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THE POINT

Winter / Spring 2019



ABOUT US

Who We Are

The Point is a newspaper organization comprised of high school students from multiple districts and schools. We strive to create a newspaper that showcases the different perspectives of students from all over New York. In doing so, we hope to build an open body of peers that are willing to listen and learn from the ideas, encounters, and opinions, of our writers. The Point's goal is simple: to build a foundation where students can connect and express themselves freely without judgment - a relatable platform where students can feel at ease.

Why We Started

The Point was started by a series of questions- why do the writings of adults matter more than teens? Why do people listen to the opinions of adults, and not teenagers? Why do students not have an outlet where they can express themselves by writing? The Point was created in order to remedy these problems and bring about a change that lets teenagers express their ideas to a willing party of peers. From the very beginning, we wanted to establish a space that's primarily made for students, by students.

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GOING PAPERLESS

By Riya Patel

First, it was the static televisions sets that hung in the front corner of the room that teachers would spend half the period trying to get them to turn on. Then, it was the installation of the SmartBoards with the cool calibration game that students would trample each other to be the first one to play 'the game.' Along came, the individual Chromebooks that could magically turn into tablets, bending in all different twisty ways. And now, it is the revolution of "going paperless." Students are now beginning to purchase iPads and Apple pencils and keyboards in lieu of notebooks, binders, and pens. Backpacks aren't filled with crumpled papers and broken pencils but rather a slim and light iPad. Their rationales are that they are saving the trees while keeping all their school work organized and

easily accessible at all times. However, it is important to consider all the benefits and disadvantages of taking part in the paperless revolution.

Let's begin with all the positive aspects of going paperless. Well, of course, with all the environmental issues occurring such as deforestation, going paperless across the country will significantly impact our paper usage in schools. Since paper is used in abundance for educational purposes, going paperless could significantly reduce the paper usage and, most importantly, save the trees. Another beneficial aspect of going paperless is organization. Many of the kids I have seen with the fancy iPads and Apple pencils love to have everything neat, in one place and easily accessible. Jericho 11th grader, Dylan Swickle, states "Through the Goodnotes app, all my

school files are located in one, easy to access application that allows me to stay on top of my school work and always be prepared for class and other endeavors." And various platforms provide that satisfaction to these students. In addition, teachers will never have to worry about excuses like "My dog ate my homework" or "I lost the review sheet." Everything can be easily downloaded from apps like Canvas or other educational platforms for the student's convenience. Many students including, Min Yoon, say that the amount of trees they save by going paperless is astonishing; "The most important pro is that I've saved so much paper like it's crazy to see how much one student uses a year. There's a really big environmental movement right now and paper is surely a big contributor to cutting down trees," states Min Yoon.

However, despite making our backpacks lighter and making it easier to locate math homework, there are many more significant disadvantages to going paperless that may not make this perfect solution be so perfect.

"I wasn't trying to capture this photo, but I ended up hitting the shutter button by accident and caught this photo. After editing it to balance the light, I ended up with this. I really like this photo too, because you can't really see the glass between me and the hippo. Many people think hippos are big and scary, but in reality, they're essentially water cows. The exhibit was a mother and her calf swimming around, slowly but surely."

- Emma Nguyen



Love, the focus of nearly too many songs and movies, is a complicated emotion. Not many people, if any, can claim to understand how it works. But despite its complexity, people often use it carelessly when talking to others, saying things like "Thank you so much, I love you" to anyone who does them a simple favor. But what exactly is love?

Scientifically, love, and any other emotion, is simply a cocktail of chemicals and complex physiological interactions in our brain. But, unlike other feelings, love has also been described as the most powerful force in the universe. The ancient Greeks regarded love as "the madness of the gods." A popular teen romance novel, *The Sun is Also a Star*, even suggests love to be the mysterious dark matter that accounts for approximately 85% of the matter in the universe. But for those needing a concrete answer, the Merriam-Webster dictionary's definitions of love vary greatly, ranging from a concise, "warm attachment," to restraining love as an "attraction based on sexual desire." These definitions, however, fail to capture the true breadth of love.

WHAT IS LOVE?

By Alice Chen & Julia Lin

While the most commonly referenced version of love is romantic love, there are many different types of love. Today, love is generally categorized into three groups: familial, platonic, and romantic love. However, the ancient Greeks believed in eight distinct forms of love: *Eros*, for sexual passion and desire; *Philia*, for friendship; *Storge*, for kinship; *Ludus*, for playful and young love; *Mania*, for obsessive love; *Pragma*, for enduring love; *Philautia*, for self-love; and *Agape*, for selfless love.

