

Dear Reader,

It is with our greatest pleasure that we present you with the 2018-2019 edition of Peabody Veterans Memorial High School's Literary Magazine, *The Observer*! Throughout the year, we have worked tirelessly to compile a collection of our school's literary and visual artwork. We are incredibly proud of all the artists in our school and are extremely thankful for all the artists that submitted their artwork to us, whether it is included in the magazine or not. Most importantly, we would like to thank the English teacher, Mr. Jones. The magazine's publication would not have been possible without him or his efforts.

Happy reading and enjoy the art that this year's Peabody high students have to offer!

- The Observer Editorial Staff Diana Le, Jade Ledbury, Amanda Lewis, Leah Salem & Rebecca Truong

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BACK COVER BY AMANDA LEWIS

American By Dado Nasso

I pledge allegiance

To every person that had to suffer at the hands of the law simply because when they wrote justice for all they only meant justice for one type of person.

I pledge allegiance

To every child that gets their life taken away from them simply because they want to escape a life of pain and sorrow, just to be shown that humanity has failed everywhere.

I pledge allegiance

To the kids that go to school everyday because all they've ever been taught was to succeed. You cannot achieve success when you're being fatally gunned down, can you?

I pledge allegiance

To every veteran that fought every day and night for the America they love just to be thrown on the streets and ignored by the county that claims to appreciate them ever so much.

I pledge allegiance

To ever brown child that waved the American flag around, just to have it taken away from them because they don't fit American's definition of "American."

I pledge allegiance

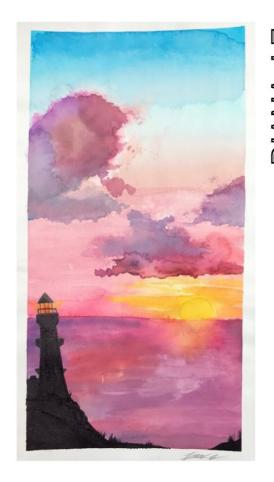
To every woman that had to die so a man could prove his dominance, every woman that's been overlooked, every woman that's been unloved and unprotected in society.

I pledge allegiance

To every person that gets the right to be in love yanked away from them because they don't fit society's definition of love and treated as if they aren't human.

I will never pledge allegiance to an America that isolates any human being that they deem not worthy to be treated with love or respect.







The Cub

Story by Olivia O'Connor Drawing by Amanda Lewis



He heard a *ping* from across the room. His leg stopped its rapid bouncing. His heart began to race a little bit faster. This had to be it.

The home screen of his laptop displayed a small Gmail notification in the bottom right corner. He placed his finger on the touchpad with apprehension and directed the mouse to click on the message.

As the page loaded, he took a deep breath. His future was about to be shown right in front of him in 500 nit Retina display.

Mount Sinai Beth Israel Residency Offices read the sender of the email, with the subject being Residency/Internship Program. Neither gave anything away. He clicked the email and began to read aloud.

"Thank you for applying to Mount Sinai's Surgical Residency Program! We regret to inform you-" He slammed the laptop shut. He couldn't see the rest. He knew what followed that phrase. He had seen it many times over the past week, and in his short, 26 year old lifetime.

How was this possible? How could he have not gotten into a single surgical residency program? He had always been taught to be quiet and subtle about his talents, never being too self confident or assured, but he knew he had them. Medicine was in his genes. He was destined to help people. He had always wanted to work in a hospital, ever since he was young.

— + —

"Hey, can I play?"

Marcus' bare feet padded down the hallway towards his older sisters, who were in Taylor's room playing animal hospital. Taylor had just turned eleven and had received a play surgical kit as a present from their grandparents. Marcus' other sisters, Camryn and Jessie, had been invited to play with the kit, each bringing their favorite stuffed animals to act as patients that needed operating on.

"Go away, Marc-y," Camryn said flippantly, with all of the sass that only an eight year old could manage. She focused her attention back to her sisters, who were attempting an appendectomy on Jessie's rainbow Build-a-Bear.

"But why can't I play?" Marcus wanted to play hospital. Who cared if he was just six years old? He liked playing games with his older sisters, for they seemed so much wiser than him, although they could be mean at times. He liked hospitals and doctors too. He loved going to the doctors for checkups, and he loved watching the hospital television show that his dad had on when he was home midday and folding laundry. His mommy didn't like that show though. She said it was "men's TV." Marcus didn't see anything wrong with that.

"Boys don't play Doctor," responded nine year old Jessie matter-of-factly. Marcus sent their way the strongest glare he could. Even still, he looked like a lion cub attempting to growl for the first time, and his oldest sister couldn't keep a straight face.

"Oh, let him play," said Taylor. "Boys may not be able to be doctors like *us*, but Marcus could be a nurse!" Camryn and Jessie looked at each other apprehensively, but they seemed to come to the conclusion that they shouldn't object to their older sister's decision.

"Get over here, Marcus," Camryn grumbled, scooting over on Taylor's fuzzy pink rug and leaving a spot for her little brother to sit. Marcus grinned happily, and sat down criss-cross-applesauce. He didn't care that his sisters wouldn't let him be a doctor -- that happened every time he joined their game of Animal Hospital -- he just wanted to play with them.

-+-

The first person he called to tell that he wasn't going to be working in a hospital anytime soon was Tommy. Tommy was Marcus' best friend all through undergrad at SUNY and med school at Columbia. They had met at a sorority party their freshman year. Marcus was stuck in conversation with a gorgeous brunette, who gave off the impression that she wanted to have sex with him, whether he wanted to or not. Tommy pretended to be Marcus' friend and got him away from the sorority sister. They developed a fast friendship after that. Both of them had shared the same issue- trying to make it in a field where women ruled it all. A world where they were expected to be nurses and stay out of the way while the girls got to be doctors and really save the lives.

Tommy picked up on the first ring. "Hey Marc."

"I didn't get in."

"I'm sorry. Mount Sinai was your last chance, right?"

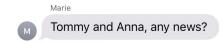
"Mhm." Marcus flopped onto his back on the couch and exhaled loudly. "I can't believe it."

