

INCEPTION

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INCEPTION

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Inception Literary Magazine is designed to showcase the amazing talents of Slocum Skewes' young writers and artists in grades 6 through 8. It is a place where emerging writers and artists create and collaborate. This issue would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our talented staff and the encouragement of our entire school community.

We would especially like to thank Mrs. Michelle Mariani for her assistance, as well as the administration for their support.

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The Smell of Autumn

It was when I had grown into very slight cognition of the waking sun of morning and the tiring moon of night that I declared the search- I stepped, nervous, toward the scape.

The sweet smell of autumn's wings flapped toward me a great sense of unfamiliar relief, its reds and browns decorating the scene that painted itself in front of my very own eyes. There was nearly no hesitation, no doubt for the unknown to reveal itself to me as I saw from Mother Nature's slight sway of her hand, her paintbrush flying in all crazy patterns, so I stepped towards the great scene- eager.

My crimson-sandaled feet thought differently though, as my small toes winced at the feel of foreign ground. There was once a time when the floors of my feet only felt the sterility of tiled linoleum- where the only world I knew was one that ended when the linoleum retired.

Instead, now, I felt a floor of different flavors.

There was the base of concrete, then the first layer of toppings of leaves of all hues...

Following that, there was the light seasoning of acorns that crunched a lovely autumn lullaby as I walked hesitantly by.

And what was both my sanctuary and my prison drifted slowly away from me, its white signs and glass doors slowly shining towards its next victim.

And as I walked, it was almost as if I could hear the wind singing to me, its slight vibrato into my ear offering strange comfort- a faint jazz tune slowly crept its way into my mind, accompanied by the neverending sea of acorns displaying my path.

I then trekked, to nowhere particularly, only where the jazz vibrato seemed at home most, where I could again see Mother Nature's slow swaying and where my feet again winced at the differing flavors of ground it devoured.

By Yaejun Myung

Illustration by Suh-in Kim

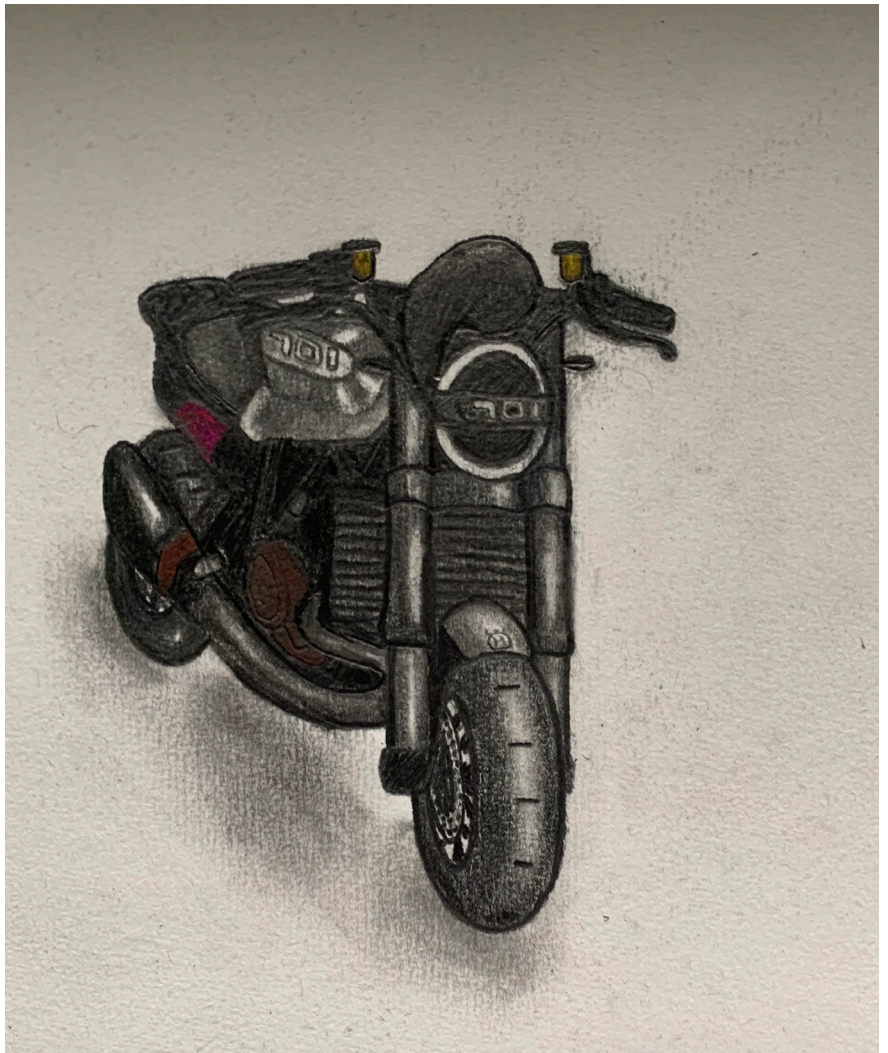


Motorcycle

As I look out the window, I see flashing lights,
I run to see a motorcycle parked outside.
Black, cool, shiny, sleek, dark, and smooth,
Finally, I can uncover the truth.
I put on my helmet, so cool so light,
It goes on cleanly, it fits just right.
I start the engine, sounds like a battle cry,
As I speed around, it feels like I can fly.
Racing around with the wind in my hair,
I can tell I have not lost my flair.
The motor roars as I go
Riding on my motorcycle makes me feel like a hero.
I ride in the dark, stealthy and fast,
And then all of a sudden, “crunch” I broke a glass.
The tire is starting to leak out the air,
And I can not find a place to stay anywhere.

By Claire Lee

Illustration by Eleftherios Marakas



Autumn

August is gone, now it's autumn
Uniforms on! School starts in ten minutes
The first day of the new school
Uneasy feelings all around, butterflies flying in my stomach
My name is Yeonsoo. I introduced myself to the class.
New friends, new teachers, new environment, new start!

By Yeonsoo Shim
Photograph by Claire Lee



The Corner Coffee Shop

It was a drenched night
I was trying to find safety from the light
The lightning struck and lit the entire sky
No one was outside on the streets dry

I could not see two feet ahead of me
And I knew I had to flee
I started running down the street
Where the intersection would meet

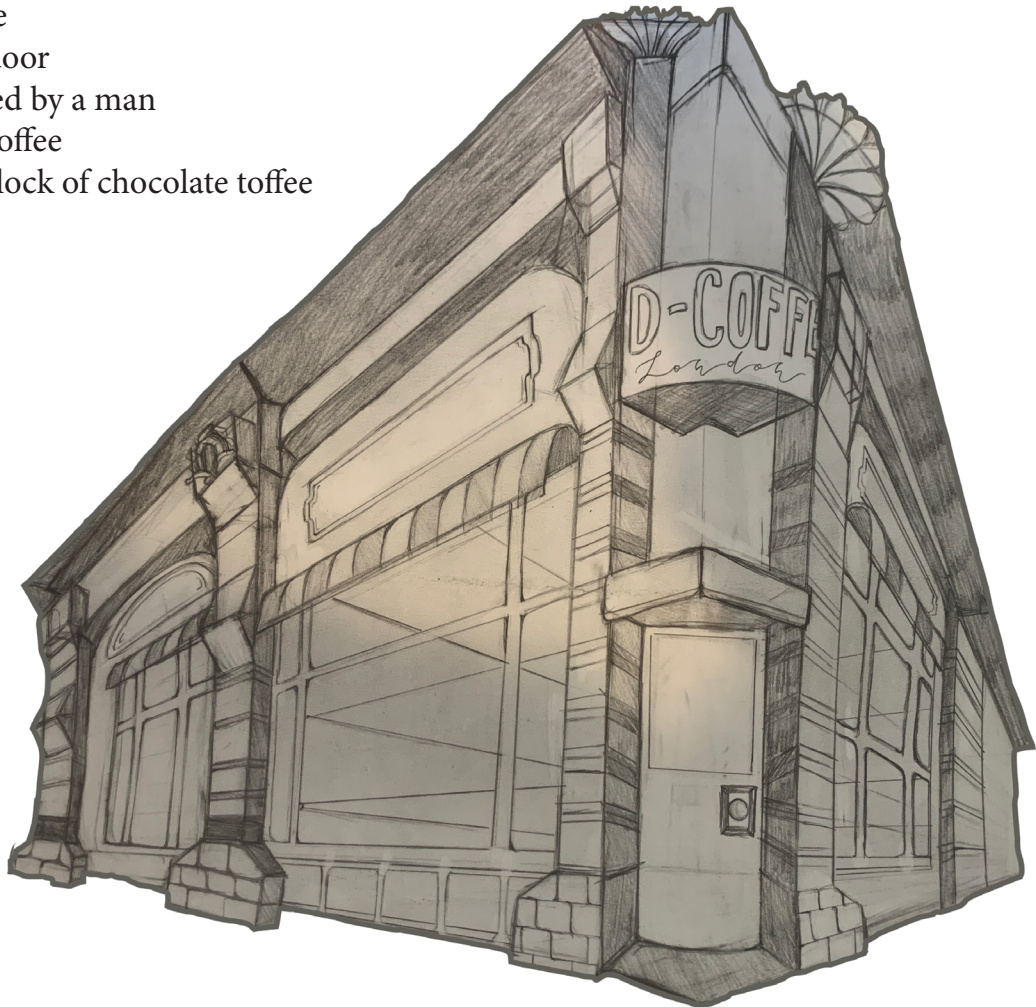
A couple of stores stood ahead
D-Coffee, one of them read
The corner coffee shop captured my eye
But I do not know why