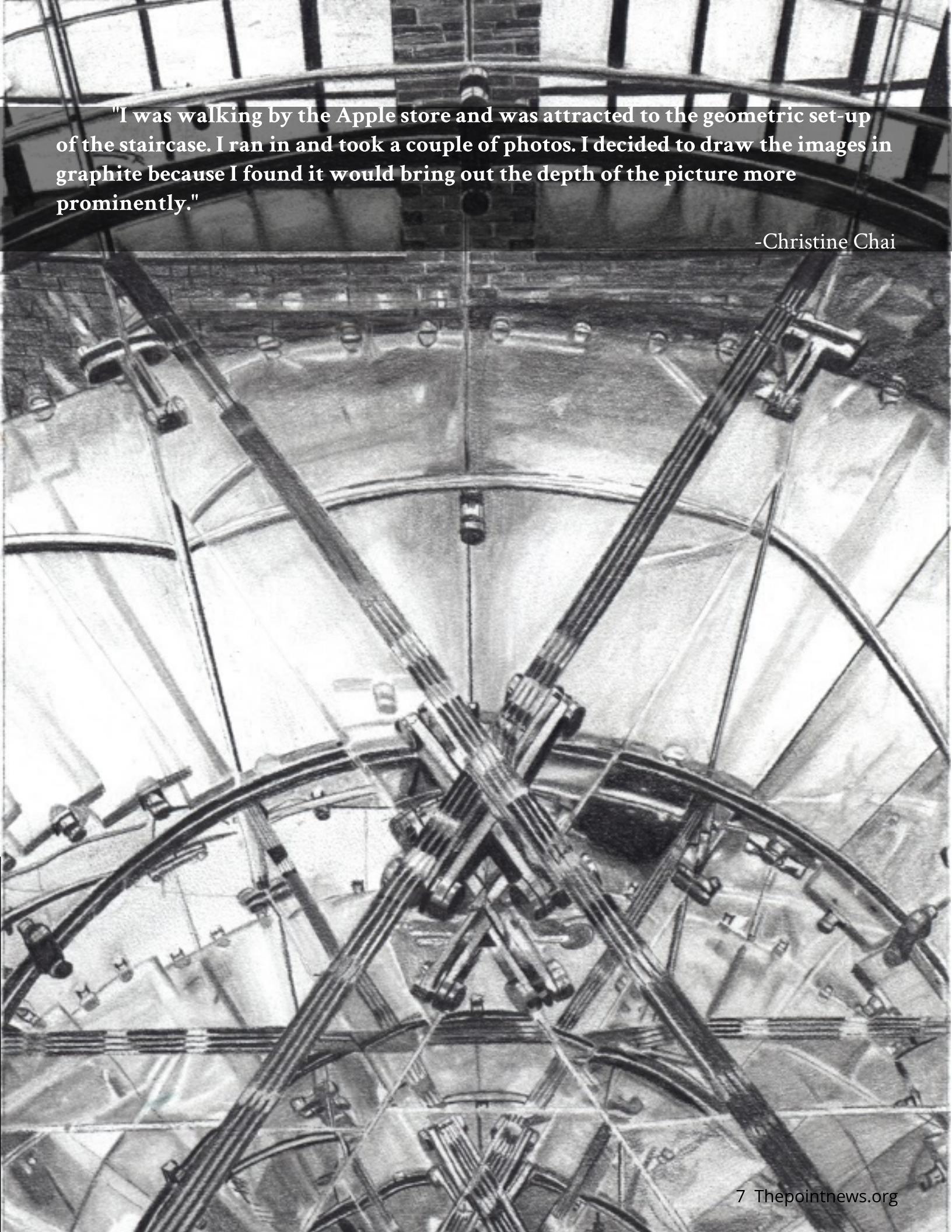
As humans, we cannot hope to have command over love. Love is involuntary; it cannot be bought or sold like a commodity. One cannot make someone love them and, in the same way, one cannot stop someone from loving them, but love can still be used to better our lives.

According to Mateo Sol, a prominent psychospiritual counselor and mentor, by learning

about the different types of love, we discover how each type of love is interlinked with other forms of love. For instance, in order to truly enjoy *eros*, we must also search for greater depths through *philia* and *ludus*, while also avoiding *mania* as relationships mature. Through this, we can find *pragma* in our soulmate. Additionally, love can benefit the individual as well. Through *philautia* and *agape*, we can better understand the power and capabilities of our own hearts.

So, what is love? Love is love! Love is the overwhelming urge to hug and cuddle your dog. It drives you insane with concern when your friend is struggling. It is when you irrationally prioritize "the one" above everything else, even when the tiny sensible part of your brain is telling you that you should really sleep instead of staying up talking until 4 AM. At the end of the day, love is a power that no one truly understands, but one that everyone experiences.





"I was walking by the Apple store and was attracted to the geometric set-up of the staircase. I ran in and took a couple of photos. I decided to draw the images in graphite because I found it would bring out the depth of the picture more prominently."

-Christine Chai

FACADES

By Catherine Liu

Society has standards that people are expected to follow and uphold. From one's behavior to their speech pattern, there are social cues that people are judged by. This judgment doesn't only promote ideal citizens and perfect subjects, but something else as well. Fear. Fear that one can't fit in. Fear of being criticized by the ravenous masses. Fear of being picked out of the crowd as "different". This terror fosters fake people within society who would do anything to protect their image- even if it means erasing parts of their identity itself.

As teenagers, we often get told to be "accept who we are" and that "we shouldn't change for others." Sure, this sickly sweet advice might sound comforting, but the hypocrisy exuded by these "wise" adults is astounding. That's not to say we're any better. We also inevitably start developing these masks as well. These facades are placed there from childhood, through sayings such as, "Keep it to yourself if it's not nice," or "If you have nothing nice to say, don't say it." These cliches that were taught to us as young kids are seemingly harmless, but it's fate that some of us develop a front to based on experience and watching others, causing some to become more manipulative and fake.

It's not to say that facades aren't negative. Some are necessary, such as employees not talking back to their bosses to maintain their jobs. Or students who resist the urge to talk back to teachers so they won't get into trouble. Or even students who act nice towards their teachers for a better grade. These types of fronts help us in our everyday lives. Deceptive? Maybe, but it's something we need to maintain a well-mannered and peaceful society.

But when does it become too much? We have all

lied and acted unlike our true selves in certain situations to benefit ourselves. The problem arises when we repeatedly start doing this and develop this mannerism into a habit, or part of our character. People who act fake too often believe they are doing this for their own benefit. They believe doing this will lead to a successful future and they will be able to fake their way through life. Although they eventually lose sight of who they really are, they eventually become successful by going down an immoral path.

The most common example of putting up fronts are fake friends who backstab others after using them to their benefit. Or kids who try to be different from themselves to fit into the "popular crowd". Another common instance seen is during college applications, where seniors start writing their essays, trying to sell themselves as a particular type of person, when they usually behave and think differently. Universities have become skilled in sniffing out these imposters, but it doesn't hinder others from attempting it over and over again.

There doesn't seem to be any barrier stopping the necessity of facades in our society. No matter how small they are or how minor they may be, it doesn't change the fact that we're being deceitful to others around us. It seems that, as of right now, one needs to harness the power of facades in order to further ourselves.



TAKING GAP YEARS

By Riya Patel

In England, about 11% of students take a gap year after graduating high school and prior to enrolling at a university. Whereas in the United States, there is a much lower rate since it is a newer and unconventional idea for most Americans. Since 2006, the idea of taking a gap year, or bridge year according to Princeton University, has become increasingly popular. The reasons for taking a gap year-- or not taking one-- can be extremely varied depending on the situation, person and environment. There are numerous influences that play into the decision of taking a gap year and each situation is different. Some factors that are influential in this process are parental and social expectations and norms, the health of oneself and family members, career aspirations and other opportunities, and financial issues.

First, let's talk about the social aspect. We all have parents, schools, and friends that expect us to go to college right after high school. It's the norm that we are expected of. Barely anyone we know takes a gap year, so why would we? No one even brings it up as an option along with the other options everyone (most of our parents) gives us... Harvard, Yale Princeton, etc. This total dismissal of the idea of a gap year leads to the extremely low rates of U.S. high school graduates taking a gap year. If more of us were exposed to the idea of it, we would be more likely to consider the option.

