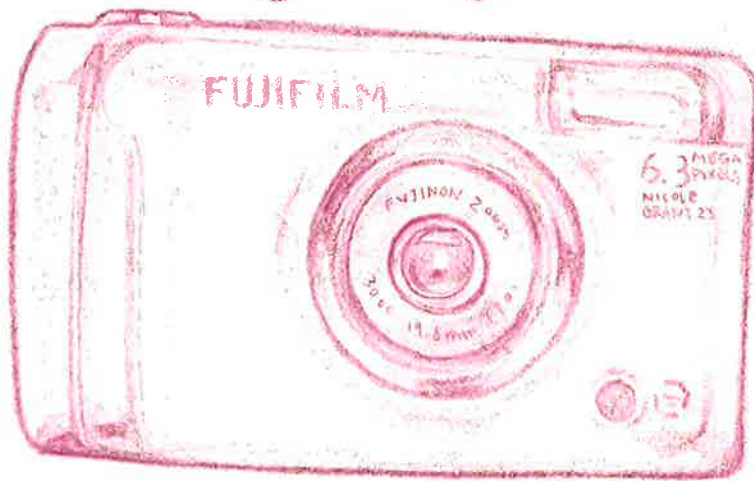


-teen spirit-

growing together



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Days

Hadley Zann

What are days for?

Days are for living. Days are for spending time with that friend you haven't seen in weeks or those friends you see everyday. Days are for going to a concert and seeing your favorite band with your best friend. Days are for getting dressed up with your friends to go to dinner downtown just because. Days are for having fun.

Days are for the simple things. Days are for living and breathing and laughing and loving. Days are for finally starting that book that's been living on your shelf for months or finishing that movie you started weeks ago. Days are for the ordinary.

Days are for thoughts and feelings and everything in between. Days are for doing what you love and being who you truly are. Days are for playing pickup with your friends and talking about your day, what's happened and what's going to happen. Days are for expressing yourself.

Days are for the good and the bad, the happy and the sad. Days are for everything and nothing all at once; days are for everything in between. Days are for facing the world with the people you love and taking it all in and smiling because you know, in the end, that tomorrow will be another opportunity, another chance. Another day.

“When I asked for growth....”

Kai

When I asked for growth why
Was I surprised when I got rain? When
I asked for friendship why was I torn
When the weeds were pulled from my flowerbeds?
When I asked for courage why did I
Fear when the day of the battle came? When
I asked for love why did I cry when I
Had to face the pain?

Everything Grows

Brenden Kaiser

The walls have all grown taller,
The halls have all grown longer,
The classes have all grown harder,
Have I grown at all?

The kids have all grown taller,
The days have all gotten longer,
The problems have all grown harder,
Will I grow at all?

The free times have all gotten shorter,
The chances have all gotten smaller,
The drive has gotten much softer,
Can I grow at all?

My bones have all grown taller,
My papers have all grown longer,
My heart has never grown harder,
I Can grow,
I Have grown,
I Will grow.

you should know
Mark Zhu



Listen to this song: <https://bit.ly/3LxGWrr>

I remember a couple of years ago
We wrote to each other letters of thoughts untold
But my ink dried up, the words didn't show
I couldn't get to tell you what I needed you to know
I still wake up, wishing this was a joke
Communication's useless when I don't want you to
Go away
Even though I said I didn't wanna stay
So just go away
I didn't really mean that, but I've something else to say
I hate that I still love you
And I promised myself not to
I hate that I still love you
If we just wait a couple years
Is what you told me, but it didn't sound very sincere
You turned 18, moved up a tier
Figured out our future was the biggest of my fears
I called your phone, waited every night
Cried myself to sleep whenever you were out of sight
Even though I said I might

Run away 'cause we made a deal that one day we would
Find a way
To meet each other after we got off the plane
But I'm so afraid
To leave my life behind and move to a different state
I hate that I still love you
And I promised myself not to
I hate that I still love you
Holding each other
Holding each other
Closer together, keeping us covered
There won't be another
Time when it's better to find each other
Holding each other
Closer together, keeping us covered
There won't be another
Time when it's better to find each other
Holding each other
Closer together, keeping us covered
There won't be another
Time when it's better to find each other
Holding each other, yeah
Holding each other

Adaptation of Caliban in the Coal Mines by Louis Untermeyer
Anonymous

Sir, we like to complain
We know that school's a dove
But- there's no room in my brain
But- there's no space for love

Sir, you don't know the blur
You, in your very own room
Hearing nothing but the whir
Knowing nothing of the gloom

The only sight, fluorescent lights
With all the shouts and screams
Sir, if you wish for our plights
You must break our dreams

**Why have you retreated to the darkest corners of the universe?
Leif Tenbrink**

You once set yourself alight from below; what was
once a small detail bloomed resplendent and golden.

Your siren song once weaved through the black ocean charting
hope for our tomorrows, but has ceased, as if severed by one sharp and
calculated cutoff.

I opened my ears to the sound of your next phrase, an inhale coiling with
ambition – but your chilling silence rang through my skull in a dreadful mire.

A star so bright, now so distant and faint.
Have you begun to flicker?

Your absence has beset us with longing – all the colors of a now far-off world.
The blue of the tides have blanched, I fear the curious and flowering pinks will soon
mute, and my listless waves whisper a prayer for kinship.

So here we sit – worlds and stars and constellations unto ourselves –
continuing to face one another. Continuing to answer the difficult questions. To grow and
strive and reach together until our very final note. But the meaning of together has
shifted uncomfortably, unevenly.

Stars do not have endless time, but we hold an abundance. So we
maintain our celestial oath: your place will be as you left it upon your return. When
you return.

please. please return.

“Let me fix you”

Lozo Soto

Let me fix you...

I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.

...

we tried to help in whatever ways we could,
How did it go?

Why not?

No, please!

You broke *me*

it didn't work

Because,
You hate me!

I've
made a huge mistake.

but

You've
made a huge mistake.

Don't you see?
This is Cruel and Unusual Punishment

I endured
the
darkness,
the sadness,
the tragedy.
I am more than broken.

**Fix
This**

“Leaves rustle in the gentle breeze”

Anonymous

Leaves rustle in the gentle breeze,
Whispering secrets to the trees.
Their colors change with every season,
Nature's own brand of rhyme and reason.

In spring they bud, so fresh and green,
A symbol of life, a welcome scene.
They soak up sunlight and the rain,
Aiding growth and easing pain.

Come summer, they're in full bloom,
Their beauty shining bright, no gloom.
Providing shade from the heat of day,
A peaceful respite from life's melee.

As autumn arrives, their colors shift,
From green to gold, then brown and drift.
Falling gently to the ground below,
A carpet of leaves, a soft plateau.

In winter, they're gone, just bare trees,
Their branches stark against the freeze.
But soon enough, spring will return,
And new leaves will once again burn.

Leaves are more than just nature's dress,
They're symbols of change and happiness.
So take a moment to appreciate,
Their beauty and the message they create.

“I really did adore you”

Anonymous

i really did adore you, i desperately wanted to be the person who made you feel as though you'd stumbled upon the gift of your soul being at home, i fell in love with the idea of your potential and i fell apart when the illusions began to fade into nothingness. i thought i knew you. i thought i'd memorized every crevice and secret kept within your soul, it tore me apart to realize that i had never truly met you. i grew attached to a version of you that didn't exist. every laugh we shared, every smile we exchanged meant nothing to you. i saw the best despite having the worst of intentions. i foolishly adored the false light you had created, in the end, it didn't matter what i saw or what i hopelessly believed you felt, you never Cared about me, and i only loved the person i wanted to believe you were.

But i want to thank you for teaching me to give myself the love i put onto others
With the pain of you leaving brought me the comfort of my own company.
Thank you.

Modern Worker
Emilia Pokryfke

Society-

Why can't we go out in the world
Without being forced to make a decision?
Why are we being hurled
To make one with such precision?

Society says-

Which side do you support
Democrat or not?
Do you have a fort
With the war that's being fought?

Society says-

Your degree?
Oh please
We just need a guarantee
of talent and expertise

So we say to society-

Where is your mercy?
We are just workers
Looking for a wage
We aren't lurkers
trying to start an outrage
But with your well threaded facts
And posts all around
We have no way to react
But to be unwound

Turbulent Healing

Sean Weathers

The roses you watered with gasoline now burn a fiery red
Red stained flames from the petals you laced
The petals you laced set ablaze
Heald heavy by the toxic flames
You dropped a lit match in the field of my roses
Those poor laced roses
You did it to keep yourself warm with the anger
The anger you grew in the soil of my garden
You watched it burn down

The ash is the only thing left of these poisoned roses
And even that has been thrown from the stone walls
Tossed away by the winds of my hurricanes
The winds of these hurricanes revoke the past
And I've forgotten
I've forgotten the simple sound of the flames
The roar of the fire
The weeping from within the stone walls of my garden
Not even a memory of mine

You kept yourself warm while the roses to my garden burned down
So I formed a hurricane
A hurricane
The eye shows the wreckage below
Torn down roses
Ashes of your laced love
Telling the story
Only to be thrown away by the turbulent winds

The turbulence healed me
From the toxic flavor you produced
When you lit that match
And blew the fuse

Community is a Vessel for Change Will Pace

Community is a vessel for change.
It is not the sole reason for change, but it makes it more attainable.

When you change,
It is done for yourself,
By yourself,
With help from community.

When you change,
It is done with intent,
With courage,
And with an idea drawn from community.

When you change,
It is not necessary to rely on others.
There are no rules or requirements.
But there are hands around you.
To lift you.

This must be heard.
Important words to hear for someone who struggles with,
And is scared to change.

Change is fueled by a strong community,
And community is a vessel for that change.

An end of an era
Rory Brater

i noticed
that i was okay
with the finale of the thing
that had seemed to
define
my entire life. it
was who i was
or
maybe who i had been.
it began as something that made me smile, and
laugh.
but now
it was something that made me frown, and
cry.
i could
not
put myself through it any longer
i had to protect my own peace.

A Poem of Defiance

Klaus

he comes down from the heavens
soaked in blood and praise
i lift my chin and narrow my eyes
a cat
staring up at his master
or a pious man
pleading to his pastor
i feel no fear
i do not fear god
and i stare at the sun with determination
they say my conscience will crumble
they cry that i am an icarus
my arrogance will be my downfall
but no one can stop my stumble
i am untouchable by the fingers of man
but i can touch god with the grace of an angel

Change is Inevitable
Nina Taleb Bendiab

Change is inevitable.
We work too hard to prevent it
Yet are caught by surprise when it occurs
It is not how can we stop it
It is how can use it to benefit us
The teacher
Making sure you are okay after class
The coffee shop worker
asking how your day was
The friend
Texting you to check up on you
Whether the change was big or small
Individual or as a whole
We all feel it
We all can help others
It brings us together
Sometimes we don't even realize it
Change is inevitable
Why not embrace it

"It only matters once it matters to you."

