

Where did all
the green golf balls

ADVANCE 2018

Go?



Where Did All the Green Golf Balls Go?

A Collection of Prose & Poetry

Composed by the 2018 ADVANCE Creative Writing Course

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Iliyan Basaria

Yo, what's up, my chili cheese dogs! It's Iliyan. I'm a rising sophomore at Clements High School and this is my second year at Advance. I like Advance because the teachers here actually teach. This year I'm taking Creative Writing, and it has been fun. Two trips to the Farmer's Market, two study halls spent in Smoothie King or Café Demon. I hope I can come to Advance next year. For now, I'll just show you some of my stuff or something.

War Story #7 (100 one-syllable words)

July 9th, 1915

“Go!” he screamed at me from the end of the trench. “Or you’ll die!” I did what he said while Death loomed over me. I ducked as a bomb knocked the dirt near me. I made it to base and looked at the trench. Gone. Every man lay dead. I saw the face of my friend, the man who saved my life. Blood on all sides of his head, one arm gone. The Turks killed my friend! I now know what I must do. I will grab my gun, look at the field, and run out to my death. Goodbye.

Disconnection

My phone whose buttons are the alpha and omega
whose each pixel is a bustling city of light
working together to create a picture.
Whose apps are sacred gods
who command the cities when called upon.
Whose battery is a box filled with the hope of the cities
that is the lifeline of their inhabitants.
Whose Wi-Fi is a portal to other dimensions
with their own cities and gods.
Whose glass screen is a fragile shield
protecting the cities’ innocence from the real world.
Whose case is a loving mother snuggling her child
making sure no harm is to come to it.
Whose charging port is a prophet sent from the gods
refilling hope to an empty and damaged people.
Whose absence is a crushing “game over.”
Isolation from the cities’ innocence and hope.

Shutting Down

“Powering on.” The futuristic and alien sound echoed across the dingy garage into Jason’s ears.

“Jesus, she takes way too long to boot up. I don’t think it’ll be worth enough,” he said while chugging a bottle of Jack Daniel’s. “At least it still works.”

“Companion-bot is now on. Say hello!”

“Hey Melissa,” Jason said, sighing.

“Hello Jason! How are you? It’s been forever since I’ve seen you!”

Jason started to tear up. Something about that programmed voice always got to him. Her voice, a sweet melody of songbirds mixed with a sharp note of a flute, appealed to him from the moment he first heard it. That voice used to be the highlight of his day.

“Are you okay, Jason? Do you need a tissue, my little monkey-butt?” A burned and crinkled tissue popped out from a slit in her right arm.

“No, no. I’m fine. I’ve always told you I hated the pet names.” Her programming always had a few kinks that could be easily fixed with a software update, but Jason never updated her. Deep down, he truly loved her flaws. Made her more human, Jason thought.

“Okay. Do you prefer ‘chicken-foot,’ my little chicken-foot?”

“No, it’s fine. I prefer ‘monkey-butt.’” He barely could finish his sentence before he broke into tears again.

“What’s wrong, Jason? Are the deaths of your parents bothering you again?”

“No, Melissa.” He paused for a second. “It’s just, it’s just, my, uh, well, bills,” he said, defeated. “Ever since that gosh darn son of a biscuit businessman Saul ruined me, the bills seem even more threatening. I don’t really know what to do.”

“Let’s work through it together! We can do it!” Melissa extended the fibers on her bicep, moved her arm to the front, bent it at a 53.2° angle, and put her hand on her bicep.

“Ha, you always knew how to make me laugh.” Jason was glad understanding human sarcasm was one of Melissa’s weak spots.

“Well according to my calculations, working at minimum wage without any tax or social security reductions would pay off your debts in only... 231,480.552 hours or 9645.023 days! That’s possible, right?”

“Haha, yeah. By the way, have I ever told you I love you?”

“Wow, Jason. I never knew that! I lo...”

“Shutting down.” The sound echoed through the garage, for the last time. Jason sighed, put down his beer, grabbed Melissa and some rope, and drunkenly walked to his trunk. He didn’t care about the risks of drunk driving at that point. The loss of his life wouldn’t matter to him now. He’d already lost everything.

I Shall Swim Across the Atlantic

Because I wish to be Moses, splitting the sea.
Because I will be the first to do so.
Because it will prove that mankind has no limits.
Because I will break multiple world records.
Because I want to laugh at those who didn't believe.
Because plane tickets to Europe are expensive.
Because I want to swim with the dolphins.
Because I want to live a new life.
Because I want to be remembered.
Because I can.

Story of Another Land

Literature over the rushing water.
Swelling stream, spilling deep into the ocean,
book in hand, a decadent symphony of words.
A tale of two men, telling where they have been,
hiking through mountains, tales of woe and grief.
The Hero's Journey, a monster slain, a town saved.
The men laugh and drink and reminiscence of their
heroics, a path to fame has been paved.
Suddenly a stone pops off a bough and falls in sand.
I leave my florescent story of another land.

Accidents Happen

The daycare. That's where it went wrong. You see, if I never decided to be nice and pick up the neighbors' son, Jimmy, I wouldn't be stuck in a mental ward. I guess I should tell you what happened.

So, I was outside mowing the lawn sometime around a month ago, much to the detriment of my unemployed government-leech of a son, when the neighbors next door, the Smithsons, asked me to take their son Jimmy to daycare. I said, "Yeah, why not, we're good friends, and the daycare is right next to my workplace." So, I take him there and drop him off. But right as I was about to leave, I heard: "Is this your coffee, sir?"

I turn around and I swear I saw the most beautiful woman I have ever seen before. Like, this chick had the body of a goddess. Perfect curves, perfect skin. She had chains of solid gold from Mt. Olympus chained to her scalp. No balding, just perfect hair. Her forehead sparkled and gleamed in the dim light above us, and it seemed as if she were the main light source in the room. I could talk about her for hours, I swear.

But anyway, I stood there for a full minute and just stared at her beauty, thinking I had died on the car ride to the day care and this was heaven. Now, I loved my wife, but when she left us, she told me to not be held down by her and to catch another fish in the sea. So, then I took my cup and thanked her and started to leave, but before I could, she kissed me on the cheek and handed me a slip of paper saying, "Meet me behind the daycare tonight after your work ♥."

So, I did just that and I saw her in a shiny sparkling dress with two slips of paper in her hand. Turns out she made a reservation to Très Cher, the fanciest restaurant in town, and she also bought me a brand-new tux. I tried to pay her back, but it was pointless. She just wouldn't take it.

So, I went into my office and slipped on the tux. To this day, it was the most comfortable thing I've ever worn. It was made of a fabric that was darker than the bottom of the sea and it felt like a rushing river of oil on my fingers. It came with sparkling cuff links made of 5 carat diamonds and a tie with a whirlpool of red, blue, green, yellow, orange, and purple splashed on the front. So, I stepped out and this girl absolutely loved it. I tried to ask for her first name, but she told me it was a surprise. I knew little Jimmy, the little kid from before, called her Ms. Mama but I don't think that's her actual name.

We went to Très Cher, and when we entered the staff started treating her like royalty but also teased her. I remember one of them said, "Pulled in another one, boss?" We ordered—I think I got a steak—I forgot what she got. As we were leaving, the woman said she knew a romantic cliff about a half an hour away and we should go there. The cliff was remote and there was a good view, but the only thing to see for miles were trees. We stepped out and I advanced this time, trying to go for a kiss but she pushed me away. Confused, I asked why. She said she wanted to walk a little bit first. I said fine, if I get my action.

We walked down the cliff and deep into the woods. I asked her if she knew where she was going, and she said the forest was practically her home. We kept on walking until she stopped in front of a cave. She asked, "Are you afraid of the dark?" I said no, and she shoved me in.

It wasn't a bad fall, but somehow, I was knocked unconscious. I woke up tied to the cave with the woman looking at me. I thought, "Oh she's into that sort of stuff. I can deal with that." But she didn't pull out a whip, no no no. She pulled off her skin. Her skin. There was no blood,

just fur. Fur! I could do nothing but watch as my beloved tore off her human skin to reveal a brown blob of fur. I then understood why she knew the path to the caves and how she didn't get lost. She lived there in that cave.

She was a bear!

She still spoke in English, though. She said thank you and a few more sentences before knocking me unconscious again. When I woke up again, I wasn't tied to the cave. I was in a hospital bed. I was covered in blood and had three large scratches on my torso. I asked what happened. The cops said I fell off the cliff riding a bike and got severely injured. But that was wrong. So, I told them what happened. Everything. But they didn't believe me, and I can understand why. The evidence matched up to an accident, and I hurt my head.

So, I was brought here. To Shimmering Creeks Mental Asylum. Given my room and everything. I lost everything else though. My job, my life, and thankfully my son. My son, being the leech that he is, took all my money. Screw him.

Why does the human mind search for questions it cannot answer?

Do trees decide which part of the sky they will dominate?
Or is a free-for-all for sunlight?

What if we sharpened the skills and intellect of the dolphin?
Would they be able to surpass mankind?

Do blades of grass die when they are cut?
Or are they a part of a larger underground plant system?

What if fish grew legs and lived on land?
Would they assimilate into human culture?

Are the souls of fish infused into fish and chips?
Is that what makes them taste so good?

Gone

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it moving.
For I believed it was gone,
dead,
lying on its cold, hard grave.
But when I saw that twitch
in the corner of my eye
and I turned
to see it alive
it wasn't there.
It was gone again.
I guess I still couldn't believe my eyes
because I stomped on it again.
Frickin' spiders.

The Sound of Last Hope

Dirty, gray halls and
walls with stained windows
blocking almost all passing light
and turning the prison into a black and white movie.

Prison guards leading a convict
with four tears tattooed beneath his eyes
to a room that is to remain locked,
a room is reeking with the odorless scent of death.

Each man locked in his cage
stealing one last look at their friend,
looking with deep pain and
wondering if they were next.

And the quietest sound I've ever heard was
the desperate prayers of Death's next victim.

My Name Is(n't) Unique

At first glance, my name seems unique.
Almost no one knows it, spells it
with an "E" or two "L"'s of all things.
I always have to repeat my name so others
can understand.
But my name is not as unique as I thought.
I know many Eliyans, and they know me.
Some spell it the same, some with an "E,"
some with no "Y," some with an extra "L."
But it is pronounced the same.
Ill-lee-yawn.
So, I guess I can't blame those who misspell.
They've met many types of Ilians.
Iliyans who thought they had a unique name
but were wrong.

Nap Time

I dreamed of a couple's hands embracing each other.
I dreamed of cards playing their games in the dark.
I dreamed of a book sharing its story, dependent on uninvited light.
I dreamed of soft whispers running from ferocious shushing.
I dreamed of light rushing to aid one who needed it.
I dreamed of popcorn kernels flying through the night.
I dreamed a tale of the sleepest chaos.
I dreamed all of this, but I was not sleeping.

