



The Shoal

A Literary and Art Journal by The Gifford Street Writers

Falmouth High School 2020-2021



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On the Cover

Plover by Casey McGowan '22



Forward

The Gifford Street Writers started this year with a better knowledge of the complications of being a writing club on Zoom. We met; we wrote; we shared; we gave each other feedback.

And our experience from last spring helped us as we began reviewing submissions for this issue of *The Shoal*. We digitized our processes, created fluid deadlines, and completed our journal earlier than any other year.

In short, we adapted and adjusted. And therein lies the real truth to the “new norm” of our club and journal.

Resilience.

That manner of resilience starts with Maryann McCarthy, our senior editor. She was an invaluable leader who maintained a quiet humor as we tackled over 75 art and 25 writing submissions. She offered her insight with honesty and a willingness to be open-minded to others’ views. I will miss our interactions and her writing. And I’d like to recognize that same resilience in this editorial board, who examined excellent art and writing over many Wednesday afternoons on Zoom. They were a small group, and they were diligent.

I have been honored to be the advisor for The Gifford Street Writers since 2004, when Casey Guerin pitched the idea of creating an FHS writing club and journal. Our student editors and contributors have consistently published a stellar journal, twice recognized nationally for its excellence by the National Council of Teachers of English. Each year we have challenged our own ideas of what *The Shoal* should look like. That same ethos will continue in the fall, when a new advisor and senior editor envision *The Shoal*’s future. I look forward to seeing what they will create.

Ms. Barbara Stephens, MFA
Advisor



lightspin

Andrew Bielinski '21

I was deep in prayer that night. The Holy Tower near the old dilapidated industrial park was my primary place of worship, being that it took only ten minutes to get there by bike. The Tower was located on the grassy hills that could only be accessed through the labyrinth of dead streets. The streets traced around huge empty parking lots and gated buildings with graffiti strewn across their exterior walls. There was the occasional tag, but much more common was the Disruptors' symbol of the one-eyed pentagon. I had never seen any Disruptors there, or at all for that matter. If I had, they looked just like any normal person.

I rested my bike against the last pine tree at the very end of the road, and started my walk over to the hill. Even at night, when the moon was the sole bearer of light, the Tower was visible. You heard it before you saw it of course. From the road I could hear its great spin and at the apex of the hill, I saw its three great arms, in their constant, elegant turn.

Once I had reached the tower, I sat down a couple feet away from it. I closed my eyes and relaxed my body, feeling the three arms carry small gusts of wind down to me. When I was younger it helped to imagine I was at sea. That I was sitting at the shore and the waves would come up over me before receding in a perpetual cycle. I performed my daily prayers; health to me and my friends, prosperity to the Tower, thanking the ancient gods that built it and kept it turning.

As I started my prayers, I heard something from far behind me. I considered that others were here

to worship, but it seemed unlikely, being that it was so late in the night. Turning around I saw two figures running up the hill, some large object carried between them. I could barely make out their movements, staggering in their struggle to support the weight of whatever they were holding onto. I rose to my feet and backed away at a distance both my fear and curiosity would allow. Once they had both reached the summit of the hill, conjoined at the torso by that object, it let out a vicious roar that cut through the quiet night and caused me to fall backward and scurry even further away from the horrid noise. Before I could compose myself, they all met the base of the Tower and the industrial roar turned to a buzzing screech. Little sparks of yellow exploded from the base, illuminating the two bodies in a fountain of light. The machine was dragged down, carving a crude gash in the layer of metal, hundreds of light bits hopping onto the Disruptors' clothes just to immediately die out.

The bald one put all his might into levering open a passageway with a crowbar as the girl continued to slice open the base. She couldn't support the weight for too much longer, but it didn't matter, because they had peeled open the Tower's skin. The girl went first, wedging herself through the makeshift door. As soon as she stepped foot in the interior, there came a blinding light from the wound, so bright and mesmerizing. The other Disruptor muttered something under his breath before jumping into the area with his companion. The light pulsed curiously, beckoning me. I felt my body take steps



toward the light, more of the brightness enveloping my field of vision. I crawled into the light and collapsed on the cold floor.

The colossal tube had a mirror-like iridescent lining that reflected, but also maybe generated colorful light. The Disruptors rose motionless up the wide tube of light, in a pose of weightless ascension. It wasn't long until I felt my gravity lessen as the Tower pulled me up its height, wrapping me in blankets of light and bringing me closer and closer to the head of the propeller.

When the brightness was at its nearly unbearable climax, I passed through the barrier into the Tower's head and was nearly instantly shot out like a cannonball. I fell at first, until the fall turned to spinning. As I tried to gain a little semblance of where I was, I opened my eyes to see a fractal abyss of space, intricate patterns off in the infinite distance. At the center of it was the steel ovoid head. I could see the man trying to gain any spacial

awareness, flailing desperately, his limbs tracing jagged paths through the air. The girl faced straight towards the head, her body completely limp. We started to rotate around the head like planets and in our spin we blurred and melded together.

I saw from the two others and everything was me. I saw the two Disruptors with my eyes closed. And in seeing them, I saw everything they saw. Everything they had ever seen. I saw the head of god as he joined us all together. We were the smallest pieces in the game of infinite complexity, simultaneously witnessing every action we had ever produced, all working towards this moment of enlightenment. We felt the deepest, richest understanding anyone or anything could ever feel. We became the same, and in that last moment of fleeting consciousness, before our minds collapsed, there was an ethereal voice that whispered our souls into pure light.



