

An artistic oil painting of a plate of food, possibly a burger or a large sandwich, with a fork and knife resting on it. The painting uses warm, textured brushstrokes in shades of brown, orange, and yellow, giving it a painterly and somewhat abstract appearance. The plate is white with a blue rim. The background is dark and indistinct.

DALAT INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL 2022-2023

THE SCRIVENER

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

If I could select one word to describe the contents of this year’s magazine, it would be “raw.” Each composition captures the interior world of the writer, laced with the intensity of emotion and contemplation. The symbol of a bathroom as a space of vulnerability manifests itself in two of these poems, yet it also epitomizes the process of crafting these pieces. In the walls of the page, as in the walls of a bathroom, the writer is given the space to weep, to express the bizarre, to reflect on memories, and to imbue silence with an echo. Through their depiction of grief, loss, disillusionment, and hope, writers of The Scrivener reveal the insides of the “bathroom,” yet, through sincere and intentional writing, ultimately redeem their difficult experiences.

We want to thank each and every one of you skilled writers who submitted to The Scrivener. Thank you for the hours you spent pondering ideas, scribbling in a frenzy, or simply staring at a blank page. Thank you for the vulnerability with which you articulated your thoughts. Thank you for your diligence in critiquing pieces and patience in editing your own. And thank you Mr. Jens for providing the space and support to continue the publication of The Scrivener.

Reader, as you enter this literary haven, I hope you find healing in the words and leave feeling less alone.

– Abigail Rinkenberger, on behalf of The Editors

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The End of Dry Season <i>by Carin Roylance</i>	4
Train <i>by Abigail Rinkenberger</i>	5
Folding <i>by Jadyn Bui</i>	6
Integrals <i>by Jadyn Bui</i>	7
We Catch No Movement <i>by Jens Hieber</i>	8
The Voyage <i>by Joshua Conklin</i>	9
Counterfeit <i>by Josiah Blacklock</i>	11
Green Bathroom Tiles <i>by Joyce Wan</i>	18
Our Fragile Sky <i>by Keiryn Sandahl</i>	19
Crying in the Bathroom <i>by Larissa Lee</i>	21
Pain <i>by Michael Hsu</i>	22
The Approachment of Fear <i>by Myra Lim</i>	23
The Instruments of the Orchestra <i>by Sophia Teoh</i>	24
Hooves <i>by Evan Juday</i>	26
I Once Knew a Girl <i>by Finley White</i>	30
Paroxysmal Anxiety <i>by Finley White</i>	31
Grief <i>by Anonymous</i>	32
I Don’t Like to Remember <i>by Anonymous</i>	33

THE END OF DRY SEASON

Carin Roylance

The end of dry season.

All day long the ashen sky above merges into the scorching earth
and hushed clouds blend as a single darkened canopy.
They press the scorched earth
--heavy but dry.

Edges and borders blend as sky to palm to dusty ground blur like a mirage,
tropical glories distorted in the heat,
and all is muffled as heavens drift heavy with the anticipation of rain.

The hot dry dampness whispers inaudible, unfulfilled promises.
Even the trees are raspy.
Even the birds sound parched in their choruses.

And still. All is still.
Still waiting,
still scorched,
still as the little brown leaves that only rustle reluctantly
under foot.

The ashen sky dissipates
and an arid wind picks up the fragile papery leaves like whispers in a church.

Everything waits in shriveled expectation.
Wondering . . .
if the sky has forgotten how to rain.

TRAIN

Abigail Rinkenberger

The train slithered down the street.
Its curtains, when closed,
Quivered in somber white,
Like cloth over a corpse.

I heard its tread in the night,
The patter of a courier.
Steam fell from its carrier,
Envelopes to humanity.

The train slithered down the street.
Its curtains, when open,
Issued a pleasant glow,
Like fire under a kettle.

I tried to board it once,
To halt it,
To watch its wheels glide to a stop,
Like the slender legs of a mare.

But it passes me, like a stranger,
Our coats barely brushing,
Cutting through steel tracks,
Oxidized by fallen dreams.

I glimpse it, through my pane:
Curtains shut, it slithers down the street.

FOLDING

Jadyn Bui

I assumed the role of a creator,
Surveying the paper in my hand.
A surface blank, a country untouched:
Such potential lay in this barren land!

What wondrous work to create today?
What fountains spring from desert ground?
When powers of mind act through the hand,
The force of creation knows no bound.

Many majestic mountains arose,
Perilous passes, viridian vales;
From a flat sheet I folded creases,
Each one part of a wondrous tale.

How to proceed on this journey profound
As mountains morphed into limbs and scales?
Now truly I walked by the map in my mind:
One slip, and my work was sure to fail.

At last I crafted what I sought
After hours of thought and attention.
A wondrous dragon with wide-spread wings,
A creature made in three dimensions.

Always perched atop my desk
Whether I work or eat or play,
Its blazing eyes and fiery mouth
In consternation seemed to say,

“What is a sheet of paper worth,
That with such care you sculpted me?
How much more significant
Is your own life and destiny?”

“Lose or forget me, only this do I ask:
Don’t stow my words on a dusty shelf!
Your precious life is a sheet of paper;
What are you folding with yourself?”

INTEGRALS

Jadyn Bui

Integrals never fail to amaze
Combined with numbers like e and pi,
Predicting products,
Producing new patterns,
Evaluating the volumes of revolved objects.

Integrals push the limits of reality
As x approaches the unimaginable,
The invisible,
Yet emerging at the end
A familiar numeral.

Integrals are the pinnacle of mathematics
Linking derivatives and infinitesimals,
Abstract and concrete,
Continuous and discrete,
Finite and infinite.