We Are Nature

The musky smell of the woods invites me. What a wonderful smell! No cigarette smoke or alcohol or an obnoxious amount of perfume. Just nature. Creatures big and small live and kill each other while new ones appear. Perfectly balanced, as all things should be. I now see the appeal of nature. It seems so, well, natural. Thousands of years ago people lived in this. This was their home. No 5 P.M. traffic, no blinking lights from a billboard outside advertising sleep keeping them up. Just the ground, sky, and everything in between. A simpler time, back when we were animals. Not knowing if we'd survive long enough to eat our next meal. The satisfying crunch of leaves, the sweet mixture of browns and greens, the light shining from above. It is peaceful. It seems peaceful. There are little bugs fighting for their lives, taking a last stand so their bug allies can escape. Little bugs fighting over what part of the ground they own. Little bugs competing for a mate. Bugs acting like, well, people. I was wrong. We never stopped being animals. Arguing and fighting and coexisting is a natural thing. That log that seems dead on the ground isn't truly dead. That fallen log is filled with many small creatures running around in their own big, bustling city.

The Future Calls

Twenty years from now, the world will be different. How? None of us know. We can't fast-forward time like a TV remote without using hypothetical instruments. The future is interesting. According to our current knowledge, the future is written down already. So, what's it like? The most common and simple answer is "technology will advance." But what technology? In twenty years, self-driving cars might be the norm. A 1989 R32 Nissan Skyline GTR or any other car that still uses gasoline and requires human effort to use will be ancient in twenty years. A car from the future will only be 50 years older than a 1989 R32 Nissan Skyline GTR, a short time compared to the age of humanity and the universe, but worlds apart. We wouldn't have a futuristic world like in "The Jetsons." We will be closer, though. Or maybe I'm wrong. Maybe "The Jetsons" will become a reality tomorrow. That's the beauty of guessing. Being wrong is okay. If we want the right answer, humanity will have to learn to be patient and wait twenty years. Or we could make a time machine and go to the future while screwing time and space up.

For I Will Consider My Orange Shoestring

For I will consider my orange shoestring
For it identifies me as part of Advance.
For if it is lost, I will lose both my money and my soul.
For it can give me a discount at some places.
For it gives color to my normal gray and blue attire.
For people can look at my name instead of attempting to pronounce it.
For the key makes a good stabby-thing to annoy friends with.
For it spelled my name correctly.
For it goes with me wherever I go.
For it is not as powerful as a purple shoestring.
For it is the only way to access my room.
For it keeps all my valuables safe.
For it shows I am not alone.
For it is a symbol of Advance.
For unless I leave it at home it shows how many years I've been here.
For it is mine.

Kayla Crane

My name is Kayla Crane. I am 13 years old. I am from Simsboro, Louisiana. I go to school at A.E. Phillips in Ruston, Louisiana. I love to draw, read, listen to music, and FaceTime friends. I studied French for 2 years; it was a struggle. I used to live in Lafayette. Before Creative Writing, I didn't write much—I only wrote in school. I've always had ideas, but I never wrote them down. My main inspiration for writing is my mom: she is a writer and ELA teacher.

Where It Went Wrong

It went wrong when I had to convince myself that it was the right decision. It was like a lion trying to convince an antelope of its good intentions.

It went wrong when you told me I was right. Not to know the consequences that lay ahead on that dark night.

It went wrong when I snuck out of the house. Hearing small creaks on the wooden floor as I tiptoed out.

It went wrong when I jumped into your busted car. Leaving a trail of gas as we headed off into the dark night.

It went wrong when you turned the music up loud. As if you were trying to drown out the sound of our second thoughts.

A Girl

The flow of the cool breeze through the air was a wonder.

The infinite field of marigolds rustled.

The city of Worcester was very calm.

You suddenly hear the thud of a girl drop down.

Was it from the tire and boredom of life?

As you walk closer the metropolis is silent.

She is out like a light in the infinite field.

Hair the color of blood as it drips like ink from her mouth.

Lips red like a cherry as it flows down her chin.

You think the setting is perfect as she fades into the breeze.

The Man

The breeze caught her gray hair as she looked at the ocean. Waves crashing in the water. Like her thoughts crashing in her mind.

She was remembering old faces. Faces of the past. The good and bad times she had with those people.

Especially her love.

Her love was a man like no other. He made her feel special. Like she was wanted. Needed.

Sadly, her love left. He left her with pain and anger. She was stuck in that place. A place where monsters and creatures of the night roam.

Thoughts still crashing as her bright blue eyes that were scanning the sea started to fill with tears.

She felt a light tap on her shoulder.

The smell of salt filled her nostrils as she turned around and saw the man. The man who was once her love.

You really did it!

I couldn't believe my eyes when the tall boy with glasses fouled Trent. How he played overly aggressive in the last ten seconds of the game. You could hear the balls bounce off the glass as Trent missed both free throws. It was down to five seconds.

With the game still tied at 50-50, Kaleb carried the ball down the court like a soldier marching into battle. Ready to shoot with only so much time.

5. He passed it off to Trent with the force of 1000 men in an effort to not lose the ball.
4. Trent was ready to dribble down the court at full speed like a racehorse.
3. The boy with the glasses stood still like a column in front of the goal.
2. Trent ran down the court, releasing the ball from his fingertips with all of his prayers.
1. The ball rolled around the rim, holding on to everyone's last breath
0. It fell in, taking screams of joy and happiness with it.

I couldn't believe my eyes. They won! And like soldiers, they carried off the spoils of war only in the form of a trophy.

The Quietest

The quietest thing that I have ever heard is the light tapping on the window as it starts to drizzle. Raindrops start to form on my window as they reflect the outside world in an upside-down view.

Hearing the creaking of the dark brown wooden floor as my brother makes his way down the hall, shuffling in his fuzzy blue socks.

The creaking of my old mattress as I get under the covers of my black bed.
Absorbing the darkness as I hear the faint noise of me humming my favorite songs.
Humming until the quietness of sleep creeps in and takes me away.

Three Doors

It happened three doors down. I was staying in a dingy motel. The room was a dirty yellow with unknown stains on the bed and floors. Despite the dirtiness, I still grabbed my phone and plopped down on the bed, staring at the ceiling with my curly brown hair hitting the pillow. I looked at my bright phone and saw that I had 5 million messages. They were all along the lines of “Come back home” and “Why did you leave?”

I rolled my brown eyes and threw my phone across the bed. I put my hands on my face out of frustration. “Why does anyone have to know why I left? If they wanted me to stay, they would’ve fought harder for me,” I thought. Glistening tears started to roll down my cheeks as I remembered the encounter. I rushed off the smelly bed and decided to take a breath outside before my mind could travel to a place that it didn’t want to go.

I grabbed my phone, my purse, and my tissue as I wiped the tears from my face. As I opened the dark brown wooden door and stepped out, I bumped into a body and dropped my phone. The body was significantly bigger than my own. I held onto the rusted rails on the edge of the sidewalk to keep my balance. I looked back up and realized that I bumped into a guy. He had dazzling hazel eyes and long dark surfer hair. The white shirt and khaki shorts suggested that he worked at the hotel. His name tag said Kyran.

He turned to leave while muttering sorry. He went to the third door down from my own and slammed it. I was about to continue my walk when I heard something coming from the room. Muffled sounds floated out of the room and into my ears. It was crying. My feet quickly turned around and I put my ear up against the rough wooden door and listened.

“Please don’t do this, please,” begged a higher-pitched voice.

“This would be so much easier if you put the gun down,” someone, who I assumed was Kyran, explained in a quiet voice.

I decided to barge in and saw a young girl in a bath robe with a gun pointed at Kyran. “What is going on,” I yelled. When I got no reply, I rushed to try to take the gun. We wrestled for the gun and she didn’t put up a fight. She looked shocked that I would even do that and still managed to get the gun out of my hand.

“He is trying to kill me,” she muttered repeatedly.

I whipped around to find the gun already under her chin. I lunged for the gun but it was too late—hearing the shot ring out, I watched as she crumpled to the floor. Lifeless. Kyran stayed in the corner looking helpless as the blood splatters on the wall ran down.

I took the gun out of her cold hand and unloaded it before any more could happen. I shakily walked out of the room, the stench of blood surrounding me like a cloud.

Epilogue

The main character left the motel immediately to go back home. Neither her nor Kyran were charged with anything. The girl who died was actually Kyran’s best friend. She had a history with mental health and didn’t get the help she needed. The main girl patched things up with her family trying to forget most things about the past. She doesn’t like to go to hotels by herself anymore. Her and Kyran sometimes like to meet up at a coffee shop to see how each other is doing.

Ducks

The girl in the flower crown throws rocks into the river.
I once heard that if you do that a duck will choke.
I never believed it.

The girl turns around.
The glistening of her tears makes her face shine.
She quickly wipes them and stalks away.

I don't go and ask if she is ok.
No. Never.
Why would I do that if I am the reason she is crying.

Dreams

I dreamed of pink clouds. Fluffy, reflecting the sunset. The feeling of cotton as I float.
I dreamed of painting my nails, the coolness of my red polish as it glides across my fingernail.
I dreamed of rolling hills that are green and full of life. Lush roses and daises spilling over as the bright orange sun rises.
I dreamed of standing in the rain. Clear water droplets hitting my face in the cloudy night sky. A lone streetlight standing to illuminate.
I dreamed of baking a cake, the smooth batter folding and folding as I stir. The overlapping of the batter when I pour it in the pan. The beeping of the oven to let me know that the temperature is set.
I dreamed of eating an apple, as the flavor of the red apple explodes in my mouth. I set it down on my marble counter, the apple catching the last glint of sunlight as I close the curtains.

Characters of My Life

Hair like the ocean, waves so deep you could swim. Smile like the sun and able to shine on me.
Bun always messy, like a spring on her head. Personality like a hole, deeper the more you dig.
Heart as pure as gold, but oh so tiny. When he is around the world seems to brighten.
Her sassiness is always on point like a knife. Can't be around her and not get cut.
He makes me feel small in this world of giants. But I know he loves me, I know it, I do.

From Now

20 years from now I will be stable.
I will have a job that is a solid rock in my life.
That job will pay me my fair share, it will be equal.

20 years from now the world will be better.
Maybe not better in the way you thought, but still.

20 years from now I will have kids of my own.
On long car rides I will tell them how emo I used to be, how I used to love this boy group.
I will let them know how accepted and loved that they really are.

20 years from now I will be a strong woman, not afraid to handle anything the world throws.
I will be experienced by then.
I will know more about the world.

20 years from now I will be alive.
Not just breathing, no.
Alive in the sense that I have done what was needed to be done.
I will not have to second guess my decisions because they are mine.

I shall braid my hair

Because I like the way it looks on me
Because it makes me look less like my mom
Because I enjoy the compliments
Because I can hit my brother with it
Because it is easier to manage
Because it gives me a confidence boost
Because it makes my real hair curly
Because I can make a statement with color
Because my friend hates it
Because I feel closer to my race

My Love

I didn't know I loved my hair the way I do until the tips of the scissors were about to cut it off.
I didn't know I loved art in such a passionate way, like when my brush hits the canvas, it takes my breath away.
I didn't know I loved my ring, but I never take it off. In some way I thought it meant my mom listens when I talk.
I didn't know I loved Shane until I saw him hurting, I don't want to sound dramatic but was like a knife to the heart when he shed a tear.
I didn't know I loved writing or the way it makes me feel, like I can be anyone at any time and all it takes is a pen and paper.