"Well," Tommy started. "I doubt you'll appreciate this news that I found out a few minutes before you called."

"What was it?" Marcus was filled with a sort of dread.

"I'm guessing you haven't read the groupchat."

"I'm looking right now." Marcus put Tommy on speaker and exited the Phone app. He opened messages and saw 5 new ones from the "columbia meddddd" group message he was in. The group consisted of his med school friends- himself and Tommy, and three girls that the guys had met when they all started the med program at Columbia.

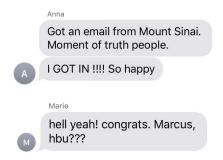


Marie was your standard alpha-female type. Head cheerleader in high school. 4.0 GPA. Prided herself on being the best at absolutely everything, especially being better than the men in their class. She drank too much when they went out and borderline harassed men she'd try to pick up at bars. Marcus and Tommy had often questioned why they stuck around with her, but they always figured she'd grow up eventually.

Boys mature faster than girls, you know.

I need someone to go shopping with me for new scrubs for when I start at NYU, so you guys have better got a reason to buy new ones too!!!!!

Sabrina was loud, sarcastic, and a tad awkward. Her mom had run out on her and her father when she was just five, so she grew up with an unconventional childhood, constantly moving from place to place as her father kept getting hired and getting fired. She viewed becoming a doctor as a way to have a stable, secure life, something she had never really had. Also, as she had mentioned countless times, being a doctor was a great way to hook up with hot young nurses. Marie and Anna would always laugh in agreement when she said that. Marcus and Tommy would exchange their usual look of discomfort and mild disgust and move on.



"Shit, Tommy." Marcus put the phone back to his ear. "I can't believe it. What do I say?"

"I don't know, man," Tommy responded. "I wish I could help."

"I work so hard," Marcus said despondently. "I deserve to get a residency. I deserve to be given the opportunity to become a doctor."

"I know, I know. Your resume was so impressive. And you said the interview went well?" Marcus thought back to his interview with the chief of surgery at Mount Sinai.

"Hello. It's nice to meet you. My name's Dr. Patricia Robinson. I am Mount Sinai's Chief of Surgery." Dr. Robinson stuck out her hand in introduction, and Marcus took in her appearance. She appeared to be in her late fifties, with deep brown hair streaked with gray. She had striking, icy blue eyes hidden slightly behind black, thick rimmed glasses. Her face showed some signs of aging, but she was still classically beautiful; her cheekbones were high, her jaw was strong, and her lips were tinted red. When Marcus took her hand to shake, she pulled him in closer. He could feel the unnatural dryness of her hands and the cigarette smoke emanating from her breath. When they separated, Marcus took a deep breath and put on his smile.

"I'm Marcus Miller, although you already know that. It's so great to be able to meet with you today to discuss a potential residency opportunity for me at your hospital."

Dr. Robinson smiled what was meant to be a kind and welcoming smile, but it came off almost predatory. Marcus didn't let his face portray his thoughts, which were that this woman gave him a peculiar vibe and he didn't feel comfortable at all. He got this feeling a lot, like when he was waiting for the subway and felt the presence of a woman looming near him unusually close for too long of time, or when he was walking down the busy streets of New York and could hear faint catcalls as he passed gaggles of construction workers.

Marcus sat in one of the supple leather chairs positioned in front of Dr. Robinson's desk, and she sat at her desk across from him, folding her hands neatly. She began to ask questions, like where Marcus grew up, the surgical fields he had an interest in, and other inquiries typical of a job interview. Marcus answered with as much intelligence and charm as he could muster. He needed to ace this interview so he could get this residency. He couldn't work part time at Target forever.

Hearing ladies tell you to "Smile, honey" when you're ringing them up gets old after a while.

At the end of the interview, Marcus began to feel a little lighter. The Chief seemed to be liking what he was saying, and he was much less uncomfortable than he originally had been. Maybe he had judged her wrong? Not all older, powerful women were predatory or looking for something.

Marcus forgot, though, that as a man living in this world, he should never let his guard down, be less careful.

Once Dr. Robinson had closed up the interview, Marcus stood to leave, but she held a hand out as to halt his movements. When Marcus made eye contact with her, it was like the temperature of the room had dropped below freezing.

"I really like you, Mr. Miller."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"I like you a lot, actually. I'd love to see you as a surgical resident here."

"I'd like to be a resident here, too." Dr. Robinson made her way around the desk to stand in front of Marcus. She looked down at him, and her eyes gleamed with something unfamiliar to him. He wanted to leave. Now.

Dr. Robinson moved closer to Marcus.

"Do you really want to be a resident here, Marcus?"

Marcus gulped. "Yes, ma'am."

"There are some things you can do, you know, to *ensure* you get this position." She moved even closer and placed her hand on his wrist. He felt the tobacco stench from her crisp, white coat envelop him. He felt like he was suffocating.

"It's all part of the job, Marcus," she spoke again. Marcus kept an emotionless expression on his face as her hand stroked his arm *up and down, up and down.* He was tense, and a slight tremor flowed through his body. Marcus felt like the young lion cub up against the much stronger lioness. He felt helpless.

It was like Dr. Robinson could feel his discomfort radiating off him like sunbeams. She halted her movement and stepped away with a smile of satisfaction on her face. Marcus felt like he was going to throw up.

"I hope to see you back here, Mr. Miller. Have a nice afternoon."

Marcus had felt guilty and sick after his Mount Sinai interview. The thought of telling people what had happened filled him with so much shame he couldn't get the words out if he tried. When his friends had asked him how his interview went, he had just lied and said it went fine. Now, he recounted the real story to Tommy over the phone. When Marcus finished, he heaved a big sigh and Tommy swore under his breath before responding.

"That's messed up, man. Like, you hear stories online about things like that, but you never think it will happen to you, or someone close to you. Then it does."

"You think I didn't get the residency because I wouldn't sleep with her?"

"You know, I could lie to you. Tell you that the other applicants were more qualified, but we both know that's not true. You're a Columbia Medical School student, for God's sake.