Charlie Celkis

"It only matters once it matters to you."

As a student that has been in the health class and gym class of — —. As a student who wasn't picked as the favorite, who wasn't coddled. I have many words to say.

I am Charlie.

I am a transgender man.

I have faced aggression from — due to my identity. As have many others.

I have faced aggression from — due to my mental illness. As have many others.

This teacher has not only taught false information about Mental Illnesses in class, but has done a great number to the stigma surrounding it. Depression, Anxiety, Autism, ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia... All taught using a basic understanding of stereotypes upon stereotypes.

It is understandable that you cannot get 100% of the truthful information about mental illness, as it is still being heavily researched.

It is understandable to not like a person because they go against your beliefs.

We are all human.

Though, a teacher has a responsibility.

They teach students information that will help them and help others in the world.

They teach information that they may not agree with so the students can learn more about the world, deciding for themselves if they agree or not.

Teachers support their students, even if they are terrible at the activity they are doing, as those students need the most support.

— — forgot this responsibility.

I know this from personal experience.

Going back to the quote I said at the beginning;

“It only matters once it matters to you.”

— — only now has faced the consequences of forgetting her responsibility.

And only now does — — take action.

I am Charlie Celkis.

I speak for the ones who were not favorites.

“In the fabric of life, we’re all threads”

Anonymous

In the fabric of life, we’re all threads,
Bound together by shared needs and creeds.
Strength lies in unity,
Inspiring change and harmony.
Building bridges, breaking walls.

Teen Spirit

By: Mackenzie Russaw

Teen spirit ignites like fire,
A passion bright and free,
With boundless energy and desire,
As far as one can see.

Innocent dreams, wild ambition
A force that can't be tamed,
A heart full of unbridled passion,
A soul that's never maimed.

Unrepentant, bold, and daring,
Mistakes will be made along the way,
But with resilience, courage, and caring,
They'll rise again another day.

The spirit of a teen is fierce,
Both light and dark, they embrace,
For though life can be a nightmare or a dream,
They know they'll win the race.

So let them rise, let them be,
Their spirit strong and sure,
For in their hearts and minds, you'll see,
A future that is pure.

My People
Anonymous

The solace
Of laughing with the people you love
Until your stomach hurts

The solace
Of being surrounded by those
Who will comfortably sit with you in silence

The solace
Of feeling like you've come home
To a safe and familiar place

"The moon cannot rise soon enough...."

Anonymous

The moon cannot rise soon enough and the sun cannot set quickly enough and the days are all too short. The earth will surely explode before I have gone everywhere and loved everyone and learned everything. I want to lay under the cover of darkness and the sprinkle of stars with every soulmate I've made and all the ones I've yet to discover. I want to sit and see every tree bloom as the seasons change. I want to hold tight to those I love and never let them go. I want to watch the waves ebb and flow as life does and know that someone, somewhere, has done the same thing. I want to grow old with them. Perhaps I already have.

Anonymous



Nicole Grant



Lily C





Elena Mychaliska

Elena Mychaliska

Artist Statement:

For my submission to Teen Spirit, I created a collage entitled “People Everywhere”. Initially, I gained my inspiration from photos on my Pinterest board. I noticed that many of the photos I had saved captured evidence of human life without actual people in it, like the mess after a birthday party or post-its on a wall. In this collage I have compiled a few of these photos, with dots, representing people, surrounding them, and glitter layer ovetop. This is meant to communicate how things that people tend to associate with a mess, or even simply ignore, are actually indicators for the beauty of human life and behavior; such as our collaboration, creativity, sense of identity, and/or growing together.

The Sahasra Cycle

A. Gupta

Veer Dhawan had always dreamed of what he would do with a time machine, he had it planned down to a T.

First: He would get money as quickly as he could, even if it meant robbing a bank or doing something illegal. Easy since he was going to jump the timeline soon after so there'd be no one to catch.

Second: He would time travel back to about 1988, a decade or so before the filming for *The Lord of the Rings* started so he could establish himself as a resident. Maybe go to Film School in the years between his arrival and the start of filming.

Third: Engineer a meeting with Peter Jackson and join the cast and crew in making the best Fantasy Trilogy of the decade. Also befriending some of the people he's always wanted to know, which is another plus.

Unfortunately, the time machine that invaded Veer's home had its own motive, dragging a small boy of about 14 years old into his kitchen. He was wearing 9th-century style clothing from India, which surprised Veer as that was the first time he used his Ancient Indian History degree in a practical real life setting. His loose clothes, more suited for a summer day, left him shivering slightly in the winter air. Veer felt bad as the boy stared at him, rubbing his arm in an attempt to warm up.

"Do you want a jacket?" he asked the boy, foolishly in English. The boy furrowed his eyebrows and responded rapidly in a language that sounded similar to Hindi. Of course, he spoke Sanskrit, what else would a 9th-century Indian boy speak?

"Uhh," Veer racked his rusty Hindi for the equivalent of his question. "Aapako kambhal chaahie?" (आपको एक कंबल चाहिए) The boy's eyes furrowed more before he answered,

"Kambala?" Veer nodded, "Evam." The boy accompanied the affirmation with a nod. Veer sighed, walking across the apartment to retrieve one of the blankets from his room. When he returned, the boy was sitting on the floor cross-legged, staring at an apple he picked from the cluster of fruit on Veer's kitchen counter. Silently, Veer watched him for a couple of seconds before pulling out his phone. A couple taps and he was able to find the translation app he was looking for, a few heartbeats later and he lowered himself to the ground a foot away from the boy, setting the phone in front of him. He looked up from his apple and Veer pressed the microphone button,

"My name is Veer, what's your name?" There was a long silence as the app translated the question. Slowly, Sanskrit characters arranged themselves in what Veer hoped was a cohesive statement. The boy stared at the letters for a handful of seconds, reading twice before looking back to Veer, who pressed the microphone button again. The boy started speaking and Veer watched the app whirl, three minutes passed and the last of the boy's words had loaded into English, it read:

My name is Shikhandi, I'm the son of King Drupada; though I am also his daughter, I like being his son more. What is this place? Are you a holy man? Are you speaking some holy language? Is this a test?

Veer blinked, trying to place the name Drupada as it sounded too familiar, scanning the questions again, this time he typed his answers into the box for translation.

This is my home in Seattle. Though I grew up in Indiana, I am not a god, just a normal guy, though I'm a guy in the same way that you are. I am not speaking a holy language, in fact, I'm speaking the language of the White Devils who decimated my grandparent's homeland for that reason I am here and not in India. Also, this is not a test, or at least not one orchestrated by me.

Shikhandi nodded, before tentatively saying,

"Asura?" Veer nodded, typing into the app again.

It won't happen in your lifetime, but it will one day. Do not concern yourself with that.

Shikhandi listens to the message before nodding again. The two then sat in silence, staring at each other for some time, trying to pick apart the stories they couldn't communicate to each other. Veer sighed, shoulders slumping when he heard the distinct hum noise, Shikhandi also heard it as he tore his eyes away from Veer's shirt to watch a hole appear in the middle of the room, spitting out a man. He looked similar to Veer, older as told by the lines around his eyes but his sense of dress was more akin to Shikhandi in pattern and modern in style. He lifted himself off the ground with a groan, glancing between Veer and Shikhandi.

"Who are you?" Veer asked, getting a better look at his face. His eyes were outlined with dark liner that almost blended into the circles of restless nights that matched Veer's own. The stranger cleared his throat, adjusting metal frames that were so thin that Veer missed them the first time.

"Sai Kala, second son of Time, sorry for dropping Shikhandi on you unannounced." The Time Traveler said, digging through his pocket with one hand and gesticulating with the other. "One second, let me just-" He pulled a monochrome Rubix cube from his pocket and flicked the layers, spinning them until he whispered a 'yay' under his breath. "Now we can understand each other."

"How?" Shikhandi said, Veer, furrowed his brow and looked towards the kid who was now speaking English.

"You're speaking English." He said, glancing back at Sai who smiled.

"No?" Shikhandi said, "You're speaking Sanskrit." The two stared at each other for a couple seconds before it clicked in Veer's head.

"Universal Translator, but how?"

"41st Century technology has developed what you were using on your phone into an on-demand translation field, operated in the form of almost any object. It's a bit rusty with names but you get the point across" Sai explained, gesturing to his Rubix cube as if it was normal to be from the far future. "But that's not important right now, what is important is documenting your stories." That seemed to surprise both Shikhandi and Veer,

"Why us?" Shikhandi asked. Veer nodded along skeptically.

"Because according to our records, you have similar stories despite being brought up centuries apart. I want to document that to preserve transgender history for myself and others like me in my time." Sai said, blunt but cheery. "Shikhandi, your story is slightly more documented though we haven't gotten our hands on a real copy of the Mahabharata yet. Veer, you were smart enough to not say anything outright in

interviews but from your scripts we were able to pick out the truths, so yeah, think of this as therapy.”

“What’s therapy?” Shikhandi asked slowly, elongating the e and accenting the a.

“It’s where you talk about your feelings and experiences. Also, did you say scripts?” Veer explained, still skeptical of Sai, who nodded along enthusiastically.

“Yup! You are Veer Dhawan after all. Please sit!” the energetic time traveler folded his legs and motioned for them to join him on the rug. Shikhandi sat immediately, wrapping the blanket around his shoulders. Veer sat next to him, the final point in the triangle.

“I am a historian who works at a library, why would I be writing scripts that hold value in thousands of years?”

“Well that’s the fun of it, you’ll find out as life goes on.” Sai quipped, speaking the same way as Veer’s Creative Writing professor. “But the point of this conversation is not the future, but the past. So who wants to start?” Sai clapped his hands, looking down at Shikhandi who motioned the other two men to join him on the floor.

“I can start.” He said simply, pausing to see if either of them would stop him before starting to speak. “Before I was born, my Father asked Lord Shiva to help him produce an heir, a request that was granted, but Lord Shiva told my Father that I would be born a girl but become a man in due time. My Father accepted this and when I was born he raised me as a boy, something which I am grateful for, though I never had the word to describe it. Transgender seems to fit.” Veer listened intently to the prince’s story, redrawing lines between that story and his own.

“What do they call you back home?” Veer asked, curious.

“There is no word for me, so they just call me Shikhandi.” Veer nodded,

“Well now you have one.” the historian said, smiling at the prince and the two fell into awkward silence.

Sai clapped his hands,

“Wonderful! Now Veer, your story?” Veer stayed silent for a second, digging up long-buried memories.