Integrals are a bridge between two worlds,
Which only those whose minds are open
Might learn to cross.

$$\int_a^b f(x) dx$$

WE CATCH NO MOVEMENT

Jens Hieber

We catch no movement with a furléd sail,
the rocking skiff makes forward movement balk;
to stutter out, away from anchored dock
and seek the windy wide and misty gale.
With only breadth to breach the corded veil
the gears of years are blown at breeze's knock;
for rooted mast but mocks the soaring hawk
so nighttime mind unshuts to unspun tale.
Behind, the churning foam of threaded wake;
above, the dappled build on saxe sky;
below, the waiting currents rise and fall;
ahead, the curve of hoping, merging break
between the roiling sheen and azure dye—
this sail unfurled, encloses, widens, all.

THE VOYAGE

Joshua Conklin

Any friendship is a voyage.
When they begin, you are unsure
Whether the boat will stay afloat,
Whether it will stand the test of time.
Some stay on the dock, afraid of what may come.
Others blunder into the boat,
Overturning it with the first impetuous step.
But those who take the risk find the adventure worth it.

Some days the sailing is smooth and serene.
Not a storm lies in sight.
By bright day, clouds float along in the azure sky,
The warm sun's rays beam with delight.
By still night, the glimmering stars guide you,
The peace of content silence rests on the waters.
Your sail billows as the wind tenderly blows,
Gently yet purposefully pushing you along.
With the wind at your back and your hand at the rudder,
All is well.

Some days the clouds obscure the sun,
Offering no satisfaction.
The lines fall slack, and the wind dies down.
In the lull, the seaworthiness of captain and vessel shows.
Though some may stop, lost in the fog forever,
The true pilot plunges the oars in and keeps the Voyage going.

Some days two ships meet
For a time.
They share the Voyage,
Focused on the same heading
Before the winds take them their separate ways.

Some days misery and gloom darkens the sky
The waves toss and turn,
The foam blinds you.
The wind howls in your ears,
Breaking lines and mizzen.

The only hope lies within your breast.
Hope that a rock will not come
To shatter the boat forever.
Hope that the storm will come to an end,
That fair wind will blow, and the sun will shine.
Here is when a bond is tested to its absolute limits.
When the swells threaten to overturn his boat,
Loyalty clings to the wheel like a steadfast captain,
Hoping to steer to safety.

For some, the storm overwhelms;
They abandon ship;
The boat sinks, and the friendship is lost.
But for those who remain aboard,
Those who stay faithfully at the helm,
They will live to see the skies again.
The sun will turn its golden face to the battered vessel.
The wind will blow favorably once more.
And despite all odds,
The Voyage continues.

COUNTERFEIT

Josiah Blacklock

Swish.

Alex Christian nonchalantly smacked his gum and slammed the ball on the cracked court a few times.

“We gotta remake teams- you and Mike are too overpowered,” the kid in the black tee and white gym shorts complained.

It was a crisp morning in Nevada. Humidity was down from last night, but dew still soaked the court in patches. The sun’s long yellow rays cast geometric patterns across the hoops and splashed the players with its warmth. Wispy clouds fought to stay alive as the world came alive with light and color. The air had a little nip, and a slight breeze occasionally picked up Alex’s brown hair and whipped it around him.

“It’s not cool- we can’t get a shot off or even drive into the paint!”

Alex grinned and rolled his eyes, casually turning two-seventy degrees to face the small set of weather-worn bleachers. “Next team.”

A short redhead and a well-built kid in Nike slides stood up from the bleachers and sauntered over to the three-point line, intentionally ignoring the protesting black-shirted kid with the mullet and his quiet teammate. Black-shirt frowned as his teammate pulled him off the court.

“What’s up fellas?”

Fear stabbed at Alex’s stomach. He knew the voice: Jack Norton. Self-proclaimed liberator of the Whitney Public High Schoolers’ pocket change. A big guy with a small brain, made even worse by the fact that Alex had swindled him out of the answers to a chemistry test.

Alex spun slowly around, a smile plastered haphazardly on his face. Jack walked right up to Alex until they were inches apart. “Hey Jack! How’s life treated you?”

The unflinching angry face of Jackson stared right back at him. With deep-set eyes that pinched his nose and freckles that looked like spilled pepper, Jackson was by no means a handsome fellow. But that could be the inner judge talking. Jack grunted as if he had heard Alex’s thoughts. Then he swung his fist.

Alex, expecting the blow, deftly feinted back towards the bleachers and away from his aggressor. Jack’s eyebrows narrowed even further, if that was possible. Alex dropped the basketball and let it bounce a few times.

“Look, I didn’t mean no harm. How was I to know that the tests were different from class to class? I failed too, if it makes you feel any better!”

“It doesn’t,” Jack grunted, advancing in a way that was probably supposed to be menacing but instead made him look like his legs didn’t bend.

“Okay, okay. I know you want a fight, but let’s not do it right now while Mr.

Schmidt is watching.”

Jack, proving he was as stupid as he looked, turned around to confirm the presence of Schmidt.

Just like that, Alex was gone.

Alex’s life had been a real turnaround story. In first grade, he had been an outcast among his peers. His lack of social skill and tendency to say the wrong thing at the wrong time had earned him the reputation of being the class idiot. But a few years and a lot of observing later, Alex had begun to understand what made humans tick. By middle school, he had a good group of friends and a reputation for semi-funny jokes. By high school, he had managed to establish himself as a cool kid. It didn’t mean he didn’t have the occasional encounter with Jack, but life in general was looking up.

The academic part of school was also a breeze, for Alex had always been uncannily intelligent. At the age of six, he was able to read Agatha Christie, and by eight he was mentally solving square roots. It wasn’t until he got some friends that he realized that ordinary people didn’t walk around with an almost photographic memory and the ability to multiply three-digit numbers instantly in their heads.

