

Anthology 16

Young Writers Project



**young
writers
project**

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"Fast Months, Slow Days," Chloe Deliso, Cary, NC

About Young Writers Project

Young Writers Project (YWP) is an independent nonprofit that revolves around a creative and dynamic online community of teen writers and visual artists who share their work, connect with each other, and experience the joy of being published.

YWP began in Burlington, VT, in 2006 with a mission that continues today – to inspire, mentor, publish, and promote young writers and artists. The community is made up of youth, 13 to 19 years of age, mostly from Vermont and other New England states, but we also welcome members from across the U.S. and other countries. All programming is free, thanks to the generous support of foundations, individuals, and local businesses.

We are honored to present Anthology 16, our signature collection of writing and art selected from some 10,000 posts to our website, youngwritersproject.org, from August 2024 to July 2025. This year, we include a special section of commentary and opinion pieces from The Tomorrow Project, a new civic engagement initiative at YWP.

Congratulations to the writers and artists who are published in this book! We are so proud of you!

—The YWP Editorial Team



"Self Portrait," Sienna Mardy, Hempstead, NY

WRITERS and VISUAL ARTISTS

Rebekah Aubert.....	54	Astrid Longstreth	9, 19
Abigail Balon.....	52	Eva Lord	30
Riley Bernatchy.....	25	Hannah Malin-Stremlau	13
Sarah Birmingham	33	Sienna Mardy.....	4
Fiona Bock.....	10	Allison Merkle	41
Jakyia Bonaparte.....	34	Sela Morgenstein Fuerst.....	50
Madeline Borowitz	49	Wyatt Moyer.....	43
Rachel Brassard.....	14	Teddy Owens	9, 47
Sophia Brooks.....	42	Shivali Patra.....	38
Chloe Brown	25	Stella Peterson	11
Emma Cotnoir	32	Albina Rai.....	28
Leah Crossett.....	35	Georga Reed	52
Alana DeFoor.....	6, 23	Imogen Sangha	31
Dylan Delano.....	16, 26	Isla Segal	18, 19, 57
Chloe Deliso	2, 21, 51	Poppy Shattuck.....	32
Rigney Deliso.....	57	Ella Sherry	47
Cora Dunne	23	Galya Siegel-Bromberg.....	28
Jaquira Earley	12, 20	Maelyn Slavik	7
Oliver Ellis.....	15	Ellicott Smith	54
Autumn Finnell	59	Shalev Smokler.....	27
Beatrice Garvin	58	Carly Stone	back cover
Isidora June Gibson.....	6	Violet Stormer Burch.....	39, 46
Ursa Goldenrose.....	13	Nina Stroup	55
Magnus Grace	34	Amelia Terry	34, 53
Phoebe Gresham.....	back cover	Ev Tower-Pierce	21, 60, 61
Madeline Hankins.....	44	Bradee Traverse	56
Sophie Heidemann	26	Avery Turbide	25
Will Helms	25, 29	Amelia Van Driesche	front cover, 8, 15, 45, 52
Eli Hoopengardner.....	7, 50	Grace Weinstein.....	24, 37, 48
Francesca Howard.....	57	Gretchen Wertlieb	14
Geri Kayingo.....	14	Miles Witters	43
Sophie Li	17, 22	Ariel Zhang.....	36
Amber Lim.....	32	Beatrice Ziobro	31



"Elephant," Alana DeFoor, Hanover, NH

Ode to the Elephant

Isidora June Gibson, Chester, VT

Under the green jungle crown
you silently go,
shimmers of light pattering
down onto your soft, worn skin.

With kind eyes, you observe
all the beauty surrounding you.

I hope you know the
beauty that *you* are
and the profound and ancient
beauty you weave
into this young world
with your sublime presence.

Through Glances at the Sun

Maelyn Slavik, Burlington, VT

Poetry has a silent power
in the way that poets
don't need words to communicate
with one another.

We simply see a wildflower
sprouting from a chip in concrete,
or the sky
smattered with stars,
or a tree branch
coiled with winter lights,
and our eyes shimmer.

Our breaths lengthen,
our lungs blossoming with each one,
the corners of our lips turning up
until we reach into our bags
to pull out a pen
and start scrawling
on whatever paper we have
crumpled into our pockets.

As we write,
we can watch one another's eyes flick
subtly up towards the sun
and feel our hearts
being handed a gift
by the raw veins of another,
and within creases of the wrapping,
we are given all the words
a poem contains,
plus every one that cannot fit.

We do this all silently,
cupping the world in our palms,
tilting it towards the sun
along with our own subtle glances.

Eyes

Eli Hoopengardner, Arlington, VA

The leaves are turning the color of your
eyes again.

As they fall to the ground,
I take care not to step on them,
break their fragile spines, crack their
delicate skin.

The leaves used to be alive, yet the second
they let go of their home,
they're a ghost of what they once were.
I don't remember the sound of your voice,
but I remember the feeling of your eyes
burned into the back of my
neck, watching me from afar
with a mix of admiration and hate.
The leaves create shadows of your
presence behind me,
and all I can do is walk forward and not
look back,
not miss a step, not trip,
because if I do, I'll fall and land into your
arms after swearing I'd never return,
the papery skin of the leaves welcoming
me home as the plumes of auburn and
fireplace embers ask me why I ever left.

There is comfort in familiarity, and I see
your face wherever I turn.
The leaves make sure to remind me of
you each time I try to step outside,
each time I try to forget, each time I try to
move on.

Yet all I can do now is pray for the leaves
to die and for winter to come because
the leaves are turning the color of your
eyes again.
But I'll relish the beauty of your memory
one last time this year.

The Library

Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT

I took a walk inside the library today,
and I noticed everything.
Two older women exchanging hellos,
kids under piles of toys,
and parents taking a breath.
2025 resolutions written by teens,
(*I add my own but it's more of a wish*)
"Save for a car"
"To stop getting with toxic people and
have a tan!"
"Have more adventures."

I look off the balcony and gaze down,
down, down –
huge seltzer bottle in the hand of a young
man,
and a book open in his lap,
he periodically stares out the window.

Even though it's not St. Patrick's Day,
a gentleman wears a green outfit
with a green fedora atop his head
and shuffles cards as if he is waiting for
someone.
Giant chess played by a mom and son,
and they even have a little audience.
I wonder how many people come to this
place every day,
just to sit in front of the wall-sized
windows,
crack open a book, or catch up with a
friend.
I know this place becomes a safe haven
for anyone who needs one.
And as I'm writing this, kids' voices and
laughter float up.
It's hardly ever silent in the library.



"The Library," Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT

The Asters Are Out Again

Astrid Longstreth, West Bolton, VT

The asters are out again, just in time for my birthday.
And each year on this day, I look back and wonder how a person can change so much,
and how, without thinking, I suddenly am who I am.
It's like how the trees go from buds to green to red to gone, each span feeling so long
but so short all the same. And the ferns look like fire now, an inferno. An inferno
without heat, frozen in place till they crumble to ashes once again.
I don't feel a year older, but I feel a year changed, though I suppose that it's all the same
in a way. Just like how in the fall you can finally look far through the forest to see what's
beyond without the shield of green a barricade, I can now look back through myself and
see where I once was.
But I can't go back, not easily, even if I wanted to, for do the trees not have to brave the
winter's icy cold to bring their buds once again? To change once more, I will go through
winters of my own.
The leaves are a kaleidoscope, red-orange-yellow-green-brown like fireworks. I see the
colors reflected in the surface of the water, and I see now that fall is a time of reflection,
to see how the year has changed you.
And once the leaves finally let go and I step out of the shadow of myself, I know that a
new year has begun ...
The asters are out again, just in time for my birthday.

Finding Joy in the Small Things

Teddy Owens, Essex, VT

In this time in the world with everything that is going on, we need to find joy in the
small things. Your sanity depends on it. If you focus on the bad things, your senses will
be overwhelmed, and all you will be able to think about is the bad in the world, which, if
you are like this for long enough, will break you.

But if you find joy in the small things, you can go through life far happier than someone
going through life focusing on the bad. If you find joy in the things you like to do, your
life will be even better. If you can fill your life with things you love, you will feel like you
are living your dream.

This is not to say that you can't think about sad or depressing things sometimes, but
don't let them consume you and dictate your life. You control who you are and who you
can become. Follow your dreams and never give up. I am not saying that you can't take a
break, but never stop trying to become who you want to be.

I Choose Today

Fiona Bock, Glover, VT

Heaven is a state of mind where all your fantasies are actualized. It is the shared recognition of “if only my blanket would arrange itself precisely around my right shoulder so that I don’t have to move the rest of my body myself because I am so comfortable already.” And just as you wish it, it is willed. Your blankets rearrange themselves perfectly.

I wish I had a pair of wings to fly me away. You are soaring through the air.

I wish I could live forever. You are no longer afraid of death.

I wish I knew my purpose. You are content with the moment.

Just as you wish for perfection and it is granted unthinkingly, henceforth when you wish for imperfection, your wish is granted with perfection also. Perfect imperfection is an oxymoron, but that is okay. You got your wish.

Gravel roads and dirt beneath my feet. Summer rain on a lake. A sigh of flowers. Snowmelt. Rebirth. Nature without interference. This is a place you can visit, a true reality within your mind. If you can visualize it to a tight point of clarity, see the clouds, smell the sea, and feel as if you have entered into a standstill of a moment, who’s to say you haven’t?

For is reality anything more than the decision – be it conscious or not – to let the breeze blow your long hair and know you’re there?

Who cares? This is heaven.

7:53

Stella Peterson, Eureka, MT

My mother has creases under her eyes I’ve forgotten I contributed to, laugh lines around her lips I didn’t realize were from jokes I’d made. Her hair is darker now, her eyes a little smaller, and where the skin once was smooth, veins make little tracks, traipsing up and down her arms and legs with typographic detail.

I used to be less in awe of her. When you’re fifteen and sixteen, your mother is ‘Mom,’ the woman who made and fed and raised you. Seventeen, she’s a friend, sure, and you can speak openly, even brazenly, but the lines remain firm. But now, I cannot remember the last time she spoke to me as if I did not have something to offer in return, foresight of my own to give in exchange for the presence I provide.