Hesitating no more
I ran towards the door
Where I was greeted by a man
with a hot cup of coffee
And even a mini block of chocolate toffee

I followed him down the hall
Where a door appeared, not too tall
As the door opened, I observed the room
Chairs, tables, and a fireplace which smelled much
of fume

I sat by the fireplace and drank my coffee all alone
Watching everyone scroll through their phone
I finally felt safe and warm
Away from the vicious storm

By Heba Mohamed
Illustration by Yaejun Myung



From Sunset to Sunrise

The sunset begins as only the barest wisps of the Sun's rays, making their way down, under the horizon. As every rooftop is painted with the burning crimson and tangerine hues of the majestic star, the world pauses for a little while. The cars cease their noise, the children retreat to their homes for supper, and the birds fly away to their nests. The quiet of a peaceful sunset seems to settle over never-ending bickering of the world. And, slowly, as the sun pulls back its warm and the night falls upon the snow-tipped mountains and the lights of the homes go off, one by one, the stars start to crawl their way to the canvas of the night sky. The darkness of the endless void emanates the light of the minute stars, sprinkling the midnight with hope and aspiration. And if you listen closely enough, you can hear the stars singing a soft melody, and if you look closely enough, you can see the moon smiling, for it will disappear soon enough. And gradually, but ever so surely, the pitch black will twist and bend to make the same, dark crimson, and then the tangerine, until finally the Sun illuminates its endless light and the warmth of the sunrise is given off once again.

By Eylul Oktay

Illustration by Basma Mohamed



Nothing But an Old Tree

"What are you, grandpa?"

"Ah, my boy, I am nothing but an old tree."

"Tell me a story, grandpa. Pretty please?"

"All right young one. This shall be a story about the journey from acorn to old oak.

One remembers very little about being an acorn, except that it is a time of learning.

All acorns feel a certain yearning
For while seeing all there is to life

An acorn is free from strife.

Nothing but the sun shining, and cool rain falling
And as you grow, you hear the whole world calling.

Then, well, you start to sprout,

Your parents make jokes about moving out.

You feel mature, though you're still young

After your first branch has begun.

As a little sapling, life is so very exciting—

You grow and grow, each drop of water enticing.

As you blossom, and your trunk thickens,
Leaves grow tenfold, all welcome additions.

You are grown, an oak of his own

Let it be known,

That any storm may come

And you shall not succumb.

Little birds take up nest

Chirping for food, trying to grow feathers upon
their chest.

Little robins, how they make you laugh.

Ah, but I digress—

Time passed, and the little birds grew,

Flying everywhere, seeing the world anew.

As your trunk becomes tough

You know you've had your fair share of storms
that were rough.

Snow and rain, whatever, the deer seek shelter,

The wandering bear takes refuge under his elder.

You are at one with those in your glade,

You truly care for those in your shade.

For as an oak, there is no dishonesty,

Not at all, nothing but modesty.

Now, you are grand

You feel the tallest tree in all the land.

An oak in your prime

You can weather all of time.

Alas, the little birds are now gone

They have others to which they are drawn,

But you still enjoy your place,

Others will come to your embrace.

You are now old

But still others come into your fold.

With age comes weariness and wisdom,

As an oak, you watch over a forest kingdom."

By Paul Amaritei

Photograph by Mya Cabrera



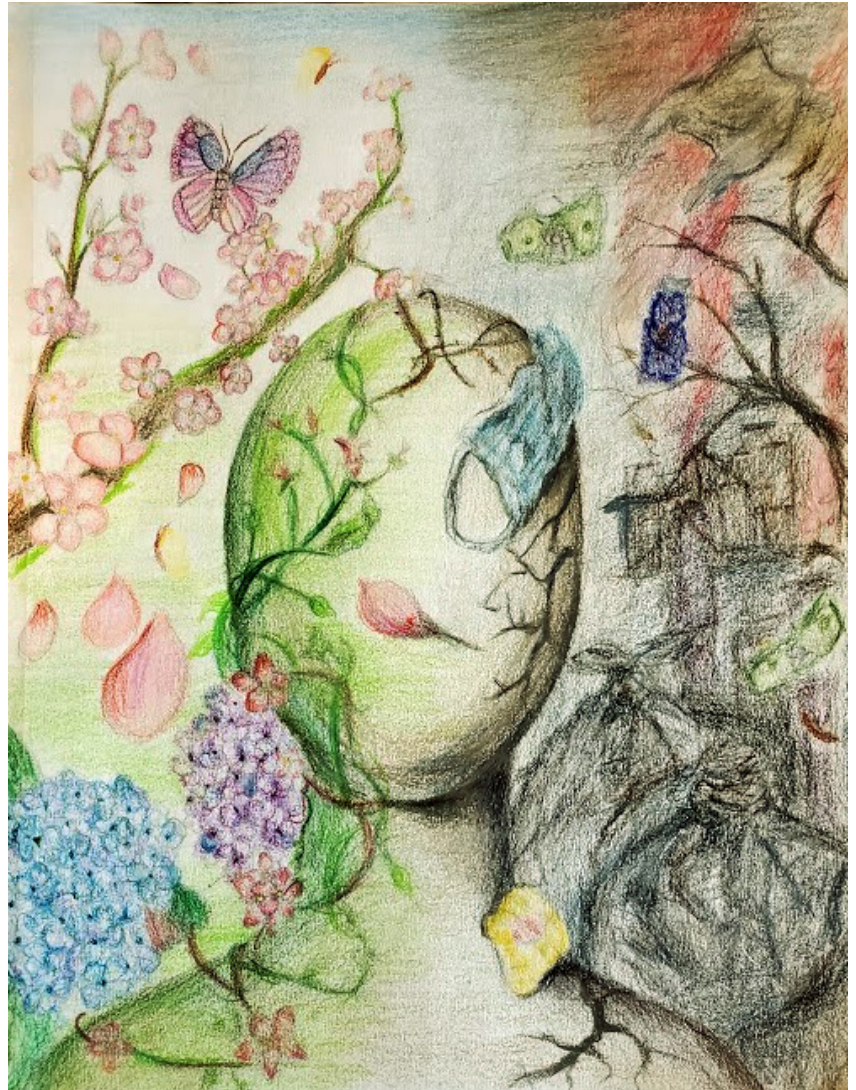
The Reason

If you look at my drawing very carefully, you can see a human statue with two sides, one good, one bad. I mainly focused on the effect we humans are having on Mother Nature. The title is also, “The Reason”. Are we the reason the world is saved, or are we the reason the world ends? I could have drawn a solution or polluted water, but instead, I drew this. At first glance, it's hard to understand, but when you look deeper into the meaning, you can see my intentions.

