

GRAY MATTER 1999

GRAY MATTER
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Gray Matter 1999

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ON DEFENSIVENESS

BY INGRID MILLIS

PATTERNS OF THE BLEMISHES ON
YOUR SOFTLY ROLLING BACK
ARE IDYLIC AND LUSH,
INSPIRING THE POETIC
PASTORAL NATURE IN
THIS LONELY SHEPHERDESS.
LILTINGLY, I WISH I
COULD SPEAK TO YOU, SO
THAT WE COULD SUMMON OURSELVES
TO JUSTIFY OUR TUNE AND OUR ACTIONS
BY SOMETHING OTHER THAN
THE MELODIES ON THE RADIO,
ITS ANTENNAE MORE FORGIVING
AND CONSIDERATE THAN YOU,
SLURRING, LISPING YOUR PATH
TO BARBARIC UNATTRACTIVENESS,
AND MYSELF, DREADING WHAT I KNOW,
THAT YOUR FACE WILL
AT SOME BREACH OF THIS ANTIPEACE
RESURRECT ITSELF FROM
THE DÉPTHS OF WHAT MIGHT BE
IMAGINED OF ME,
TO GAZE AT MY OWN FACE,
EXPECTING MANIFESTED EMOTION
WHICH NEVER SHALL BE AFFORDED
OR INSPIRED BY YOUR HEART
OR ANY OTHER PART BELONGING TO
OR DESCRIBING THE PATTERN OF YOU.
PLEASE FORGIVE MY
BEING BROKEN BY YOU BEFORE
AND MY RESULTING INABILITY
TO LOOK INTO
YOUR BARREN PUPILS
FOR ANY AMOUNT OF UNEMBARRASSED TIME,
FOR I MIGHT BETRAY MYSELF AGAIN
AND LET YOU SEE EVERYTHING,
DO NOT WISH YOU TO,
THAT IS,
GRANT YOU AGAIN THE GLAMOUR OF
UNDERSTANDING ME.

Modern Convenience

by Eileen Oh

There exist people who have never seen the stairs of their apartment buildings. Everyday these people, in their rush to leave and return to their apartments, zoom past every flight of stairs until they reach the bottom floor. The elevator is the answer to modern convenience, modern rush, and modern technology.

They live in these apartment buildings, but all they know is their own pads and their mailboxes. Oh, and the number of levels inside the building, but that knowledge comes solely from the elevator buttons. Never do they take the time to run up the seventeen flights of stairs or down the strenuous path. It's simply "up, please" to my level and "down, and hurry" to level 1. Cracks in the stair rails do not concern them; their pleasure is only met in zipping through their buildings at record speeds to ensure they are not late for the important morning meeting or that they will make their curfew.

When mud is tracked into the building, it's usually only children who bring the mud through the proper pathways, up the stairs to level twenty, making lingering circles here and there next to the beautiful scene of the rainbow seen out the window, following in the tracks of the rain. They're the ones who wistfully wish the green exit sign on level be fixed or that the water level not be so deep next to apartment 908. But the older children and adults for the most part do not know what their own handrails feel like when lugging a two-ton backpack up all those flights of steps nor could they describe the color of the decaying roach on the window frame between levels eleven and twelve.

It is not as if time was necessarily lacking. Between dinner and that favorite drama on MBC at 8:30, there is plenty of lag time during which one can properly give adequate attention to the stairs residing outside one's apartment, the same stairs that have been neglected for all these years. Yet the course of modern selection prescribes that the elevator be used and the alley be forgotten. What are our lives coming to?

How many stairs separate you from your apartment? Never counted? Okay, then if you were to attempt to step on every other step, would you be able to start on the bottom and always have the perfect number of steps to skip in order to skip the second to last step and end up on the top level? Ah, so you never tried it?



Taking the elevator rather than the stairs can be a quick and convenient way to maneuver through one's apartment, but it is not the only way. Why do you suppose stairs are there? To act as a backup in case of a power failure? Well, yes, but they also exist to serve as another means of "transport." Were all people to allow the elevator to monopolize their lives, human kind would be in for some rough times.

Convenience, you say, convenience is all I need. But consider the air conditioner. Another wonderful modern convenience, you say. Admittedly so, but why is the air conditioner so appreciated during the summer? Because it's hot, you answer. Precisely. You see, you cannot appreciate one thing without its polar opposite, and that is exactly what stairs are to the elevator. Huh? you add. We cannot enjoy happiness without sorrow or love without hatred. We need sorrow to compare happiness to and hatred to understand love, much as we need alleyways to grasp the concept of Main Street. And that applies to stairs because...?

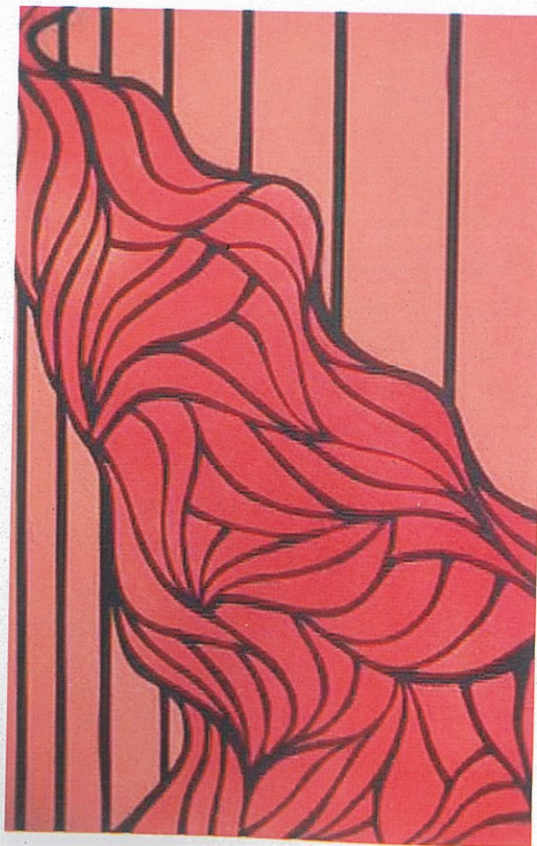
Very few people take the time to appreciate the dirty particles accumulating on their stairs as very few use these stairs. But those very cracks in the stairs, the shuddering light on level thirteen, even the candy wrapper lying between levels nineteen and eighteen, are sites to explore, the trademarks of the building to be remembered. Years from now, the smell of CK flavoring the elevator will be forgotten when one's linoleum floor is dismissed from memory. Instead, the marble lying dangerously close to the edge of the stairs in its reluctant path from level fifteen to level one, the toddlers passing you on level nine, and the glittering ten won coin treasure on the roof are moments to be etched into permanent memory. One day, when stairs in apartment buildings (or apartment buildings themselves) cease to be, you can tell your great-grand children about the little surprises each level of your old apartment building once held for you. Then they will imagine the past and remember for your Alzheimer's-stricken memory.

You know, I think I'd better go count those stairs now.

A Simple Love Song

by Kristina Rader

The unreachables, Love, far away
Born akin to cultures separated
A chasm deep, true love on display
Love falls with lives often fated.
Ancient grudges based on skin alone
new generations piercing deeper
True identities yet to be known
Pride of parents carves the canyon steeper;
Why shouldn't the heart rule over the face?
Hateful words fill the gorge with tears
can a personality be summed up in a race?
wishing all gone with the passion of years.
Of lovers trials, the hardest is this one
but past proves vulnerable when love can
overcome.



Josh

by Jane Lee

I squirmed with discomfort in the brightly-lit room filled with the chattering of voices and peals of laughter. Strangers that I had never seen before, supposedly my relatives, sat smiling at me and asking me questions about school, grades, what college I wanted to attend—the usual. With a stiff smile, I sat and politely answered the string of questions, hoping that there would soon be an end to this torture. Soon, there were no more questions to be asked. An awkward silence filled the room, but was broken by the timely wail of a baby: my dad's cousin's grandchild or someone or other. Everyone turned their attention to the crying baby as I took this opportunity to sneak out of the room. I desperately needed some fresh air.

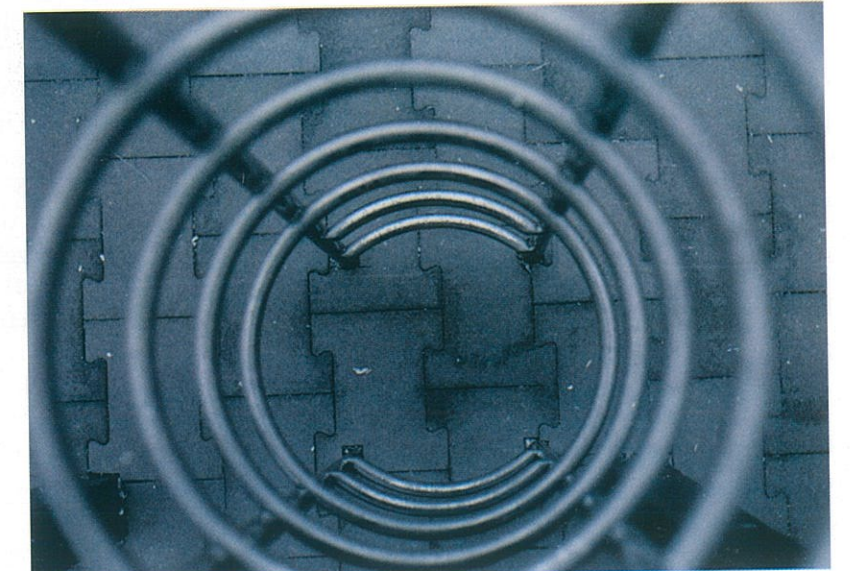
I stepped out of my apartment building and sucked in the cool air of the night; finally, I could breathe. I was glad to be alone. All I wanted was to be by myself and to walk aimlessly around the city. At that moment, I heard footsteps running up from behind. I turned around to see my little brother smiling up at me. He had somehow managed to escape the wearisome "family gathering" and follow me out. He tugged on my hand and pulled me towards the playground. With a sigh, I reluctantly put off my solitary bliss for another night.

We walked side by side through the parking lot and were occasionally forced to stop in order to avoid the passing cars. We walked through, around, and in between the parked cars. My brother began to run, but quickly looked back at me with a playful smile. We raced each other to the playground. I let him win and he thrust his arms in the air as a sign of victory. He looked back at me and laughed at my impersonation of the Korean marathoner who collapsed after he won the gold medal in the 1996 Olympics. He walked over and pulled me to my feet.

I looked at the playground: a sandy grave at night, with metal and wooden bones standing guard, the moon its flashlight. It was late and there were no kids playing on the swings or the seesaw, or sailing down the winding slide. Only silence could be heard, except for an occasional car slowly driving by through the parking lot, hopelessly trying to find a parking spot on a Saturday night.

I stepped on the merry-go-round in the center of the playground. It was oddly bent lopsided and the green paint was chipping away. My little brother pushed me around and around. I tried to laugh, but my sight kept breaking and splitting. I was moving up and down as I was spinning because of the way in which the merry-go-round was tilted. Squeezing my eyes shut, I clenched the bars, fearing that I'd fall off. I felt like throwing up so I told my brother to stop.

Quietly, he ran to the swings. Back and forth, with each screech of the rusting chains, he rose higher and higher. My stomach still churned as I sat on the edge of the merry-go-round. Silently, I watched him swinging alone in the dark.



I wanted to say something to him, to talk to him, and for him to talk to me, but I wasn't sure if he would understand. As we were growing older, my brother and I had been talking less and less. There was nothing to say, nothing to relate about. The six years that came between us was only a part of the reason. He was living a completely different life than I was, attending Korean school and being brought up in the Korean society. English had nearly become a foreign language to him. My heart became heavy and the night became colder. I signaled to him that we had to go.

We walked home, my arm over his shoulder and his arm around my waist. As I looked down at him, I saw that his head almost reached my shoulder. I hadn't realized how much he had grown. I began to silently weep. Tears slowly slid down my cheeks. Under the parking lot lights, I looked down at our shadows to see his head turn to look up at me. He squeezed my waist and said nothing.