“My uncle had a dream before I was born, he claimed he saw that I would be born a boy. My grandmother was obsessed with that idea and refused to believe anything else as she was desperate for a firstborn grandson. I was unfortunately born a daughter, and I think my mother blames me for that, as her sister had a firstborn son a few years later, only months before my younger brother was born. My parents raised me a girl, though I didn’t truly want it. I was taught that I must be a girl as that was all I could be and that the walls of gender couldn’t be broken. As I grew older, I learned of trans people, hated by the people in power, and I was determined to ignore how much I related the idea of being a man. In my teen years, every other week would be news of another trans teen like me being murdered for existing. My parents didn’t seem to care when I tried to talk to them about it, saying I was too young to know myself and that if I came out it would ruin them. So when I got to college, I ran. I ran as far away as I could and ended up here, talking to the long-dead prince I idolized as a kid and a time traveler.” Veer shrugged, looking up at the two watchers. Sai’s eyes looked tired, almost glazy, but far away. Shikhandi was blank, slumped slightly,

“You idolized me?” the boy asked, there was a sadness in his eyes that reminded Veer of those nights so many years ago, warmth marred by the unmelting knife of hate. There was a seconds pause before he replied,

“Yes, because our stories are the product of our own times. Of the respect our families had for us and who we are, it’s written in our experiences, in our lives.” He held his hand out to the boy, lining their palms together. Shikhandi’s hand was significantly smaller, his fingers barely passing the first bend of Veer’s. “It’s been my goal to keep your legacy alive for the future, for the kids like us who need your story, who need hope.”

“And that’s my goal for the two of you as well,” Sai interjected, having been silent since Veer started talking. “The end of the 21st century gave way to the Death of Information at the hands of the Western World. A wave of censorship tried to erase and discredit every bit of history detailing the existence of queer and transgender people. In turn, the little knowledge of pre-colonial Asia, Africa, and the Americas was also mostly censored or destroyed. We lost so much history and for decades our communities spread stories orally in fear of another Purge. Eventually, physical copies were restored, either transcriptions or undiscovered documents, one of the stories was the Story of Shikhandi, written by none other than Vas Dhawan a good 60 years before the Purge.” While he talked, Sai pulled a slim sheet of glass out of his bag and set it on the floor. He fiddled with it before a pale green hologram ignited, projecting the image of a worn box, a messy scrawl of *Story of Shikhandi and Other Queer Stories in Mythos* ran across a worn and peeling label.

“Vas Dhawan,” Veer repeated, “What does the ‘as’ stand for?”

“That is your first question?” Shikhandi laughed, and the young boy brushed his hair back with his hand. During Sai’s speech, he had pulled at the tie in his hair, letting it fall to his shoulders. “Time sir told you the future and you want to know the letters of your name?” Veer scoffed, goodhearted and with a slight smile,

“I just want to know why future-me chose ‘Vas’, Names hold meaning, for example, Sai’s last name is Kala which supports his claim of being the Second Son of Time. Alternatively, Dhawan is a name I chose for myself because it means ‘messenger,’ and I am indeed a messenger.” Sai watched as Veer gestured to him in his explanation, nodding at the mention of his title.

“So you used ‘Vas’ as a moniker, maybe you just liked the name?” The time traveler suggested. The historian shook his head,

“If I know myself, then ‘Vas’ is actually V.A.S Each letter stands for something, ‘Veer’ means brave, which leaves the ‘S’ and ‘A’ unknown.” There was a pause, silence to let their brains filter through name after name.

“Hope.” Shikhandi whispered, pushing himself from the leaning position he was sitting in. “You said you were trying to keep my legacy alive for the next generations so they would have hope.” Veer clapped, springing up from his seat on the carpet,

“Asha!” He dashed out of the room, “I’ll be right back!” Shikhandi and Sai exchanged a look of confusion as Veer slammed open a door, the sound echoing through the apartment. “Found it!” he yelled after a few minutes, footsteps thudding back towards the living room. Veer appeared almost winded, hair messed and grinning with life in his eyes. With him he carried a large binder stuffed past the brim with pages. Sai stood, an almost shocked look on his face,

“You already wrote them?” His hands shook a bit as he stared at the binder. Veer made a face, sheepish and almost embarrassed,

“No, uh these are my character notes, they date back to like early high school. I have a couple sheets that might be helpful though.” The historian drops back down on his pile of blankets and starts flipping through the binder.

“Kiran...Luka... Lark... Viridian... Kalkin... Lixue... Admani... Asha!” Veer unhooked the binder and carefully extracted two pages. “Asha Joshi, The Star of Hope...” he started flipping through the pages again. “S...s...Sakshi...Sheila...Satya!”

“Satya? That means truth, V.A.S Dhawan, Veer, Asha, Satya. Brave. Hope. Truth.” Veer’s head shot up at that, and he muttered a quick ‘be right back’ before dashing off.

“Time sir?” Shikhandi spoke, startling Sai slightly,

“Yeah?”

“What happens?”

“To what?” Shikhandi hesitated, wrapping the woolen blanket around his shoulders.

“To my family, to me.” The Time Traveler grimaced, looking almost guilty.

“I’m sorry,” He says, “I’m afraid I have no clue.”

“But you know everything about Veer, so why not me?”

“Because you mean much more than Veer ever will. You were the hope for people like us for thousands of years. You are our spark, our guiding star, proof that we can be respected.” Sai paused, his eyes slightly dewy and distant, “You are proof that we deserve to be alive.”

He paused again, pinching his thumb and index finger across the undersides of his eyes. “That’s why you scare them, the people from Veer’s time, they want to forget us because they cannot stand seeing people who have different experiences.” Another slow sadness wrapped the two time-displaced men, Shikhandi inching closer to Sai, who had removed his glasses, obscuring his eyes to whip tears.

“I may be a spark, but you are my hearth.” Shikhandi took one of Sai’s hands, lining their right palms together. “I’ve spent my entire life alone, so alone that I believed that I was the only person like this. You opened a door for my own future that will bring comfort for years to come.” Shikhandi’s voice had dropped to a whisper, his sharp amber eyes tracing the outline of their hands, his a half-inch shorter than Sai’s.

“Our palms match.” Shikhandi said, a half moon smile on his face. Sai furrowed his eyebrows, pulling his hand away to look at it for himself. “Veer!” Shikhandi called, his voice echoing slightly down the hallway Veer had run down.

“One Minute!” the man yelled back, a heartbeat and a half passed before the historian walked back toward the main room, a box tucked under one arm. Shikhandi stood, meeting Veer in the middle of the room.

“Can I see your hand?” the prince asked. Veer shrugged and held out his free arm, palm facing up. Shikhandi grinned again, holding his own palm up next to Veer’s, “We all match!” he announced, turning both Veer and his own palms towards Sai who held up his own hand. Four identical lines pressed like trenches into each of their hands, a shared path, a common destiny.

“I found some stuff for you guys by the way.” Veer cut in, his silent standing getting uncomfortable with the heaviness of the box.

“Technically, Shikhandi can’t take much back with him, timeline fragility and all that.” Sai said with less than an ounce of conviction. Veer nodded along,

“I figured, that’s why it’s not anything crazy, just a message.” the historian said, rooting through the box, finally pulling out three golden bangles. “I know they’re simple, but they’re the only ones that I have more than two of.” He passed one to Sai and the next to Shikhandi, the third he slid onto his own right wrist. Sai and Shikhandi copied his motion, both fixing the bangle onto their right wrists. Veer then reached back into the box, removing a leatherbound book and a binder. He handed these to Sai,

“The Story of Shikhandi, Mythos Orion, *and* Faith-fall?” Sai gasped, reading the neat printed inscriptions.

“This isn’t everything,” Veer said, “Most are works from college that I assume were polished up later but these are the raw essays I wrote for my Creative Writing class.”

“Well thank you, this is amazing! Genuinely, I cannot thank you enough.” Sai said to the historian, flipping through the first few pages of *Mythos Orion*. Veer nodded, twisting the bangle on his forearm.

“It’s what you came here for, right? It’s my duty as a Historian to preserve history, so this is me doing my job for someone I believe in.” Shikhandi peered at the thick leather bound book, the blue ink spelling his name across the peeling label.

“Veer?” the prince asked, “What happened to me, to my family?” the Historian’s eyes darken, shadowed with a swirling storm of stories. He takes the prince’s hand, lining their palms again,

“Listen to the forest, hear its call, don’t fear what you find in it.” He hugged the boy, “I can’t tell you anything else, but know that you will not be alone in the end.” the prince nodded, pulling back from the tangle of arms. He looks to the right, where Sai stands, one of the books is open in his hand and he has tears in his eyes

“*Mythos Orion*, who’d you base the characters off of?” he asked Veer, who moved to stand next to the time traveler.

“I based them off a feeling, like-” Veer paused, reaching out for the words he wanted to use.

“The knowledge that your life may mean nothing to the people you care about?” Sai offered,

“Yeah, exactly.” The following silence was thick with pain and memories, a phantom wind chilled Veer’s bones as he could have sworn he saw snow falling right there in his living room. He pushed aside the memory and Shikhandi appeared in front of him,

“Veer, are you well?” the prince asked with concern, “Your eyes glassed over, that’s usually not good.”

“I’m okay, I’m okay.” Veer assured, glancing toward Sai who had pulled a blanket around his shoulders. “Sai?”

“I’m fine.” The time traveler stated, rubbing his wrists absentmindedly. “You just happened to write *Mythos Orion* in a way that mirrored me so well it caught me off guard.” Veer nodded solemnly,

“Was it your parents?”

“Yeah, the whole world is okay with trans people except for my mother and father.” Veer grimaced, his eyes sad, gilded with memories.

“For me it was both, the world has been on fire since I was a kid and I’ve just gotten used to it. They passed another law last week in my parent’s home state, a ban on HRT. You can get up to 10 years for even possessing it without a proper prescription. My parents called me after, saying that it wasn’t too late to turn back from this because my gender will be my death.” Shikhandi frowned, his mouth set in an unhappy line.

“My father says something similar. He knows who I am but he won’t let me leave the palace or meet new people. He’s scared they will call me illegitimate and he will be left with no heir. It’s not terrible but I was raised to think that there was no one else like me and I was different, which is very lonely as time goes on.” Veer put a hand on the prince’s shoulder,

“You’ll be able to leave one day, and I hope for you that the world will be kind because you deserve that.” The prince smiled, shifting his own hand to Veer’s shoulder. He had to push himself onto his toes to reach, knocking his bangle against Veer’s.

“Thank you, Vas Dhawan.” Shikhandi said, a laugh held in smiling eyes as he named Veer’s future. “And thank you, Sai Time, for everything.” Shikhandi pulled one of the discarded blankets over his shoulders again, “Also can I take this with me?” Sai laughed,

“No, but I can get you one from your time. Just have to go steal a sheep from England or something.” The time traveler said, voice level and eyes blinking tears away. He had his rubix cube time machine in his hand, absentmindedly spinning the pieces until the cube lit up a low purple. “Now, I hate to disappoint, but we must go.” Shikhandi slumped slightly, letting the blanket fall to the floor. He glanced at Veer who held out his right hand,

“I’ll see you again one day,” Veer promised as Shikhandi placed his palm to mirror his. “I can’t wait to hear your story.”