"You 100% did not get that Mount Sinai internship because you wouldn't screw that woman. And you didn't get the other residencies not for the same reason, but because of a different one.

"We've known that it's harder for men to succeed in the medical field than women. Right now, it's become real. For some reason, we're considered inferior and less qualified, even when we're the most qualified in the room. For some reason, we just can't be top of the pack."

Marcus took in Tommy's remarks. He was still laying despondently on his couch, his phone held to his ear in between his shoulder and neck.

"How do I tell my parents? They probably won't be surprised. It's not like they believed that I would be a doctor anyways."

"Don't know, man. Look, I have to go, my date is here. It's at that Mexican place on 6th, incase anything happens, y'know? I'll text you when it's over."

"Yeah, keep me updated. I'll talk to you later." And Marcus hung up the phone.

Marcus finally rose from the couch and walked into the kitchen. He opened his fridge and took out a beer. Then, he grabbed an apple off his counter and went back to his position on the couch. As he was about to flip on his TV and find a comedy to drown out the fact that he was residency-less, his phone rang.

Incoming Call from: Dad

"Oh great," Marcus muttered to himself. He grabbed his phone reluctantly and slid his finger across the screen to answer.

"Hey, Dad."

"Hey, Buddy," his father said over the phone. "How're you doing today? Any good news?"

"Yeah, I have news, actually," Marcus answered, trying to keep his voice from betraying his feelings. "Is Mom there?"

"Um.... yes, your mother is home. PATTY! I'm talking to Marcus! Come out here!" Marcus heard slight rustling through the phone.

"Alright, your mother's here- Hi, Marcus!" his mother's voice interjected. She was always interrupting other people whether she meant to or not. To Patty Miller, what she had to say was always a little more important than what others did.

"Dad, can you put the phone on speaker?"

"Ahhh, now which button do I hit for that? Let me see... oh! Found it. You're good to go, son.

"What do you have to tell us?"

Marcus knew he had to admit to them that he didn't get a residency, but he wasn't ready for the backlash that would come with it. His oldest sister Taylor was currently working as a surgical resident at Mass General Hospital up in Boston. No one had ever doubted her when she expressed from a young age that she wanted to be a doctor. "A doctor is a great job for a woman!", their family had praised when Taylor exclaimed at seven years old that she wanted to be a doctor, and when she got into medical school fifteen years later.

No one ever told Marcus that being a doctor was a great job for a man.

The year Marcus got accepted and started at Columbia University's prestigious medical school was coincidentally the same year the Miller's decided to throw together a summer Family Reunion, a way to reconnect with long lost aunts and uncles and cousins that no one had seen or heard from for years.

The celebration had taken place on Montauk, at a rented waterfront house where the family of 50 people managed to squeeze into for a night. The women were manning the grills or sitting around them with beers in hand, discussing politics and the economy, or whatever else grown women did that made them sound smarter and better than everyone else.

The younger kids were alternating from running into the ocean with floaties and playing beach football, breaking into teams of boys vs girls. Every time the boys took the lead in points, the girls whined and exclaimed in disbelief, "How are we losing to boys?!"

The high school and college aged kids were "supervising" the younger ones, while sitting back in lounge chairs with their toes dipped in the sand, sipping cans of Twisted Tea.

The older folk sat on the patio under an umbrella, snacking on appetizers and drinking chilled lemonade. They discussed their children, their grandchildren, and who else's kid did what, and so on.

Most of the men sat near them, at another table under another umbrella. Marcus' dad and his uncle Stew were rushing in and out of the house, carrying in empty pitchers of water and carrying out plates stacked high with watermelon slices. The men sitting at the table offered up compliments to the hosts as they brought out various things. They also discussed their kids, as well as whatever TV show they had been watching that week.

Marcus was seated with those his age, taking small sips of his drink and soaking in the summer sun. He would be starting med school in less than two months, so he was always finding every opportunity to relax as much as he could.

He heard a voice call his name, and he stretched his neck back behind him to see who it was. It was his father. Bryan Miller waved his only son over to where he was standing on the expansive patio. Marcus downed the rest of his drink before making his way over to his father.

"Marcus has some exciting news for everyone!" His father exclaimed to those settled on the patio, including the women, the older folk, and the men.

"What's the news, Marcus?" Aunt Caroline asked.

"Are you getting married? Who's the lucky girl?" expressed Uncle Mattias. That was to be expected. His family was always hinting towards him at every birthday or Christmas or Memorial Day that he needed to settle down, marry a nice girl who could provide for him and their family. The comments made him roll his eyes internally every time.

"No," Marcus clarified. "I am not getting married. The news is that I'll be attending medical school at Columbia University in the city starting in a month." A few of his relatives' faces lit up in pride, especially his father's, who, although thinking being a doctor was a little too ambitious, was proud of Marcus for everything he'd accomplished. A couple of the women at the table gave each other a side eye glance.

"Medical school," his mother's cousin said, giving him a once-over. "You're still stuck on that dream, aren't you?" Marcus clenched his jaw in annoyance.

"It's not really a dream if it's actually happening," Marcus snapped back. His mother gave him a stern look, as if warning him against standing up for himself.

"Well," Cousin Ann said flippantly. "I don't think being a doctor is a proper job for a man. Be a nurse if you're so desperate to have a career." Marcus became more exasperated. He looked at his father, hoping he would step in and defend him. He knew his mother wouldn't. His father wouldn't meet his eyes.

Everyone on the patio was gawking at this interfamilial interaction. Marcus wanted to curl in on himself from embarrassment. Ann stared at him like a lion going in for the kill.

Marcus gave one more wary look at his father, who still avoided his only son's eyes, and then he looked at his mother. She was sipping a beer nonchalantly, as if her relatives weren't ripping her child apart.

He trudged off the patio in submission, having nothing to say back to his judgemental family. He grabbed another Twisted Tea from the cooler in the sand, and resumed his earlier position, sitting back in a beach chair.

Marcus checked his phone and saw that he had received a text from his dad just a moment ago.

Today 2:19 PM

So sorry about that. You know how this family can be.

Marcus ignored the message.

"Marcus, are you there? Did we lose you for a second?" His father's voice snapped him out of his reverie.

