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Illinois Association of Teachers of English

IATE is a professional organization for teachers of English/language arts. IATE publishes the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the *IATE Newsletter* and hosts an annual fall conference. IATE is organized by districts throughout the state, each district having a district leader and providing local activities to members throughout the year.

IATE also maintains standing committees that address a number of professional interests and works with other professional organizations to further the interests of teachers. Composed of over 1,000 teachers throughout the state, IATE provides a working network for the exchange of teaching tips, current research, and professional development as well as enduring friendships.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEST ILLINOIS STUDENT POETRY AND PROSE OF 2017

JANICE NEULEIB

As I write about the Young Writers for the Fall 2018 *Bulletin*, I have just returned from the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam reading. Each year I write my own essays in response to the AP questions, and this year was no exception, but I think I predicted less well what the essays writers would do. The question I read had to do with eminent domain: whether it is a good power for the government to exercise. The best writers saw the pros and cons clearly and argued well for their stances. Oddly, enough the essays and poetry chosen by the judges to appear in this Fall *Bulletin* echoes the power struggles and worries of the AP essays. What freedoms do we enjoy? What are the limits on those freedoms? What are the expectations? These questions hover over many of the students' essays and poetry in this issue of the *Bulletin*. As always, I am deeply grateful

to the teachers and parents who nurture and encourage our Illinois young writers, and this year I wonder if they and we are not a little overwhelmed by the zeitgeist of our era. As usual, I urge teachers to write along with their students and bring that writing in one form or another to the IATE conference in the fall to discuss and debate with peers. We all need readers and responders. Let me respond to the teachers of these young writers with enthusiastic congratulations. You and they have done well.

As many of you know, Kevin Stein has moved on from his stint as Illinois Poet Laureate, so we lack his response to the poetry this year, but let us all read with his clever and subtle eye and give these young poets our accolades.

Finally, I'm ever grateful to Steve Halle and Holms Troelstrup of the ISU Publications Unit for their editorial work on this issue of the *Bulletin*. My deepest thanks go to Robin Murray for her work as poetry judging coordination and Delores Robinson and her new succeeding editor, Tracy Lee, for prose judging coordination. To these coordinators, we owe so much and thank them for their work with the young writers and their teachers. Each year at the IATE conference and at the AP readings, Illinois English teachers tell me how much they and their students value the opportunity to publish in the *Bulletin*. My thanks go to all you readers for your support.

Teachers with Students Placing in Any Contest Category

Jennifer Arias
Sarah Avallone
Jennifer Bamonte
Angelique Burrell
Gina Chandler
Heather Fehrman
Denise Foster
Jared Friebel
Stephen Heller
Stephanie Hiffman
Richard Holinger
Martha Keller
Cyn Koukos
Karen LeMaistre
John Lodle
Cherise Lopez
Melissa Mack
Kimberly Musolf
Deb Riggert-Kieffer
Diane Riley
Anne Singleton
Amy Zimmermann

IATE Poetry Runners-Up

Cassidy Farrar, "Fern Girl," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, Teacher: John Lodle

Reese Dannenfeldt, "Ode to the Women Who Cuss," Grade 11, Libertyville High School, Libertyville, Teacher: Karen LeMaistre

Andrea Chacon, "I am," Grade 7, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Teacher: Sarah Avallone

IATE Poetry Honorable Mentions

Joy Chen, "The Market," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Heather Fehrman

Johnna Gelck, "Window Pain," Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Denise Foster

Clea Sterner, "The Call for Spring," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Teacher: Cyn Koukos

Taylor Simmons, "Sisters," Grade 7, Northbrook Junior High School, Northbrook, Teacher: Sarah Avallone

IATE Prose Runners-Up

Charlie Calkins, "Romeo, Kin of Montague," Grade 7, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Teacher: Cyn Koukos

Hannah Chiou, "The Significant Insignificance of Virginity," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Melissa Mack

Mary Constantinou, "On Being Forgotten," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Teacher: Diane Riley

Rachel Fuechtman, "Fitting In: Do You Really Need To?" Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Stephanie Hiffman

Jayne Gelman, "Jayne Gelman by Jayne Gelman," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Heather Fehrman

Kevin Hu, "The One Fall," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Jennifer Arias

Sanjana Jain, "The Garden of Memory," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Denise Foster

Abhiram Kakuturu, "Literature is a Grand Master," Grade 12, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Jennifer Arias

Adele Lee, "Rhinos and Pillows: The Pursuit of Self-Happiness," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Melissa Mack

Lana Millman, "On Motivation. Kinda" Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Stephanie Hiffman

Julia Multer, "Ko Wakatsuki," Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Teacher: Cyn Koukos

Benjamin Saloga, "Eye of the Storm," Grade 11, Marmion Academy, Aurora, Teacher: Richard Holinger

Kristiana Strtak, "Just Another Victim: How Falsifications Turned into an Epidemic," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Cherise Lopez

Charlotte Sudduth, "True Life: I'm a Hinsdale Nanny," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Heather Fehrman

Audrey Young, "A Growing Tree," Grade 12, Belleville West High School, Belleville, Teacher: John Lodle

IATE Prose Honorable Mentions

John Bazukas, "The Golden Enlightenment," Grade 11, Marmion Academy, Aurora, Teacher: Richard Holinger

Heather Birdsell, "爸爸," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Jennifer Arias

Victorian Clinton, "Rides to School," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Teacher: Diane Riley

Aishani Dutta, "Deity Divided," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Kimberly Musolf

Julia Ellis, "OCMe," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Denise Foster

James Giltner, "Winning, above All Else," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Jared Friebel

Samantha Hurd, "The Aftermath," Grade 8, Washington Middle School, Washington, Teacher: Deb Riggert-Kieffer

Kylie James, "The Caboose," Grade 11, O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon, Teacher: Diane Riley

Bridget Kilpatrick, "A Time-Written Response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" Grade 8, Lycée Français de Chicago, Chicago, Teacher: Cyn Koukos

Anne Kuckertz, "The Neatly Chaotic," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Cherise Lopez

Matthew Lorenz, "The Theory of Evolution," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Gina Chandler

Claire Mills, "Giving Up Alone," Grade 12, Libertyville High School, Libertyville, Teacher: Karen LeMaistre

Austin Pinderski, "My Bench," Grade 12, Lake Forest High School, Lake Forest, Teacher: Amy Zimmermann

Thivya Sivarajah, "Luck of the Draw," Grade 11, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Teacher: Melissa Mack

Albert Sterner, "A Memoir of a Painted Man," Grade 10, Libertyville High School, Libertyville, Teacher: Karen LeMaistre

Jenny Witt, "Not So Pretty in Pink," Grade 11, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Jared Friebel

Rachel Wu, "Portal," Grade 12, Hinsdale Central High School, Hinsdale, Teacher: Heather Fehrman

ILLINOIS POETRY 2017
WRITE SOMETHING ON THE RUN: NOTEBOOK TIME AND TWO-LINE POEMS

ROBIN L. MURRAY

This year many of us joined the 100 days of summer writing challenge, "a movement for students and teachers alike to use the summer break to build writing muscles and bits of genius through the regular inspiration provided by Notebook Time."

Because my life is busy with academic writing, I chose to write two-line poems for the month of June, using the little time I had during the summer institute or right before bed to jot ideas sparked by the day. What I didn't know, was that these two-line poems would continue into August, with a series of topics that (so far) have built longer poems I'm actually proud of. Here's one of them:

The Fall

A stage, a fall, a distant warning
echoed by a backyard dog's howl

from a two-year-old in red tights
looking like veins

in the tops of her black patent leather shoes
molten, seamed, flaring

she still can't know why
Santa changed his clothes in the women's bathroom

crushed red velvet and cotton balls draping
over a stall oozing like the center of a cherry cream

more than the broken lip and bumped forehead
she remembers a mother sewing a pink Easter cape

for a child who loved dirt so much
she found it in the middle of a white cotton sheet

she broke another tooth falling
off a church wall, concrete turning white sharp and flat

playing all three movements of Clementi's Sonatina
to come back to middle C

Rome falls in the Book of Revelation
horsemen of the apocalypse like that spring

in Bradford Woods when a Sunday school teacher
thought teens needed to learn about Clint Eastwood
painting a town red

or oohs and awes over an itchy cast from a pancake toss
that first day in the church basement

This is what you say when a pastor prays for you
while you bow over a sprawl of skirt clutching frozen meat
in a throbbing hand

on an uneven kitchen floor.

This is one of the benefits of poetry writing—and "notebook time"—missing from most of the research, even that which we've cited in the past to encourage further creative writing. With fewer submissions, especially from elementary students, we thought drawing on CCSS might work. Now I'm convinced we can keep it simple, give students just five minutes to write a two-line poem (with or without visual or verbal prompts) and see what happens. They'll definitely feel a sense of accomplishment, and they may end up proudly submitting longer works to the *Illinois English Bulletin*.

Symphony

Strathmore Bristol Board. 12" x 14". 100 lb. tooth.
Graphite. Hardness 2B. Mechanical pencil, for sketching.
48 Prismacolor Premier wax-based colored pencils.
Pencil sharpener. Kneaded eraser.

Ready?

Begin.

First movement. Allegro.
The graphite pencil takes the lead, setting the tone with soft, swift strokes.
The allegro is halting, second-guessing itself—scratches of pencil are layered in chords, and the eraser dispatches the dissonance.
The theme is established, the paper prepared—ready for the rest of the piece.

Second movement. Andante.
Out come the colors, calm, deliberate.
Lingering and *legato*, blue, yellow and red fill the page.
Colors are blocked in, and liquidly layered
Themes and chords that take turns and build until
Blue isn't blue but it's your lover's eyes and the night sky
And yellow is the glint off gold, the sunset in the birdbath
And red is every rose you ever picked and every drop of blood you ever pricked on the thorns.

Third movement. Minuet and Trio.
This is the fun part. Pencils are sharpened at intermission
Because now they get to dance.
The music is exciting now, notes are sparkling and *staccato*.

And the pencils prance across the page to develop delectable detail.
An eye. An ant. The sweat on a glass. Sienna for stripes of sandstone.
Come the Trio, surprises are hidden
For whomever endeavors to see.

Fourth movement. Finale.
Faster and faster, repeat the themes. Cement the colors and shapes.
The pencils, pointed so pristinely
Their sharpness, what gives the colors their glow
Are dampered and dulled as they burnish it down—
this symphony performed on paper.

Ellie Buescher
Grade 12
Belleville West High School
Belleville
Teacher: John Lodle

Quiet

Like you, I question half
the people I meet. I use that
delicate circumlocution, whisper demands and ask: "How did they do?"
Could they be enough?