And they were gone. Veer was alone in his apartment, and the 21st century continued to speed towards a tipping point. The historian sighed, collecting the blankets left by his guests and folding them away. Then gathering his old notes and placing them back into their dusty boxes. There was silence all around him, unlike the low whispers of Sai and Shikhandi.

“What happens?”

Veer remembers the story, about the war and the attack in the night, about how Shikhandi’s son perishes before he does. It’s a cold truth, one he could not impress upon the prince even if Sai wasn’t there to stop him. Time couldn’t be altered, and Veer couldn’t write a cruel fate to that boy. In the smallest part of his mind, the historian wondered if his encounter would save the prince, but he pushed the thought away. It’s too dangerous to wonder about the could-have-beens, no matter if it brought some comfort in the moment.

Slowly, Veer packed away his things and settled onto his chair with a warm mug of coffee. He didn’t drink it, just sat and let the scent of the bitter drink consume him. Soon after the coffee went lukewarm, Veer picked up his pen:

The sun rose soft over jagged mountains, staining the sky red. In a palace room, a child cried, surrounded by maids and a mother.

“Shikhandi,” The mother whispered, stained smile through grilling pain. Past the door, the King paces, twirling a spring of Yellow Jasmine in his hands, a gift for his Queen.

*Centuries upon centuries passed, and civilization evolved, from burning words to raging storms to now. The 43rd Century was a modern man’s dream, technology had been harnessed but art still thrived in the hands of humanity. One of the greatest exhibit’s was America’s **Open Road Gardens**, founded by the TimeChild Foundation. The Gardens are dedicated to preserving lost history retrieved by Time Travelers through statues and plaques, reminiscent of ancient museums. The centerpiece of the Gardens is the Triad, three statues at the heart, the first stories recovered by the Garden’s founder, Sai Kala.*

The first statue is of Prince Shikhandi of Panchala, he stands with a wolf by his side and a crown of fire. His right hand facing Northeast, the four lines of his palm bold against the bronze.

The second is V.A.S. Dhawan, famous 21st century writer and historian. He stands clutching a book to his chest and his right palm facing Southwest, directing a gold horse frozen in gallop.

Third was Sai Kala himself, the founder of the Gardens, the first man who time traveled to rediscover the stories that had been lost. He stands facing East, palm outstretched, with a silver elephant and his side.

All three statues intersect at the very center of the Gardens, where you can find copies of V.A.S Dhawan’s works and records of Shikhandi’s life. You will also find a plaque that reads:

To our lost siblings, may your stories find the light once more.

A Steel Heart and Clockwork Hands

Kathryn Plotner

Vienna had always been entranced by the sky. The sky seemed entranced by her, too, and it parted under and around her. Her journeys were smooth. She flew a ship that she loved and encountered enemies, which she incapacitated with ease and ever-increasingly risky antics.

She was a darling at balls, a standoffish stunt pilot that nevertheless knew all the right words. Whirlwinds of people flew by in a haze: a handsome man from the distastefully rebel-ridden North planet; a laughing duchess and minder, notable only for the braided blonde hair; an officer that tittered over her performance and used her to talk up his own advancement.

Battles were distant enough, time between sufficient to forget. Incapacitate the targets, clear the area, move on. The pilotry was spectacular, though: once-in-a-lifetime dodges and rolls that, if divorced from context, were wonderful.

Vienna was a bit of a daredevil , well earned. She was the star pilot of Good Prince Willy's galaxy-spanning fleet.

Her efforts merited her the honorary title of captain, countless awards, and personal attention from the Northern Rebellion.

In the middle of the galaxy, near the edge of Prince Will's empire, was a planet, peaceful enough. There were two women of note: Vienna Alvarez and Daisy Pierremont.

Daisy was a mechanic. Vienna visited her in the shop, tinkering about with the miniature gears that Daisy herself didn't interact with.

The two were soon to be engaged; everyone in the outpost knew it, and good-natured ribbing was common. It was a time of relative peace: the harvest was good, war was only on the distant edges of the empire, and Prince Will was content to let his peaceful steward rule as Governor.

But the Governor was soon replaced as war came ever closer. Henrietta von Liesbeck was transferred from her prior post after her failure to stem the Northern Rebellion, and she was desperate to prove herself. Liesbeck was harsh, eager to quell even the chance of rebellion. Taxes were raised ever higher, and the draft reinstated.

Vienna's name came up for a year of service. She'd not see action, likely- their planet was on the Top-Southern edge, far from rebellion. The Serpent King's daughter, Prudent Federal, was gathering an army of pirates and the Far, they said. Vienna was to train as a pilot.

Daisy, in compensation, would be wired a measly sum each month, and the promise of a letter. Vienna had sat in the meadow with Daisy, pants gathering pollen, and looked at her. They'd held hands in the glow of the yellow sun and kissed. Daisy had stared at Vienna and said "Promise me you'll return." Vienna had, returning "Promise you'll wait for me." The two had exchanged promises till the warm light of the day had vanished and the bells rang, drawing in for one last embrace.

Vienna held her bag loosely, taking her few travel-worthy possessions. She walked to the second-tallest building in town, the government building evident in the flags waving through the air.

The military had cheerful posters boasting of success, contentment, and a patriotic duty being fulfilled hanging on every wall. Smiling faces stared out, advocating anti-Rebel action. Someone had graffitied in harsh black letters across the thirteen-odd identical faces of Prince Willard Wesley Williams the Third: CHILD KILLER.

Vienna didn't let her gaze linger. She scanned the pavilion for the military sign.

Though training was not fast or efficient, it was effective. Vienna Alvarez got her own starship and post, in the far Northern end of the galaxy.

Vienna went up up up, to the sky.

Vienna was a good pilot. She did not think about whether she was a good person. She didn't think about a lot of things.

A ship signaled Vienna, wearing the appropriate symbols. It was mid-level, nothing special, claiming to be out of fuel. Vienna opened a comms link. It was declined, bizarrely- normally the signaler made first contact, explaining the situation further and verifying allegiance.

Vienna erred closer: perhaps the fuel shortage affected comm range. Something was wrong, though, beyond the unnatural movements of the downed ship.

Vienna started to flee- back thrusters, sharp right swivel to deter gunfire- when a Class Three missile hit.

Vienna's ship crumpled like a tin can. Vienna herself started gasping against the oxygen, firing switches: an answering missile volley. Emergency oxy kit- the opening door was blocked, shit. Switch to under-seat panic button, never effective. Hit the power, because running out of air on a planet's better and she's surely good for a ransom. Watch the green explosion- must have hit a fuel cell. Think of Daisy. Say goodbye.

Vienna goes down, down, down.

and everything is silence

The ground is cold against her back. Her right arm is burning, and she can't feel her left at all, though her shoulder is screaming. Around her is sterling metal twisted into unrecognizable shapes. A padded chair is upturned near her head- heavy ripping, badly damaged. Massive forces were involved. Her chest is covered in something red. Something around her throat- a silver necklace, maybe?- hangs loosely, almost falling off. Her eyes flutter shut.

there is red and cold and silver/steel and no oxygen in her lungs and someone is near her and she was trained for this, must

She catalogues her environment neatly. Nothing of use is within arms reach. She is not mobile. There is no air in her lungs no air no air and she will die in this cold dark

Everything is in pain. Every single part of her body feels like it is freezing to death. She screams and there is no air in her lungs

she cannot remember her name

She is lying on a gurney table. Someone she does not recognize is leaning over her. Vague concern dances across the stranger's face, a performance. The stranger is short. He has white hair- a short cut, inch-long beard, sideburns. His face is wrinkled with age and stress. His clothes are of an old style, brown leather on off-white with oil stains across them.

Her legs and right arm are bound by leather straps to a steel table. An assortment of surgical tools are on a small table positioned near her head. They seem

to be of hospital-quality, well-maintained and expensive to start. A large clump of metal sits on the table as well- bronze accompanied by silver- but she doesn't recognize it as anything, though it's sophisticated machinery.

She can feel the stranger's breaths. The room seems much colder in comparison; she shivers. Her own pulse is thrumming in her ear. The sound of the ventilation is omnipresent, accompanied by a static humm. Something is flowing into her bloodstream.

The room is small. White walls add to her feelings of disorientation, and the corners seem off, somehow. A metal clock hangs slightly off center, with an owl figurine, also made of metal, perched on top. The eye sockets are an empty black. More clocks are around the room, now that she looks, as are assorted other gears.

She observes everything with a detached sense of distress, as though she is merely an observer to the figure on the gurney, to the stranger, to the strange room. The stranger notices that she's awake. As though the stranger's awareness makes it so, she understands that she doesn't have a left arm. Where the arm should be is just empty space, and the shoulder doesn't feel strange, either.

"Hello, Vienna," the stranger leaning over her says, "They call me the Clockmaker."

So her name is Vienna. The man- the Clockmaker- backs away a bit, seemingly content after saying his piece. Vienna has questions, many, but they feel sluggish and heavy under her tongue. The Clockmaker and her look at each other for a while, until everything fades out into a soft haze.

The Clockmaker leans over her again, turning her onto her right side. He's looking at her shoulder, the place where an arm should be. A gloved hand is firm against her shoulder, the other holding a grey tool.

He examines her shoulder socket for some time- a metal cap has been bolted on, dark bronze flowing into her own skin almost seamlessly. A few small adjustments are made. Vienna can hear quiet screechs of metal.

The bronze thing from before is in the man's hands. He carries it gently to her shoulder, and Vienna realizes with a jolt that this is to be her left arm.

She wakes intermittently. The Clockmaker brings her food, oils her arm, adjusts gears.

she wakes up gasping for air that isn't there she will die alone and forgotten

Eventually, Vienna recovers enough to begin asking questions. The Clockmaker answers them, forthcoming if awkward. She does not learn who gave him his moniker, if it's self-imposed, a bequeathal, or a natural continuation of the devices he creates. He brings in small projects of his, eloquent mechanics that she can only begin to appreciate. She asks how she got here, who she is, what's happening to her.

Those are the questions that he does not answer.

She is not bedridden forever. She can walk, in clumsy steps that exhaust her. As her proficiency with the metal arm improves, so too does her ability to use it. The arm is expertly crafted: large bronze gears intersecting with finer silver ones, all overlapping to create an intricately moving device. The hand is finer yet, small plates for each section of each finger to allow maximum dexterity.