I love her smile crinkles, her laugh lines, the river of veins on her calves and wrists. I don’t recognize them from my youth because I had not yet had enough time to put them there. I love the little hairs that stick out of her ponytail because the layers her hairdresser gave her made them too short. I love her aching hips, and her strong laborer’s hands. I love how she stands in the meadow, far enough away that all I can see is her silhouette, ant-like against the enormity of our ranch’s grasslands.

I am eighteen, and I sit alone at the table in our dining room, but she is only ten feet away in our kitchen, and I love her with all of the empty spaces we both have not yet taken up, and all of them that she has already filled within me with the love that I am so fortunate to try my own best to spread.

I loved her, I love her, I will love her always.



"Smoky River," Jaquira Earley, West Rutland, VT

End Zone

Ursa Goldenrose, Hardwick, VT

Repair the world,
pull off the patterned papers.
Leave the walls all bare and empty,
no toll, free entry.

Welcome to the end zone,
a heap of land
filled with the lonely souls.
Friends, family, foes,
it doesn't matter.
Their spirits are just pigments,
barely visible on the brush.
Their ratio to water is sparse,
just enough to make a mark,
a hue, a shade,
solidified into a statement,
a saying, standing for
what they are,
or what they could be.
Write their stories down,
they are always making history,
just a stain of tattered brilliance,
and they are always dismissed.
Together they will become a rainbow
smith.

These streets won't be empty.
Sour and sweet as it is,
this life is just a mystery.
When we find the answer,
we'll find it in our humanity.

Credo

Hannah Malin-Stremlau, Sharon, VT

Those who are lost
have forgotten
the body does not stop or start at the skin
but continues to be one being.

You are the world as much as the world
is you.
You are a patchwork of experiences,
eroded and shaped from feeling as sand
is by rivers.

Earth serves as a reflection to our insides,
just as a mirror would to our face,
because both are viewed through the
same lens.
In this way, we are never without
relationship.

To feel the comfort of a mother,
bury your feet in the dirt.
Those who are lost
have forgotten that
we all come from the same womb.

To see where you are headed,
peer up at the sky.
Those who are lost
have forgotten that eventually
we will all share the same grave.

In this way, we are never without
knowing.

Afterlife

Geri Kayingo, Towson, MD

Oh, look at the leaves.
Look at how they fly.
Look at how they circle,
freckling the sky.
Look at how they shimmer
in the last dance
of their lives.

I hope I go like that
when the light fades from my eyes,
falling farther, faster,
yet somehow still alive.

To Be the Fox

Rachel Brassard, Montpelier, VT

Now, I know it may seem common, even
shallow –
to answer with such a simple thing,

but 'tis what draws my heart –
the fox, silver fur, dancing in moonlight.

Could I choose, I would be one with her,
screaming in the hollow night air,
hunting rodents in the deep woods.

I long, more than anything, to join her –
to run along the forest floor, wind ruffling
my fur –
to perk my ears at the rustling of leaves,
to join the wild life.

The Paper Sailboat

Gretchen Wertlieb, South Burlington, VT

Regret has many meanings, and this time
I feel it strong,
for "love" can be the right word, and yet so
very wrong.

I've kept all boats tethered, left none to
sail away,
kept all the little memories, for when the
world turns gray.

I'd have loved to know you better, but we
never got the time,
so when I walk by you, I take a snapshot
of your smile in my mind.

I thought I saw a spark, a glimmer in your
eye,
but it could have been a false light that
led my thoughts awry.

The time we spent was short; all chance
has passed me by.
I've written you this modern sonnet; I'm
awaiting no reply.

So, when I tell you, when you leave, I bear
my dignity.
If you didn't know, I pity you, and if you
did, I pity me.

This dramatic declaration reflects things
that did impede,
because "love" is the shortest poem
ever written, and the one that takes the
longest to read.



"Apartments," Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT

Bigger Windows

Oliver Ellis, Belmont, VT

Collect the raindrops left scattered on the
ground, cut the dying trees before they
die.

Live with your hands until you die in your
mind.

Walk with your feet along the long and
winding road that brings you to whatever
form of the afterlife you believe in. Or rest
in the body that you know and love.

Be yourself for yourself, but for others as
well. And cry. It's okay.

Live on the premise of working for a goal.
A personal goal or a collective goal.

Join a community. How else are you
supposed to figure out the answers to
your problems?

How else are you supposed to live your
life other than practicing the same rituals
and habits again and again?

What is life without change?

Change is the only constant. You are
always who you are, but you can always
change.

Each day may be your last day on Earth.
Move into a mental apartment with
bigger windows, windows that look out
across the skyline and across the hills
beyond your city.

Do You Still ...?

Dylan Delano, Wayzata, MN

Do you still find comfort
in the way the leaves change
green to orange to red to green again?
Do your clothes still smell like apples and
spices?
Do you still drink cider
while you drive that car with the rusted
bottom,
admiring the changing of the seasons?

Do you still yearn to grow old
in a house where memories line the walls,
and you and your family will add on to
them?

Do you still dream of getting out,
but your true dreams
lie deep inside your heart,
buried deep beneath your skin?

Did you ever find someone else
to sit and watch the stars with
as the air grew cold,
holding onto them so tight,
hoping,
praying they wouldn't leave like the last?

Did you also wish for it to not end,
for nothing to change,
for all the moments to never become
memories,
and for all the people to always stay the
same?

Did you watch as the leaves changed
again
this year like the ones before?
Were you still sitting on the hill,
no longer comforted by my presence
while I wished to see you again?
Or did you forget about me
like I hoped you never would?



"The Lake's Trap," Sophie Li, Coconut Creek, FL



"One Fall Morning," Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

Drive

Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

Take me on a drive.
I'll roll the window down,
stick out my hand,
let it soar through the air,
fly on the speed,
fly on the wind.

Take me on a drive.
I'll paint a sketchbook full
of watercolor landscapes
in my head,

of the white-wrapped hay bales,
the green rows,
the red tractors,
the orange rolling hills.

Take me on a drive.
I'll breathe in the feeling
of just-right cold air,
comforting barn smells,
piles of pumpkins
for sale on all the dirt roads.

Take me on a drive
through fall.



"Mirror," Astrid Longstreth, West Bolton, VT

Fragments of Heartbreak in Paris

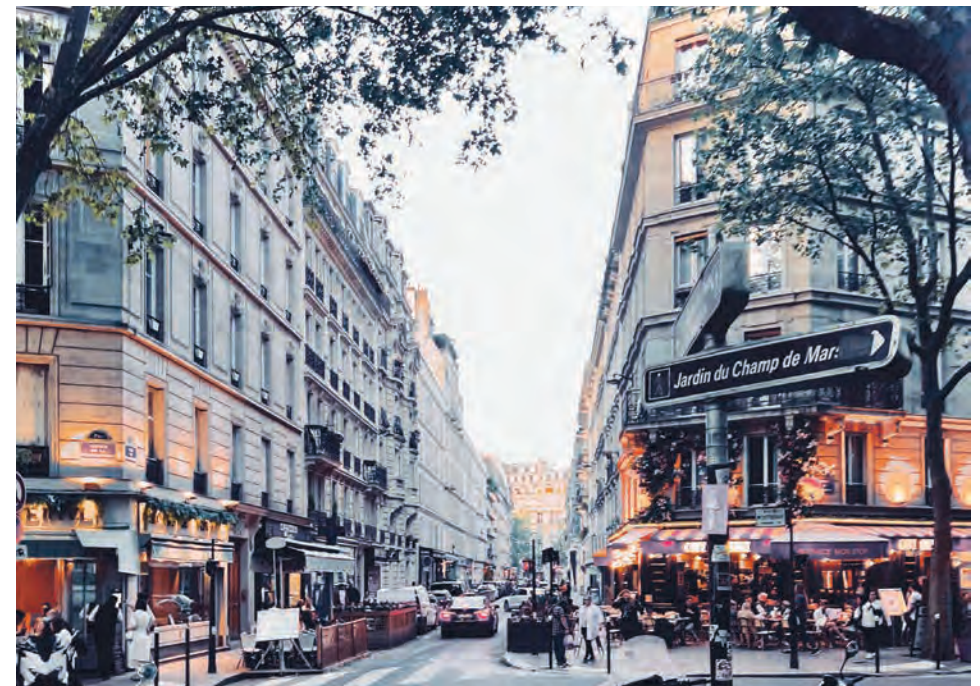
Ev Tower-Pierce, East Burke, VT

This morning, I watched
as someone I love broke their heart.
Over and over,
I watched them wander through the
secret streets of Paris,
clumsily holding their heart in their
hands.
It wasn't their fault, you see.
Hands moistened with tears of sadness,
a hint of relief hidden within,
the tension of deep emotion lingers in
the air.
This morning, I watched
as someone I love let their heart fall
onto the unforgiving cobblestone
sidewalk.
The streets filled with a sea of red silk,

and golden sparkles glistened like
forgotten coins,
while dreams shattered into shimmering
shards.
As the sun cast its shadows, veiling the
city,
the heart lay exposed and vulnerable,
its beats echoing softly through the city's
veins.
I watched as strangers passed by,
oblivious to the delicate fragments of the
lost soul,
each glistening shard a testament to
love's fragility.
If you listen closely,
the Seine in the distance whispers secrets,
consoling the fallen heart,
promising that time will mend its cracks.
Yet in that moment,
as heart met stone,
the glass of quiet resilience shattered,
forming a mosaic of the heart's journey.



