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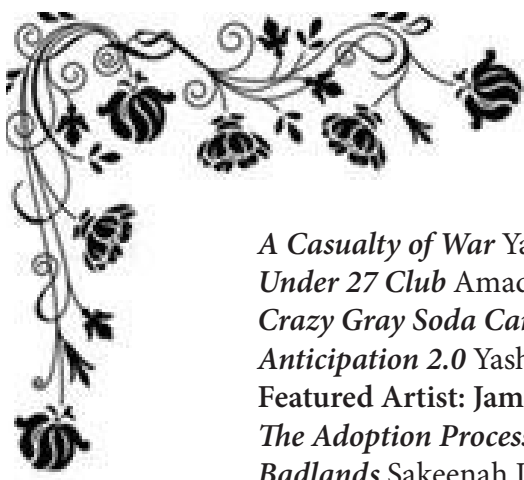


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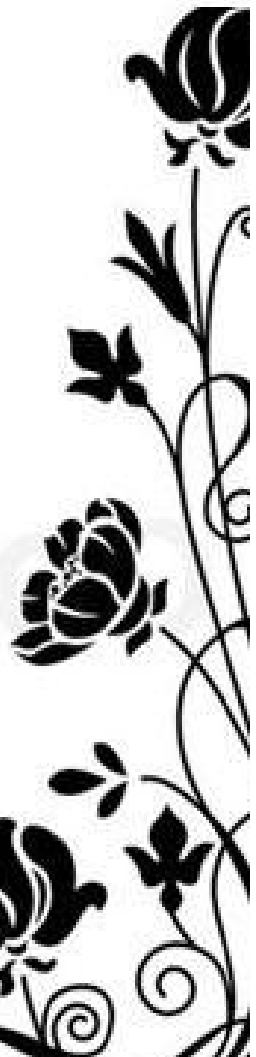
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# A CASUALTY OF WAR

Yatta Khoury

My mother's terror permeates through her womb to me, her gasps of pain arousing me from the warm cocoon. "Try and keep up," her brother whispers urgently, running, half carrying her through the jungle. "He'll kill us if he finds out I've freed you." I feel every tremor and terror, her movements slow as she runs for her life from the man who took away her innocence, then her sanity. The trek through the jungle feels like an eternity. Then finally, the final push, her screams piercing the inky night, her exhilaration as she pushes me out, undeniable. Her liberation is twofold: from me weighing her down, and from the warlord who was her rapist and one of the leaders of the civil war in Sierra Leone, a war that ravaged my country from 1991 to 2002.

It is 6:30 A.M. in August 2006. I face the front door alone. "Run fast and join the parents and their children walking to the bus stop," my aunt's words echo in my ears. I am seven years old, know minimal English, and am starting the first grade. I am a new residence in Atlanta, Georgia, for everything is so strange and foreign. Though I am scared, a part of me is excited about being in the fabled U.S.A. I feel a hunger for this new life. I am determined to embrace it fully, and I do; through the jeers of 'African booty scratcher,' constant bullying, and culture shock. A culture shock so dizzying, I have had migraines for years. My home life gives little respite. My mother is in the throes of drug addiction and deepening mental illness. Her pain and hostility towards me always reflect in her eyes. I am a constant reminder of her stolen life. I frequently try to avoid the guilt I feel by staying away until nighttime.

However, I could not escape the words of my aunt, who always showered me with love and positivity. Her words of affirmation pointed out the many opportunities I had here in the U.S. I gradually respond to my aunt's words in my head. "There are millions of children suffering in the world. Just imagine how lucky you are! Do not squander this wonderful opportunity. The sky is the limit for you." Determination sets in. Instead of running out into the neighborhood furiously like I was chased by demons at the slightest criticism about my grades, I took her words to heart. I began to see through different lenses. My anger at life started to abate, the hardness in me to thaw. Maybe, I can touch the sky, and even be able to not only help my mentally ill mother, but other disadvantaged children. With this new goal, I started studying even harder. As time went by, I believed that I could be more. Try as I did, though, certain things remain the same: I still dressed in all black, and never showed much emotion. Everything was wound up tightly in my chest.

April 8th, 2016 at 3:05PM. News of my mother's death is introduced to me.

April 23rd, 2016. I am standing in front of a coffin, looking down at my mother's body. She was shot in Youngstown, Ohio by a drug dealer. She was only 33. Different thoughts race through my mind. How had she survived captivity by a warlord, lived through a horrendous civil war, escaped the jungle at 7 months pregnant, and won a lottery to come to the U.S.A. only to be murdered in Ohio? A wave of emotions engulf me as family members, including the village that raised me, form a protective circle around me.



I scan their faces, some crying hysterically, others more subdued, and catch the worried eyes of my aunt. The love towards me in this funeral home is so overwhelming, I feel the emotions that I always kept inside welling up. I nod at my aunt to assuage her fears, a nod to say, "I am fine. I am a survivor."

April 8th, 2017. It is the one year anniversary of my mother's death. My emotions are still the same from the first time I heard about her departure: not surprised. Life with her forced me to grow up really fast, I the mother, she the child. I am not upset with her with what she put me through. I have reached a stage of contentment, understanding a very long time ago. I relinquish her of any heartache she submitted my young self to. I know none of it was her fault, her mental illnesses and what they made her do, her demons that constantly chased her until the end of her time, and the battle she was not strong enough to win. She tried, she truly did, but her time was near, she could not endure any more pain. Her death does not bring happiness into my world, but it does bring a sense of clarity, peace. The pain is still drenched in my heart, but a sense of calmness is there knowing she's no longer straining to escape. She's at peace, true and final peace. I am glad.

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**Satan Chains You, God Frees You**  
Johanna Lopez





# Under 27 Club

## Amadea Oberg

I could imagine him a drunk and disillusioned Jim Stark.  
Perhaps a few of his demons mirrored Cal Trask,  
But he wasn't much for social estrangement.  
Never without a story,  
Never without an epic told with such nonchalance,  
You would assume every late date persisted as such.  
A shared penchant for fast cars,  
Though it didn't prove equally as dangerous,  
Left me fearing for my life once or twice.  
The stylized hair, the posture, the entire cool-guy vibe,  
Their aesthetic matched to a T.  
"Knowing your brother was like knowing James Dean."  
At the very least,  
They both went out with a bang.