A solution to these desperate times isn't as simple as you think. Climate change is the result of human neglect, and it's up to us to fix it. That is why I added a statue of a human in the middle. It is our problem.

As much as people want to avoid this problem, we need to wake up and realize we're right in the center of the storm. Surrounding the statue is a “change.” Is it a good change or a bad change? Nobody knows. We can't predict the future, but it wouldn't take Einstein to figure out we're not going in a good direction.

When someone might see it, they could see the world getting better or moving towards the right. Others might see the world getting worse or moving towards the left. It's really up to humans. That's why we're tied into the problems too. I wanted to draw a different vibe than the others, so instead of showing a solution, I showed what most people fear. We are the solution or the problem.



By Olivia Kim

Illustration by Olivia Kim

Behind Closed Doors

Doors are closing
People are posing
All the lies
About their lives

Their life looks perfect on paper
But behind closed doors
They're nothing more than a faker
They lie about their life
And always want to start strife

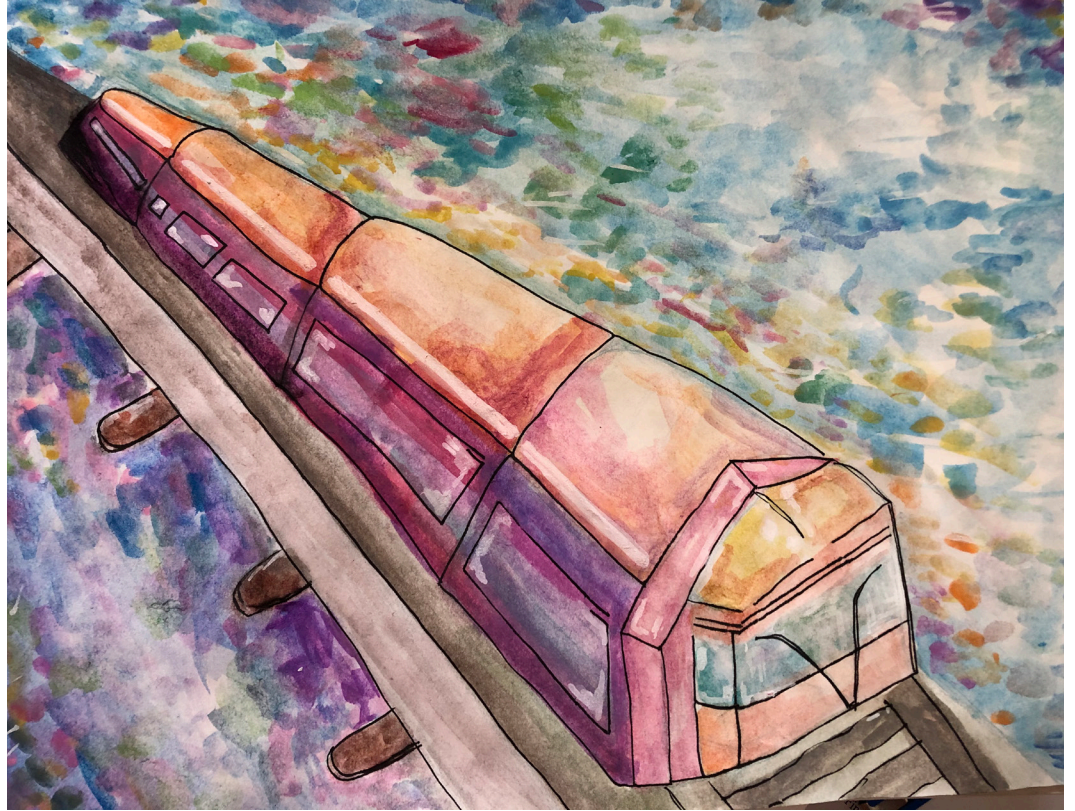
The lies they tell, only for clout
And live their lives all about
They let their followers think their lives are perfect
People change, thinking their life is a defect

They change to become fake
Their other lives they break
But why would you change your precious life
To one that they know is only rife

Your life is perfect and does not need to change
Your life isn't something you can just exchange
Your life is precious, so hold on tight
To the real life, you have, that you know is right

By Heba Mohamed
Illustration by Basma Mohamed





The Station by the Shore

The train waits for no one at the station by the shore,
It moves with a force that can't be stopped anymore.
Only the sharpest can find it to try and take a ride,
They can enjoy an eternity of happiness inside.

The passengers would wave to those left behind,
And think of possible wonders in their mind
When really, they'd never again see the light
They were tricked into thinking they were alright,

And as more time passed on the train,
One by one, the passengers would go insane.
Without knowing what would happen anymore,
They had suddenly arrived at the station by the shore.

By Eylul Oktay
Illustration by DaJeong Won

Worldwide Pandemic

It was March 13, 2020,
All the streets became empty.
The United States was in a lockdown,
No one found outside of their town.

Covid-19 took over the world.
And everyone stayed at home,
Days blurred.
Worrying about their family across
the world,
Cries of sorrow to be heard.

Malls and stores all closed down,
Everyone was now stuck at home,
sitting in their sleeping gown.
Not allowed to go outside,
While cases did not subside.

Families grew together,
Playing games, solving puzzles, no
one knew the weather.
Watching TV and eating popcorn,
A new period of history was born.

Covid-19 brought the good and bad.
Everyone was happy, but also sad.
Covid-19 brought us mixed
emotions,
A time when the world moved in
slow motion.

By Heba Mohamed
Illustration by Olivia Kim



When the little fish left his home, his father had warned him about the dangers of the ocean. But had he left his home? Did he have a father? What was an ocean?

"I do get quite confused these days." He said to himself.

The little fish's father had told him their kind did not remember much, that they forgot quite easily. But did he remember that, or was it merely a figment of his imagination? What was his imagination? Did he have a father?

"I do get quite confused these days." He said to himself.

Well, out of the jumble of thoughts, the little fish remembered one thing, and one thing only. He was to look for food, a shrimp, preferably, because he was definitely hungry. But was he hungry? What was a shrimp? Did he really remember he was to look for food?

"I do get quite confused these days." He said to himself.

The little fish did not like to get confused, though. He liked it when he could think clearly without forgetting things. But did he not like to be confused? Had he ever thought clearly? What did it mean to forget?

"I do get quite-" He was about to say to himself, when he saw another little fish who had a sea green tint and was roughly his size.

"How do you do?" The green fish asked the little fish. But due to the rumble of the colossal engine on the boat sailing above, the little fish could not hear what she had said.

"I'm sorry, I did not hear you. What did you say?" He asked.

"What did who say?" She inquired back.

The little fish truly did not know what to say to this, for he had forgotten who had said what and where this new fish had even come from. Suddenly, the green fish said, "Did you know we have really short memories? My mother told me once." The little fish knew this, but from where? Something about memories and a father... They stood there for a few moments with hazy gazes until the green fish looked into the little fish's eyes as if she had just noticed he

was there.

"Well hello! Didn't see you there. What is your name?" she said.

"I'm afraid I don't know," the little fish replied.

"Don't know what?"

But the little fish could not give an answer for he did not know what it was that he did not know.

"I do get quite confused these days."

Without another word, the green fish started swimming away and chasing after a tiny shrimp. Shrimp. The word seemed familiar but the little fish did not know why. There was something important he had forgotten, something to do with... With what? The little fish could not remember. He decided he would continue swimming though the little fish did not know why he had even started swimming in the first place. Maybe he would remember along the way.

The little fish started to make his way across the forest of kelp and saw countless fish as he did so, yet he had once again forgotten how or why he had even come to where he was currently when he arrived at a patch of seaweed that looked much darker than those around it. The little fish observed the peculiar patch countless times, forgetting each time that he already looked at the same spot for so long. However, the patch of seaweed was most definitely a darker, richer, green color.

Suddenly, something caught the little fish's attention and he directed his gaze upward, only to find that the darkness was merely a shadow being cast by a sailboat above. The same boat that had the loud engine which had blocked the green fish's voice. But, of course, the little fish did not remember the boat nor the green fish he had met only a few moments before.