"What a Pear," Jaquira Earley, West Rutland, VT



"Down the Street," Chloe Deliso, Cary, NC



"Chasing Circles," Sophie Li, Coconut Creek, FL

Moving

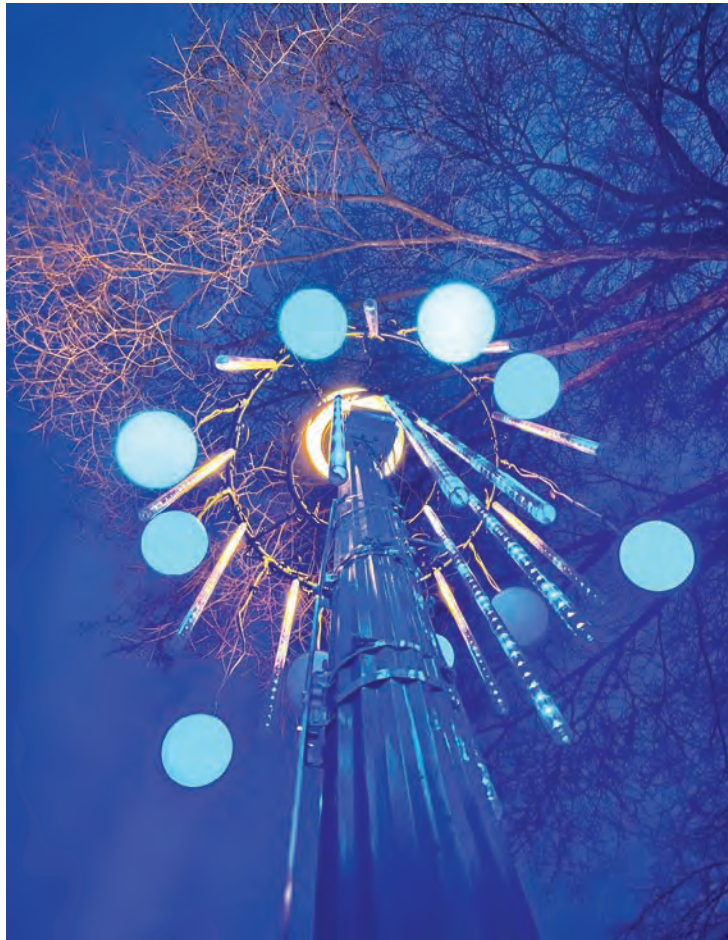
Cora Dunne, Hartland, VT

I'm moving.
I've found a little place in the Past.
It's not much, but I think it's quite lovely,
very dear,
and things aren't working out Here,
so I'm settling for memories.
It's temporary, I know,
somewhere to lie low for a little while
until I find something more permanent.

I know you'd disapprove —
this isn't quite your style,
not that you were ever afraid to
pack up and leave.
It's just that you never believed in going
back.
You had your ideas about things,
your philosophies and wonderings,
and, well, mine rarely matched.
But that's okay —
you keep running.
I'll see you in the Past.



"Reflection," Alana DeFoor, Hanover, NH



"Extraterrestrial," Grace Weinstein, Etna, NH

Morning, But Not Really

Chloe Brown, Stowe, VT

It's 2 a.m., and I'm still lying awake
with thoughts in one hand and feelings in
the other.

How can I go to sleep with a head full of
stars
and my face running away
up into the sky
looking for the moon?

Intertwined

Riley Bernatchy, Cambridge, VT

When only the stars shine,
the wind's whispered rhyme
echoes across the land
as the sea longs for the moon.
The magnetic pull
weaves their fates together,
intertwining them for eternity.
The moon chases the earth
as the sea reaches up,
forever trying to find each other.

Counting Flowers

Avery Turbide, Grand Isle, VT

I rang the doorbell to your heart,
and throughout your house it rang,
a bouquet of astilbes in one hand
and in the other a pink dove.
I carved it of cherry wood just for you,
my future and my love.
When I meet you, I hope you ring my
doorbell too,
so we may step for the first time outdoors,
and pick more flowers and free our doves,
intertwined forever more.

Midnight Haircut

Will Helms, Hardwick, VT

It is midnight, and I am getting a haircut
on the lawn.
I am tired, but I shiver with excitement.
Gentle hands tug and snip at my curls,
and as they fall, they take root in the
grass.
I will never remember this happening to
me,
save for lonely, forgotten dreams and
the strange feelings of déjà vu that I feel
any time I go to the barber shop.

Watching Him

Sophie Heidemann, Southold, NY

Kathy watches out her window
as Samuel leaves his apartment,
spits his gum on the ground,
and lights his cigarette.
The same as yesterday.
The same as every day.
He squints and looks up to the blank,
cloudless sky.
Kathy does the same, staring into the
blue, only to distract herself with a
passing bird and lose sight of Samuel.
He's the man from the complex across the
street,

with the warm lights on at night
and the jazz played loud enough to be
heard if she leaves her window open.
Watching people is sick.
That's what mama says,
but what else is there to do in a city full
of sad?
Kathy closes the blinds shut, and sits atop
her bed,
waiting to feel something she's never felt
before.

In the morning, she keeps her eyes closed
till the light won't wait,
walks to the window,
and begins again.



"Walking the Line," Dylan Delano, Wayzata, MN

Mr. Red

Shalev Smokler, New York, NY

There is a man on the corner of 87th and Amsterdam. I do not know him, and he does not know me. He wears a red T-shirt with red sweatpants. He wears a red coat with red shoes. He wears a red ski mask on his face. Though he does not know it, in my mind, his name is Mr. Red.

He has seen many people. He talks and smokes with some of them. Some of them he just stares at, and when the night gets too cold, he throws his joint in a puddle and walks into his apartment. He has a worn and peeling leather recliner and a side table with a lamp over it and a journal where he writes about all the people he has seen.

Mr. Red writes about the man who cuts flowers in front of the bodega and the man's journeys through the mountains that he goes on every morning to get the plastic-colored flowers he sells.

He writes about the man across the street from him, who sleeps in his golden Cadillac and the man's dream of being more than some guy with a shiny car.

He writes about me, the child with the fast scooter, and how I use it to fly far away, but only at night, when no one is looking.

When his eyes get heavy, he closes the journal. He kisses a framed photo of a young woman he had cut out of the newspaper. He decided long ago that she was his mother. He turns off the light and falls asleep in the chair.

Mr. Red is an old man, and, like many old things, he will die. His rotting body will be found by his landlord three weeks later when they come to collect the rent. He will be buried on Hart Island, still wearing his red shirt, red pants, red coat, red shoes, and red ski mask. He will not be given a capstone, just a white plank hammered into the ground. His apartment will be cleaned out, and his journal will be tossed in a black garbage bag which will be on the side of the street later that day. His home will be up for sale in a week.

That same day, the man who sells rainbow roses will just be a man who sells dyed flowers. The man with the gold Cadillac will just be a pimp. And I will just be a child with a fast scooter.

Silent Thoughts

Albina Rai, Winooski, VT

To be chosen,
that's all I wish for – to be someone's first
choice.
I watch from afar, lost in a sea of the
bittersweet feeling
as others are always chosen first, but
never me,
and I wonder why I can never be
someone's first choice –
a silent observer in the sea, longing to be,
longing to find a place where I could
belong.
Always the option, but never a choice,
lingering in the shadows, quiet, and
unseen,
hoping for someone to notice the light
within me.
Each day I wonder if I'll ever be seen,
if someone will notice the ache in my
heart,
or if I'll remain a whisper, echoing in the
silence,
longing, forever waiting, for the moment I
can finally belong.

Her Hope

Galya Siegel-Bromberg, Thetford, VT

She's little, not even 8,
but she has hope,
hope that shines
through her blue eyes,
hope that dances
across her face,
just like how she
dances in the rain,
listening to Taylor Swift,
not a care in the world.

She hopes for things
she doesn't quite understand,
but she knows
things need to be better.

Her hope
is like a hug,
warm and steady,
something to keep me
hoping.

Her hope
is shiny and sparkly
like the plastic crown
that she wears
when she's the princess
of unicorn world.

Her hope
is beautiful.

I Am Someone Who

Will Helms, Hardwick, VT

I am someone who is waiting on a dock in the middle of the night. There is a gross,
green, electric light shining on me. There is something out in the waves.

I am someone you pass in the hallways daily on the way to one of your classes. It is so
late in the day that you can only think about getting home and sleeping. I am neither
ugly nor pretty enough to grab your attention.

I am someone who takes a nap after school. I have homework. It wouldn't take me long,
but I don't do it. Instead, I take a nap after school. Pages are hanging on my bedroom
wall, right above my headboard. They are pages from a book I haven't finished. I didn't
forget about it, I just didn't finish it. I keep the pages up as a reminder.

I am someone who keeps pages of an unfinished book on my wall as a reminder. I got
a few chapters in. My character had some wooden conversations and wandered around
the story a while. My character was me. I am someone who has wooden conversations
and wanders around. I stopped writing because my character had nothing to do. He had
no attachments. I didn't know anything about him.

I am someone who is leaving town next week. I will abandon it in my mind. I will not
forget it, but I will abandon it. It will not be my town anymore. I am someone who has to
stay moving.

I am not someone who cries. I am someone who wants to, very badly sometimes. I am
someone who sits and waits for the tears to come and never feels them. I am someone
who doesn't have the strength to get up and move.

I am someone who is sitting on a dock in the middle of the night. If I hold still long
enough, the motion sensor in the light turns off, and I am left in darkness. Unmoving,
unblinking, I look forward at the waves.

They are beckoning me, taunting me, waiting for me; dancing around the line of time
that weakly binds me to myself. The line is not something that flows on its own. It needs
me to pull it, but I'm not strong enough.

Right now, I am someone whose present moment is out in the waves before him.

Life Plans, in the Style of Fredrik Backman

Eva Lord, Putney, VT

Rori Acher is eighteen years old and dying. Any licensed medical professional would pronounce her perfectly healthy. But there are many ways to be dying that are not physical.

Rori knows exactly what her future will be, and this is why she is dying. Adults tell teenagers to plan out their lives. This is, in fact, the worst advice you can give a teenager. It takes the mystery out of life.

Humans aren't supposed to have their weeks and months and years and lives planned out for them. They aren't supposed to follow the ringing of a small metal and glass rectangle for when they should wake up, get to work, pay the bills, get groceries, see other humans.

Rori is dying because she is trying desperately to be an adult at eighteen.

The problem? She feels everything nearly all the time, and the minds of adults just can't cope with that. Why else do you think we age too quickly and die so slowly? Everything inside us simply doesn't fit. We weren't meant to carry it all, at least not carry it alone. Especially when you are eighteen and feel everything.