Health comes first, to everyone— at least it should. A significant factor in taking a gap year is the health of the student and the health of family members. If one is sick or has an ill family member, they should not feel pressured to attend school and sacrifice the health of themselves or a loved one. Currently, students feel like they must attend college right after high school but if there is a good reason, like a health issue, they should feel comfortable taking a year off. This is not the case now in our competitive high school environments. In addition, it doesn't have to be a physical health issue. Mental health disorders are becoming increasingly prevalent in the adolescent years, especially after undergoing 4 years in a competitive and pressure-filled high school. Everyone should be aware that it is completely okay to take a year off to improve your wellbeing.

Everyone has goals and aspirations for a bright future. No matter where you end up, it is where you were meant to be (I truly believe that). It is important to note while some career destinations are similar, every single journey is unique. Depending on what you plan to do as your

occupation, a gap year may be perfect for you to figure out the path you want to take. More likely, however, is if a student has no idea which career direction they want to take— which is relatively common in this day and age— a gap year could allow him/her to explore their options, develop a passion and be confident in their choices (that is better than going to school for one thing but realizing that you want to do something else resulting in starting over, wasting time and money). Also, once in a lifetime opportunities only come once. It is the student's responsibility to take advantage of these crucial skill-building and life-changing opportunities. Examples of these opportunities volunteer and service work in an underprivileged area, highly-selective internships, and cutting-edge research. These are all instances where a gap year would allow one to focus and flourish in a field of passion.

Finally, college is becoming unimaginably expensive, like crazy expensive. Tuition for a year can be anything up to \$80,000 a year and financial aid seems to be harder to get. That is something very very few families can easily afford. And although many colleges claim to "meet 100% of our students' needs," the definition of "need" is flexible and it is questionable if this statement is actually factual. Families are left with the burden of sending their child to a good school and spending all of their savings. Often, a gap year would allow the student to obtain a full-time job and help with the fees of going to school the next year. Since many students work part-time at the same time as attending university, it is difficult to manage academics and finances simultaneously. Anf taking the gap year would significantly help out their parents and ensure a good education for themselves.

Overall, "gap year" is not a bad word to consider— or even say. It should be completely acceptable for students to take a gap year for the right reasons. Taking a gap year to play video games and go to the mall on a daily basis is not something we should encourage, however, there are so many reasons a gap year can be beneficial. This decision should be thoroughly considered by the student and family if it is the right option for them. It is predicted that the prevalence of gap years will increase in the future as the trend is currently showing. Talking about and considering gap years can lead to highly beneficial situations for students and it is important for everyone to become aware of the option.



ANATOMY OF HUMAN EMOTION

By Angela Zhu

Somewhere, United States, Monday, 3:53 p.m.

It's Monday afternoon. The sky's pale blue and covered with a blanket of atmospheric cotton. A rustle can be seen from the corner of the window as a young squirrel looks for its next meal. The air is crisp and placid. In the midst of the ordinary, within the walls of house 44, in the room downstairs, farthest to the left, a girl is suffocating in pain that is more than just her own. Just ordinary.

Outskirts of Angola, Monday, 8:27 a.m.

A cry breaks the impermeable silence of Monday night. Like a snake, it writhes through the village and stirs the inhabitants in their time of quiet. Slowly, in each clay hut built along the side of the dirt road, the faint shadow of movement rises from stillness. A young boy's head pops out of a door frame, his eyes much too big for his gaunt visage. He inspects his surroundings and recedes into the darkness of the clay hut. Minutes later, a larger figure comes to the door. An older girl, her hair woven with dust and copper, steps into the street. Her skin is rich like crushed cacao beans, blackened under the hue of night. After walking a few, agonizing steps, she stops in the middle of the road, allowing the dust to settle after unwanted disturbance. Turning to face the moon, her shadow does not resemble a girl, rather a skeleton. As she stares, her mother, with the same, chocolate-dipped skin, slowly moves next to her and whispers something in their native tongue. The girl does not smile but nods knowingly. Slowly, her fingers curl into a tight fist, and drops of blood fall through her grip, running through the chapped cracks of the earth. Another child was taken in the dead of night, the beauty of their souls hidden by shadows, and discovered lifeless the next morning or too late in the night. Her skeleton and her shadow return to the house. But, as she turns to face the darkness, nothing is left once the moon leaves her eyes.

House 44, Tuesday, 3:27 a.m.

The haze of night is still opaque like a dense fog that hides the once boisterous sun. The neighborhood is quiet and the winds are all but whispers and rustles of distant branches. In her bed, the girl is wrapped in a light blanket, yet it seems like she is weighted, as if the pressure of the heavy silence is too much to bear. The creases in her eyes, the sweat that gathers on her neck, and her nails tattooing into her skin make it seem like her nightmare is much too real. Suddenly, she escapes the mounting pressure of silence with a great gasp. Soft breaths fill the silence, the sweat and heat from her body radiate across the room. However, her bed sheets are stained. Stained by the wine of life that dripped from her unbreakable grip. Her heart aches but the only thing she can do is return to slumber. Now, the night thins. Slowly the sun begins to shine through. This nightmare was not the first. Her sheets were already stained with the drops of blood from her nails, digging away into her skin as if she lost something in her sleep.

The street's of Luanda, Angola, Tuesday, 8:30 a.m.

High rise buildings and skyscrapers line the edges of the street. Here, the buildings are like a forest, dense with glassy leaves and concrete trunks. The dirt roads are replaced with cement and the natural boulders are exchanged for neon stop signs. At this hour, no life is seen on the streets, save for a stray animal or a drunk, stumbling to catch a taxi. The lights of the city radiate for miles, blinding those within its vicinity. Suddenly, a sharp turn is made and the lights of the city dim until only a faint glow is visible. This alleyway looks as if there is no end, but, the darkness is almost magnetic. Now, forward, step after step, until even the glow of the city light fades into the darkness.

Outskirts of Angola, Tuesday, 9:35 a.m.

The darkness of the alley seems to never dissipate until, slowly, small lights begin to dot the sky. Soon, beautiful, undisturbed constellations shine through the plaster of black and guide each step in the right direction. In the distance, another small light is seen. It emanates a soft, flickering glow like a candle meeting a soft breeze. The light gradually draws nearer and grows brighter with each successive step. Still, the stars act as guidance, the tip of the centaur's bow drawn straight at the light. Nearing, the light is no longer a candle but a fire. It is small and contained, but around it, there are no signs of life. Finally, the heat of the fire is felt, a soft, delicate sense of warmth. Now, standing near the fire, the surroundings can be seen. It is a luscious field, like a sea, with each wave coming after the breeze blows. The stars seem to almost sway with the golden grass, both dancing in perfect harmony. Strangely, some areas of the field seem to be stagnant as they don't dance with the rest of their brethren. On closer examination, it seems as if a small rock is blocking the grass. Reaching down to feel it, its texture is soft and it feels almost like rotting fruit. The grass waves one more time. And a rotting babies face stares up at the sky.