Fish Dreams

Jaden Miranda '21



Rustic Home

Maria Krag '21

Time

Samantha Malfy '22

Time; this blank slate in life
I never fully appreciated
My time is never thought through
Especially when there wasn't reason to
The slow but fast pace
Infinite sea with limitations
Morning to night and over again
Everyone experiences
The never ending process
In life with time
Maybe someday
Everything will still in silence
The seconds will stop ticking
It won't matter you failed that algebra test
Moons won't retrograde
If we stop and breathe for a second
May we all see the birds ahead
Every star in the sky
The leaves our trees shed
If we stop and breathe for a second
Maybe just maybe
Everyone will be happy again



2020

Hope Oliveira '22

Betrayal

Eva Reif '22

I was running for my life. Adrenaline coursed through my body. Bullets whizzed past me, left and right, narrowly missing their mark. My ears rang and my heart thundered against my ribcage as though it was trying to break out. Every quick ragged breath I took felt like tiny ice daggers in my lungs.

"He's heading toward the wood!" someone belted behind me.

My combat boots crunched on the dead leaves that carpeted the forest floor. Every muscle in my legs pleaded for rest. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Never in a million years would I have imagined my comrades trying to kill me.

Comrades that I've laughed with.

Comrades that I've shared meals with.

Comrades that I've fought with.

They were all tasked to hunt me down.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I didn't mean to kill him. Really I didn't. I...BLAM! Pain erupted through my thigh and I crashed to the ground. I screamed, clutching my leg. Scarlett seeped through my pants.

"I got him!" one of my pursuers cackled.

In seconds they had surrounded me like a pack of hungry wolves. All firearms were pointed at me. I recognized most of them. My comrades, some with solemn expressions. The rest looked reluctant to aim a gun at me. But orders were orders.

"Well, well, well," a cool voice drawled above me.

A steel-toed boot kicked me onto my back. There

stood my former captain. His silvery irises glinted with malice. His usual slicked back hair was disheveled and matted with half-dried blood. Half of his ear was missing, courtesy of me. It glistened red and fresh. He wore a pitch-black fur cuff trench coat over his military uniform.

"Urizen," I choked through gritted teeth.

"Emil," he said, spreading his arms in a welcoming gesture. "Is that any way to address a superior?"

He kneeled down to better study my face. He was looking at me the way an owner looks at their dog until they obey.

"Commander," I spat, finally giving in.

He smiled. "Good boy."

I never liked Urizen. He had little sympathy for failure or mishaps. He always had this little smirk whenever he looked at me. White, hot anger simmered underneath my skin.

My nails dug into the earth. "You..."

I tried to get up, but my arms screamed in protest. Spots danced across my vision. My thigh felt like it was on fire. Urizen reached out and hovered his palm over my wound. The bleeding slowed. The pain lessened, but only enough for me to focus on him. I slumped back down to the forest floor, drawing ragged gasping breaths.

"Dying would indeed be problematic," he said, standing up. "However, traitors such as yourself do not deserve that luxury just yet. Tie him up!"

I felt rough hands bind my wrists behind my back.



"I'm sorry," a familiar voice whispered in my ear.
"Norn?"

Before I could say anything else, two soldiers half carried, half dragged me toward a nearby tree, and propped me against it. Urizen stood in front of me. I saw Norn in the back coiling up the extra rope. They didn't look at me.

"Now tell me, why did you betray us?"

My attention snapped back to the commander. "I didn't betray anyone!" I snarled.

The ugly sneer melted off his face. "Lies!"

"I couldn't just stand by and let innocent people get slaughtered."

"Innocent people?" Urizen let out a short, bark-like laugh. "This country is full of spies. The Neivilheinians have eyes everywhere. Of course, you would know this because you're one of them."

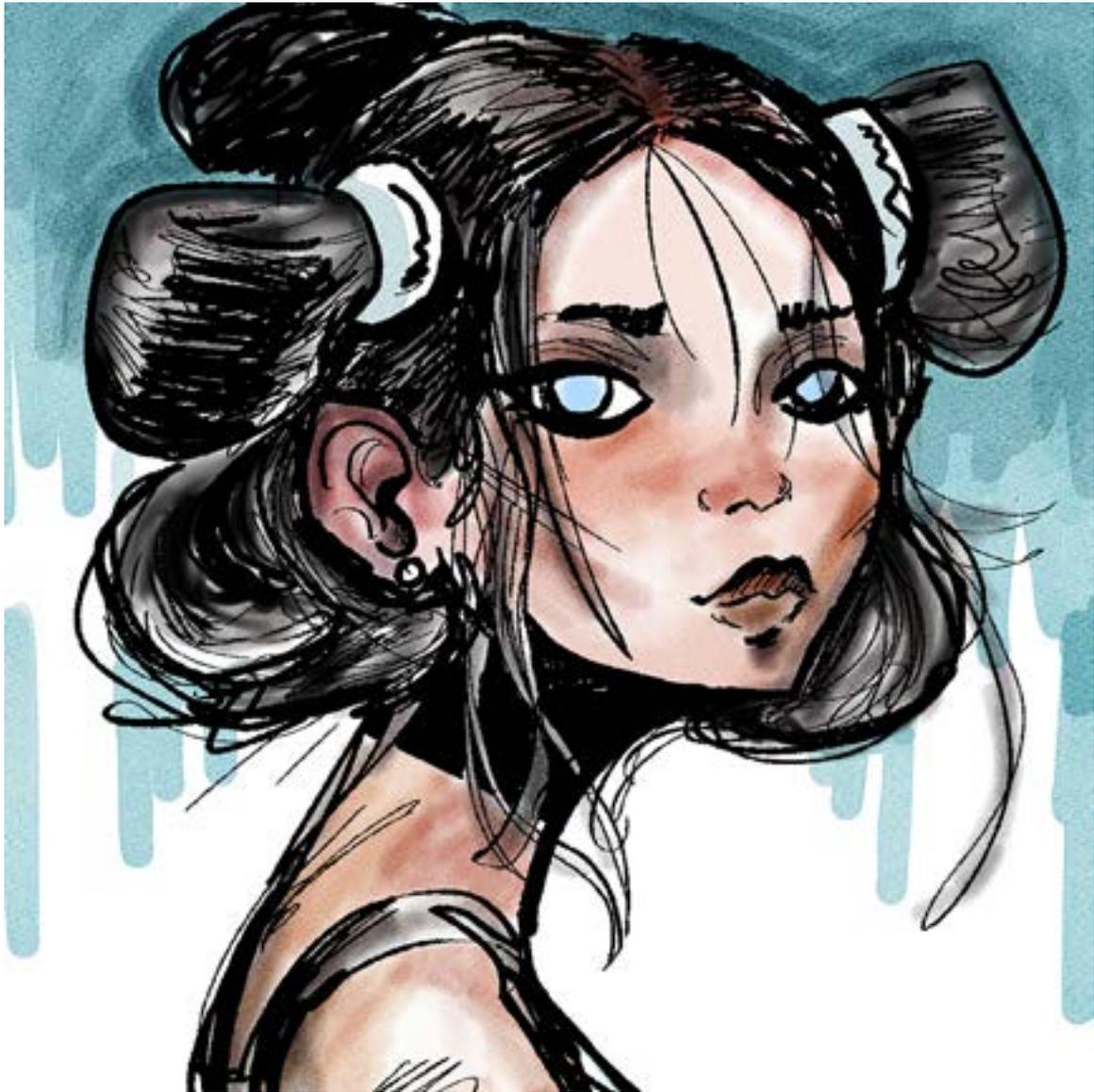
"I'm not..." I started, but I was cut off once again.