For I Will Consider My Friend Haylee

For I will consider my friend Haylee.
For she makes me laugh when I need it.
For she makes me laugh when I don't.
For she asks the dumbest questions ever thought.
For I love her for that.
For she jumps high in the air with a smile.
For she is very reluctant to come back down.
For then she wears her hair messy without caring.
For her hair bothers me very, very much,
For she doesn't have a filter when she talks.
For she then says something that she will come to regret.
For I must put her in check.
For she doesn't realize our social differences.
For she can talk to anyone.
For I love a social queen.
For I stay in the corner while she is social.
For she deserves all the love in the world.
For she is loved by most, but not all.
For she is thought of as fake.
For I don't see it.
For she cheers me on when I least expect it.
For she lets me rant when I most need it.
For she listens more than you'd think.
For she absorbs every word.
For I love her for that.
For she doesn't know this.
For she thinks that I don't think highly of her.
For she must know that that is untrue.

What She Tells Me

Don't do your hair like that; This is how you bake chicken; This is how you iron your clothes; This is how you separate your laundry; This is how to braid your hair; This is how you dress for church; You can always go five miles over the speed limit; You can; Not really, but they will sometimes let you slide; Never let anyone eat off your plate; Make sure you close your legs while in a skirt; This is how to wash your hair; Never shave forwards, only backwards; Keeping your feet together is an important part of being a lady; *But no one sees my feet, so I don't care*; You should care; Kick, scream, cuss if someone tries to take you in Walmart; Not all friends are real ones; You fold towels twice to conserve space; This is how you make tuna; *How much of the ingredients do you put in*; I don't know, however much you think is enough; Make sure to spread your black girl magic; *What is that*; All you need to do is be yourself and you will know.

Nick Goodan

Nick Goodan is a writer. He takes pride in most of his writing. He likes making poetry but will also make short stories. However, his favorite thing to write is a book. He just needs ideas to write said books. He does not want to share any other information.

Ocean Breath

Come in,
Go out,
Breathe in,
Breathe out,

Arms forward,
Arms back,
Grass pushed
Back and forth,
Back and forth,
Moving with the breathing
Of the sea,

Fish splish and splash,
Swim and play,
A rainbow of colors
Shimmering in the waves
And sparkling
In the salty water

Birds fly in the air
Watching the sea,
Blue waves splashing
The birds are waiting
For fish to eat;

And the crabs click and clack,
Scuttling along the beach;
Hiding in the sand,
Trying to sleep

Coral reefs under the waves
Bright colors and uncountable fish,
All together;

A ship wrecked
On a stone pillar
In the reef;
On the ship,
Seaweed growing,

Just another home for fish;
The sea is a great place,

Teeming with life;
Even the water
Has its own salty breath.

Dark and Light

Light pushes her brother away
But he, dark, always returns
For where there is light there is shadow
And at dusk they join
In the night they shine
But when dark steals the moon
Light shuns him yet again
Eternally repeating
A sibling's love

Dying Phoenix

Leaves fall
Plants wither
Preparing for rebirth

Sleeping Wastes

Ice and snow
Life withers or hides
Sun will shine soon

Reborn World

Ice thaws
Plants sprout
Green has returned

Sunlight

Hot
Sunshine
The life matured

Drunk Man Walking

A jack-of-all-trades is in a bar
His entrance makes the bar bustle
He scribbles his order on the notepad
Business slows, he orders a shimmering drink
Intoxicated, he stumbles to an arbor
Screaming, "Sir! Madam! Get my rat for me!"
Trying to stay awake. Too intoxicated.
Friend picks him up and drives to his house
He jumps onto the counter, barking at nothing.

Dying Stars

The generals are in a war room. It is broken and ragged, but the room is considered to be of high quality.

"How will we defeat our enemies?"

"How many guns?" the first in command asks.

"100,000 guns. Only 200,000 rounds. Cannot produce more."

"What happened to your damn factories! We can't afford to waste resources so casually!"

The ground rumbles.

"It's happening, sir!"

"Warning: Mistake repeated. Too much wasted. Evacuate the planet immediately."

"We're doomed! We have nowhere else to run!"

"Well..."

"Well, what?"

"There is one option, sir. But it is incredibly dangerous."

"We have nothing to lose. Do it."

"Warning: Wormhole unstable. Reality failing. Four escapees. Rest will be spaced."

"This is the end, boys."

The planet now disintegrates into dust and rubble.

The Saving Soldier

Tick Tock.
Tick Tock.
Grenade!
A leap to death,
A sacrifice
Boom.

Pain.
Suffering.
But at least I saved them.
My soldiers.
My family.
They are saved by my sacrifice.

Bye bye, sweetie.
Take care of Alex for me.
See you in the afterlife.

From: Daddy
To: Mommy and Alex

Life Thrives as Rivers Change

The Red River hides its fast-flowing anger. It looks calm on the surface, but its currents are great and powerful. All rivers are powerful, at least being powerful enough to carve out a valley or canyon from the earth. The Red takes only a century or two to change its course. But, even in such unstable environments like the Red, life survives and even thrives! Several species of fish, birds, and aquatic plants live in this amazing river. A forest surrounds this part of the river. Life has found a balance, fighting against the chaos of the Red. Life sure is beautiful, isn't it?

The Tower of Dreams

I dreamed about a tower
I dreamed that it was cursed
I dreamed that it once was beautiful
I dreamed that it had changed
Marble turned into obsidian, and water into lava
I dreamed that the curse was only active at night
And that the curse made the tower shine
Then I realized that the curse was a blessing in disguise
For the tower was a beacon at night
I dreamed about an ancient tower
I dreamed about the tower of dreams and nightmares
And the tower faded away as I woke.

Sophia Gruesbeck

Sophia Gruesbeck has loved to write for as long as she can remember. Now, at 14, she uses writing to express her feelings on situations that she goes through, no matter how large or small. Outside of yoga, she likes to read, work on her blog, babysit, and do yoga. She hopes that in 20 years she will be a labor and delivery nurse at the Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, Texas. She is thankful for the platform she has to share her writing here at Advance.

Homage to These Arms

In an ocean of flesh, these arms are a current, salty and strong like the wind on my tongue. These arms are thin, long, and sweet, filling in spaces where my lips can't speak. Beneath the weight of the mountains, these arms hold steady, and the rain of your voice courses up through my veins.

The Girl with Blonde Hair and Other Curious Characters

1. The girl with blonde hair is afraid of the dead frog on the floor.
2. A man in green pants has abnormally large hands.
3. How much more history could an old person possibly be interested in?
4. The elderly couple are wearing equally brightly colored pants.
5. The pamphlet about water safety is unnecessarily aggressive. No, I am not “Next.” I’d quite rather wear my life jacket, thank you.
6. The berries are red, so the birds know to eat them. It’s like some sort of sign. What are the signs in my life that I’m missing?
7. We are told not to fear the snakes. I am fearing the snakes.
8. The blonde girl needs to enjoy her surroundings.
9. What do I “just sit and take” in my life?
10. Eagles have hidden away so that the southern summer heat can’t reach them. Just deal with the heat, you darn eagles. I want to see you.
11. Listen closely. You can hear Mr. Green Pants’ voice echoing among the trees.
12. The pink flower lies still on the ground, still moist with anticipation. Abandoned.
13. There are remnants of a failed attempt to be healthy on the top of the trash can. A half-full can of tomato juice stares back at me.
14. The blonde-haired girl is wearing a bright blue frisbee as a hat. It goes with her sweatshirt. I am questioning her sanity.
15. The blonde girl is making a moaning sound. Perhaps her ancestors were cows.
16. The conversation is beginning to take some interesting turns.
17. I keep forgetting that there are children in this class. Perhaps it is because when I was their age, I neglected to remember that I too was still a child.
18. The tattoo on my arm is tightening over my flesh. I do not like it.
19. Blondie has started referring to me as “striped shirt girl.” I continue to call her Blondie.
20. Where did that bruise come from?
21. There is a bright blue dragon fly that is sitting still on my shoe.
22. The tiny bunch of bananas is deadly if you smell it.
23. There is a point in a flower’s blooming process in which the bud is neither fully pink nor green. Pre-pubescent innocence is still in the midst of disappearing completely.
24. The woman in the green shirt scowls at me as I ask for a bowl of lemons. I receive a plate of lemons instead.
25. Blondie has lowered herself to the point of asking the boy with glasses to fight her. Blondie eats $\frac{3}{4}$ of her meal. It was not a large meal. But good for her.

I'm Trying to Breathe.

Just say a little prayer. Don't curse. THAT WAS A ONE-WAY STREET! Never give a panhandler money, it's almost always a scam. Put your phone away. GO TO SLEEP. Beauty doesn't have to be pain. Don't crack your neck, you're going to break it. Don't take off your shoes in this car; I'm trying to breathe. Don't say you're sorry if you have nothing to be sorry about. No, I am not mad. I'm very very frustrated. DON'T HAVE AN ATTITUDE WITH ME. You are about one eyeroll away from not going to that party. Don't encourage your sister. Don't pick up the dog, you'll break her hips. Don't do yoga in the kitchen; I am trying to cook. Don't stick your feet out of the window, this is a new car. Don't hold the cat in that new dress; it was expensive, and he smells. Hang in there, it'll get better. You are my favorite 14-year-old. I love you, princess. You are so smart and strong and beautiful. This is how you write in cursive. This is how you cook quinoa. This is how you hold a baby. Stop doing that, you'll hurt your neck. Would you rather have a Rolex or braces? Be careful, you're going to break your braces. Think of the positives. Can you make me another Spotify playlist? I want to name it Disco Theque. I love you. I love you. I love you. BUT PLEASE STOP SAYING YOU'RE SORRY.

It All Happened So Quick

It happened three doors down. The child had not been sick for long before he perished, is what I heard. Mrs. Camilla told me at the ladies' group meeting, the rundown of what had happened.

"It was all so quick!" she said. Her voice was high and irritating. "Poor little fella was only 7 years old—I heard that his mother had 8 children—and she had so much on her hands that not a one of them can use the toilet. What a shame. I..." The woman kept yammering about our neighbor's parenting techniques until I interrupted her and shut her the hell up.

"And how did he get sick, Camilla?"

"Oh, mercy me, look at me, so riled up and everything. Well I'll tell you one thing, it was mighty unexpected! The family had just started to go to sleep while they were on a family campin' trip of some sort. You know, grillin' such and such. And that family is vegan or whatever, 'cept for that little dead fella. They thought it would hurt his immune system or somethin' like that—" she cut herself short and began to whisper. "Personally, I think they're all a bit skinny 'cept for the boy. You gotta have some meat on your plate so you're not just a sack of bones—"

I interrupted her again. "I agree completely, Camilla. Now, what was that you were sayin' 'bout their poor baby?"