Wonder if they had martyred
themselves like you had, fought invisible figurines. Fallen willingly into the system, paranoid all the same. *They*, you fold your arms, *will always be out to get you.*

At times I want to peel myself away, crosshatch shade my neck peachy pale, dip fingertips in carmine ink and yank out melted fists. *If I worked*

harder, I would be anything.

But knuckles are brittle, and feet
bruise sap green. Shutting the door begins the interrogation. In your death,
you ring tinnitus behind my brow, the echoes of swine slaughtered.

Take a walk. Untie the drawstring,
so Aeolus might crack his whip
metal against bone, skin folded between not "flesh" enough to be human. Outscream winter cold, but even Typhon's

cries could not escape his bed.
If only it was possible that—
like empty meals, the man you

married, powder pigment and blank film—use does not define worth.

You refuse us, ears plugged with black slithering down. Pound the ceramic, splinter the empty oak, wear raw the voice. I want to bite, carve

spoonfuls from your withering hairline.

Snap bone like plastic straw, stitch your eyes' shadows up away from their irises,
plunge a knife down the esophagus and practice interior design. *Can you*

see better now?

I find myself hanging after dark, envisioning your oath of *a gain and again and again and again and again*,
the asthmatic's nightmare. Bore a screwdriver into the hollows between ears:

Sisyphus likes to labor in quiet.

Emily Luo
Grade 11
Adali E. Stevenson High School
Lincolnshire
Teacher: Martha Keller

Privacy? What's that?

Small parts of you are taken every day.
You are stolen day in and day out.
Browsing the web,
Scrolling through your favorite social media,
You simply have no way to stop it.
Multinational corporations rest every direction we look.
Nobody wants their private property taken away.

Privacy policies are so wordy, you don't even know what they're saying.
Privacy of customers should be the first thought.
But no, privacy is not even worth a penny to those corporations.
They steal from us, they take from us.
They know us better than we do ourselves.
They sell our information off to other corporations,
Who also know us better than we do ourselves.
Pretending your information is safe, that's just what they're portraying.

Browsing the internet is like filling out a fake phishing form.
All of us are hacked at every moment and we don't even know it.
The bang of keys on our computers,
Not knowing we have hidden keyloggers,
Dropping unblockable ads at every direction.
We live our lives as if everything is perfectly fine.
Even with protecting ourselves as best we can,
We can't stop the constant, ongoing privacy war.
It's the war against us and the corporations.
It's just the norm.

You find yourself with an inbox filled with spam.
That's what happens when your private property is stolen.
You have just provided all rights to use it to the corporation.
You see ads that are so directed to you, nobody else would ever see them.
You find your browser filled with personalized scams.

Your browser—pretending they're providing you
With this amazing, helpful tool—is taking from you
And selling you and not providing you with anything.
With every download of a browser, you're installing spyware.
And the way to delete it: close and never open your computer.
But, you can't push through.

Private searching is here.
Ad blockers, tracker blockers, it's all here.
I block it as much as I can, but all the unknowing people.
And there's no way to permanently block it.
Being able to is just what we hear.

I have to accept the unstoppable privacy war.
I live life logically wondering when the next robbery will be.
There is nothing I or any of us can do.
It's the unstoppable privacy war.

Ian Cox
Grade 10
Libertyville High School
Libertyville
Teacher: Anne Singleton

Second Shadow

Little boy with his paper swords,
Given a promise he could not keep,
Stay young forever.

Boy tried to keep his promise,
Dragged along the River Styx,
Made it back but was never quite the same.

Tired bags under brown eyes,
So pale he's almost yellow,
Chocolate hair in a curly crest.

Picked himself back up,
New shade to his eyes,
Set out with a second shadow.

After seventy years,
Tempered and hardened,
Half-bald and silver-haired,

Stood in front of a grave with his son,
Said his final request,
Stay young forever.

The son disbelieved.
Tears in contrast to his father's stern eyes.
The old boy just flicked him on the nose and chuckled,
Before saying goodbye.

Theodore Martello
Grade 9
Morris Community High School
Morris
Teacher: Jennifer Bamonte

Tufts of Flowers Welcomed Me

Bright tufts of purple welcomed me
A cloud-like pleasure to my eyes—
Their pop-corned petals—afar I see
As shiny sparkles seemed to rise
In perfect rows these swaying flow'rs
I stood transfixed for many hours.

Some buds a shade of shocking blue
And some a lovely shade of pink
They're dotted with the summer dew
And I could hardly blink
Hydrangeas tilted in the breeze
All masses they did seem to please

The smells enchanted all noses
As I dashed through the lovely fields
The flowers seemed to strike poses
Each petal standing up like shields
Like godly kn'ights ready to strike
Or stealthy ninjas in the night

When spring returns these perfect blossoms
Will leap into their prime again
Their colors will suggest awesome
As they will break the icy chain
With petals not covered anymore

Charlotte Geyskens
Grade 7
Northbrook Junior High School
Northbrook
Teacher: Sarah Avallone

What Is It about Broccoli?

What is it about broccoli
that makes me want to hide
whenever it's for dinner;
Would it taste better fried?

What is it about broccoli—
that little green tree—
when it's on your dinner plate
makes you want to run free?

What is it about broccoli
when it's sitting there useless?
Those leafy greens staring up at you
make me wish I were toothless.

What is it about broccoli
that makes me want to gag,
no matter how it's cooked;
Wouldn't it be better off in a bag?

What is it about broccoli
that makes me dread
the upcoming meal?
Can I have carrots, instead?!

Maya Machen
Grade 6
Lycée Français de Chicago
Chicago
Teacher: Cyn Koukos

ILLINOIS PROSE 2017

IMAGE IS NOT EVERYTHING

TRACY D. LEE

For the next few years, college English composition instructors will see the students from this year's contest in our classrooms while they learn, struggle, and make room for new skills. We will do so with an understanding that some of these students will go on to graduate studies and come back to teach alongside us, others will be our future doctors, politicians, and administrators, and still others will begin a valuable and indispensable skilled trade. No matter *what* they do, we all wish them happiness with their choices and the future professional and personal relationships they will build and foster.

However, many recent conversations with my colleagues have detailed anecdotal ways we see social media effecting our students, specifically in terms of their career aspirations. One of the main things we're all taught to consider

when choosing a future profession is what will make us happy—if work doesn't feel like work, we are more likely to be happy. The other fundamental consideration is how to afford the house, transportation, food, and daily items needed to live a comfortable life—no one wants to want, and in looking to the future, most of us choose a career that can afford our projected *dream* lifestyle.

But what if social media's grossly hyperbolic representation of *real life* is the only measure one has in which to define happiness and success? While many of today's youth have deeply sophisticated views about social justice and inclusion, how many of them also consider the Hollywood mansions, flashy cars, personal trainers, contoured faces, YouTube fashion hauls, and ever-smiling faces on social media a realistic ideal?

We are not the sum of our things nor the carefully crafted and culled images on Instagram. Yet, few of us teaching today have had to deal as an adolescent or young adult with the way in which social media can warp one's perspective about life, others, and where an individual fits in. As educators of the fragile yet powerful upcoming generation, perhaps we need to teach our students the critical thinking and career-specific skills needed for them to succeed while also teaching them that many of us find happiness in modest homes, in volunteerism and community service, and that some have jobs we like-but-don't-love because we find refuge in our family and friends—none is a failure, and all are valid. The message is as powerful for us as it is for them: we are complex, emotional, and fallible humans in search of emotional connection and personal fulfillment, not things or image.

Tracy D. Lee, on behalf of the judges at Illinois Valley Community College, Oglesby, Illinois:

Lori Cinotte
Jean Forst
Kirk D. Lockwood
Kimberly M. Radek-Hall
Randy Rambo
Delores Robinson
Nora Villarreal

Panic and the Meaning of Life

Everybody panics.

I know I've slept through my alarm on the first day of school. And forgot to check my blind spot while merging onto the highway. And I may have seen somebody cute at a wedding, foolishly let my friend convince me to try and flirt, and then was unceremoniously reminded that the prickliest saguaro in the Mojave Desert is still smoother than me.

These are Small Panics.

Sometimes, panic takes over my whole body. It shoots through my veins like ice on fire, my heart working overtime because *something is wrong*. But excruciatingly I *know* that it's nothing more than my indifferent brain grunting, "Well, my shift's done," punching out, and letting the intern take over. Don't let the intern take over! She's been here a week! She can't handle the whole department by herself!

This is a Panic Attack.

A Panic Attack is different from a Small Panic because the intern doesn't know the difference between shortness of breath and *actual cardiac arrest*, so she spills her coffee and presses the big red lockdown button anyway, just to be safe.

Unfortunately, sometimes the intern *does* press the button in the event of cardiac arrest or something equally serious.

This is what happened to me in August.

If, back in July, someone had asked me where I would be spending the first two weeks of August, I might have said, "The lake with my family" or "The St. Louis Zoo, where I volunteer in the education department" or "In my room with the blinds drawn, eating unhealthy snacks and watching Netflix." The ICU at St. Louis Children's Hospital would not have made

the list. But as I'm sure you're aware, the universe doesn't care about lists. The universe thoroughly enjoys giving lists a respectful, one-finger salute. And the ICU is exactly where I wound up, with cancer in my right atrium and two Coke cans worth of fluid compressing my heart. My summer goals also wouldn't have included "zapping my heart with high-energy X-ray radiation" (which didn't give me superpowers) or "learning to walk again after lying down for five days," but hey, the universe does its thing.

I tell you this, not so you'll pity me, but because (hopefully) you want to know who I really am, and as somebody famous probably said once, it's our greatest challenges that define us. This August I was more afraid than I've ever been. I almost died. And let me tell you something about almost dying: it makes talking to a cute girl look like a relaxing nature walk. So I don't mind that chemotherapy tires me out, and I don't mind that I had to shave my head, because now that I have bigger things to worry about, I don't fret about those small things. I can focus more on figuring out the meaning of life.

As far as the meaning of life is concerned, here's what I know so far: I don't just want to read about the world. I want to live in it. You and I don't have a lot of time to spend here on this planet of beautiful accidents, and we don't know where we'll go next. Wherever that is, we likely won't have feet to take us exploring, or bodies with which to dance, or mouths to taste new food in new places. We might as well wear out the ones we have. So if I experience all I can experience, and make sure the marks I leave on others are positive ones, then hopefully in the very end, dying won't cause me so much panic.

Even if the intern does press the button.