"Sorry. I just zoned out a little bit."

"Well, what's the news?" His mother requested. Marcus sighs softly with dread.

"I didn't get into any of the residency programs that I applied for."

His parents were so silent, he could have sworn the line was disconnected.

"I'm sorry, Marcus." Patty Miller sounded surprisingly remorseful.

"It's fine."

pity.

"What are you going to do now?" his father asked.

"I don't know," Marcus admitted honestly.

"Well, we'll let you be right now," his mother chimed in. "You must just need some time for yourself."

"Yeah, I guess. I'll talk to you guys later." And Marcus dropped his phone on his chest. Then, he heard voices coming from his phone. They must not have hung up.

"It's not a surprise, really, that he didn't make it. A doctor isn't a job for a man." his mother said to his father, unaware that Marcus could hear the conversation. His heart fell down an elevator shaft.

"I told him not to go for anything too ambitious. It never turns out well. He didn't listen. Now look at where he is." Marcus soaked in his father's words. Now, it felt like a lion mercilessly ripped a chunk from his heart. He always thought his father was in his corner. Looks like he was wrong.

He pressed the *END* button silently, as to not notify his parents that he heard their exchange, and tossed his phone across the room. It landed on the hardwood floor instead of the rug, which was Marcus' target. He wouldn't be surprised if the screen had cracked. He was cracking, too.

Marcus grabbed the TV remote from the arm of the couch where he had left it, and resumed his previous attempt to find something funny on television. When the TV flickered to life, the children's movie The Lion King was playing. It was always one of Marcus' favorites, and so he settled in the couch to watch. The knot in his stomach slowly unraveled.

On the screen, Simba and his father get chased by a pack of wildebeest, with the ultimate ending being Mufasa's demise. Simba mourns his father's death and runs away alone. As Marcus watched the scene unfurl, it felt like, once again, someone was tying up his intestines like shoelaces. Like the young cub on the TV in front of him, he was alone. He grabbed the remote to change the channel, for he couldn't bear another moment of being reminded of how tragic his life had become.

The Animal Channel came on screen, showcasing a special documentary on the life of lions, from cubs to lionesses. Marcus just turned the TV off and expired into himself. Tears welled up in his eyes. How could have his life taken such a downturn in such a miniscule amount of time?

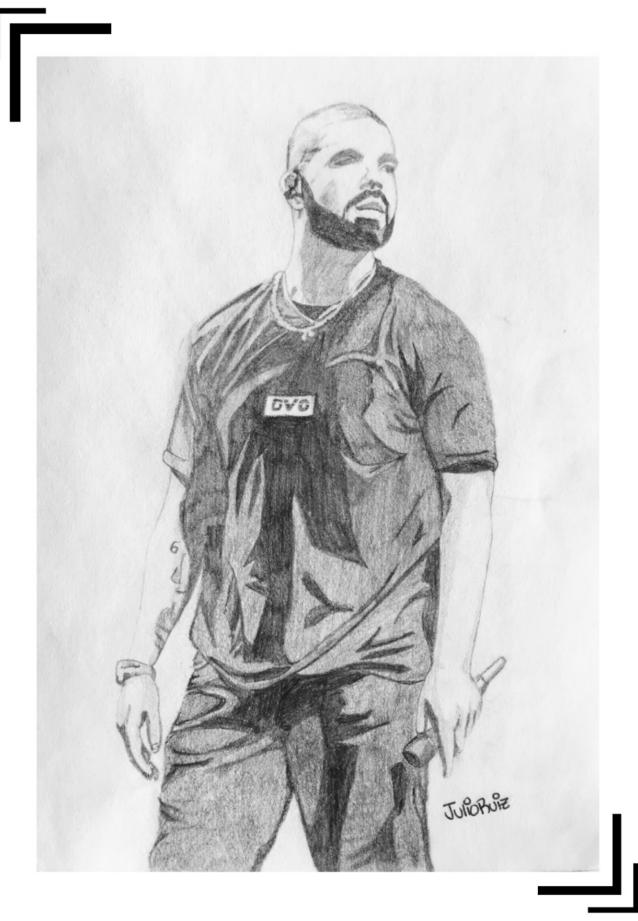
First, no residency program. All because he wouldn't sleep with the Chief of Surgery.

And now, no one with faith in him, not even his own father.

Had he really been on his own this whole time? He thought the lions were supposed to protect the cubs. Marcus sat on his couch, a blanket wrapped around his legs, crying silently and swimming in a pool of self

Maybe I had just been too ambitious? He thought to himself. Maybe I set myself up for this?

His subconscious rolled its eyes at him. Of course he hadn't been too ambitious. He deserved a chance at success just as much as any woman, as any human. For some reason, the world didn't feel the same way.



The Wacky Rhythmic Brawl of

Two Strange Siblings • By E

"Oi Nick nice job mate, ya totally got him this time." A kid with a heavy Australian accent and a baggy Australian flag sweater told another sitting down, behind him a small crowd of clapping and cheering could be heard.

"Yeah man, those rhymes were off the chart. Can't believe you came up with those so quick too!" This time a kid with an afro, a black t-shirt, and baggy jeans complimented him.

"Yeah whatever, ey Spencer think we got anymore brawls with this guy after this?" Nick said this with a confident smile, as if he already knew the answer. Nick wore just a casual, white sweater.

"Nah mate, just talked with him. Got no more with this one." A little thumbs up was given.

"Hey fellas, let's grab a bite then head home, got some bars to produce!" Tyrone, the afro kid, suggested. Then with that, they all went over the nearest CVS.

The sun was halfway to its destination at the time, bright day nonetheless. The three opened the door to the convenience store. As the door opened the bell above dinged alerting the cashier to man their post. As they walked towards the drinks section, the noise of the fridge got louder and more apparent. As Nick neared the door of the fridge-

"Yo, what you guys want?" Nick asked.

"Nick grab me the red gatorade." Tyrone replied while on his way to the snack aisle.

"Spencer, you?" Nick asked while he waited impatiently for his reply while holding the fridge door.