The sun begins to rise, each ray of light shining over the grass. In the lights, the grass is no longer golden but a putrid brown. In the light, the fire is no longer cleanly lined with stones but rather the skulls of children. In the light, a rat climbs out of the baby's skull and begins to gorge on its rotting flesh. Suddenly, the baby's skull turns and stares directly towards a spot in the distance. There, the same chocolate girl is standing. She looks downwards, and with her bandaged hands, places another child on the earth already infested with lost souls.

House 44, Tuesday, 6:00 a.m

Drip. Another drop of blood falls onto the bed sheet. The girls sits straight up, her eyes wide open and her mouth agape. She grabs at her heart and slams back onto the bed. Her eyes begin to water, and she whispers, "I'm sorry, why did I ever do that? When will it stop haunting me? I'm so sorry." Her voice dies but the sobbing continues. Finally, her tears dry and she steps out of bed onto the cold floor. Right beside her feet, peeking out from under the bed, is a small, bloodied hand.

SUMMER READING LIST

By Elizabeth Son

As a high school student, to my own dismay, I find myself reading less and less books simply for the pleasure of it as time goes on. In elementary school, I would devour books in any genre from sci-fi to autobiographies as quickly as I visited the library to get new ones. Sometimes, I even read two books in one night. After starting high school, however, I limited my reading to the reading I did within my classes and assigned readings I got from history and English teachers. With this realization, for my New Years' resolution in January, I made a small promise to myself that I would spend less time on my phone and stressing about schoolwork to do something both enjoyable and rewarding. It's been 6 months since I made this resolution to read more, and I learned much more about how to pick a hobby back up and once again reap its benefits in no time at all. If you, too, want to become a reader once again, here are some of the books that I've read and loved since January.

1. Becoming by Michelle Obama

If you like autobiographies (or the Obamas).

2. Greek to Me: Adventures of the Comma Queen by Mary Norris

If you want a new perspective on the world around you, starting with everyday words.

3. You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought by Peter McWilliams

If you want to figure out how to make the most of your life (and the psychology behind it).

4. The Sun and Her Flowers by Rupi Kaur

If you love short poetry.

5. Looking for Alaska by John Green

If you're looking for a book about college students and love.

6. Columbine by Dave Cullen

If you're looking for a book about a historical event from expert psychological and factual perspectives.

JUULING EPIDEMIC

There is a growing epidemic among high schoolers, especially in New York City. The problem has grown so big that the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have attempted to silence it. This rampant issue is juuling, an electronic cigarette.

When you walk into a bathroom in my school, you notice one particular smell. It's not the pungent smell of any usual public bathroom. Instead, it smells sickly sweet. Almost as if someone poured fruit juice all over the floor. Some may wonder why, but I immediately know the reason: juuling. As I'm using the bathroom, I see the telltale trail of smoke snaking its way to the ceiling. I shake my head in dismay as I make my way around the kids juuling in the bathroom and to the sink.

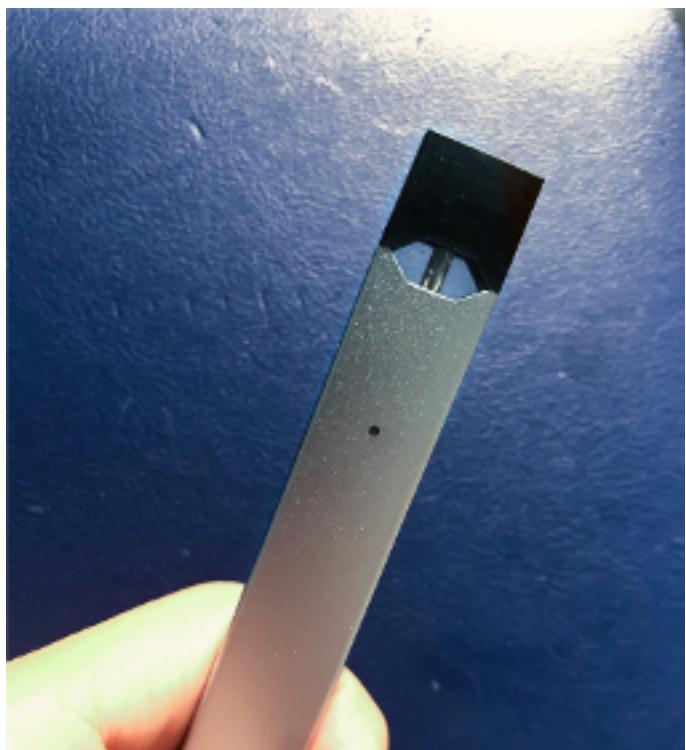
What is a juul, some may ask. It's an e-cigarette that looks like a long flash drive. It uses a pod system (conveniently named Juul pods) that comes in all different flavors, ranging from mango to creme brulee. These pods contain 5% nicotine, and although it may not seem like much, each individual pod contains as much nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes. Aside from Juul pods sold by the actual company, there are other pods as well that come in, you guessed it, other flavors. EON pods, for example, come in pineapple, grape, etc. The worst part is that these third-party pods may contain even more nicotine than their original counterparts.

In the eyes of a teacher or a parent, it may seem like a harmless flash drive. Multiple teachers have seen mine before (when I used to own one) and thought that it was a harmless flash drive. It's easy to deceive adults, but I bet you that every single teen knows what a juul is. Its slick and simple design allows kids to decorate it by engraving it with something as simple as a pen and a pocket knife. There are even protective sleeves that people can buy to further decorate their juul.

So why do teens start? What drives them to begin sucking on these vapor producing sticks? Simple, the peer pressure and social influenza that plagues us all. When someone offers me a hit of a mango flavored pod, to say "no" sounds cowardly. There's a sense of irony present in this situation. Wouldn't it be cowardly to give in to the pressure? To submit? Still, in a twisted sense, I wanted to prove my bravery. To show the world that I could be a part of the "cool" crowd and get buzzed off the nicotine. Everyone gauges me with their eyes. They flick them down to my hands that unconsciously grab the

device. The first hit was rough, it chafed against my throat. I wouldn't cough, though. I was already far enough, why would I ruin the image by showing weakness? The effect was imminent. I felt the world shift slightly and my center of balance moving with it. It wasn't anything intense, or earthshaking. It was, simply put, a mild buzz.