A ripple occurred in the water as a string started lowering down into the ocean with something attached to the end of it. Curiously, the little fish swam over to the string and saw a tiny flailing shrimp on a hook and had a burst of memories flash before his eyes. Shrimp. The word seemed familiar once again but the little fish did not know why. There was something important he had forgotten, something to do with... With what? The little fish could not remember. But then he regained his focus and looked at the pinkish-gray sea creature at the end of the line. He supposed he should eat it. What harm could it do? Somewhere inside the little fish, a thought, a memory came to him. His father had once warned him about

the land-creatures; monsters who ate his kind. But did he even have a father? What was a land-creature? What was “his kind”?

“I do get quite confused these days.” He said to himself. After repeating the same thoughts over and over in his head, forgetting each time that the same muses had already occurred to him before, the little fish decided he would stay away from the shrimp even though he was quite hungry.

“I will not eat you, little friend,” he said to the shrimp.

“You will not eat what?” came a voice from behind. The green fish had returned, but of course, the little fish had no memory of ever meeting her before.

“I’m afraid I do not know,” he replied.

“Do not know what?” the green fish asked.

But the little fish could not give an answer for, once again, he did not know what it was that he did not know.

“I do get quite confused these days.” The little fish said, more to himself than the green fish.

As he turned around, a little shrimp attached to a string stood before him. The little fish could’ve sworn he had seen it before... but he could not have sworn, for each time he blinked and opened his eyes again, the shrimp sparked no memory in his mind.

He turned around to look at the green fish, but she was already gone and the little fish forgot why he had even turned around in the first place.

Forgetting about the shrimp next to him and his somewhat green fish-friend, the little fish decided to swim away, not remembering why he had begun swimming in the first place.

“I do get quite confused these days.” He said to himself.

By Eylul Oktay

Illustration by JinYoung Kim



It was an immaculate spring morning with delicate, yet mesmerizing flowers blooming everywhere, filling the whole world with color. The sky was crystal clear with the bright, morning sun shining its beauty and warmth to all creatures below. The wind blew gently, carrying sweet floral scents that were now floating in the air. Spring, indeed, was the most magnificent season to start a new beginning. Yes, a new beginning, especially for that young lady over there.

She was quite tall with sleek, long hair gracefully hanging down on her elegant, white gown. It was perfect for her flawless beauty, but to be precise, one would not be able to tell if it was her gown that was dazzling or her glamorous self. Even her warm, brown eyes were twinkling under the sun, which made her look more like a seraph instead of a mortal. She was a gorgeous bride, indeed, but her facial expression would confuse one to think that her engagement was broken. There was a look of anxiousness and sadness on her face. She sighed nervously and looked around the enormous waiting room. It was a fine place with a pleasant aroma filling the air. So many vases of various flowers were placed all around the room and the smooth leather sofa-like chairs were quite luxurious too. As expected, the wedding venue was superior to her waiting room. It was a massive garden with small, but lavish water fountains placed here and there. In the distance, there was a sparkling beach with a tall resort next to it too. It seemed like a grand wedding, except to the bride who was now looking paler as the time to exit out the door was drawing near.

Each minute that passed was tormenting for her. Her heart was racing and her hands wouldn't stop trembling. She tried every possible method to calm down, but nothing worked. She regretted asking the cosmetologists to leave with her parents who were zealous to take her pictures. Just as the tears were about to run down her face, she was hugged from behind by a young man. He was very tall and lean, making him perfect for a model. His stylish suit enhanced his beauty even more. He comforted his fiancée very tenderly and escorted her back to her seat.

"Do you feel any better, dear?" he asked concerned.

She nodded slowly, thanking him, and rested her head on his shoulder. Feeling relieved, he smiled warmly and kissed her hand.

"Thank you, honey, but is it okay if you stay here like this?... I'm sorry to always cause you trouble... I wanted to be the best bride and walk confidently out the door to you- I'm sorry...", she whispered, with her face now facing the floor.

"Shhh- You are the world's greatest bride! Do you realize how ravishing you look? Just look at the mirror!" he exclaimed.

She sighed, "... Please honey... I'm not joking- don't change the subject like that. Please..."

The groom looked like he wanted to speak, but paused and looked at his fiancée earnestly. He hesitated for a moment, but held his hands out and placed them on hers. Immediately, she stood up in shock and grabbed his hands tightly.

"Honey! What's wrong? Are you feeling sick? Why are your hands so cold and pale!" she cried out.

He let out a chuckle and motioned her to sit back down. There was a brief moment of silence, then he cleared his throat to speak.

"Funny...right? I comfort you to not stew, but here I am- all anxious like a coward. I tried to be a confident groom, you know? I didn't want to embarrass you by acting this way. I thought it would be

best to keep it a secret but look at me now. I'm a hypocrite, aren't I?" he sighed.

He was turning gloomy and looked away from her helplessly. Just as he was about to apologize for his actions and leave the room, his fiancée held his two hands firmly once more and stared into his dull eyes.

"Honey... you are wrong. You are not a coward, but the most perfect husband! I have many flaws, but you always cover them and make me shine. You give me the strength to rise from my fall and comfort me in my weakest, hideous state. I've become a new, better version of myself that I'd never have discovered if it weren't for you! Thanks to you, I can be who I truly am without fear." she shouted confidently.

He broke out into a bright smile and hugged her very tightly. They both embraced that moment and chuckled at how foolish their worries were.

"You do not know how thankful and elated I am to have you as my wife! Do you know you were shining like the sun when you told me that? I thought an angel appeared before me. You know... it's all right if you are nervous, dear. You're not the only one, I won't make you stay alone fighting your fears. Even if you make a mistake out the door, I will always be there for you no matter what. You will always be cherished in my heart as my number one treasure. That's a promise," and he kissed her softly.

She blinked in surprise and was so touched by his words. She didn't expect her husband to be in the same state as herself. He looked too calm despite her thoughts, but she felt glad that she could comfort him back. They were both at ease now and her groom, who was now in front of the door, held out his hand to escort her out.

He grinned and said, "Shall we go, my queen?"

At last, the final moment was here. There was no anxiousness on her face anymore. She was as tranquil as she can be. She headed towards her husband with a smile as bright as the sun and for a second, she gazed at him. They both thought "I love you" as they stared lovingly into each other's faces. As the door to the venue opened, all their worries were gone as if they never existed from the beginning. They were the most charming couples above all. A new chapter to their life has just begun.



By Emoji Han

Illustration by DaJeong Won

Crossing Over the Bridge

She was standing at the start of the bridge, determining whether or not to cross it. The other side of the bridge held a new beginning. The next chapter of her life. However, she did not desire to leave the life she already had. The one where it was only her and her mind in a little cottage in the rural area of France. She was not certain that her new life would benefit her.

She hesitated as she set one foot down on the bridge, but she then remembered what her mother would say to her. “Great opportunities don’t come commonly in life, so if you come across one, do not hesitate to take it.” A hot tear traveled from her amber eyes down onto her rosy cheeks but did not stay long as she quickly wiped it away. She looked up to the sky, which held not one cloud, blew her mother a kiss, and crossed over the bridge.

By Heba Mohamed

Photograph by Mya Cabrera



In Love

I look into eyes, so shiny, so smooth
But these certain eyes belong to you
Whenever I look away
I feel dizzy and start to sway
When I do that you hold me tight
And when that happens I feel just right
When I go home I'm wide awake
Trailing home like a snake
Walking on the side of a bay
I wait for yet another day
For you to come and call my name
Even though your love may be a
game...