Vienna explores the quarters she's allowed in, gets to know the Clockmaker. She nicknames him Pierre, after a vague remnant of a half-forgotten memory, and he takes to it well enough. He seems to regard her as an odd mix between a patient, a protege, and a project.

They have a language barrier between them- Pierre's native tongue is not one Vienna speaks, and his own knowledge of her language is somewhat halting. It's enough for the basics, but more technical terminology is harder.

He teaches her, first, how to maintain her own arm. How to oil the exterior, how to check for jams. She will need someone else to fully disassemble and reassemble it, he explains.

Next, she learns of his numerous automatons. All of them seem to run on systems of gears similar to her own, although she can't understand what powers any of it, and Pierre lacks the vocabulary to explain. It's a source of much frustration between them, and Vienna stops asking.

They learn to speak to each other, to navigate around both of their strange edges. Pierre is stammeringly awkward if not explaining his machinery, when he is confident and patient. She is rediscovering everything about personhood, frustrated

when she realizes that she doesn't know things about herself. He takes her fits with an easy, rolling wave of empathy.

Vienna's days are quiet, occupied by the chatter of the automatons and easy work. Her left arm has stopped spasming, clockwork machinery finally settling into place. A few travelers come and go, buoyed by the Clockmaker's reputation. They must think her strange, which is just as well; she thinks them strange too.

All those that come have a purpose. They seek knowledge, or repair. They come to threaten the quiet man, which Vienna does not take well, yelling and intimidating them away like a protective housecat. They come to beg for help that he cannot provide, for all he is a genius.

Vienna settles into a rhythm, with the man, the Clockmaker, Pierre. She knows that he saved her life- she doesn't know how she arrived on his planet, or how her life needed saving. She grows protective of the man, and he of her: both are quiet, hesitant. They do not know how to live with others, how to share a space, but in time they grow to predict the other's movements.

Vienna thinks that she could spend her life here. Grow into a well worn shape, fill the missing parts with the quiet ease of understanding companionship. She would be happy, or at least content.

As with all things, it cannot last. A richly dressed man, garbed in the wealth of an entire town, descends on their planet. He is an omen. He declares that the man known as the Clockmaker is under the sovereign rule of Contessa Prudent Federal. He declares that the Clockmaker is to come at once to the Capitol. He disregards Vienna.

Pierre begins to say something, but Vienna dismisses the man first. "Go," she says, "We do not want you here. You bear no authority."

After much huffing, the man threatens them. "She will come for you and your petty rebellion. She will bring an army a thousand strong. And all who stand in her way will fall."

The man leaves after that. Vienna watches the dark shape in the sky get smaller and smaller as the stars begin to fill the air. Pierre heads back into the garage.

It is a crisp spring morning, the air clean and bright. They come like a plague of locusts, pinprick dots darkening the sky, the beating of motors so many wings. The

planet will never be the same- the sheer exhaust will have corroded the atmosphere, and scorch marks freckle the earth.

Vienna is prepared. Her arm is remarkably strong, for a civilian prosthetic, and Vienna knows how to use it. Similarly mechanized suits are available, but her own body is reinforced enough, bones that had shattered reinforced with cool metal, malfunctioning (ill-working. it's flesh.) parts replaced. Intentionally or not, the Clockmaker has made her into a weapon. She will wield herself.

She remembers battles. She is a participant, not an observer, in her memories, but she is a quick study all the same.

A ship, larger and more extravagantly marked than the others, begins to land. A short woman steps out, elegant sword clutched in her right hand. Around her head is a twisted silver circlet, a burn mark on the left side. This is Contessa Prudent Federal, former emissary of the Serpent King and more deserving of the title.

The landing must have woken Pierre- it is a small earthquake, and the man is well attuned to anything that could cause a disturbance to his precious gadgets. Nevertheless, he does not appear outside.

Vienna is standing vigil in between the ship and the house. The Contessa regards her coolly, an impassive gaze scanning her. "Where is the Clockmaker?" Federal demands.

"Nowhere you will find him."

Federal continues walking forwards, jaguar-smooth. Vienna stays firm, resolves herself to the feeling of blood. They are about three feet apart, enough that either could lunge forward.

Silence, for a moment. Then: "Step aside."

Vienna does not. As though uncoiling, Federal darts forward, striking with her sword. It's fast, but Vienna pulls her arm up with a *clang*. Lightning-fast, she lashes out with her right hand. The Contessa steps back neatly, and they begin in earnest.

It's an exchange that takes them across the field. Metal raps against metal, filling the air along with measured breaths and light footsteps. Neither is trying to kill the other, but they fight with such intensity that harm couldn't be prevented.

Both stop for a moment. “You are quite good.” says Federal. “A place for you could be made in my collection.” It is an offer sincerely meant. It fills Vienna with a sharp spike of revulsion.

“Your *collection*? What are you collecting?” Vienna leans forward slightly.

Federal steps back, smiles. “Why, people with unique talents.”

“And Pi- and the Clockmaster? Is he one of those people?”

“You must have noticed his gift with machinery. Did he make that arm of yours? Excellent proof of concept.”

Vienna suppresses a snarl. “What do you want with him?”

“Why do you protect him?” Federal is curious, eyes blinking slow.

Vienna edges back, startled. “He saved my life.”

“And so you owe him the rest of it?” said pointedly.

“He deserves someone to protect him!”

It is nothing short of contempt that flavors Federal’s next line. “You gave him your devotion, then. I know devotion.” With that, her sword is swung. Whether it is emphasis, rage, or both, Vienna cannot tell.

Federal is a whirlwind of motion, short jabs followed by slashes, the air itself a weapon. Vienna cools herself, dips into the merciless well that is her focus. She begins attacks of her own- punches accompanied by sweeping kicks that lead into well-rehearsed sequences.

Eventually, Vienna lands a solid punch onto Federal’s face. It is her right hand. Federal goes down, and rolls herself up again almost as fast.

“Leave.” Vienna says.

“Make me.” Federal spits. “But you’d have to leave your precious Clockmaker, and you couldn’t do that.”

Maybe it's the challenge. Maybe it's the gleam in her eye. Maybe Vienna just knows that she can't stay here forever. She grabs Federal's forearm.

"My armies won't stop, you know. You can't make them." Federal adds, needlessly.

"Then you'll order them yourself." Vienna drags the two of them into Federal's ship.

"You mean to go with me?" Federal laughs.

The door closes on the planet, Vienna's home. The window reflects a thousand stars into their eyes, as she goes up up up to the sky that loves her.

In Lieu of A Eulogy: A Gardener's Belated Letter
July 17th, 2017 - estimated date of initial growth.
October 26th, 2019 - end of growth.
Anonymous



My favorite thing about humanity is that we are doomed to be imperfect.

It's not our fault— it's in our genetic code. Nature in itself is riddled with mistakes, mutations; so too have we evolved and cultivated together from endless, tiny, slip-ups.

If I had to pick out my biggest flaw of the limitless many, my *hamartia*, I think it would be that I have to look everything up. The internet is my wooden crutch in a modern world, my reprieve from charging into things blindly.

Did you know that when you type “*the best opening for a eulogy*” into Google, it doesn't really give you much in return? I think there should be some sort of Masterclass on it, a book titled *Eulogies for Dummies; The Guide to Formal Speaking at Funerals for the Fundamentally Flawed*. But there is nothing. Instead, before my apprehensive fingers can find the “e” on the keyboard, the search engine suggests that I would much rather want to see the best openings for chess.

Did you know that the best chess opening (if you're playing white, of course) is to advance the queen's pawn forward two spaces? *The Queen's Gambit*. To aggressively stride an unsuspecting soldier forwards, risking it all for ultimate domination over the center of the board: this move is 59% successful, almost the same percentage of women who are still alive five years after receiving the same diagnosis you did. It is like this that I find that even in chess, life is dealt in glancing, unexpected blows.

So here is my blow, my shocking one-two punch to begin this speech. **It has been exactly 1,273 days since you died, 2,104 days since the beginning of your hamartia.** The funeral was short, intimate, just the way you would've liked it, and I didn't speak. I didn't speak because I couldn't read through my tears and I couldn't give a eulogy without looking up a

how-to first, couldn't hobble my way to the podium without my wooden crutch; I have always, always regretted it.

My fatal flaw is that I grow too trepid, too slow, and yours was that your cancer grew too fast.

□ □

As much as you wanted me to be, I'm not a chess player. Though you and I have always appreciated its precise logic, I cannot dole out the harsh moves; I am not built to be the ruthless executioner. My best friend laments that when I play, he can see the glee on my face, cheeks flushed pink and plainly giving away my next move. He complains that I am too full of life.

But how can I not be, when I have witnessed how precious it is? I started gardening because I have come to love life in its every imperfection. The mistake-riddled Earth, awry with its erroneous, beautiful creations. Why should I have to concern myself over too-small eyes or a too-large waistline when the too-limp tomato plant still bears fruit and the too-tiny flower blooms bright red?

Here's a gardening fact: Cilantro and fennel cannot grow together because the fennel will secrete chemicals into the dirt that stops the cilantro from reproducing. Is that ironic? Fennel, delicate and minty, is akin, in a way, to a tumor, planting its tangled roots into a womb that does not want it there, ruining others in its desire to grow.

Oh, selfish fennel. Flawed, hubristic fennel. Only now do I understand when you told me that you were not angry with the cancer cells for wanting to grow— you were simply angry that they happened to choose you.

One of the only plants that can grow with fennel is dill. The two interact with each other in symbiotic ways. My friend tells me this is romantic, and I say he is an idiot; they are simply plants. But I have a dirty secret: sometimes I believe him. If I close my eyes, I think I can see it. Sweet, patient dill stabilizing the fennel seeds. I have this image of the two of them holding hands beneath the dirt. Dill soothes fennel like my father

held you in his arms, massaged your feet, wiped your tears. *My darling wife*, he whispered, in broken English. *My darling, my wife*.



When you grew too frail to leave the bed for too long, we talked more than we ever had before, lying strewn atop the queen size comforter like angels in the snow. The trouble was that once we began, we didn't know when to stop, both afraid that each pause would be the last, the lull lasting forever, the silence never broken. The less time we thought we had, the more precious it became— isn't that funny? Why are things never valuable until they are rare?

I am terrified that my midlife crisis will hit me and I will realize that I peaked at 27 or 18 or 11 and there is nowhere left to go, that I will begin to feel the parabola curve back down, the bending fall stirring a great stiffness in my stomach.

I have this deep desire to leave some sort of legacy of mine— like some excited kid in a museum fogging up the display cases and leaving dirty fingerprints on everything that they touch. I am but a blip on the timeline, vastness extending out at either end of my life. We are but lights blinking in and out of a universe, and yet still, I want this light to scorch into the wood of the trees, to set ablaze the grass of the prairie.

My arsonist's confession; I would set alight the garden I love most just to leave my scar. I am no different than fennel. I am no different from a selfish cell.