"You know, I heard rumors that there was a 'Neiv' among us. I never would have imagined it was you." He ran a gloved hand through his disheveled white hair. "But it would make sense for them to send someone you would least expect to turn."

I stared at him. How could he believe that I was the spy? How could he excuse his soldiers that were going to gun down farmers just for offering them food? Hopelessness clawed at my throat. Was I really going to die here, alone, ringed by former friends who now considered me a threat?

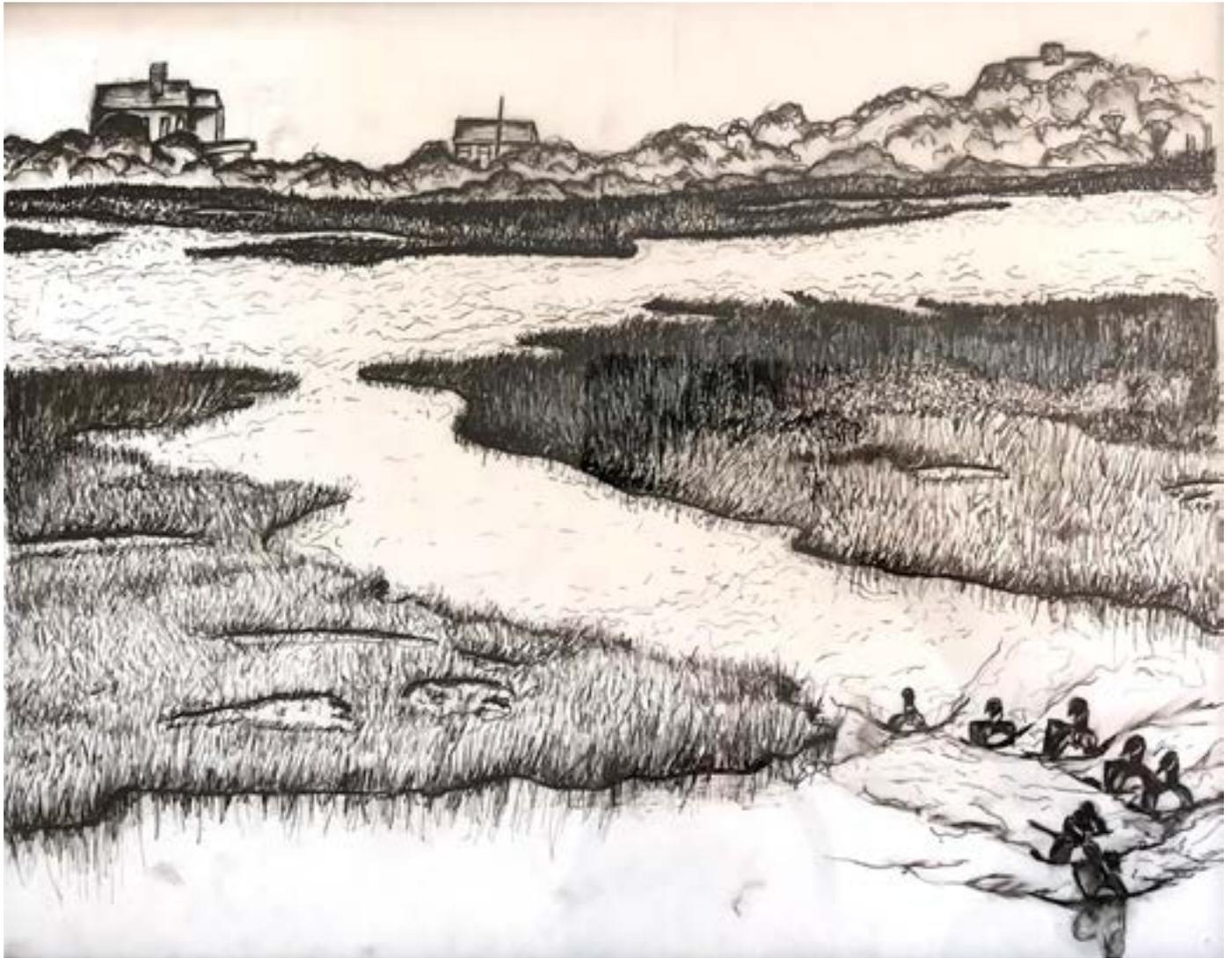
I stammered, "S...sir. I'm not the enemy. You have to believe me. Please."

Urizen's lip curled. "Still lying, Emil? You have seven rifles pointed at you. If I were you, I'd start talking."