Ellie Buescher
Grade 12
Belleville West High School
Belleville
Teacher: John Lodle

The Pain of Painless Death

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *euthanasia* is defined as "the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (such as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy." In present society, many people and governments think that being allowed to commit suicide or to kill someone out of mercy is inhumane, whereas others think it should be legalized as long as the right is not abused. In the novella *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, the character George Milton shoots his best friend so that Lennie Small is killed out of love instead of being killed by an angry lynch mob. Thus George's actions serve only to alleviate Lennie's misery through an act of euthanasia and should become an acceptable practice in the present day in order to prevent prolonged human suffering.

As a writer, one of the tools that John Steinbeck uses to build suspense in his work is foreshadowing. *LiteraryDevice.net* defines *foreshadowing* as "a literary device in which a writer gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story." Steinbeck foreshadows the death of Lennie by comparing the duo of George and Lennie to Candy, an old swamper, and his dog whom he had "since he was a pup" (44). What both George and Lennie, and Candy and his dog have in common is the fact that they have been together for a long time and consider each other family. In the rising action one learns also that Candy's dog is old and told to be past his prime as a sheep dog. When Carlson, another ranch worker, brings up the discussion of killing Candy's dog, at first Candy refuses, but after further persuasion from another comrade, Candy agrees to let Carlson kill the dog with his Luger. The execution of the dog foreshadows the ultimate

action George must take when he secretly shoots Lennie with the same revolver.

Now some people may say that Candy's decision to let Carlson kill his dog is irrational, but when a being is suffering, sometimes the best thing that one can do for whoever is suffering is to put him/her/it out of their misery. Veterinarians practice euthanasia with their patients daily, and yet society refuses to allow the very same act of mercy for human beings who are suffering.

In present society euthanasia is legal in only a handful of countries. In eight states *physician-assisted suicide* (PAS), also known as assisted suicide, is legal. According to the *World Federation of the Right to Die Societies*, "[p]hysician-assisted suicide refers to the physician providing the means for death, most often with a prescription." The difference between PAS and euthanasia is that the patient, not the physician, is ultimately administering the lethal medication (worldrtd.net). Some might argue that both forms are morally incorrect, but relieving people from their pain should be acceptable to maintain the well-being of the individual as well as of society.

An obvious difference in the shooting of Candy's dog and the shooting of Lennie is the manner in which they are killed. The old dog's killing occurs with the sentiment of apathy from Carlson who "can't stand him in [the bunkhouse]" (44). Lennie's murder, however, is done as an act of love. George, who "could live so easy" without the burden of Lennie, continuously looked out for him upon the death of Lennie's aunt and even made plans for a future with Lennie (11). Yet, at the climax of the novel, Lennie accidentally kills the wife of Curley, who is the son of the boss, and George knows that if he does not execute Lennie himself, Lennie will be murdered out of pure hatred even though Lennie intended no harm.

Throughout the rising action, Lennie killed smaller animals, including mice and a newborn pup, for the sole reason that he pets them too forcefully since he has no knowledge of his incredible strength. After each incident Lennie's mental disability makes him unable to feel remorse and to realize the consequences that prevail. These responsibilities are always left for George to deal with instead of an adequate mental institution. After all, the story takes place during the Great Depression, and Steinbeck's work focuses on man's inhumanity during this era. Thus when Lennie commits the ultimate killing of a human being, George is left with no other option as the lynch mob, led by an angered Curley, fast approaches.

Even though some might argue against euthanasia, letting humans suffer is not acceptable, especially if the person is someone like Lennie who was mentally challenged. Although Lennie was George's best friend, he kills Lennie to shield him from the severe consequences of his actions and with the knowledge Lennie would never have had his day in court if Curley found him alive by the river. Euthanasia was correctly implemented when Candy agreed to let his beloved dog be put down to rid it of its pain. The same acceptance applies to Lennie and his pain. Therefore, in circumstances where the mercy killing of said individual is a better solution than facing a lynch mob, one should support euthanasia to alleviate one's suffering as one would for an animal.

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Banjos for Breakfast

The sunlight peeks through the windows in my living room, illuminating the space and shining onto my peacefully closed eyes. But still, I sleep soundly after a late night of marathoning *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on the sofa. It's not the sun or even the hyper-realistic dreams of me slaying demons that eventually awakens me. It's the piercing sound of fingernails on metal strings as my dad fires up his banjo.

At 7 a.m. On a Saturday.

One would think that after years of bouncy southern songs being the soundtrack of my life, I could just tune out the repetitive riffs. But they follow me. They follow me in the living room during the nightly news, in the dining room, and in the car on road trips. I just can't seem to escape the curse that is bluegrass.

I'm no Mozart, and neither are the rest of my bloodline, but my family name carries a certain weight where I'm from. Ask any person in a bar in southern Illinois or St. Louis, and they've heard of us. Nearly every member of my father's side is a musician. My brother and two of my uncles play bluegrass and folk for a living, while the rest—like my father—stick to part-time gigs. People will often connect the dots to my surname and tell me how cool it is, but I didn't always see it that way.

Like any rebellious child, because my family obsessed over boot-thumping music about life on the Mississippi, I hated it. Growing up, I had disdain for any man in a bolo or boots. My angsty phase wasn't the entire reason either, because I just never truly connected with the genre. Listening strictly to head-banging music was often my oasis. At the time I thought, for a ten-year-old blonde girl, I pulled off the eyeliner and red-dyed hair tips pretty well. (I didn't.) When

my family begged me to sing and play guitar with them, I adamantly refused. Nothing terrified me more than performing *and* bluegrass music, so I stayed away.

As I've grown, even though I'm still not a huge fan of these hillbilly melodies, I trudge out to my brother's shows. I find myself singing along to the George Strait and Waylon Jennings songs my dad hammers out in the next room. The music that has surrounded me my entire life is certainly not my number one, but throughout the years I've learned to respect it. My family dedicates themselves to their passion and are honestly really, really good at it. As for me, I never could quite get my hands to perfect strumming patterns or to reach all of the piano keys, but I found solace in a furrowed brow and backspacing as I make a sentence sound just right for the third time. Through encouragement and plenty of writing contests I found *my* bluegrass. My family may not understand why my fingers would rather stroke the keys of a laptop than the cool, humming strings of a steel-pedal, but they always inspired me to be the best I could be in any field I chose. I now clap along to their covers and originals alike because I know it's what they love.

Waking up to the sharp sound of mandolin-tuning with a smile on my face will probably never happen, but I know that not having that soundtrack behind me would've made me way less cool than I am now. (And I've barely got any of that going on as it is.) So when I awaken from my *Buffy*-induced comas, I'll usually still groan. I may even ponder about how quickly I could pawn off musical equipment on eBay. And yet, I know that without it, I wouldn't have grown up with the drive and support I've had in pursuing what I enjoy. I wouldn't trade that for anything—not even a little extra sleep.

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You Only Live Once

His body was not shown at his funeral. After dying almost instantly by the impact, he and the car had been set aflame, burning away what remained of Billy Sweeney's life. Maybe it was better that way: to not have to see someone so young die from something so controllable. I wouldn't know; I was four weeks old when it happened, but I've been told the details. When I was little, my parents told me, "It was raining, and he hit a tree." A few years ago, they admitted, "He was drinking, and he hit a tree." It was raining. He was drinking. This change in detail affected me deeply and forever changed my perspective on what it means to truly live.

In a recent article from the *Chicago Tribune*, "State's tough laws curb teen driving deaths," Charles Selle writes about Jesse White, the Illinois Secretary of State, announcing the number of teen drivers who died in car crashes had been reduced by 50% in the past decade. The article ends, "Often, tough lawmaking is needed to make sure teens make the right life choices to make it into their 20s" (Selle). There's something unsettling to me about the state's "tough" laws, as if satirically suggesting that these laws are so "hard" to follow for our generation; there's something unsettling about how these laws "curb" teen driving deaths, as if we are stocks in an American business. And that last thought: "to make it into their 20's." There's something so *easy* about that ending—something that just lacks reality. Isn't death a very serious thing?

After reading this article, I thought about the 76 people that had died in 2016 that were mentioned in the article—and that's only from Illinois. In 2013, 2,163 teen drivers died in the United States, meaning, on average, six teens died every day for that year. To me, 2016 should not have been a time for "announcing." Death should not be based on a statistic. Yet, I

came to realize something, and perhaps a reason for that unsettling choice of words: the government has already done its job. They raised the drinking age to 21. Billy Sweeney was 19 when he passed away, far too young for my birth father to die.

It is us, the teenagers and young adults, who make the decision. It is with the hope to live while we're young, with the riveting idea of only living once, that we are the masters of our own destruction. For some, destruction is bliss. Destruction is what our parents have told us not to do; what our teachers have told us will prevent us from going to college; what our coaches have told us will get us kicked off of sports; what the law has told us will get us arrested. Yeah, we've heard it all, and we seem to not be affected by it. When we're offered to live life with passion and recklessness, we feel we must accept. In an instant, we can throw away all the stress and pressure, make it nothing, by making this moment everything.

I think what we don't understand is the reality of our decisions. We are growing up with so many of them and so many ways in which we want to see ourselves. We are dreamers because, at this age, we have to be. Most of us are fortunate and don't see what can really happen. I've seen what can really happen.

Billy Sweeney's family and friends were left to live with a certain pain. Those who had memories of him lived in grief; I did not have this chance. Grief is more of a fresh wound, *Merriam-Webster's* calling it a "deep sadness, caused especially by someone's death." I have felt an emptiness, or hollowness, that will always torture me. His father says I play sports like him; his mother says I have his eyes; his best friend says I laugh like him. There's something else of his that I have too—a less favorable gene. You see, scientific research at the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has

revealed that children of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves ("Alcohol Use").

This is why I do not drink.

Believe me, I understand the appeal. I mean I've thought about how wild it might be to get drunk, run from the police, laugh about it the next day. Danger can seem exciting. But what stops me, and what always will stop me, is that I have seen the pain that can come. Besides, wouldn't you rather experience something more *real* anyway?

I've always wondered what it would be like if Billy came back to life. If he did, I know what I would ask him. Billy, did you drink or smoke because it made you feel better? Or did the addiction make you do it? When you tried it the first time, whatever it was, what were you thinking? And the last night you tried it, the one before you hit the tree, were you thinking of me? Was it worth hurting your family over? Was it worth hurting your friends over? Was it worth hurting yourself over? Was is worth hurting me over?

And in the end, looking back, do you feel as though you had only lived once?

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Black Boys Shine

Black boys shine blue in the moonlight, and glitter in the sunshine like gold. Black boys range from shades of milk cream to brown leaves. The modern-day milk and honey. Black boys are art. Black boys are living Loïs Mailou Jones paintings, expressing their lives through colors, styles, shades, and outlines. Black boys are the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Black boys are jazz music, hip-hop, R & B, soul, reggae, salsa music, and trap music all in one. Black boys are Spike Lee joints. A cinematic masterpiece. Black boys are activists, poets, speakers, and lyricists—spreading words that inspire. Black boys are for the people.