I haven't gone to get tested yet— to find out if the cancer is genetic— I cannot bring myself to.

Is it masochistic to want to be a mother? I watched you grow your own cruel and twisted life, watched the harvest scythe's sharp edge gleam above the vine. You writhed, you cried, my eyes emptied— and still, I want to be a mother. This is *my Queen's Gambit*, my risky step forward.

Because in the end, I do not want to simply be in love, I want to bestow it.

I am afraid I will never get the opportunity to dote on someone, to give them my unconditional acceptance. Some strange maternal instinct I suppress is horrified at the thought that I will never fulfill this promise, the one I made simply by being born in this body.

Is it a betrayal to my sacrificing father to admit that he isn't enough? I owe him everything, and still, I search for the missing piece of a gaping hole. It is now that I seek your guidance more than ever-- somehow I never miss you as much as when I want your wisdom. Ever the selfish daughter, even in death I abuse your motherhood.

Losing a mother feels like a forever homesickness; you who created me from your own flesh and blood, my first home: No matter how much I try, I will never, ever, not need you.



In lieu of walking me down the aisle, in lieu of crying over your first grandchild, I want to ask you, just one time, for a piece of advice— maybe even a sharp reprimand. The type girls are supposed to get from their mothers, caught red-faced behind doors cracked open at least 5 inches, which was bargained down from an entire foot, punctuated with eye-rolls and groans.

Tell me how to once again expose my soft, scarred underbelly to the world. To roll over like a naive puppy and accept love once again, though now I can see that we are standing on the edge of a ravine and I am so afraid that I will fall once more, right after I have clawed my way out.

Tell me if the next boy I meet will kneel by my hospital bedside like my father did by yours and lift spoonfuls of soup to my own mouth. Tell me if he will let me put my weary feet upon his to laugh and dance, dance while our daughter sleeps through dried tears. If even when he knows I have very few hours left and my hair is beginning to fall in clumps beneath my sallow cheeks, he will care for me all the same— not more, not less.

Tell me when I have strayed too far from you. Day by day, I lose edges that you molded, the world chafing me into its own shape. Fading memories make my stomach drop as I clutch desperately at the

dissipating haze. Every passing second I am transforming into someone you will never get to know, and I wonder to myself, would you like the person I have grown into?

In lieu of a eulogy, I am just here to tell you that I am growing up. I am just here to tell you I am growing together.

I am just here to tell you that I love you.

How the Running Helped Me Survive the Pandemic

A Thank-You Note to the Running Community

Anonymous

When the COVID-19 virus shut down the country, I was anxious over the well-being of the world, as most people were. But while many fellow classmates complained about virtual school, citing feelings of loneliness and isolation, I was hardly affected by those symptoms at the time; in reality, I was relatively content during the year of Zoom classes. And the truth is, I probably owe it all to the fact that I decided to join cross country as a sophomore.

I wasn't exactly new to running, since I'd participated in three years of middle school cross country and track before that. Unfortunately, I hadn't enjoyed it very much because I absolutely despised the sport at the time, and I'd only joined because my dad, an avid runner and a Boston Marathon qualifier, had highly encouraged me to do so. I hated it so much that I refused to join as a freshman in high school. However, when a friend convinced me to come to winter conditioning practices with her, a switch flipped in my brain. To my surprise, I started enjoying the crunch of snow under my shoes and the wind whipping against my hair during workouts. The girls on the team were mostly positive and welcoming, and the assistant coach, who later became the head coach, was very encouraging. Then, when the pandemic occurred in March, I had an overabundance of free time and decided I needed something to cure my boredom. My solution, much to my dad's delight, was to start summer conditioning with the team and run cross country in the fall.

That decision ended up being one of the best ones I ever made. Although there were several rules and regulations that our team had to follow in order to prevent the spread of the virus, we were still allowed to run without masks, being a no-contact and therefore low-risk sport. The constant practices and meets gave me a routine, a reason to go to bed on time, and a way to get fresh air after staring at a screen all day. I didn't realize it at the time, but because of running, I was able to avoid the mental health issues that so many others were experiencing. The exercise provided a daily release of endorphins and serotonin, which relieved my stress and made it easier to find motivation to complete schoolwork, and I strongly believe that much of my productivity during the pandemic came from those benefits.

Most importantly, though, joining cross country gave me a community. It helped me stay healthy not only physically by keeping me in shape, but also mentally by allowing a place for face-to-face interactions with others. It gave me connection with other peers: teammates who would run with me during long workouts and cheer for me

during races. Truthfully, what likely got me through the pandemic was the everyday stimulation that came from being in contact with other people. Most students have a similar experience with an activity that helps them get through the year, whether it be a sport, a music group, or a club, illustrating the significance of community in all of our lives. Because of the running community, I didn't just survive during that time; I actually thrived. And for that, I'm forever grateful.

My trip to India and how I learnt silence could be deafening.
Arjun Alva

I find it enlightening that the richest messages can be found in the poorest of places. Deep within the impoverished areas of this world lay millions of stories trapped within desperate souls. If I wanted to achieve anything with this piece, it would be to share my discovery of one of these fragile, sweet, generous, and beautiful souls I met during a trip two and half years back.

It was the last day of school before summer vacation in 2019. The day was warm. A light breeze shifted the leaves around as I walked out of the door. The air carried the fragrance of the flowers in the garden. I walked to the car watching glistening sparkles of sun flash all around me. The next day I was flying to a country where my parents grew up before coming to the U.S. for higher studies. I felt a sense of attachment and love for a country I had only visited twice. This special destination was India, the archaic land. What I would find in my experience there was beyond amazing. The last time I went to India was when I was in kindergarten. The memories were faint, but I had kept a collection of pictures that I could access whenever I wanted.

I woke up early on June 15th. We were all set; our clothes were packed, the gifts were all wrapped, and our backpacks were fitted with water bottles and snacks. Spirits were high. My dad dropped us at the Detroit Metropolitan airport. We flew to Chicago first as there was no direct flight to any Indian city from Detroit, surprisingly. Our flight to Chicago was a short one. I was going to visit several cities in India: Delhi, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, and Pondicherry. My younger brother, Anmol and I were excited beyond words. Once we boarded our long flight from Chicago to Delhi, we were all set. I didn't sleep a wink and binge watched many movies during that never ending flight. We reached New Delhi on a Sunday afternoon.

It was the capital of India during peak summer and that too during a weekend. It was sweltering hot, and I started to pant in the weather. I wasn't properly dressed for it. I stood there in a hoodie and pants realizing my terrible decision to wear a typical American outfit. My aunt came to receive us from the airport. It was excruciatingly difficult to adapt to the humidity level in New Delhi in the month of June and not to forget the dirty roads. The congested roadways were hard to navigate through. I was in awe of my aunt who drove through that traffic. We stayed at my mom's uncle's place in the

heart of New Delhi. He was a retired army officer from the Indian army, and he had a posh bungalow. The house was great but outside of it, I found myself surrounded by all sorts of animals such as cows, chickens, dogs, and sometimes cats. I had a particular fear of street dogs and I tried to avoid them as much as I could.

Every time my family and I ventured outside, there was a gigantic sea of motorcycles puffing out a toxic abundance of carbon dioxide. Despite these problems, all of us had a great time in Delhi. My most memorable trip was when we went to see the Indian Parliament and the Rashtrapati Bhawan (Home of the president of India). Three days later, we boarded an indigo domestic flight from Delhi to Bhubaneswar (where my maternal grandmother lived). I enjoyed the short flight of two hours. Most people spoke either Hindi (Hindi is the national language of India) or Odia (state language for the state of Odisha) and it was fun listening to different dialects. But I had no clue that Bhubaneswar would be welcoming me with a surprise.

Grandma came to receive us at the airport, and we went to her place. Her apartment was on the 5th floor of a huge apartment building. We were tired but immensely happy. We were seeing her after three long years. I wanted to eat dinner and go to bed. As I was carrying my suitcase in the elevator, I saw “Hari” for the first time. Yes, that’s what he called himself, Hari. He was tall, medium built and had dark brown eyes. He warmly greeted tenants who passed by and shook his head whenever someone greeted him. He had an aura of kindness and was probably the politest person I had ever met in my life. His demeanor was everything you would expect from a man of good character. Next few days when I stayed in grandma’s apartment in Bhubaneswar, I saw Hari more.

He had no home and during daytime he went around asking for work, finding all sorts of odd jobs. Some days he swept the floor in front of the apartment building, someday he got groceries for an old lady who lived in the adjacent building where my grandma lived, and some days he watered the flower plants for the residents. I grew curious to know more about Hari. But I was far too shy to start a conversation with him. Besides, I didn’t want to be embarrassed by my terrible Odia. India is a culturally vibrant country. There are more than three hundred and fifty languages, and most people speak at least three languages. Hari spoke Hindi, Odia and Bengali fluently. One afternoon while he sat on a

bench, I saw him from outside the window. He was smoking a bidi, a cheaper form of a cigarette. The sky was clear as it almost always was back there. The sun shone like a huge golden ball in the sky.

I continued to watch him, perhaps out of mere curiosity. Most likely because of the fascination I had with his bidis, something that I had never seen in the U.S. He kept smoking relentlessly, lighting one after another. There were a lot of people who looked like him on the streets; he wore an ordinary dress shirt with an unbuttoned collar, long pants, and torn slippers. But there was something special about him. He possessed sincere compassion that I saw in his deep eyes so vibrantly. As days passed, I noticed that food was never a problem for him. People happily offered him roti (Indian bread), rice and vegetables. Grandma always gave him leftover food. He was dearly loved by the other residents of the building too.

Soon I realized that people trusted him. Hari had great values. People trusted him with money, their plants, and pets. He was not at all materialistic and never thought of stealing from others. Maybe that's why grandma was so fond of Hari. After mom saw his torn slippers, we went to the shop to get him a new pair of shoes.

"Thank you, Ma'am, for your generosity." He said so happily.

One afternoon while coming back from town, I saw Hari standing near a traffic light. It was scorching hot that day and he sat under a half-torn umbrella. I was with my cousin brother. We had ripe mangos and other savory fruits, like guava and lichi. We took out some from our plastic bag and gave it to him. Some more folks joined us in giving gifts. I remember a lady behind our bike got down and bought cold drinks for Hari. The gifts were returned with subtle and appreciative gestures. We left and I continued wondering about Hari. He was an enigma to me. A puzzle that I wanted to solve.

After spending about ten days with grandma in Bhubaneswar, we flew to Hyderabad to see my mom's best friend. Grandma joined us on that trip. We were gone for three days. Hari volunteered to water our plants during her absence, a request which my grandmother readily accepted. A couple of days later when we came back, I saw him again. He looked healthy and happy. He was sweeping someone's floor in the building, smiling through it all.