The problem is growing to the point that the administration of many different schools is taking



action, but that doesn't seem to hinder kids. When a dean or teacher makes his/her way into the bathroom, you will always find a student warns the others to hide their electronic cigarettes. This is such a problem that at the renowned Bronx Science High School of Science, the administration shut down half of the bathrooms to crack down on juuling.

It's shocking that something that was meant to help adult smokers quit has grown to become such an epidemic among teens. The trendy and accessible vaping device has become a social issue causing strife between administrators, parents, and students all over. Something needs to be done to halt this nationwide pandemic.



ANTI-VAXXERS

The idea of having the right to decide whether or not to vaccinate your kids is on you, but it is always good to enhance your own opinion, especially when someone you know is working through this decision, perhaps a relative or a friend. You're only helping them by providing them with the facts and having a discussion with them. However, I strongly urge you to take the pro-vaccine side in this debate.

Children at a young age are more prone to developing diseases since they are surrounded by billions of germs and only have a developing immune system. This is why all fifty states require children to take vaccines before entering public schools. However, anti-vaxxers say that taking the vaccines only worsens a child's immune system. They argue that children's immune systems can naturally fight off most infections, and putting all the questionable vaccine ingredients such as aluminum, gelatin, or mercury-into a child's body can cause side effects, including seizures, paralysis, and death.

On top of that, anti-vaxxers make the point that the government should not be interfering in one's personal medical choices for their own children, saying that the guardians, or parents, should be able to decide how they can handle their child's health, as they know their children the best. Additionally, the usage of vaccines oppose religious beliefs of not taking vaccines, and according to the first amendment of the US Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." So, by requiring vaccinations, the government is disregarding the constitution.

On the other hand, vaccinations save millions of lives by providing and preparing our natural immune systems with the strength to fight against illnesses such as rubella, diphtheria, smallpox, polio, and whooping cough. These diseases that once harmed or killed hundreds of thousands of children have been eliminated completely with the usage of the vaccines. In addition, despite anti-vaxxer arguments that

vaccinations may cause all sorts of diseases, the countless scientists and doctors that evaluate these vaccinations deem them safe to use, as well as 90%-99% effective in preventing diseases. Additionally, studies, such as Andrew Wakefield's in 1998 and 2002, have been proven to be flawed. The vast majority of medical organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), agree that vaccinations are safe.

Furthermore, vaccinations can save families time as well as money, due to the fact that parents would not have to skip work in order to tend their sick child or pay for medical attention. Since insurance covers the cost of vaccinations, they do not cost a lot. Even nationwide, our economy has been aided by vaccinations, as the CDC estimates that children vaccinated between 1994 and 2014 have yielded net savings of \$1.38 trillion in "societal costs," including money saved by preventing lost productivity due to disability and early death.

THE PRESSURE ON STUDENTS TO SCORE HIGHER

By Rachel Ok

"If I get a B on this midterm, I need A's the rest of the year!"

"Is she psychotic? She gave me an A-?"

"This is so unfair. I deserve a better grade."

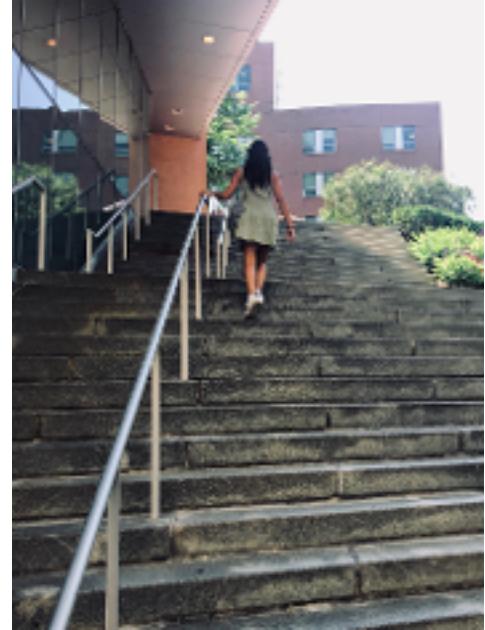
More than ever, students are going to their teachers begging for a bump on their grade by 2% from a C to a B, a B to an A. They beg as if the matter of that 2 % is life or death. More than ever, they feel pressured to academically be the best of the best. The question now is why they go through so much stress, so many sleepless nights to get there, sometimes putting their well-being aside completely to academically overly-succeed.

So many students want to make it into the best colleges, whether it's from the desire of their parents or their competitive nature. It is easy for someone to look at someone else's high accomplishments and think, "I need to do better than this if I want to get into this college." For this reason, students are feeling the need to get A's all across the board. And it is not just the pressure to get good grades. A 1400 on the SAT is no longer considered "good enough" for many students. Many will spend a lot of time and energy doing extra preparation on top of schoolwork, trying to get a 1500 or a perfect score of 1600. They often face sleep deprivation, and sometimes depression and anxiety,

while staying up late studying for multiple AP classes.

The obvious trend here is that colleges and even high schools are making it all about the number. The student's GPA, their SAT or ACT score will often be the most important factor in deciding a student's acceptance into a school, and the school may even look for upward trends in their GPA. This signifies that they are "improving", but at what cost? So many students say they take multiple AP classes for the high GPA, and to impress their dream school, but at the same time say they learn things they will "never use in real life."

Of course, a high grade can earn a higher chance of being accepted to a school. However, wanting to stand out by succeeding is one thing, but working so hard that it takes a physical and mental toll is another. For the purpose of being a "well-rounded" student, many students will not only be tackling a mountain of work, but also clubs, sports, and other extracurriculars. This can often lead to an imbalanced lifestyle as they lose time for social life and self-care. Their focus becomes school and only school. At the end of the day, they may feel good



about a grade, but what would they really have accomplished for themselves? Is education really about just the grade?

It truly is the time that schools start focusing on a student's strengths and personalities that set them apart from the crowd. Instead of seeing the B in math as a lower score than the rest, they should see the drive the student had to try hard enough to at least earn that B. The constant desire to only score high may lead students to climb the wrong mountain. Many of them do not realize the toll that high grades in hard classes may take on them—or even worse: they don't care—, and aim for a warped image of a perfect student. Eventually, this will do irreversible damage to students' mental health, social lives, and everlasting outlook on education if the emphasis continues to be placed on just a number.