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# Falling in Deep

Therese Manzanero



# Clarify

Therese Manzanero





## Don't Let Them In

Cecilia Ford

Artist note: In literature, vampires can't enter a home unless welcomed. Also, Girl Scouts are discouraged from entering the homes of people they're selling cookies to, for safety. Whose safety, though?





# Crazy Gray Soda Can

## Inaara Molina

I was sixteen and it was wintertime when my soda can of emotions burst open. Realistically, when you shake a soda can enough, it will start pouring out the second it is open. Then you are left with three things: the soda that is spilled, the soda you tried to save from spilling, and the soda left in the can. It will still be soda but it will also be a mess. So now you have to clean up the mess. My can of emotions burst open on December 19th and I cleaned up my mess in Shady Grove Adventist Behavioral Health Hospital.

My mental breakdown reached its worst on a Monday morning when I had skipped 13 school once again due to anxiety. This was not the first time I had skipped, and these days were adding up along with work I missed that I had to make up. The pressure of the work drove me insane, and the pressure of attending school frustrated me. The explosion of my can suffocated my lungs enough for me to feel unable to breathe, and my mind was flooded with too many emotions to try and fix it.

I believed if I felt that I could not save myself from my drowning, maybe someone else could help me get away from the flood. I went to my current therapist for help and she instructed me with steps in order for me to get the help I felt I needed.

When I arrived in the emergency room I was questioned for an hour about my previous diagnoses of PTSD, depression, and anxiety. This was reopening the deepest wound in me, one that was stitched together to hold my flesh from tearing apart but never began healing. The cavernous parts of me were still trying to stop the bleeding. The doctors then asked for my treatment history and my current medications. An hour after that, when my mother finally arrived after many attempts to contact her, my blood was drawn and I had to provide a urine sample. They then asked more specific questions, like, "Why do you believe that you need to enter in-patient care?"

With fear plugging my throat from letting me speak, I briefly and quietly replied, "Even after consistent therapy and help, I still want to kill myself. I don't want to live anymore because I can't find the point. I feel like all the good things I do are not enough to make me keep going."

Softly, one of the doctors asked me, "Have you hurt yourself before?"

With shame seeping out of my pores, I said, "Yes, I have."

"When? How? Where on your body?"

With my trembling hands I pointed at the bold scabs and scars on my ankle. I dreadfully responded, "I started when I was 12 and stopped around age 15. I started again a week ago."

Of course, they asked me more questions, and based on my responses and self-harm, they decided they agreed with my decision that I needed in-patient care. All that was left to do was have my mother agree and sign the documents that gave the doctors permission to take me to a behavioral health hospital. That was the part of the process that

would decide if I would sink or swim.

My mother told me, "Inaara, hospitals like that are meant for crazy people." This made me feel weird for going to a place for crazy people. I did not believe I was crazy. The idea of being crazy stuck with me enough to agitate my stirred mind even more. Why did I have to be someone crazy?

As we were waiting for her to make a decision, a nurse entered the room and gave me food. She then told me, "You are too beautiful to be feeling this way, just try and be happy." We thanked her for her good intentions and waited for her to leave the room. My mother noticed how upset I got when I heard her say that. Beautiful or not, she minimized the validity of my feelings, and that made me feel like right as I was reaching the surface of the water, I was pulled back down again. The journey to accept myself became harder, but then something caused my mother to stop doubting the hospitalization.

My mother then told me, "She doesn't know what happened to you. Don't be upset, princess, only you know how you feel." She paused for a moment, took a deep breath, and said, "Only you know what you truly need to get better. I trust that you are capable enough to do what is best for you. So I will sign the papers if you're certain this is what you want." The riptides of feelings stopped dragging me under the water. My faith was restored momentarily.

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I was then waiting to be transferred to Shady Grove Behavioral Health in an ambulance. Somehow I felt that my scenario was too amplified to be in an ambulance, but then I recalled that people die from mental illness too. This hospital was ordinary, but what made it feel dazzling were the other patients and staff. I learned that the people there made me feel like everything that was going on within me was normal. I did not feel out of place. These people also had immense trouble handling their emotions. The staff would always be so patient; you could express yourself as much as you wanted, whether it was dark or bright, and you would not be judged. At the drop of a hat patients would either rip their mind apart, or tape it back together. It seemed crazy, but this was something that was routine for me, just like it was for them.

I learned that hospitals like that were filled with intimacy and none of the patients had to be undressed or touched for us to feel that way. I learned that I fall in love with people almost instantly for who they are and the strength they carry within themselves. Everyone I saw was fighting battles every day I could not even imagine being in. I learned many things, but what impacted me the most was that I learned that crazy is an ableist term for a reason.

We had daily talks with a therapist for thirty minutes and after a couple days I mentioned to my therapist that I felt I was going crazy and that I did not like that feeling. He then said, "I don't think you're crazy."

Just because he told me he did not think I was crazy did not mean that I believed him. To me those words were sweet nothings only meant for flattery. I had had enough of experiencing fake flattery that meant nothing. So I asked him, "Why?"

He responded, "I think that maybe some things are harder for some people than others. Maybe it's just harder for you to control your emotions and that's why you're here. We're here to help you express them in a healthy way."

Immediately these statements expanded in my mind and a new concept was introduced to me. All sorts of opinions I had heard most of my life had made me come to

believe that things were either black or white. With this statement the mud in my mind cleared. I saw why the color gray belonged in between black and white. Things are much more than just black and white. Therefore they are grey. With this concept, I decided that my soda can of feelings would no longer exist. I should not hold them back; instead I would express them in a healthy way. I decided that I would fight everyday against the stigma of me being crazy. I decided that my complex being would belong best in the gray area, so that is where I remained.

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The Mill // 2017



## Constellation Girl

Michelle Caceres





# Chained to Her Traditions

Haya Saad



# Anticipation 2.0

## Yashelle Hunte

I never thought I had stage fright; I just deeply dread public speaking. My heart races, my voice goes quiet and I talk quickly, stuttering and slurring words. Needless to say, I hate presentations and speeches. They evoke pure terror in me: standing in front of everyone, with their eyes fixed on me like a pack of polar bears watching, waiting, ready to attack.

17 The worst part is the anticipation, the unbearable waiting. I curl and crack my toes until it is uncomfortable to stand, flex my hands until my fingers hurt from the twisting and stress.