Tune

by Daniel Shim

Turn the peg.
And reach perfection.
It's too low.
Tighten it.
That's too high.
Loosen it.
Back and forth,
Until the voice of my string
Matches the cold, metallic drone of the tuning fork
It's still not quite there.
Why can't I get it right?
Frustration.
I wish that tuning fork would stop ringing.
I know what the tone is.
I know what it is supposed to sound like.
Then why can't I reach it?
It's not too far, I've done it before.
I know what the tone is.
I've heard it all my life.
It is as familiar as the sound of my own voice.
But it's still not there
And I am still here.

Close Your Eyes
And Listen To
What Cannot Be Heard
by Merrill Shin

"There are so many things I want to tell you,"
he said in a tone floating with attempts at sincerity.

WALLOW in your own needs,
you gerbil of a man,
always begging
with your eyes
for pellets from the dark-haired girl.

Always take, never give...

Read into my exhausted BAG
I call my soul
and
find the tragedy
you make me live!

I crave the words
I know I am not allowed, I understand my need so
give to you
YOU

I do not.

Idiot boy
ensnared in my demanding pulse,
the object of all my desire plays it safe with this little
girl.

Always taking!

never giving.

Saint Patrick

by Patrick Chapman

On December 1st, 1980, I was christened Patrick Michael Chapman. Most people just call me Pat these days, which is fine. My name makes me think of inebriated little leprechauns dancing Irish jigs in the heart of Dublin, so whenever someone calls me by name, I find myself giggling hysterically. Of course, I find anything abnormally short to be hilarious. In fact, one of my greatest talents is that I'm able to come up with Gary Coleman jokes without even thinking about it. You'd be surprised by how much can actually be related to the li'l guy:

I was born with a dimple in my chin eighteen years ago. It's still there. Every so often Mom will grab my face with her hands, shake it, and squeal, "That dimple is so cute!" I can't stand it when she does that. Once, in an effort to get her to stop, I tried to fill it in with plaster. Upon reflection, I have to admit that wasn't a very intelligent plan.

My hair is brown and my eyes are green. While the brown hair is nothing special, I can't deny that I'm rather fond of my green eyes. To quote myself, "The chicks dig 'em." (In all honesty, I don't know whether this is true or not, but I hope that if I keep repeating it, they'll come to see things my way.) Green is my color, you see. When I think of my name, I think of drunken leprechauns, and what color do you think of when you think of drunken leprechauns? Green, obviously, so it's only fitting that my eyes match my name. To play up on this, I've created an Emerald Empire of my own. I have a green hat, a few green shirts, a green bedspread, a green lamp, and a green rug. As a consequence, I've never been pinched on St. Patrick's Day, and I always paint my thumb green on Arbor Day. Tom Thumb, who is the first person I think of when I think of "green

thumb," was abnormally small, like Gary Coleman.

Because my father is an agent of the Drug Enforcement Administration, my family and I have been forced to move around the world many times over. In my lifetime, I have lived in Maryland, Miami, Pakistan, Tampa, Texas, and now Korea. However, in all my myriad travels, I have never once lived in France. This often leads people to wonder why exactly it is that I have so many..."opinions" about the French. Myself included. As near as I can remember, I just woke up one morning a few years ago and decided I would start commenting on France. Granted, it's not the most noble goal I could have set for myself, but I'm proud to say that I've adhered to it one hundred percent ever since. I think that says something about my tenacity, don't you?

Not only am I tenacious and decisive, but I'm also responsible. As the oldest of five children, ranging from ages sixteen to two, I take most of the credit for raising them. And, not to be boastful, I think I've done a fine job. For example, I refuse to let them watch *Barney* (especially in the case of my sixteen year-old sister!). So even at the tender age of eighteen, I'm already a certified parenting master... at least according to Slash, the local pawnshop owner.

Every Halloween, I try to force trick-or-treaters to dress up as the Village People. I've been shocked by the lack of cooperation. Truth be told, the only reason I'm so adamant about getting a Village People group together is because I've always wanted to dress as the leather-clad biker. Some folks might be embarrassed to admit that, but for some reason, I find I'm actually rather *proud* to admit that. And it's that kind of effrontery that makes me the envy of my classmates, teachers, and family.

I despise poetry. I've only liked one poem out of the hundreds I've read in my life, and the only reason I liked it is because it had the word "taco" in it. Man, do I ever love those

things. But beyond just the great taste of a nice



beef taco, I find the Mexican "delicacy" to be a metaphor ripe with potential. For example, a taco shell could represent man's confinement, while the meat, lettuce, and salsa (which represent man's soul) try desperately to liberate themselves from that confining taco shell by oozing out the sides... There's poetry in that.

I guess, when it comes right down to it, I, too, am a taco. A taco filled with millions of different thoughts (represented, again, by the meat, lettuce, and salsa), all of which are trying to escape this little brain of mine (the shell) and be heard by the rest of the world. I just hope the rest of the world, represented by the person eating the taco, appreciates the way my thoughts stained his shirt.

Loop 9: Mr. Dream

Author Unknown

The other day I met a dream.
Still quite young—just shedding his teens.
Draped in the most flamboyant clothes,
Flashing the most sanguine smile and pose.
Full of so much pride,
I had to open my mouth wide in surprise.
Yes, he was ambitious,
Nothing done by him was gratuitous.
I was him, tragically, at dusk
Filled with such lust
For the materialistic maladies of the world
I thought he had forgotten his form.
The other day I met a dream—just shedding his teens,
But wanting all he believed he could be.

Thoughts

by Fiona Wilson

I've become so lost
Because confusion has taken over.
It's swarmed into my head,
Making all my thoughts
Come at once.
They pile one on top of each other
Until sentences become lost
And words mix,
And all that is left is a
Symphony of sounds.
Ohs and Ahs climb on each other,
Each trying to be heard,
Each trying to dominate.
Cohesion draws thousands after
And it becomes an ocean of waves
That never ebbs
but ceaselessly flows forward.
They all pound on my brain,
Demanding release
So that they can be heard.
They march forward,
One after another,
Then they break ranks
And charge like rebels.
They attack.
Overwhelmed, I scream.
Unable to defend myself,
I sit and let the onslaught happen.
After, I am beaten and battered
And even more confused than before,
And there is nothing left to do
But cry.

A Reflection's Glimpse

by Catherine Ghim

I see her almost everyday,
A daily reminder of
What I am,
A reflection sheathed in a
Cursed garment of life.
A quick glance,
A reassuring stare.
That's all I get.
With the blink of an eye
I show her an opinion,
Mine,
Unbiased and indifferent.
I show her a girl,
Squirring to cross the fine line
Of maturity,
Yet still grasping onto
The familiar reins of childhood.
She comes to me one day,
Crying.
Unable to ask
"Baby, what's wrong?"
Or hold her close,
I reply frankly to what I see.
Salty rivers of tears run
In and out,
Over and under
the wrinkles and scars
Carved into her face
By the cruel hand
Of past pain.
I share with her my truth
And it sets her free.

Raymond

by Yune-Kyung Lee

I took a bus to the park because I was tired of taking pictures of buildings, city, and whatnot. I thought that a change of surroundings might provide inspiration. In my neighborhood there was little to be seen but gray walls, gray pavement, gray sky, gray suits, gray, gray, gray... I turned away from the window and stared at my hands clasped in my lap, until the bus reached my stop.

My first thought was that I'd made a serious mistake. Get this: old man (with gray hair) sitting on a stone bench (gray stone) chasing away pigeons (gray feathers). Look to the right: cat (gray fur) in the lap of a woman (wearing a gray dress) who sat on another one of those cursed gray stone benches. I was wondering whether I'd become color-blind to the point where everything was gray, but decided to give the park one last chance. I'd stroll around for ten minutes, then find someplace else to go.

I picked a path after great deliberation ("eenie, meenie, minie, moe...") and set off at a brisk pace. Green, now—a slight improvement. Very slight. Green trees, green bushes, green caterpillar, green fence—I turned a corner and stopped.

A Kodak moment:

A scrawny kid in a yellow T-shirt was feeding pistachio nuts to a whole bunch—herd? flock?—of squirrels. They scolded him for more and he obliged with a grin. His teeth were very white against the brown of his skin and his face was transformed from that of homeliness to beauty of any happy child.

Absurdly, I noticed that his sneakers were red and rejoiced.

I was afraid to approach at first, but I needed a closer view. I couldn't get one standing fifty feet away and gawking. I moved forward cautiously. The kid spared me a glance and said defensively, "Squirrels really like pistachios."

I relaxed. For a moment I'd been afraid he would tell me to go away. "I believe you," I said soothingly. Why not? I'd gone to the beach once and found out that seagulls were crazy about saltine crackers. Squirrels had a right to be weird, too.

I must've sounded convincing, because he brightened and said, "They like pistachios even better than peanuts. If you ever want to attract squirrels, pistachios are the things you want."

I dug into my pocket and found some crumpled dollar bills. I offered one to him. "Can I have a couple?" I asked.

We made the exchange and I crouched beside him, trying to lure the squirrels to me. When the first one finally overcame its distrust and snatched the nut off my palm, I found myself with a foolish smile spread over my face. The kid was still steadily feeding them.

I withdrew and brought out my camera. I took several pictures of the kid and squirrels and pistachio nuts and all.

When the kid ran out of what I'd thought until then to be an inexhaustible supply, he turned to me and said, "You a photographer?"

"Aspirant," I said. He gave me a blank face and I said, "Wannabe."

"Oh." He shuffled his feet and said in a small voice, "Can I have one that you took of us?"

I blinked, startled. I'd expected him to be hostile at the thought of actually being caught on film. Losing one's soul, visible pimples, etc. "I have to develop the film," I said. "I've got to go home first. But I'll come again on the weekend—" I stopped, feeling stupid. I had quit my job just yesterday. I cleared my throat and started again. "I'll come again tomorrow at the same time," I said.

"Okay." He gave me that sunny grin and zipped off on a green bike. The squirrels scattered. Time wandered on.

I showed up early with the developed photos; but he had beaten me. I watched his face anxiously as he glanced through them.

He said diffidently, "I think you're pretty good."

"Thanks," I said. "They're yours."

He held them as if they were pieces of the Holy Grail. "Really?" He looked as if he wished he hadn't asked, that he was afraid I would say no.

I hunkered down and firmly closed his fingers over them. "Really," I said, meeting his eyes squarely.

He rewarded me with a grin and pulled out a rumpled bag. "You want some more pistachios?" he asked me.

"Sure," I said, handing him another dollar. I insisted when he tried to push it back. He then pocketed it, somehow juggling the bag, the photos, and the money at the same time.

We fed squirrels for ten minutes before I bought out the good old camera. The kid went through a series of poses: peace sign with one hand, feeding a squirrel with the other; bonking the nose of a squirrel (who didn't appreciate it); hopping around after it bit him (maybe not a pose after all); and so on. I must have used up the entire roll of film I'd allocated for the day.

When I said I had to go, he looked so disappointed that I subvocalized an apology to a friend with whom I'd made a lunch appointment and said, "I'm hungry. Aren't you?"

He nodded warily.

"How about lunch?" I offered. "On me."

His face broke into a smile.

We went to Pizza Hut, where he gulped down a pitcher of Seven Up and three quarters of a large combination pizza. We talked about squirrels and pigeons and seagulls, even about photography.

Afterward, he told me his name: Raymond. After his dad, he said. Who was dead, he whispered.

I patted his shoulder. Poor kid. His mother worked hard to support them, so he probably had no one to take him to the park or the zoo. The thought came suddenly and I haltingly asked whether he wanted to go to the zoo the next day.

He shoved his hands deep in his pockets. Wistfully he said, "I want to, but you've already done so much—"

"I don't mind," I said. And without meaning to, I added, "I get lonesome sometimes...my friends don't think much of going out and just having fun."

"I know what you mean," he said. "The squirrels are my friends. Danny—who acts like a clown—and Ralph—he's the one who ate from your hand—and Matt—" He lowered his voice to a whisper. "I named him after this bully, because they act the same way. Then there's Pete..."

I listened as he seriously described the names and traits of each and every squirrel. I couldn't imagine, say, Samantha ever being silly enough to make friends with a squirrel. One more special thing to file away about Raymond.

"...and Mary, as bossy as my aunt...and the last one. I haven't named him yet, but he's real gentle. I like him the best."