"Oh Jesus, have mercy on my soul—I apologize. I am just a tryin' and tryin' to kick that gosh dern gossipin' habit of mine. Lawd. Anyway, bless his little heart, they made him one of them hotdogs—you know, them... oh dern. What's it called?" She massaged her temples with a pained look on her face. "Oh!" She said, brightening. "Them ballpark chicken dogs. Now, there was a recall on them thingies about, say, a month ago. But of course, that dern family was 'off the grid' or whatever theys callin' it these days, and they never saw that recall post that ballpark put up on Facebook. Personally, I don't know how they do it. I wouldn't go two days without my Facebook. Gosh dern millennials."

I shook my head, actin' like I agreed, but really I wanted that woman the hell out of my house.

"Anyways, that boy died within 10 minutes of takin a bite outta that dog. It was some rare parasite that eats your lungs, so you can't breathe or nothin'. What a shame, ya know? If you ask me, Facebook really is a lifesaver!" She threw her perfect hair back and cackled as if she hadn't been describing a 7-year-old child's violent death 30 seconds ago. She continued to gossip on and on about our neighbor's family and the color scheme of the boy's funeral, as I thought back to when I had seen the recall post. My face went red as I realized that I had bought a pack of Ballpark chicken-dogs the weekend before the recall was posted.

"Excuse me, Camilla." I edged between her thick body and the doorframe of my living room where the ladies' group meetings had been held for the past 26 years. I walked calmly into the kitchen as I listened to Camilla tell the exact same story to Harriette, an older woman in the group. I reached into the cold metal fridge, my wedding ring making a noise against the plasticky handle, as their conversation became a dull hum. I retrieved the pack of chicken dogs and placed one on the stove to cook with oil in a saucepan. I watched the conversation grow more exiting to Camilla and Camilla only as the chicken dog cooked. As Harriette and Camilla ended their conversation, I plated the chicken dog with a whole wheat bun from my kitchen pantry. I smirked as I brought the plate to Camilla.

“You speaking about the chicken dogs made me remember the good old beef franks I had in my fridge.” I held the plate out to Camilla. “Go on, sweetheart, you’re lookin’ mighty thin these days.” I smiled politely as she blushed and picked up chicken dog. I watched quite calmly as she took a bite.

“So good, Nancy!” she said and swallowed.

“Have mercy on me, lord,” I thought, and threw away the rest of the chicken dog as Harriette screamed and Camilla fell to the ground, heaving and gasping for breath.

For Considering My Dog

For I will consider Mathilda, to be imprisoned by her gaze.
For she is of starlight—thick and bright and desperate.
For she has the coat of riches—lush and strong and red.
For she has the heart of God—and all of his everlasting grace.
For she watches over her castle—guarded by her hard wood throne.
For she drinks the tears of maidens—thirsting for their tenderness.
For her eyes are of rocks in the river—honest as the current that rolls over them.
For when she loves it is an abandoned love and a terrible one.
For when she eats her daily meals, she throws her head and laughs.
Quite a funny dog, to love in such a way;
For when she wakes she greets the Lord with an arch of her back
And when she sleeps, her manner rests in heaven.

Behind Closed Doors

Chapter One

I wake up under a new roof every morning, it seems. The fat ones and the skinny ones assure me that I am where I need to be. “Safe and sound,” they say. They inject me with long, sharp instruments. Poison dripping out of the end. They put tubes in my nose that tickle me when I breathe. I let them do it. It’s easier this way. I don’t worry. I always get the poison out afterwards. Behind closed doors, with the sink water running, I stick two fingers down my throat until I vomit, and all the poison is out of my body.

They feed me too. Brown mush and sopping green vegetables. But I know what they do to them. I know what they do to all our food. I’ve seen them do it. Behind the partition that separates our dining hall from the kitchen, they put the poison into our meals too. Same way and everything. Big needles, thick and sharp and long, filled up with the poison. Sometimes cyanide, sometimes arsenic; they drip the toxin into our food. One drop, two drops, three drops. Not enough to kill us immediately, but just enough to make us insane and forgetful. Then, they force feed it to the anorexics and bulimics. Spoon it into the psychopath’s mouths. Occasionally, one of them will slip—putting a little too much poison into the syringes. Then, one of us will die.

“We are all mourning the death of so and so,” they’ll say over dinner or lunch. “They lived a good life up until their suicide/overdose/heart failure, and we did everything in our power to stop them from getting sicker than they already were.” Then a few of the depression ward patients would cry, using up what was left of the brown paper napkins on the dining room table. And the fat ones and the skinny ones would go back to the kitchen, and bring us poisoned milk, to ease us off to sleep. “Safe and sound,” they say.

When I wake up and don’t know where I am. As if my health wasn’t collapsing in on itself every minute.

Chapter Two

As I straighten my bedsheets, a fat one with brown hair and black eyes comes into my room. She doesn’t knock. She is carrying a tray with a needle, an empty bottle, and a thin, purple piece of gauze. I like the color purple today. It comforts me.

“I’m here to take your blood sample, Mrs. Louisa.” Black Eyes sits on my bed, the plasticky mattress crinkling beneath the weight of her enormous body. She reaches out her hand to take my arm. To spite her, I lift my feet instead. She smiles at me. I can see in her eyes that she doesn’t get my humor, so I show her my middle finger. She scowls. “Mrs. Louisa, I’m going to need to see your arm please. We do this every day.”

I have decided that I will not speak today. It will be fun. I place my arm in her hand and cackle. She doesn’t know that I know everything she is about to do to me. “I’m here to take your blood,” she says. That’s what they all say when they come in with big empty bottles and sharp syringes. Then, after they have drained my arm of blood and DNA, they take it to a laboratory in the hospital. They check it so that they can tell if the poison is working or not. Then they give us more, depending on the results. I know this. I. Know. This.

But they don’t know.

And Black Eyes doesn’t know either. So, I laugh again as she ties the gauze over my arm and slides the poison into my vein.

Chapter Three

The others don't know what they do to us. The anorexics and bulimics don't smell it in their food as they are force fed through tubes and pick at the meals on their plates. The fat ones and the skinny ones call the people on my ward their "Dementia and Alzheimer's patients." I know that they use this as a code for the old ones who need a higher dose of poison to redeem the desired effects of it. Their system is quite simple, and I have recorded every detail of it in my green field notebook.

In the morning, they wake everyone on my ward up and administer the poison by injection, calling it "morning medication," or an "A.C.h.E inhibitor injection" or "dementia medication." They speak of the day's activities during the ingestion period, so that they can keep a close eye on you to make sure that the medicine is spreading throughout each blood cell and organ. During this period, your stomach will begin to have sharp shooting pains. Sometimes this pain results in vomiting or diarrhea, and almost always fainting and flushing. When they see us get sick, they know it is working. Then, they relax. They fluff our big down pillows and put the ones of us who can't walk into bed. They give us "sugar water" and call us "honey," "sweetheart," "love." They do this strategically so that we think we can trust them.

But then, they feed us even more poison, as if the injection wasn't enough. When I confront them about injecting our food, they say, "It's a supplement to help maintain a healthy weight. We put it in all of our elderly patients' food." I know all their tricks. Every single edge of their plan, I have discovered. They are slowly killing all of us. And they start with the old ones and work their way down. The problem is, nobody believes that they are doing this but me. They say I am crazy—blinded by the disease in my brain. Demented. I can only save myself.

Chapter Four

A skinny one comes into my room. I am asleep. She taps on my shoulder with a long, dark finger and a big, pointy fingernail. They are fake and neon and put on crooked. I laugh at this loudly because I know the reason I am laughing will be my secret and my secret only.

She raises one thin eyebrow at me. "Mrs. Louisa, it's time for your morning injection."

I shake my head at her. "I took one yesterday morning, skinny."

She flares her nostrils. They are too wide for her face and I can see black hairs inside of them. "Mrs. Louisa, you take one of these every day, you know that. Are you feeling alright this morning?" She sits down and grabs my arm. Her grip is too tight, and her fingernails dig into my flesh. I pull my arm away and shriek.

"Mrs. Louisa! PLEASE give me your arm or I will have to call security to hold you down. You need your medicine!" I am confused. I don't know why she needs my arms. I search my brain for a reason why and it feels like my mind is on fire. I begin to cry, wiping away tears with my fingers and feeling my wrinkled skin run across my face. I look her in the eyes. I don't even remember why she's here. "Please give me your arm, Mrs. Louisa. We can get this over with or I will have to call security." She clenches her jaw as she speaks.

"No," I say, in a small voice. I don't know why, but I don't want her to see me like this. Broken. Confused. As she calls for security on a small pager, I remember that she did this to me. They all did. The poison is working. It's doing what they want it to do. I get up, out of my bed and wrap a blanket around my shoulders as security comes into the room.

“Mrs. Louisa, sit back down, and let the nurse give you medicine, or we will have to restrain you.” The security guard is short, and has rolls of flesh covering his body, like a coat of fat that protects him from us, the people on the unit. I slide past him, out of my room, down the hall, into the dining area, and sit down behind a chair. I stay here, hiding myself, until another guard runs toward me from behind. I try to stand up, reaching for the tables in front of me, and I slip on my woolen socks. I fall hard, hard, hard, and feel a sharp pain in my hip. And then I faint. Slowly, slowly, falling into sleep.

Chapter 5

For the first 63 years of my life, I remember having perfect memory. I was an advanced student in school and college, and I worked as a secretary in a political office until I was 63. When I retired, I noticed that I began to constantly switch my friends’ names. Susan would be Nancy, and vice versa. I figured it was just exhaustion from the busy weeks I had been having; however, the memory only got worse. I started to forget appointments, spend money I wasn’t remembering that I had spent. The doctor admitted me into the hospital when I went to an appointment, was weighed, told I was severely emaciated, and he realized that I was forgetting that I had to eat.

The doctor didn’t believe me on my weekly visits, when I told him over and over that I am getting sicker, because of the poison, and if he doesn’t listen, I’m going to die—but he doesn’t understand. Can’t understand, perhaps. If you yourself aren’t experiencing the effects of the poison, wouldn’t it be so easy to believe the lies you are told to cover it up? It is quite a brilliant plan. Quite brilliant indeed. If I hadn’t figured out their intention, I would be much sicker, and possibly dead at an earlier age than God intended.

As I wake up in the hospital bed, tubes in my wrists, administering poison directly into my veins, and a clip connected to my finger, making it thick and white, monitoring the levels of poison in my blood on a screen that makes an irritating beeping noise, I begin to cry. I have to find a way out of this. They are killing me. They are KILLING me.

“I HAVE TO GET OUT!” I scream into the hospital room. The air is stale and smells like something my mind can’t quite contain because of the poison in my system. I scream again, and a skinny one that I haven’t seen before comes into the room, out of breath and concerned. I try to lift myself up out of the bed, but my legs feel fragile. Fire burns a hole into my tailbone, as I sit up. I scream in pain, and let the fire reach up into my spine. The skinny one shrieks and runs to my bed.