But of course, exposing these talents would only lead to more criticism from his peers. So instead, he chose to neglect his studies and focus more on sports. Life was about having fun.

“I’m coming for you, Christian!”

Alex snapped out of his reverie, taking a turn by storm. The dirty hallway rushing by him refused to yield a possible exit. Alex rounded another corner and was greeted by stairs at his feet. Alex didn’t think twice.

It wasn’t until halfway up the stairs that he finally started to feel it. His lungs wheezed and his calves burned, but he ignored it and pushed on. Upon reaching the top, he found himself in the cold, quiet atmosphere of the library.

Alex skidded around the Biography section and took a right at the Flash Fiction. There he stopped. His breath was quiet but rapid, and his throat was scratchy from the air. He took time to take in his surroundings. The library was big for a public school, with a large curved roof with concentric circles and arches extending from the apex. The carpet was slightly faded but immaculately vacuumed, with polka-dotted beanbags scattered randomly throughout the rotunda. The low sound of a backup generator hummed harmoniously with the relentless blowing of the old air conditioners.

A door barging open from the far side of the library snapped Alex to attention. He was being chased. He wasn’t free yet. He held his breath and peered furtively from behind the shelf.

The last thing Alex Christian remembered before he died was the whistling of Jack’s fist on a collision course with his head.

* * *

“I didn’t expect it to come this way.”

It was a half-truth. The reality was that he lived a life full of curve balls. Of course he had expected it. Just not so soon.

The engineer he had summoned gulped nervously, obviously fretting over what he would say next. *Good. A healthy dose of fear isn’t a bad thing.*

“I’m guessing you want to know who I am,” he spoke again. His voice was

one part authoritative, one part soft, and one part dangerous.

The engineer again visibly gulped and stiffened, eyes darting around the cold shadowed room. “I know who you are.”

The whole thing was a bit cliché, but people tended to forget that fact when their life was at stake.

“Take a shot. Who am I?”

“You’re Mr. Webster.” A pause. “Senior tactician and supervisor of the pilot program for AI-7i and AI-8e.”

“That indeed is my name and titles, but that isn’t who I am.”

Webster liked to toy with his victims- another cliché. But beyond Webster’s cliché tendencies, he really was serious. And he had to be serious, considering what he played with: people’s minds.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the engineer stuttered. *Poor fellow. Being used like a pawn in a game of wit and sacrifice that was beyond his comprehension. Being turned on like a tap for his resourcefulness and then silenced when he was no longer necessary...*

“What I meant, sir, is that I have no answer for you. I cannot give an answer that is worthy...” He trailed off, to the quiet amusement of Webster.

“Dr. Filmore, do you know why I summoned you?”

“Did the pilot fail?”

Smart kid. “Not exactly. But I suspect it will soon. Physical damage tends to incite unwanted action.”

“It sustained damage?”

Crazy, isn’t it? “Quite a lot. Enough to damage something. My wish is to remove it from its testing grounds and bring it back to the lab for examination.”

“Why do you need me for that, sir?”

“I was told you programmed in it a failsafe as a precaution to this sort of event. As a result, you are in charge of capturing it *peacefully* and returning it back here by tomorrow at 2 PM sharp. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

Dr. Filmore scrambled off the red chair he had been sitting in and hurried out the door. Webster smiled. This was going to be fun.

* * *

The first thing Alex saw when he came to was a holographic logo that read “Axon Technologies”.

Then it was replaced by the familiar domed ceiling of the library. Only something was wrong.

He couldn’t feel.

A wave of nausea washed over him. Was he paralyzed?

Instinctively, he flexed his fingers and toes. They moved. A feeling of relief flooded his body before he realized that although he could move, he couldn’t feel his movements. He tried to stand. Success.

He was up on his feet as quickly as if he had never taken a beating. But he still couldn’t feel. He couldn’t feel the cold air of the air conditioner on his skin; he couldn’t feel his feet touching the ground or even his hands brushing against the shelves. He was vaguely aware of something approaching him. The librarian. How long had it been since he was out?

The door creaked open, and Alex stumbled out from behind the shelf. It was not the librarian. It was a man in a white dress shirt and a black suit. His crisp black

pants extended all the way to his polished leather shoes and bulged at the left pocket.

Another hologram appeared in Alex's vision.

"Warning," it read. "Hostile approaching. Evacuate now."

As if on cue, the suited man whipped out a Springfield Armory 1911 pistol and fired three shots straight at Alex.

Somehow Alex managed to dodge them. They were accurate shots, but Alex felt his body move without his own will. In three seconds Alex was on top of one of the six-foot bookshelves.

"Warning. More hostiles inbound."

Alex spun and raced toward the back end of the library, running on pure instinct. He dove behind the last desk from the door. Bullets whizzed over his head and shattered the glass windows behind him. The door lay tantalizingly close.

"Warning. Hostile approaching through exit. Alternate exit found."

And then, without warning, Alex's body jerked up and took a terrific leap toward the broken window. Another enemy burst through the exit, but it was too late. Alex had jumped out of the window.

* * *

The grass was wet with rain. The moon shone bright through the thin clouds, casting eerie shadows around the trees. Aside from the chirping of crickets and the rustling of leaves, all was silent. Yet the forest was alive with movement.

Alex sat on a wet rock next to a tall oak. The powerful scent of petrichor and decay assaulted his senses, the blinding light of the moon making him blink. He ran a hand through his matted brown hair, not noticing any of the forest beauty.

His world was spinning.