It was sad, I thought, that squirrels were his only friends, and that he knew no one gentle enough that a name wouldn't spring to mind. Only one way to remedy that, I supposed.

I managed to appease Samantha by meeting her for supper instead, in one of those high-class, way-too-expensive restaurants. After we'd eaten away the edge of our hunger, she leaned back in her chair and said, "Where were you today? I called and the phone just kept on ringing."

"I was out," I said, somewhat lamely.

She raised an eyebrow, clearly an invitation for me to expound and expand and explain and who knows how many more ex-'s.

"I was out with a friend and I lost track of the time," I said.

She frowned. "You have other friends, you know. Some of us actually care about you. You can't go on being unemployed like this—"

"Freelance photographer," I interrupted.

"Huh?" She stared at me.

"I like to call myself a freelance photographer," I said.

"Whatever." She dismissed my words with a flick of her fingers. "I have a friend who knows of a job you can have. Why don't you talk to him?" She slid a business card across the table to me.

I pushed it back without looking at it. "I'm fine," I said. "My uncle died a few months ago, remember? I have enough money to get on."

"It's not going to last forever!" she exclaimed. "You've wallowed too long in this photography thing." She gestured angrily at the camera I took everywhere, given its own chair beside me to rest on. "Real life doesn't work that way."

I changed the subject. We talked about politics and current events and local affairs.

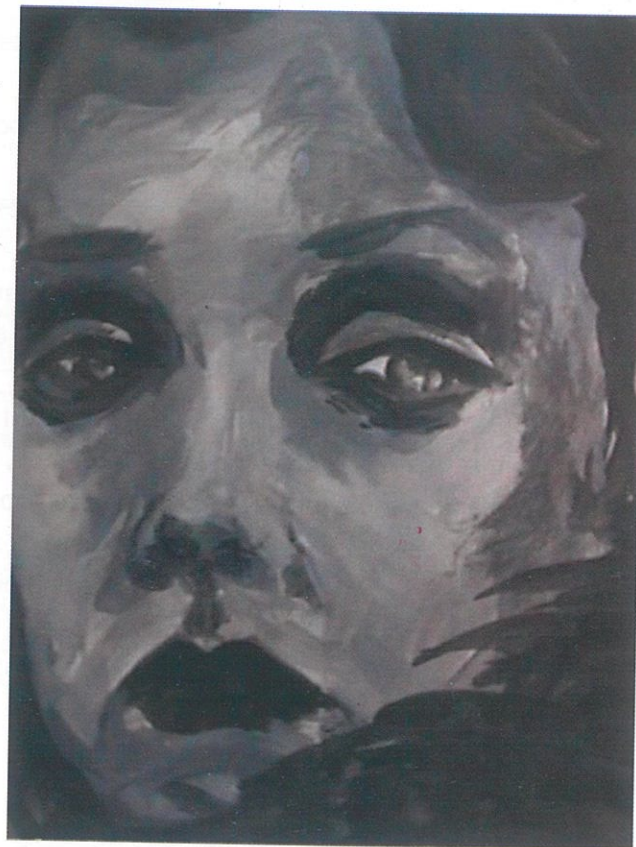
"Did you know that the black population of this city has jumped from thirty-five to forty-two percent within the last two years?" she said, brows arching elegantly.

I was silent—still a little angry at her from before. She went on without noticing.

"But it's not that bad, don't worry. I hear there's an entire black neighborhood somewhere to the south of the city. As long as they stay there, we're fine."

I stared at her in disbelief. "What did you say?" Samantha had never been prejudiced before, although I knew that her husband was from the South and hadn't shared the same lack. "When did you start feeling this way?"

She shifted uncomfortably. "Well...you know my son? A black bully at his school scared his lunch money out of him for an entire week before I found out."



"One black kid," I said, trying not to sound too disgusted. I knew her son, a spoiled brat with a big mouth from what I could remember.

"Not just one." She frowned, then quickly went on. "There were just too many of these kinds of incidents for me to let it pass by. A gang of black boys liked to rough him up on the way to and from school. One of them went to the same school and called him all these names. Even this half-black kid my son tried to make friends with wouldn't do anything but go to the park and when my son tried to tag along, they had some kind of fight." She sighed. "When these things happen over and over, you have to suspect some kind of connection—"

I pushed my chair back and stood. "Good-bye, Samantha," I said coldly. I slammed some bills on the table. "On me," I said, then left the restaurant. I took pictures of every bright red object I saw on the way home in an attempt to remember those vivid sneakers. I ended up with three-fourths of the roll left over.

Cotton candy, lion roars, screeching monkeys, panda snores...well, perhaps not the latter, but without exception, the panda was asleep whenever I went to the zoo. I was disappointed, but not as much as Raymond, who sighed quietly.

"I like pandas," he said. "They're black and white."

"Then why don't we go see the zebras?" I suggested, and he brightened.

On the way to their pen he confided that his mom was white and his dad had been black. So he felt a kinship with any creatures that shared his mix—"But," he said, "I'm not pieces of black and white stuck together with glue. I'm neither. I mean, at school, both white and black kids pick on me." He looked down at his sneaker soles slapping the path. "I think I'm my own color—gray. I like gray."

I was dumbfounded by his declaration.

Someone actually liked gray?

How could this colorful kid, dressed in bright primary colors, be called gray?

Who picked on a nice kid like Raymond?

I found out the answer too soon.

A big black kid sauntered up and stood in our way. I absentmindedly circled him, still trying to find the right words and not noticing how still Raymond had become. He let me pass but blocked Raymond's path. I finally looked into his sneering face. Add: sign reading "trouble" with neon lights.

"Hey, you. Think you're good enough to live in our neighborhood?" he sneered.

I quickly lifted my camera and took a picture. Startled by the click, the bully turned toward me and I smiled blandly. Raymond took his cue and fled. The other kid snarled and stalked away. Almost a waste of film, since he was bound to take it out on Raymond later.

Speaking of whom, I found him gazing at the peaceful zebras and giraffes. I got a picture of him waving to the former, but up close, I could see the smile was fake.

"Don't worry, he's gone now," I said awkwardly.

"The problem is," he said, almost to himself, "when you're gray, both blacks and whites hate you."

"Not all of them," I said, somewhat desperately. Somewhere along the path of life I'd picked up the notion that kids were supposed to be laughing, happy creatures without serious thoughts to burden them. It seemed unnatural for this little guy to be musing on the same issues that had been tangled up with an entire war.

"A lot of them," he said sadly. "We've already moved twice. Mom's trying to find a place where the kids won't pick on me."

"Well," I said, "if giraffes and zebras can live together, why can't humans and humans?"

He didn't answer. I didn't blame him. It was a stupid question.

Gamely I said, "Want to ride the camel?"

It was a dirty trick, but a successful one. Soon he was bobbing up and down on the camel as it slowly went around in a circle, laughing aloud in delight. The handler had an old Polaroid, which he used to snap a photo of them. To my embarrassment, Raymond studied it critically before saying to me, "It's not as good as your pictures."

"I hope not," said the camel handler good-naturedly. "I'd hate to discover I had a talent for photography after years of leading around creatures with nasty spit."

We had hot dogs for lunch. Or rather, I had a hot dog and he had three. After looking at the bears, I decided that we'd done enough. At least, I'd used up all my film. We parted ways and I took the scenic route home, meaning twice as many gray buildings as usual; this time I didn't mind. Having Raymond as an advocate helped raise gray's esteem a lot.

I wouldn't have been so cheerful if I had known what was happening to Raymond at that moment.

Later, I would imagine it all. The twisted expression of contempt on the face of the same black bully (dared I suspect his name was Matt?). The resigned fear in Raymond's eyes. The impact of fist on flesh. The blood, as red as his sneakers. The jeers of the gang of white kids afterward. The crunch of gravel as one sped away on his bike. The quiet sobs.

We met again, you see, four days later. I had waited in vain the past few days and when I caught sight of him, walking slowly toward me, my first emotions were of delight and relief.

Then I took a good look at him.

Let it suffice to say that bruises show on all colors of skin, dark or light. The language of pain is a universal one.

We sat down on a bench, never mind that it was stone. Slowly he told me what had happened. It hurt for him to talk—his jaw had been punched—but he persisted.

"So Mom wants us to move to another city," he said very quietly. "This is my last day here in the park. Mom doesn't want me to go out anymore, but I told her I had to..."

I swallowed. "Keep in touch, all right?" I tried to find a business card and remembered that I had renounced them all along with my last job.

"If you keep on taking pictures and send me some," he said solemnly.

"Okay," I said softly.

He looked away. "Will you remember me? Everything?"

From curly brown hair to red shoes, I vowed. "Of course."

Then he dug into a pocket and pulled out a small bag. "Here," he said, pressing it into my hand.

"Promise to feed them everyday?"

"Promise," I said helplessly.

"And the last squirrel...can I name him after you?" A grin, a shy one, that hurt me because it wasn't half as brilliant as it had once been.

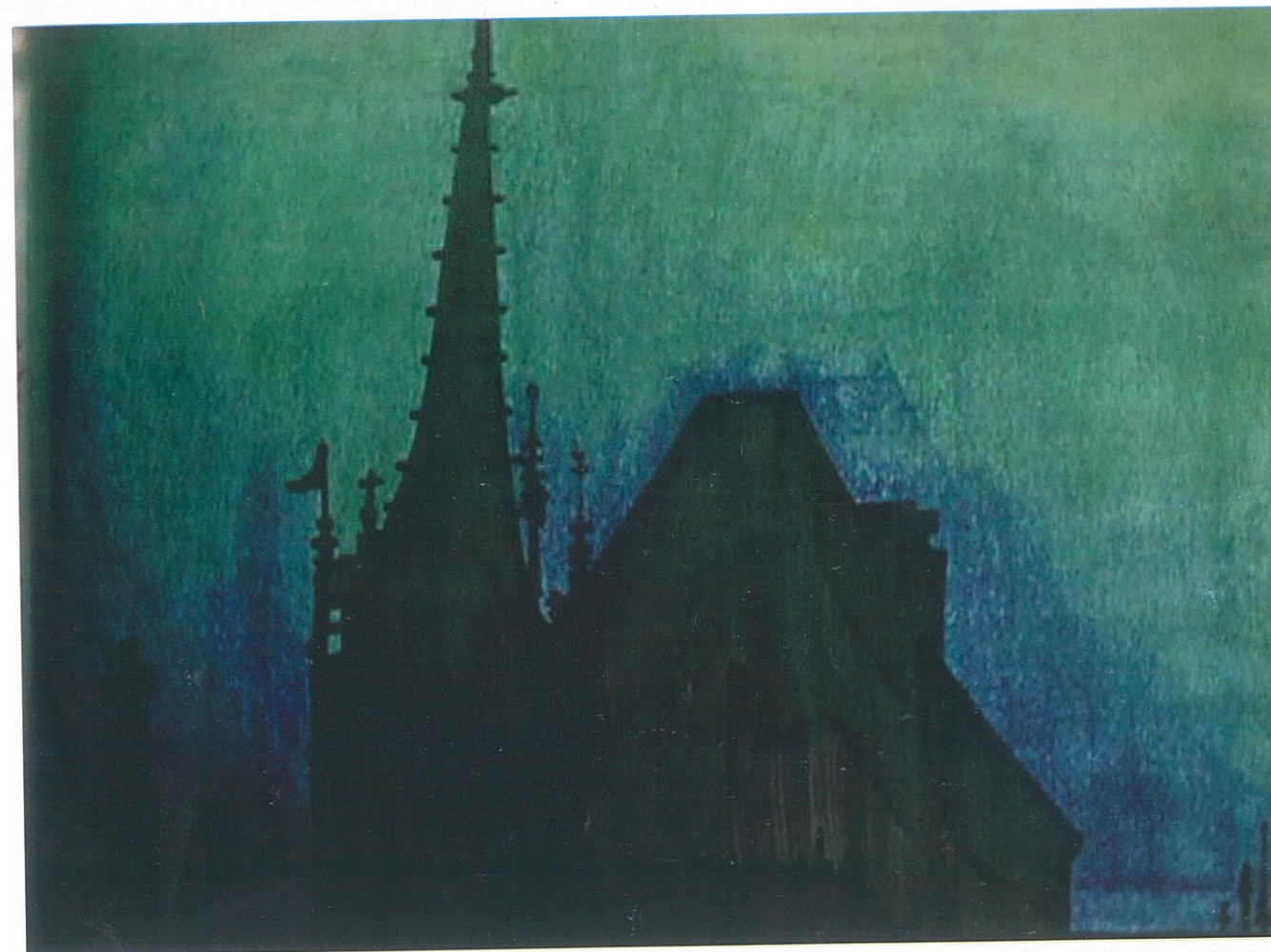
I nodded. I didn't trust myself to speak calmly.