When I joined Magruder's Literary Magazine as a sophomore, I did not think I would have to present my writing. But at the end of every school year, the Literary Magazine has a showcase at Outta the Way Café to show off the magazine and talented students to the public. The year I joined, overwhelmed by school work, I forgot about the showcase. To hold myself more accountable, I became a fiction editor. In my junior year, I had a poem published in the fiction edition of the magazine, so when the showcase came around again, I felt obligated to share my poem.

The other fiction editor, Kaci, introduces the performers. I watch the other students confidently walk to the stage, speak without hesitation, and assuredly share their poems, stories, and songs. I try to enjoy it, but a voice keeps whispering, "You're next." Every time Kaci introduces the next performer, I dread the thought of her looking my way, saying my name. I curl and crack my toes, flex my hands, twist my fingers into awkward positions, waiting with apprehension, until she locks eyes with mine and says my name. I deeply inhale and walk to the stage.

Like the noble wolf standing alone in the tundra, I look out over the sea of frozen people and think, "I'm going to freeze to up here." My heart retreats from the cold. My lungs sting from the cold dry air. I have to say something, anything. "Hello... My name's Yashelle... My poem is called *Anticipation*." I open the magazine and start.

*She is a cruel mistress,  
The old sister of Patience,  
Time's greatest ally and enemy.*

I quickly read the poem, trying to articulate every line. I glance up in the middle, and shiver from the cold.

*To all who wait, she burdens,  
To all who sleep, she wakes.  
Sweet relief from her departure.*

I smile. I'm halfway done. I look up at the crowd, no longer frozen and still, but enjoying my poem. I stop feeling the chill of the cold.

*If Patience is a virtue, what is she?  
She chases off sheep in the night,  
She taps her feet in the day.*

I remember the warmth of writing the poem in the middle of the night, impatiently waiting to return to school after being sick, giddy with excitement over the prospect of seeing my friends after my absence.

*To all who suffer through,  
Few say it was worth the wait.*

I grin at the cleverness of the last line and thank the audience. They clap as I return to my seat. I let out a deep sigh of relief, letting it wash over me, thinking, "What was I worried about?"

It's ironic my poem is called "Anticipation." I love and hate the feeling: the agonizing wait, only having over-exaggerated the event. But anticipation is ambivalent, dual connotation; excitement and apprehension. The feeling only fades after the wait is over, after the anxiety subsides, leaving a universal calm in its wake. No matter how much I dread it or cannot wait for it, the solution is always to face it. There is no need to panic over what comes next because anticipation is not always worth the wait or as bad as it seems.



# Connected

Estefani Cardoso





# Featured Artist: James Vissari



James Vissari was born in Wheaton, Maryland and now resides in rural Poolersville, MD. James attended the Corcoran School of Art, Montgomery College, and the University of Maryland. Currently, he is the President of the Montgomery Art Association in Kensington, MD. James' pieces span from two-inch paintings to murals to pen-and-ink works in public spaces. Influenced by Impressionist artists and landscapes as well as Realist artists, James is tenacious and prolific in the pursuit and production of artwork. He has a weekly art blog called "Letters to Vincent."

## **Places to see James' artwork:**

Daily Dish 8301 Grubb Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910

209 Gallery 12276 Wilkins Ave, Rockville, MD 20852

Yellow Barn Studio 7300 MacArthur Blvd, Glen Echo, MD, 20812







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# Interview with James Vissari

By Betty Xiong, Bijou Barry, Samiksha Paudel, and Paula Fudolig

## Q: What inspired you to pursue art?

JV: My uncle was the first one I ever saw drawing; he would draw stick figures, ducks, and geese. I was fascinated. My dad used to do paint by the numbers, and that was interesting to me. Bob Ross was on TV all the time, and I would always watch him.

By the time I was in the sixth grade, people would come to me and ask, “Are you taking art classes? Do you go to any art school?”

I told them no. Eventually, my father sent me to the Corcoran School of Art. I would gather up all my gear, get on the metro, go downtown, and go to school.

It wasn't really something that inspired me; it was something I always did. I love the way light looks on things, and the way colors are. I guess just my general interest in color and light inspires me. I've just always had an aptitude and interest in art greater than anything else. I would be caught looking at something and people would ask what I was looking at.

I want to show people something that, when they see it, will make them think, “Oh, I never noticed that.”

I would think to myself, Well, I can't tell you because I can't explain it to you. But I can show you by painting it. I want to show people something that, when they see it, will make them think, “Oh, I never noticed that.” These kinds of things interest me.









## Q: How much do you work/draw?

JV: My father taught me a good work ethic, so I am always working. Even on vacations! I once had a ten day vacation, and by the end of the eighth day I realized I hadn't left the place. I was sitting there studying anatomy the entire time. I am just much more interested in studying bones and anatomy than I am in going to the beach. It is, like I said, an obsession.

It's like I'm always, always working. I have to tell myself: Don't. Don't touch the phone. Don't touch the internet. You've got to relax for a minute. Because I do. But I love working. People are always like, "You're going to burn yourself out," but that hasn't happened yet. So, we'll see.

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## Q: What's your favorite artwork?

JV: My favorite artwork? Well, my name is James Vasari. Giorgio Vasari was the first, and he invented the system of going to school and learning art that way. He was the biographer of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Leonardo da Vinci just fascinates me. He was more than just an artist. He was a builder, an architect, a designer. I used to build things. I used to be a contractor building homes, so I can feel that kind of similarity.

Then there's the color work of Vincent van Gogh. I've always loved the bright colors and the way he painted. There's so many in between those too: from Picasso to Monet to Caravaggio.

Right now, my favorite artist is Teresa Alvoca. She's twenty-eight years old. She teaches around the world. The way she uses color is just unbelievable. Other than her, I enjoy Walp Artman. I admire Walp; I think he's got that work ethic. I think he's definitely done more for artists than anybody I've ever known.

My favWalp; I think he's got that work ethic. I think he's definitely done more for artists than anybody I've ever known.

My favorite artist? I'll stick with da Vinci.