Black boys stand out all the way from across the street. Black boys are live cookouts—even the uncle who put his foot in the greens—and fried fish with extra crisp. Black boys are kings, who wear their crowns in the form of waves, afros, twist, dreads, curls, fresh line-ups, and taper fades. Black boys are mamas' boys because even though they idolize their fathers, they don't want to be exactly like them. Black boys are fragile, hiding their emotions through forced masculinity that never existed outside of closed minds. Black boys are feminine too.

Black boys are just as equal. But black boys are not what *they* see. Black boys aren't dangerous or thugs, just because they have their hoods up at night. Black boys aren't great value to name-brand people, just because our brown painted limbs aren't as light as theirs. Black boys aren't problem children who can't read, and always pick fights. Black boys aren't gentrified cupcake shops in the middle of the hood, or New York brownstone apartments for sale for higher values than they were paid by *us* in the '70s. Black boys aren't white rappers who know nothing of our culture—who wouldn't accept

it—but don't mind succeeding because of it. Black boys aren't gun targets to hold misfired bullets, or a receptacle for silver handcuffs. Black boys aren't bad people. Black boys aren't just a color. Instead, black boys are a product of culture that we were told to forget about, but hold onto.

Black boys are powerful, and find beauty in situations that aren't so beautiful. Black boys are gentle hands coming together to support each other. Black boys are fathers who lead their sons, and have mothers who love them. Black boys are the blessing before dinner. Black boys are the calm within the storm. Black boys are universal. Black boys are love. And *we* are human. I am a black boy, on my way to becoming a black man, and the culture that comes with it. No one can take that away from me, because *we* shine through.

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Will of the Wind

I grew up beneath the canopy of the weeping willow that lived in the front yard of my first home. If I craned my neck from far enough away, I could just barely see the top. There its trunk divided into two branches, where each became two more, and so on until they were thin enough to drape downwards, limp tassels forming curtains that hung from the sky and gently brushed the ground. Its branches were set into motion by even the slightest gust, peacefully submissive to the forces of nature. Supported by a broad trunk held firmly in the ground by thick intertwining roots that spanned far beneath the soil in every direction, it stood, implacable upon the earth. I spent my afternoons gathering thick armfuls of thin branches and swinging from them, pendulum-like, until my hands lost their grip. The inevitable fall after each swing did not discourage me, for there was that brief second that I too hung freely in the air, and the unforgiving earth beneath me became so much less intimidating.

Perhaps I was not falling, but flying for a fleeting moment.

Just footsteps away from the willow tree stood the home in which I have memories of muffled arguments creeping through the drywall that divided my bedroom from that of my parents. I don't remember the divorce, but I remember the feeling that came what must have been months after their separation. All at once, it seemed, my mom and dad lived separate lives in separate places. I wondered which to call home: Mom's house or Dad's apartment? There was no room for my opinion in the tight confines of custody forms. My brothers and I were traded back and forth according to the schedule determined by some legal agreement which I hadn't signed. We were dragged along in the wake of changes, of questions

without answers. My voice would not be heard over the roar of rushing waves, so I kept silent. Soon my mother's income alone was not enough to pay for our little ranch-style house and the acre of land that it sat on. It didn't seem too hard to say goodbye to the willow tree, I think because I expected there to be one at my new house too. I always thought that if willow trees were people, they would be old and wise, speaking carefully chosen words in hushed voices. But there was no wise tree at my new house. My new yard was a quarter of the size of the one I used to roam, defined by a chain link fence covered in rust and peeling paint. With the new house came a man that my mom loved. She told me I didn't have to call him dad, but my new baby brother would.

My oldest brother firmly rejected the fast and frightening changes within our family. He tried desperately to resist through anger and violence; his temper was short and so was my family's patience for him. There was no hope in bottles of Ritalin or psychiatrist visits. I became accustomed to the ambiance of wild yelling and fervent sobbing, the clatter of objects falling to the floor. I hid away in my room with my new baby brother and never asked questions about these recurring incidents, afraid of the answers I might receive. I withheld my tongue, resuming my role as silent observer.

On the night that the yelling was loudest and sobbing most intense, I watched through my bedroom window as my brother was escorted into a police car and taken to wherever they take dangerous boys who hit and scream. He would stay there for a while.

The following summer I sat in a sailboat for the first time. The early morning sun tinted the water of Rest Lake with hues of orange and covered it with dancing specs of light. A swift, steady wind wrestled with the polyester sail of a small Sunfish, producing a satisfying slap of fabric and knocking the

mainsheet's metal clip against the boom like a brass bell. As I launched from the dock, the wind immediately caught my sail, sending me gliding at terrifying speeds across the water's choppy surface. I yanked the mainsheet from one side to the other with trembling hands as I zigzagged across the lake in whatever direction the wild wind propelled me. I struggled with the sail, pulling it in and letting it out with no success, coming dangerously close to capsizing every few seconds. In a last-ditch effort, I relaxed my grip on the sail, hoping to tip over slowly and swim the small boat back to the dock.

But I did not tip. Rather, the boat stabilized and caught the wind at a perfect angle. I raced steadily across the lake, smiling helplessly even as mist sprayed at my face and stung my cheeks, overcome by the exhilarating freedom of submitting to the uncontrollable wind. It would be more than a year later that my middle brother, a fanatic of ancient Greece, would share with me the story of Epictetus, and soon I'd find myself buried in his meditations.

This past summer, before that same brother left home to attend college, the two of us drove to our first home to reminisce over the youngest years of our childhood. We pulled up to the familiar openness of the yard and the yellow brick house. There was a surge of memory, pale yet pleasant, like watercolor on canvas—but the painting was incomplete. Where the towering, majestic weeping willow once stood was now a sad stump, cut cleanly across no more than two feet above the ground.

Like mourners at a funeral, the two of us wept, heads hung and posture drooping the way the willow's branches once did. Yet still there sat the thick, stubborn base of the trunk, and beneath that an expanse of gnarled, ancient roots that stretched deep and far into the earth.

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All for One, One for All: Reparations Must Acknowledge Racism's Reach

Beyoncé Knowles has conquered American stardom. With more Grammy nominations to her name than any other female artist, Knowles boasts a net worth of $350 million[1] and a level of success most of her fans will never attain. Yet Knowles must also cope with a burden foreign to certain members of her "Beyhive"—that of being black. When considering her 2016 Album of the Year snub[2] and her confinement to a Grammy category dubbed urban,[3] it becomes clear that even one of the most successful black people in the world faces a daily struggle against racism.

Projecting these experiences across the roughly 42 million black people residing in the United States produces a failure in the American experiment of unthinkable proportions, a failure that leads many wondering how to mend the past's wounds. Progressives propose reparations, allowing the United States government to apologize monetarily to black Americans for the legacies of slavery. At first glance, those like the fabulously rich Beyoncé seem unworthy of this generosity. Such a perspective, however, neglects to consider the cumulative nature of oppression.

Closely following the American narrative yields one conclusion—that the historical roots of racism run deep. After the

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1. France, Lisa Respers. "Is Racism Why Adele Beat Beyoncé at the Grammys?" *CNN*, Cable News Network, 13 Feb. 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/02/13/entertainment/adele-beyonce-racism/index.html.
2. Ibid.
3. Boboltz, Sara. "Sufjan Stevens Says The Urban Contemporary Grammy Award Is 'Racist.' Is It?" *The Huffington Post*, 14 Feb. 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/beyonce-best-urban-contemporary-album-grammy-award-what_us_58a305c5e4b0ab2d2b18e309.

thirteenth amendment abolished slavery, and the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments supposedly protected civil liberties of free black Americans, racism began its co-opting of a new, more subtle identity. Southern white supremacists threatened black Americans attempting to vote with violence, poll taxes, and impossible literacy tests,[4] while former plantations employed former slaves with subpar compensation and working conditions.[5] Throughout the early twentieth century, Jim Crow laws mandated segregation, prohibited interracial marriage, and again hindered black people's attempts at voting.[6]

Many white Americans point to the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the civil rights movement of that same decade as the end of institutionalized racism in the United States. But this outlook neglects the racial dimensions of legislation pursued during the Reagan era and beyond. Disproportionate criminalization of drugs used primarily by people of color[7] and monetization of prisons[8] combined to create black families that, on average, experience only six percent the wealth of white families today.[9] Skeptics of institutionalized racism

4. Costly, Andrew. "Race and Voting in the Segregated South." *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/race-and-voting-in-the-segregated-south.
5. "Sharecropping." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2012.
6. "The Origins of Jim Crow." *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, Ferris State University.
7. Cohen, Andrew. "How White Users Made Heroin a Public-Health Problem." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 12 Aug. 2015, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/crack-heroin-and-race/401015/.
8. Neate, Rupert. "Welcome to Jail Inc: How Private Companies Make Money off US Prisons." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 16 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/16/us-prisons-jail-private-healthcare-companies-profit.
9. Shin, Laura. "The Racial Wealth Gap: Why A Typical White Household Has 16 Times The Wealth Of A Black One." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 26 Mar. 2015.

often wonder how slavery could impact generations living 150 years into the future. The answer clearly lies in the forever evolving racism that afflicts our government and society.

However, even those who accept the existence of modern racism may question slavery-based reparations for all black people. After all, other axes of oppression exist. If a wealthy, cisgender, heterosexual black man is worthy of monetary reparations, there seems to be little justification for preventing those who are impoverished, gay, transgender, female, or gender nonconforming from receiving this same compensation. And considering the strain reparations for black people would put on government funds, money for everyone is hardly a viable solution.

Justifying reparations for all black people, then, seems to require proof of a sort of special oppression, but all that really must be shown is that black Americans, collectively, experience a kind of oppression that is best healed through monetary compensation. For instance, it is undeniable that gay people experience disadvantages in American society. Yet the percentages of gay men and straight men who live in poverty both hover near 13%.[10] By comparison, 26% of black Americans live in poverty, while only 10% of whites can say the same.[11]

Analyses of other axes of oppression yield similar results. Wounds inflicted by racist institutions leave race and poverty uniquely intertwined. Though other people of color, especially the Latinx and Native American communities, experience similar poverty rates, black Americans

10. Sears, Brad and Lee Badgett. "Beyond Stereotypes: Poverty in the LGBT Community." *Tides/Momentum*, no. 4, *Williams Institute*, 3 July 2012.
11. Parker, Kim. "Demographic Trends and Economic Well-Being." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 27 June 2016.

inexplicably (and abnormally) face high levels of education and low levels of wealth.[12] The issue of African Americans is an issue of money, one that monetary reparations are capable of addressing.