After a couple of days, mom took all of us to a luxury 5-star hotel, called "Trident" in Bhubaneswar. There was also a gift shop inside the hotel where I found myself looking at amazing Sikh swords. They were short, but their blades were precise and not even

one had a touch of bluntness in them. Their curves fascinated me beyond anything, even more than all the Japanese weapons I had seen in cinema. Those gorgeous swords didn't need to be wielded in dramatic fashion with exuberance; they looked fine just resting on the display.

We had dinner at Trident that night with some family friends and mom's classmates. While we were waiting for desserts, my brother asked grandma about Hari. With a deep sigh, grandma offered us an amazing telling. Grandma told us some stories about Hari's childhood, the orphanage he grew up in, how he liked eating rice on banana leaves, his dropping out of school at a very young age, his struggles to find and maintain jobs. My brother and I didn't talk much but we listened.

We went for a long walk after dinner and bought some kesar pista ice-cream. By the time we came home, we were exhausted. I wasn't ready to go to sleep yet. Even though we were tired, we decided to play chess. At that point it dawned on me that I was going to miss being in Bhubaneswar. It wasn't just the family and people. It was the town itself, which was full of diversity, temples, food, restaurants, museums, friends, family, grandma's beautiful apartment, Puri beach, culture, and Hari. By now I knew it well that even though I was enjoying being in India thoroughly and was soaking it all in, the main highlight of my day was HARI. I looked forward to talking to him and seeing his sweet face every day. We had exactly four more days in Bhubaneswar and then we were flying to Pondicherry (where my paternal grandparents lived).

My dad joined us in Bhubaneswar two days later. Next evening, I saw Hari on the steps under the half-crescent moon. I saw a completely different side of him that night and I was aback. His sanguine, seemingly sincere countenance was replaced by a melancholic look. His clothes were the same. He still puffed the same bidis, but it didn't feel like it was him. He looked exhausted and his face was sweaty. I could see the wrinkles on his face clearly.

It felt like what I had seen over the past couple of weeks was fake; a façade to please the society. At that moment I felt that what Hari showed to the outer world was not him. Grandma was particularly very kind towards Hari, and she started a conversation.

"Hari, how was your day? Looks like you had an exhausting day." Grandma said.

"Yeah, kind of. But I made some money. So that's good." He said with his magic smile.

“You work way too hard during the day. Make sure you get some rest in the evening and during the night.” Mom spoke.

“Evenings are okay. I don’t like the night.”

“Why not?” Grandma was curious.

“There is something about darkness. It reminds me how lonely I am.” He said in an extremely melancholic voice.

“But Hari, so many people love you. Look at all of us. All the people in these buildings. Everyone is so fond of you. You are a good person. Stay like this always.”

He was silent.

“You, okay?” Grandma asked him again.

He looked at us and smiled. It wasn’t a smile exactly. Behind that fake smile, there was profound sadness.

“Yeah, most people like me for sure. But you see the truth is that I have no home. I have nobody to go to. As far as the night is concerned, I can tolerate the darkness, but something bothers me....”

“What?” Grandma asked him again.

“The Silence of night.” He said while staring at the sky.

“What do you mean?”

“The silence of night is deafening. I hear my heartbeats and that bothers me. Every time my heart beats, it reminds me that I have nobody in this world.”

Grandma was sad and didn't know what to say. She gave him a Rs 100/- note (equivalent to \$2) and we went inside her apartment. It hit me hard. Silence. I felt profound sadness. That night my heart broke into a thousand pieces. But something stuck with me, something I will always remember. I will never forget how sad he looked when he said that the silence of the night was deafening to him. Next morning, I spent a big chunk of my morning sitting on the balcony looking outside. It was hot. Grandma brought me some freshly brewed black coffee. "Ah, we shouldn't be out here." I nodded as she went back inside. I followed suit.

A couple of days later, we left Bhubaneswar. As we were stuffing our bags in the trunk of the cab, I saw him looking at us from a nearby park where he was helping build a wall with cement bricks. He smiled at us, and we smiled back. We gave him a quick wave. When we started driving to the airport, I could see him looking at us with his magic, never disappearing smile.

I still didn't know everything about him and most likely never will. But I was content that I got to spend some time around him. I knew that he was the person who represented the ethics we dreamt of having. Pondicherry made me mighty happy and took my mind away from Bhubaneswar for some time. I had felt how English some of the towns in India were, but Pondicherry was French all-around. The policemen wore the standard French kepi and had their uniforms fitted in a French style. I loved it.

I went to a French restaurant in Pondicherry with my first cousins. They had come all the way from another state to spend a week with us. When we were waiting for food, I told them about Hari. It was hilarious because they wanted to know about my life in the U.S. and here, I was talking about Hari. When food arrived, it was a mix of French and Indian dishes. Behind the table where I sat was a wide, romantic portrait of Napoleon waving his sheathed sword at a chaotic battlefield with the tricolor hoisted up in the center of the misery. Austrians and Prussians could be seen on the far side of the field advancing in columns and dropping from the powerful musket and cannon fire hurled towards them. I recognized one man, Marshal Davout galloping towards the enemy flamboyantly.

Pondicherry was fun overall, but I often thought about Hari, who I had left behind in Bhubaneswar. I realized how rich my heritage was and how much India had to offer. I was so glad that I could connect to the land and its people. I felt the pride of being Indian rise in me. I could experience being true to my identity. The people I met on this

journey were extraordinary. A tank commander who fought in the Indo-Pakistani wars, street vendors, Carnatic musicians, and most importantly: Hari. People like Hari were rare. I knew it well that he would reside in my heart. I was going to miss his eyes which spoke an ocean of words, his smile, and his character in general.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, grandma informed us that Hari passed away. He tested positive after he complained of shiver and cough. Some of the residents pooled in money to get him admitted to a local hospital. But he died after a couple of weeks due to multiple organ failure. This was the time when COVID-19 was rampaging India and decimating the population. Hari didn't have a family to mourn for him or friends who wrote a thoughtful and emotional eulogy. He passed away with the quiet remembrances of all those who surrounded him and all those who had experienced the touch of his kindness.

Everything will be okay when we have angels like Hari on this earth- I remind myself every day.

Bella Simonte

She has a beam that soothes woodland creatures and makes children on the street giggle. No amount of sunscreen could smoothen the ridges of wrinkles that cup her dimples and coat her eyes.

Sometimes I feel jealous that she greets other people with her beam, people she doesn't even know; strangers at the market or people walking their dog in Central Park. I want to be the only one she beams at, soaking in every sparkle I can. But, she says it's important to share. That some people need her sparkle more than I do.

She says all I have right now is a glisten. That I have to learn from the world before I can have a beam. I interpret that to mean I'll get mine on my tenth birthday, when I get to double digits, but she says I have to be patient. It'll come with time.

I don't know when that time will come, but someday I'll have a beam like hers. Someday I'll dress my beam with the same pink paint she does, and leave a stain on my coffee mug. Someday I'll kiss someone's cheek the way she does mine. Someday I'll have a beam so bright my house never goes dark, and my friends and family never have to know what it feels like to not be shone on. Someday I'll shine my beam at the little boy walking to school, and the new family who moved into the house down the street with the tall windows and nice ghosts. And then one day, when my beam dims, I'll know I left the world a brighter place. The same way she left the world for me.

A Slice of an Orange

Reva Patchava

The slice of an orange means love in my family. When we were younger, my sister and I had the world between us. Hate was an understatement for the fury I felt when I was around her. Yet at the end of the day, after our playful dinner conversation, we sat in silence as she peeled a juicy clementine for the both of us and we rejoiced when the sweetest juice hit our tongue. It didn't matter that it was the only connection we had all day or that I wouldn't see her till next dinner. The comfort of knowing that after a rough day filled with school, basketball, golf, swimming or whatever under the sun that we had both decided to accomplish, our dinner bar stools were waiting for an enthusiastic conversation to end the night. Somewhere in between time, our connection turned from reading stories to sharing gossip and from homemade dinners to chipotle runs. In that time I have found a special space in my sister's heart no matter our distance. With what feels like fewer years between us, our time together was filled with short days, long nights and beautiful springs.

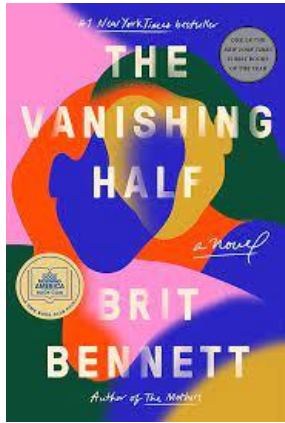
To my mom, our lives were her dream. With her sister being years in advance from her, not even living with her in highschool, back then she spent most of her time alone. To absorb with reluctance our special connection that allowed us to say the same fruit without thinking, play hand games the entire 10 hours to Minnesota, or portray some of our favorite characters on TV brought her back to the childhood she wished she experienced. Looking back at such an important time it angers me, wishing I would have absorbed more of the infamous Patchava sister memories. Because now, the shrieks of joy from the actions of the tickle monster have been replaced by the rum of the air conditioning and our car rides are no longer. When warned about change, I feared the conversation; "What would that mean for MY future, how would that affect me". The selfishness took charge of me like the reins of a horse directing me to the safest path. Who was to blame for the uncomfortable situation I had now been placed in. My stagnant normal life was protected by avoidance and naiveness. But like a fly to a light, the day came like any other: My golf coach moving schools or my sister leaving to go to college. Everything felt like a reconstruction of a perfect jenga tower that I had just built; each year greedily grabbing a piece waiting for it to topple. I desperately felt the need to take back what was mine, gluing pieces back together. But what I hadn't realized is that as the new efforts of change came, I got over what was before. I moved on, and on with no reminiscence of what I believed ruined my life. My sister leaving got replaced by my new trimester classes and I got used to waiting by the doorstep for my carpool instead of in the car. My body adapted to the new circumstances unconsciously rewiring every learned action that involved my sister. The house with the purple door that we had grown in had grown silent, and the little things around it were placed for the purpose of remembrance was something I hadn't grasped. The chip in the wall caused

by us chasing each other around with sticks or the faint paint stains on the wood that encased the special memory of our art projects were forever marks, hence why my mom hated all the new homes we looked at . On days that have become harder for me to find joy, the pockets of the past surrounding me take me back to a time when my AP chemistry class's homework was non-existent and my petty friend drama was over American Girl Dolls.