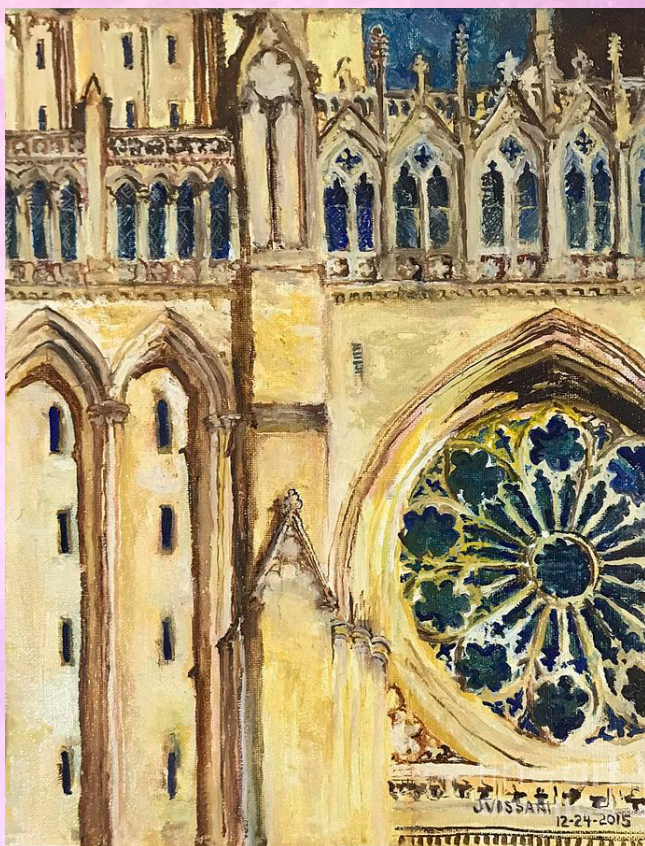
## Q: What are the roles that artists have in this society?

JV: I would like to see art make advancements in culture. I think that art should mean something. It is aesthetically pleasing; it is a furnishing in your home. But beyond that, art should replace words. Instead of writing, we should take an image that evokes a feeling. Hopefully these are the feelings that help advance cultural needs--society's needs.

When you look at a painting, maybe it will help you realize, "Oh wait a minute, the countryside is beautiful if we don't throw trash out the window." More contemporary artists will take that to a next level, like gluing trash to a canvas. When you walk in, you'd think to yourself, "Is that trash? Is that art?"

The painting I'm working on now--it's not just airplanes. My girlfriend is from Korea. The quest with that piece is that of a first-generation immigrant. She said to me, and it really touched me, that every time she sees an airplane, she thinks about going home. So that's what I'm trying to convey with that piece. The [complete] show is called Passageways; it's about being a first-generation American. If you look at the airplane, it might look completely different to you from here on, just trying relate to somebody who is first-generation American.

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You have to think about what that artist is trying to say, trying to tell us, trying make us think about.



## Q: What do you want to say to those art students that aren't sure what they want to do in the future?

JV: It's not easy. One of the misperceptions about being an artist is that you get to sleep all day, hang around with the hippest people, and have parties nonstop. But it's so much work getting there. We all have these ideas as young artists that we are going to change the world, that we are going to do something so hip and cool that every-  
25 one's going to love us. But there's such a foundation in the history, in learning what's behind it all.

### You have to know you'll never get to stop learning.

You'll never stop taking classes. It's like studying to be a doctor or a lawyer or a computer technician or anything else. There's a lot of study involved. It's not just that I couldn't get through high school so I decided to be an artist. There are so many different things to learn.

When people put their pieces in for judging, they wonder, "Why can't I win anything? Why am I not getting the ribbon? Why are people not buying my stuff?" Maybe there is something you need to study. Because when the judges judge, they do look for history. It's like a secret club that's like, "Hey, these are the techniques we learned." When I look at a painting, I can tell if the artist spent ten minutes on it or ten years. I can tell what their background is. I can tell who they studied, who their interests are, who they were influenced by. If you can walk in knowing all that, you are the king of the room, because you can tell what's going on while everyone else is just scratching their heads. That's where you want to be as an artist. You don't want to be like, "I did this because I felt like it's the right thing to do." That's good, emotional, and shows a part of your soul. But if you attach that to the history and education behind it, that's what's impressive. It's impressive to me, to the judges, to the buyers and the gallery owners. Because in order to make a living off of your art, you have to make people interested in it. Either you find a gimmick, or you build on thousands of years of foundations that are out there.

It's always about learning the next thing. You have to figure out what works for you. As far as being a student, sitting in front of a lecture, I was never any good at that.

Listening to my English teacher speak, or my Algebra teacher trying to teach me a formula--forget about it. I had to sit alone and do it. A lot of artists worked in solitude. I think that's one of the reasons I like being an artist. I can do it very quietly by myself. You have to figure out how you learn, what's best for you, and pursue it that way.

For a number of years I went through my own self-study for something that, if I had gone to the right instructor, I could have figured out in twenty minutes. It's about finding the right instructor and staying with it, doing your art and discovering the right thing. There are more things involved in painting than just mixing colors and sticking your brush in paint. There are so many different classes that you'd never think about.

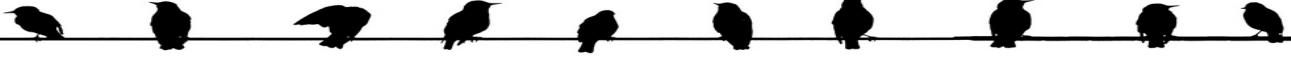


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When you finally get the **boatload** of knowledge that it takes, you can go anywhere that you want to go.

# The Adoption Process

## Nicole Laffan



10 months old: I have a nice life. This orphanage is heaven. I have all the friends I could ever need, baby dance parties, and room service. This strange older couple has shown up out of nowhere. They come and hold me for the first time and the first logical thing I think of is to scream and cry. They are not my caregivers. Screaming and crying seems like the right thing to do. I finally get to go back to my caregiver. She speaks to me in hushed tones and then gives me back to the strange couple. But they don't seem so scary anymore. I've been adopted.

5 years old: I have been in what they call home for four years now. Life is better than I could have thought. Mom and Dad are real fun and they make me laugh lots. Bethany looks like me, but mom and dad do not. They tell me that I am adopted and so is Bethany. Bethany and I have dance parties and Mom and Dad record them. I like seeing myself on the screen. There are Bethany toys and Nicole toys because big sister Bethany does not like me playing with her toys. But we have fun playing together and then they become Bethany and Nicole toys. Our doggy is real fluffy too. I can walk him all by myself with Mom watching me. At school my friends ask me why I have a white mom and dad. I say because they chose me and wanted me; I am adopted.