"Uhhhhhh, mate just grab me a water, and oi Tyrone grab me Fritos!" Spencer yelled making sure that he reached the attention of Tyrone.

Once the three grabbed all the desired items, they approached the cash register. A young woman, maybe around her twenties, was there on her phone. All she wore was a red sweater and some jeans, nothing special the store required employes to wear. Once they paid for the food, they left. As the three stepped outside they instantly noticed the once sunny bright day had turned into a shower of water.

"Just our luck. Walk into a store for five minutes and next thing you know it's downpouring. Let's just get home so we can practice," Nick said in a disappointing tone. Everyone was in a good mood until this happened. Now everyone was just wet and eager to get home. Not even three minutes out the door, they encountered two figures a little bit down the road, no one could make them out at first but Nick had a bad feeling.

"Hey I don't like the feeling those two are giving, don't they seem odd?" Nick said, the worry spilling into his words.

"What do you mean, just some two shorties? What they gonna do? Bite your ankles!" Tyrone shared no feeling of worry whatsoever, but as they drew near "Wait! That's your sister ain't it? Man that girl is all kinds of crazy."

"Oi mates, lets get outta here, I don't-"

"Hey IDIOT!" A demanding voice from a few dozen feet away called out. "Did Ya LOSE?"

Almost as if the devil himself had appeared before them. The dark presence seemed to fill the air as she walked towards them. The flashy, cute, bright colored clothes, covered the pitch black heart of her soul. Her eyes showed full evil intent, and the bright smile gave off faint malice to it. She walked up close to the group before continuing her thought.

"Heard about that battle you just had, it'd be a shame if you lo-"

"Steph look, I just want to go home can we-"

"DON'T INTERRUPT ME! When I'm talking, I STAY TALKING. Now let me FINISH!" She paused a little bit before continuing, "DAMN IT LOST MY THOUGHT. Oh yeah, don't lose. I'll tell ya why later." The group seemed astounded at the way she can lose and regain her train of thought in an instant. As the little demon walked away with her oddly quiet follower, she gave a little head tilt, smirked, then waved goodbye. The sun began to pierce through the clouds once again.

"Oi mates, what in Aussie just happened?"

"Ey man, I don't know. Let's get out of here. Nick you good?"

Nick did not reply, he just stood there looking at the ground. Thoughts of question and self-doubt came into his head. "Why am I nervous?", "What does she want?" Nick never got his head wrapped around the scene, and as they walked back home he stayed silent, sweat streamed down his face at a constant.

They now sat in the garage of Nick's house, big enough to fit three cars. Although there were no cars there, along the wall were tools and equipment, and the other side was lined with instruments and musical equipment. Nick still sat there, silent. Everyone ate their food besides Nick.

With a hand over his mouth and Spencer's ear, "Yo man, he's been like this ever since we encountered Steph. He's never been like this before though, usually just shrugs her off."

"Oi mate I don't know, but this silence is kinda killing me. Let's talk about something else, like, the new rappah in town, heard he's been climbing the ladder. Ain't no way is he gonna take Nick's spot tho-" Spencer was cut off by a kid running and yelling towards their door, he wore pretty baggy clothes to be running in and had very shaggy and unkempt hair.

Staggered and out of breath - "Guys, Guys! Bad news, there's this girl in town. She's been beating all the top 10s, and she's after you NEXT NICK!" Tyrone and Spencer looked at each other, in a "what a coincidence" sort of way. Nick on the other had felt a sharp pain go through his stomach. What he feared most of all has come into fruition, the thing he's been fearing for the past couple of hours.

"It's my sister..." Nick's voice was shaky and out of control, "I didn't really care about it at first but out of nowhere she got really scary. She started rapping half a year ago but went nowhere, but now she just climbed the ladder in two months. She's been rubbing it in my face, constant ridiculing, laughing, and eventually my fear of her just grew out of that." He started sweating even more, just thinking of her made him nervous.

"Nah I get it, if I had a demon as a sister and then she beat me at something like this, she'd never live that down. You're scared of living under her, trust me I would too. And if you lose that's reality." Tyrone at that moment gave everyone a big moment of realization, now stress

built up for not only on Nick, but Spencer and Tyrone too. They all thought of it, constant ridicule of the demon child and her posse.

"Mates I think it's best we all sleep on it. Get some rest, so much happened today." And with that, they all left and Nick stayed home. There was no reason for him to be scared of her, and if he had the choice he wouldn't be. To him it's just one of those uncontrollable feelings. He went to his room only to see a paper, he knows who it's from. It reads "Meet at the big spot in two days." The words were written in pink glitter pen.

It was 3 AM and Nick could not sleep. The demon sister only three rooms down slept like a rock. Nick stared out the window until some sort of inspiration struck. He took out a piece of paper, grabbed a pencil, and wrote. He wrote, and wrote, and wrote. Lyrics and raps and anything to help beat his sister. He wrote till his pencil was out of lead. He wrote till his hand hurt. He wrote until he filled up five whole pages.

7:30 AM, one more day until doomsday. Nick calls up Spencer and Tyrone to come over, and when they get there they notice something off about him. He was no longer the mopey, frightened man he was yesterday, but today there was a gleam in his eyes, despite the bags and dark circles that surrounded them. What had gotten into him? how could one man overcome fear in one night? Did he overcome it, or is he just good at hiding it?

"What's up with you man, weren't ya sweating rivers yesterday over your sister? To be honest I think I'm more scared than what you look right now." Tyrone watched, but Nick had no reply but he placed a stack of papers on his desk. Although Nick was not aware, Tyrone and Spencer noticed the sudden shake he had in his hand, most likely not sleep deprivation, but fear.

"Oi mate you still are scared, but oi, that's a lot of lyrics. That means, you still willing to fight?" Spencer skimmed over the lyrics with shock, so many and a lot of them were quality too.

Nick finally opened his mouth, "She's scary. If I break during the battle it's over, never knew my little sister would ever scare me to death like this. I still don't know why she's scary, just gotta deal with it. The battle is tomorrow at the big spot, she's planning something big so that makes me even more nervous. BUT. If we win, if we beat her, she's gone. Same goes for her, if she wins we're gone. So might as well give it our all if this our last one!"