By Claire Lee

Photograph by Claire Lee



A Love Letter to the Woods

My feet run – click clack
On polished yet worn
Red shoes with the buckles
Big sweater big holes
My mind runs on nothing
My brain fried, and confused
Exhaustion and eye bags
I'm nothing without you

My salvation my sanctuary,
my forest my woods

Breakfast with birdies
and dinner with deer
My snack times near twinkle,
near rush of stream
My sunrise my sunsets
I witness near you
And for the company,
the memories I thank you

My feet land on soil on rocks
and on roots
My jeans stained with dirt,
wild berries, fruits
And I dance through the trees
Eyes closed and arms free
On a cold autumn evening
Feeling whole, feeling me

By Mia Fowler
Photograph by Olivia Kim





Cataract

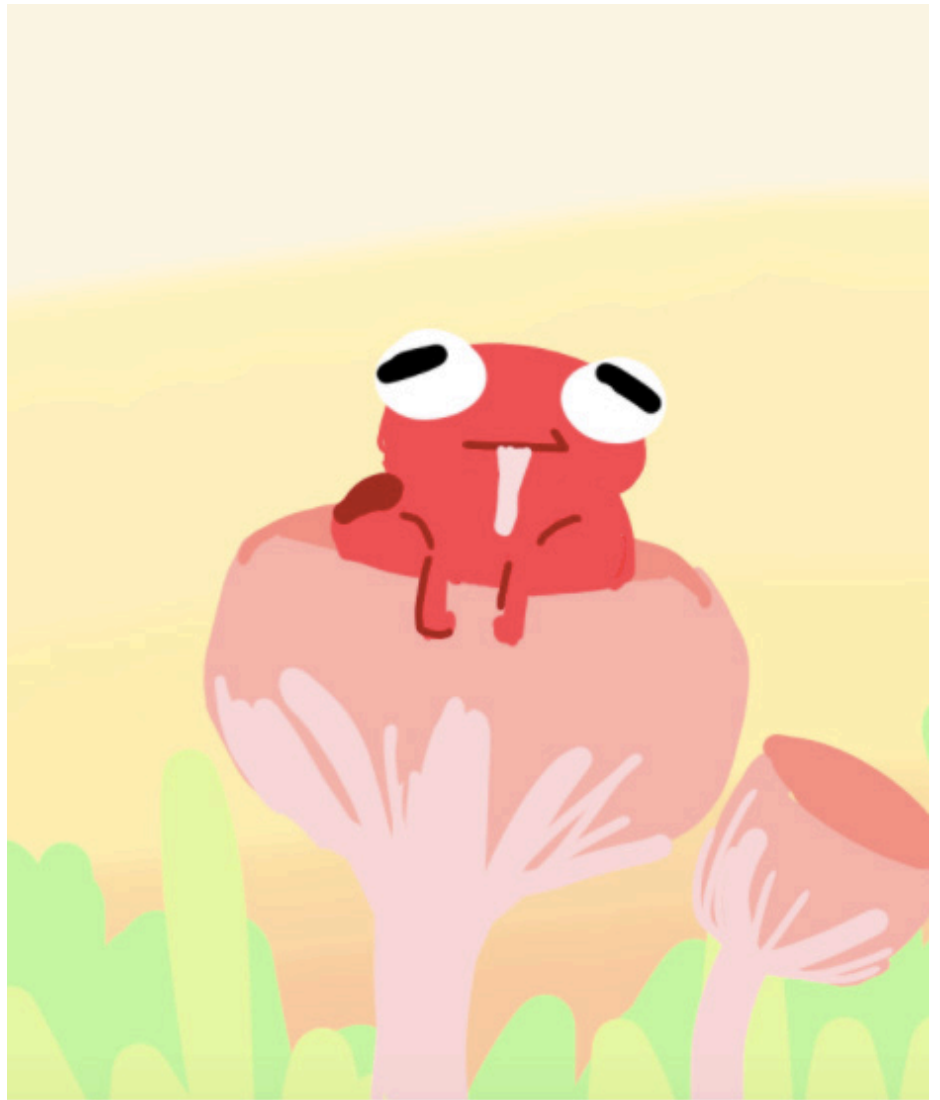
She lay there on the coal-black cornerstone where her sapphire eyes glistened in the radiance of the moonlight. She lay and listened to the collision of the two masses of water. The crashing and the tiny, little droplets of water that make their way to her skeletal, pale visage. She could smell the hint of sodium chloride that was liberated from the mass of water. She counted each and every droplet that ever lay on her face that night. “Three hundred sixty-nine, three hundred seventy.” Lying there ‘til the first rays of sunlight poured out from the sky. She knew then that it was time to go.

By Heba Mohamed
Photograph by Dami Bae

A Frog's Thoughts

Lying in the meadow
Swimming in my swamp
You keep me warm, contented
And in the night you cool me off
Blended hues of reds to greens to blues
Yellow painted skies, above the morning drops of dew
And in the afternoon aquamarine you reign supreme
Amongst the creatures and the critters
The clouds in the sky
and even through stormy weather
You always keep me high
Above the clouds, soaring
Like the birds with feathers plucked
straight from the color wheel
Making it hard to believe
this is real
So, how could I compete
With animals colored so neat
Maybe in everything so diverse
you need a little of me
I might be the foundation
holding everything together
And if you fly too high
I will be your tether

By Mia Fowler and Emma Brongo
Illustration by Alanis Avila



Home

I sleep
In the meadow where I was deserted

I lie
Between the autumn leaves

I dream
About the fluffy clouds in the sky

I hear
The birds twittering about and leaves slowly falling

I taste
Fruit so tangy and sweet

I touch
The leaves I'm lying down on

I see
The sky the painted trees of gold

I wait
In the meadow for someone to take me *home*

By Claire Lee
Illustration by Olivia Kim



Camera

It was a normal Saturday. I was with my aunt shopping at a nearby mall. We did what people normally do at the mall. We ate food, bought toys, and had a great time. However, this particular Saturday, we decided to go into a camera store. It was there where I would get my very first camera. It was the latest model and I knew it was the perfect camera for me.

I used that camera all the time. I used it to take pictures of my family and my friends.

Sadly, my aunt passed away. Now every time I use my camera I think of her. Her gift has made it possible for me to take wonderful photos of important people and events in my life. I will never forget my aunt and this wonderful gift she gave me.

By Chris Cha
Illustration by DaJeong Won



Don't Judge a Book By Its Cover

The little cactus always wished to
have a friend,
A lovely companion with a
helpful hand to lend.
But the other plants and animals
were scared of his kind,
When playing games, they would
leave the cactus behind.

The cactus understood that his
appearance was quite fearsome,
Which is what the others wanted to
stay away from.
But what could he do to show he
meant no harm?
An act of kindness to show his true
charm?

At last the cactus decided upon this:
To grow beautiful flowers that no one
could miss.
He soon grew flowers of various colors,
Obtaining a beauty unlike that of the others.

The cactus' flowers drew attention from all around,
And many apologized for the wrong thoughts to which they were bound.
Everyone saw how the cactus was peaceful and kind,
And started to see him as a friend in their mind.

It is important to accept everyone for who they are,
And to not commit actions that leaves their heart with a scar.
So the next time you see someone unlike the others,
Remember to never judge a book by its cover.

By Eylul Oktay
Illustration by Kayla Lee



Dragon

A dragon in the east
Is the benevolent beast
Flying in the sky
Wisdom in her eye

Long-like a snake
Water she makes
Creating rain
In her heavenly domain

Lengthy like a river
The drink giver
Flexible and wise
Giving the good prizes

Wise, dragon
Pours water into your flagon
Ruler of the sky
But as peaceful as they come by

By Kenneth Ryu
Illustration by Suh-in Kim



The People in the Clouds

Do the people in the clouds ever wonder what's below?
All the chaos and the pain and the feelings we don't show?
Do the people in the clouds know they're at peace?
How those on the ground want to be released?

Do the people in the clouds know they're the stars in the sky?
The destination of those who wish to fly?
Do they know the secrets to the eternal universe?
Were they the ones who put on us a curse?

Do they know that inside us,
jealousy still burns?
But we were never really part of
their concerns.
And when we can no longer
stand the crowds,
Do they know that we look
at the people in the clouds?