10 years old: We moved from Tennessee to Maryland. I'm in the fifth grade. Explaining to people that I am adopted is a new and uncomfortable thing but I meet people who are also adopted. Some of them know who their birth parents are. Why can't I know too? Did my birth parents not want me, and abandoned me? Maybe they were superheroes and they couldn't keep me safe so they sent me to live with my current parents. Maybe they are spies and they had a secret romance, so they couldn't keep me because of their forbidden love. I suppose I'll never know. But me and my friends are proud that we are adopted.

15 years old: So what if I am adopted? Is it weird? Not really, it's just my life and I have nothing else to compare it to. I can't find out who my biological parents are. They left me outside a hospital, which means there's no paperwork, no family medical history, nothing. They gave me up for a better life I guess. I love and hate them for that. Who am I? Where do I come from? I'm left with these questions and a hole in my identity. My parents have been there when my birth parents could not. They taught me the things my birth parents never could, showed me love that my birth parents never showed me. I do not need my biological parents when I have real parents.

17 years old: My sister and I have always had to explain to people who still live



with their biological parents that we are no different than their family. We fight. We laugh. We go on vacation. The only thing that is different is our genetics. I am who I am because of the people who raised me. They showed me everything I could be and let me reach for the stars. I thank my birth parents for giving me the opportunity to know what family is, for loving me enough to let me go, and for wanting a better life for me than they could provide. My parents and sister have stepped up and helped me grow into the young woman I am today. We are 0% blood and 100% family. My birth parents might have given me life, but my parents taught me to live.



28

## Among the Chaos

Deepica Premaratne

# Badlands

Sakeenah Dasti

On Tuesday I woke up  
and there were tears in my eyes.  
And I was awake but there was a haze,  
something raw and desperate, washing over me.  
pulling me apart and piecing me together.  
I fantasized that I held the world in my hands  
and it was glowing and beautiful and I was tired.

Tired, but I still have things to do, places to go,  
expectations to meet. Work and  
take time, study atlases,  
talk and smile and cheat and cry  
and lie down in tangled moonlit sheets and drift.  
I wake up on Wednesday  
and still I am empty.

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The Mill // 2017



# Clarity

Sakeenah Dasti





# Growth

Cielo Dela Cruz

# A World Detached

Liam James

My eyes were closed, yet I was moving. A cold wind blew past my tunic, chilling me to the bone. The sound of horse hooves thundered. I opened my eyes. I was beside three other men, all of us bound. We were in the middle of a prisoner convoy headed down a steep stone slope towards the military outpost, Helgen. Some of the others joined in the petty conversation, but I found no interest in such matters.

Like the beginning of my high school career, this scene is one I remember vividly. My first month in high school consisted of a blur of new names, faces, processes, challenges, possibilities, and confusion. Privately, I wondered, how on earth am I going to accomplish this? Is that project really due so soon? What is that teacher's name again? Should I ask this question? How do I study? I'd never needed to before! Confused and lost, I quickly fell behind freshman year.

31 Next, I faced another challenge. Lacking any sense of place or time, my caravan suddenly came to a stop. A voice commanded me to step forward. Obliging, I walked towards the captain. He asked, "And you. Who are you?" Who am I? Am I an Argonian? Inferior, but adaptable. Or maybe a High Elf? Proud and indifferent. Should I throw my lot in with the Wood Elves? Renouncing progress and maintaining my earthen ties. Or am I an Imperial or Redguard immigrant caught in the crossfire of this civil war? Perhaps a fellow Nord returning to his home? Aside from the choice of who I am, I must also come to terms with my physical appearance. High, low, broad, shallow, flat, or arched. How do I look? How do others see me? How will I see myself? Who am I?

The answer to this question I've found is not simple. Struggling with possibility after the death of many passions, I floated throughout Sophomore year as aimless as a ghost. And while I knew, relatively, who I was, I had not yet discovered who I wanted to be, who I could be, and how I would become the best version of myself. This confusion and lack of direction distracted me from myself, setting me on a path where I found myself in others instead of on my own. Luckily, I narrowly escaped those tumultuous times.

Now I stand beneath the executioner, knees bent, fatal blade raised high above. I have accepted my fate. Any thoughts of escape are immediately vanquished as I watch a fellow prisoner mercilessly executed before me. I know I cannot think about what will happen next; otherwise, I will lose all faith. I have to believe I will be saved by some other-worldly power. Darkness descends as a storm of fire and stone pours from the sky. A circling dragon's fiery breath engulfs all, be it friend or foe. Shocked and stunned, my feet react instinctively. I find shelter and seize this opportunity. My chance has come, and like a phoenix reborn, through fire, I must forge the path ahead alone. The journey is uncertain, but I must not squander this opportunity that has now been afforded to me.

Much like my junior and senior years, as Sparrowhawk and I escaped from Helgen that day, I changed from acceptance to determination. The challenges I faced were seemingly overwhelming: an unrelenting tide I could never hope to influence. I am now in the midst of my senior year, and I have conquered the waves. Standing on the shores, I ask myself. Where do I go from here? There is an open expanse before me, a valley with innumerable villages, interactions, and quests. I must find the one that turns me into the hero I want to be. I gaze down once more at the list I scribbled earlier. One of these, I am sure.





Puggo  
Aliyah Viray

# Mother Tongue

## Stephanie Ramirez

When I hear the phrase “mother tongue,” I picture being a child again with my first language as my literal mother. My parents being from Mexico, it makes sense that my mother is Spanish; I needed her to socialize and survive. Through my mother, Spanish taught me to laugh, to think, and to have fun by doing things like swimming.

Swimming was my favorite thing to do as a kid. The pool was the deepest world I'd ever been submerged in until I found a greater world when I turned four years old and was tossed into another pool called kindergarten. This new environment was full of children with mothers of English. Although I could have chosen to stay within my comfort zone, I decided to become a child of English as well. Language can be anyone's mother, mentor, cousin or friend. English became my second mother in the sense that it taught me 33 who I am, what I believe in, and what I value in my life.

I valued that we should be equals and take pride in English for not having gender-specific articles for their nouns that no object may be considered as “feminine” or “masculine,” and I fell in love with the wide range of absurd Spanish expressions to express what words cannot in English. One day I was at a soccer game and heard something that sounded like my mother Spanish, but was actually her close-cousin Portuguese. I was shocked by how I was able to read and understand it when I came across Portuguese. That's when I realized that when you learn any language, you can immediately find another that is somewhat related, some more than others. I want to get to know more languages and the children they have raised.