Nick's mini-speech gave hope to Tyrone and Spencer, the fear that was once hindering them from progress was starting to drive them towards success. That day they worked and wrote lyrics as if it was their last day. Nick probably used over one thousand different words that day on the dummy, Tyrone. Might have ruined his self-esteem a bit but nothing as bad as what Nick's sister would do.

It was the morning of doomsday. Nick went outside, Tyrone and Spencer were already there. The sun was shining as bright as light directly in front of your eye, but as their walk to the big spot carried on it began to rain. The big spot was the place where all the big local rap battles took place. Wanted to ruin someone's career? Go to the big spot. The big spot was through an alleyway that lead to a big basketball court.

As Nick and crew walked through they see all the graffiti, mold, and tags on the wall. One side of the wall was riddled with "RIP Lil Cheesy, killed by Lil Dasani," and "RIP Biggie Pac, killed by Lil nomaD," all indicators of those whose careers ended at this spot. The smell of a rainy day filled the air.

As they step onto the court, the rain poured more heavily. They felt it even though they haven't seen it yet, the presence of a demon was right in front of them. The court had no players,

but a huge crowd, possibly a hundred people, all ready to see the number one local rapper get destroyed by a twelve-year-old girl, who was also his own sister. Everyone was screaming and chanting when he arrived, some positive some negative. But all that mattered was what was in front of him, death itself.

She looked as if she'd grown even more powerful and demon like since the last time they saw her. Horns seemed ready to pop out of her head at any moment. The big grin and evil eyes definitely did not match the flashy way she dressed. Her posse of six surrounded her, compared to Nick's three. This was it, life or death.

"Oh Niiiiick are you ready? Because I'm ready to claim the number one if you don't mind." She gave a big smile afterward.

With a big gulp and drop of sweat down his face, "Never been more ready." And so it has begun, the battle of the century.

"Brother, more like another sucker. Tryna be cool but he's really just a fool, spittin' bars but he's not getting far. Number one is mine the crown on my head will look fine, I hope you don't whine when your career starts to decline. "She started off strong, the crowd let out a big cheer. The rain got heavier.

Nick was up, this was his big moment. "..." Silence, everyone looked at him in confusion. A wave of distress flashed on his face. People started to think that he was out of the game. His friends looked at him in worry, the rain got heavier. Everyone watched as he took a big breath of air, and then as everything was looking hopeless he started. "This little demon scheming when really she's just dreaming. No chance at beating me so go back to dance recital with madam Lee. Pride has taken you for a ride makin' you think you can take me from one to none. You're sly now but wait until I swat you down like a fly." The crowd was thrown into outrage due to the unexpected comeback from Nick. Everyone was cheering, the crowd during this moment seemed to have divided itself, one side was cheering on Nick and the others were cheering his sister.

"I'm the one dreaming but you're the one leaving. Scaredy cat thinking he can take a pot shot at the big bat. Honestly now you can stop trying cus no one wants to see you crying. Please quit before the fire of regret is lit." Even more came from the crowd. This time she went for the sudden emotional attack instead of a full force end.

Nick once again fell silent. Maybe this time it was over. He looked the part of a loser, sweating, eyebrows pointed down, looking at the floor. All anyone heard at this moment was the pitter patter of the heavy rain hitting the basketball court. Everyone was soaking wet by this point, but most of the crowd remained due to the tension and suspense. Tyrone and Spencer were sweating more than what the rain was doing, but no one could notice because of the rain. After another couple of minutes of no movement, Nick started to stretch and closed his eyes while stretching.

"What is this a joke to you, or you just can't come up with anything?" His opponent was obviously very annoyed. She wanted to eagerly finish, but he was delaying.

After giving his knuckles one last crack he continued, but this time something was different. When he opened his eyes they looked a lot different than before, they had a look of pride in them. He shuffled his hands, pointed them to the rainy sky, then let out all in one breath, "Honestly I don't know how I can modestly say this but you're about to see why you can't sit atop of this rap tree. Sure maybe I was trembling, quivering, but I just fear that I'm gonna leave you shivering. You say I'm gonna be crying, but that's because I know someone's gonna be

dying. It seems like I'm talking future, but by the look on your face it seems you are already the loser." When he spoke the last word he furiously points the hands he shuffled to the ground, as if claiming his victory.

"Uhh, Nick he's wack. Uhhhh he likes cats." The once vicious sister, lost in words. This marked the end, once someone can't think, they lose. She fell to the ground in defeat and kept staring at the ground of the damp basketball court. The sun began to peak from the clouds.

"She's done! It's over! Put her name up!" The crowd started chanting and gathering around Nick.

"Oi mate this mean we won?" Spencer said, still trying to process the whole event.

"Yeah man I'm pretty sure it does!" Tyrone gave a cheerful reply to Spencer. Nick, his friends, and the crowd went over to the wall of names in the alleyway. A tall man held out two spray cans, one yellow and one blue. Nick took the yellow one and sprayed on the wall while covering his hand with the sleeve of his white sweatshirt, "RIP Steph, killed by Lil Washing Machine."

An hour later the crowd was gone and the cheers were over. He looked over to see his sister still staring at the ground, her posse nowhere in sight. She had the look of utter defeat in her eyes, eyes that said "I'm done for."

"Hey fellas let's get outta here, grab a bite to eat while we are at it." Tyrone suggested.

"Yeah sure. Let me just do one thing." Nick started to walk towards his defeated sister, he stopped right in front of the defeated girl. "Steph, want to come with us you're probably hungry too? Brought some extra money with me." Nick held out his hand.

His sister finally looked "But, I was so mean, and I even made you scared of me, why don't you just leave me here." A shred of regret was in those words. She then continued to stare back at the basketball court.

"What, nah. So what I was scared of losing, Anyone would've been. C'mon now." Nick still held out his hand as his sister looked up with a tear in her eye. She grabbed his hand with one hand and then wiped the tear with the other.

"Man, this guy is just too nice."

"Mate, glad to know him."