This is why the incredibly rich, in their fancy apartments and expensive clothes, and first-class seating are in incredible pain. You simply cannot carry a life by yourself ... especially if it is your own.

It's just we've forgotten that uncomfortably close quarters and awkward conversations will save us in the end. If we have them. If we are willing to see each other.



"Stick Season," Beatrice Ziobro, Pomfret, VT

Braking for Leaves

Imogen Sangha, Hanover, NH

In the beam of headlights,
a flash of motion darts across dark
asphalt.
Brakes slam,
a breath catches in the throat.
And the stillness of a stopped car,
frozen in place,
is alien to the music still playing
and to the single leaf,
carried by the wind,
still skittering along the road.

Group Chat

Poppy Shattuck, Guildhall, VT

Half a dozen pink hearts
strewn across a glowing white screen.
Girls guessing at identities
of secret beaus.

A link to Spotify
for a playlist
full of songs I – love – but
once thought were unique.

Chatting, lengthy,
half-past twelve o'clock.
Texts flashing and buzzing
against my white flannel pants.

Clutter of initials
against the left side,
tantamount, glittering,
softer than I thought.

Candy Stars

Amber Lim, Mentone, Australia

I hold my secrets in the shape of stars,
constellation-clustered candy like flaming
balls of gas.
Sometimes they have five points.
Sometimes six.
Always, they burn
in that space inside your head
where all your obscurities are kept,
sweet treasures ready-made like lollipops.

Sugar decorates my tongue,
flecked my teeth like the wisps of cloud
that we used to pull off sticks at the fair,
like strawberry hailstones in striped party
bags.
Sometimes I eat your secrets.
Sometimes I let you hold mine.
And sometimes lemonade
drips from my eyes,
fizzing over my cheeks
when your thoughts turn sour like
expired gumdrops
and I can't find you anymore.



"Balloon Cat," Emma Cotnoir, Dracut, MA

Nine Lives

Sarah Birmingham, Chester, VT

If I had nine lives, I would spend the first one jumping from a tall mountain, the wind in my hair, and filling my lungs, the full feeling of freedom. After that, maybe I'd find peace and wouldn't fear the mountains. I'd spend my final eight lives in the mountains, never being scared to fall.

I would spend my second and third lives in the shadows of others, seeping in all their goals and regrets, find their deepest secrets, so I don't mess up lives four through nine. I'd spend my fourth life running away, wondering why I am the way I am, and why I can't be like my peers. They look so happy, so free. "What went wrong with me?" I'd ask. I would run through fields and chase butterflies. I would look for my people but in all the wrong places, the wrong cities, states, countries? I would be still too naïve to know I have to live for myself, not in the shadows of the masked people around me. Before I know it, I will have run through three of my nine lives.

In my seventh life, I would listen to society, work a nine-to-five with a stable income, settle for a man I'm not sure I'm in love with, but he's good to me and my children. We would live in a big, white house with blue shutters and a picket fence. We would have a big, fluffy dog, one that barks at the wind, but then settles in front of the fireplace.

For my eighth life, I would live alone in a little apartment in New York City. I would work in the fashion industry, but never feel in the right place. I would write stories in the little worn-down corner of my apartment that looks onto the Upper East Side. I would read in the little cafe two blocks from where I live. I would do yoga, eat healthy, and walk to work, but have a glass of wine before bed. I would raise a small dog by myself, and he would sit and watch as I took my last breath.

In my final life, I would look for you. I would wait at bus stops and move back to our hometown. I would go into the grocery store hoping I would "accidentally" run into you. Little do you know you're all I think about. I would write letters I would never send, but regret it later. After living eight lives, I would realize something was missing. Going about life without the person I loved would make it all feel meaningless.

But I don't have nine lives. I just have this one. So, I guess I'll spend it hiking mountains and looking for you.

Home

Magnus Grace, Burlington, VT

He waits each year
for that one week of the summer
when he can feel free
and finally be himself,
kin among kin,
finding safety in their differences.

He watches the young ones
who revel in the safe haven.
He smiles at the sound of their laughter,
remembering the magic of seeing
everything new.
He listens to the water and music,
knowing he has found home once again.

Life Plans

Jakyia Bonaparte, Philadelphia, PA

A single spark, a fleeting breath,
this wild, precious life, defying death.
I'll chase the sun on windswept shore
and seek the truths I can't ignore.

I'll dance with shadows, embrace the light
and paint the world with colors bright.
I'll mend the broken, lift the weak
and find the words I long to speak.

I'll risk it all, for love and a dream,
a vibrant soul, a flowing stream.
For in this journey, short and grand,
I'll leave my mark upon the sand.

Summer

Amelia Terry, Philadelphia, PA

The air tastes like honey and promise,
sticky with the scent of blooming jasmine
and freshly cut grass that crunches
beneath bare feet.
The sky drips blue,
stretching wider every afternoon
like it's trying to hold all the sunlight
before it slips away.
Windows thrown open wide
carry the hum of lawnmowers and distant
laughter
and the slow steady rhythm of cicadas
waking up.
Schoolbags lie forgotten by the door,
crumpled papers and pens left behind like
winter's ghosts.
The sidewalks burn hot enough to melt
the soles of shoes,
and the ice cream truck's tinny song
winds through the streets,
a ribbon of sound tying the days together.
Less than a week now
before the world shifts,
before mornings start with the taste of
sunscreen
and evenings stretch out like lazy cats on
porches,
before the night sky fills with fireflies and
whispered secrets,
and the air holds the soft weight of
something new.
Summer is breathing just beneath the
surface,
ready to burst open.

The Road That Remembers

Leah Crossett, Thetford, VT

I live for these moments. Moments that make you forget anything but remember
everything all at once.

The dirt road crunches beneath the car tires. With windows down, I am serenaded by the
gentle sounds of crickets chirping and peepers making their infamous Vermont peeps. A
soft breeze swoops in through the sunroof and out through the passenger seat window,
tugging my mess of golden-brown hair with it. I follow the path of air with my hand,
stuck out beside me, moving up and down as if conducting its current. The warm sun
barely sits upon the canopy made of beech and maple tree arms, speckled with green
leaves that embrace the small road I travel on.

The smell of damp earth and wildflowers clings to the air, wrapping itself around me like
a memory I haven't lived yet. For a moment, time feels like it pauses – held in place by
the hum of late spring and the rhythm of my heartbeat matching the rumble of the car.

These simple drives seem to be stitched into the fabric of who I am. They don't ask for
anything – no words, no plans, no destination. Just presence. Just peace. Just me and
the road and the soft reminder that sometimes the best parts of life are quiet, slow, and
fleeting.

I live for these moments. The kind of moments that sneak up on you, golden and
weightless, tucked between the ordinary. Moments when time doesn't stop, but instead
it softens. When for a breath, a blink, a heartbeat, nothing hurts, nothing rushes, nothing
is missing.

And somehow, in those quiet seconds, everything you've ever loved, lost, hoped for, or
needed feels present – not in words, but in feeling.

Confession

Ariel Zhang, San Jose, CA

When I think about tomorrow, I see the calculus test I have not studied for and the five overdue assignments with long-received fat zeroes.

I see the boy I think I love still leaving my messages on delivered. (*It has been tomorrow, and he, in fact, has left me on read.*)

I see the sun rising, my parents driving to work, my dad swallowing his mother's death whole – bones, flesh, and all – as he replies to emails in Times New Roman font.

I see American consumerism in the thirteen food lines my school opens at lunch, the mouths of trash cans open with leftovers, in the green-washed Tesla cars that have become a status symbol for those who are not dying from the lithium mines.

I see American blindness in the genocides we never learn about at school, in the wars that are merely a headline. I see a country trying to forget itself; of us worshipping wealth as gods and sleeping on beds on dollars on stolen soil on blood. I see the immigrants and refugees we do not see. (*They're aliens, after all, and aliens don't exist.*)

I see my mom taking her father to the pharmacy for his vaccines, wondering if being sick is worth 327 dollars.

When I think about 50 years from now, I can't see anything. Perhaps I followed my dream

of becoming a violinist. Perhaps I didn't and became a poet instead.

Perhaps I found another dream; or I realized dreams were stupid, and I started to let myself be, and followed the soft-shelled monster/animal/human (*are these all synonyms?*) in this body. Perhaps, I'm choosing to write about my silly career choice instead of my parents because it's a much easier thought to have. (*In this society, my self-worth is also tethered to the things I can produce.*)

It is much easier to work a 9 to 5 than it is to love and grieve. It is much easier to reply to an email than cry. It is much easier to love (*what you think is love, anyway*) a phantom of a person at a distance, than to hold them up close and feel the burning of their flawed, imperfect, human bodies against your own.

It is much easier to forget than to know, to consume and devour than to vomit our sins that reek of our ugliness.

However, today, the sun is falling through the leaves, the sky is all the different colors at once, and I'm holding my friend's hand as we quietly sit and sit, and I realize I am in love.

I am in love with the world around me. With the way the clouds move. With my mom, my dad, the human souls like mystical creatures that have fallen from another dimension, the poets, the truth-speakers, the history-bearers. The way my body gets to feel and experience it all.

50 years from now, I will be somewhere, and I will be loving and loved.

I dare not say more.



"Daydreams," Grace Weinstein, Etna, NH



"Grand Canyon's Heart," Shivali Patra, Saratoga, CA

Don't Mean Nothing

Violet Stormer Burch, Wooster, OH

There was cedar in the beginning and then there were candy canes.

They weren't peppermint candy canes, the bad ones, but the Skittles and rainbow-flavored ones. The ones that just tasted sweet and like cherries, and together with the cedar smell lingering after winter, it was perfect.

It wasn't supposed to be cedar, it was supposed to be spring and dandelions. The coast of winter was just out of view, but occasionally the wind of it blew over and the scent of cedar from the old and new trees blew with it.

A Christmas tree farm is nowhere to stay in spring, but there they were, eating cherry-flavored candy canes and sitting on a tractor.

"You brought me cherry candy canes in April." A whisper as One leaned against the steering wheel. "They don't sell these in April."