One of my greatest breakthroughs with language happened when I attended a summer program called Center for Talented Youth held by Johns Hopkins University.

Only a minimal fluency in English was required to attend the program, so many international students who attended were unable to understand English colloquialisms. My friend Mary wasn't Chinese; however, she was able to speak Mandarin fluently. I admired how she was able to bridge the language barrier and help the students who could not understand English colloquialisms. This inspired me to learn Mandarin. When I got back home, I immediately went to the library and picked up a stack of books. I downloaded apps and left sticky notes around the room so that I could remember to practice. The next year when I came back, I made friends with some classmates from China, and in a conversation we had they brought up that they were big fans of the song “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi. Excitedly, I translated a couple lines of the songs in English first, of which one of the lines was, “You are a magnet and I am metal. I am getting closer to you and making a plan. Just thinking about you makes my heart race.” I then pointed to the only Chinese word I knew which was “heart” and in Chinese is called “xīn.” Afterwards, I made gestures to indicate beating and my friends applauded my efforts.

From then on, every summer I would go to the library and bring with me new notebooks to write down and make-up lessons for the language that I wanted to take a chance on. My goal is to be able to be fluent in more than just two languages and to be



able to travel the world. I want to be able to use my language skills to connect with people from other cultures and hopefully have some impact on the people I meet, to try and make the world a better place by becoming a language bridge the way Mary was.



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Piero  
Stefany Rosales De Leon



# El Salvador

## David Caceres

We sit under the evening sun on the truck edge, our sore fingers gripping the hot metal frame. My eyes race through the passing mountains, the tattered homes on the barren field, and the kids dressed in school uniforms walking along the roadside. The scorching sun and the gust of dry wind bombard my face as I long for water. The scrawny pickup truck, glutted with luggage, jolts along the rocky road and hits a pothole; my body jerks forward but someone yanks me still. I look over to my cousins and we burst out laughing.

As a child, this strange place was a chance for adventurous escapades from home, but this time, in March 2017, I truly felt that I was returning to my motherland, El Salvador.

From the moment we hop off the plane, I feel a sense of humbleness. The seasonal heatwaves burn our skin. The poverty-stricken conditions, the heavy marks on families left by gang violence, and the societal constraints are everywhere.

Drinking water is scarce, and our water supply is cut short for many days. My cousins, born into the farmlands, grow up to be farmers unless they journey north; they learn to use a sickle at a young age and suffer juvenile labor in the heat. I once dared to ask my cousin Christian how much he earned, but I never thought I would regret asking: \$4 a day of hard fieldwork for a father and three working children to support a family of eight all living under one roof.

Yet, these economic conditions never rip apart my family's morals. In fact, it empowers them to become stronger and to hold tighter to the values of a family-oriented culture. My family's strong spirit inspires me to persevere with humility through the constraints of life.

I suddenly realized that I feel true happiness only when I live in the instantaneous moments of life. Even as poor living conditions continue to endanger my own family, it's heartwarming to look for the positive qualities in my community, even if the events are small and insignificant.

It's heartening to see my mom cooking tortillas by the fire stand with my abuela and tía. My cousins and I play under the pitch-black night, fish in the nearby river, explore the vast terrain under the glaring sun, eat the wild fruits, but, most importantly, live in the moment.

Seeing my parents' excitement when returning to their homeland and seeing my Salvadoran relatives in their ordinary lives pushes me to reflect on who I am. Seeing my cousins, sunburnt, skinny and frail, tend the farm animals and look after each other while



working in the fields motivates me to stay humble and examine my family's roots. Seeing families breathe life into the streets of Moncagua with dances and Sunday food markets under the blazing sun and tasting the variety of Salvadoran sweets reinforces my unique culture and helps me take pride in my own Latino identity.

My travel experiences help me look firsthand at my own cultural identity and see the humility of my family. They make me realize the opportunities I take for granted and that I have at my own disposal the potential to change myself and improve the negative stereotypes of my identity. I will become my ancestor's wildest dream.

Seeing my oppressed families in the economic reality of El Salvador encourages me to break the poverty cycle to pursue the better future that my parents aspire for me. I refuse to turn away from my bloodline; rather, I empower myself whenever I return to my humble roots.

It's uplifting to realize that my parents came to the US in desperation to escape a civil war to look for better opportunities. Now it's in my hands to continue and empower this dream for a better future.



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# Mastery of the Violin

Marissa Choy

# Closet

## Meghan Kane

I am twelve years old and reading in the cafeteria. It's a new book series my dad gave me, *The Mortal Instruments*, about demon hunters. I am reading a scene with one of my favorite characters, a warlock named Magnus Bane, when I see the words "freewheeling bisexual warlock." That day was the first day I saw that word: bisexual. I had no idea what it meant. As far as I was aware, you could either be gay or straight. The idea of being able to like more than one gender was a whole new concept to me that sparked years of questioning and denial.

I am fourteen years old and entering high school. This is my first experience where the majority of my friend group is not straight. I am slowly beginning to realize that yes, I do like girls and yes, I do like guys. Not only that, but that it is okay to not be straight and that if those you care for can't accept you, then they don't truly care about you, only a version of yourself where you constantly hide an integral piece of your identity.

I am fourteen and realize that I want to go on a date with a girl. I don't know what to do anymore. I don't know if people can tell that I'm hiding this, and if so, what they think of me for trying to hide it. I know that I cannot hide this secret much longer. I don't want to hide this anymore. I see the people at pride and those at my school who wear their pride bracelets and don't try to hide their sexuality and I realize how much I want to be like them, how much I want to say this is who I am and have no shame in it. I have discovered what it means to be in the closet and I hate it more than anything I have ever experienced.

I am fourteen years old and meet the first openly bisexual person I have ever actually met. She does not care what people think of her. She is strong and does not try to hide a single aspect of herself. I want to be like her. I want to be open about my sexuality and the idea that I don't have to let it control what people think of me.

I am fifteen and come out for the first time. My friends asks me, "What is your sexuality?" I'm hesitant at first. Yes, I want to tell people, but I also don't know how she will react. Then again, she was one of the first friends I made when I moved schools in the sixth grade and I've seen her interact with many different people of the LGBT community without caring in the least. I trust her with my life, so I tell her. Three simple words: "I am bisexual." I have to admit, her reaction is one of my favorite ones I will receive. She says, "Yeah, I kind of figured. No one can ship gay couples as much as you do and not be at least slightly gay themselves." I am finally free of that terrible closet.