“Mrs. Louisa, PLEASE! You need to recover from your surgery, you’re going to get complications! LAY DOWN, MRS. LOUSIA!” I begin to cry, and I like the way the tears feel cool on my cheeks. “Just kill me if you want me dead so bad. Just kill me.” I know I am past the point of being sick. I know I am almost dead. I just want it to stop.

I just want it to stop.

Ashley Kurian

Ashley Kurian is 13 years old, and she will be going into 8th grade this fall. She lives in Sugar Land, Texas, and goes to Fort Settlement Middle School. She enjoys reading and spending time with family in her free time. This was her first year at Advance and she really enjoyed her experience! She would definitely recommend this class to anyone who wants to hear other young writers and wants to get better at their own writing.

I Shall Go for a Walk Today

After Carole Satyamurti

Because the weather is beautiful today
Because nature is often forgotten these days
Because I want the peace and quiet
Because it will leave me free
Because I wish to smell the fresh air
Because the sky is a pristine blue
Because I need the exercise
Because I have nothing else to do
Because I will remember how big the world is
Because I will be delightfully small in it

Left at Home

I didn't know I loved the constant chatter at home
Like birds constantly twittering in the background
I didn't know I loved the feel of my books
Like the flow of water through my fingers
I didn't know I loved the feel of the carpet in my room
Like a cloud that stretched across the floor
I didn't know I loved playing my instrument
With music rippling out of it like waves in the ocean
I didn't know I loved the keyboard on my computer
With its constant tapping like rain dropping to the ground
I didn't know I loved all these things
Until I left them at home

On Leaf Street

After Ernest Hemmingway

The day was muggy, with the oppressive stickiness that kept all the kids indoors and pets off the sidewalks. It was the end of another workday, and there were television lights flashing through houses on Leaf Street. One woman, wrapped in gauzy shawls and wearing worn blue jeans, sat on one side of a worn park bench, staring at the horizon with a content smile on her face, as if imagining something that pleased her. Her hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail, and the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and the plane of her forehead were smooth for the first time in many years. Another boy joined her, dressed in a sharp business suit, too good for the likes of Leaf Street, with polished shoes and small briefcase. He set the briefcase down and relaxed into the opposite side of the bench, and stares at the horizon in the same way. Their eyes were the same color, a gray that could rival that of a thundercloud.

“She’s going to go through with it, you know,” he said. “She doesn’t know when.”

The woman’s smile faded a bit, as though pushed behind a curtain, but her gaze never left the horizon, which was now starting to darken.

“Has she really decided? Or is it just another pastry without filling?” she replied.

The young man threw her a sharp look.

“Won’t you try to help her, knowing her situation, instead of doubting and doing nothing?”

The woman’s smile became a thoughtful line, and her eyes went back to the past as she whispered, “She left us both. She decided to leave the only people who had ever loved and cared for her. She left, and told me she never wanted to see me again. So I let her go.”

The young man turned back to the horizon. “And what if she wants to come back?”

The woman laughed bitterly. “Why would she want to come here? She hasn’t talked to me for twenty years. The only news I have of her is through you.”

Sighing, the young man began with: “Her situation—it’s getting worse, and—”

“And nothing. She ran off to be part of his world. Let her stay in it.”

“They have a child,” he said softly.

The woman came to standstill. Her hands, which had been vigorously gesturing just moments before, dropped to her sides. Her chin dipped a bit, and she seemed to age 10 years.

“How old?”

“A year and a half. A little baby girl.”

“Anything wrong?”

“Perfectly healthy child. But she’s worried he might try to hurt her. She doesn’t want her stuck in a situation like hers.”

“And what do I have to do with this? She said she loved him, and there was nothing we needed to do despite what we saw on her, and that was how he showed his love.”

The young man looked at her sideways and softly said, “You really want that little girl to be hurt? To grow up like that?”

The woman shrugged, but her face fell.

“All she wants you to do is to take the child for some time.”

“And what would happen to her?”

“She didn’t know whether you would forgive her. She said she’d make it on her own.”

By now, the night sky had fallen, and the woman and the young man had moved closer together.

The woman pulled her son into her arms and stroked his hair affectionately.

“Have you forgiven her?” she asked.

After a long while, the son replied, “Enough to want the best for her child. The rest I haven’t quite figured out yet.”

Another pause followed, and the young man got up and wrapped an arm around his mother, and she leaned into him, the weight of her new burden drooping her shoulders, and they walked down Leaf Street.

Comfort of a Book

After André Breton

My book, whose pages are a veil
Shielding me from the outside world
Whose pages have the power of a lion
But the comfort of a loving embrace
My book, whose cover can tell a thousand stories
Its art as precise as the point of a needle
Yet allowing for a number of interpretations
As many as the grains of sand on the beach
My book, whose words are the waves in the ocean
Each one as vital as the heart to an animal
Feeding life and meaning
Into the world it transports us into
My book, whose title is the gleam of a sword
Giving the entrancing first bite of a meal long-awaited
My book, whose spine is the sturdiest tree
With the firmness of a stone
Whose movement is as smooth as running water
My book, whose plot is a black swan
Whose climax is a bolt of lightning
And resonates like thunder
My book, with an escape to the depths of imagination
My book, with an experience equal to the brilliance of a shining star

Growing Up

When I was born, my mother said she fell in love for the second time. I was her pride and joy, the apple of her eye, as her only child. She used to pick me up and nuzzle my ear and say, “My little peach!” When I was one, she bought me cute pink onesies and cried when I took my first steps. When I was three, I drew a scribble that resembled a butterfly, and she kissed it and tucked it into her wallet. When I was five and learning to ride a bike, I fell down and scraped my knee. She gave me a popsicle and stroked my hair after bandaging it. When I was nine, another girl called me a name and hit me, and I came home crying. My mother wiped away my tears and told me that I was strong and beautiful, and that the other girl was just jealous. My mom was my protector, my counselor, my teacher, everything I ever needed, all rolled into one.

When I entered middle school, I showed a real passion for acting. I wasn’t very good at it. But my mother took me to plays, studied acting with me, and sacrificed so much of her time for my dream. I practiced and practiced and became good at it. I started going to competitions and winning medal after medal and trophy after trophy. For each one, my mother was there to congratulate me, to jump up and down saying, “You did it, my little peach!” I attracted filmmakers from Hollywood, who were looking for good child actors. I was signed onto my first movie and my mom drove me to each and every set, taking notes, going over things I needed to fix. And the movie was a huge hit. I began starring in other films with other famous actors and directors, and I started hanging out with other older child actors. Suddenly, I realized my mom wasn’t cool anymore. I started picking fights with her: “I want to grow up! All of the others come to the set by themselves, they live in LA and take online schooling and shop and party all day! What is your problem with that?! Everybody does it!” My mother adamantly refused, but she often walked away from our fights looking shaken. When I was eighteen, we had a really big argument. “Just let me grow up! You just do this because you don’t have a life!” I screamed as I ran outside. And I left the house. As I was driving away, she was still standing on the porch, one hand on her open mouth, tears streaming down her face, her once-strong shoulders shaking.

I continued acting. But my performances suffered, and the critics noticed. My stubborn pride kept me from calling my mother, from breaking down and asking her for help, for twenty-five years. After a particularly bad set, I snapped. I called my mother. There was no answer. I found out that she had died two weeks after I left. They said the disease had been passed down from her side of the family and was left undetected. But I know that isn’t all of it. I know I was the problem, the trigger, the one that killed her. I grew up too fast. And I left my mother behind.

Learning Experience

Be careful of what you say
For it often comes back to bite
Like the forgotten pin on the countertop
As you slam your hand down
Be careful of what you assume
For often it's a shield
Protecting your blissful ignorance
But leaving you blind
Be careful of the way you act
For you are not the observer
The one for whom the actions are intended
They may see through a different lens
Be careful what you ask for
For often wishes are mirages
To a weary desert traveler
Chasing after them
But never truly reaching them
Despite all these things
Live your life
For we are human
And we will experience mistakes
Hopefully teaching us what words never could

The Smile of the Heart

It happened three doors down. She was so close to home. In those days, I used to have a sort of sense of when my mother would come home each day from her job down the street, almost like a sweet and deep ache in my gut. So, I used to watch for her from our brown wooden porch swing, my pink sneakers dangling, just barely touching the ground. It was just me and mom, living on a street where everything looked identical, with white-beamed houses and red shutters and plants down the front walk, and where everyone knew each other. So I saw it all.

My mother had been walking on the paved sidewalk next to the road. She always walked in a straight line in the middle of the sidewalk. She always walked on the right side. Always gave me her special smile, from the time she turned the corner till she reached me, the one smile that made me taste ice cream and feel the bubbles rising within me. She used to say I was the only one who could make her smile like that, smiling with heart rather than with just her mouth. That day, a white car turned onto our street. I didn't recognize it, which was unusual for our neighborhood. Instead of staying within the yellow lines, the way my mom drove, this car seemed to find a game in swerving in and out of them, going faster and faster. But I wasn't paying much attention to it. I was imagining the hug she was going to give me, the way she'd sweep me into her arms and say into my ear, "How was your day, my little peach?" I would laugh and inhale her lavender smell and fidget with her earrings as she carried me inside. I never got to do that again.

The car swerved too far, too fast. It bounced up onto the sidewalk and kept going, knocking down a mailbox and trampling the neighbors soon-to-be-roses. But all these things could be replaced. My mother, whose smile melted off her face as she felt the touch of the front bumper. My mother, who crumpled under the weight of the massive, still-rolling tires. My mother, whose eyes found mine and reached for me, putting all the things she wanted to say and never would into the stretch of a hand. My mother could not be replaced. The sound of rushing waves roared in my ears, drowning out anything else as I screamed, "Mommy, don't go, you can't leave me, I'll be all alone," while sitting in the pool of blood near her body. But even at that age, I knew it was pointless. As soon as I had seen her eyes, lifeless brown circles, the spark in them extinguished, as if somebody had smothered the flame inside of her. I pulled her head into my small lap, stroking her hair, which had once fell in dark, glossy waves down her back, my face wet with the tears she wouldn't be there to wipe away. Then they took her away, and we went to the funeral. I just moved through the motions. They didn't know that when they took her away, they took away the wings I used to fly on. They didn't know that when they took her away, they took away the sunshine I used to bask in. They didn't know that when they took her away, they took away the smile in my heart.

Homage to My Sister

This girl is a strong-willed lion
Not choosing to accept on anyone else's terms
Rather deciding to find her own way
This girl is a graceful flower
Enjoying the soft wind
Finding her own music
This girl is a compassionate one
Always willing to lend a hand
Yet unafraid to say no
This girl is a strong tree
Firmly rooted in good soil
This girl is a working machine
Never looking back
Letting the future dream
While focusing on the present
This girl is a strong woman
I have known her to stay on her feet
No matter what tries
To sweep her away
This girl is my sister.

Olivia Miller

The following pages are Olivia Miller's work. She is 12 years old and goes to Benton Junior High in Benton, Arkansas. This is her first year at Advance and she loves it, except for being apart from her dogs. She loves reading and watching movies. Please enjoy some of the poems and stories she wrote!