It was almost twelve hours since the incident. After involuntarily defenestrating himself, he had found himself very much alive and conveniently next to some motorcycles. His new inner voice had politely recommended that he steal one of them to escape his pursuers, and he had complied reluctantly.

But at least he was free. From the suited men with guns. Not his questions.

Why can't I feel anything? What is this inner voice that talks to me? Do I have schizophrenia? Who were those men? Why me? *Who am I?*

The bushes rustled to the side of him, but he took no notice. His inner voice would warn him if danger came. *Who was the inner voice?*

"I am you. Or at least the system that analyzes daily life and gives more thought and reasoning behind your actions. Your instincts and casual conversations can be done without any substantial brainpower and thus without my help, but anything that involves more complex thinking is my job."

Alex gawked, then closed his mouth. "Why haven't I heard from you before?"

"I was programmed to work in the background and let your intuition evolve by itself, but a physical injury allowed this safeguard to fail. Now your intuitive consciousness can talk to your analytical system."

Alex's breath came in short quick gasps. He noticed blood on the rock next to him and scooted away. Then in a sickening realization, he looked at his hands. Bloody.

"If only I could feel pain," he murmured, holding his hand close.

"If only."

Alex whipped around. A bulky man with slicked-back blond hair and blacker-than-black sunglasses was leaning against another oak tree, a silver pistol nestled

snugly in his left hand.

"Hello, Alex."

Alex sucked in a breath. "H-hi there."

The man wore a smart gray collared shirt, black sports shorts, and a golden Rolex.

"My name is Ewan Webster," the man said in deep bass tones. "And you probably have a lot of questions."

An awkward pause.

"Come, let's sit and chat."

Alex slowly sat back down on the rock. Something about the man commanded obedience. Maybe it was the gun.

The man lumbered over and sat next to him. It was then that Alex noticed how big the man was. Almost a foot taller and a good six inches wider, he looked like he could snap Alex in half. His pulse quickened.

"Actually, let me answer your questions for you. Then I'll have some questions for you. Sound good?"

Alex didn't respond, choosing instead to keep his breathing under control.

Webster continued, "As you might already know, you are a bit different than your peers. You might have an inexplicable aptitude for math, language, or computing. You might be very fit and can shoot baskets with surprising accuracy. You might come to conclusions that seem straightforward to you while nobody else can."

Alex's stomach churned. *How does he know?*

"Here's my first question: did you think anything of it?"

It didn't take much effort for Alex to croak out the answer. "No."

"So you dismissed it. Interesting..."

Alex cleared his throat. "Am I in trouble?"

Ewan smiled warmly at Alex, melting a little of his fear. "Of course you're not. It's just that you have something of mine that I would like back."

Alex blinked, then realization hit him.

"The motorcycle? I'm so sorry- it's just that there-"

"Were CIA agents hot on your tail?" Webster smiled. "I understand the situation perfectly. But don't worry, you're safe here. They don't have a clue where you are."

Alex frowned. "You're not angry?"

"Why would I be?" He answered, swinging his gun carelessly around his finger. "It wasn't my motorcycle."

Alex started perceptibly, then turned to him. "Then what do I have that's yours?"

Webster smiled but ignored the question. "You have incredible talent. I find it a little sad you chose to reject it."

Alex found the situation slightly wrong, but the man did have a point. Millions of people worldwide didn't have access to education or even food. And over in cozy Nevada, Alex was squandering his education like it was a given. *I could save lives; I could do something!*

"Anyways, I do have a small manner of business to attend to. I hope you will excuse me," Webster said, standing up and brushing a small piece of moss off of him.

Alex turned, surprised. "That's it?"

"No, I do still need the thing you have of mine."

“Oh yeah, what’s that?” Alex asked, flinching as Webster cracked his neck.

A rustle. Alex glanced at the bushes and then did a double-take. A suited man was standing among the overgrowth, a gun pointed straight at Alex. Then slowly, a dozen suited men emerged from the forest, all with guns trained on Alex.

Alex’s knuckles, which were gripping the rock, turned white. It’s a trap.

“I need your mind,” Webster replied, and then he smacked Alex hard on the head.

* * *

“It was a good run,” Webster commented, sitting in a black leather chair facing Dr. Filmore.

They were in a bright, spacious office that contrasted sharply with Webster’s choice of clothing. In one corner sat a water dispenser, unused. Black carpet extended from the door to a small table and two red chairs and then past it to a mahogany desk where Webster was sitting.

“I agree…” The doctor replied, standing from the chair and walking stiffly to the water dispenser, his shoes clacking loudly on the polished floor. “But I have my reservations about it.”

Of course you do.

“Primarily, I’m struck by how humanlike it seemed. How… real.”

Webster folded his hands and leaned back in his chair, staring at the “Axon Technologies” mug that rested on his desk. “I completely understand. These kinds of things are bound to happen with the sort of technology that we’re dealing with nowadays. Frankly, the evolution surprises even me. For instance, it seems like yesterday that we would run into issues with the whole ‘Sensation’ thing.”

The doctor sat down on the chair again but didn’t relax. He was frowning, deep in thought.

“What if it’s sentient?”

“It’s not.”

“But what if?”

The question stung Webster. It sounded eerily similar to his younger self, who was eager to do something in the world. In a way, he was just like Alex, possessing talent but without the wont to use it wisely. Is this really what the world needs?

He dismissed the thought as a buzzer sounded. The doctor jumped.

A man with a blue suit and white tie walked in. “The boss requests your presence.”

Webster wrinkled his nose. “Why couldn’t he just send an email?”

“It is of the utmost importance.”

Webster groaned quietly and then stood up. “You’re dismissed, doctor. Have a good evening.”