Statistics including such a wide range of people could never convey such a nuanced situation, however. Even if African Americans are uniquely able to benefit from monetary reparations, only the lower and middle classes seem to deserve such precious funds in actuality.

Giving cash to multi-millionaires like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods seems strange, and justifiably so.[13] Racism's effects on these wealthy men and women clearly does not take the form of insufficient income, and yet it still exists. America's 44th president Barack Obama boasts a net worth of $7 million,[14] which is 87.5 times higher than that of the average American,[15] and, obviously, he held more power than most Americans ever will throughout their lifetimes. Despite all this, Obama was still met with racial slurs, imagery recalling early twentieth-century lynchings, and movements claiming he was not a citizen of the United States throughout his 2008 and 2012 campaigns and presidency.[16]

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12. Ibid.
13. Miller, Matthew. "The Wealthiest Black Americans." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 6 May 2009, www.forbes.com/2009/05/06/richest-black-americans-busienss-billionaires-richest-black-americans.html#aa4de87956e7.
14. Galvis, Michael. "Barack Obama's Net Worth on his 55th Birthday." *Money*, Time, 4 Aug. 2016.
15. Campbell, Todd. "Here's the Average Net Worth in the United States." *The Motley Fool*, 17 Mar. 2017, www.foxbusiness.com/markets/heres-the-average-net-worth-in-the-united-states.
16. Samuel, Terence. "The Racist Backlash Obama Has Faced during His Presidency." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 22 Apr, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/racial-backlash-against-the-president.html?noredirect=on.

Money, then, may not be the best or final response to American racism, but it certainly seems an appropriate place to begin. Beyond the tangible value of money is the symbolic value of apology, of sacrificing something of worth in pursuit of reconciliation. Obama proves a fitting case study for what wealthy recipients may choose to do with the cash. After winning the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, Obama donated his prize of $1.4 million to charities, many of which benefited people of color.

While some thinkers today find that reparations for slavery should be "targeted," whether towards the impoverished or those who can prove a direct connection to slavery, this language is inadequate. Unqualified reparations must be pursued. Blackness is punished by government and society in the United States, regardless of victims' other identities. Without acknowledging the extraordinary reach of racism, Americans cannot resolve the issue and repay their debts to the victims of a long, cruel history of oppression.[17]

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17. Cooper, Helene. "Obama Lists Who Will Get Prize Money From Nobel." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 11 Mar. 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/us/12nobel.html.

血豆腐 (Blood Pudding)

Try it, the outstretched hand insists, the porous bamboo chopsticks already dotted with soup. I accept the offering, squeeze it clumsily, and place it in my mouth. The delicacy slicks soapy over my tongue, coating my teeth and lips with the faint taste of iron. My insides churn, the sticky texture floating still in my throat.

"好吃吗?" *Does it taste good?*

I nod, mouth squeezed tight and eyes wet. "Yes, it's very good."

My grandfather's grin is outlined in black ink, residue from years of smoking. Summer light bounces off the unevenly polished tiles, searing marks into my vision. Translucent veils billow besides the open window, the draft carrying in the smell of sanguine soil.

Tomorrow, he promises, *I will kill one of our chickens. I make yummy chicken soup.*

I respond with gratitude, tongue stumbling over the dips and bends of fragmented Mandarin. When my cousin seizes my forearm, I follow her complacently. We take our seats on the hardwood floor by her plush silk-drenched bed, and she unwraps her favorite origami paper, *just for me*. She chatters and laughs wide, hands alive with movement.

Although I am only six, I've already begun to lose the ability to speak Chinese. When my aunt asks me to add to the family grocery list, the pen she offers is as useless as my blank mind. When I accidentally speak in casual English at my grandparents' dinner table, my father reddens from some concoction of humiliation and Chinese beer. My cousin and I share a surname, but her fingers twitch as I struggle to articulate myself.

As my parents and I land at O'Hare International

Airport, my mother pledges to "teach me better," bargaining with some unrecognizable deity. She announces that I will only speak in Mandarin at home, but my father and I make skeptical eyes. It is easy for her—two decades after immigrating to America, her memory hasn't faltered. Though I wince when her clumsy accent bewilders friendly strangers and salespeople, I envy her for finding meaning in bizarre, ancient glyphs. In middle school, the most interesting classmates could spout foreign languages as easily as breathing while I watched in wonder from the masses.

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Since birth, I have whirled around in place, jaws snapping, hoping to snag some bite of my own stereotype. I relished the expectations, following the instructions to the letter. My parents listed the items and I checked them off, attending violin lessons for years before I found myself sick of the harsh noise. Throughout elementary and middle school, I remained at the top of my Chinese class and satisfactory grades seem to come naturally. My success made sense; *of course* I was the right kind of Asian.

Eventually, school was abruptly interrupted by sickness. Hospitalized for life-threatening aplastic anemia, I observed my parents' struggles from various hospital beds. They referenced Chinese-to-English pocket dictionaries for every medical form, called relatives overseas for financial aid, and requested Chinese doctors to explain each procedure. The language barrier seemed to have grown from a speed bump into an insurmountable obstacle overnight.

After recovery, my parents become involved. Instead of brushing off their accents as minor inconveniences, they took speech classes. My mother, determined to prove her

worth, studied and passed the citizenship test. She scoped out a white-majority church and attended weekly. She began to identify as Christian, a religion her family had never followed before.

Yet Chinese culture was harder to shake off than I had imagined. On trips to the library, my father steadfastly refused to look beyond the international section. My mother continued to fear Chinese superstitions, even when their existence clashed with Christian values; she forbid me from wearing white on my head or clipping my nails at night. My parents' upbringings had left an indelible mark on their persons, labelling their master statuses "Chinese" before all else.

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Leaning over the basin, I let the clotted paste drop from my open mouth into the porcelain sink. Water slides down from the faucet, burrowing beneath the block of congealed pig's blood and bearing it down the drain. I remain there, neck folded over the rim of the sink, diligently rinsing the residue from the roof of my mouth.

The next night, the chicken soup is delicious.

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I've Never Heard Silence Quite This Loud

My childhood was really loud. To my wide-eyed, barefoot little self, it was simply perfect, everything tinged in a golden glow.

My extended family and I did everything together, always laughing, cheering, playing, and screeching joyfully. We might have disagreed if there was only one Lemon-Lime Gatorade left, but we always made up. Grandma made sure of it.

I came home one day, to find my mom on the phone with Grandma, who I heard holler a "Hey, Meg!" through the speaker. She was one of seven people with permission to call me Meg.

The next morning I was down to only six people who could call me "Meg." The world was no longer tinged with a golden glow.

We spent the next week at my grandparents' house, which was now just Grandpa's. Amidst the hum of storytelling, advice giving, catching up, and eye drying, there was one person who stood in the corner and did nothing.

It was my cousin, Andy. Despite the fact that he lived right down the road, he turned down every invitation the family extended to him, refusing any interaction. I always mistook the silence for dislike or arrogance and had stopped trying to talk to him long ago.

I now know that he, coincidentally, had tried to meet God only hours before God decided it was time Grandma's suffering ended. Ironically, the doctors were too late to save Grandma who, if she had known God was bringing her home, would have fought like hell to stay.

But they were just in time to save Andy.

At the time, Andy's family kept this secret from us. And

they would keep it secret until the day we didn't get there just in time.

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In the years since Grandma's death, trust has been broken, lines have been crossed, and our big happy family has quietly and purposefully drifted apart. For the first time in my life, I couldn't cling to my cousins. Instead, I clung to my family, the "nucleus of six," as my mom calls us. Grandpa was swallowed by the silence the year following Grandma's death. I thought he liked the quiet, though I know now he simply had nothing to say anymore.

But we are persistent little buggers. We've always been close, but the mission to "halt the hush" bonded us even closer.

Eventually I clued in that if we were loud enough, he could close his eyes, get lost in the chaos, and pretend her voice was somewhere in the mix.

So, we bumped up the volume and Grandpa favored our joyful noise over the uncomfortable hush still covering our extended family, much to their dismay. And this dismay led to bitterness.

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We spent the years after Grandma died treading carefully to keep the peace. I knew this tense state couldn't last forever, but nothing could have been prepared me for the call from my mom's brother (who never calls). My mom's eyes were rimmed red when she eventually choked out the words, "Andy died."

When my grandmother died, it was absolutely devastating, but deep down, I knew it would happen eventually.

But when you go from 13 grandkids to 12, and a grandfather outlives his grandson, it's a different story.

The truth of Andy's death is ugly and painful, a mirror of health class horror stories. It started small, trying to fit in and deal with insecurities, but soon he was messing with the bad stuff. The stuff that always results in a casket and dozens of confused, grief-stricken, guilty people milling about a funeral home wondering, "How the hell did we let this happen?"

But the truth is also that this side of the story was too harsh. Because his parents loved him so deeply, they sunk every penny into helping him. He was a good kid, who likely had no idea this last score was laced with fentanyl.

The truth is he needed us, but we didn't know it. It was simply too quiet for anyone to hear a cry for help. But if he had just one person to help him fight his demons, he might still be standing here.

The only black-and-white aspect of his death is that he is gone. It's an odd sort of grief because we don't have much to miss, only the missed opportunity of knowing him.

His parents did an expert job of keeping the situation quiet, and their relationship with us makes more sense now. They didn't talk to us because they were afraid people would get too close to their secrets. They were so far removed from Grandma's funeral because only hours before, Andy attempted suicide. I can't blame them for the silence.

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After the funeral, my uncle, who had buried his son an hour earlier, stumbling over his words and feet due to lack of sleep, sat and heaved a sigh. He mumbled something about trying to find the good. The best he came up with was—

"At least we're all under one roof again. Maybe things can be different."

And for a second, I believed him.

But that was the barefoot, wide-eyed little girl talking. The girl with Gatorade dripping down her chin who believed to her core that we'd always work it out because we're family, and that's what families do.

Traces of that girl remain, hoping this is the beginning of the end of silence. I wish I could say things are better now, that we came together in the wake of tragedy and now spend our time together singing "Kumbaya." But we don't sing. It's still quiet.

I'm more grown up than that little girl. I know not everything can be fixed with a hug and a popsicle. I know the noise I grew up with was more than background chatter. Noise is more intricate than filling silence. Noise has saved people.

The little girl in me wants to believe that maybe it can again. Maybe I should listen to her.

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Letter to Stigma

A letter to my old friend, Stigma:

I remember the first time we met. You crept into my life when I was barely three feet tall, a cloak around my schizophrenic uncle who had come to live with us. I heard you in the late night whispers between my parents, in the stories they told about him—how he thought the doctors were spying on him, how his brain wasn't normal. How we should be careful around him. So the day he arrived, I wrapped my chubby arms around my mom's legs and peeked out at him, both curious and scared, but mostly just scared. Would he hit me? (He never did.) Would he throw things? (He never did.) Would he babble about nonsense? (He never did.)