MEDIA'S IMPACT ON YOUR DECISION

By Nadav Cohen

Media is often described in simple terms like “the movie is exciting!,” “the book is sad,” or “the news is unreliable.” Psychologists, on the other hand, view media from a more complex, theoretical perspective. By applying socio-cognitive theories to media, experts suggest that individuals are proactively involved in their development and can exercise control over their feelings, thoughts, and actions.

In other words, media psychology delves into the relationship between human behavior and the media. This field studies the interactions between individuals, groups, and technology, then tries to make sense of this synergy. As recently as 1950, when television was becoming a popular form of entertainment, media psychologists became concerned about children’s enthusiasm for television viewing and its impact, or lack thereof, on their reading skills. As a result, psychologists began studying the effects of violent television on children’s behavior, and if those children were more likely to exhibit antisocial tendencies.

Dr. Sarah Vinson, a board-certified adolescent psychiatrist states that the media continues to consume an ever-growing part of people’s daily lives. Younger people especially do

not have the face-to-face interaction necessary to learn social skills, and an increasing number of children have difficulty interacting with others, a sign of antisocial behavior.

An area of great discussion in the field of psychology field is the topic of video gaming and their related effects. Psychologists have varying viewpoints on whether the consequences are negative or positive, but all agree that gaming is significantly impacting children, teenagers, adults, and even people well into their 70s. The controversy surrounding video game violence as well as the often extensive hours spent playing them arises great concern in many. Parents and psychologists alike have raised questions about the potential of video games desensitizing violence, especially with a video game user being an active, willing participant and not merely a passive viewer, as with Television.

A 2010 review by psychologist Craig A. Anderson concluded: "...exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect, and for decreased empathy and pro-social behavior." Another way in which the media can readily impact the average

American's psychological well-being is with popular social media platforms such as Facebook. Over the past decade, Facebook has become a highly popular and influential platform, suggesting that it offers a means to appease the innate needs of communication, acceptance, and companionship. However, as with any other online frenzy, Facebook can--and often does--invoke psychological issues, many of which may go unnoticed for weeks, months or years but have significant long term effects.

A recent study found that heavy Facebook users experience a decrease in subjective well-being over time. Many users become depressed with their lack of success, only proliferated by their envy of a friend’s accomplishments. In the case that one’s Facebook profile doesn’t have as many likes or followers, they may feel inadequate. Propelled by feelings of jealousy and inferiority, many may ultimately fall into an on-going depression.

As studied through Media Psychology, a resource used by millions of experts worldwide, the impact of media has been shown through causation between one’s decisions and the media.

Whether it be through video games or social media platforms, one thing is certain: the media has a tremendous effect on our society’s mental well being.



DO GRADES DETERMINE INTELLIGENCE?

By Elizabeth Son

Just last week, I was sitting in the school cafeteria while munching on some baby carrots. The conversation buzzing around me was nonstop: Have you seen her new hair? Did the English teacher get fired or did he quit? Who do you think the smartest kid in the grade is? Amidst all of this chatter, my attention is drawn to one topic: "...he has to be the smartest boy in our school. I heard that his APUSH average is 105!"

The conversations between me and my friends often gravitate around this theme: comparing our grades, averages, and test scores. We, along with many other students in our classes, compete to see not only who has the highest average, but the most intelligence.

Sure, no one says it out loud, but people often associate grades with intelligence. For example, take the college admissions process. One of the first things that colleges see in our transcript is our grades. With everyone scrambling to get the highest score possible on their SAT or ACT, one has to wonder how much all of these factors really matter. Just a few numbers have the ability to make or break our school career and the last couple of years of our adolescence. But how accurately do grades really determine how smart we truly are? Are complete strangers correct in attributing our intelligence to our grades? Or is this tendency a wrong

that needs to be made right?

There are a variety of factors that can affect how a student does on a test. Try to remember the last time you took an exam without getting any sleep the night before. Were you satisfied with your score when you received your grade? Probably not. The amount of sleep one gets can affect test scores, much like a bad day or anxiety. Taking multiple tests in a week or even a day can also affect test scores. With so many variables factoring in on test taking, it's hard to compare the intelligence of all students to one standard of grades.

Think of it like a science project where the question that you're trying to answer is, "Do Grades Determine Intelligence?" The dependent variable would be the varying grades of the people who took the same test. The independent variable should be a single difference in the conditions under which students took the same test. As you can see, this experiment is flawed. It is impossible to ensure that an entire group of people can take a test in the same exact conditions, from what they ate for breakfast to their current socio-economic situation.

Another reason why grades cannot truly be reliable indicators of intelligence is because of the varying priorities of people. Some people have a passion for math and take part in the Mathletes team.

Others may love playing basketball, hoping to be a future NBA player. Still, others may love singing and receiving applause on stage. Just because someone would prefer studying their lines for a school play over formulas for a chemistry test doesn't mean that one is smarter than the other. It only shows how different people have different values.

Take, for example, one of the most brilliant scientists in history: Albert Einstein. He once failed a college entrance exam, flunking the botany and zoology sections. We now know that Einstein had an aptitude for math and science, and his failing grade did not reflect his intelligence in these fields because it tested other, less favorable subjects of Einstein's. However, Einstein remains arguably one of the smartest people in history.

So, maybe grades don't determine intelligence. But that doesn't mean that they are unimportant. They simply reflect our ethics when it comes to test-taking and school. Regardless of the lack of correlation between grades and intelligence, this fact will do little to deter students from comparing averages or intelligence in the near future because traditions are difficult to uproot, even if they have no basis in truth.

YOU

I saw you dance. You weren't good or even decent, that much was obvious. Each step you took was teetering and unstable. Your arms were splayed out awkwardly, dangling at uncomfortable angles. Were you drunk? Or just a bad dancer? I kept watching you tripping over your own feet from afar, hiding drunken snickers underneath my breath.

I saw you look up, and I expected to see an expression similar to when a five-year-old wets the bed—flushed embarrassment. I don't recall most of that night, but I remember the look you held on your face. Maybe it was the vodka speaking, or the tequila whispering delusions in my ear, but you were *gorgeous*.