The doctor dipped his head as Webster walked out the door, following the servant. He tried to guess what the talk was about, but all he could think about was the doctor’s words. *What if it’s sentient? What if it’s human?*

They arrived before Webster had the time to notice. The servant pushed open the door, and Webster stepped inside.

“I don’t have a lot of time,” came the boss’s voice. “So let’s be brief. First of all, congrats on the latest model. It is very fine work.”

Webster dipped his head but didn’t say anything. *It’s all wrong.*

“Second of all, have you dealt with the doctor?”

“I slipped cyanide into the new water dispenser in my room. He will no longer be a problem.” Regret surged through Webster. *It’s all wrong.*

“Good. Then our business here is done. How would you like a promotion?”

Anger gnawed at Webster, then rushed out of him in sweeping torrents. “Do you have any idea what we are really doing? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT WE ARE ACHIEVING? This is more than just tech, this is life! The pilot did incredible things, and now you dismiss it as the latest in a series of constantly improving technology? This is life, this is HUMAN! To make a lab rat out of it when it obviously cognizes is a unethical, unwarranted, illegal, irresponsible-”

Webster paused when he realized that a gun was aimed at his head.

“I’m sorry to see you go. It’s always the best of them.”

Webster gritted his teeth and whispered, “You will regret.”
Then darkness.

GREEN BATHROOM TILES

Joyce Wan

cheek pressed to bathroom tiles.
watch the floor meet
the plastic shower curtain, tap dripping
far away, an unfurled puddle
by the time it meets outstretched arms.
watch strands of hair
curl into stories
atop the green swirls
and specks within tiles.
watch orange parallelograms
shrink
into spools of ink, shadows
dragging curiously through
the growing pool.
watch the water leak from under the curtain.
watch the ceiling's reflection warp across.
watch the cracks in the tiles and the
dirt crusted between
and wonder again— get up and clean
drowning thoughts in bleached soap, or
watch.
and let the tap drip.

OUR FRAGILE SKY

Keiryn Sandahl

I could not have known I lived in a cave. I thought I knew my world well. I and my family and cousins and neighbors had lived in that world all our lives, and we thought the black vault above us a Sky. We knew about Skies, as well as Suns, Trees, Stars, Winds, and other wonders, from our books and our stories, dead men's memories carefully handled. The world we could see, of course, was a craggy, stony wilderness disappearing on every side into dense shadows, the edge of the Sky. When we told our stories, though, we always told them so that the wonderful world was a distant part of our own; we had wandered – or, sometimes, we were led or forced – from that land into this barren one, forsaken by the Stars, where the Sun had long ago forgotten to rise. Of course we looked for it, East, West, North, and South – our compasses worked just fine – and some disappeared, but others returned dejected. We never thought to search above.

Our city lit the known world, hacked by our forefathers from the unfriendly stone. We grew crops of mushrooms, fishing and bathing in the warm waters of our lake. We made beauty. We had mines that yielded colorful gems – tunnels and crevices in our cliffs, the ceilings of which we could see. We polished our walls and dusted them with silver, so that the candles in our windows glimmered along the walls of our neighbors, making our streets dance with the flickers of a hundred fiery tongues. Our candles were tame lights, and they did our bidding.

I had a clever friend called Peck; he was very proud of his catapult, which he had soldered himself out of scraps from his father's forge. After months of working on it, he had finally finished it, and so, with myself and one or two others, he carried it to the summit of a cliff, overlooking our city on one side and the inky expanse of the lake on the other. With our chisels and mallets, we carved out loads to test it. The catapult flung its rocks splendidly; we cheered as we watched them arc with awful force, only to plunge with weighty splashes into the lake, sending up plumes of spray.

Eventually, however, we lost interest in this display, and anyway, our arms were aching. We flopped down on the stones together, gazing out at the lake. The window-lights from the city shone on its surface, reflected by water smooth as glass, except where lingering ripples from our projectiles disturbed it. Beyond the glow from our lights, we could see nothing. Perhaps that was why, flushed with the power of heaving our stones to wreak havoc on the lake, one of us mentioned the Sun.

We imagined it lying there, beyond the shadows, impossibly far beyond, drowsing, and with it, all its wonderful heat and light. Playfully, somebody suggested we send it a message.

"Better yet, let's provoke it," I remember saying, "Make it growl and wake up and come rushing back." And we laughed at that, because even if a Sun really existed, of course a stone flung from a boy's catapult would never reach it. But we cut

out our boulder with special care, because at least this idea was a new take on the old game, and we wanted to see one last flight. If we aimed to find the Sun, we would make it the greatest flight yet.

I engraved the message because I had the neatest letters. By the light of Peck's lantern, I carefully chipped into the side of the boulder a taunt pieced together from everyone's suggestions. I'd rather not repeat what we said.

Then we loaded it into the catapult's basket, and all of us drew it back as far as it would go. It creaked, and Peck faltered, worried for his creation, but the rest of us urged him on, too eager now to abandon our plan. A deep breath, and we released it. The arm of the catapult sprung away from us, and the rock shot into the Sky, throwing the catapult back at us with the force of its passage. We whooped and clapped. The rock had vanished; for a moment, we half-believed it could fly to the sunny side of the world.

Until we heard a terrible crack.

The world echoed with the creak and crumble of stone, and somewhere the splash of our sinking boulder. We didn't understand, even then, but we felt instinctive fear. And then our fragile sky caved in.

Light. White-hot, heavy, blinding, it poured through the leak we had punched in our sky. We shut our eyes but it hammered our eyelids, piercing and stinging. I forgot my companions, the catapult, the cliff... nothing seemed to exist but that awful light and the pain it inflicted. For the first time in hundreds of years, the Sun shone on us; we had wanted it, but now we hated it, for it was brighter, far brighter, than we wanted it.