Love

I didn't know I loved the roses that sat comfortably in a tamed bush right next to my aunt's front door, their smell is so sweet and full of life as it welcomed me to the door.

I didn't know I loved the picture of my entire family sitting in the grass looking up at the beautiful bursts of red, green, yellow, fireworks at the lake house we called home for that summer.

I didn't know I loved the couch my aunt refuses to get rid of; its worn down cushions and oversized fluffy blankets swallowed me as I sank into the little nest, so happy I was back at the place where I'd made so many memories.

I didn't know I loved their old grumpy cat, Mr. Floof, until I walked into the backyard and he rubbed against my ankles.

I didn't know I loved this house until I didn't see it anymore.

Haiku

A waterfall slowly but surely
Cascades into ice
Snow falls onto the frozen, forgotten lake

Butterflies flutter
Flowers hum, bees buzz
Spring is here

Quiet

I sit in the cold, hard, plastic chair in the waiting room, tears dripping down my face and sprinkling my jeans. I am alone but cry quietly. I have no more sound left in me. My aunt quietly walks in, her mascara more on her cheeks than eyelashes. She then says the quietest thing I've ever heard. "She's gone." Everything melts away. The bland brown paint on the walls and the unnatural green of the paintings that hang among it. The dark blue of the chairs and the ketchup and mustard colorings of the carpet. It is just me and my aunt, collapsed in each other's arms, in this quiet, desolate waiting room.

The sky mourns with us as we stand outside the church. Everyone is dressed in black, despite her jokes of a yellow funeral. Grief hangs in the air thicker than the humidity. Suddenly thunder shakes our empty souls. All umbrellas go up, dark as the clothes we wear. Except one. There is one lone umbrella the color of the morning sunset. It is the color of lemon sherbet on a hot summer day. It is the color of my favorite shirt that I wore so much it now has a hole. It is the color of hope and happiness. It must look so strange from above. This beautiful soft yellow standing up against the black, as though telling the sadness to go away. It's the quietest argument I've ever heard.

The ocean breeze blows onto my skin as we sail towards her favorite island. The sunset lights up my face as I slowly smile for the first time in too long. The quietest sound I have ever heard was when I released my sadness and grief into the ocean to carry.

I Shall Eat This Cake

Because I'm craving chocolate
Because I've been working out
Because I spent 40 dollars on it
Because I won't regret it in the morning
Because it looks so delicious
Because I didn't have a good day
Because it's a Saturday night and no one has invited me out
Because I'm a strong independent woman and I can do what I want
Because I deserve it
Because it's already in my mouth

The Flower Meadow

I couldn't believe my eyes when I looked out onto the beautiful flower meadow as I emerged from the thick and dark forest. Finally, I was back home. I started to run out into the meadow, enjoying how the flowers tickled my bare and tired feet. I lay in the grass as the sun warmed my face and took a long, blissful nap. Then I started to follow the sound of water hitting rocks and pebbles, creating a tiny symphony. I finally found the beautiful waterfall. It fell steadily and softly as it flowed into the tiny stream where animals drank and fish jumped joyfully. I waded into the stream, enjoying the cool water running through my toes. This was heaven. For dinner I had delicious berries you can't find anywhere else that taste of a sweet summer sunset as they burst on your tongue. I happily strolled back to the meadow where I slept for the night. Sadly, I must continue my journey but I will always come back to the beautiful flower meadow I call home.

Look, Look, the Zoo!

Look, look, the lions are yawning! Their teeth are so sharp and scary! But their cubs are so cute, I want to steal one!

Look, look, the seals are swimming next to the glass! Their bodies look like they were made out of the most yummy chocolate! I wonder if I can swim as fast as them?

Look, look, the elephants are taking a bath! Watch how they use their trunk to clean themselves! Wow, they're almost as big as my whole house!

Look, look, we can feed the giraffes! Their tongues are so purple and slimy and their necks are longer than me! Can I feed them please, oh please!

Look, look, the gift shop has stuffed animals! I'm getting a lion, seal, elephant, and giraffe! Now I can take them home and have them forever!

Homage to my Freckles

Freckles sprinkled across my skin

Did they appear by magic or just the sun

People say they're beautiful angel kisses or all my blessings, but I believe they're proof I was meant to be a giraffe

They hide my imperfections and conceal my pale skin

They go where they wish and are proud to be seen

But most importantly, my freckles are me

When?

As the waterfall flows behind me
I try, oh I try, to be content
But sure enough, tears begin to trickle down my cheeks
Frustrated they might ruin my makeup, I brush them away quickly
Why must I always be sad

A week later and I'm in a restaurant, surrounded by friends
One makes a snide comment about our waitress's weight and everyone laughs
I tighten my hands around my stomach and push away my burger
I smile quickly and laugh with the group

When I finish high school it will get better
When the summer ends it will get better
When I get a job it will get better
Will it ever?

Call Your Mama and Other Life Lessons

This how you read, so you can explore new worlds. This is how you write, so you can create your own. This is how to dance properly. This how to dance when you don't want to. This is how to actually dance. This how to sing a pretty song. This is how to make friends so you're not lonely. When you start a conversation, be friendly, not invasive. This is how you make ramen, the only food you'll ever need.

This is how to stand up for yourself; don't take crap from anybody. Be kind. This is how you love. Don't hand your love to anybody, it's not a mint. This is how to be happy and successful. Once you are, don't forget to thank me! This is how to curl your hair—don't burn yourself. This is how to cover a pimple, but don't be ashamed of your face. This how to do laundry—don't forget to change the lint! Do not be picky! Be grateful and thankful. And don't forget to call your Mama!

For I Will Consider My Best Friend Sophia

For she texts me funny jokes, so I can impress that one special guy

For she gives me her clothes because I like them more

For she steals mine in return

For she makes me pizza rolls at 1 in the morning, when she's too tired to move

For she will hold my hand when the airplane takes off

For she will take semi-good pictures of me

For she will never forget my birthday

For she understands all my random thoughts and will relate to them

For she answers my late-night calls when I can't sleep

For she loves my dogs more than me

For she will buy me Starbucks

For she listens to me rant

For she hates everything and everyone I hate

For she doesn't care what people think

For she has dealt with me for 6 years

For she will never not be my best friend

Stephanie Okereke

Hey, my name is Stephanie Okereke. I am 13 years old, and I live in Shreveport, Louisiana. I go to Calvary Baptist Academy, and I am going into the 8th grade this fall. I am a first year at Advance. I am loving it and hope to come back next year. I play soccer and softball and I love Nutella (on anything). I hope you enjoy my stories.

A Name

A Stephanie is a human that runs around free as a bird. If you want to use it that way, then it can be like that, but if you break the name down, it can be used in many ways. If you pronounce it in a different way, it can be heard as step-hanie. In that case, *step* is something you take. You can take a step into a happier life, you can take a step into something positive. The last part of my name, N-I-E, can be heard as knee.

The knee is obviously a part of the leg. There really many ways my name can be said or heard. The word *an* is also in my name, and that word can be used anywhere.

Candy Apple Boy

The boy walking around selling candy apples. I wonder if his parents are making him do it. Did he make them himself? Update: I asked him he did make them himself. He says they're good. I told him I would buy some from him; I probably won't, though. Is he doing it to afford a new game, I wonder? He looks like a high school student who plays videos games on Wednesday but still has enough time to do his homework. He looks like a nice kid and I hope he does good in life. I just need to know two things: does he play Fortnite and why is he selling candy apples?

Crayons

The coloring books without crayons are a representation of life in some ways. We can draw pictures in our mind and color them a different way than others. It's like when you give five different people the same item and they do different things with it because their minds are different. There are many ways we can receive information. Our minds can be somewhere and nowhere at the same time. They can be like a trash can in the middle of nowhere.

Flowers

The bloom of a petal,
The touch of a rose,
The sight of a lily,
The murkiness of a violet,
The smell of a daisy,
The pattern of a lilac,
The satisfaction that comes from these flowers can fill any void.

Homage to my Life

My life, so happy and sweet, my confidence peaks where others can't see.
My life, so full of love that makes its way into me from up above.
My life, sometimes not so great, it makes me want to escape.
My life, a colorful gleam that beams from me.

The Lady in Red

Does the Lady in Red sleep at night?
Does the Lady in Red ever change clothes?
Does the Lady in Red talk or make a sound?
Does the Lady in Red talk to herself in the shower?
Why does the Lady in Red dress in red?
Does the Lady in Red exist?

My Routine

My day starts out normal for the most part. If I were not here at Advance, I would probably still be asleep. I would be doing that, or I would be helping my mom with anything she might need. For the most part my morning routine would stay the same and not be affected. Like I said though, it would depend on the day of what I would be doing, but I'd most likely be asleep. There could be a random day (and I don't do this often) where I would go running or jogging or doing some stretches, but that's only if I feel motivated. At night I would go to bed around 3-5 AM and then wake up around 12-2PM. If I wasn't at Advance, that's what I would be doing.

The Lake

July 17, 2018

The lake, so calm and peaceful,
The lake, so long and beautiful,
The lake flows and it glows all at the same time,
The lake attracts the animals and all the surroundings,
The lake makes the whole town smile.

Winter Dream

July 13, 2018

Tis the winter night cold and frosty,
See the children home smiling and laughing,
The cold night brings across a warm winter smile that has a familiar thought of a time where the friends and family played soccer together when it was warm,
Hear a whisper of hope spreading through the air as a summer approaches,
See the gleaming smile of the children eating food with their classmates for the last time before summer,
Oh, what a thought, for it still remains the cold winter night.

How to be a Woman

July 19, 2018

Do what you're told, don't act a fool. Listen to what I say, I know what I am talking about. Don't act like you don't have sense when you do. Clean up after yourself and others and make yourself useful. Do what I say, your life will be fine. Don't do what I say, you'll live a life of crime. Have a good attitude even when you are not happy. Hold your head up my dear, your crown is falling. Be useful and not lazy, make sure you put others before yourself. Are you listening? I am still talking.

Love Lies

White lie, I am ok, don't fret,
White lie, I do have a lot of regrets,
White lie, I am fine I promise I am sane,
White lie, my name was said in vain,
White lie, I promise I don't hate you,
White lie, I promise I love you too,
White lie, say you won't go,
White lie, no,
White lie, say you'll stay,
White lie, be with me every day,
White lie, I hate you but I don't want you to go away,
White lie, please say you'll stay,
White lie, you can stay my love,
White lie, I'll just have to be the one that flies away like a dove

The Fall

July 12, 2018

I was on the top of my game a head in my classes and praised by all my classmates. Sounds great, right? But now I am now I am barely passing, everyone dislikes me, and I got kicked off the football team. I started going to parties, sneaking out, not studying as hard and honestly not trying. I hung out with the wrong kids who did the wrong things. I skipped out on college because of my laziness. I honestly hate my life; if I could redo my entire high school experience, I would. Now I am all alone with barely any money in my pocket, struggling to pay rent and eat food. That's the same talk I have with my therapist every week, but she doesn't care; she just nods her head and agrees. She doesn't understand. No one does. I am alone, cold, unhappy, starving. That's where it all went wrong.