Dangerous, the way they sat on the tractor. One with her back on the steering wheel, feet on top of the seat back. Two in reverse with her feet on the wheel. Both half falling off.

Either could fall. They didn't much mind, seeing as they hadn't yet in all the years they'd sat up there.

"Yeah. I found 'em at the store I buy mama's flowers at, half off and all. I thought I'd pick some up." She shrugged. "I like 'em too, don't mean nothing."

One looked out at the new trees growing. "Yeah, don't mean nothing."

There was a moment, a pause, between One and Two as they sat.

"Thank you, though." A cherry-stained smile.

"O' course. Anything."

There was cedar again, but it was warmer than it was before, the scent more unusual as summer made her appearance in the early throes of June.

They were out on the tractor again, staring at the trees growing to be ready soon. For every tree taken away, new ones were put into that old dirt.

It wasn't cherry candy canes this time though, it was mango. Fresh mango, straight from wherever, cool, and fat with juice.

"You found fresh mangos in Alabama?" Two asked. They'd switched spots, her feet were on the seat this time, One's on the wheel.

"What, like it's hard?" She giggled, the flesh sticking between her teeth and juice running down her fingers as she manhandled another piece of chopped-off fruit from the bowl sitting between them.

Continued next page

They would have eaten without waiting to cut them up, but the skin was too bitter for their tongues.

"Stop quoting 'Legally Blonde' just cause." Two reached for another piece too. "Seriously though, how'd you get these? Your mama find 'em?"

"Nah. They was at that stand down by the church. They've got boxes of fruit from all over." She shrugged. "Don't mean nothing. I like 'em too."

"Yeah," Two said as she bit down. "Don't mean nothing."

A pause. A moment. Frozen even in the heat of Alabama summer.

"Thank you, though." A juice-stained smile.

"Certainly. Anything."

Cedar blew in from the future this time, instead of the past, heralding the closeness of that winter shore that had seemed much too far off not too long ago.

Blonde curls and brunette ringlets and cedar-smelling bows sat on the tractor once again.

One ran her fingers over the other's ribbons holding her pigtailed ringlets in place, cementing them as yellow bows. Hers were red.

They sat side by side this time, each one foot on the wheel and one off. No shoes today, they'd taken them off the second they'd gotten home from school.

"You're better at bows than me." Two glanced in the rearview mirror. Blonde and brunette side by side, dark skin and pale in matching jeans and that soft red and yellow. "They don't look right when I do 'em."

"I practice is s'all. You'd be good too if you gave it a shot." One folded back onto the seat. Two reached out for her hand.

They stared out at the Christmas tree farm, listened to the birds yelling and watched the sun start its lazy trot towards setting.

"Thank you," Two said, not looking at One.

"Certainly. Anything," One responded. It was automatic, quick, sharp. An action that was unthinkable sewn into her. "What for?"

"You." Two shrugged. "Simple, ain't it?"

"Yeah."

A pause. A moment hanging in the cedar-tinted air. They'd had a lot of those recently.

"Thank you," One echoed.

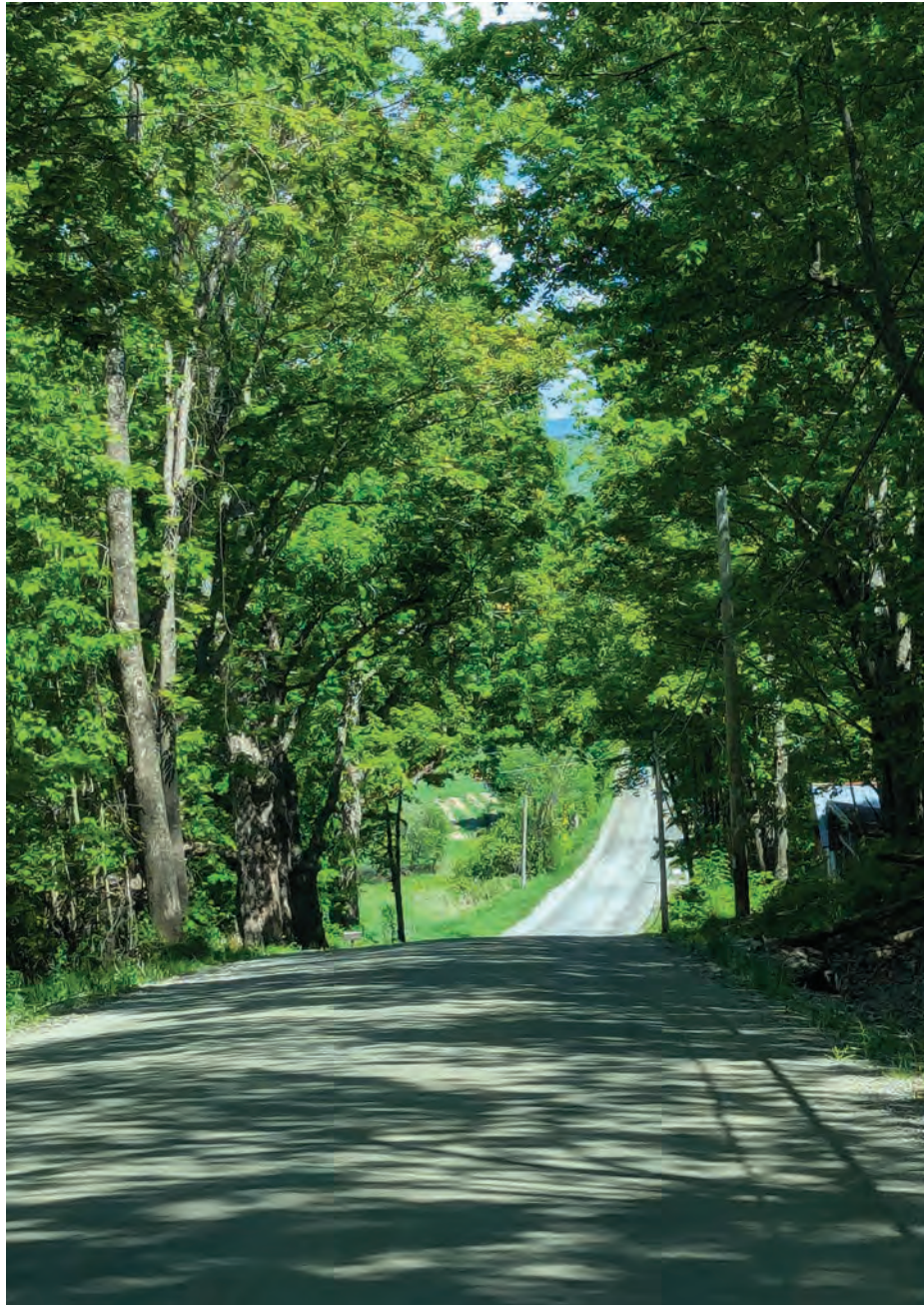
"O' course. Anything." The same automatic link running through One was built into Two almost like an engine that kept her heart beating. Almost like an engine that kept *their* hearts beating. "For what?"

"Simple, ain't it?" She giggled. "You."

A cherry-stained smile met a mango one.



"The Red Barn," Allison Merkle, West Rutland, VT



"Shadows," Sophia Brooks, Essex Junction, VT



"Starry Skies," Miles Witters, Richmond, VT

Nothing Can Reach Me Here

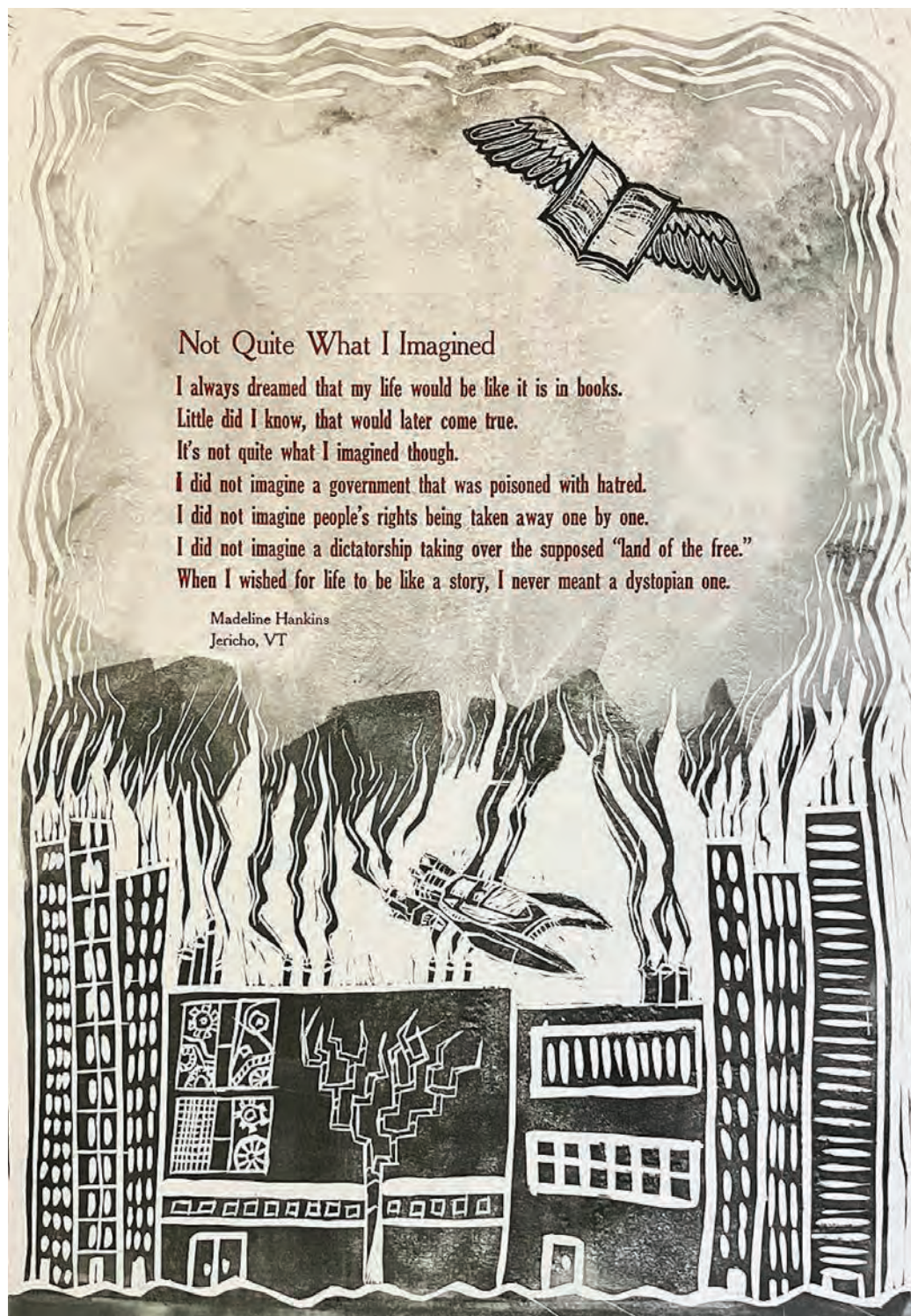
Wyatt Moyer, Starksboro, VT

Sometimes the drive home
is just too good to end.
The darkness envelops
the road ahead,
the road behind,
the fields on either side.
Nothing can reach me here.