A Summers Glance

Dabney Peters '22



Ducks Atop Glass

Catelyn Charette '22

figures from a study in power

Lee Jackson '22

it is March.
let the days pass.
you won't get anywhere
if you interrupt it.

today will mark March seventh.
i push up my eyes and grab
the clipboard off the wall. it is
the fourth time i
have conducted
this study in power,
that i have had seven months. i
face my subject. i strike him.

lichtenberg figures surround him in the shadows
they grab at his limbs and upend his roots
there is no change observed in him
i tell him i'll return, and
he spits at my feet.
tomorrow will mark the Eighth.



Our New Reality

Tierney Roggiolani '21

Untitled

Cooper Brandt '21

2/6/20 7:45 AM

Based off of looks Roland wasn't anything special. He was a short guy with patchy facial hair, but he was my friend. Roland always found ways to make me stumble in our matches. His knack for chess was borderline frustrating. But during our morning bike ride to school he seemed a little off.

"Hey Magnus," he paused. "I can trust you right?"

The look on Roland's face was unfamiliar. A bleak and desperate expression that made me feel cold.

"What kind of question is that?" I replied hastily. "You can tell me anything, I won't repeat it. I swear."

Roland's expression got even bleaker. "I think... th- that I'm quitting chess for now."

"But Roland," I choked up. "What about the tournament, and our goals? We both said that this tournament would be our big break."

He closed his palm, crushing a leaf that he had been carrying. "This life, our world. It can all be described as easily as the rules of chess," he said solemnly.

"Don't be so dramatic, Roland, if you quit I guess I'll have to be the best to ever play the game and not you."

His expression got a little lighter, "Don't be so pompous Magnus," he scoffed. Think about what the future holds in store. Do you really want to spend all of it on Chess.com?"

"Where is this coming from Roland? What are you not telling me?"

Roland's face started to swell. "It's nothing!" he shouted. "Don't act like you know everything Magnus!" he said defensively.

"That can't possibly be the reason, Roland. I've

known you long enough to know when you're hiding something from me."

"I don't deserve to be the best at anything," Roland muttered. "That's why I'm done." He hopped on his bike and sped off towards the school.

"Roland, hold up!" But it was too late. I let out an exasperated sigh, "What is wrong with him."

2/12/20 7:15 AM

*Beep *Beep *Beep

"Ughh... It's too early for this crap," I groaned as I slammed the snooze button on my irritating alarm clock. I quickly threw on my clothes, as my body followed the aroma of fresh coffee.

"Good Morning, my love."

"Hey mom," I mumbled.

"Sleep good," she poured the dark brown liquid into my mug.

"Amazing," I said snarkily.

She smiled, "Anything wrong hun? You usually don't get up this late."

I looked into her nurturing eyes, "Yeah," I said quietly. "Someone's just on my mind lately."

She took a sip of her coffee, "Do you want to talk about it?"

I paused for a moment, "What would you do if your best friend suddenly stopped talking to you?"

"Well, I'd probably throw myself into my work, take my mind off it."

"Yeah," I stared into the mug.

"Some people aren't capable of keeping friendships, Magnus," she said softly then passed me my lunch.



“Try not to worry so much, okay?”

I grabbed the brown paper bag, “Thank you,” I said as I headed for the door.

“Have a good day sweetie!”

I sighed, “I’ll try.”

8:00 AM

The bell rang for the first period. Algebra, a class Roland and I shared.

“Good morning everyone!” my teacher said loudly.

“Have a seat, and take out your notes from yesterday.”

Taking my seat I then looked around for Roland. Usually we walk into class together, but we hadn’t been riding to school together. As I took out my notes, I accidentally dropped my notebook. “What the hell,” I groaned.

Before I could reach down to pick it up, Roland had grabbed it. “I think you dropped this,” he said, handing me the book.”

I grabbed it from his hands. “Thanks I guess.” I felt a bitterness towards him.

He looked down at the floor. “Sorry I’ve been blowing you off lately.”

“Yeah well I don’t know what the problem is but I’m over it.”

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “Well, see you at the tournament tonight.” He walked back to his seat.

The tournament? Wasn’t he quitting just a few days ago?

9:06 PM “The Tournament”

We pulled up to the school’s gymnasium where the matches were to be held. When I stepped out of the car I immediately felt the chill of the February wind.

“Good Luck tonight,” my mother said.

“Thanks. Don’t forget it ends at 10:30, okay?”

She smiled and rolled up her window as the car pulled away. I looked up at the tournament’s banner, flapping on the side of the gym: Chess Tournament Finals.

“Let’s see if he actually decided to show up,” I said making my way to the entrance.

When I opened the door I saw three tables on the gym floor, each with a board, pieces and timer. Beside the entrance was a check-in desk with our chess club’s runner, Mr Frost.

“Good evening Mr Carlton, please sign your name on the sheet in front of you,” Mr Frost said as I approached the desk.

There was a sheet of paper on the desk with three of the contender’s names on it. Roland Weary, Juice Shabazz, Robert Craft.

“Of course he was the first one here,” I signed my name on the sheet.

“Perfect! Have a seat at board 2, you will be facing Mr Shabazz first.”

Walking over to the table I saw Roland sitting nervously in front of Robert, then I saw Juice with his feet up on the table.

“Feeling nervous fella,” he said confidently. “I don’t blame you.”

I smirked and pulled out my seat. “We’ll see who’s nervous, Juice.”

“Gentleman!” Mr Frost spoke over the intercom. “We will now begin the matches! But first the rules,” he said with enthusiasm. “The matches will be 45 minutes long, standard scrimmage rules apply. Once you finish, the winner’s from each match will continue to the final’s. Now Begin!”

I slammed my timer start and made the first move. “Let’s make this quick shall we.”

9:33 PM

"Checkmate!" I shouted triumphantly.

Juice groaned. "Damn, I didn't even see that."

"Good match. Juice, It wasn't as easy as I thought," I said sarcastically.

He scoffed and stormed out of the gym.

"Well done, Mr Carlton, Please have a seat at board 3. Mr Weary is waiting for you."

Frost led me to the final board. As I approached the table, Roland briefly looked at me. I met his look with a glare that made him look back down.

"How was your match?" Roland said.

I took my seat. "Easy, you?"

