stuff. I was one heck of a rebel. I would sneak into empty pools with the guys I'd skate with, and we would spend hours dropping into them, doing tricks, ripping up our jeans and scratching elbows-- and when the police would show up, we would book in all directions.

“It was a fun life, but I soon turned 18, then 19, and I started to realize I wasn't getting anywhere. I was an adult with no real aspirations or goals in life, and while my old friends were going off to fancy universities, I was loitering around with a pack of street rats that only cared about 3 things: their boards, their drugs, and their money. I slowly began to get sucked into their lifestyle, their void, their nothingness. I mean, that's really what it was-- nothingness.

“I was walking home one evening after spending a few hours in the skatepark. I was famished. I thought to myself, ‘Man, I should get some pizza or something.’ That was when I realized that I hadn't eaten all day. No lunch, no breakfast. I didn't even have dinner the night before. I checked my pockets, and I had, like, a few quarters. I was broke, I had no job, I had no real home to go to, and I was starving. It slowly dawned on me that I was a nobody. I sat down on the curb and felt like the biggest loser in the world. I felt so miserable. I thought to myself, ‘Why am I even alive? This isn't life, this is misery.’ I stared at the cars speeding right past me, and prepared myself to jump right under the next one.

“Right as I got up, a man in a suit tapped me on the shoulder and handed me a business card for a modeling agency. He told me to call the next day. Just 30 seconds before, I wasn't even thinking about a ‘next day.’ At that moment, I decided I had one reason not to step into the oncoming traffic.

“So let me guess, you're probably thinking: ‘If this guy became a model, why is he a monk now?’

“Remember how I said I believe in miracles? Well, in this monastery, I'm being saved-- a second time.”

# On Bugs and the Hatred of Them

Kyle Kroese

I really don't like bugs. Whether it be fear or annoyance, I always have some negative feeling whenever I see a bug. Everything about them, be it the look or the behavior. That's why I like winter because the bugs are dead and the allergens are all gone. If I see a spider, I won't pick it up with a piece of paper and put it outside like most people. I'll pick up a textbook and throw it at that thing. I don't care what anyone thinks, those things are evil. Even though spiders aren't related to bugs at all, they still count enough for me.

Not too long ago, I was just going about my nightly routine when I noticed something. A little spider darted out from under my bed. I lifted the textbook I was doing work from and got ready to sneak up on the spider, but it noticed me and snuck back under my bed. Now, I didn't believe that urban legend that you swallow five spiders in your sleep in a year, but I wasn't about to test it. I couldn't exactly crawl under my bed here, because I have a bed with a tiny gap between the bed and the floor. So, I set myself up over the edge of the bed, lying in wait for this spider. I waited for at least thirty minutes. Mind you, it was about one o'clock in the morning at this point. I was not about to let this slide. When it darted back out from the bed, I dropped the book and crushed the spider, likely disturbing my family as they slept. After confirming my kill, I finally had the peace of mind to go to bed. I just hope he didn't have friends under there. I'll check that later.

Bees are even worse for me. I have apiphobia. My dad once told me there was a yellow jacket nest under our deck. I haven't been out there in years. I've never been stung by a bee, mostly due to caution and staying inside, and I don't intend to. I even hate carpenter bees. They don't sting, but they buzz and they're black and yellow. That's a no go. Despite that, the rapid deaths of bees lately have saddened me. It's not because of actual direct sympathy, but because bees are pivotal for flowering plants and their reproduction.

It's a testament to my personality, really. I only really care about things that affect or could affect me or things I care about. Everything else can piss off. It's my 'True Neutral' alignment poking through. I pretend to care about bad things until they affect me, and that's when I care. People will call me selfish, but to be perfectly honest, my attitude accounts for quite a large portion of people. If a person feels more bored than helpful at a food bank, then don't force them. Humans do things that make them feel good and have fun. If someone isn't having fun, don't make them. I won't annoy someone with these little things and waste their time.

The insect I harbor the greatest hatred for is the fruit fly. They are the biggest annoyance on this planet Earth. I kill one in my bathroom and twenty minutes later there's two more. It's like the hydra, cut off a head, two more grow back. Except, in this case, fire does nothing. I was sitting in my room a few days ago, and this fruit fly kept landing on my laptop, and I kept shooing it away. It got so annoying I actually Googled how long a fruit fly's life is to see how long I would have to deal with this. Unfortunately, it's not twenty-four hours, it's thirty-three days. I eventually got the bugger, but the next day there was another one. I have painted my walls with the bodies of their brethren, but they still keep coming. It's weird how they can keep slipping into my house through some invisible crack in the wall, yet they can't fly out of an open door. You're so proud of your success

that you refuse to let it go. And we all know what that's called.

Nostalgia. I really don't like nostalgia. Just because the old ways "worked" doesn't mean they're better, and just because you think it was better doesn't mean you have to berate everything that opposes you. Who do you think you are? What gives you the right to rain on someone's parade? Let people have their fun. Even if that might be a bit strange to you.

In my opinion, insects are the scariest creatures on the planet. There are some bugs out there that are really strange, and often, scary looking. You might be bored sometime during the weekend and turn on the TV to the nature channel and watch some documentary on the rainforest, and you see this dog-sized spider eating a snake. Next thing you know, you're whipping around on the street to the slightest movement, or sleeping with a baseball bat out of paranoia. It doesn't even have to be that big. These weird bugs could be the size of a pinhead and live on the other side of the planet, but some people, such as myself, will be utterly terrified. It's an odd bit of psychology. We brush off lions and bears, actual deadly creatures, because they look "normal", but the second we run into a tiny weird looking bug, we cower behind a rock. We see so many quadrupedal, furry animals that we just accept that as the norm, forgetting the little things buzzing under our noses.

If there was some nuclear apocalypse that caused bugs to turn giant like in the Fallout games, I would have a heart attack as soon as I saw them. It's not just the threat of being sucked dry by a giant mosquito, it's the appearance. Tiny things like bugs don't look like much from our perspective, but get in close and it's creepy. People who have ever looked at pictures of bugs under a microscope can attest. They're like some hairy hell beast, or some monster from deep space. Everything from just the color and texture of their skin to the appearance of their facial features. It all seems odd and alien. It's the world we never see because it's so small, and that unfamiliarity is unsettling to us. It's the same reason that Lovecraftian creatures are all reminiscent of deep sea creatures. Humans never see anglerfish or, the favorite, squids. The large eyes and bony visage of an anglerfish combined with the creepy tentacles of a squid could easily be combined to form a terrifying monster. There's nothing more terrifying than the unknown.

Now, if you may excuse me, I have to check if I have more spiders under my bed. That's really bugging me.





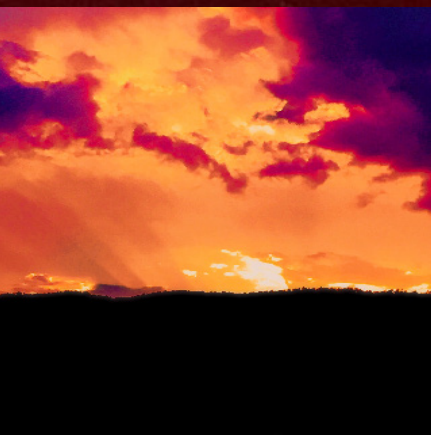
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