The tires whine on the road's pavement,
and the engine whirs;
but there's a silence,

a silence that blankets the dark drive.
Nothing can reach me here.
Sometimes the drive home
is just too good to end.

There's a certain peace in the dark,
even as the dark presents unknowns —
and unknowns are not peaceful.
It's not a peace you know can last,
for once the destination has been
reached, it's gone.
It's a bubble,
a bubble that says,
Nothing can reach me here.



"Not Quite What I Imagined," Madeline Hankins, Jericho, VT; *Linocut by Nicky Coupe;*
Printed letterpress with hand-set type by A Revolutionary Press, New Haven, VT

OPINION & COMMENTARY

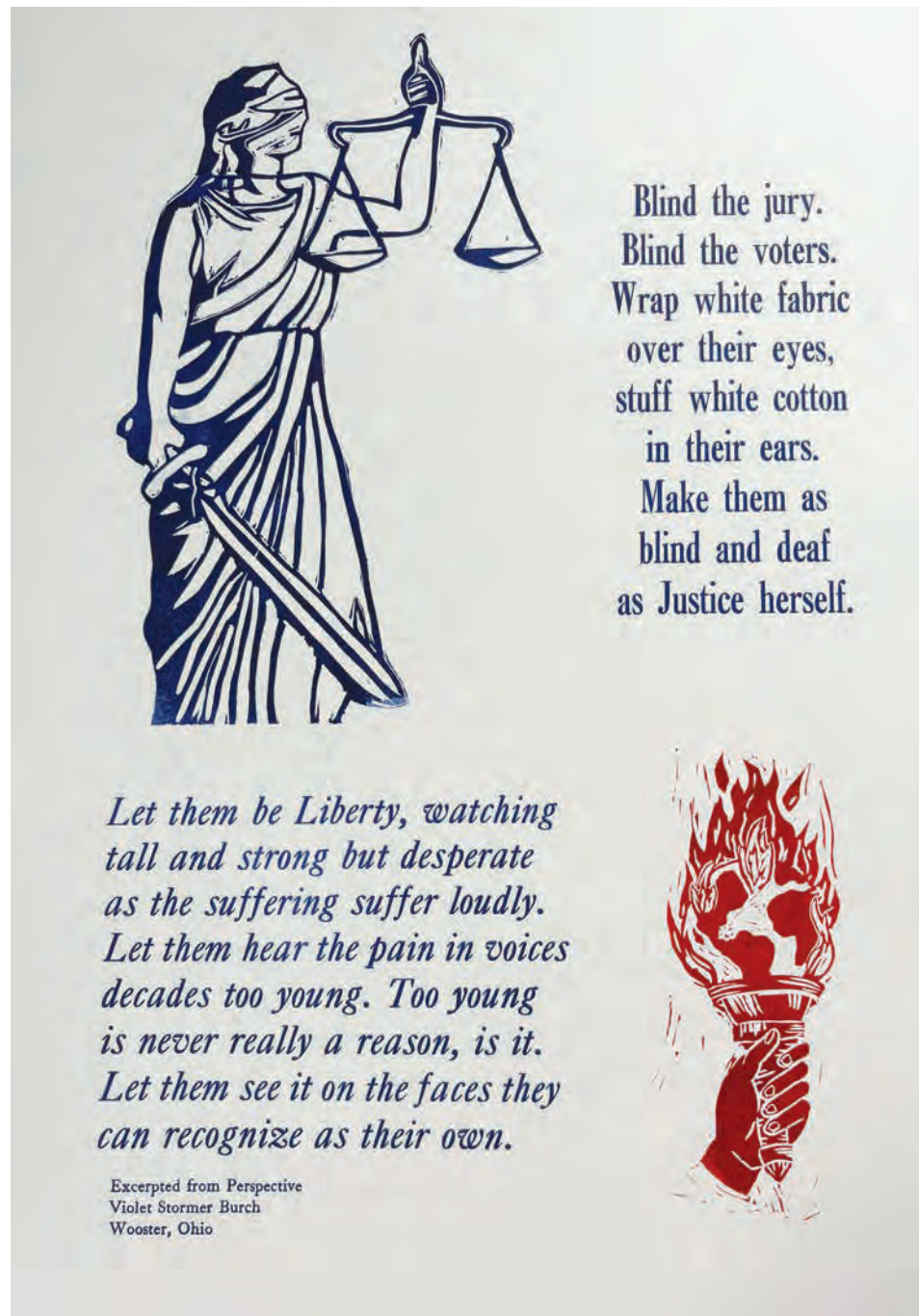
The Tomorrow Project

This section is devoted to The Tomorrow Project, a new civic engagement initiative that grew out of the YWP community's interest in writing and making art around current issues of human rights, democracy, values, community, and climate.

The project includes challenges, contests, publication, and exhibits. In spring 2025, as part of Fair Housing Month, YWP partnered with Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity and A Revolutionary Press of New Haven, VT, to exhibit work from The Tomorrow Project at Burlington City Hall. Some of the letterpress prints, created for the exhibit by A Revolutionary Press and a group of Vermont artists to illustrate YWP writing, are included here.



"Hands Off!," Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT
(Hands Off! Rally, Church Street, Burlington, VT, April 5, 2025)



"Perspective," Excerpt, Violet Stormer Burch, Wooster, OH; *Linocut by Anna Browdy and John Vincent; Printed letterpress with hand-set type by A Revolutionary Press, New Haven, VT*

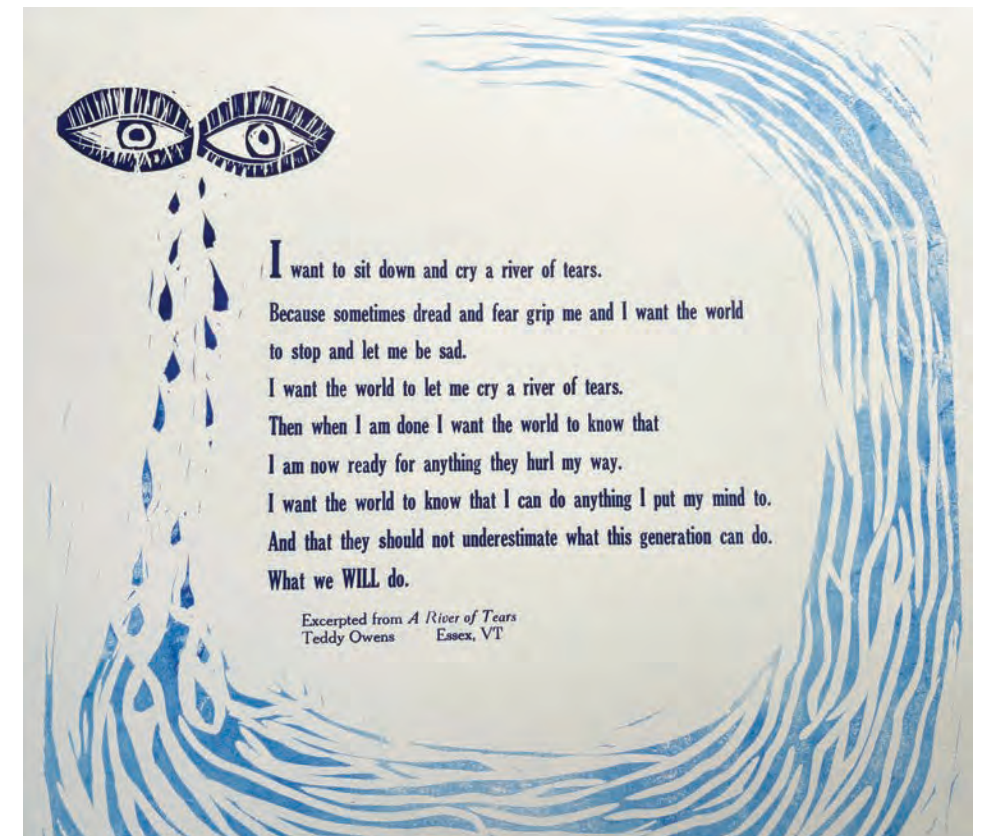
After the Fifth Day of November

Ella Sherry, Palos Verdes Estates, CA

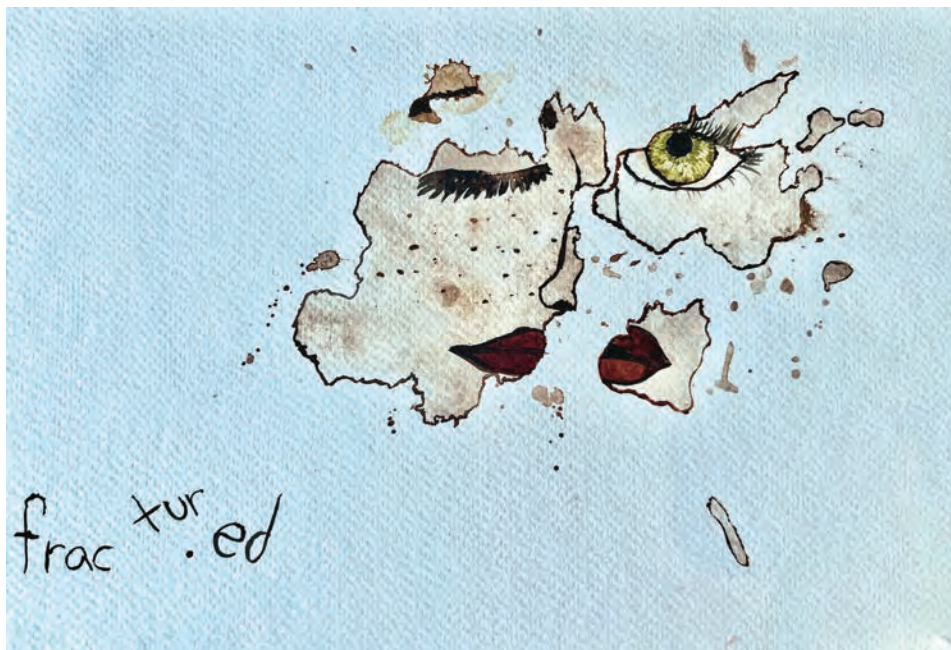
I want you to sit and stare at the
glistening horizon.
I want you to hear the wallow of the gulls,
the weeping of waves as they hit the
shore,
the quiet anguish of the setting sun.
I do not want you to tell me it will be
okay –
I do not want you to think the world is