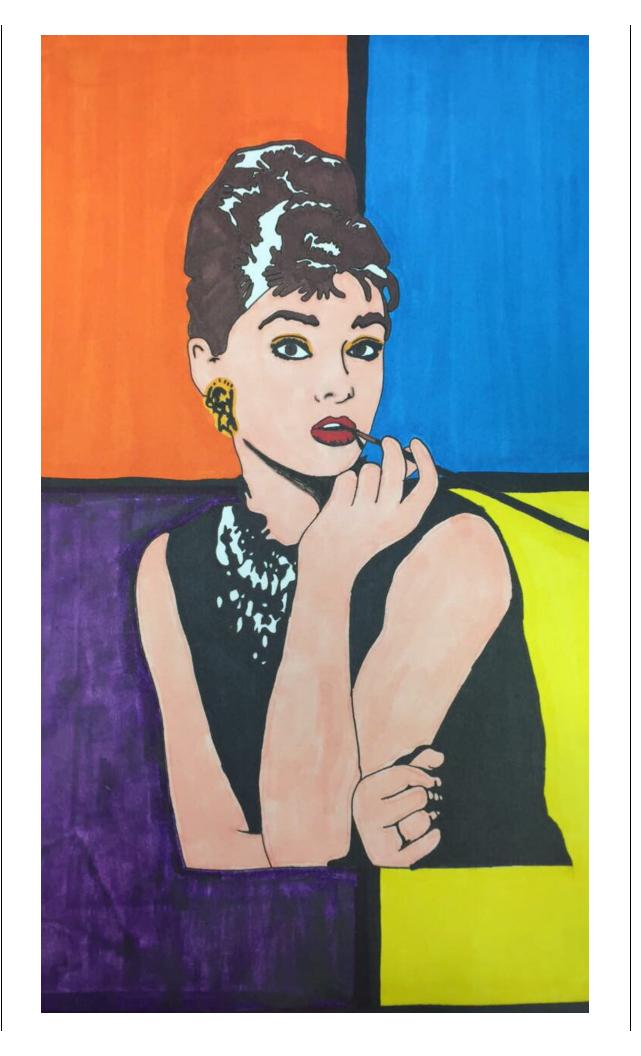
The group of four walked out the alleyway into the streets, lit by the bright rays of the sun.



Leah Salem



A R T W O R K B Y



L E A H

S A L E M + +

THE END COULD BE ANYTHING

BEING THE BEST CHEERLEADER ON THE TEAM TO SOMEONE ON THE STREETS

From having your best friend turn into a complete stranger

EVEN WALKING DOWN THE HALLS, ANY KID CAN TURN A NORMAL DAY INTO A BANGER

NOT KNOWING ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN SOCIETY TODAY

Not even the eyes that open the gateway to your soul

CAN IT BE YOUR LAST DAY?

Anything can happen, everything is unknown.

LIVING IN THIS WORLD WITH TERROR AND FEAR.

Walking in the halls you can only hear the screams and yelling

GASPING IN TRAUMA

BUT ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS REALISE, IT WAS ALL IN YOUR MIND.

"Fear"; Barbara Sweeney

+

Drawings by Diana





Crying herself to sleep tonight

She doesn't think she'll be all right

Anywhere she goes she feels pain

And ending her life? She just might

Mom's yelling gives her a migraine
The bullies at work, can't be tamed
This drama made her not feel loved
This sadness just can't be contained

He comes and helps, rises above

Shows her she deserves to be loved

Putting all her pieces back

Her life, he becomes a part of that

They both decide to leave and

Start a family in a new land

The man and women say with joined hands

"Together, forever, we stand"



W W W W W W W W W W

► SHORT BLURB BY TRISTIN HUBISZ

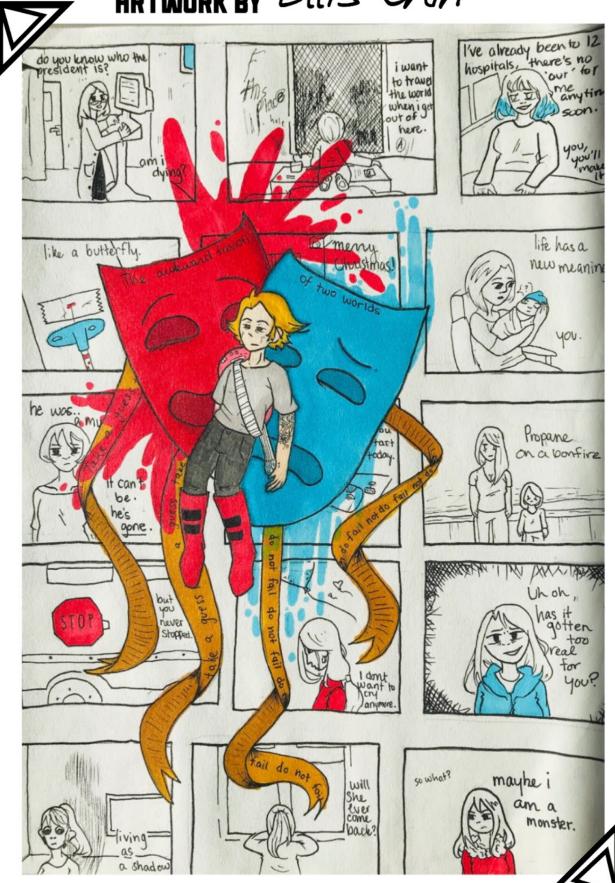
we can't change this world. we have tried and tried time and time again. but we never truly can. no matter what we do, this world is our master. we manipulate it, whereas it controls us. there are principles in life that we cannot overcome. death. love. loss. sorrow. joy. we feel these things because we are meant to. we are meant to enjoy this world we "control" while we still can. and to some, that is enough. to some, living is just the same as being alive. but no. because in this world of ours, we do not matter. in twenty years time, the faults of yesterday will no longer matter. in thirty years time, no one will remember you as you remember yourself. the grandiose proposition that we hold, the belief that we truly matter, will no longer matter. because in the end, after death, this world will still control us. storms do not contain themselves, earthquakes will still tear this world of ours, humans will kill and kill until war becomes complacent and synonymous with peace. in the end, nature will claim what we foolishly thought was of our own right. because in the end, we are nothing but specks of dust to the eternal being of this world.