Alyssa Reid

Alyssa Reid is a sixteen-year-old going into the eleventh grade. This is her fourth year at ADVANCE. She is a dual credit student in Houston, Texas, where she has lived all her life. Outside of academics, she enjoys both art and theatre classes. She is also an officer in the iWrite Youth Club, a club in which members promote literacy and creativity across Houston. Her heart has always had a love of words, and she hopes her writing reflects that.

I Shall Wear My Watch

After Carole Satyamurti

Because reading analog is becoming a rarer skill.

Because I am one for habit, and this one has gone on for three years.

Because it will remind me where I came from.

Because I will look professional... in terms of knowing the time.

Because I can admire the way it gleams in the lights.

Because if I feel awkward and look at it, people will just assume I'm waiting for someone.

Because my wrist is used to the weight.

Because it is the reason I don't have to ask for the time at the sign-out sheets.

Because it is something I can put in my backpack at night and take out again in the morning.

Because it is a cure for my need to always know the hour, minute, the second.

Rainbow Symphony

After André Breton

My dog, whose run is hurricane level winds
Whose paws are the punch of an experienced fighter
Whose paws are the steps of a learning dancer in heels
Whose bark is a lightning rod in a rainstorm
Whose eyes are the mirrors of spoons
Whose eyes are gold, spun and wound and woven
Till a solid pool was formed
Whose whiskers are tired war strategists
My dog, whose nose is a kindergarten slide
Whose fur has been dipped into caramel
And chocolate—sewn into a waterfall
My dog, whose collar is an overworn prom tux
Whose tags are a rainbow symphony
With the absence of red and orange and yellow and purple
My dog, whose heart is all of summer and spring and winter and autumn.

Boots Weather

Rain and petals fall
And the ground grows brown with them
And soon, grows cold.

2010 Radio

Stars have fallen down;
They make friends with the grass, ready
To fly back to the sun.

Unkeepable

We grew a secret garden
But you went and lost the key
So the flowers fell apart
And only we could leave

Statues littered the earth
The sun gave up on getting light
Through those cities of marble
And soon, so did life

By tying your hands with ivy
You said you justified your crimes
But vines break like your promises
While justice keeps hold of your lies

But the news reported the secret
A place we can't keep anymore
And if I could, I never would have let you past
That unkeepable garden door.

Colors of Yous

1. She holds herself like she is a princess learning the customs of royalty, adorned in creased blue-green plaid shirts and well-loved black Converse. Her teeth shine white in conversations, the most interesting of which discuss the way people can be predators and the aftertaste of coming face-to-face with them.

2. She changes the color of the ends of her hair almost every summer—purple and blue then pink and golden—and yet the fire and ferocity in her soul never seem to burn out, as they are dimmed only by the unkindness of those she knows. She has dreams of tattoos in a world where nothing is permanent.

3. She has a quiet grace like the dark side of the moon, her cynicism always waning because the goodness of her nature is one of the strongest things about her, no matter how much she denies it. She is delicate but with the forces of wind, sea, and sky behind her.

4. She walks into rooms with her shining eyes cast to the ceiling, full of calculations and awareness. She understands humanity better than some psychologists.

5. He sees every wrong answer as a point of discussion, leaping into unknown waters with such confidence it is easy to believe that he has swum in them a thousand times before. He is always having a dilemma on whether or not he should unbutton his blazers.

Homage to my fingers

After Lucille Clifton

my fingers are slim and short fingers
sometimes i turn them into art museums
that a few weeks' time will chip away
these fingers put on necklaces
only on occasion
because they know they do not need any extra bling;
and they can barely play an octave
much less a bar chord
but oh, how they try
my fingers are scribes and poets
authors and journalists
calloused for a decade because of their labor
i have known them
to lift weights
my shoulders cannot carry.

...topian

Twenty years from now, I'll be thirty-six, which is around the age when people start to wonder if they're aging gracefully. I'm not sure how gracefully the world will age—perhaps phones will be extinct, rendered useless by machines and applications in our systems, like the ones all those dystopian novels warned us about—because we are human nature, humanity, and we do what we want, no matter our warnings. Perhaps dancing in the rain will become obsolete, because the sky will only curse us with the acid of our labor. Maybe downtown city streets will become sprinkled with shattered stain glass.

Perhaps the Great Barrier Reef will become a relic, a memory, that only history books can prove the recent existence of.

Perhaps I will understand how the New York City subway system works.

Maybe, in 20 years, very little will be different—maybe no more earphones, and no more shopping in stores, and maybe higher prices for Wi-Fi on airplanes.

In twenty years, I will be thirty-six.

I guess that is the only thing I know.

Heart of Gold

After Christopher Smart

For I will consider my dog Cullen.

For he is a traveler who gave up his adventures to live in our humble abode.

For he begins each morning at the back door, looking at his human father, loyal to his routines.

For he loves his meals and rarely asks for more than he needs.

For he will fool those who are susceptible to giving him more than he needs.

For he does not like the green beans we tried to give him once.

For he takes his needed pills with no complaint, but rather excitement—

For he knows the word pepperoni.

For he will ignore the limp in his leg to drag his earthly parents on as long a walk he can forge.

For he understands the importance of hydration.

For he has no questions about his duty: to grow warm in the golden sun.

For he knows he cannot catch squirrels nor rabbits and will not try, unless they pose a danger—

For he is acutely aware when a squirrel has trespassed too far into our borders.

For the way his eyes catch the light when we say hello.

For the way his individual furs are an ombre from cream to brown—

For he only appears at the surface in gold and caramel and chocolate.

For he knows a dictionary of words that relate to him.

For he understands the concept of goodnight—

For he likes hugs—

For I sleep knowing that his aware ears are always listening.

For I know he cares for us as we care for him.

For he proves every day that he is a miracle.

For he can run.

For he can play.

For he can love.

For he will always come back home.

For he is a traveler who gave up his adventures to live in our humble abode.

Keyan Roshan

Keyan Javid Roshan was born on December 10th, 2000, in Miles City, Montana. He is fond of cats, cats, and photography. Keyan has lived a somewhat nomadic life, moving from Miles City to Boston, Massachusetts in 2004, and subsequently to Denver, Colorado in 2012. In 2015, Keyan once more moved to San Diego, California, where he resides to this day. This constant moving was both a curse and blessing to him, as he met new people and saw new places while at the same time leaving some of his best friends behind. Keyan currently attends Torrey Pines High School and is headed into his senior year. This year, being his fifth and final year at ADVANCE, he decided to take Creative Writing, a class which he had always wanted to take in order to learn how to turn the complex thoughts and emotions of his teenage mind into words on paper.

Under the Stars

In the sand, the sun beat down on the backs of the men as they dug through dirt, sand, and rock. With each shank of the earth, the hole's reach grew more and more. The sign to stop came to the men when they could dig no more. By the time they got out of the hole, the sun had set long ago, and they were left in the dead of night. They threw the black bag that lay next to them down the hole, and with a soft thud it hit the earth. The hole was filled, and with the close of two truck doors and the start of the truck, she was left down in the dirt.

Black Ice

Late for appointment
Relentless wind howling
Scramble to the car

Streets covered in ice
Mom looking back to children
Slipping skidding crash

World turned upside down
Snowfall on spinning tires
Sirens in the wind

Warfare

The Red River civil war trenches are remnants of mankind's aggression and are slowly being reclaimed by nature herself. The trenches are filling in as saplings take root in what was once a strategic defensive position. Much like the trenches near Verdun and Passchendaele, this is an example of how wars themselves can and will be forgotten by the earth, as nature swallows their remnants whole. Fortifications, guns, and bullets. These all slowly crumble away with time, returning to the dirt and leaving no sign of the war from which they spawned. Yet we still slaughter one another on the battlefield, using the blindfold of dehumanization to help us do it. An example of this dehumanization occurred not far from the trenches along the Red River. The use of POWs, working in miserable conditions to quell the Great Red River Flood of 1945 through the construction of a levee, demonstrates the willingness of humans to use the forced labor of another group of humans, so long as the guise of alienation remains.

Two Decades Gone By

People fill sidewalks
Cherry blossoms fluttering
City full of life
Sidewalks crumbling
Nuclear winter sets in
City lies ruined
Laughter throughout room
Mother tending to baby
Spring shower outside
Deafening silence
Shattered glass all over floor
Crib covered in snow
Double-deckers packed
Raindrops tapping umbrellas
Big Ben above them
Busses sit empty
Big Ben lies toppled over
Clock ticking no more

First Love

They were together at the station, and as they parted, she kissed him goodbye. He knew that there was realistically no chance for him to ever see her again, no way for them to ever be lovers again, and yet with every passing day, her name was still stuck in his heart. They were thousands of miles apart, leading very different lives in very different places around very different people. All the while, he still loved her. She was to him as Hong Kong was to the British Empire: the pearl of his world. As time went by, he began to fall out of love with her, until she was out of his mind entirely. He loved other girls, found one to be the love of his life, and eventually settled down with her. All the while the name of that girl at the station, however faded and forgotten it was, was still stuck with him deep inside his heart, for she was his first love.

Stranger

In a country far away, a man lies unconscious and dying in a hospital bed. He's quite young really, and even his hair isn't all too gray. His face, however, has lost almost all signs of life. His face is pale as his chest rises and falls in shallow breaths. He lies almost a skeleton in his bed, a shell of what he was just a few months earlier. The whirring and beeping of hospital machinery around the man is unsettling to the little boy standing next to him. The little boy's eyes differ from everyone else in the room. His eyes are filled with youth and curiosity. The boy is told by his mother to say something nice to the man, and he repeats the same thing that he's been saying to the stranger for weeks: "I love you." He then walks out of the room, leaving the man and adults behind to play with his toys. Hours pass as he plays with his toys on the cold tiles of the hospital hallway, occasionally talking with passing doctors and nurses. Then comes an outburst of adults from the man's room, some crying, some comforting others as they stream out and into the hallway. The boy's mother takes his hand, and he can feel the warmth of the hand that has held his entire life gone. He looks up only to find his mother's face a mess. Streams flow down her once rosy cheeks, as her swollen eyes replenish them with fresh tears. He and his mom leave the hospital accompanied by other adults and hail a cab from the busy street outside the hospital. The boy's eyes start to water, not from the sight of the man, but from the haze of pollution that veiled his city all his life.

The cab ride home is a quick one, and as he exits the cab, he asks his mother the same question he's been asking for weeks: "When will Dad come home?" His mother, plastering a smile on her face, tells him that the boy's father will be back home soon. Hearing this, the boy smiles, and runs off inside, throwing himself in front of the tv to catch the tail end of his favorite show. Outside, some of the adults catch the boy's mother as she comes to her knees. "He couldn't even recognize him," she murmurs as she begins to sob.

Nowhere

I stand alone in the middle of a world which has already ended.

There are only the grasses of an endless meadow surrounding me, swaying with a restless breeze that forever moves throughout this world.

This world shouldn't exist; it shouldn't be possible; I shouldn't be here, and yet I am.

I always have been and will be standing forever in this world in which time and space are irrelevant.