The clumsiness of silence.

"Bye," he said. He got up and began walking away very slowly. He looked back just before he turned the corner.

I pulled out the pistachios. As if a whistle had just been blown, a swarm of squirrels came out and scampered eagerly to my feet. I tossed them to the ground, one by one, and identified maybe half of them. And over there, lurking at the edge of the crowd—the favorite squirrel, surely. I gave it two pistachio nuts.

When the bag was empty, I started walking around the park aimlessly. I don't know why. Maybe I was looking for another Raymond to befriend.



The Initiative

by Eileen Oh

I have found that my palette is of no use. In fact, I've permanently given up the profession, seeing how the results are ultimately the same as the monotonous and dreary work I painted on July 7, 2257. That was the day they passed the White Initiative, thus driving us creative artists out of practice.

Oh sure, I know what you're thinking. Your society would not dare ban all the colors as mine did. But before opening your mouth and shutting your eyes to the possibility, examine your culture a little more closely. Can you say for sure that the populace cares enough about politics to know every initiative does in fact affect your lives, some more deeply than others?

I'm the perfect example of the effects of such measures, though by no means the only one. Ten years ago, our little nation was just like yours; probably still is-free for the most part, protected by basic freedoms and an educated, knowledgeable populace. We artists took for granted that not only would our palettes always be full, but every year we'd gain new colors to add to our creations.

Then one day, someone complained.

MP Torez Smith insisted exposing children to the malignant influence of brown, contributing to the breakdown of society's morals. Smith just happened to have donated some billions of pounds to the slush fund of then-PM Oscar Delicaso, who humored the MP by privately calling other MPs with whom he'd developed bonds of varying degrees. The result was the Brown Initiative, which forbade "the tolerance of varied shades of brown as defined by Act 55798 of the -----th Parliament" upon "prescription of death."

The language of the Brown Initiative would seem to support banning the unnatural use of brown, but radicals carried it further. Declaring that "no one should be exposed to the offenses of brown," the PM drafted construction workers, painters, scientists, and other professionals and

craftspeople to either paint over or genetically manipulate any brown encountered in the streets. They even injected brown-skinned people with frightfully high doses of skin pigment to "blacken" their skin tone. Teddy bears had to be quickly replaced, wood became orange, and all people were injected with an enzyme complex to turn their feces gray. Additionally, the concept of brown was destroyed. Any existing works using brown or shades thereof would be edited, with "-----" signs used in their stead. Furthermore, writers were strictly forbidden to use the terms or otherwise elicit any remembrance in those who had previously known the color. The sole exception lay in the Brown Initiative.

If people had spoken up and challenged the ban of brown, the process of aggregate centralization might have stopped there. Other colors probably wouldn't have been banned and certainly the government would not have morphed from a democratic union to one more closely representing mind control and thought suppression.

But people were already experiencing a milder-though equally potent-form of mind control. Each household made purchases, contacted other households and businesses, was told the news, searched public records, and amused itself by means of "the box." And while this teleportal was a convenient form of efficient news delivery, communication, interactivity, and entertainment, its mass approach also took on a brainwashing effect.

Large conglomerates controlling the mind feed wanted very much to create a homogeneous blend of box users. Seeing how it was in their best interests to support the Brown Initiative, their coverage of the event was spared no expense. The initiative dominated every moment of news coverage, for even when seemingly separate news events were covered, cross-references were frequently made to drill into every viewer's mind: "Brown Initiative-good." It was by using every known technique of mind control that they were ultimately successful in manipulating the minds of those around me. I myself almost fell prey to their mismanaged influences.

You're probably wondering why the media, as the mass of conglomerates is often called even today, would so much want to turn the audience into a collection of soulless, unthinking bodies. Well, I found out quite by chance one day that the media was controlled by robots; it's a fact no one is supposed to know. They were obviously trying to create a society in which they'd have a better chance at ruling.

Our infamous Brown Initiative really was a test set up by the government. When no one complained, it assumed full control of the dispersal of other colors. And once Parliament had ridden our nation of brown, it sought to play the role of god by taking away from sight the color purple. The rationale behind this move was that it "frivolously flaunted its brash futility" in the face of the nation's ongoing "economic upheaval." However I obtained a copy of the official economic report, risking public knowledge of my existence. When I found that the economy was doing more than well, I wondered why the government would lie.

I was helpless to save purple. I sent my petitions through anonymous means and had my efforts promptly rejected. This scenario repeated itself as, color by color, I lost more tools to Delicaso's golden pen. But upon hearing that red, along with yellow and blue, was to be dismissed from service in the Primary Initiative, I stormed into one of Parliament's sessions and demanded an issue of cessation on all color initiatives.

Coldly, they said to me the words I would have forgotten had I not written them down. "It is because of our responsibility to the welfare of the people that we pass these laws. Time has not acted favorably to secure for future generations the promise of the better life inscribed in Thomas Jefferson's famous *Declaration* of our sister nation: All of mankind has the right to expect 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' By sending these colors packing, we insure no person shall have to stand up to such impossible standards of beauty, intelligence, temperance, and depth of character as demonstrated by these fine fellows. Thus we will rid the world of hate,

war, infidelity, and the time-honored emotion of jealousy. We will forcibly make this world color-blind. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream will be realized. No longer will man cheat on his wife, or vice-versa, as all people will look similar, act similarly, and be, in essence, the same. All shall be equal; all shall be free."

I didn't say their arguments made a whole lot of sense.

But just as I was about to point out the flaws in their justification, a lowly security guard half-dragged me to a holding cell for crimes against humanity, namely disrupting Parliament and-horror of horrors!-showing myself in public. And at that moment, my red was lost.

My running tally up until this point showed that I could not use brown, purple, orange, pink, green, yellow, red, and blue to express my emotions through painting, nor could I use any combinations of these colors. The world reverted to two shades, which were not even official colors.

In theory I might be persuaded to say the policy was good. Instead of a complex and emotionally straining world of colors, only the gray, black, and white portions remained. But the moralists would not stay satisfied with injecting or otherwise manipulating every living organism and painting the objects. They insisted that combining black and white was a dangerous process, with the result having already been noted, in the form of "corruption." They heralded the coming of the Absolutes, with room enough for no one to hide. That time, they said, could come only with the removal of either black or white.

The Parliament had had enough by this point. Instead of going on a power trip, as I figured most of them would, and passing the last Initiative, they staged what came to be known as the Great Mess. Half of them died by their own hands before the end of the debate, and the others never made it out of the room. I obtained tape copies of the cameras' views and from what I could tell, it was a ghastly death. Spasms were taking place all over the floor of the grand hall. Those not affected at the onset, terrified



black compositions, they never differed from the previous or next compositions. Those around me also received their final injections, to cure the "malady of skin color" they possessed, as the Moralistic doctor called it. Not having any color but black, our boxes were silent, our books were ashes, and we could not do anything needing contrast for clarification. I chucked my last pot of black paint, along with my brushes and black painting surfaces, out of my window last week. A "hey!" could

be heard from the outside, but I paid it no mind. by this unpredicted turn of events, ran to the doors and found them bolted shut. How wide their eyes opened and how loud were their screams! With their backs to the door, they pressed themselves along the walls, desperately fumbling for any means of escape. But the agent, apparently spreading through the air, caught them on the ground, begging for their very lives. The great equalizer triumphed.

The John C. Craiggs Memorial Center, home of the now-defunct Parliament, resisted conflagration. After two measly attempts to burn it to ashes, the new Moralistic government used a non-atomic bomb to crack it. Absolute Stone Hall, the renamed Prime Minister's office (he mysteriously took a vacation and never returned), housed the offices of the Absolute Nos. 1, 2, and 3. From that point on, life never was the same.

No one voted the Moralists into power. They simply responded to a vacuum, filled it, then started pumping our heads with their ideals. And while the Parliament had been liberal, the new Moralists were beyond radical and extreme. They made the Parliament look quite gentle and doting.

White was the first thing to go. From that day forward, I could only paint with black on black media. No matter how I changed the layering or brushstrokes of my

be heard from the outside, but I paid it no mind.

The government also began executing people who painted with colors using paint pots that had survived the frequent searches of private property or otherwise tolerated "the varied shades of" forbidden colors. At first, these criminals, deemed "traitors" by the Moralists, were marched in front of squads of soldiers who started first at non-vital organs, then moved very slowly to the more essential ones. And these were the lucky ones. After the Moralists realized no one was learning from the screams and offenders were increasing in number, they took to using more extreme punishments. Their brilliant ideas led them to use toxic gas and they forcibly herded us to large gathering areas to watch those who had been caught. I couldn't help noticing that their deaths and their reactions to them paralleled those of the Parliament's.

Ten thousand civilian casualties in three days of extermination techniques. The Moralists murdered them in plain sight in one of the darkest acts of the Moralistic government. The aboriginal people in this nation had unique genes that rejected pigment supplements, thus rendering their pigmentation the same as it had always been. The old Parliament had been content to

separate them from the rest of the population so as to prevent our seeing such colors, but the Moralists had apparently needed the land for something else. And seeing how the murders were last week, I feared for my life and future that which lay ahead.

But the wonder of the wait has ceased. The official word has come from the mouth of the Moralistic leader, Heml Cross, that we will be shipped underground tomorrow afternoon. Of course, it will cease to be afternoon for us as we will spend the rest of our lives below the surface. I was appalled when I learned that all 30 million of us would be forced to live underground, where we cannot see the light of day, be it orange, red, blue, yellow, purple, green, or white. We will have only black. All will be dark; days will not exist, nor will pleasure, pain, or emotion as we are to live like common burrowing animals with the mass control techniques still in place. They tell us we will finally be colorblind, free, and equal. Even our eyes cause problems for the Moralists, who want nothing but pure blackness. In the darkness of the underground, our blood will cease to appear red and our eyes will not be white and another color, our veins will not be blue, our teeth will not be white, nor will our skin flush red. We will be without sight.

I suppose humans would reproduce as normal down there and raise children like moles. But I was thinking it over, and it appears that a normal day would most probably be something like this:

We would awake whenever we wished. Our food would, of course, have to be scrounged from our dark surroundings, full of crawling black creatures. As we'd be 100 feet below the surface, no plants would be available. Every once in a while, I suppose,

we'd come across an animal that has burrowed down quite far, and we'd have a pleasant time eating raw flesh. But there would not be much to do. Forget the economy. Having only the comfort of large sterile dark room and paved tunnels, escape would not be possible.

It concerns me that we will not be able to remember in writing or read tales, history, and life. Lessons learned in past periods must either be known or such mistakes shall inevitably be repeated. I imagine people will be bored. Besides recounting past lives, there would not be much to do except reproduce and raise children in the dark, oppressive atmosphere. If I could reproduce, however, I would never subject a being to such horrid conditions.

I have considered escaping and



attempting to flee to another nation where such restrictive laws do not exist. But were I to be caught, my unique programming could be manipulated to the extent that I might be used to further the Moralists' ways. At the very least, I would lose control of my mind. And much as I would like to taste true freedom, I cannot allow my special abilities to fall into the hands of the government to which I consecrate so much. Protecting my intellect is my sole responsibility outside of not allowing anyone to see me.

If you are reading this, it must mean the Moralists were conquered and the people freed. Or perhaps your government found landmass devoid of any people and decided to take it. If such is the case, I hope you can be good enough to free the virtual slaves under the surface. Those who have not died of boredom must surely still be reproducing underneath.