By Eylul Oktay
Illustration by Claire Lee



Heartbreak

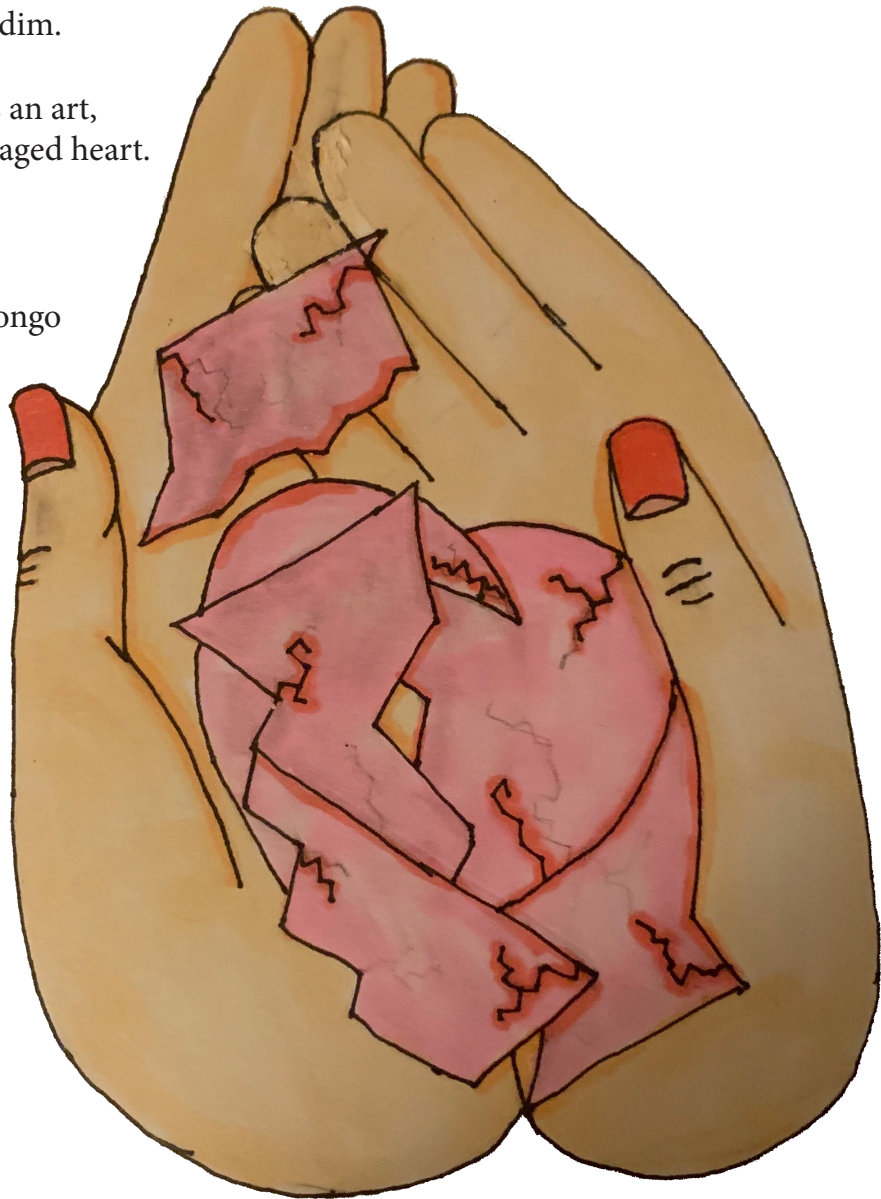
He won't look me in the eye,
I can feel his love fading.
He doesn't smile around me,
I can feel this ending.

He looks at others with a loving gaze.
I wait for the day where I lose him.
He won't hold me anymore.
I begin to see a world so dim.

He lets me go, as if it was an art,
He finally broke my damaged heart.

By Jade Dimas

Illustration by Emma Brongo



I Never Play Piano, But For You, I'll Make An Exception

Goddess of Sun, I beg of you to my feeble Moon
A smile, a hand, a glance
For if I were bold, or my mind attune
I would ask you for a dance
Your presence sets flame to my heart
As your eloquence strikes the floor with a passion
And I watch you dance engulfed in your art
From the sides, in my typical isolated fashion
Darling words can't describe how much I adore you
But this adoration, is that not an art?
A voicing of my feelings, that is long overdue
Expressed in piano, for my sweetheart
For the Goddess of sky, for the warmth of my heart, for one I always think of
From the Prince of the stars, the son of the moon, a declaration of my everlasting love

By Mia Fowler

Illustration by Kayla Lee



Standing By The Sidewalk

I sit down and think
Of colors like pink
And wonder what life is about
To play, to live, to have some doubts
Sit by a tree
Or to be free
So I walk in the snow
As the cold winds blow
Because I don't know...
With the snow ankle-deep
I walk slowly without a peep
A mountain covered in snow
A river around that slowly flows
Wind that squeezes you very tight
Clouds in the sky, that feel so light
A star in the night

That shines so bright
The water reflects the light
The sun in the sky makes water look like ice
Trees so old that are ready to slice
Feeling like I will fly
I think that I cannot deny
What will happen if I lie
Webs of network intertwine
As everything starts to align
Time slowly goes by
As the snow falls by, I sigh
As I stand on the sidewalk...

By Claire Lee
Photograph by Claire Lee



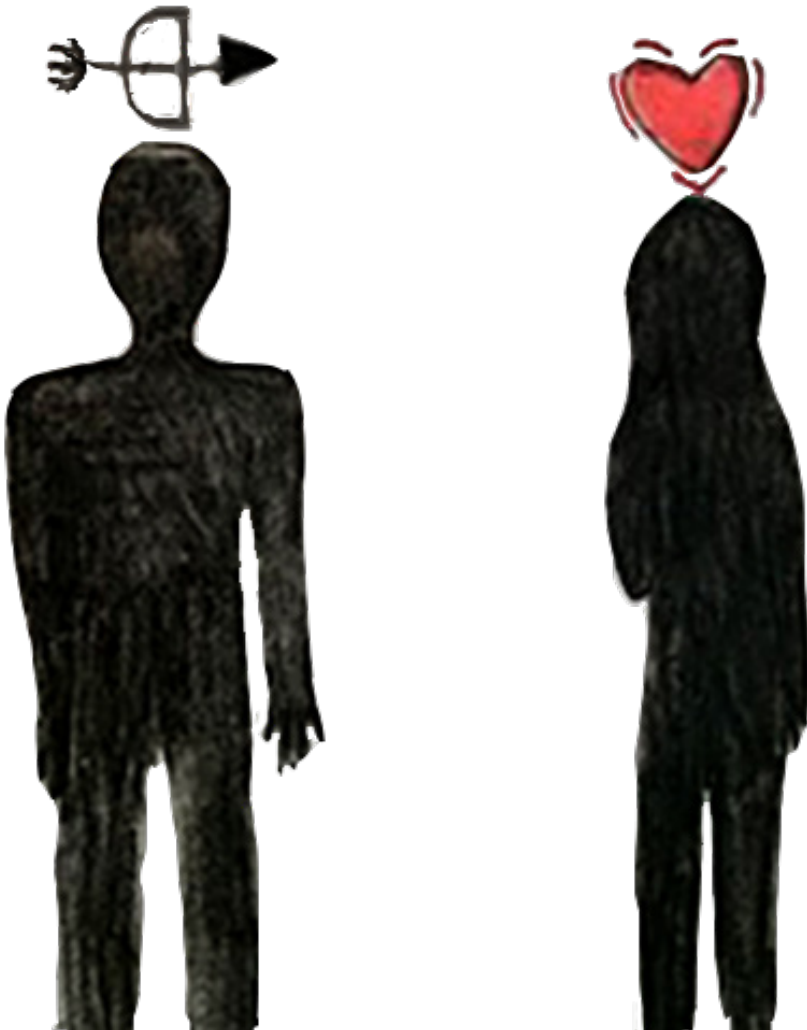
My First Love

My gaze fell upon you and I saw stars.
My world filled with color as I stared from afar.
When you smiled my face became flushed and warm.
Butterflies filled my stomach like a storm.

Your beautiful brown eyes make my heart flutter.
My knees wobble as I hear the chairs clatter.
I feel like I've been given a gift from above.
I finally found my first love.