Instead, he bought me a toy donkey at the zoo when my parents wouldn't. He gave me a gold necklace, the first I'd ever received, and I thought it was the most beautiful thing in the world. He tried to give me a goodnight hug once; his smile sagged when I ran into my mom's arms, frightened. He knew you stood in the way of our relationship, but he wanted to know me anyway, so he showered me with gifts, loving me the only way he could.

You became my friend when I was sixteen, sent to treatment for my struggle with depression. You told me I didn't need help. Depression was for the emo kids with stringy black hair and piercings, not me. But the other teens looked past my resentment and my judgmental glares and reached towards us. They pushed you away from me—long enough for me to see without your hands covering my eyes, long enough for me to hear the lies woven into your honeyed voice, long enough for me to finally say goodbye to you.

But we met again when my college admissions counselor warned rising seniors, "Don't write about mental illness.

Frankly, you just don't want them to question your ability to handle college life." I'm so frustrated with you. You turn triumphs into stains. You make others forget that mental illnesses are not all-consuming, that people often grow more resilient, more hardworking, more aware from their experiences. You are a shape-shifter who befriends people at their most vulnerable, a hazy behemoth that we can never seem to destroy completely.

I think about my late uncle, how "crazy" was just another form of you, a label that drove him into his illness and away from the connections that could have been his antidote. I think about the bouts of insanity he struggled with, the moments that you magnified beyond proportion and shoved in our faces. I think about the friends who tore you away from me as you tried to keep me in your power.

So I speak up, hoping my words will break you down just as you broke so many others.

I speak up when my teacher jokingly says, "I'm just so OCD!", when my friends gossip about a classmate's absence from school—they heard she was "self-harming for attention"—because it's those little comments that have kept you alive. I speak up for the twelve-year-old girl I've tutored, who struggles deeply with anxiety but refuses therapy, because you told her that therapy was for the crazies. I speak up for those who can't speak, won't speak, all because of your burden.

They tell me I shouldn't write about you. But you are not my friend anymore, so you sure as hell won't stop me.

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Titania, Queen of the Fairies

"Set your heart at rest: / The Fairyland buys not the child from me" (Shakespeare, 2.1.125–126). In one of Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania the Queen of the Fairies speaks this quote to Oberon, her husband the King of the Fairies. In this scene, Titania and Oberon fight over a small boy, one Titania has inherited from a once loyal votress of hers, who unfortunately died while giving birth to the boy. Although Titania is a secondary character, her presence is crucial to the play. Titania's love and trust for her husband becomes excessive and provokes her downfall. She demonstrates a resolute and intent personality as she constantly refuses to accept Oberon's demand. Nevertheless, Titania is quite an enjoyable character.

Firstly, Titania is a secondary but important character. Her presence is crucial for Oberon to think up a trick requiring a magic flower, the same flower that the whole plot of the play revolves around. Titania is a rather flat character because she does not really evolve throughout the play as a person. She only changes her feelings when Oberon drugs her. Her role in the play is to be the magical fairy queen who rules over the land of the fairies.

Being a secondary character, Titania is not the main focus of the play, but she contributes to some of the major conflicts between two sets of lovers, Lysander and Hermia, and Demetrius and Helena. She is mostly seen in scenes between these two sets of lovers. When she is drugged, Oberon comes to check on her to see how his scheme is working. In one particular scene where Titania and Oberon are fighting over the baby boy, Oberon speaks of being Titania's lord. This is relevant to Titania's role because back in Shakespearean times, the male generally had more power than his female

counterpart. Contributing to this fact, the Shakespearean audience watching the play would think Titania's role inferior to Oberon's role. Titania, in response to Oberon's question involving him being her lord, replies however, "Then I must be thy lady," (2.1.66) suggesting the fairy queen still has authority over or equal to her husband since she is a queen.

Secondly, Titania is developed to be excessively loving and trusting of her husband. This proves to be her downfall in the play. Although Titania still loves and respects her husband despite the fight going on between them, she is too trusting. She does not think for a moment that Oberon might seek revenge in some way or another for her hurtful denial of the boy in act 2 as previously mentioned in the introduction. From her perspective, Titania desires to keep the peace between her and her husband and attempts to bribe Oberon into celebrating and reveling with her and her fairy servants. She graciously says, "If you will patiently dance in out round / And see our moonlight revels, go with us" (2.1.145–46). This demonstrates that Titania trusts that her husband will just drop his troubles and come dance with his queen. Upon his refusal, Titania leaves and soon seems to forget their dispute as she has a good time with her fairies.

Unfortunately, her good faith backfires since by leaving Oberon with his servant Puck, she is granting him an opportunity to seek his revenge by casting a spell on her to fall in love with the first ugly thing that she awakens and sees.

Nevertheless, Titania stays resolute and determined not to give up the child. This is one of her better virtues. Although her firm, intent characterization provokes Oberon's wrath, her conviction wins the current battle with her husband that has been going on for some time and has affected the natural environment. In act 2 the audience learns from Titania that "[t]he seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts / Fall in the fresh lap of the

crimson rose"(2.1.110–11). Unlike Oberon, who cares not what is happening within nature, she does. Her caring, therefore, extends not just for this foster child who lost its mother, but also for all mankind and fairyland. Titania's heart still stays determinedly loving and intently worried about her kingdom despite the ongoing feud. On the other hand, Oberon, who does not worry so much about the natural disasters caused by their arguments, puts more of his time and energy to find a way to acquire the child while punishing his wife. The audience infinitely respects Titania's virtue of staying determined and resolute in this situation of stress.

To conclude, Titania is a determined and resolute queen whose goal is to keep peace within the fairy kingdom as the argument with her husband begins to interfere with nature. She is loving and trusting, but these elements become too excessive and do not help her in the long run. Titania's role as a flat, secondary character is still an important one within the play. Her virtues and flaws work together to make an overall pleasant and enjoyable character. Therefore, Queen Titania portrays an interesting, admirable character that stands up for what she thinks is best.

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Sugar and Spice

Sugar. The first time I can remember trying to help my mother bake, I made a simple but fundamental error: I confused sugar with salt. We were baking brownies, so the slipup was noticeable, but the incident was forgiven—if not forgotten. The ability to make mistakes is liberating. A hundred years ago, any girl who didn't know how to cook had a limited future—marriage prospects flew out the window. The dictionary's third definition for the word "girl" is "a young unmarried woman." A lack of skill in the kitchen could be the cause of never-ending girlhood. A lifetime of adolescence. One word. Four letters, one vowel, and endless consequences.

Salt. Sweat is all salt. Unironically, so are tears. They were both there the first time I can distinctly remember wishing I wasn't a girl. It was the peak of summer and I was in my Tae Kwon Do dojo that smelled like a unique combination of feet and perspiration. My class, otherwise exclusively male, was doing partner drills. The rules are simple: an assigned partner is wearing armor, so kick them with as much power as possible—the more force, the better. Knee up. Chamber. Turn. Kick. Recoil. Repeat. On the last kick of the set, my leg whammed into my partner with so much momentum that he began to cry. My teacher rushed over, and I expected him to congratulate me. Instead he told the boy, judgement oozing from his tone, that it was shameful to cry when you were kicked by a girl. My partner was humiliated and angry. I understood the feeling. The tension that had bubbled up in my chest before the kick came back, but there was no way to expel it this time. I'm still not quite sure if it has left.

Eggs. My dad makes an omelette every morning before I go to school. He packs lunches, does the dishes and folds the laundry; my mother cooks dinner, cleans the house and

washes clothes. Neither of them does more than the other. I have always been surrounded by gender equity. My mother bought my sister and I as many Legos as she did dolls. She raised us like kids, not like girls or boys. And yet, around the time I decided to take up Tae Kwon Do, I also decided it was time to embrace my inner masculinity. *Star Wars* shirts replaced flower prints and my long curls were cropped short. To this day I don't know why I decided that being more like a boy would make me strong. Maybe it was because I was sick of the boy who chased girls on the playground till they pretended to marry him. "Boys will be boys!" laughed my teachers, as the girls he had targeted before tried to form protective units around themselves. Boys will be boys. The perfect excuse. Perhaps I thought that if I became more masculine, I'd have that same privilege extended to me. I can't articulate the thoughts of my nine year old self. She was thrown from a home of endless possibilities to a world of pink and chiffon. And if I, coming from an environment like I did, still acutely felt that it would be easier to be a boy, then how could anyone else stand a chance? Boys will be boys. Girls will want to be boys.

Vanilla. My coffee order is a small iced vanilla latte with almond milk and whipped cream. For reasons unknown, iced coffee has become emblematic of teenage girlhood. Though I can't seem to think of a biological reason that there should be something odd about a boy drinking my coffee order, society seems to disagree. It's as if anytime something becomes feminine and that something is used by a man, he is automatically tainted. A girl in a dinosaur shirt receives far fewer questioning glances than a boy in a flowery skirt. And if it is such a sign of weakness for a boy to act as a girl, then the logical conclusion for any child to draw is that there is weakness inherent in girlhood. When I was a camp counselor

this summer, a group of six-year-old boys formed a tag committee. The rules to be in their inner circle were simple: you had to be able to run at a certain speed, catch a certain number of people, and you had to be a boy. I heard them tell this to one of the girls and suddenly I felt nine years old again. I stepped into their little powwow and challenged the boys to a race. Unsurprisingly, at 16 years old I beat them with ease. The rules changed. They apologized and life moved on. I am not so naive to think that those boys will be changed forever, but I do hope that little girl remembers that her possibilities cannot be restricted by the packaging she was born in.

Flour. If you forget flour when you're baking then you really haven't baked anything. My culinary skills are now mediocre enough that I would've made a decent match back in the day. But despite what Merriam-Webster may believe, I doubt even marriage would free me from the confines of "girlhood." Have you ever noticed how grown women are still called girls? Boys are only called boys when they do something childish, but girl is a permanent label. You can't earn your freedom from it. When you're faced with a world that has convinced itself of the box you belong in, it is far easier to swallow your pride and step into that role than it is to break out. Still, I've come this far and there's no going back now; if I could, I'd go back seven years to a little kid refusing to cry in her Tae Kwon Do dojo because she fears looking weak. Chin up. You got this girl.