CRYING IN THE BATHROOM

Larissa Lee

Clasping your face with your hands,
Regretting every decision you ever made.
You might know what it's like, or you might not.
I'll tell you, though, as an expert of sorts. It's
Not a pleasant experience, that's for sure.
"Get a grip," they yell over the buzz of the party.

I would if I could, you know. It's
Not like I wanted this to happen.

The spiraling is normal, it
Happens often, in fact.
Escapism's the best solution.

Blaring in my head are all the regrets,
Again and again and again.
The solitude provides comfort,
Harrowing isolation is difficult to ignore.
Roaring in my ears is the noise
Of the foreign concept of laughter and cheer.
Only the fortunate wouldn't understand, the
Misery of crying in the bathroom.

PAIN

Michael Hsu

It is not good to run alone.

THE APPROACHMENT OF FEAR

Myra Lim

I'm scared:
When I'm lying in my bed,
hoping spiders don't touch my head.
When I think I'm confident downtown,
someone will step on my gown.
When the teacher calls on me
and the answer wasn't meant to be.
Could what is approaching near
the idea called fear?

But what is fear?
Could it be so scary,
it causes you to tear?
Could it cause you misery
as you slowly remember the 2020 year.
But what is its true meaning?
Fear is an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of
danger,
pain,
or harm.
It could be your grades dropping
or it could be how you show your charm.
Sometimes, fear can be misleading.

How do I define fear?
It could be irrational or rational
Like monkeys or lizards
Or moving out on my own
From Malaysia to across the sea
But as far as I know, fear won't follow me

THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE ORCHESTRA

Sophia Teoh

Many of you have seen an orchestra play in a concert.
The rich, harmonious sounds emanating from each musician,
Their instruments so precious, so masterfully crafted.
But do you know what an orchestra really is?
It's a large group of talented musicians of different instrumental families
Coming together to produce marvelous, beautiful sounds.

First up, we have the string family.
From lively and bright to mellow and deep are what they are, you see.
The highest of them all is the violin,
Its soaring, dulcet, brilliant tone piercing the soul deep in,
Followed by the mature viola – oh, how it sings!
For peaceful music with a sense of longing is what it brings.
And while the cello cries and coaxes, with its resonant, voice-like song,
The deep, grumbling double bass shall thunder all day long.
Now, we won't forget these guys' cousin - the tall, golden harp,
Whose forty-seven strings play out notes sweet but sharp.

Slender, quicksilver - those must be the woodwinds!
First, the nimble flute and piccolo, siblings - but not twins.
Next, the oboe, black and smooth, has a reedy, poignant sound,
And the clarinet plays things from cheerful to sad, fluid and round.
The low bassoon jokes and pokes, yet gives a woodwind foundation,
But the contrabassoon, often unheard, speaks in slight vexation.

Oh, how shining, beautiful, and bold they are!
For now, we've come to the brass, who sparkle like stars.
While the trumpet's triumphant fanfares evoke the calls of war,
The horn has brooding and warm, or brazen and bright tunes in store.
Third is the trombone, who is known for those signature slides,
And the tuba, low and rumbling, is found funny by kids worldwide.

Last is the group that is called percussion,
Which some don't play often but when they do, it's sudden.
Now, there are too many of them to be fully listed.
Here is a brief list if anyone is interested.
Those two cymbals are so famous for shocking the ear,
And the bass drum whose booms are oh, so clear.

The metallic glockenspiel who speaks a chromatic range,
Contrasts with wind chimes, who bring calm ringing to the stage.
For all math lovers, the simple triangle likes to say ting!
While the timpani bang and crash – they are such funny things.
The tambourine shakes and jingles, putting on a face a smile,
As well as the clappers, who make many laugh for quite a while.

Each instrument is different from the rest, but we all should know,
That without one of them, the orchestra's full talent won't show.
But, with so many musicians, how do they all play together so well?
That is thanks to the conductor – so talented, so swell.
From classic strings to agile woodwinds, to radiant brass and diverse percussion,
An orchestra is such a wonder – it's a gorgeous, unique fusion.
Thanks, my friends! I hope you enjoyed this amazing journey today,
And till next time, in an orchestra, together we shall play.

HOOVES

Evan Juday

Snow fell steadily from the cloudy sky. It looked like powdered sugar or dandruff being shaken off a child's head, twisting and gliding at the will of the wind, falling wherever it chose. It covered a small town in Maine on Christmas Eve as sleigh bells jingled overhead, signaling the arrival of Santa Claus. The reindeer galloped swiftly through the sky as his joyous laughter burst merrily from his maw, but no one heard its sound, for all were asleep when he arrived.

Santa looked down at all the houses below. They were all burning with the glow of the bright lights they were dressed in, all ablaze as the old saint arrived. Quickly, he pulled his list from his coat. His eyes shone as he scanned the rows of children's names, almost all of which would be receiving a gift from him. He would be particularly busy in this town. It always made him so exuberant to see so many names marked nice on his list. His eyes rested at the top of the list. Little Arthur of 5 Dewy Lane would be the first to receive the privilege of his visit.

Leaning back in his sleigh, Santa thought of all the joy that would come from his trip. What a life he lived, working hard all year to bring joy to the entire world. He could hear the children's laughter and see their faces light up when they woke up to find their gifts. It was so beautiful. The thought warmed his soul, and it burned like a torch within him. He couldn't imagine a better life. Pulling his pocket watch out from within his coat, he checked the time. It read ten past eleven.

"Our time is running dry," he cried to the reindeer. "Come, descend with great speed my friends!" The reindeer obeyed his command and the sleigh dropped lower and lower until it came to rest on the roof of the first blessed home. Humming to himself, he dismounted from his chariot with his toy-filled sack mounted on his back and approached the chimney, his boots thumping softly on the twinkling, light covered roof. Naught but a moment later, he was down the chimney and in Arthur's house.