I knew right away when I witnessed your grin, seemingly pointed at both everyone and no one. It wasn't that you didn't care. Saying something so easy would be the equivalent of generalizing a human as a sentient mass of flesh and bone. You were, you *are* so much more than that. My eyelids felt heavy, and my vision was blurred, but even through that beer-colored haze, I could see you so clearly. It wasn't that you "didn't care", but rather it was that you just enjoyed yourself. You didn't get sucked into the mind-devouring black hole of norms and ideology. You didn't even notice the staged, peacocking dances of the masses cramped around you. Their eyes were noticeably cloudy, a drifty fog that blinds them from everything except for what they *want* to see rather than what they *need* to see. In their vision, there was no distinction. Yours were clear and bright, like two flashing spotlights that made anyone you look at feel like the main role in a Broadway musical. A dancing actor who greedily devours all the attention of the crowd.

I looked at the couch I was sitting on, and to my left was a girl in fishnets passed out with drool dribbling from the corner of her mouth. To my right was a tall, lanky stoned blonde quietly chuckling to himself. I looked at you again, and you were dancing. This time you were rocking your body slowly, with slow sensual thrusts of your hips. I felt my face light up like kerosine catching a spark. I downed the rest of my liquid courage, and stand up. As hypocritical as I may be, I conformed to the rest of the partygoers. I swung my arms in rhythm and swayed my hips to the beat. I wanted to see you better. To get to know that subtle dip nestled into your collarbone. To understand that crooked smile and imperfect laugh. You turned and finally made eye contact with me. My face was the hue of a cherry, but at least I could attribute that to Asian glow. I breathed out slowly, forcing my breath to even out while staring at your multidimensional pupils, getting transfixed in every glimmer of light caught in it.

I shook my shoulders as the song got louder and drew closer to you.

"Hey."

You gave me a smile. The look of your glowing face put so much pressure on my heart it felt like my arteries were going to clog. My chest felt oddly tight like the muscles and sinews were getting sewed together.

"Hey". You smelled like eucalyptus and sandalwood. "What's up?"

BLURRY EYES

Waiting quietly for someone, anyone, to approach. Silently sneaking darting glances around myself, hoping to catch a person walking towards me. People are passing by like fireflies, and just as quickly burn out. Fleeting. Temporary.

Occasionally there is a wish that I could see a particularly beautiful person once again, but it dissipates with the approach of another alluring stranger. Each one carries a novel engraved within him/her like an etching on marble. Some deeply planted like gnarled tree roots while others are flaunted on purpose, like a carnation that blooms for the pleasure of others.

I watch them walk to and away from me. A man in a fleece sweatshirt and chinos. A woman in a floral dress donning a thin belt cinched around her waist. I am free to walk around as I please. I am not chained to a lamppost or tied to a mailbox. I can, I *could*, run around wherever I want. Hell, no one's stopping me from dancing in the middle of the street. So why are my feet dug into the ground? Cinderblocks are tied around each leg, dragging me deeper and deeper into the cobblestone paved streets. I feel dragged down. Tugged back by an illusion. By a false ideology. The chains feel real. I can feel the metal pressed tight and cold against my bare skin. I reach out for someone. Desperate. But not desperate enough to accept aid from the ugly. From the boring. From the unpopular.

The chains feel tighter now. Tensing with each passing day. People reach out towards me with reassuring smiles. I am here, they say. Aren't you satisfied? I scoff with a quick puff of breath and upturn my chin towards the unworthy. This narrow mindedness threatens to consume me. It's a vulture circling around my half dead carcass of a soul. Swooping lower with each passing hour, checking to see if I am weakened enough. If my pride allowed for enough blood loss. Even through this arrogance, the people still swarm like gnats. They all reach out with benevolent, kind hands and I slap at them like one swats at a mosquito.

It's when I'm starving and mortally wounded when I realize. The chains aren't chains. They're threads, spun with cotton candy. The pulling is like a child tugging on my leg for a piece of candy. I sob with joy. Tears spill out of my eyes and splash on the ground, each producing a blooming flower of different varieties. One drop creates a tulip. Another gives birth to a chrysanthemum. From the center of the street, directly in front of me, a large stage shoots up from the ground, spilling rubble and vestige as it emerges. I am not you.

You are not me. Who said I ever needed you? Let my pride be. Let it devour me. Let that vulture eat my liver and the rest of my entrails. I step up from the prison of pavement and make my way towards the stage. The robe that adorns me is silky and glistening. There's an illuminant quality to them like it was woven from moondust and star fragments. Are you watching? All the hustling people, who once walked away, who once walked towards me, are looking at me. Awestruck? Jealous? Contemplating what could have been? Too late for that. I grin cheekily towards the crowded, astounded masses and begin to dance. I don't know where the music is coming from, but it resonates deeply throughout the city. It's loud enough for the pebbles to clatter and the trees to shake. I pound my bare soles on the floor. I let my hair fly out in untamed curly masses. My arms flail out extravagantly, and my hands point to as many people as I could single out. Superfluous? Maybe. Embarrassing? Definitely. Still, who the fuck cares? I'm enjoying myself. Their eyes are *still* on me. I jerk my head left and right in irregular spasms.

Do you see me? Are you noticing me? How could you not? Give me the melody, and I'll give you something greater in return. It sounds so sickly sweet. So saccharinely intense. It's a sugar rush, and I'm devouring everything around me. Your attention. Your time. Your attraction. I swerve and laugh out loud. My heels are still slamming against the smooth glass floor, and the spotlight begins to shine on me, a glittering beam that makes my robe twinkle. I stop suddenly and plop down on the floor in front of millions. I wave to them with rapid jerky movements.

The show's over, I shout out in a loud, clear voice. I'm tired now, so please leave me alone.

Madame Curie

The woman tapped her cigarette holder with a gloved finger. Her chocolate eyes skimmed over the cards she held in one hand, obscured from the other players.

"Raise", she said without looking up. She didn't have to look to know that the men's stoic faces darted down towards their cards. The pot was brimming to the top. The chips- a skyscraper, waiting to get torn down in a matter of seconds. One by one, the men went all in, their faces void of any emotion. The dealer nodded.

Showdown. One by one the men revealed their hands. Pair. Three of a kind. Straight. The woman adjusted her feather boa and sat up with her legs crossed. She laid down her cards fanned out for the rest to see. Flush. Her painted lips grew into a feline grin, and the dealer pushed the chips towards her. The lady stood up daintily, her posture perfect and poised. She took a drag from her cigarette and blew it through the black veil covering her face. The men's faces paled as they gawked at the cards. The handcuffs locking them to the table rattled as the victims jerked their arms in a spasm of terror. Two out of the three men frothed at the mouth like rabid canines while the third one clawed at the

chained arm with his one free hand, desperately trying to break his shackles. The woman looked at each of the men hungrily. She pointed to each of them one by one and spoke words like silk.