mourning with us
because it goes on –
the sun will wake and the earth will spin
for another day.
I know this is not the world you wanted
to leave me.
But we can listen to Sinatra if it reminds
you of home, and I will plant daisies into
the sand and water them until they can
stand on their own.

(Partially inspired by Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese," and for my mom.)



"A River of Tears," Excerpt, Teddy Owens, Essex, VT; *Linocut by Jen Berger; Printed letterpress with hand-set type by A Revolutionary Press, New Haven, VT*



"Fractured," Grace Weinstein, Etna, NH

Australia

Madeline Borowitz, Etna, NH

At school, we draw in the margins of our notebook paper
and toy with the idea of moving to Australia.

We look up the latest news in between classes, knowing that
the teachers will think we're addicted to our phones.

Really, we're paranoid, our fingernails bitten to the quick.

We watch a week pass and wonder how it's already begun to feel normal,
the creeping dread like a tidal wave,
the kind of dread
that is usually reserved for exam season.
Sometimes we forget,
but hardly ever.

My Italian friends
joke that we'll be deported
and I laugh along with them, thinking of the families
who cried tears of joy
when they got their papers,
who will be forced to return
to countries marked by devastation
and the purple-blue-black of endless night.
The Statue of Liberty
stands stony-faced, her torch outstretched
like a false promise.
Like a goodbye.

In the South, a woman
receives two red lines like a death sentence. She knows
the way men twist their need to control

into poisonous protection, stripping her
of the decision to wait. She cries,
because she voted
to never have to fear two red lines again,
she voted
secretly, fervent hope in the privacy of a ballot box.
She cries,
and she tells her coworkers it's allergies.

My mother cancels
her New York Times subscription.
She walks our dog
along the meadow that winds behind our house
in the sunniest part of the day
and calls it coping.
She says we can focus on ourselves, on our family
and everything else will melt away like sugar cubes
in the herbal tea she makes for me.
I try to believe her.

I read long articles
about the American dream and learn nothing
as I sit in the car, and forest gives way to town,
home gives way to school, fatigue still blurring the edges of everything, night still
clinging to day. I think of
my ancestors and their fantasies of streets paved with gold
as my father's tires roll over the pavement.
I count the days.
Sixty-four, which still feels impossibly long.
Sixty-four, which will soon curl into nothing.

Dear Madame President

Eli Hoopengardner, Arlington, VA

I hope that you rest easy as the world
tumbles down into fire
for you did everything you could
and we didn't do enough.

It was never your fate to carry the failures
of common sense and education, but now
there's no one left to hold up the sky
before it crushes humanity like a
well-placed punch to the windpipe.

After all, that's how it felt when I woke
up the next morning and saw our country
baptized in blood; it isn't Jesus's name
that's being preached or prayed to now.

All we can do is scream into the void and
hope someone cares enough to answer.

Madame,
please forgive us
for it is not you who failed us,
but we who failed you.

I'm sorry
we didn't have enough courage
to save ourselves.

And What Must They Think of Our Golden Door Now?

Sela Morgenstein Fuerst,
South Burlington, VT

The Statue of Liberty was brown once, an
unprepared American girl blistering in the
sun as if our Constitution had torn sharp,
green papercuts into her skin.

The Statue of Liberty does not speak, a
silenced American girl who cannot utter
even a hello to her people, her lips sealed
together by a man she does not know.

The Statue of Liberty clutches
independence in her left hand and
freedom in her right, a heartbroken
American girl still holding onto things
she no longer believes in.

The Statue of Liberty used to long to turn
around, a naive American girl wishing
to greet the country she was named for
instead of the cold Atlantic crashing
against shores she doesn't remember.

The Statue of Liberty screams silently
into the unborn constellations, a terrified
American girl trying to save the whole
world with only a torch and a poem and a
broken chain.

The Statue of Liberty walks forward into
the night, a tear-stained American girl
ready to give up all she knows for only
the chance of a place where children do
not know what it means to live like this.

The Statue of Liberty cries because she is
an incomplete American girl who is trying
to find the strength to fight for a someday
American girl who will not need a copper
statue to be free.



"Lighthouse," Chloe Deliso, Cary, NC

Dull Roar

Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT

I'm so mad I can hardly write poetry
anymore,
every word rushes out and tumbles down,
knocking the inside of my skull,
a dull roar that follows me to school and
home again.

I want to write about the world,
and how everything feels as if it's going
downhill.

You know what they used to say?
That the world would end in 2000;
I think it's going to end in 2026.

I'm a hopeful person who looks for the
best in people,
but I only see red now;
it's like the annoying sunglasses your
parents always make you wear.
I try to not cry at night after scrolling
TikTok.

I try to watch the happy puppies, but how
can I pretend everything is fine?

I keep seeing little girls forced to give
birth,
and old men telling me my body is not
my own,
and I can't believe I'm the one to blame,
when I don't even have much of a say at
all.

Dear Canada

Abigail Balon, Panton, VT

Dear Canada,
You do not belong to us.
You never have.
And I really, really hope you never will.
You are your own country, but I know I
don't have to tell you that.
You already know it.
On behalf of many, many Americans (*ugh*,
do I really even want to be an American?),
we're sorry this has happened.
This makes up for nothing that has been
said, done, and proposed,
but we wish this had never happened.



"We the People," Georga Reed, Killington, VT

Unfinished

Amelia Terry, Philadelphia, PA

They gather in shadow beyond the
monuments,
no longer chiseled names, but men again,
haunted by what they see,
each bearing the weight of his vision now
worn.

Washington stands first,
his hands once steady on the reins of
power,
now clenched as he watches
factions twist the unity he bled for,
a farewell ignored,
his warning a whisper beneath the roar.

Jefferson walks among the wires and
screens,
half-proud, half-ashamed,
he sees his words engraved on school
walls,
but the man he was
and the contradictions he lived
echo louder than his eloquence,
freedom for some,
chains for others –
still not resolved.

Hamilton paces,
delighted by the banks,
the market,
the surge of commerce,
but his eyes narrow
at greed mistaken for greatness,
debt wielded like chains,
ambition without virtue.

Madison sits with the Constitution open
on his lap.

His fingers trace the parchment,
now frayed by loopholes and lobbying.
He wonders if balance was ever possible,
if checks and compromises can still hold
when power no longer blushes.

Adams stares sternly.
His pride in law and order tested,
he sees opinion swallowed by outrage,
civility crushed beneath celebrity,
a republic of laws
now hostage to personality.

Franklin laughs,
then falls quiet.
No candle to lighten this tangle,
his pragmatism sees the flaws,
his hope searches for the spark.
He finds it not in politics
but in people –
small acts of repair,
a student questioning,
a neighbor feeding another,
a scientist unbought.

They speak little now,
each left to reckon
with what they built
and what it became –
not gods,
not saints,
just men,
and the future
still unfinished.

The Next Step

Rebekah Aubert, Fontana, CA

What do I do,
as a Black woman,
when *they* get control?
When the consequences
don't matter anymore?
When I watch my people
get bullied,
get beaten,
get murdered,
because it's okay now?
What will I do,
as a Black woman?

What do I do,
as a queer woman,
when *they* get control?

When the one in charge
doesn't think we
have worth?
When I want to
get married,
adopt kids,
be *free*,
but it may not be free anymore?
What will I do,
as a queer woman?

What will they do –
the other suffering minorities –
when *they* get control?
Latinos, transgender people,
they will suffer.
They will suffer, and I will watch them
suffer,
because I am forced to see this madness.
What can I do to help you all,
to help me, my friends, my family, my
life?



"What Do I Do?," Ellicott Smith, Norwich, VT

Blood, White, and Blue

Nina Stroup, Parkville, MD

It's 12:34 a.m. on July 5, 2025, and I still
see fireworks going off in the sky.
I hear the booms, the bangs, the
commotion of endless fireworks
going on for hours,
still raging
on a brand new day.
Did I have a barbecue with a friend? Yes,
but did I celebrate the rights I don't have?
No.
What am I supposed to celebrate?
I see and hear people with their illegal
fireworks complaining about what they
think are illegal people living on stolen
land,
and all I can do is sit and cry,
knowing what our modern-day definition
of "democracy" is.