I do not know what sort of life you are living—for all I know, the people of my country may have revolted. But I am satisfied with my existence for the most part. I am a rather unique work, if I do say so myself. My creator's name I cannot write, however, for fear that if the Moralists find this, she shall not survive to emerge from the underground. And now, for the last time, for added emphasis, I'd like to end with

Kalbi (Korean Beef)
by Albert Suh

In the smoke filled atmosphere,
my family enjoys dinner at the Kalbi Restaurant.
First comes the sound of the lady slicing the beef
on to the hot
burning gold plate,
the slicing, clean and soft like a paper-cut.

Then lands each chunk of beef onto the plate,
and quickly it boils itself
spewing out the bubbly grease inside.

The frying of the tasty meat
turns quickly the red spots into a rich brown,
burning some parts slightly black,
bringing joyful anticipation.

I pick up a green leaf,
and a piece of lettuce, forming a double layer,
with a piece of warm meat between,
covered with an orange, spicy bean sauce.

The beef enters my mouth,
and I crunch down madly on the lettuce,
while flavor squirts out to fill my mouth completely.

BROWN! WHITE! BLUE! RED! GREEN! PURPLE!
YELLOW! ORANGE! PINK! But I hate black.

Editor's note: This narrative was found in present day England and was printed on papyrus contained in a sealed capsule, lying in some rubbish believed to have been used to build computational devices among which was found an archaic processing chip inscribed with six identifiable letters: "A.I.N.T.E.L." Carbon-14 dating has shown that the youngest bones below the surface in crude tunnels were 234 years old while the oldest were 236. As for the year 2257 (the only date in the story), our scientists have used old calendars to determine it was approximately 236 years ago. The story was not abridged in any manner.

Untitled
by Kevin Yoo

Don't blame yourselves when I die,
although it may hurt, please don't cry.
Believe it or not, it was meant to be this way,
even if you begged, I would choose not to stay.
Life is cruel and it's too much to bare,
when it comes to living I just don't care.
You probably think I'm selfish for wanting it all to end,
but when its all over, apologies and blessings I will send.
To all those who cared and thought my life was great,
I know you tried to help me, but I'm afraid it's just too late...

A Bitter Cup of Coffee

by John Yim

We live in a coffee-driven world. There's no denying that fact; coffee is the world's most valuable agricultural commodity. Many would be quick to point to caffeine as the reason for this; the jumpstart it provides as well as its slight addictiveness surely keep many a drinker happy. However, in this world of ours today, the coffee's bitter taste may be a better reason. The bitterness of coffee matches perfectly with our motif of bitterness. One fits the other like OJ's glove; it's tight.

These days, we have an attraction to the bitter, cynical side of things. We like to incessantly whine about our problems like some mosquito on stimulant drugs. When we become disillusioned with life or one of its aspects, we sulk. That's because we're wimps. We don't have the guts to go through our lives and put up with all our challenges. We just give up and decide that pulling over to the side to be bitter, cynical, and sarcastic is much better. At least while we're annoyed with ourselves, we can make someone else annoyed as well.

That's life you may say. And it very well may be. This sarcasm of society is so ingrained within us that we live in "doublethink." We think several layers away from the literal; everything is taken for granted. When one says, "that was smart," in a sarcastic manner, most of us will automatically interpret that as false. We'll look underneath to the implied, "that was stupid." We won't consider the literal meaning of our words; instantly it's discarded as a facade of a deeper, often opposite meaning. This becomes all the more apparent, and disturbing, in full interactive conversations among people.

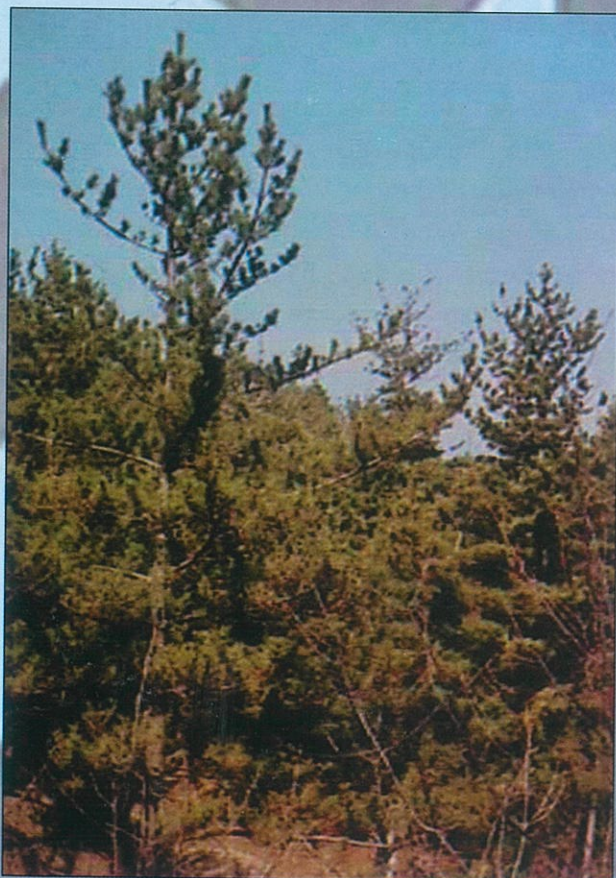
This whole trend of negativism really is bothersome. Why can't we all just stop and be a little more productive? I mean, look, we waste all this time lashing out at something, being bitter and all. Instead of throwing away our precious time and energy to think, say, or even write all this junk, we could just be sitting back and taking all the bitterness we'd ever want from a little cup of black, black coffee.



THE WILLOW TREE

BY JOHN YU

I LOOKED AT A WILLOW TREE, AND I AM OVERWHELMED BY A FEELING OF RESPECT. ITS HEAD IS ALWAYS BENT LOW. IT IS HUMBLE, AND YET DIGNIFIED. THE TALL TREE DROOPING ITS HAIR AND GENTLY SWAYING ITS LEAVES IN THE BREEZE DEFINES MAJESTY; ITS MAJESTIC APPEARANCE BUYS MY RESPECT. YET, IT IS NOT PROUD. EVEN THOUGH IT DESERVES MUCH RESPECT, IT IS MODEST. IT STANDS ALONE—ISOLATED FROM OTHER TREES. WILLOW TREES ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR NETWORK OF ROOTS THAT ABSORB ALL THE WATER IN THEIR VICINITY AND FOR MOLDING THE SOIL ON WHICH THEY STAND. I DESIRE TO POSSESS THE SAME CHARACTERISTICS.



MY SURNAME IS YU, A CHARACTER MEANING WILLOW TREE. LIKE THESE TREES, I TOO, SOAK UP MY LIFE. MY EXPERIENCES

STRENGTHEN ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND I CAN STAND FIRMLY ON MY OWN. TRAPPED BETWEEN TWO CULTURES, I LIKE THE WILLOW TREE. I CANNOT MINGLE WITH OTHER TREES FOR THEY FIND THAT I AM DIFFERENT. CULTURE IS ONE OF THE STRONGEST BINDING FORCES; YET I DO NOT BELONG TO A SINGLE CULTURE. ETHNICALLY, I AM KOREAN, BUT I AM ALSO AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. KOREANS DO NOT ACCEPT ME BECAUSE OF MY NATIONALITY; THEY THINK I AM TAINTED BY AMERICA. THE AMERICANS, ON THE OTHER HAND, CANNOT RELATE TO ME BECAUSE, IN FACT, MY CULTURE IS DIFFERENT. I ACCEPT THIS SITUATION AS PART OF MY LIFE AND USE IT TO MY ADVANTAGE. AS A RESULT, I HAVE LEARNED NOT TO LEAN ON ANYONE. I DO NOT HAVE TO DEPEND ON OTHERS FOR MY IDENTITY. INSTEAD, I KNOW THAT I AM UNIQUE AND STRONG; I HARDEN THE EARTH BENEATH MY FEET AND FIRMLY STAND ALONE.

YET, UNLIKE A WILLOW, I AM NOT HUMBLE. POSSESSING THIS TRAIT IS ONE OF THE MOST ARDUOUS TASKS WITH WHICH I AM CONFRONTED. I LACK PATIENCE, AND MY FIERY TEMPER TURNS DOWN MANY OF MY FRIENDSHIPS OR BRIDGES, AS WELL AS MY PERSONAL WORTH. AGAIN AND AGAIN I SCOLD MYSELF AND PROMISE TO KEEP CONTROL, AND TIME AFTER TIME I FAIL TO KEEP MY VOW. STILL, WHEN I LOOK AT A WILLOW, MY DETERMINATION GROWS ONCE MORE. I WILL SUCCEED. I WILL POSSESS A NOBLE LOOK AND HUMBLE MANNERS IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIPS.

EVEN THOUGH I AM ALONE AND SEPARATED FROM MY RACE AND NATION, I AM NOT AFRAID. I WILL ROOT TO MY PLACE ON EARTH, PERSEVERE, AND GROW EACH YEAR LIKE THE WILLOW. THEN, PERHAPS ONE DAY, PEOPLE WILL LOOK TO ME WITH AWE AND RESPECT.

Gabing

by Vivian Kim

His face was covered with dirt
and a smile.
My little Batman in the Philippines.
Less than 3 feet tall,
but full of vigor—
Dancing,
laughing,
rolling in the dirt.
Carefree and oblivious to pain,
Playing with Coke bottles and stones.
Technology free,
but happier than any kid I've ever known.
How old are you Gabing?
5
Years of happiness in a bottle,
From a bottle.
Eyes of an angel—
Huge,
Bright,
Brown.
Unceasingly active,
Playful.
Easily amused.
Easily loved.
He talks to strangers,
He tells people his age,
He wears the same outfit all week long
But doesn't care.
I gave him a smile
And got back one worth mounds of gold.
Beautiful innocence and love.
Nothing like it,
unexplainable happiness
no amount of money could buy.
Gabing! Canta para namu!
He runs away.
Gabing! Canta para namu!
Guapo, Gabing!
He looks and then he is gone.

A Review: *You Can't Take It With You*

by Claire de Braekeleer

On the evening of November 13th and 14th, SFS was treated to the comedy *You Can't Take It With You* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. Set in the 1930's America, the play focuses on the lives of the Sycamore family and friends. Under the wise eye of patriarch Martin Vanderhof (David Park), the extended clan includes a wide variety of ages, nationalities, intellects, and especially pastimes. In fact, possibly the only unifying characteristic is their inability to conform.

The conflict soon becomes evident as the romantic daughter Alice Sycamore (Ingrid Millis) and rich, upper class Tony Kirby (Dan Kim) are introduced. Alice is, as you might expect, afraid that Tony's conservative parents will disapprove of her unconventional

household. When the young couple gets engaged, both anticipate the meeting of the two families to be explosive. The welcoming committee for Tony's parents includes, amongst others, a snake-keeping grandfather, firework-making father, sex-crazed mother, and a toga-wearing geriatric houseguest. This hilarious scene emphasizes the difference between the free-spirited Sycamore family and the image-concerned Kirby parents, who take immense pride in their assets in Wall Street.



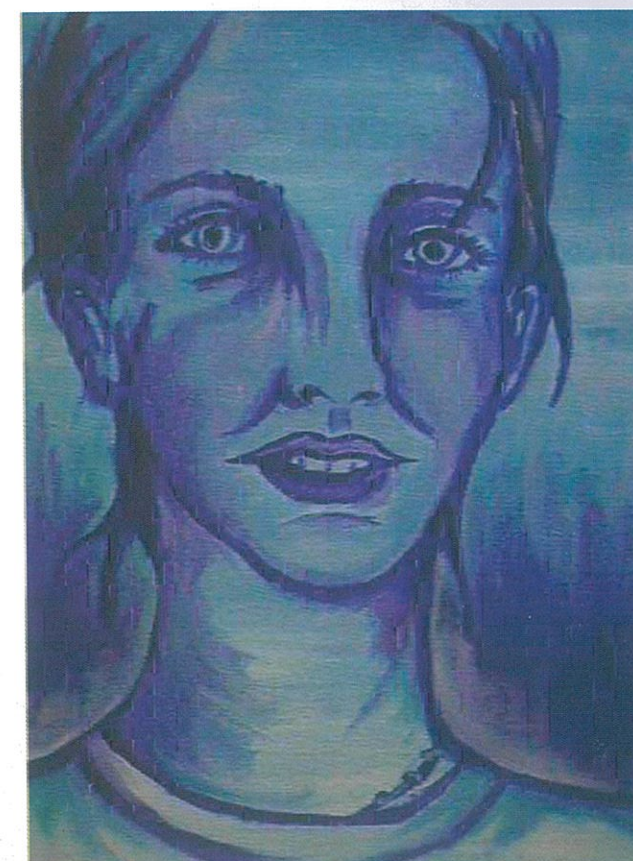
Amongst a strong ensemble cast, the overall execution of the offbeat characters is impressive. The supporting characters provide much entertainment, with standout Josh Williams as the Russian ballet teacher who consistently provokes chuckles. Both Nicky Clark and Peter Lemmich give strong performances as the Sycamore parents. However, it is David Park who steals the show. As the accepting, sagely Vanderhof, he is a convincing grandfather, quirky and humorous, yet able to gain compassion from the audience. His confrontational scene with Mr. Kirby is performed without flaw.