"Tough, Robert doesn't mess around." He fixed his collar.

"Well," I cracked my knuckles. "Let's get this over with."

He tapped the game timer. "Yeah, good luck."

10:15

Our match crawled by. Every second was as methodical and thought out as our usual games in chess club. I could feel the itching sensation of sweat coming from my pores, as I made my next move.

"Rook to D5." I tapped the timer.

Roland scanned the board. "Nice move." He moved his piece.

"Tell me something, Roland," I said tapping the timer.

"What is it?"

I took his pawn with my rook. "Remember when I said I knew you were hiding something from me?"

He stared at his pieces. "Yeah, I do."

"Well, were you?"

Roland paused as his queen swiftly took my rook. "I

was."

"Then why didn't you tell me? You know you can trust me, right?"

"I know I can." He looked out the gym window. "I just had to figure something out. By myself."

I was stunned, "What do you mean? Figure out what?"

"You're running out of time Magnus."

"Oh crap." I quickly moved and tapped the timer.

Roland was always different when it came to chess. On the outside he was fragile and weak. Put a board in front of him and he stands taller than any man. It was now that I realized how much taller he was standing.

"So you're not gonna tell me?" I asked.

His queen closed in on my territory. "I've always looked up to you, you know."

"What do you mean?" I moved my knight into the attack position.

"Chess club was the only good part of my day," he said solemnly. "Because of you and our matches." He moved his queen. "But now I feel different."

"How? I-I don't understand."

He looked me dead in the eyes. "I stopped caring about you."

I was shocked. Roland never had the guts to tell off anyone. "What do you mean? What did you figure out?"

"And time!" Mr Frost yelled.

"What?" I said appalled. "How is that possible?"

"You were so obsessed with others around you that you forgot to worry about yourself." Roland reached out his hand. "That's what I figured out."

I shook my head. "Well, you got me. I gotta hand it to you." I shook his hand.

"Good game," he said.

"Yeah, good game."



The Vine Plates

Sophia Kasparian '21

A Rose without Thorns

Siena Girouard '22

Eyes like steaming cocoa,
Reminding me of that one wintry night
When we sat by the fireplace,
Freeing birds from the cages of our minds

Her eyes are deep like forests,
Vibrant like autumnal leaves
If someone were to look inside,
They could lose a mind among those trees

Make those eyes sun kissed,
And let them smile bright,
So even in the darkest times
They can still hug the sorrow away

Big and brown; they are like rich soil,
Dampened by a vernal rainstorm
This gift from the skies births new life,
In other words, a field of flowers to frolic in

But as we amble through this meadow of life,
She struggles to find commonalities between herself and the others
Because in her world,
She's a *rose without thorns*



Jellyfish
Samuel Collins '24

One Number Away

Nora Deyo '21

I always swore I'd never listen to country music. Something about the twangy voices and the songs of men drinking copious amounts of beer and oversexualizing women really made my blood boil. If it ever came on the radio, I'd immediately change the station, even if it meant listening to NPR for the duration of whatever car journey I was on. If someone around me insisted upon listening to "Today's Top Country," I'd leave the room or put in the closest set of earbuds I could find and put on what I considered "acceptable" music. After all, I grew up on Cape Cod, the land of 4.5 million dollar homes and picturesque dream vacations, so I felt that the narratives told in country music didn't fit my lifestyle.

You see, I take great pride in my plethora of Spotify playlists, and I have one to fit just about every mood or genre that could possibly exist. Rap? Got it. Need some songs to cry to? Hopefully not, but I do have that, too. Nothing but John Mayer? You bet. I even have one entitled, "Songs That Could Probably Be the Soundtrack to the Stories My Dad Tells Me About Being a Teen in the 80s." Long winded, yes, but descriptive. Now, I usually listen to nothing but the playlists I curate (I'm a very routine-oriented person), but one day, I was feeling particularly bold. Alone in my room, I decided to open Spotify and click the button that I avoided like the plague: a Spotify-created playlist called "Hot Country."

The first couple of songs were exactly the kind of stereotype I had always condemned, and I heard lyrics about driving trucks on a back road and sitting at a bar with some buddies. But then, after skipping a few tracks, I stopped. Quite honestly, I think I was just

bored of tapping my finger against the "skip" button. Looking down at my phone, I said to myself, "Might as well take note of this for being the first country song that hasn't completely repulsed you," and I will forever have the image of "One Number Away" by Luke Combs ingrained in my mind.

After that initial listening, I repeated the song about five more times (maybe even more). Something about it, even today, completely hypnotizes me. I immediately created a brand new playlist called, "Songs I Surprisingly Don't Hate," made specifically so that song could have a home. It's funny, really, because the story isn't even something I can relate to. The lyrics tell of a man who is completely hung up on his ex, and is battling with himself to avoid calling her. I have never been in that type of situation whatsoever, so it's not like I enjoy the song because it resonates with me. It doesn't even match any of the criteria I had on the mental checklist I'd go through to decide if a song was worth listening to. For some reason, though, nothing gets the dopamine flowing in my brain the way the all-familiar, "I'm one number away from calling you..." of the song's chorus does. It has almost become my theme song, since I'm always playing it, and everyone who's interacted with me for more than an hour knows it.

Looking back, I'm not quite sure what provoked me to change my listening habits, but I do know one thing: it wasn't the completely life-ruining decision I thought it would be. Everyone always says, "You can't judge a book by its cover," but let me add to that and say, "You can't judge a song by your own preconceived notion of its genre." Not quite as catchy, but true just the same.



The Ballet Dream
Gabriela Polakovic '22



Fruitlands
Lily Hauptmann '21



Rose Vase
Rachelle Andrade '22

The Search

Maryann McCarthy '21

"You mean to tell me you raised an entire army in one hour and then managed to lose it in the span of thirty seconds?" Red shouted. From where she was standing her voice carried across the cave.

Beside her, Burgundy merely shrugged and took another sip from his medium coke that was more ice than anything else. "Yep."