By Jade Dimas

Illustration by Emma Brongo



Serenity

Everyone thinks they've found the treasure
When in reality it was just displeasure
It's not desiring jewels or money
It's simple joys like a pot of honey

Whether it's wishing for the end of a war
Or the unity of the people you adore
There is one task that must be completed
And without it your goal will be defeated

Look around, it's right in front of you
It is a shell that one must break through
In order to spread serenity
Be at peace with oneself and enjoy some honey

By Fatima Lira

Illustration by Suh-in Kim



Role Model

Over every bump,
Every burden,
Every stump,
Through every garden,

Water streams,
Seamlessly,
All throughout the ground to our souls.

We look towards this significant source to feel all sorts of things;
We feel relaxation, adrenaline, revelation, and motivation-

Water,
Traveling through every burden,
Never stopping to hop over a bump,
Streaming through whatever comes in
her way,

Water is a force of nature
that moves on and into the future,
no matter what may attempt to pause
her neverending system of progression-

Water is the world's role model.

To be like her,
Requires much wisdom, age,
and endurance,
But the next time
we feel such adrenaline
from the sound or sight
of water splashing by,
Remember to never let a single stump
pause your own progress in life.

Stream through those who burden you,
and embrace those who admire you.

By Yaejun Myung
Photograph by Mya Cabrera





Butterfly

Tiny and graceful
Time runs out as its wings rest
New beginnings form

By Amber Worsham
Photograph by Amber Worsham

Right from the beginning, the letter seemed peculiar:

Dear anyone that reads this,

It's been four months. Four months of uncertainty, of nail biting, of near sleepless nights. Four months since Papa left with the only horse and the last two guns to find out what was making those eerie sounds. Four months of nothing but open plains stretching out as far as the eye can see. Not even the wild horses came through here anymore. Something changed here, that day the animals ran away. It wasn't an obvious change so we stayed of course, and laughed about it. Everyone except Dale. He was the first to go. One by one, they were taken. A sickness, a snakebite, a rockslide in a cave. At some point, it was only Papa and I, but now he's gone too. I've tried my best to not think about it, but I feel like there's something out there- something that's toying with me. God, I wish Papa left a gun or a horse or something. I needed to leave- to get far away from here. It's as if whatever higher being is up there was playing a practical joke on me and laughing his heart out. Or at least, it was. Because yesterday, Papa's horse came back alone.

Wishing you better luck than me,
Anabelle

The most curious thing was that the house was perfectly clean. There was no corpse, as if no one was ever there. However, dark red on the blood-stained letter told another story.

"Amusing," Walter Crane, the youngest private eye in history chuckled to himself as he put the letter in his coat pocket and walked down the street.

New York City was bustling. Smog from several steam engines filled the sky, while their whistles reached everyone's ears. Horse buggies paraded through the streets and the sounds of lively city life clogged one's head. Safe to say, New York was thriving. And right in the middle of it was Sammy Hughes' Investigation Firm. It was the most renowned private investigator corporation on the East Coast, boasting a congregation of the finest detectives in the United States, and dating back to Washington's time. People from all over would flock to Sammy's whenever they had something they needed to solve. A mysterious disappearance, pay a visit to Sammy's. A possible murder that the police couldn't attend to, Sammy's had a guy. If you had money, you had results. No-one ever left unsatisfied and no case ever left unsolved. At least, that was what the old staff thought. But on the top floor in the third room on the right, something unheard of was occurring, something that never happened once in all of the firm's proud history: a woman was begging Walter Crane to help her for the second time.

"Please Mr. Crane, please. Find out what happened to my husband and children! Please!" The woman's voice wavered with every word. She was failing to hold back tears.

"I already told you Mrs. O'Riley. My colleagues have already given their best to crack your case, they simply could not. There's not enough evidence for us to act."

Having to lie and stain the company's name hurt Walter, but there was nothing he could do. The police had already ordered Sammy's to immediately cease all activities regarding the Anabelle O'Riley case and let them take over.



“Please, I beg of you. No one else can help me. You’re supposed to be the best,” she pleaded. The woman’s country drawl mixed with her trembling voice made her last sentence nearly unintelligible.

Walter gritted his teeth. “I apologize but as I’ve said before, there’s nothing I can do. Now, if you would be so kind as to exit my office, I would greatly appreciate it.”

Mrs. O’Riley was escorted out promptly, her shock and grief silencing any further pleading.

The private eye sighed and ran his hand through his red hair while swiveling his chair around towards the window. Outside, he could see clouds darkening the sky and heard the light pitter-patter of rain on the glass. It was a relaxing scene, but there was something troubling the detective. Why didn’t we solve it? It’s our guys. There’s no case too hard, right? His troubling thoughts eventually prompted him to go get the monthly case reports on the O’Riley disappearance. As he was reading, he had a nagging suspicion that something was missing. He read late into the night, struggling to keep his eyelids from closing yet determined to find some hint to help solve the case. Eventually though, Walter fell asleep at his desk, his head resting on the pages.

“Have you seen the papers?” An amused voice disturbed Walter’s sleep and he bolted up. Standing in front of the desk was Walter’s best friend and rival, Ethan Dawson. Ethan was the model of success: he was intelligent, humorous, attractive and held a top position at the most reputable private intelligence firm in the nation. He came from a long line of policemen and detectives all in the Northeast region of the United States. Ethan leaned on the desk and pulled out a tobacco pipe.

“Well, well, well. It’s Mr. Yankee. You’ve come to trouble my sleeping again, huh. How could I have? I just woke up,” There was a hint of annoyance in Walter’s voice.

“Well, you should.” Ethan remarked while lighting the pipe and then he dropped a newspaper onto the desk. Walter picked it up lazily, and yawned before starting to skim through.

“What’s so important about the papers? Let’s see, let’s see,” he said in a bored drawl. “The Whigs won the presidential election, Antarctica has been circumnavigated, the U.S./Canada border has been designated. No Ethan, I see nothing in here of interest.”

Suddenly, Walter’s gray eyes widened as he grasped the paper. “Oh! That’s it! That’s what I missed!” Walter threw the paper down, and with an intense smile on his face, strode hurriedly out of the office. Ethan followed him down the stairs and outside the building into the crowded street.

Eight days later, the pair had made it into Topeka. They had taken a Cruiser train, which was unlike any other train of its era. While the trains the commonwealth rode were small, cramped, and dirty, those fortunate enough to hitch a ride on the Cruiser train rode in lavish first class carriages. The rooms had silky purple drapes and black leather seats. Golden chandeliers hung from the ceilings, and the walls were made from beautiful mahogany wood. It was an elegantly designed locomotive, and it boasted all the commodities of a mansion. Patrons of the bar carriage enjoyed a broad selection of quality liquor at the lacquered redwood bar that contained everything from champagne to aged whisky. The food served in the dining carriage was made by the greatest chefs of the time. It was the symbol of luxury transportation, and best of all, the owner of the Cruiser company was indebted to Walter Crane.

However, the days of luxury were over for Walter and his companion, seeing as the most reliable way from Topeka to their destination was a wagon train. Before starting the second leg of their journey, the two picked up supplies and any scraps of information that could relate to the O’Riley case. They met the head of the wagon train, Al, on the outskirts of Topeka. He was a simple man; he rarely spoke, and when he did, he spoke in a heavy Southern accent with slurred words. The brim of his straw hat obscured most of his face, but his toothless mouth showed. When they were about halfway through their incredibly bumpy trip, the second huge O’Riley case breakthrough was made.

“The police’s theory stating that the O’Rileys died from natural causes is not believable in the slightest. On the contrary, roughly half of the evidence supporting that claim appears to be doctored, and half of what isn’t altered doesn’t pertain to the case. This is starting to seem more and more like a coverup rather than a solved case,” Walter said.

Unbeknownst to him, Ethan bared a sly grin of satisfaction only for a moment, making it disappear the instant Walter looked up at him.

“But who would do such a thing? And what is this person trying to hide?” Ethan asked. His voice oozed with sarcasm, but Walter didn’t seem to notice it.