I am fifteen years old and out. In the last month of my freshman year, I have come out to the majority of my friends and family. The feeling of freedom that comes with no longer having to hide a single aspect of myself is overwhelming. As a matter of fact, it still is a truly amazing feeling every time I am able to tell someone that I am bisexual. I haven't had a bad reaction yet, but I know that eventually my luck will run out. However, I never want to go back in the closet. The feeling of freedom that comes from being able to be open about who I love is something that I never want to give back.



I am fifteen years old and in my sophomore year. I make gay jokes and puns about my sexuality. I wear pride bracelets that I make and t-shirts I buy with gay jokes on them. I plan to go to pride as soon as I can and I tell all my friends and family and have never felt freer. I was going to submit this story as anonymous, but then my dad told me that hiding behind the name anonymous is just another closet door, and I am never going to hide myself from the world again. Just maybe, this could help someone else free themselves from the closet.



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## Tattered

Cielo Dela Cruz

# Juan Jose Campero Guzman: Mayor of Magruder

Samiksha Paudel and Scot Ehrhardt



*Seniors Juan Jose Campero Guzman and Kristen Martindell take pictures before the Homecoming Dance.*

It is a rare feat for a single student to change the culture of a school. Senior Juan Jose Campero Guzman, the “Mayor of Magruder,” has done just that.

Juan will graduate this spring with a wide array of athletic and social experiences, ranging from captain of both the handball and bocce teams to the ambassador for Best Buddies club to capturing the prestigious title of 2017 Homecoming King. More important than his official roles, Juan has made Magruder a more thoughtful, inclusive community.

Juan was born with a condition that required him to have open heart surgery at three months old. Due to this condition, Juan exerts twice the effort of a typical person for physical and mental tasks in his daily life. His social life, however, is soaring.

Juan’s teachers and classmates attribute his popularity to his ability to connect with other people and make them feel special. His amplified voice is often heard in the hallways, asking how someone’s day is going.

Danielle Paluti, the staff sponsor of Best Buddies, says, “Juan has always been outgoing. He is very comfortable here. Obviously, being crowned Homecoming King is an indicator of that.”

One of Juan’s strengths is surrounding himself with positive, supportive peers.

Owen Hochuli has been friends with Juan since the second grade at Sequoya Elementary School. “He is willing to approach other people before they come up to him. By doing that, he creates a bond with each person he meets,” Hochuli says.

Fresia Guzman, Juan’s mother, says, “Juan is caring toward other people. For him,



everyone is the same. There are no distinctions, no discrimination.”

He thrives off of any opportunity he has to socialize with people. Juan is not shy and will introduce himself to people he does not know. He joined the handball team after seeing James Mills in a jersey, and asking what sport it was for.

“I don’t know how he remembers everyone’s name,” says Senior Kristen Martindell.

Juan’s preeminent place at Magruder was solidified on October 13 when he was crowned Homecoming King. Students voted anonymously through the school website. Juan was unaware that he was even a candidate.

At the homecoming football game, he was called down to the field, and the crowd began cheering. Fresia Guzman says, “The school was chanting ‘Juan, Juan.’ I have it on video. I almost cried.”

Juan remembers the chaos and excitement. He recalls thinking, “Bro, what is going on in my life right now?” However, he has not allowed the celebrity status to change who he is. As for the crown, he says, “It’s at home. I don’t know where.”

Juan’s coronation was a historic moment at Magruder as it showed the love and acceptance people have for Juan, but the love extends well beyond this single incident. Homecoming was one point in a steady stream of positive experiences for Juan at Magruder High School.

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Jenny Foster, Transition Support Teacher, says, “Popularity is just not looks and money and clothing. It really speaks to another value that I think Magruder students have, and Juan exposed us to that.”

High school students are frequently portrayed as superficial and inconsiderate, but many adolescents at Magruder break this stereotype.

Hochuli says, “Honestly, everyone is open to meeting new people, making new friends. No one is going to judge someone based on what they look like or what they sound like.”

Hochuli’s perception reflects the larger picture of Magruder: that of a diverse place in terms of culture, interest, socioeconomic status, and ability. Students who appear very different on the surface often come together in meaningful ways.

Kristen Martindell accompanied Juan to the Homecoming dance. She says, “He is just like me. He is like different but the same...it opened my eyes. People don’t think about that--he is just like anybody else.” Martindell is president of Best Buddies club in addition to being a peer buddy.

For the people close to Juan, he has made a lasting impact on the trajectory of their lives. Martindell will major in special education next fall. Fresia Guzman left a career in finance and economics to work with the wellbeing of impacted youth, including finding employment opportunities and ensuring mental health.

Juan would like to work in the field of customer service, or drive a monster truck. Though he plans to attend Montgomery College in the fall, he has accepted a position at Magruder as Assistant Coach for the handball team next year.

“Magruder is awesome! The people are nice,” says Juan.

Fresia Guzman says, “He’s going to miss the school a lot. For us--for him--this school is a safe place.”