Her eye twitched. How could he be so calm about this? She was about to question him again when he took another long drawn out slurp. The sound of it caused Red's blood to boil. He had to be kidding, the war wasn't prophesied to happen until 2 years from now. They were supposed to be 20 not 18. Red at least wanted to hold onto the hope that she would at least be a functioning adult before this mess would hit.

She pinched the bridge of her nose. "Do you have any idea what you've just done?"

He rubbed his ear and looked down at his hand, smiling slightly, the neon orange nail polish was still there.

"I have some idea, yeah," he said. His monotone voice was unaffected by his words. It was as if it was an ordinary Tuesday like he was going grocery shopping and didn't just screw all of them over by losing an entire army within seconds.

Red kept walking through the dark cave and willed herself not to whack Burgundy over the head with her flashlight. She could feel her skin glowing red from underneath her blue sweatshirt. She gritted her teeth. She needed to calm down. God knows they didn't need another one of her

explosions right now and in a cave no less. "So you know that you managed to speed up the prophecy. And for what?"

She refused to glance over at him, but she could tell he was shrugging.

"It's spooky season," he said as if that explained anything.

She wanted to scream. "Which means?" She felt like she was pushing a car through the mud. Everytime she thought she made progress she only realized she was further behind.

"The Skeleton Army needed recruits."

"It's November!"

"Spooky season is over when I say it's over."

Red inhaled sharply. *This*, this was why she never wanted to be around Burgundy. He was free spirited but annoyingly so and didn't understand people who didn't think like him. She swore if they survived this cave of nightmares she would kill Blue for this.

"Oh come on" they had said, a calm smile spread over their face as the wind blew through their hair. "It will be fun," they said. Red should've said no. She really should've but she didn't have it in her heart too. Blue had looked at her with such sadness. "He's a great person, why can't you try to understand him?"

Truth be told, Red herself didn't know the answer to that. Could she ever understand Burgundy? Probably not considering he just sentenced them to imminent doom. She allowed the feeling of embers scorching her skin, begging to rise to the surface in



a flurry of crackling to wash over her before ultimately letting it go. For Blue, try to understand him for Blue.

“So, do you at least know what direction the skeletons went off in?” She mentally patted herself on the back. She could do this. All she needed to do was just stave off her anger until they found the army. Piece of cake, she could explode when they got back to the base and everything would be fine.

It would’ve worked had Burgundy not opened his mouth. Instead he focused his own flashlight to the fork in the cave.

“That is a great question that I don’t know the answer to.”

She looked up at the ceiling of the cave. “Lord give me patience.”

“Don’t you mean strength?”

She snorted walking past him towards the tunnel to the left. “No, if I had strength I would’ve exploded by now and killed you.”

He nodded and moved to the right tunnel. “That’s fair.”

She rolled her eyes and tapped her foot pointedly. Even the way he brushed off her remark got on her nerves. She hoped he got the hint, but he just kept walking down his path.

She watched as the pink flashlight disappeared behind the wall. She could let him go. She could let him go off on his own and nobody would know. All she had to do was keep walking and she would have peace. She took a step before gritting her teeth. Blue so owed her for this.

Red rushed after Burgundy. “What do you think you’re doing?”

He side eyed her as if she was an idiot. “Splitting up. I thought it would be faster. You want to get out

of this cave as soon as possible, don’t you?”

She let out a long, suffering sigh. “Have you never seen a horror movie? You do realize that’s how people die, right?”

“And?”

He had to be kidding. This had to be some sort of joke, but based on the way he remained perfectly calm it told her everything she needed to know. He really didn’t see an issue with it. She pursed her lips and looked at him for a moment.

The scar running across his left eye was visible. He must’ve taken his eye patch off when he realized that he lost the army. How did she not notice it before? It ran deep, whatever caused it must’ve been one powerful weapon. She wanted to ask what happened, but refrained. This wasn’t the right time.

Taking her silence as a silent agreement he began to walk again. She caught up to him quickly, showing the thoughts out of her head. Heavy silence weighed on her shoulders. She wanted to say something, but it all sounded wrong. She was rightfully annoyed before and still is for the most part, but it became overshadowed with something else.

“Do you uh, do you want to talk about what you said earlier?”

He furrowed his brows as he turned towards her, clearly not expecting her to ask. Instead of his usual dismissal he shook his head with a crooked smile on his face.

“Nah, I just meant that if we died we wouldn’t have to be in the prophecy anymore.”

Was that--“A joke,” Red stated in disbelief. “You have some dark humor if that was a joke.”

He put the flashlight to his face as if he was about to tell a scary story. “I mean, we’re surrounded by



Inside Looking Out
Kyleigh Waggett '22

darkness. I thought it fit the mood.”

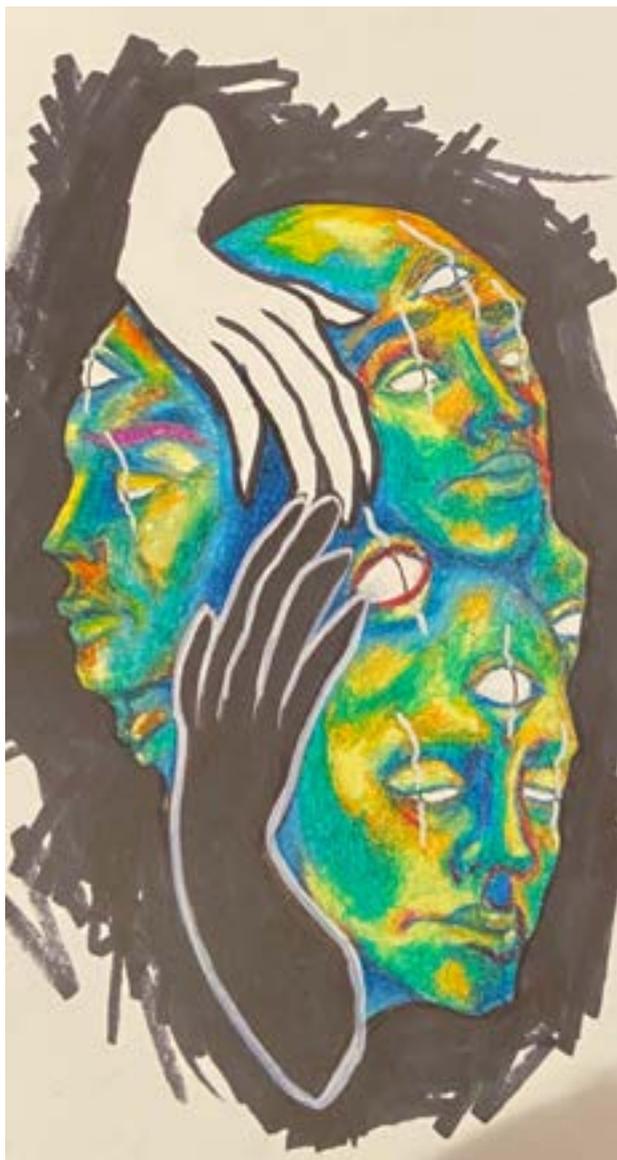
She crossed her arms over her chest and shook her head, but the smile betrayed the disapproving look she sent him. “And you killed it.”