Walter started again. “It’s no secret that the police are corrupt, but they aren’t smart enough to fabricate a case as elaborate as this. I suspect the true mastermind here was using the police as a tool in order to cover something up. Well, whoever the person in charge is, they are clearly professional. The execution and coverup were immaculately thought out, but from what I see in the reports and newspapers, the police botched the job.”

It was well known that corruption had long plagued the government. The ineptness and dishonesty of the early police force known as the Watch was, after all, the reason Private Investigation (PI) companies formed and quickly thrived.

Eventually, Walter and his colleague made it to their destination of Swanford, Kansas. It was a small town, one that didn’t even have a courthouse. Swanford was just as monotonous and flat as the plains that surrounded it. Its population could be estimated to be around 350 people, 85% of which were farmers, with the rest being store owners and a few deputies. As Walter and Ethan were walking through the main street, Walter noticed the lack of buildings. There was one bank, one hotel, one saloon, a sheriff’s office, a few shops, and a handful of houses. The pair slept in the shabby hotel overnight, and woke up at 7:00 A.M. sharp to prepare for the final part of their trip. Ethan hired a guide to bring them to the O’Riley farm while Walter purchased two horses and camping equipment. The remaining leg of their journey was long, dull, and uninteresting, but finally, after two cold and cloudy hours, the detectives could just make out they were in sight of the O’Riley farm in the distance.

"There it is, Ethan!" Walter's voice was filled with excitement, like a schoolboy towards a new toy. After two weeks of theory making and general inaction, he was finally ready. True, he had many leads to follow and he had even more theories, but now he could finally start solving the case. From a glance, there was nothing special about the area. The farmhouse was small, and next to it was a three-stalled horse stable. Covering half of the valley was a corn field, and there was an animal enclosure with only two undernourished pigs inside. To the north of the house, there was a small slab of rock with a boulder just inside the mouth of a cave. The duo first examined the home. It was built for practicality, and made to last. On the inside, it was clean and orderly. The only sign that something was off on the table was the ink, a quill, and a bloody letter. After further examination, it proved to be identical to the letter Walter had received. After a few more hours of investigating, four bodies were found- left in the same exact places where Sammy's detectives had reported them to be.

The situation Walter and Ethan were in was incredibly lucky. The crime scene was left exactly the way it was found, except for a little degradation of the corpses. Three days of hard work ensued, during which only a sheriff's star and a Swanford policeman's uniform was found. Although Walter wanted to inform Ethan of his discoveries, he had a sneaking suspicion which stopped him from sharing the news.

"Ethan," Walter finally said. "I believe we should expand our search area. It is clear that we can't solve this case with solely the evidence that we have here. These past three days have merely proven my theory that this was a coverup."

"I take it this means we're leaving now?"

"Yes, Ethan. Back to Swanford. I think I have a lead!"

During the trip back, Walter explained his plan to Ethan, and they readied themselves for its execution that they would carry out later on in the night.

Nine-thirty p.m. Heavy rain crashing down upon Swanford, making the nearby saloon seem like the warmest place in the world.. From the window of a hotel room, a pair of eyes watched the entrance to the bar. Unaware of that, a short fat man stumbled out of the saloon and walked to his left in a hurried manner before turning into an alleyway. The man was looking down when he bumped into someone. Immediately, he was grabbed by his shirt collar and pulled a few inches into the air.

"Good evening Mr. Randall. I trust you had a good time?"

"WHO ARE YOU? LET ME DOWN THIS INSTANT. I AM A OFFICER OF THE LAW"

"You have two options. I can get what I came here for the easy way, or the hard way. Which one do you choose? I should inform you that the hard way is rather painful and unpleasant" It was Walter. He spoke in a forceful voice as he shoved Mr. Randall into the saloon wall to emphasise how serious he was.

"THE EASY WAY! THE EASY WAY, PLEASE!"

"Good. Then tell me, who is in charge? Who orchestrated the murder of the O'Riley's? And kindly lower your voice, it would be unfortunate for you if someone were to hear this."

"Please no! I'll be quiet. It was my second in command. Someone approached me in the street and gave me \$5,000 to kill them."

"Who then? Who would offer \$5,000 for the killing of four people?"

"I never knew his name. He just told me to call him the Patriot." This sent Walter deep into thought, and casted a worried look onto his face.

"So can I go now?" whimpered Mr. Randall in a fearful voice. Walter calmly let him down and disappeared down the alley. A few minutes later, he entered his hotel room where he was greeted by Ethan.

"So Ethan, I think I solved the case. You remember the uniform we found?"

"What about it?" As the words left Ethan's mouth, he realized that he had slipped up. He might as well have shouted 'I DID IT!' at the top of his lungs. When Walter asked him about the uniform, Ethan's loyalty was being tested. Walter never told him about the uniform, and if Ethan really was on his side, he would have told Walter. Him answering the question revealed that he did know about the uniform.

"Why Ethan, why? We grew up together. We were the best of friends. What happened?" Walter pleaded.

“It seems we remember those days differently. Back then, you would always outdo me. I would try my hardest to impress my family by doing something, then you would come along and grab all the attention, while all I got was my relatives telling me to be more like you. It seemed as if you could never fail. And after years of living in your shadow, I’ve had it!” He took a breath, raised his gun to Walter’s head, then continued in a calm voice.

“These past two weeks have been delightful. I’ve really enjoyed watching you fail to find how those peasants died. You see, all you know now is that I orchestrated the killing. You don’t know how they died. That’s barely a solved case. However, I think you beating yourself up over your ineptness would make for a good show. For someone to get into a cave, the entrance would have to be open. This means he was trapped inside by someone. That means the rockslide wasn’t natural. Next, the sickness the man died of was like nothing else ever seen. That is because it wasn’t a sickness, it was poison. Finally, there was the snake bite. If you had studied the environment, you would have known there aren’t any venomous snakes in the area. It seems the great Walter Crane has failed. Think about the press articles. They might even call you a fraud. You know how the press is these days. Well, I’ve had my fun. It’s time to end it.”

All the time Ethan was talking, Walter was having an internal battle. His brain told him to fight back, his heart told him he shouldn’t hurt his friend, and there was a little voice in the back of his head that was telling him to give up. However, right as Ethan cocked his weapon, Walter made up his mind. He kicked the table forward, into Ethan’s legs. At the same time he pulled out his revolver and shot. Ethan fell to the ground with a cry, and was silent. Walter fell back onto his chair, and noticed that he was bleeding. That didn’t matter to him, because the emotional pain he experienced was far worse. Walter dragged himself to his former friend’s corpse and passed out while crying over the body.

“Mr. Crane! Please! Tell the press how you solved the case!” Walter had made it back to New York, running on autopilot the whole time. As he got off his train, reporters swarmed him. They were calling him a hero for what he did, though Walter felt more like a killer than a hero. He trudged through the streets to Sammy’s and stumbled to his office. As he walked down the hall, he passed Ethan’s old office. The sign had already been replaced, and there was a new man sitting in Ethan’s chair. Walter’s heart had recovered a slight bit, but seeing this hurt him even more. He continued on his way, hurting more than ever. Once he got back into his office, he tried to sit down and start writing his end of case report. But he couldn’t bring himself to put pen to paper. There was too much weighing on him for him to focus. After three hours of pain and sadness, he got up, walked to the Head Investigator’s office, and quit his job. When he left the building, he felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

Forty years later, Walter was congratulating his son, Morgan, for getting hired by Sammy Hughes’ PI Firm. It was a sunny day, and they were standing on the porch after the celebration. Morgan was the spitting image of his father, with his same red hair, short mustache, and grey eyes.

“Well, Dad. I made it. I got into Sammy’s. I look forward to my next years, and I’ll try my best to uphold the family reputation.”

“Morgan, don’t you worry about reputations. As long as you solve a few cases, you’ll be just fine. Just remember, look out for your friends. They are what makes and breaks a man.” Morgan thanked his father for his words of advice, walked to the front of the building, got into a car, and left with a smile on his face. None of them knew that this day marked the start of the most successful private investigations career in history.

By Paul Amaritei

Illustration by Kayla Lee