The Saint took a deep breath and had to allow his eyes to adjust to his surroundings, as the room was dark. It was odd; most families kept their lights on throughout the night on this precious eve. Still, even in the dark, the living room was a merry sight. In the right-hand corner farthest from him, a two seater couch stood with its back against the wall accompanied by an easychair beside it with a crumpled newspaper laying on top of it. The room was decorated for the season; garland snaked its way around the tops of the walls and stockings, waiting patiently to be filled with presents, lined the mantelpiece on which pictures of the happy family stood, and a wreath hung above the archway opposite the fire which separated the living room from the main hall. Most impressive was the tree erected in the far left corner, next to the window revealing the pale snowy world outside. It was smaller and thinner than most, but it waited patiently all the same, with presents to be stacked beneath it, for the morn on which it would be the center of attention. Unlit lights were strung around

the tree while plain baubles colored green and red hung from the branches. Even in the darkness, and without its crown, the tree looked like a piece of fine art to Santa.

Kris Cringle sighed with happiness and lowered his sack from his back. He strode over to the Christmas tree and opened his sack. He reached into the bag and fished around for Arthur's present, unsure what exactly he was looking for. He had completely forgotten what he had asked for this year. As he searched, a clatter rose to his ears. It was the sound of hooves walking on wood. He stopped his work. Such a sound would not have bothered him normally; his steeds did get impatient if he dawdled, but this noise came not from the roof, but from inside the home, from down the hall, accompanied by the clanking of chains. He quickly turned to face the archway. Whatever was making the sound, it would be revealed to him soon. It was coming closer. From around the corner of the archway, a pair of hooves emerged.

Though it had hooves, the figure that faced him stood upright at about the same height as Santa himself. Chains covered the thing. They wrapped around its arms, waist, and neck. They were obviously heavy, for their weight bent the thing's back forward. It was covered in robes that were copies of the ones Santa was wearing, except they were much larger. They hung loosely around it and hid most of its features, including its face, which was censored by a large hood draped over its head from which a pair of massive curled black horns erupted.

"Krampus," he grumbled, addressing the thing that faced him. "Why are you here?"

"I thought I heard sleigh bells outside," Krampus gurgled. Its voice was low and had a sickly sound to it, as if it was recovering from a bad throat infection. "I'm here for a boy...."

"Arthur has been very good this year!"

"Not him. His older brother, Ralph. I'm taking him."

"You'll be taking no one from this house tonight as long as I am alive to prevent it," Santa said coldly. "Leave this house, you foul beast. Do not insult me with your presence again tonight. That is all I have to say to you." With that, he turned his back to it and opened his sack.

"Saint, I am tired of your treatment." Anger sparked within Santa, and he whirled around to face the beast and punish it. How dare it talk back to him. "Yeah, yeah, banish me, remove me from your sight. Keep living the lie that you are any better than me."

Santa scoffed. "How can you claim I am even comparable to the likes of you? I bring happiness to all homes graced by my visits. Little Arthur will wake up tomorrow morning to find a gift in his stocking that will fill him with the special kind of joy only I can give. On this night, I will give millions of other good little children the same kind of joy. I am the very embodiment of it. What do you bring to the homes you visit tonight? Only misery and pain."

The creature chuckled. "I bring misery and pain to those who deserve it. There are two children that dwell within this home, and yet you bring a gift for only one. You have seen how Ralph has treated others, how he revels in their suffering. You've seen him bully precious Aurthur, gang up with his friends on classmates at school, and disrespect his seniors. You talk of the misery I bring. What about this child? Do you know how many individuals he has harmed? He must be dealt with."

"And you think it is your responsibility to deal with him? It is his parent's responsibility, not yours. You just want to watch him suffer in your workshop and

revel in the suffering."

Krampus hissed angrily at this, its forked tongue escaping from its mouth as it did. It shifted his robes, rattling the chains he carried, and pawed the wooden floor with its hooves. It pleased the saint to see the creature so agitated. "His parents do nothing. They chose to ignore their son's wickedness rather than face it. Their ignorance fuels his sins. I must put a stop to it."

"Who are you to decide the fates of misbehaving children, to snuff their flames? He will face the consequences of his actions. You do not get to decide what those consequences are!"

From within the folds of his cloak, the shadow of fists clenching caught Santa's eye. "And how many will he harm before that happens," snarled the beast. "His evil will only strengthen with time. Abuse, rape, robbery, murder. I see it all in his future. I see him rotting away in prison for life, and ending it himself, brimming with spite and hate for the world. My actions tonight will save others from him and him from himself."

Santa was silent. Krampus continued. "Do you really think a lump of coal will change this boy's fate, make him see the error of his ways? You have so much power that you say you use for good, and yet you fail to uproot evil. That is why I exist, to do what you cannot. To remove the causes of misery so you may fill their empty spaces with your joy."

"Joy does not need an empty space to fill," said Santa. "It can overflow and wash over misery, cleanse it."

"Misery can do the same to joy," growled Krampus.

"You cannot see a way for this boy to change? There is always a chance, Krampus. It is the gift I give to all the wicked children."

"Not this one. His wickedness is too great."

"Couldn't you just leave him with your chains?"

"Some children are too strong for the chains. There is only one way to deal with him."

"That is what makes you so unbearable! You are so consumed by their darkness you fail to see the light that glows from just beyond!" Santa sighed deeply. "Leave, Krampus. I will not ask you again."

Krampus growled furiously but began moving towards the fire, his hooves thumping against the hardwood floor. He pushed past Santa as he passed.