ARTWORK BY CADY VACCARO

82223



ARTWORK BY Ellis Chin





every night i think of you
i dream of you
i dream of the day i can see you again
hear your voice again
hear your laugh again
i dream of the hydrangeas that grew
in your eyes

— , —

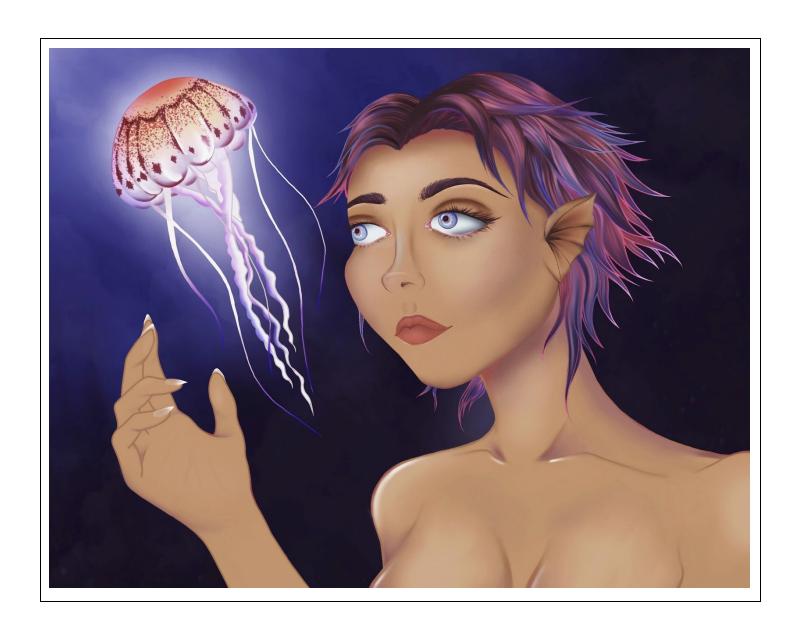
i hate this thing that i have
its ugly name
how it haunts me
how tired it makes me
constantly unmotivated

unfinishedett

i hate how it makes me leave things unfinished
how it leaves me without closure
how it takes so much
that i don't even have enough to finish this
damn poem

POEMS BY ANONYMOUS

b y



Diana Le

Untitled by Anonymous

•

Depression is a night out after a break up.
You go out with your friends,
Drink too much,
Make bad decisions,
Cry your eyes out,
Wonder why no one loves you,
Come home alone, tired, and with a headache.

Recovery is the hangover,
It hurts at first,
But you take baby steps
Get out of bed and to the couch,
Get some water,
Start slowly taking care of yourself,
As the day goes on, it dissipates,
It gets easier.



Unrequited by Anonymous



Hands in pockets, Lips sealed, Eyes averted

I beg myself not to cling to you I beg myself to get over you I beg myself not to love you

Please hold my hand Please kiss my lips Please look into my eyes and realize that I love you.









BETRAYAL

I've been stabbed in the back by those I needed most. I've been lied to by those I loved And I have felt alone when I couldn't afford to be But at the end of the day I had to learn I only have myself. With people always saying, "family comes first" It's true but in reality first is yourself. Having to be gone And feeling it all to the bone You've only come to question. Is this the best decision? The Answer? It can only leave you better.

His Cyes

Olivia Grabowski

-- ♦ --

Deep down
I think I knew
That he was no good
When I looked into
His eyes

His eyes Were never alive to me They didn't tell me a story When I looked into them

They were a deceased brown Like a hopeless swamp

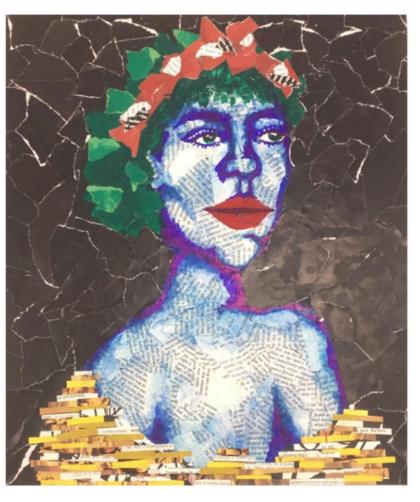
And no matter how much I believed his words
I could never trust the way he looked at me
Because there was nothing there
That could be held onto

No childish glimmer

No innate fascinating depth

No adventure waiting to be discovered

Just two shallow circles
Dead brown in color
Ordinarily
Scanning the room
For the next girl
To call
"Baby"







Б





Olivia Grabowski

Why is there always a story behind you A girl A love A life Who you are, is subject to change But I stay the same Scene after scene You have your story straight Mine is a series of crookedly handwritten notes Written on a checkered diner napkin Falling out of order. But I see you And nothing seems to matter For a moment, I fall irresponsibly, irrationally In love with you Your story And I think that you could mean something to me I see you as a solitary existence But then I realize That you are part of something much bigger You do not stand alone I will never understand Your complexities Who you laugh with on the bus The girl in the play, whom you fell in love with The life you live Outside of the picture And it makes me sad So, as the light focuses on you I look away Entranced And I silently love the way you smile the way that your voice carries on The perfect moment has occurred. I want to hold onto it forever. I never want it to end. But when it does, I stand up I applaud with the rest. And I let you go.

ARTWORK BY OLIVIA GRABOWSKI





Words

Words are like quicksand The more you say The faster you sink

They jumble together
Like two necklaces in a box
Hard to untangle and find meaning in

They have become worthless Less than a thought per phrase Thrown around without a care

Words are powerful Yet so powerless Just a sound to fill the space

And at the end of the day, Words can remain to hurt, But they can also remain to heal

:::

Frozen Nights

Leaves fall upon the cold ground, Like tears fall upon a warm cheek. Gentle, yet purposeful.

Mourning what once was,

Mourning a loss,

The loss of summer,

And the loss of a friend.