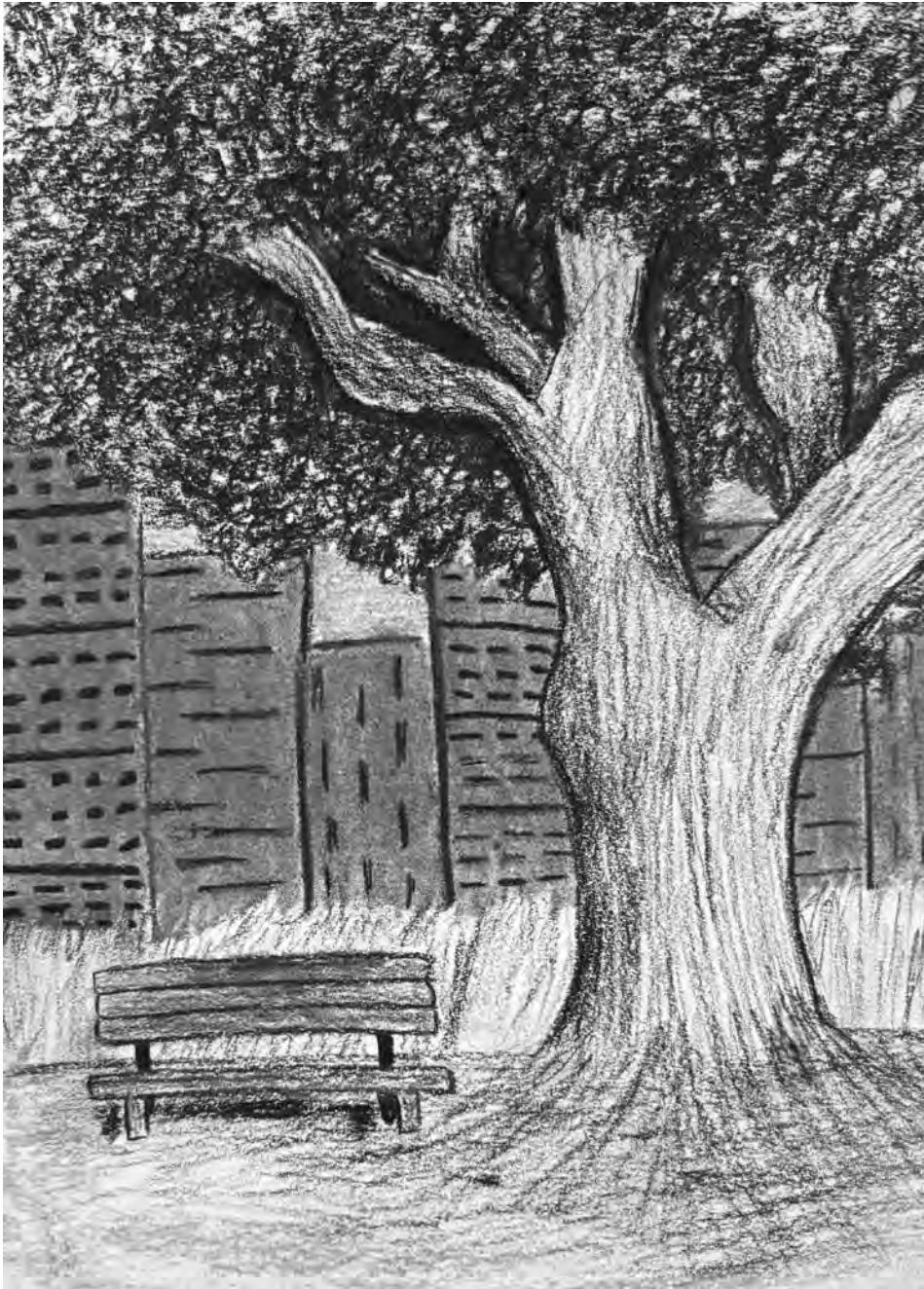
I see people with their hot dogs and
hamburgers in hand,
their colorful fireworks,
American flags plastered on every inch of
their bodies,
chanting the words, "I love America,"
when there's nothing to love
about a country run by
a man whose motivation is hatred.

I see people celebrating the freedom I
don't have,
as I watch the rights being stripped
from more and more people each day.

I see people celebrating the independence
of our country,
right as we're on the verge of a war,
one that many people
see no issue with.
I see people, both oblivious and selfish,
watching our government strip rights
from women, gay people, trans people,
Black people, the less fortunate and all
other marginalized groups I am unable to
mention directly because there are simply
just that many people whose needs are
not met
and whose freedom is not fought for
enough,
although it shouldn't be something one
must fight for at all.

I watch people celebrate
a democracy
that's masking a king,
the one who is hypnotizing
the "strictly Republicans"
and the "strictly MAGAs",
the same people who
blast "Born in the U.S.A." on the Fourth
of July,
mistaking it for a song about freedom.

I think it's time that we rip off the mask.
We'll rip it off hard and proud as we chant
"NO KINGS"
with our hands painted blue as we shout
"HANDS OFF!"
It's time to remind the government what
democracy really is.



"I Know a Spot," Bradee Traverse, West Rutland, VT

We Grew Trees from Our Bones

Francesca Howard, New York, NY

At dusk, the city climbs into trees.
 Streetlights fold into branches;
 apartments blink like nesting owls.
 Commuters dangle from vines in tailored suits,
 sipping moonlight through trembling leaves.
 You knock on my bark-body, and I let you in.
 Inside, my ribcage rings with cicadas who know what happens next.
 We speak in pollen and prophecy.
 Beneath us, ancient rivers chant our forgotten lexicons
 like we'd even care to remember what was lost.
 When morning comes, the city yawns,
 stretches its roots,
 and sinks back into concrete skin.
 We pretend it never left.
 But I still cough up twigs.
 I still dream in chlorophyll.
 You still whisper in leaf speak:
 "We were wild once."
 And I believe you.

The Most Tragic Death

Rigney Deliso, Cary, NC

The ground beneath us trembles in fear.
 The future is dark; the ending is near.
 The trees around us shrivel in fright.
 They cannot stand another hot night.
 The water beside us slips away,
 its death caused by the games we play.
 The clouds above us crash to the ground.
 Yet nobody hears a single sound.

Everywhere

Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

There's a climate rally.
 Okay, let's go to that.
 I'll make a sign.
 But now we're making the sign with the markers,
 plastic with artificial dye shipped around the world,
 wrapped in different plastic,
 to make the sign about no plastic.
 We're driving to the rally in our car,
 have yet to convince our parents to go electric.
 They say it's a good idea but we can't afford it,
 and so that's gas pouring out of the tank into the air
 we are protesting to keep clean.
 Three hours into protesting
 I can't believe I forgot my water bottle,
 and now here we are,
 you're not going to let yourself die of dehydration
 to save the planet and
 now I have the cup that I know can't go into the blue bin
 and none of this is my fault
 or is it and
 now I feel itchy
 in my coat,
 plastic and
 my leggings
 shipped from China,
 holding the sign made with cardboard from the box
 covered in plastic
 shipped from China.
 Is it
 all
 my fault?

A Letter to the Grownups

Beatrice Garvin, Peacham, VT

It's not all the grownups, but it's too many.
Nothing is how it should be.
The world is heating.
The government is collapsing.
Yet we – *we* are only overreacting?
Nothing is the same as it was.
We aren't stupid, and we weren't born yesterday.
We are young, but we are not babies.
Everything we do is too much or not enough.
Why are we never enough?
Maybe it's just the age,
but if that were true,
haven't you been here too?
Because you don't seem to understand
and all you can say is that it's "those damn phones,"
and if it is, whose fault is that?
We didn't come out of the womb with a phone addiction.
It is not our fault.
This world is not our fault,
but it is somehow our responsibility.
And we will fight.

We will fight as hard as we can,
and we will try.
But we are still only kids.
I know that you're worried about us. We are too.
We are too young to worry about more than our crushes and our math test.
But we do anyway. We have to.
Our childhood ended a long time ago.
We watched people die, saw trucks of dead bodies on the news.
We weren't allowed to go outside in some of the most developmental years of our life.
Yet we are lazy?
We didn't choose this world,
yet we must hold it on our shoulders.
In school, we must work hard.
They assign so much homework, yet when we are relaxing, we are lazy.
We are not lazy.
We are burnt out and stressed and scared.
We will get through these years,
but maybe we won't change in your eyes.
Maybe we will be frozen in time or maybe we will grow up,
and you will realize that even back then, we were trying.

This Year Feels Different

Autumn Finnell, Layton, UT

This year feels ... different,
like there's anticipation hanging in the air.
This year feels ... scary,
like there's so much uncertainty
that we don't know where to go from here.
This year feels ... strange,
like there's something not quite right about it.
This year feels ... hopeful,
like maybe we can take a stand.
This year feels ... hopeless,
like the stand won't make a change.
But ultimately, this year is just going to happen. We can't stop it, but we can change it. Every time we stand up for ourselves and our loved ones, we change the future.
Remember this, you are not alone. You have all of us here at YWP.

Kindness, Accidentally

Ev Tower-Pierce, East Burke, VT

I did not know kindness isn't always loud,
not the grand gestures, not the
throw-the-coat-over-a-puddle,
because sometimes,
it is simply someone sitting on the
ground
just because you did, even though
there's a perfectly good chair
and they're wearing white pants.

Sometimes,
it's the way they swing your hand while
walking, no rhythm
just something they can't help, or it's the
way
someone grabs your arm mid-laugh,
like the joke was too big for one body,
like joy needed somewhere else to go,

someone spinning while they're waiting
for the microwave,
skipping stairs just to feel a second of
flight,
swaying in the kitchen with you,
arms around your ribs, like there's music
only you can hear.

It's the breath someone takes at an open
window,

like the sky said their name,
the way they pull their chair closer to
yours,
not because they can't hear you,
but because they want to,

someone waiting for your laugh before
they keep talking,
letting you hum, letting you be,
someone asking if you're okay
when you're crying on the phone
in the middle of the street,
reminding you you're not invisible.

It's no big deal, just a hundred tiny things
that say, *I see you I see you I see you*,
without making it a thing,
and maybe you don't notice at first
maybe you're still unlearning how to
flinch –
but something in you
starts to relax

and suddenly,
you're laughing with your whole body,
spinning in hallways,
breathing deeper at windows,
pulling your chair closer too.

Maybe that's the point.
Maybe kindness isn't the starring role –
just the reason
the story gets to keep going.



"Common Ground," Ev Tower-Pierce, East Burke, VT

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