"Just remember this, you fat slob. Though my chains weigh heavy on the children I lay them upon, I wear the heaviest chain of all." With that, he stepped into the fireplace and was immediately engulfed in flames. A moment later, the fire vanished along with Krampus.

With him gone, the old saint went back to his work. He reached back into his sack and, after a few moments, found what he was looking for. He pulled out a small red box with a green bow on top. He remembered what Arthur had asked for this year. An action figure of his favorite superhero, The Incredible Hulk. A faint smile dimly lit his face as he faced as he put the box in Arthur's stocking but it quickly vanished as he turned to the one that hung beside it. He grabbed a lump of coal from his sack and hesitated for only a moment before he dropped it into Ralph's stocking. He knew that there were more presents to deliver, more happiness to spread, but he halted in front of the boy's stocking. After a minute, he turned away and marched to the fireplace with his bag dragging behind him. As he climbed into it, he turned around to get one last

sweep of the room. He wished the Christmas tree was lit, the room would look so much warmer. He wished with all his heart he could do it himself, however nothing could reveal him but the gifts he left. With a touch of his nose, he shot up the chimney and out the top.

With his work done, Santa Claus climbed back into his sleigh while the reindeer snorted impatiently. The events within this home had put him behind schedule. He could not dally. He cracked the reins, and the reindeer at its head began to pull the sleigh off to their next destination. As the sleigh began to accelerate off of the home, Santa thought he could hear the sound of hooves moving across wood coming from inside the house. He didn't go back to confirm his suspicion. He must have been hearing things.

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL

Finley White

I once knew a girl
With soft brown hair
And eyes like crescent moons
And a dimple like a shooting star
And oh, she could have gone so far.

I once knew a girl
Whose friends said she was pretty
Complimented her style
Called her mannerisms cute
But really they were insecurities she tried to boot.

I once knew a girl
Whose parents thought she was smart
Who got good grades
And had books on her shelf
But this girl, she cut herself.

I once knew a girl
Who smiled a lot
And pretended to be happy
In case they thought she was bad
She didn't understand that it's not bad to be sad.

I once knew a girl
Who was told she was worthless
And fat and ugly and frustrating
She was told she was selfish, entitled, and spoiled
So she tried to be selfless, and oh, how she toiled

I once knew a girl
Whose main goal was to be kind
Who tried and tried and tried
To others' struggles, she was never mindless
But she tended to forget that she, too, deserved kindness.

I once knew a girl,
And that girl
was me.

PAROXYSMAL ANXIETY

Finley White

Set the bag down-
head thumping.
Feel as if about to drown-
throat lumping.

Curl into fetal position,
hoping to breathe
Squeeze arms in repetition,
a useless grounding technique

claw at skin and hair in desperation,
using pain to combat numbness
try to steady respiration,
but think only of apparent dumbness

cry, breathe
sob, heave
bawl, wheeze

feel the thoughts spiral
nothing and everything
i hate you i hate them i hate me
feel as if the hate for me is viral
hear nothing but my ears' ring
i hate you i hate them i hate me

Pick up the bag,
hand trembling
Look in the mirror at a hag,
feeling a forced reassembling

Wipe away the tears-
tell myself that this is not my place.
Wipe the blood from my scratches-
and leave with a smile on my face.

GRIEF

Anonymous

A professional consort of concealing
Knowing they'd just belittle the feeling
I'm fine is not that hard to deny
The truth comes out as easy as a lie
Past the point of demanding commotions
Is this what it's like to be lost in oceans

Waking up to struggle through the motions
Losing my grip on past devotions
Sick and tired of having to comply
Not caring enough to fake a reply
I'm sorry you're bothered I'm not jumping and squealing
I'm sorry you find quiet suffering so unappealing

I didn't realize not being happy was a crime worse than stealing
By all means inform me how I should be dealing
Now I understand what Poe wanted to imply
Ceasing to question when my peers go get high
Having no control over thoughts or notions
Wishing there really was healing in potions

Getting too good at numbing out emotions
At this point I could ignore explosions
Long since avoiding any holy ally
No longer wanting to know why
They won't shut up about how articulating is healing
But even writing private poetry feels too revealing

I DON'T LIKE TO REMEMBER

Anonymous

I remember being six
And getting calls on the street
Shrinking from their eyes in my car seat

I remember being seven
And having my seniors look under my skirt
Step one to hating school

I remember being eight
And having older boys not let me leave
Bikes blocking my way home

I remember being ten
And having lovely names bombard me
How kind of them to keep me humble

I remember being eleven
And using my fists
I couldn't understand but it wasn't right

I remember being twelve
And seeing sex associated with my skin
Learning to expect the worst from boys and men

I remember being fifteen
And not eating
Hunger couldn't convince my throat to swallow

I remember being sixteen
And having a guard with wandering hands
Months after the upperclassman couldn't hear no

Now I'm seventeen
And memories invade my dreams
Why am I still fighting the unseen

CREDITS

Editors

Joshua Conklin
Sophia Teoh
Jadyn Bui
Anya Shanmugabalan
Samantha Owen
Myra Lim
Keiryn Sandahl
Joyce Wan
Jens Hieber
Finley White
Evan Juday
Larissa Lee

Cover Art

Dora Liu

“Pet peeves– everyday frustrations and annoyances that we all experience– are rarely represented in artwork. ‘Sticky Business’ aims to evoke the feeling of annoyance and disgust that comes from dropping a fork or a spoon into a saucy dish. The piece hopes to build a connection with the viewer through this common grievance while allowing the viewer to reflect on their own pet peeves and the emotions they evoke.”

Chief Editor

Abigail Rinkenberger

Layout Editor

Joyce Wan