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Begin Began Begun

Flipping through our photo albums, I reach the section where the baby photos end and enter a different time entirely—no kids, no apartment, no money: my parents right after they immigrated from Russia. There's typical tourist shots and then there's photos they took for themselves, ones in which they weren't always smiling, where the lighting's poor, or the flash illuminated the sheen on their faces. I found myself returning to one photo: my mother sitting at the kitchen table and in the corner, three sheets of printer paper pasted on the wall. They were lists, handwritten lists of irregular verb forms. *My mother didn't know English.*

Unlike my mother, my English was spotless. In second grade I was in the highest reading level. In second grade we started science. I loved science, yet it was the part of day I repeatedly missed. I was pulled from class for ELL: English Language Learners. They were pulling one of their top test-scoring second graders to review English, to draw pictures and read stories—what seemed to be a waste of my time. They would grab me and two girls—Hispanic and Italian—yet I failed to connect the dots: we all had immigrant parents. That's why I was there, *the only reason why I was there.*

My parents were immigrants, yet we didn't stand out. We could have been any other lower-class family in the neighborhood. If you'd seen my brother and I, you'd never have guessed. We were white, we didn't dress differently, we spoke fluent English, no trace of an accent, we didn't even belong to a church. And so that's what we were: just another family, our immigrant status hidden by our complexion.

It's hard to hide an accent. "T—like a tiger I—Illinois N—Nancy…" my mom's voice drifts from the kitchen. There's no denying that she has an accent: understandable

in person but undecipherable over the phone. The prompter would request her name and she would begin reciting her little impromptu poem: "T—tiger, I—Illinois, N—Nancy…" spelling our last name out with common *American* words. My mom has to repeat herself often. I'd present my mother to my course director, art professor, another parent, they'll shake hands and my mom would introduce herself. The accent always throws them off. They knew I was white, "middle" class, a great student, outspoken, making the accent the more surprising. Like it didn't fit their picture.

My mother received her green card during the Great Recession. She could work now. For a stay-at-home mom, work was freedom. She had a PhD in biological sciences and had been the top of her graduating class all throughout her academic career. *For nearly six years she worked minimum wage.* A babysitter, a librarian, retail. Sometimes she held three jobs.

This summer my mother decided I needed to open a bank account for myself; it was time to be practical about money. She was *so prepared*. She had my passport and birth certificate and legal forms and school ID in her handbag. It should have taken us fifteen minutes: flash some documents, sign the paperwork, and we would've been done. At the bank, we began filling out information. Address, name, email, security pins, and zip codes. Five more minutes, three more signatures, scroll down here, and you're done. But his cursor hovered over a box. It read *Not U.S. Citizen*. "Do you have your green card with you?" he asked. "No, I don't. I thought it was irrelevant, the account is for her," my mother points at me. She ends up driving home to get the card.

Ten minutes later, she hands it over but his finger hovers over her name. "The names don't match," he exclaims. "Yes," she replies, "I'm in the process of changing names." She assures him that the card is valid, it has a temporary sticker,

there shouldn't be a problem, she double-checked, she filed all the paperwork—the sticker *is just as valid*. Her voice rose in pitch as she repeated herself. "No, I can't use this." My mother explains again and again and again, and now she's red. "Cancel it then. Everything. I don't understand why this is problem." We leave in a huff, documents jammed into the handbag, passport haphazardly shoved into my hands. *None of this should have happened*.

The government isn't trying to build a wall to keep me out, and during the election we'd joke that we could always go back to Russia—Putin or Trump, just a choice between two evils. I've never been discriminated against for my appearance or my origins. In the news, being an immigrant is always about being a different skin color, a different religion, or talking funny. Today there's a whole movement to embrace being different, but too many times I've felt like I wasn't. Most of America is white, Christian, and lower middle class—what's one more family like mine? My mother left her entire life behind hoping to gain a new one, which was promptly denied to her.

Today my mother supports herself and her two children with her one paycheck. She's still lower middle class, she still has an accent. She still recites her little poem over the phone to spell her name. She is an immigrant to whom I owe my life. But you look at me and you don't see that—the things that she gave up for me to be here, to have this education, to wear these clothes, or to even speak this language. You'd look at me and you'd never have guessed that we had lived in poverty, struggled to buy groceries, shared a single bathroom between four people, that my brother and I slept in a room the size of a closet. Yet our white skin merges us into a false majority. It overpowers my parents' sacrifices and disguises our struggles as an immigrant family. Somehow, it became our distorted identity, misinterpreted like my mother's English.

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In My Woods

An ancient hickory tree stands on top of a towering wall of dirt. Only its top branches grow leaves in the spring, leaving the rest a decrepit, grey snag. The trunk is smattered with the scars of old branches long splintered off. Thin bark covers the tree, growing shaggier as the branches root themselves into the sky. At the base, half of the roots are exposed, the soil beneath weathered away by decades of Illinois rain. They curl and dig back into the dirt wall as if seeking refuge from the frigid fall air. Some of its branches, felled by a recent thunderstorm, are caught in its own wooden claws.

The stream running below cuts a small valley into the woods. Its bed is sand, the large, flat banks are sheets of dirt and leaves. Deep pools are created wherever sticks and logs clog the stream and the level sides show past years of flooding. On small islands throughout its length, tracks of the woods' inhabitants can be found running across the sand, sometimes from pursuing predators. Tadpoles and crawfish swim in the muddy waters while water striders skitter across the surface. Almost as if trying to free itself, a muddy tarp hangs off of a fallen tree and drags in the water. I remember once my friends and I camped out in a fort we made with the tarp; halfway through the night, it collapsed. After somehow scrambling out from the fallen structure, we went inside for a consolation of hot chocolate from my tired but sympathetic parents.

Beyond the tree lies a small prairie filled with wild grasses and burrs that stick to my clothes like Velcro. At one point in time, a gravel path cut through the field in a mile-long loop with a slatted gazebo halfway through. Now, the grass has overgrown the gravel, pushing even more seeds and briars into my shoes than before, reminding me of a summer from my childhood where my dog, Tyler, was lost in the field

and we spent hours picking burrs from his fur. The puffy, off-white clouds above slowly cast a shadow, dividing the plane into dark and light. Insects leap into my path as I walk the trails deer have cut through the dead grass. The air is a lot like hay—slightly damp and clings to my skin.

Like the old hickory, the woods are full of old, dead trees, some stretching across the stream. One such log lies with one end on a hill and the other swamped in the mud of the bank near the creek. Moss wraps around the top of the log like a blanket left out in a rainstorm. A branch stretches out of the top and curves to a horizontal line halfway along its length. Its rough, dank surface leaves wet splinters on my palm whenever I hold on to it for balance. Spider webs fill the space between the limb and the trunk. On the moss, slugs and millipedes inch along past the toadstools growing from the old rot. A giant fungus as big and as white as a dinner plate grows out of the side with water collecting at the divot near its stem.

None of it remains as it was. The mossy log has fallen into what's now a creek and the giant hickory, its clawing roots no longer able to grasp the loose earth, creates a dam in the swelling water. Yet, the forest is the same as it has ever been. The field remains wide and full of dead grass giving way to green sprigs, and logs still stretch across the stream, creating bridges from one side to the next.

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On Patience

On Tuesday March 15, 2011, I witnessed my parents' home being bombed on television. The start of the Syrian conflict, however, did not come as much of a surprise to our family. Corruption reigned, the economy was weak, and there was absolute political repression. Baba (dad), a blunt individual, predicted the conflict years before it occurred while walking with my mother and my then five-year-old sister down *Mal'ab al Baladī* street. "There is going to be a war. It's going to be very bad," he told Mama. He foresaw the severity of the eventual situation, while others did not.

Mama was always the emotional one; I inherited that quality from her. Before the *Al Jazeera* reporter finished informing the public about the events that took place that weekend, the fear and sorrow was apparent in her glistening turquoise eyes. "I can't believe this is happening," she exclaimed.

"Well, what do you expect? Years of incompetent governing by the same family is eventually going to lead the country into chaos," Baba said through his stern mouth and icy green eyes.

Amidst the chaos we witnessed on television, my siblings and I were far from removed. Although we were not born there, our hearts ached for the country we used to visit every summer. Our most enjoyable memories took place in Syria with our many cousins and surprisingly homey one-bathroom apartments. We wanted to go back more than ever.

Waiting was the most arduous part of it all. Whenever one of us was mad we would complain, "I just want to go to Syria." I would definitely not be this mad if Teti (grandma) was making me brown bread and warm Nutella sandwiches. Whenever one of us was sad, *I just want to go to Syria*. I would most certainly not be this sad if Khalo (uncle) bought me a

new Fulla doll to play with. And whenever one of us was lost, *I just want to go to Syria*. I know I would not feel this way if I had my loving relatives helping me through this.

When we finally arrived, everything would fall into place; it was as if we walked out the door of Teti's apartment for a second and walked right back in. Our disappointment when we realized we would not be able to go to Syria that summer was justified.

People complain about the weather, their in-laws, the long lines at Taco Bell. Little do they know, there are Syrians whose homes were demolished, livelihoods shattered, and loved ones killed or worse.

Many individuals have been separated from their families, unaware of when they will reunite with them.

All of the protests, flash mobs, and fundraisers my family and I have attended continued consistently up until a few years ago. Even though our efforts are miniscule compared to the horrors many Syrians face, our efforts are a sign of patience. We have the patience to endure six years of diligently protesting, to get nothing in return. Why have we stopped? Because people have lost interest and we are getting impatient.

People care about making sure their order at Domino's rang through correctly and whether or not their prom outfits fit them, but a country crying out to the world for help? *Pass*. "Looks like Western countries have better things to do than carry the burden of a war-torn country," my father says. He only speaks the reality.

This exact feeling of grief ached me and my mother's hearts when we found out my Jido (grandfather) had been diagnosed with gallbladder cancer. At first, we were determined to do whatever was necessary to relieve his pain. We drove him to the hospital weekly for chemotherapy, radiation,

hormone, and numerous other therapies that only weakened his body. He wasn't the same after the war started, and he didn't live to see the end of it. He endured cancer for approximately two-and-a-half years. When two things very dear to your heart start to fade before your eyes, time feels frozen for eternity. It was then that I realized that not only was I going to have to wait for life to change, but I was going to have to accept the circumstances that made waiting nearly impossible.

To add to these events, all of this transpired while my mother was caring for four children, one of them merely a baby. During all of this, she didn't walk the same, talk the same, dress the same. When she went out, she would never stay out of the house for more than an hour and when she came home, she would collapse on the couch or robotically do chores. Two-and-a-half years of this eventually caught up with me. It was hard being a fifth grader whose mind was always on my Jido or the war in Syria.

I was not a happy fifth grader; I no longer reveled in the things I used to enjoy. My grades began to suffer, and I never felt the urge to see my friends. While I felt my days were burdened with sadness, I was still able to enjoy some aspects of everyday life.