Sometimes I found myself settling into my "new" life, enjoying my peaceful dinners and bedroom theater nights, knowing a couple hours away my sister was doing the same thing . The new chapters of our lives that didn't involve the intense revolve around each other but rather new faces and experiences had become a reality, one that I used to dread. As she left patches of years past behind to create space for new ones, following the paper trail were my tiny hands grasping each memory to collect and add to my own mosaic. What she hadn't realized was as time went on I had become her, learning each and every move that would take me on the path to what I considered "The Perfect Life". Her approval was the final decision for my choices, and I joked that erasing her would make me a ghost. Her effect on me was brighter than any other and her decisions became a step by step plan. Now that my days are no longer busy, having not much to accomplish, I recall old times while I peel myself a full clementine, getting the skin stuck in my nails and squirting the juice in my eye leaving a singular clean piece next to me on her empty chair.

Book Review (books about finding + growing through community)
Lexie Rooks

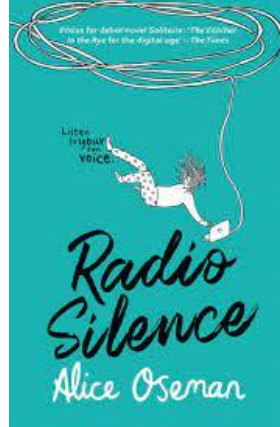
Brit Bennett



This book is centered around twin sisters of which one is living as a black woman and one is living as a white woman. It goes through generational shifts and talks about how their daughters live their lives. I really loved the dynamic between the family members and all the representation in this

book throughout many communities.

Alice Oseman



This book is about two best friends, Aled and Frances. The reader gets to see them grow and watch them individually. It depicts realistic relationships while the viewer gets to experience all the ups and downs of friendships. I don't think this was Alice Oseman's best book,

however, the character development and growth through friendship was very well thought out and organized.

Mary H.K. Choi



This was a very powerful book about two Korean American sisters living in NYC. It is centered around disordered lives with past hurts that have yet to be resolved. There is a trigger warning to this book around body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and mental health

issues. However, the writing was amazing as the book was entirely written in the first person pov of the younger sister. It handles love within messy families, a sense of healing, and self growth that everyone should experience.

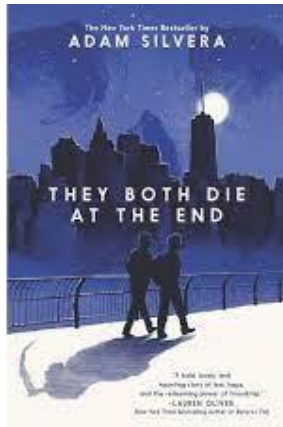
Casey McQuiston



This book explores a relationship that is looked down upon by the royal family and how they think it will impact them in the public eye. We see the two main characters, Alex and Henry, find a relationship and grow together both outside and inside

the public view. It covers grief from a young age while discovering sexuality and how that impacts someone's being. Not only does it show representation for finding yourself and the LGBTQ+ community, but also looking through how family can impact a person.

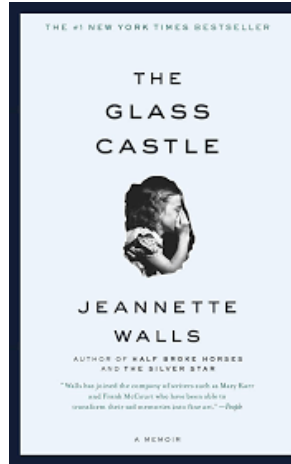
Adam Silvera



They Both Die at the End is a super moving book. Although it doesn't have a huge spike in the plot line or any real plot twists, it is filled with amazing writing as it depicts how important friendship really is. In this society, people are informed when they will pass away

within 24 hours. Two boys both get this alert and find each other through an app for people in similar situations. They live out their last day together and say goodbye to their loved ones. Friendship and finding community within our lives is truly what keeps us going, making this book a must read.

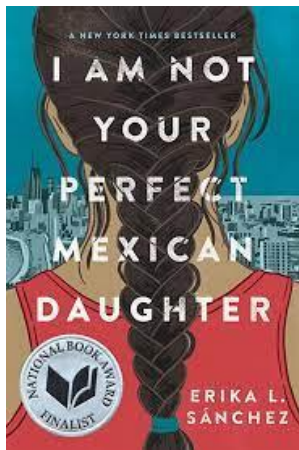
Jeannette Walls



This book is centered around Jeannette Wall's childhood and growing up with unconventional parents, who deal with alcoholism and other mental issues. There is definitely a trigger warning for sexual assault and abuse, making this book an intense but powerful one. The

writing was skillful and done in a way that didn't feel dense or boring. I really liked the depiction of resilience and perseverance through hardships, and how one can love people while simultaneously recognizing that they are just awful.

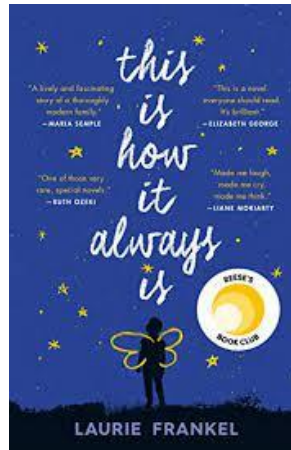
Erika L. Sánchez



This book follows a teenage girl and her daily life. It represents a Mexican American lifestyle and is very coming of age. We see the main character, Julia, experience loss in her family and her dating life. It does a really good job of showing the journey

of where she wants to go and her dreams. Julia finds herself struggling because she has a goal for herself, but her family doesn't fully understand. So she is finding herself as her own person, while also trying to live up to her parents expectations.

Laurie Frankel



This book depicts a reality centered around a whole family when the youngest child is born as a boy but starts to identify as a girl. This book follows what the family goes through and how they protect their child. The family representation in

hard times was shown so well. Finding oneself and the struggles of self identity can be a relatable concept for many people. This is a very unique read that was catered to this family specifically on a very important topic that everyone should be exposed to.

Kristel Solano

When I first got to the country, I was lost. There were too many people that didn't speak my language and I couldn't understand the street signs so I was always lost and confused. Because of the language barrier, I was not able to communicate which made the impact of moving to a different country a hundred times worse. But everything changed when I first joined my local school. The environment was so friendly and my classmates were so nice. This made me feel comfortable with making mistakes and learning from them. In doing so it prevented me from feeling disappointed in myself. I was able to learn from my mistakes, I was able to make mistakes without feeling disappointed in myself. My school community helped me go through the change of a new culture and new life and I will never forget that.

Personality Types

<p>The Duty Fulfiller</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and serious • Responsible and thorough • Dependable • Hard-working • Can accomplish any task they set their mind to 	<p>The Mechanic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and shy • Talented at putting things together and taking them apart • Can be risk-takers • Not always concerned about following rules 	<p>The Nurturer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and kind • Dependable • Usually puts the needs of others before their own • Aware and observant about other people's feelings • Considerate 	<p>The Artist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet, sensitive and serious • Appreciates beautiful things • Likes to be original and creative • Not interested in being in leadership or controlling roles
<p>The Protector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet but forceful • Sticks to things until they are done • Concerned about other people's feelings • Well-respected by others • Likely to be an individual rather than lead or follow 	<p>The Idealist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and loyal • Laid-back and flexible • Usually talented writers • Quick-thinkers • Able to generate ideas and see possibilities • Interested in helping others 	<p>The Scientist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent and determined • Has a way of turning ideas into action • Enjoys learning and gaining knowledge • Thinks ahead rather than just about the moment • Able to lead others well 	<p>The Thinker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and reserved, hard to get to know well • Original and creative thinkers • Very smart and values knowledge • Prefers working alone
<p>The Doer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly and works well with others • Risk-takers • Impatient with long explanations • Focused on getting immediate results 	<p>The Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized and practical • Hard-working • Has clear visions of the way things should be • Likes to be in charge • "Good citizens" who respect peaceful living 	<p>The Performer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun-loving • Loves new experiences • Usually the center of attention • Good sense of right and wrong • Practical, not complicated 	<p>The Caregiver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular • Warm-hearted • Has a strong sense of responsibility and duty • Respects traditions • Interested in serving others
<p>The Inspirer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eager and creative • Great people skills/gets along well with anyone • Personal beliefs and morals are important to how they live life • Interested and able in a wide variety of things 	<p>The Giver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive and popular • Truly concerned about the feelings of others • Dislikes being alone – prefers working with others • Humane • Helpful with other's issues – can help find solutions 	<p>The Visionary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and quick-thinking • Enjoys conversations that they can argue • Outspoken and not afraid to say what they think • People enjoy their company and can be motivated by their ideas 	<p>The Executive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven to lead • Very outspoken and have a "take charge" attitude • Able to understand complicated problems and find solutions • Intelligent and good speakers • Has little patience for disorder or inefficiency

Anonymous

Today my teacher asked me to pick two personalities from the image above that best describes me in the workplace. At first it was difficult for me to figure out which two I'd choose. It wasn't until I carefully reflected that I think I strongly align with the "Idealist" and the "Nurturer". Many of the Idealist's attributes are similar to who I think, and have heard I am. I try to be as flexible as possible when it comes to being selfless in workplace scenarios, and I think being kind and considerate is vital in all of them. The Nurturer is also observant when it comes to other's feelings which I achieve to always be considerate of. At first I thought this activity was silly, but I've come to realize just why I was asked to do so. I suggest you take some time to self-reflect and pick two personalities you think are the most similar to you. Maybe you'll learn something from it.

The Appeal of Fictional Dystopias

Liam McGlohon

In the last few months, I've noticed a strange trend among fans of the cyberpunk genre. For those unaware, cyberpunk is a dystopian sci-fi genre focusing on the combination of "lowlife and high-tech." It presents a world owned by huge megacorporations fighting for dominance over the corpse of a broken world. In many ways it is a deeply cynical genre, none of the heroes end happily, the most anyone can hope for is to burn bright and die a legend.

Despite these grim themes, and grimmer settings, there is a sizable fanbase that fantasizes about living in dystopian settings like this. Much of the appeal of series like Hunger Games, Divergent, and Mazerunners is how readers can project themselves into the universe, imagine themselves in one of Hunger Game's districts or Divergent's Factions. Despite the objective horror of these settings readers still want to be a part of them.

I propose the appeal of these settings is twofold - firstly there is a clear enemy and avenue to fight them. In real life for every problem there are hundreds of different ideas on how to solve it and some who refuse to acknowledge it's even a problem. In contrast, in a dystopia it's understood who's responsible without any introspection, the evil king or megacorporation is responsible for the state of the world, and even if they can't be brought down, the villain is clear. A reader doesn't have to analyze their own society, challenge their own preconceptions, or do any of the other hard work that's required for radical change.

Secondly, in this suffering there is solidarity, many of these settings have inbuilt social structures. Community is central to the way all people cope with suffering and this is multiplied tenfold in dystopian stories. In our current dystopia, community is a commodity, people are more lonely than ever, and many can't seem to imagine anything better. Even in an age of instant communication people feel more isolated than ever. People want a fictional dystopia because they want a community, they want connections with others, and they want the powerful held to account but have no hope in this world.