He shoved her playfully and was about to make a retort before the sounds of rattling filled their ears. Red’s entire demeanor shifted. She quickly got into a fighting stance while Burgundy pointed the flashlight ahead of him. Well he would’ve if the flashlight hadn’t flickered before darkness blanketed them.

He muttered curses under his breath as he started to hit the flashlight in hopes the light would come back on. Red slowly grabbed his hand to stop him, but instead of feeling flesh she only felt bone. Her eyes widened. Cautiously she felt for the button on the flashlight. She pressed the light on only to gasp.

Behind them was a series of skeletons all manning swords and various other weapons.

They didn’t find the skeleton army, the skeleton army found them.



Time vs. Color

Ethan DeLory '23

Mangoes

Katherine Litton '23

I was sitting by the lake on that hot summer day all those years ago. New to the area, new to everything. I had a bag, the plastic kind you get at the grocery store to put fruit in; full of mangoes. I had snagged them before my mother could put them away. I sat in the shade of the tree, hiding from the bright sun. Four mangoes had been in the bag, and now there were three. My fingers were coated in the sticky goodness that made them taste so sweet. The taste was still on my tongue, even after I tried to wash it down with water.

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I didn't see you at first because my gaze was on the lake. I only took notice when I heard you put your bike down. Even though the summer had just begun, you wore a blue coat over a very dirty shirt and jeans. It was the kind of coat someone would wear when walking to work in the cold. Long, businesslike. Your black hair was tracked with mud.

"What are you doing here?" You asked in a voice that did not suit your crazed outfit.

"My mom just got mangoes," I said, holding up the bag of mangoes to show you. And you approached, no longer cautious.

"Can I have one?" You asked as you sat down beside me.

"Sure," I replied, reaching into the bag and handing one out to you.

It still had a hue of green on it, nearly identical to your eyes. I had only ever seen you once before. You were walking that pillow of a dog. You had passed my house and saw me up high in the big oak. I waved, and you had done the same.

I took one mango out for myself and we ate, absorbed in the sweetness of the fruit. The nectar ran down our fingers, forcing us to lick the small streams before they reached our elbows. I tossed my long hair out of my face, a flower falling down the side. My sister was prone to decorating my hair with flowers or moss.

I looked down at the flower, a few of its petals were missing. I looked up and caught you glancing at the rest of the flowers in my hair. You turned your head, embarrassed perhaps, I noticed a scratch right on the side of your neck.

We finished our mangoes, and looked in the bag. There used to be four mangoes and now there was one. One for me, one for you, and one for me. I pushed the bag closer to you, offering it as an equalizer. After all, it wouldn't be fair if I had had one more mango than you. You took the mango and broke it in half.

"I'll bring more tomorrow," You said, handing me half.

I took it with a smile of thanks. I didn't know what your name was and you didn't know mine. I didn't know your story and you didn't know mine. But for the time being, all we needed were some mangoes and some silence.



Koi Fish
Caitlyn Pedro '22

The Man and Anna, Anna and The Man

Alanna Huguen '23

The table is hard and cold under her wrists. Its wood is stiff, long ago chopped lifeless from a beautiful oak in the countryside. By the window, the wool of her jacket that had been so comforting during the brisk morning has become too thick and stuffy for the little room. She must not attract attention by taking it off.

She turns to the window. Women in long skirts on bikes ride down the cobblestone streets. There are no clouds in the sky, yet shadows creep towards the street from the small storefronts and other cafes lining the road. Inside, the smell of pastries from the oven fly overhead and under her nose. The room is filled with a delicious chaos. The coffee is strong, resting on the table in front of her. Its steam is an unwelcome visitor on her already perspiring brow. It smells of rich rainforest and sweet sunshine, but she must wait to drink it until he comes.

She looks into the small espresso cup, a reflection of herself in its deep chocolate brown looks back. She was told to be calm. Her tight low bun and jacket have become ruffled over the morning. She looks as if she had just run all the way to the cafe, rather than just taken the bus.

Voices of sweet French, all speaking of invasion. waft from table to table. The waiter asks for her order with a nice accent. Where is it from? Does he notice her slight English accent under the French she had worked so hard to perfect? She hopes not. To not seem like the alien she is, she takes a sip of coffee. A waterfall of chocolate and cream flow down her throat. Just as she swallows and the

warmth of the cup hits her stomach, she wonders if it has been poisoned.

It has been ten minutes and he still has not opened the front door, sending the chiming of bells across the room from the turning of the door knob. The room is bustling, with a dozen more tables outside. Plants hang from the ceiling and create a sense of privacy, but she is not the least bit comforted by the hanging vines over her head. The rope holding them up may fail and drop at any moment and she may exclaim "Goodness!" in surprise. Her identity would be compromised and her wrists would be quickly bonded with that very same rope.