Although he was always in bed, I loved spending time with my Jido. My relatives lightened the mood and helped me through the distress. My family made me content beyond words, and I would have had a miserable fifth grade without their support and reassurance. Nonetheless, stepping inside my home every day after school wasn't the same after my Jido was diagnosed. It was as if a dark cloud hovered over the whole world, and no one could make out the other end of the sky. I felt stuck, truly and utterly unmovable. If nothing else in the world was getting better as time carried on, how was patience a good piece of advice given to me by my

relatives, including Jido? What was the point? I was mad at God and there was no point in hiding it if He wasn't going to do something about it anyway. These thoughts clouded my mind during school and kept me up at night.

If there was so much bad in the world, what was the point of trying to make out the good? Was there even any good? I did not realize how much these questions had been haunting me until one day when my Jido asked my cousin and I to massage his feet. It was weird and gross at first because his feet felt dry and they were wrinkled like raisins, but we allowed him a brief moment of relief and comfort. I saw it in his face and it gave me a shimmer of hope. Maybe one day he would get better. Maybe one day he would be able to walk, talk, drink, speak, and eat normally again. Maybe one day, this will all be worth the wait. "Syria will go back to normal," he mumbled through chapped lips as his restful eyes began to shut, "just wait and see."

The next day was a blur of smeared tears and red, hot cheeks at the funeral home. That day, I witnessed my Baba cry for the first time. All my life, I knew him as impervious and indestructible, but at that moment, I saw a side of Baba I'd never witnessed before: a gentler, hidden side I never knew existed.

Even the strongest people can be dragged by the exhaustion of waiting.

That memory was the last one I shared with my Jido, and it taught me an important lesson. My Jido displayed the strongest kind of patience because he did not only wait for his tumor to shrink. He did not only wait for his home to be rebuild, but he accepted that the walls were tumbling down around him and made out those that were still intact. My Jido had patience because of his fortitude and positivity, and I pray I am as patient as he was.

I began watching the news more often after Jido's death as the situation in Syria intensified. By the hour, recordings of bombs, beatings, and blood were uploaded as well as articles in magazines and on the internet. Information was finally being spread and there were people who actually cared. Maybe patience wasn't needed anymore and maybe we would be able to visit Syria again soon. Although the media helped spread awareness of the issue, it still wasn't enough to clear people's blurred realities. So we still remain patient like our Jido told us to.

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Teacher: Gina Chandler

Counting Up

We had arrived at the glass doors of the Lutheran General Hospital. My mom gently dried my cheeks and guided me across the flecked, beige tile floor, through the maze of white halls. With shuddering breaths, I slowly began counting.

One. Two. Three. Three hours ago, Grandma was walking across a parking lot when she was knocked to the ground by a car backing up. *Four. Five. Six.* Six days ago, she was smiling at me proudly, the corner of her eyes crinkling as I flashed the medals I had won. *You are better than you think*, she would always tell me. *Seven. Eight. Nine.* Nine weeks ago, we were celebrating Chinese New Year at a restaurant. As soon as I finished a plate, she would pile on more. *Ten. Eleven. Twelve …* The wails of newborn babies broke my concentration. As we rounded a corner, I glimpsed the Newborn Nursery from the corner of my eyes. Twelve years ago, Grandma had carried me out of that same room, beaming down at her first, newborn granddaughter. *Ten … Eleven … Twelve …* I bumped into my mom, who had stopped.

Wrapped in white sheets, Grandma was sleeping peacefully on the bed when she was rolled away in front of me. *Eleven … Twelve …* For twelve years, Grandma had been my loving, unfailing pillar of strength.

I couldn't count past twelve without her.

Time, however, did not stop counting. Hours and days jostled past me, dragging me to the white church with a belfry, murmuring stories about Grandma that were familiar and foreign.

I tried my best to fill up the glaring void. One picture that I consistently look at is the one we had taken together on a white beach in the Caribbean, with golden ribbons streaming across the starry sky behind us. The photo sits in front of the

mirror, surrounded by a growing pile of seashells. Each time I visited a beach, I would find the one with the prettiest whorls to add to the collection. And along the way, I have started my collection of Grandma's stories, one at a time.

1–4

They were gentle hands. From as early as I could remember, her trembling, callus-covered hands washed me carefully every day, covering me in rainbow-colored bubbles. They would embrace me tightly in a cloak of reassurance, sheltering me from my parents' occasional storms of anger.

They were also strong hands. These very hands had worked precisely and carefully on patients in the emergency room in China, saving hundreds of lives. The same long, slender fingers had danced furiously across a sewing machine twelve hours a day, six days a week, creating dress samples for fashion designers.

Liver spots scattered across her papery skin stood out boldly as proof of how she began with nothing in California and ended up supporting two kids through college.

They were hands that had always grasped tightly onto mine, only to let go so unexpectedly. But her hands have left a memorable imprint on mine.

5–8

"Grandma, it's fine. I got my rain jacket on. I'm not going to get hit by lightning. Don't be a scaredy-cat!"

I couldn't fathom what my six-year-old Grandma and her mother had to endure to flee from the Japanese soldiers during World War II. Or imagine how a paper-thin girl sacrificed her meager food stamps to save her friend's life during the famine induced by Mao's Great Leap Forward. Or appreciate my seemingly meek Grandma calling in "sick"

for almost a year to make a political statement during the Cultural Revolution.

The scaredy-cat was a lion in disguise. Her roar resounded with strangers, friends, and family alike, and I can still hear its echoes today when I close my eyes.

9–12

Throughout middle school, my Grandma was my most avid fan and saw something more in the cacophony of my violin compositions. She would sit on the couch, listening intently, occasionally joining in—together, we were a symphony of off-beat claps and out of tune arpeggios. She was always there for me, rooting for me at every triumph and setback.

The love she showered on me mirrored the same maternal sacrifice she bestowed on my father when he was a child. Long before sunrise, she would take a bus to downtown Los Angeles, where she sewed alongside immigrant families in a dilapidated factory. She had given up her comfort and position as a respected doctor in China to come to the US. Restarting her life at the age of 47, she wanted her children to have the best education.

13–16

The bright flames of purple and blue flickered before my eyes as a chorus of happy birthdays rose around me. Claps and laughter enveloped the air. I slowly counted the number of candles I had to blow out.

One. Two. Three. Four. Four years ago, the girl reflected in the glass doors of the hospital was a blur of puffy red eyes and tousled hair.

I took a deep breath.

Five. Six. Seven. Eight. It was eight o'clock in the morning. I stood in front of the mirror, glancing down at the seashells

and the picture of Grandma and me. The girl reflected in the mirror was vastly different from the one four years ago. She was much stronger and more determined. She was the granddaughter of a woman who had fought for her family and herself. The girl reflected in the mirror would carry on her grandmother's legacy.

I made a wish.

Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. In twelve days, I would be able to take the steering wheel and zoom across cities and highways. I had wanted to take Grandma along with me on my adventures so that she could guide me through the bumpy paths and winding streets. Instead, she had left me an endearing present: a map to navigate the roads ahead.

I smiled. *Thank you, Grandma.*

Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen.

I exhaled and blew out the candles.

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS TO THE *ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN*

As the written forum in which Illinois English teachers share their ideas, the *Illinois English Bulletin* welcomes all kinds of materials related to the teaching of English.

We seek articles dealing with literature, writing, language, media, speech, drama, film, culture, technology, standards, assessment, professional development, and other aspects of our profession. Any combination of research, theory, and practice is appropriate. Some articles take a formal and conclusive approach, while others are informal and exploratory.

Book reviews, poetry, black-and-white photographs, and line drawings are also welcome.

When you are ready to share your work with your colleagues across the state, please consult the submission guidelines on page 92. We look forward to hearing from you. If you have questions or suggestions for the editor, please

don't hesitate to get in touch (contact information on page 94). Thank you for reading, supporting, and contributing to the *Illinois English Bulletin*.

Submission Guidelines

(See page 94 for the editor's contact information.)

- Via U.S. mail, send one clean, paper copy of the manuscript to the editor. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information to include in your cover letter.
- Attached to an e-mail message addressed to the editor, send an additional copy of the manuscript in an MS Word or PDF attachment. See below for manuscript formatting guidelines and information you should include in your e-mail message.
- In your cover letter (mailed with hard copy) and in your e-mail message (with electronic copy attached), include the following information: your manuscript title, name, mailing address, institutional affiliation, and phone number. Also indicate whether you are currently a member of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE). State that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Manuscript formatting guidelines: follow either the current *MLA Handbook* or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* guidelines for parenthetical in-text citations, the works cited section, and other technical elements; follow NCTE's "Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language"; place page numbers at the top right corner of every page; type and double-space throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with one-inch margins all around.

- With both your paper and electronic manuscript submissions, please also include a biographical blurb of 50 words or fewer. (Blurbs for manuscripts with multiple authors should total 50 words or fewer.) Blurbs usually mention institutional and professional affiliations as well as teaching and research interests.
- The *Bulletin* editor will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript via e-mail.

Submission Deadlines

You are welcome to submit your materials at any time to the editor of the *Illinois English Bulletin*. Traditionally, the *Bulletin*'s spring issue features shorter articles based on presentations made at the previous autumn's IATE annual conference. Summer issues may be themed or all-inclusive. The fall issue presents the "Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose." The winter issue is the program for our annual IATE fall conference.

To be considered for inclusion in the spring issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous November 1.

To be considered for inclusion in the summer issue, materials must be received by the editors by the previous January 15.

To be considered for inclusion in the fall issue ("Best Illinois Student Poetry and Prose"), materials must be submitted electronically through the IATE submission manager (iate.submittable.com/submit) by the previous January 31. Please see page 95 for the two-page special submission guidelines for fall issues.

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CALL FOR STUDENT WRITING FROM ALL LEVELS FOR IATE'S BEST ILLINOIS POETRY AND PROSE CONTEST

DEADLINE: Submit all contest entries electronically through the IATE submission manager (iate.submittable.com/submit) no later than January 31, 2019.

FORMAT: Accepted file types include .doc, .docx, and .rtf.

COVER LETTER: The "Cover Letter" field must include:

- Full name of student
- Student's grade level at time piece was written
- Full name of school
- School's complete mailing address
- Full name of teacher (indicate if IATE member)
- E-mail address of instructor

IMPORTANT: The student's name, the school's name, and the teacher's name must not appear anywhere other than in the "Cover Letter" field.

LIMITS:
1) Five prose and ten poetry entries per teacher.
2) One thousand words of prose per entry; forty lines of poetry per entry.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE JUDGES:
1) Please see that students abide by the line and word limits. Have them revise and shorten pieces that exceed these limits.
2) Please emphasize to students that prose and fiction are not synonymous. Encourage them to explore the possibilities of expository essays, arguments, and personal narratives.

CONTEST COORDINATORS:
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IATE Prose Contest

Robin L. Murray
Department of English
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