"Kidneys". "Liver". "Heart".

She waved her gloved hands dismissively and three people dressed in black stepped forwards from behind her. The woman observed as the men were taken away. She was particularly fixated on one thing- their faces. The mouths, open wide and shrieking incomprehensible words, were satisfying, but nothing compared to the eyes. The eyes were always diverse, some filled with utter despair and loneliness, while others were filled with anger and fire. One thing, however, was always the same in all of them- fear. Everyone is afraid when they die, and gambling addicts were no different. The lady made eye contact with the dealer.

"Shall we go watch?"

As the two left the operating room, the lady gestured her cigarette holder towards the dealer.

"What was their debt again?"

The dealer dug out a notepad from somewhere inside of her sequined dress.

"One of them borrowed

50K. The other two borrowed 60."

The lady smirked underneath her veil.

"Men. Always willing to push their luck against a woman."

The dealer shifted uncomfortably and thought before speaking.

"Madame Curie, may I ask why you do this?"

The executor's clicking heels stopped abruptly. She turned smoothly to face the pale dealer. She grinned cattily.

"Do what?"

The dealer swallowed hard. Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"Gamble with them. For their lives. You could take their organs without a problem but you always let them go free if they win. You even cancel their debt."

The madame's face grew dark. A rare occurrence. Her bloody lips grew into a firm line but the dealer couldn't see her eyes.

"I apologize. It was out of line."

Curie gestured to an elegant couch near them, and they both sat down. She was quiet for a few more moments and took a silent drag from her cigarette. Finally, she took off her veil, revealing her sharp eyes. Composure seemingly regained, she

Curie gestured to an elegant couch near them, and they both sat down. She was quiet for a few more moments and took a silent drag from her cigarette. Finally, she took off her veil, revealing her sharp eyes. Composure seemingly regained, she looked at the dealer directly.

"People seem to take luck as a joke. That it doesn't exist."

Her eyes were two smoldering flames.

"Luck is real. Very real. It saved me once, and I plan on giving everyone the same chance. The chance to live. Gambling is how I know the ones who die were forsaken by luck."

The dealer didn't push anymore. She plucked at the hem of her dress nervously.

"May I ask one last question?"

The madame was leisurely laid back onto the couch with her arms outstretched elegantly. Her right glove was on, but her left one was gone. Her fingers were long and slender, with golden rings adorning them.

"I'm in a good mood today."

The dealer spoke hesitantly.

"Why do you only let men borrow money from us and gamble with you?"

The Madame laughed underneath her breath. She set down her cigarette onto an ashtray next to the couch. She held up a gloved index finger.

"Before that. Aren't you curious why I don't particularly care about my left glove, but I always have my right glove on me?"

The dealer paused, then nodded slowly. The Madame grinned widely and pulled off her right glove. The dealer's eyes widened in shock.

Gnarled, root-like burn scars wrapped along the entirety of the hand. The color of the palm was deep brown and discolored in some areas, a drastic comparison to the snowy white complexion she normally had. The fingers were wrinkled and bright red. The madame stared at the hand with a blank face.

The dealer gaped at the woman, unable to hide her emotions. The madame

spoke softly.

"Grotesque, isn't it? Referring to your earlier question, a man did this to me. A man I thought I knew well. One day I guess he got tired of me. He came at me with a knife, but as luck would have it, I had slept with a pistol that night. I knew something was off, and luck helped me."

The dealer looked at the madame with shock. Why was she telling her this? The madame continued with a faraway smile.

"Lady luck gave me a chance for a reason. She told me to get what I deserve. Not a nice car, or a fancy house, but a chance to put men where they belong."

She paused, and the dealer choked out uncontrollable words.

"Where is that?"

The madame slid her glove back on in one smooth motion. She adjusted her veil once again and picked up her cigarette holder.

"Beneath me of course."

I Wanted To

By: Alice Chen

*I wanted to go places
To see things
To eat and to play
To return to old favorites
And discover new ones
I didn't say it enough
But I wanted to,
I really did.*

Anyway.

*Now I am
I'm going places
Seeing things
Eating and playing
Where I've been hundreds of times before
And where I am lost
And I feel happy*

*But am I?
Because I wanted to go with you*

Ember Lilies

By: Anjika Friedman-Jha

I dance with petals on my hips
Lily and rosebud melody
Staring up at the blue ceiling

Cover me in honeysuckle memories
Drunk off nectar and perfume
Stumbling as I sway

Carpets of grass compel me with caressing blades
Singing a quicksand melody
cruelty of razor-toothed sweetness
Madness of honeycomb
Sanity's sweeter, isn't it?

I call the daffodils
They said-
The whole world is on fire
Smell the singed sienna
Burnt under my eyelids
I just keep moving through
Bareboned garden drenched in sunshine

I touch the bottom but cannot propel myself farther
Living upside down for so long
I forget which way is up
So I keep dancing leaving as much space as I can for the music.

Outside the City Lights

By: Angela Zhu

Beyond the glow of the artificial lights in the city
Past the walls tattooed with graffiti
And far away from the screams of people drinking their fears
away
There is a place, like heaven
Where the only sounds come from the natural heartbeat of
the earth
And the soft song of the wind's lament
If you dare to escape from the metallic grip of the skyscrapers
And dare to find the end of the sidewalk, laden with gum and
garbage
There is a place where
The stars cradle the crying moon
Tears dripping as waterfalls down the worn face of the
mountains
And pooling into the pearl seas
Where the water is so clear
One can see the future
If you escape the poison air of addiction
And run past the glaring blue light of screens
There is a place
Where those who don't have enough numbers to label their
souls
Find imagination tucked beneath each stone
But those faced with the harsh tempest of quantity
Who forget that the beauty in themselves
Lies around them
Will never find this place
That is before their eyes
Although not many listen
It sings to each of its children

A painting of a red bicycle against a striped background. The bicycle is positioned diagonally, with its front wheel pointing towards the bottom left and its back wheel towards the top right. The frame of the bicycle is a vibrant red. The handlebars and seat are also red. The background consists of vertical and diagonal stripes in shades of blue, white, and black, creating a sense of depth and texture.

I was drawn to this arrangement because of the different textures in the still-life. The metal from the bicycle and the soft fabric from the cloth were challenging factors that worked nicely together to form an interesting composition."

-Christine Chai



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