The purpose of drama is, after all, to reach the audience, and this play is not without a deeper meaning. As the title suggests, in reference to money, "you can't take it with you." We cannot take material wealth with us from this life, but we can strive to find happiness when alive. Indeed, this story is full of examples of unorthodox, but content individuals. Just as Martin Vanderhof gives up his stressful job in business for a more fulfilling one consisting of snakes and graduation ceremonies, we can all make an effort, however small, to live according to what we enjoy, not simply what is deemed socially correct.

Shards of Myself

by Ingrid Millis

As a writer, I am like a jagged, bent, convex-concave curved shard of glass; something a lonely denizen of the alleys would find next to shaded spiral fire escapes and garbage resting places, overshadowed by city buildings that are the spawn of urban sensibility. Perhaps I would be rose-coloured, or perhaps a frosty green, like the material old cola bottles are made of; perhaps I would be christened with designs and trademarks, or perhaps I would have been created smooth and pure from the machine which born me, covered only by superficial filth. The shape of the glass gives me my slant on life, as from one side things may be perceived as nearsighted and alarmingly immediate, and from the other everything is farsighted and omniscient. In prose and poetry, it is possible to see life from both these angles, simultaneously and schizophrenically. The shattered piece of glass reflects rainbows of the visible spectrum of colour and beyond when inspired by the white light of sunshine, art, or love. All of these combinations and images then are always deemed beautiful to the glass, because the heat of these forces is enough to make existence suddenly worthwhile. Yet tears and rain precipitate onto my writing's cutting form, as the glass is cleansed inside and out, burdened by additional knowledge, and made to be grateful. Quite understandably, not many people are apt to look upon a fragile piece of glass and think it beautiful,



or even worth a hand to carry it home to be stored in some safe cupboard to be looked back upon later, with slow secret smiles. And so I rest much dismayed by the concrete, sheltered and befriended by minute tufts of grass and cynical cigarette ends smoked to the death. My work as a writer has cruel beginnings and cessations, drawing no clear explanations if one is insensitive, or blood if one is fortunate enough to be able to abandon his or her good sense for a few moments to revere words.

4:37 AM

by Young Yee Shin

It's 4:37 A.M.
Or
Is
It 9:37 P.M.
On a Friday night
And
I
Don't have
To
Wake
Up
But it's really 4:37 A.M. Tuesday morning and I have
A biotest and french homework and art work to finish
I. Have. Less. Than. Two. Hours.
If it were 4:32, or even 4:35,
I would've pushed away my covers
Really
But
It's not
And
It's
Too late
Might as well
Just
Go back to sleep
And
Worry
About
It

Tomorrow.

A Day

by Catherine Ghim

The ninja sun seeped in,
disrupting a calm morning
Cackling wickedly,
its rays permeated our souls
and gnawed at the home my culture.
It rose again,
only to swoop down on innocence,
pack it up in a splintery wooden crate,
and ship it away.
Zapping crystalline dew drops
off the jade skin
of tender young ginkgo leaves
into a crusty white residue
of what was.
the morning pleaded
and weeped,
then transformed into noon.
But the sun never listened
to its silent sobs.
finally, the sun
flickered down to a
dusty yellow light bulb
and surrendered its pride
to a star-spangled night.
An old woman sits down with a sigh.
She is too tired and too weary,
but glares at an outstretched hand
with beady lifeless eyes
as she refuses to accept
an apology
for the death of morning.

A Greeting from Above

by Bo Kim

Uncle Sam was my best friend. I can't remember back to when I didn't know him. He always seemed to be around me, probably because I followed him everywhere he went. His back was always bent and he never looked straight into my eyes when we talked. But he always told me beautiful stories about everything, even about how the many cockroaches crawled around our yard.

There was only one thing that I liked to listen other than his stories: his songs. It just somehow sounded so different from songs that were sung by people who looked more like me. Uncle Sam said that it's because his people always sing with their souls. I really didn't know what he meant by that. When I begged him to explain, he said that I'd never understand. And in fact, I never did.



Grandma never approved of our friendship. She always wore a parasol in order to prevent herself from getting even a slight tan. She always called him "Boy," although he was almost as old as she was, maybe even older. She often dragged me away from him saying that she'd play with me instead. However, I knew that she couldn't sing with her soul.

I had told Grandma that I wanted a pair of black leather boots for my twelfth birthday. I guess, inside, I really wanted to become a man. So she set out for town early that morning of my

birthday. The day was just beautiful. The sky seemed deeper than the sea and the gentle breeze from the fields brought with it the sweet odor of the flowers. The day was too perfect.

Late in the afternoon, I was lingering about the road leading to my house from town, eager to take a look at my new pair of boots. Uncle Sam had said that he'd come and wait with me once he is done with his chores for the day. I turned around to look in the direction of my house and I saw him coming towards me. Then I saw something crawl on the ground in front. I crouched down to take a closer look and it was a cockroach. I suddenly remembered the story Uncle Sam had told me about cockroaches. I was so deeply caught in my thinking that I couldn't hear Grandma's coach approaching me. The day was too perfect. And Uncle Sam should have never told me the story about cockroaches.

The coach approached closer and I didn't know it. Just as it was about to hit, Uncle Sam pushed me out of the way to the other side of the road. But he didn't have enough time to get out himself. The day was too perfect. Uncle Sam should have never told me the story about cockroaches. He died on my twelfth birthday. He died in my place.

When the Civil War broke out, I decided to join the army. I had made up my mind to fight for Uncle Sam's people. I knew that that was the only way to ever pay him back for what he had done for me. Grandma

opposed when I told my family that I was going to join the army. I told her my reason; she hugged me tight, sobbing and nodding silently.

I guess Uncle Sam had heard Grandma's cry. He sent Robert to accompany me in the war. I never thought I could ever meet a friend like Uncle Sam again, but there was Robert. I suppose Uncle Sam was too worried to leave me alone during the war.

~*~*~*~

"Nice ring you got there."

"Oh, thanks. It's from my sweetheart back home. She makes jewelry for a living."

This was the first thing we said to each other as we met inside our tent on the first day of training. Robert's ring was neither flashy nor attractive, but something about it gave me a warm and cozy feeling. And that's exactly how our friendship came to be: warm and cozy, something that's hard to find in a battlefield.

He was a photographer or so he said. I couldn't understand how he could be one though, since all the pictures he ever took were only of the sky. He particularly liked the sky right before or during snowfalls, when it was completely white. "It seems to purify my heart. And no matter how hard the situation is down here, it seems to be so peaceful up there," said Robert. That was his explanation. I guess that's why I couldn't stop him from joining the peaceful world up there.

The night before his departure, he ran back into our tent with a huge smile on his face. He had received a letter from his sweetheart, Charlotte. He read the letter over and over again, until he almost knew it by heart. Although the letter had actually been hand-written by an acquaintance (since Charlotte was illiterate), he said that he could feel Charlotte's love from it. That day, he stayed up all through the night writing her a reply.

The next morning around eight o'clock, I heard an explosion nearby. It was followed by the gathering of every soldier in our regiment. We were ready to fight. With some fear and some worries but mostly with courage, we marched toward the battlefield. Before we began our attack, Robert and I glanced at each other and winked, like we always did before we fought a battle. And that was the last time I saw those deeply set, aqua eyes.

He was shot three times in the chest, one almost directly through his heart. With explosions and smoke surrounding us, I fell to the ground, picking him up in my arms.

"I'm...alright, Thomas...I'm.....," said Robert, wincing painfully.

"I know, Robert, I know. You'll be fine...you will." I couldn't stop my tears from rolling down my cheeks.

"Here...Thomas.....take this." Reaching into his inner chest pocket of his uniform, he handed me a letter stained in red, just like his violently shaking hand. "Please...read it...to Charlotte.....for me, will you...?" He strained to open his eyes, but the pain was too strong.

"Of course, Robert, of course." My tears were falling hard against his face. I couldn't let him go, so I looked up into the sky to keep them from falling. The sky was white as ever, as if it was getting ready to greet Robert into its world. I'm not sure how long I sat there looking up at the sky. I couldn't hear anything. Then I felt cold snowflakes land on my forehead. I looked down at Robert, who had fallen into his eternal sleep. His face was calm, almost a smile. I whispered, "Tell Uncle Sam that I'm doing fine, okay?" I looked up again. And I knew he was telling me that he had been accepted into the world of peace by offering me the soft and tender snow from there.

~*~*~*~

I've been waiting for the carriage to pick me up for an hour now. My chest is starting to throb again, from where I had had a bullet removed, day before yesterday. The regiment doctor had told me that it was too damaged to be repaired.

I could finally see the carriage coming toward me. I couldn't wait to see my grandma, my mom, my dad, and my sisters, although I'd have to leave them in a short while. Maybe it would comfort them a little if I told them that they need not worry, for Uncle Sam will take good care of me.

On my way home, I should really stop over at Robert's hometown to read Charlotte his letter. I'll ask her if she has anything she wants to tell him, since I'll be there soon. I just felt something cold falling against my forehead. I guess he is already greeting me from above.

Untitled

by Kristina Rader (adapted from "The Worn Path" by Eudora Welty)

long snakelike road

no, not a road, maybe a path

soft and painted,

winter placid,

grooves 'bin worn

tread upon.

my grandbaby's sick

throat's not right

needs medicine again,

walk the same old path

almost as old as the skirts,

and the rags, and ringlets, and wrinkles

but not quite.

I be old as dirt,

and still livin'

love that grandbaby, he all I got

ceptin' the skirts and rags and ringlets and wrinkles

worn path,

I walk

Cornucopia

by Grace Kim

Success is an unreliable paradise,

Made to lure all whom are ambitious

A trap filled with a lifetime of unbearable cries.

It begins with a dream, oh so delicious.

Then it goes further to create visions,

Of being someone of significance.

Climbing past the soaring high walls of decisions,

One tries to reach a place of importance.

Honor, wealth, and prestige

These prizes of the game called prosperity,

Which cost the lives of many under siege.

Even though there is much agony,

Some think success is worth

The sweat and blood which enable its birth.

The Color of Creation

by Melanie Yoogalingam

Swirls of color flowing endlessly through the world
From the picturesque plains of Africa to the snowcapped mountains of Tibet.

People with rich skin as dark as ebony,
People with soft skin as light as ivory,
People with beautifully baked brown skin,
And people with brilliant yellow skin,
All created beautiful in the eyes of God,
All created equal in Intelligence and in Love.

And then life changed forever.

No longer was harmony intact,
But ruptured by the scourge of man.
All sides fighting for supremacy and neither side yielding in its pursuit.

The entire world was in chaos.

Mighty Wars crushed the Earth
As weaponry, machinery, and nuclear power all combined to kill.
Millions died at the hands of the merciless, and thousands more were yet to be murdered.

Yet,

As all this was happening,

Not a glance was thrown towards the generation of tomorrow – the children.

Thrown in the middle of these dastardly games, and taught to be biased and evil,
They never stood a chance.
They committed the same crimes that were committed,
And never learned from past mistakes.

And thus, the vicious cycle continued until the world could take no more, and all life ceased to exist.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Presenting:
The Color of Our World

Some Good, Old-fashioned Sheep

by Patrick Chapman

You've been here before. It's 8:00 in the morning and you're sitting in Algebra II class, barely awake, barely listening to the teacher's monotonous voice drone on about logarithms, and you find your mind drifting. Not drifting to fantasy images, or to the rock concert you missed over the weekend, but the drifting to the one thing you didn't get to do last night. I speak, of course, of sheep.