A pair of women sitting in the corner of the cafe catches her eye, cuddling in a booth as if it wasn't already stuffy with body heat inside the cramped space. There were two chocolate croissants on a plate in front of them. Not a crumb on either of them had been touched for the two were too busy whispering and giggling in one another's ears. How peculiar. She wondered how nobody had noticed them. They were seemingly invisible, except to her eyes and each other.

She is taken aback by their carefreeness, a feeling she had been deprived of since the morning her son was taken away. "For the better of the country," they had said. But he was only 18, still so young in her mind. When she was 18 she was still working in a linen factory in London with her younger sister. Oh, how she missed Mary. It had been so long since she had felt the touch of her sister or her son. Longer since she had let anyone else get close enough

to touch her.

Suddenly a man slid into the seat across from her, jolting her attention back to the mission at hand. Neither of them said a word as he called over the waiter and in the most poetic French she had ever heard, ordered a cappuccino and blueberry breakfast pastry. Her gaze did not leave his as the waiter walked away. The tension at the table was rising, and she gulped, trying to budge the hand clasped to her throat.

This was not the man she had met two nights prior, the man who had told her to meet him here. This man had a closely shaven face and hair combed from the left to the right, apart from one strand that had escaped the sticky hair gel. He extended his hand, his fingernails bitten down to the edge and his knuckles a dry map of cracks. She was hesitant to take it, but his eyes, a swirling mix of the sky and sea, his pupil the horizon, stole her hand at last.

The man smiled, "Hello, Anna."



Beach Fence

Ava Norris '22



Campfire

Amena Weiffenach '23

The flames crackled discreetly among our encirclement of logs as the heart of the fire remained encaged within the large branches compiled into one enormous tent-like heap. The lot of us layed or sat down patiently, all ten eyes glued to the kindling fire. The branches rustled as the wind started to pick up, softly whispering and tickling our ears, quietly warning us to take cover.

We did not dare to speak a word. It felt as if one noise, one sentence, one wrong step would shatter the protective bubble of silence we had created and awaken an unwanted presence. So we snuggled against one another for reassurance and warmth, our thick layers of clothing not sufficient enough for the late fall and great winds approaching.

Goosebumps covered my arms like a valley of hills, my whole body shivering and tingling as the cold air pricked and jabbed at my skin. It felt as if I was submerged head down in ice cold water. My hands and feet were beginning to lose feeling as numbness washed over, weighing my body down like there was a solid brick attached to each limb. Not even the piercing cold could make me feel.

Feeling light headed and falling in and out of consciousness, I sat there waiting for the pain to come to an end.

A gust of wind swept through our small and secluded clearing without any warning, shattering the tranquility we had attempted to preserve. It felt like a small slap to the face. We all braced ourselves, eyes shut tight and holding on to the sturdy but modly logs, praying for the wind to kindly find its way out.

Woosh.

A fire larger than life suddenly started to scale its way up the branches, seeping through the gapes in the twigs, and in a burning white flash a burst of flames erupted from the meager fireplace into a shapeless roaring mass of chaos.

The world became devoid of any noise except for the bonfire, roaring ferociously like a lion, with a sporadic pop and crackle that made us all jump back in harmony. It was like Zeus had struck lightning to the wood, gifting us with a torch from above to ensure we woke up the next morning.

Sensation rushed back to me as a wave of heat almost hot enough to burn our faces off emanated from the fiery bonfire. Finally...warmth at last.

The color crept back to my skin as the cold fled away welcoming a satisfyingly radiant heat, illuminating and contorting our faces with an eerie glow. The reddish orange flames danced passionately with no form or sense of direction, occasionally a fleck jumping out too close and causing us to inch back even further in fear. Shadows were brought to life as they vibrantly twirled and swayed in a jumbled mess, darkness taking over as the fire would bow down to the ground for a fleeting moment and then spring right back up.

An overpoweringly repugnant smoky odor penetrated my nostrils, forcing me to clasp a hand over my nose before I could get another dangerous whiff. But for some odd reason I liked the taste of it. It was smokey and tangy but most of all it reminded me of roast pork fresh out of the oven, slightly burnt around the edges and charred. It had



been so long since I had eaten a home-made meal that I had almost forgotten the taste of it. As I savored the flavor of smoke in the air, an overwhelming sense of nostalgia filled me as I got caught up in my feelings, tears welling up from reminiscing back to my mother's cooking.

My eyes stung from the intense heat but the tears brought a bit of relief as I sniffled and wiped them off on the blanket. We all huddled closer together as our blankets seemed to burn through the fabric of our thin clothes and keep our blood rushing.

The fire was only growing in volume, consuming every scrap of wood, but thankfully staying in the bounds of the rocks we had placed around it in precaution. Our eyes gleamed alight as the flames flickered, everyone wide awake from the outburst. It almost touched the night sky, reaching for the heavens, but the grand bonfire made even the night

sky look dull in comparison. The world wavered before the fire.

The roaring intensified until it was nearly deafening and the heat was starting to become unbearable as our foreheads gleamed with sweat and we started to shed a few layers.

Yet we could not leave its presence. The bonfire was calling to us, clutching us by the shoulders and begging us not to leave until its very last breath. And so we waited, entranced by the beauty of the fire till the branches were no more and ashes littered the ground, picked up by the wind and carried off to every corner of the forest.

For the first time since I can remember, I slept peacefully, lulled by the sweet wind and hugged in loving warmth knowing that we were safe and alive. At least for tonight.



When Cardinals Appear, Angels Are Near
When Cardinals Appear, Angels Are Near by Malia Jablecki '21

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A **shoal** is a shallow nutrient-rich refuge in a body of water. While the shoal can beach the greatest of ships, it also can nurture the smallest of the ocean's creatures. The Gifford Street Writers is likewise a place where we find nourishment in the company of our peers. The Shoal showcases our haven and growth in the life of artists and writers at Falmouth High School.

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