# Lean on Me

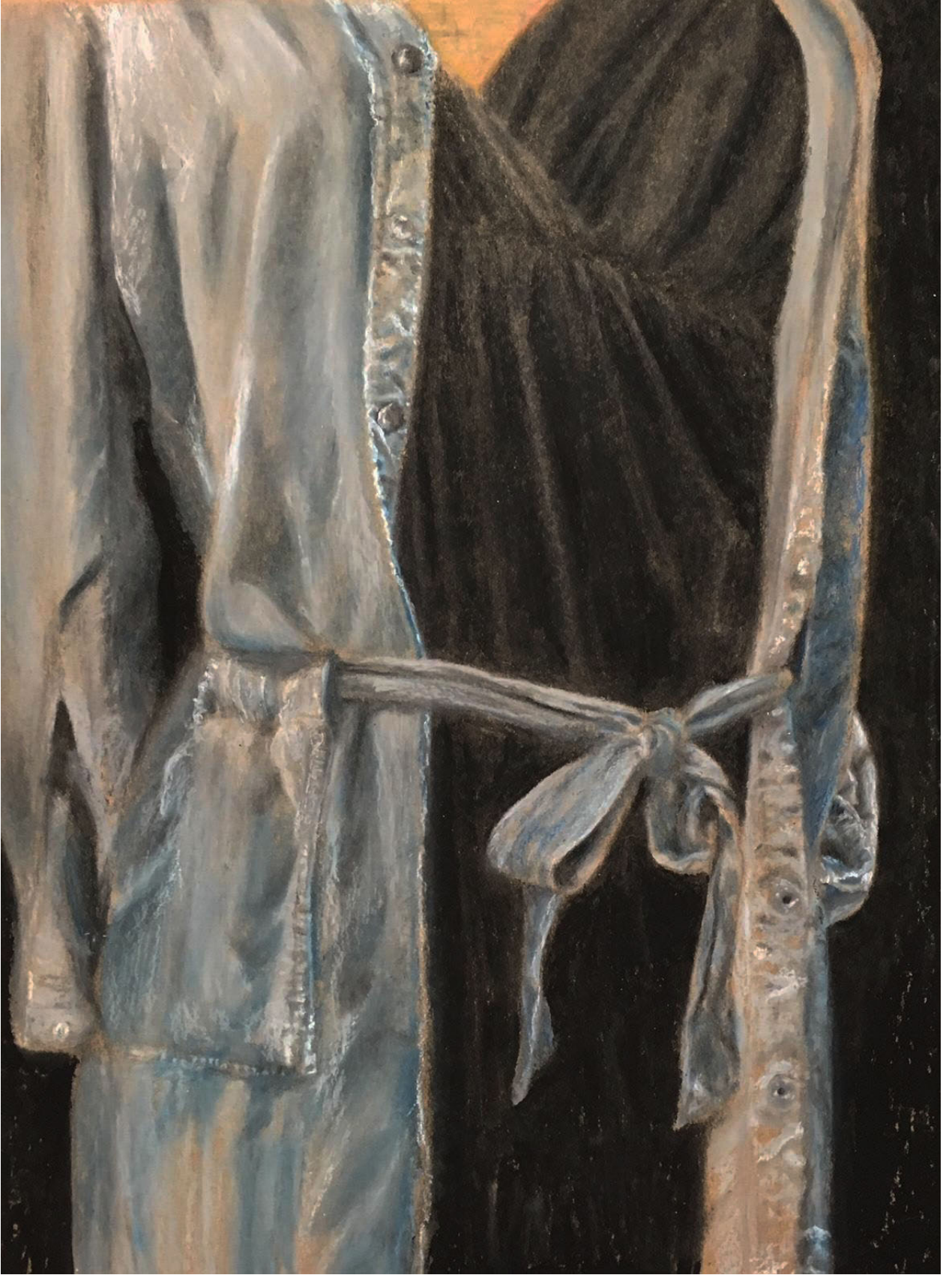
Jaime Cantarero





Focus  
Jairo Orellana





Study in Blue  
Trinity Aguilar



# Royal Superstar

## Claire Simonson

In the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield says, “If a girl looks swell when she meets you, who gives a damn if she’s late? Nobody.” This quote is relatable to me because I am a combination of rockstar and supermodel, so this was basically written for me. In addition, I have a tendency to be late for important events (like Judith Wheatley’s 6th period class) and no one seems to care because I am such an awesome person. I’m not even marked tardy!

I believe that this particular statement is relatable to my life solely because I am the most incredible person on this planet. However, some may disagree with this statement. 44 Their disagreement is understandable because not everyone has the same opinion even though the opposing opinion may be viewed as incorrect.

I agree with the remark Holden made. At age 13, I was one of the leads in a school show. I had gotten my hair and makeup done at home. The call time was 5:30 and the show started at 7:00. I arrived at 6:15. However, no one cared because I was already made up and I was one of the leads. Technically, they needed me so they could not be mad I was late. I learned that people depend on you more than you assume.

A swell example of this is the movie *The Princess Diaries* with Julie Andrews and Anne Hathaway. The Queen (Andrews) arrives late for her own ball but no one cares since she is the queen. She says, “A queen is never late; everyone else is simply early.” Some believe that you should never be late to anything, no matter who you are. They would rebut that part of the passage from the book.

Not everyone would agree that looking good is an excuse for being late. Why? I have no idea. But for some reason, people think that. If I am late to school, I will face the consequence of getting marked tardy, no matter how nice I look. This teaches you the discipline of being punctual and that is a very important character trait to have. Some believe it is important to be on time so they would rebut the remark that Holden made.

In conclusion, in the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield says, “If a girl looks swell when she meets you, who gives a damn if she’s late? Nobody.” This quote is good to relate to a personal experience because I have found myself in many scenarios in which being gorgeous made up for being late. After reading my paper, I want people to think I am a royal superstar. Because I am. The end.

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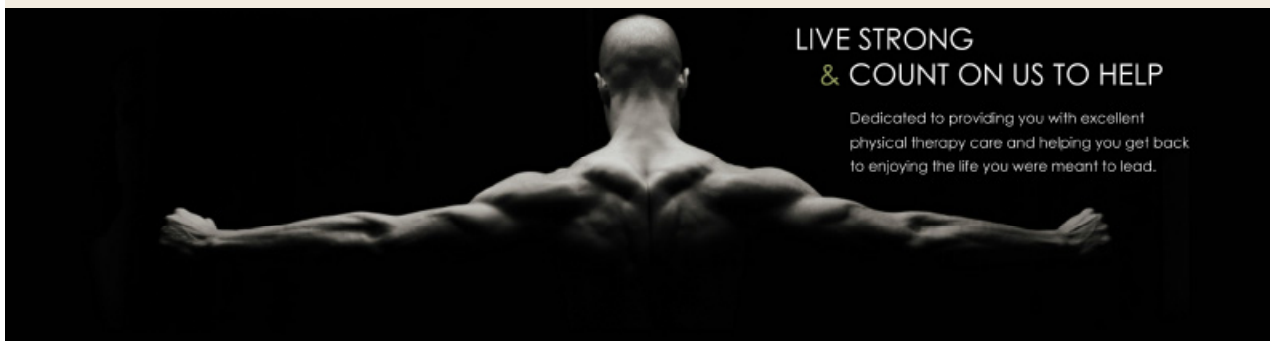
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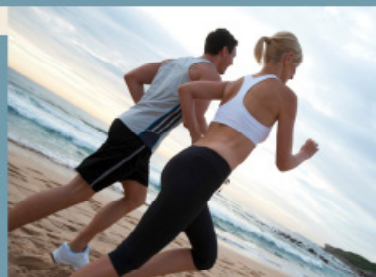
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