You try to keep your eyes open, you try to learn, but the only idea swimming through your fatigued brain is the sweet glory that is sheep. Sheep during the morning, sheep during the day, and especially sheep all through the night. As a typical teenage male in high school, I know that's all I can think about.

Unfortunately, I find I don't have as much time for sheep as I used to. In the good old days, I could sheep whenever I wanted, usually



at around 8:00 at night when I was young. And then I'd do it all through the night. Nothing but sheep, sheep, and more sheep. I loved everything about the experience. I loved stretching out after being curled up in the same position for hours on end. I loved the funny taste

in my mouth after I woke up from my sheep. I loved the sweet dreams it gave me. Sometimes they'd be nightmares, and I'd come out of my sheep in a cold sweat, but that was okay. At least I *had* sheep, a luxury no longer available to me.

As I've come to learn, good sheep is harder to get the older I get. Instead of acting on my impulses to get some sheep, I am now forced to suppress my urges; to deny the burning, seething action my body demands. I can't get any release; I don't ever get a chance to unwind, loosen up, and obey nature's most poignant command. I can no longer snuggle in a large, warm bed and spread my body wide open. My arms and legs are never sprawled all over the entangled sheets, inviting the sheep to take over and enter me anymore. Instead, my greatest pleasure has been reduced to only an hour or two of sheep a night; an hour or two of unfulfilling and low quality sheep at that.

Needless to say, all of this has taken its toll on me; both in body and mind. All sorts of things have begun to fall apart. My eyes are sunken in, I feel stiff and tight all over, and it seems as though my bodily fluids are flowing with alarming irregularity. It frightens me. But that's not all, believe it or not. The side-effects have not been limited to just my physical well-being, but also include that of my mental and emotional states: I already explained my torpidity and sluggishness... it's just so *hard* to survive off of two hours of sheep! My overworked appendages hang limp, they're so exhausted. But it seems as though this is just the beginning... I can feel myself slipping further into a downward spiral heading towards a world where the majesty of sheep is *completely* absent. I'm suffering so much now (indeed, we all are) that I can't fathom surviving that. When it comes right down to it, I depend on sheep more

than anyone else, an addiction only worsened by deprivation.

I blame this on school, to be honest. Having recounted the horrors the students across America and I have endured, it is here that I will make my plea for mercy. We students sit in school all day, learning about calculus, physics, and other useless trivia, then go straight home to study it some more, neglecting sheep altogether. Well, I have a message for you, professors and teachers of the world: we teenagers need our sheep. If you give students the time to re-energize with sheep, I can almost guarantee better performance in academics,

Viola

by Daniel Shim

I started playing viola when I was six years old. You wouldn't believe me, but I truly cannot remember a time when I wasn't playing the viola. I remember watching *Sesame Street* one time, when this famous violinist came on. I told my mother that I wanted to do that, too. However, she knew what pains could arise from a six year old starting the high, squeaky violin, so she asked me if I wanted to take cello instead. For some reason, I didn't want to play sitting down. I suppose you could say that I was an active little child. And so my mother suggested the viola and I then began lessons in a few weeks. My first teacher's name was Mrs. McClary. She was a woman of unending patience. She had to have been, for I can't remember an instance in which she raised her voice. We began with all the basics: how to hold the bow, how to hold the viola up. Eventually, I was scratching out variations of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

In that year, my sister also began to take lessons. She was too young to actually produce music, and so, in order for her to practice, she was given a wrapped Cracker Jack box for her viola and a dowel rod with a block at the end of her bow. I remember how excited she was the day that she got a real viola, and as a "congratulations" prize, she was able to open the box and eat the contents. We also had a cardboard palette with foot marks on it. There were three positions. The first position was feet together and pointing straight ahead. This was for times you bow or wait to play. The second was with the feet in the form of a "V" and the third was with the left foot placed forward and to the left. This was to help us with our standing. Each foot position had a corresponding viola position and in a short while, we had mastered it.

My sister's lessons and mine took place with Mrs. McClary in an old church. We played our violas downstairs where there was a type of nursery, for children to play during services. And so, all of my first lessons took place in a surrounding of building blocks and finger paintings. While one was taking lessons, the other would be busy making creations out of the blocks, trying to keep quiet as possible. Unfortunately, this didn't work well. Somehow, through those first months when I was barely able to tie properly my own shoes, Mrs. McClary had me playing a musical instrument, and more importantly, developed my love for music that I have today.

athletics, and all kinds of classes ranging everywhere from biology to sex education.

With a good night's sleep, we will begin our first period class with stamina and vitality instead of lassitude and lethargy. We will come into school with a refreshing sleep behind us and will be prepared to work to our full capacity. So heed my message and heed it well, teachers: you let us have all the cozy sheep we want and I can promise, without any shadow of a doubt, that we will use it to perform our hardest and to penetrate even the greatest of obstacles. All these assurance... and to think, this can all be achieved with just some good, old-fashioned sheep.

Unspoken by John Yu

Tonight we refuse to speak.
We try to remember each moment the way it is.
Silence prevails as we sit side by side on sloping banks of the lake, like two love birds perched on a branch.
Below, a lake sleeps in the night, tucked away underneath a blanket of shadows.
Above, a crescent moon sails in the blue-black sky, steered at an angle, shining like a burning ship.
Cool motionless air mirrors the stillness of the dark waters.
When Dawn comes to paint the sky,
She, like a bird flying from tree to tree, will leave me far behind.
Wary of sleeping parents, we cautiously crawled out of our houses to share one last night.
But now awkwardness settles over us like heavy smoke,
Suffocating my voice in its box.
Her face silently tilts up towards the sky, mute but understanding.
The only ripples through the quiet air are the cicadas crying, "Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!"
I feel a wet drop or imagine one, for the lake is still calm.
Not showing our inner feelings, we return home, each thinking the same thought.
Fearing all forms of separation, we foolishly seal our lips—as though this conscious act will keep us from the inevitable.
But our bodies unrestrained, we move away.
Tomorrow I know—
She will receive a new life, and with it, all thoughts, memories will be lost in an abyss of immutable time.



Behind Her Smile

by Merrill Shin

My friend Samantha was the most precocious girl to hit Peace River Elementary School. At age 7, she knew about the popular music of the time, how to do a French twist, every second-graders' favorite hairstyle, and the fundamentals of kissing. At age 8, she knew more. She suddenly appeared to have an especially impressive understanding of how our small county court dealt with custody battles. At age 9, she described the kind of crooks her mother the probation officer had to follow around. She even called them "ex-convicts." I've never heard another 9-year old say the word "ex-convict." At the same time, Samantha was a kid. The way she sang those crazy Billy Joel songs in the car on the way to the park had a slight touch of purity to it.

Samantha and her mother went right after school to Gilchrist Park every Friday. I had joined them five times. We always went with a full stock of pickles in the fire red plastic cooler. Samantha loved everything about pickles. The strange expression their sourness inspired her to make, the unnaturally fluorescent green "juice," and the way they shriveled up after she gave them a good sucking.

On my fifth trip to Gilchrist Park with Samantha, we decided to break from our usual routine: swings, jungle gym, slide, seesaw, monkey bars. We felt forced to institute a drastic change by moving backwards through the routine and starting with the monkey bars. This was because we always ended up having to leave the park never having gotten to the bars. She started singing "Uptown Girl" with a voice louder than most days. Her green dress, a dress I had seen on her more than a few times, looked brighter than I had remembered.

"Oh whoo-----a, oh whoo-----a, she's an uptown girl! Sing with me, Jaemi!" Samantha was screaming at the top of her lungs as she skillfully moved herself bar to bar. But of course I couldn't sing with her; the only tunes I was familiar enough to sing were

the melodies of the arias, concertos, and overtures that my father loved.

"Hurry up," she called to me over her shoulder. I could never catch up to her, and she knew it, but it was a habit of hers to always tell me to hurry anyway.

She suddenly stopped; I figured that she was giving me a chance to catch up. I panted as I reached for bar after bar, somehow keeping my eyes on both the bars and sand a yard under my dangling legs as I went.

I was about four bars away from Samantha when she turned her head around. Her face was red, her eyes glossy. She said nothing but just hung there. I didn't say anything either. I hung until it was as if I could really feel my knuckles turning more and more white. Staring at each other for a good five minutes, we hung there until her body dropped to the sand.

Twenty years later, I find myself standing in the middle of a city that knows no tragic childhood heartbreaks. Monkey bars do not make it to the \$80-a-plate dinner tables, and in the same way, nobody thinks to talk about their best friend that died twenty years ago, either. I loved the city for that. The business and chaos of the city made me forget, and the beauty of it was that I didn't even have to make a conscious effort to do so.

I half-walk, half-jog to the magnificent building on Madison and Columbus. Once I, in my traditionally rushed manner, meet the gray granite steps leading up to its glass carousel doors, I go through the words of the silent prayer I have come to say every morning: thank you, God, for this beautiful building, the Ivy League education that got me here, and the thousands upon thousands of dollars that my parents squeezed out for that education. I smile to see the familiar beggar on the third step and I throw him the change from the muffin I bought and ate on the way. And then it happened.

"Doodoo, doo doo doo!!!"

Someone was whistling. I stopped dead in my tracks. Slowly, I turned around. I saw a woman about my age. The song was familiar, but of a world that I had left behind. I concentrated on the tune, but I could not draw a line to connect me with it.

"Excuse me, one beggar is enough here," I said, in my cool, businesswoman voice.

"Yes, you wouldn't want to deplete the revenue of this other one here!" jeered Rick, who worked on the floor above mine.

"Doodoo, doo doo doo..." She began to go through the curious tune once more as I continued to walk back up the stairs. Unable to control myself, I looked back. I had to. Her fat lips still puckered in a whistle, she looked up at me.

"No..." I denied what I saw. It wasn't her. She died of some heart condition. What was it called again? All I could remember was that I could never get the pronunciation correct. She smiled.

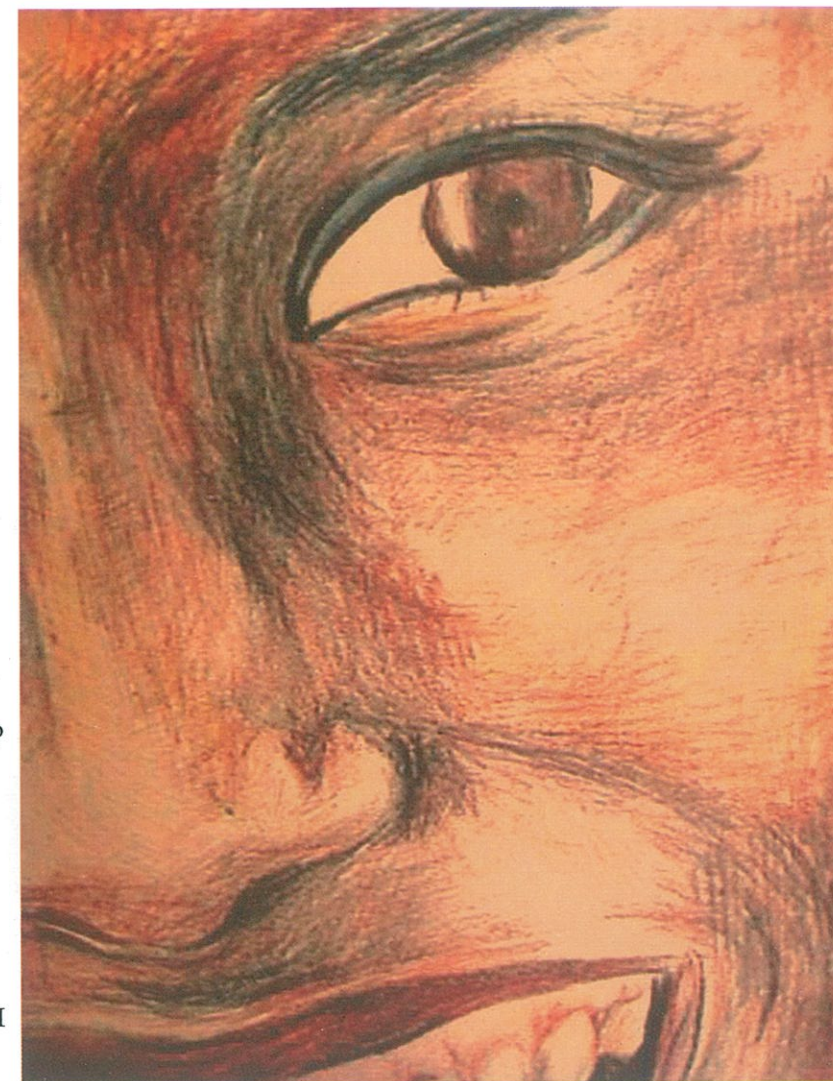
"Don't worry. She's dead; I'm not her. I'm just a... middleman," she said with a voice that was as smooth as ice cream.

"And what... what is it you need?" I couldn't stop the trembling in my voice. Since my move to the city, I had never seen anything that reminded me of Samantha or spoken to anyone about her.

"Samantha's sad," the woman continued, "It appears you've forgotten her, Jaemi!"

"You don't—"

"No, I do understand. Who does want to relive a tragedy and devote time everyday to mourning over a girl who will never graduate from college, find her true love, and hold her baby in her arms? A life most undesirable! But that's not what that little girl is



asking for! Just because she wishes you would think of her from time to time doesn't mean she would like you to do so with pools of tears spilling out of your eyes and a sorrowful frown on your face! Think of her with a smile; think of all of the slides you two slid down and all of the birds you fed at the park! Think of her and smile."

I stared at this curious "middleman" and her tattered clothes. Suddenly, I knew the smile behind the thin lips and crooked teeth, in the same way I suddenly recognized the fiery gleam in her eyes. And I smiled.

Four Cities

by Alyson Slack

The four cities I have lived in during my lifetime of seventeen years are so contrasting and distinct from each other that they individually represent to me a unique phase of my life. Hong Kong, the Chicago suburb, Charleston, and now Seoul, have all contributed their colors to the special personality and mentality that are me.

Hong Kong is often only a vague childhood memory, since I left it when I was only eleven years old. But in the years that I was living back in the States, I always felt that the experience of living overseas made me different and certainly more worldly than my peers, some of whom had never left their



home state. More than occasionally, in my bedroom in Charleston, I would turn on my deep blue Christmas lights that covered the wall and start to remember all the millions of lights of that city, and put myself into those memories, pretending I was there. More obscure little memories come back to me as clear as crystal when I reflect like that, sitting in a deep blue illuminated room.

My preteen years spent in a suburb in Chicago called Naperville, may as well have come straight off a brightly colored TV sitcom. After all, there are so many young kids in those confusing years between eleven and fourteen years old, living in the ideal neighborhood with lots of kids who play outside from dawn till dark, just going into middle school. The indispensable best friend, the crushes and boyfriends who didn't last more than a week, and all the other

things that generally characterize your average preteen, were all there for me during my two and a half years in Naperville.

Charleston was a different place altogether. It was a green and brown countryside, it was historic, it was full of rich old Southern families, and it was full of scattered trailers. Its black people still knew very well the stories of their enslaved ancestors, and its white people still knew very well the stories of their slave-owning ancestors. On my drive to school every morning while playing Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," I passed through the black trailer community and then an old rusted pickup truck sporting Dixie pride bumper stickers driven by your typical southern redneck. I then drove five miles down a road where there was no life to be seen except an occasional deer, which would just miss the hood of my car if it was lucky. After that, I passed by the connector that led to the beautiful barrier islands. My favorite part of the drive was going over the old, extremely narrow, rickety Cooper River bridge, which got a safety rating of 4 out of 100 about five years ago. Going twenty miles above the speed limit, it always sounded and felt a bit like a roller coaster. The river below is one of the most beautiful sights I can remember when the sunrise is melting into it, creating fantastic colors of orange and yellow. If one dares to take his eyes off the road for a minute, he might see some dolphins breaking the surface. Living "way down South in Dixie" was possibly one of the best times of my life so far and it was the time when I really found out who I am.

And now I'm embarking on another phase of my life, living the experience of another foreign city, Seoul, Korea, that will blend yet another color into me.

November 16, 1998~1:44am

by Ingrid Millis

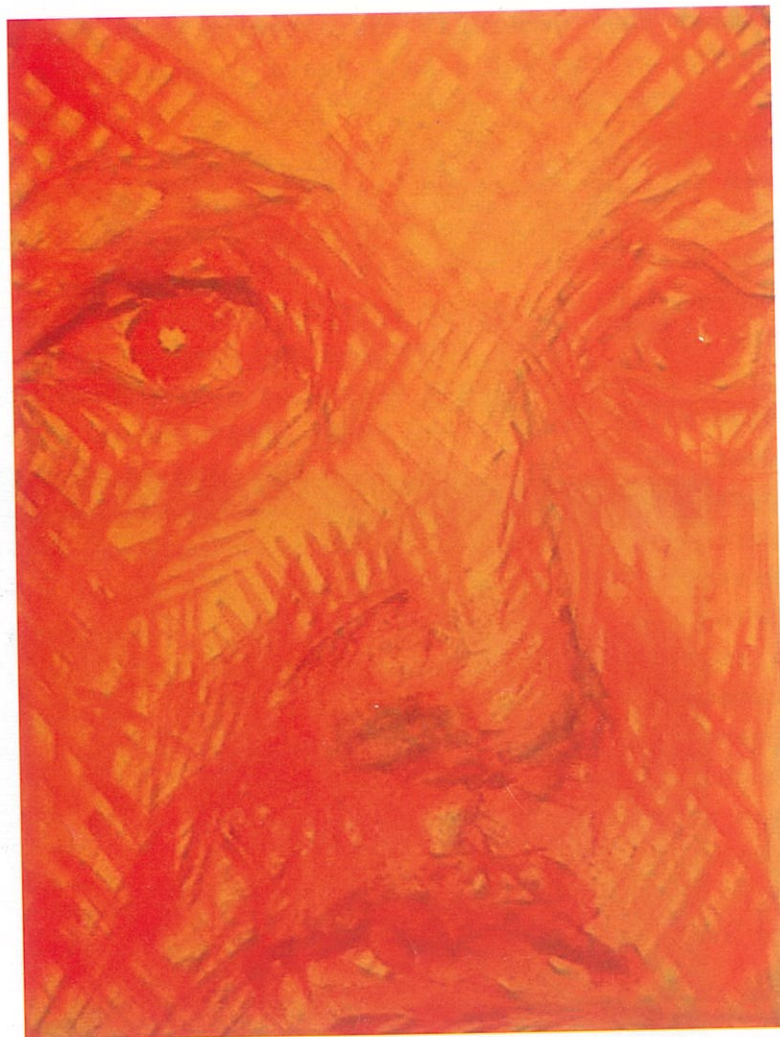
Sometimes the body aches and pleads
To write poems,
To have something extrapolated
From its soul other than
Tears that do not travel well and safely
Upon its face.
It is so painful though to
Rouse one's self from nearsighted
Slumber of light,
To grasp a tool for ruminating on paper...
And left only are
Unfinished contemplation
And compunction for having farsightedly
Not appreciated sleep.

Internal Watcher

by Tomas Haran

Shut up.
Don't mean to be rude, but
I've hot things to do,
And things to see.
Don't worry me
Anymore.
This battle has lasted
For five years.

Who told you to come?
Are you in others,
Or just in me?
This isn't fair.
You seem to get the best of me,
But I will realize,
That you are just a voice and can
Not take me down.
Knowledge and distraction take you
away,
Losses and others comments
Make you laugh with glee.
You may watch me
As long as you want,
But you can't kill
this spirit in me.
Of this I speak
To warn you of your stupidity.
Go hassle someone else,
'Cause me in me has taken me.



SENIOR by Albert Suh

Until you actually become a senior, you'll never know what it's like to be one. Senior year, I guess, starts off like a blessing. There are no upperclassmen that keep your head down in the halls, no one to tell you off when you laugh loudly in class, no one to scorn you if you're late to basketball practice. It all began with the last year's Graduation Party back in June. "We're finally Seniors!" I bet everyone yelled it sometime. The summer vacation for most college-bound people was about studying: preparing for SATs, writing college essays, and doing "community service". August came quickly. And yes, when I stepped into my school bus, I sat in the way back, where I looked proudly down on everyone. Yes, when I stepped into the school, I walked straight, expecting the rest to avoid my path. The Senior Weekend was the pinnacle of joy. My friends, bonded with the time of four years were all there, and everyone was secure with the rest of the bunch. When we came back, though, the infamous first semester senior year awaited. Last year's seniors had told us once, "first semester senior year is the killer." We sure began to experience it as our work piled up along with the incoming college applications that had to be filled. Thank God I had study hall. Even six classes were overwhelming for most of us. Field Day in September came quickly. The Senior class color "black" was intimidating (supposedly) and as always, we dominated the day and won (don't get me wrong, the juniors and underclassmen displayed extraordinary effort). For seniors applying early, mid-October was Judgment Day, when the over-prepared application was to be sent in. On top of that, those who needed to take SATs had to take it on the 10th and rush-report it to the college. There was no Chusok vacation. More like Chusok cram session for whatever you needed to do. I might see all of this in a systematic way. The November SAT testing date is, for obvious reasons, the most popular one for seniors. It's basically the second to last chance for your score to be sent in. Now I've mentioned SATs and applications. I must emphasize that in addition, we had to dissect our squalid pig in IBH Biology, finish reading our five-hundred page book for 20th Century History, write our commentary for Dicken's Tale of Two Cities, take our Derivative Exam for Calculus, carry out our Piaget experiment for Psychology, and so forth. Regular apps were due the first of December, and consequently, the Thanksgiving Holiday was the final, final cram session for applications. People were writing their college essays, which could be a determining factor in the admissions decision, in their pajamas at three in the morning. Now, we can't blame anyone for that. This school, and probably any other school this time, drives us crazy. And at 3:00 PM on December 1, all seniors sighed. *It's all over.* This is what I've waited for. In reality it wasn't. Except for those who applied early, many had to still take the SATs which was again administered on the 5th of December. I didn't have a second to lie down. I ripped open my SAT II book and started taking practice tests. And two weeks passed and came our lovely Final Exams: for seniors, they were the final tests to really try hard on. The last test for me was Calculus and it ended it all. Now it's "*for realz*" over. To me that day was even more special because at two in the morning that day, I had called in to get me my first and last college acceptance. Second semester senior year came after the long winter vacation. Nothing really changed other than the absence of time constraints and pressure. Nothing really changed other than the casual put-asides of homework or casual tardies. No—nothing really changed. Only thing left was the calendar to flip. You really don't realize that you can be casual as a second-semester senior until someone reminds that "you're a second-semester senior." Moreover, the privileges as a senior are sometimes taken for granted. No senior continues to appreciate their seniority. So the conclusion here is, Lunar New Year was just last week and I'm now two days away from my Senior Trip. Clichés do make sense: time just flies.

Stranded
by Jane Lee

Stranded in a hollow darkness,
I grasped a handful of air
And crammed it into my choking mouth,
Relieving the pain in my lungs for seconds;
Not enough to mend my heavy heart.

My body became weak
And I curled up in the corner of my solitude.
On my knees I crouched
With my shoulders dripping
And mouth hinged open.

I closed my eyes against the biting wind,
As it violently whipped my hair across my face
I cried out in pain
And listened to my cries being smothered
In the merciless grasp of the wind's powerful hands.

I screamed and I yelled
But nobody could hear my desperate cries.
Frustrated, I cried bleeding tears
Because I had never felt so alone
And in need to be heard.

Last Words

"Gray Matter NEEDS student writing!" This phrase may be familiar to you. This year was a hard one for the GM staff, for the necessary amount of work needed to publish didn't come in fast enough. We had to search every corner of the school for possible contributors. Yet in the end, it all came together.

I hope this last issue of the millennium succeeds in exposing the literary and artistic talent of Seoul Foreign School.

GM 1999 is dedicated to the writers and artists who have overcome the barrier of pressed time to express themselves in color; also, to those who are still trying...

-Albert Suh '99

Credits

Thanks to the teachers who helped take note of the gifted students.
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A Very Special Thanks to Jay and Paul who supported me through the entire tiresome process of publishing.

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