In which there is no love, there is no hate.

There is no peace, there is no war.

There is no joy, there is no sorrow.

There is only the sway of the grasses in the breeze.

There is only me.

Homage to my Cat

My cat knows no bounds,
For every room in
the house is hers.

My cat knows no fear,
For even the neighbor's
Dog trembles at the site of her.

My cat knows no stress,
For the world is her bed
To nap in.

My cat only knows love,
For that is the one
Thing we give her.

Scattered Thoughts

What dreams do pigs have as they drink water from the trough?
Do bees dream of one day attaining human honey?

Where will the soldiers march when there is nothing left to march on?
Can the deaf hear the voice of their lover under the moonlight?

What milk do cows use to make their ice cream?
Is the internet just an ocean for computers?

Do the birds ever dream of reaching the sun?
Can the rich be poor at heart?

What will the old men say when the young ones are gone?
In an age of reason, can one still be dreamer?

Redwood

I lie in the grass, surrounded by the darkness of the forest around me,
Overhead, the redwoods stand, reaching for the stars above.
Around me, there is silence, only the faint croaking of frogs in the distance is audible.
It's now that I begin to close my eyes and start to feel the grass beginning to swallow me.
I'm slipping away from consciousness, descending into the depths of my subconscious when it starts.

A loud crack, followed by another, then another in quick succession of each other.

My ears are filled with the sound of a woodpecker, on a tree close by it seems.

I want it to stop, I need it to stop! Oh God make it stop!

That one, yes that one! That's the tree!

I feel through the grass and find a stone.

I brush the dirt off of it, then fling it at the tree.

The dreaded noise is no more, and I slowly return to the calm of the grass, hoping to once more recede into the depths of my dreams, when it starts again.

Only it's louder, and much more frequent.

This can't be one woodpecker, not even a dozen of them could make such a dreadful noise!

My mind is filled with the pecking, which is getting louder and louder, as reality thrusts back into me.

I curse and shout, throwing endless rocks at the tree until it finally stops.

I wait for a second, calming myself down.

I lie down in the grass again and begin to close my eyes when I hear one last crack, only it's much louder.

I look up and scream as the tree comes crashing down on me.

Brotherly Love

The earth all around was savagely devastated, the once beautiful green fields turned to miles and miles of mud, pockmarked with dead trees, craters, corpses, barbed wire, and thousands of miserable men.

One of these men had, along with the rest of his platoon, just fixed his bayonet. His name was Wilfrid. Born to German immigrants in the UK, he had joined the British Army, eager for the adventure that the war had been advertised as. Now he along with his platoon stood waiting in their trench as the rain began to fall. Sobbing could be subtly heard as one of the younger men kissed a photo of his beloved nearby. Then it came. A whistle all too familiar to most of them, pierced their ears as the men began to climb up their ladders and over the top. A bagpipe could be heard off in the distance as Wilfrid made it to the top. In front of him, men were being cut down by volleys of machine gun fire and artillery shells as they tried to make their way through the thick barbed wire and soggy earth. Wilfrid managed to make it through the mayhem, crawling through the mud until he and what was left of his platoon began to pour into the German trench. Wilfrid watched as young men around him became intertwined in hand-to-hand combat, killing one another with bayonets, pistols, knives, spades, and anything else that could be used as a weapon. In his daze he saw a German rushing at him with his bayonet. Wilfrid dodged and used the butt of his rifle to hit the attacker. The German stumbled back, taking a shot at Wilfrid with his rifle. It missed as Wilfrid charged at him with his sharpened spade. He tackled the man and began to slash at his face with the weapon, causing the young German to screech in agony as he attempted to shield himself to no avail. The German began to scream: “Bruder! Bruder!” Wilfrid, in his rage, thought nothing of it and kept slashing and bludgeoning until the screaming finally stopped. He got up and dropped the spade from his bloodsoaked hand as he looked down at the mess that was once another human being. He was breathing heavily, still filled with adrenaline and rage. As Wilfrid looked closer at the mutilated face, he thought he recognized him. He knew his brother had chosen to go back and fight for their native country, but he had never thought anything like this could ever happen. Wilfrid fell down to his knees and started to shake. He rifled through the pockets of the slain man and found a photo, one of Wilfrid’s family. It was his younger brother Friedhelm after all. He began to remember all the times they had fought as children, all the times they had played together, the humanity that the two had shared. It all rushed back to him. He began to sob, as the fighting continued around him. Screams of other young men and boys rang out in the air as a chorus of gunfire and explosions surrounded him. After what seemed to be an eternity to Wilhelm, he got up, found a rifle, and took one last look down at what had been his brother just moments ago. He then charged deeper into the enemy trench, destined to meet the same fate as his brother.

Though there are no documented cases of fratricide during the first World War, there are many cases in which brothers have been on opposing sides in open warfare. The slaying of Friedhelm by Wilfrid depicts the mentality of the men during combat, allowing rage to completely consume them to the point at which even their humanity is lost. The absolute hell that Wilfrid and Friedhelm went through was a result of the introduction of advanced mechanized warfare to a world not yet ready to handle its horrors. The resulting horrid nature of trench warfare left many veterans with severe cases psychological trauma after the war, shellshock

being the most common of these cases. In the end, the man charged towards his certain death, exhibiting what true madness the first World War brought to the men who fought in it.

Danison Zhang

Yo, what's up, my dudes? Hope you're enjoying life. My name is Danison Zhang, and this is my first year at Advance. I plan to come back next year and the year after that. This year I am taking Creative Writing, and I am enjoying it. Mr. Adamo really makes you jump in, so be ready for the splash of information. I took Creative Writing so I can get better at writing. I go to Caddo Middle Magnet, and I like math, English, Social Studies, and I do Band. I play the flute. At home, I like to play basketball. My favorite team is the Cavaliers. Also, I like to watch anime and play some games such as Fortnite, although if you're reading this, it will probably be old.

What If

I see a lonely, orange cone in the middle of the lake. I wonder why it's there. You could say it's there to block people from going further into the lake. But wouldn't there be more? Maybe there was more, but they left him. If it could talk, what would it say? I wouldn't say anything—who is there to talk to? What if it was a living being? What would it do? Nothing, it wouldn't do anything. It probably suffers from loneliness and depression. There isn't anything he can do about it. He can't sink and disappear. He can't decompose. He will have to wait until he gets replaced, but how many lifetimes will pass before that happens? And when he does get taken away, he'll get thrown in a scrapyard, recycled, and reincarnated. But it's just a dream, and I dream of things I don't know about.

How to Play Basketball

Dribble with your fingertips, not your palms. Do not hold the ball for more than three steps. That is called travelling. Shoot with your dominant hand, and to keep the ball stable use your other hand. Also, when you shoot you should make your arm into a 90-degree angle. This is how you make a layup. Stand to the left or the right side of the goal. Then aim for one of the corners on the white box. Then shoot it. This is how you play defense. This is what you do when someone gets past you cause you're bad at defense. This is how you block somebody. This is how you trash talk. This is what you do when you trash talk too much and now your opponent wants to fight. This is how to fight.

I Shall Use my Chopsticks

Because they are different,
Because they are fun to use,
Because they are versatile,
Because my parents want me to,
Because some skill is involved unlike other utensils,
Because that is what we have at home,
Because you can't cut yourself.
Because I don't like the sound of teeth on metal.
Because I am proud of my heritage.

First World Problems

Why doesn't it rain much in San Diego?
I don't understand, is the climate different?
Why did my goldfish die when I was eight?
Did the pet store rip us off?
Why is there a piano in this room?
Every time I walk into the room I see my reflection.
Why are you the way that you are?
Why does my cat want to murder me?
Why does my head hurt?
Oh, it's because of you! Hahahah

Lucid Racing

There was a F1 engine in the Toyota Sienna; it also had a sexy paint job.

The Sienna sat idle at a red light as a Ferrari 458 pulled up and both drivers nodded toward each other.

Both drivers sped away as the light turned green.

The driver behind the wheel of the Sienna scowled, upset with the fast start of the Ferrari, and he himself put a little more force on his accelerator, going 45 in a 30.

Suddenly, there was a flash in front of both drivers' eyes.

The driver was blinded by the quick bright light; screaming expletives, he swerved. The car swerved too fast, all too fast, and the woman in the passenger seat cried out.

The driver grabbed onto the woman, bracing her for the oncoming impact.

They were then teleported to another dimension as they hit the car.

They awoke in bed with the worst headaches ever.

They stumbled out of bed and grabbed two glasses of water, unable to remember what had happened.

This poem may seem weird, but it was because one person wrote the top sentence, then we passed it around, and we could only see what the last person wrote. That means I wrote the first line, then members of the class wrote everything else.

Box of Disappointments

knock knock

“Who’s there?”

“I have a delivery for you.”

“I have a delivery for you who?”

“Come on bro, just take the package, no one has time for this.”

“Ok.” “What a buzzkill.”

I open the box, and there are many things inside. I see a computer! But the parts are missing. Is that an iPad? But the screen is cracked, and it won't turn on. I see a TV! But the screen is missing. Are those new shoes? Oh, the soles are missing. Are those playing cards? I love cards! But the faces are missing. Is that a new suit? I have a wedding to attend tomorrow and I need one! But the colors are worse than the suit that the Joker has. Oh! A new shirt! Oh, the back is missing. A new bed! I need one, my old one is about to break. But it's so hard you might as well sleep on the ground. Instant ramen packs! I love to eat these whenever I want, but especially when I'm hungover! But the seasoning packets are missing.

“What a box of disappointments.”

“Everything was broken or unusable.”

“IS THAT BUBBLE WRAP?!”

pop pop

Down

It started three doors down. I could hear the yelling of the couple. They had only been married for a few months at this point. As I heard the yelling turn to screaming, I ran outside to see what was going on. It was my first day at my university, and I had just moved into my apartment. There were two women and one male. One of the women was on the ground, trying to cover up her wound to prevent the blood from coming out more. At this point, the other people had disappeared. As I ran to help her, I couldn't help but notice the beautiful ring she had on her hand. I pulled out my phone and called 911.

"Hello, 911, what's your emergency?"

"Yes, there is a woman lying on the ground who appears to have a stab wound, the blood is everywhere!"

"Ok, what is the address of the place you are currently at?"

"I'm at 1145 Lope Lane. Please hurry, she looks like she might not have much time."

"Ok, police and medical attention is on the way."

"Thank you, what time will they arrive?"

"In a few minutes. In the meantime, try to help her."

I saw a car pull out of the driveway. Rushing to get away from the scene, I happened to catch the license plate, 1919LI. After a few minutes, I saw the police and the ambulance arrive, and I motioned them over. The workers loaded her onto the ambulance and rushed off to the hospital. I was asked questions by the police. I told them that there was an argument between the two people. That I went to see what was happening. That's when I saw her on the ground with a stab wound. I told them the license plate, then I asked them if I could go with them to the hospital. As we rode silently to the hospital, I thought, what went wrong between them. When I arrived, I asked to see the woman. I found out that her name was Laurel. I went to the room. It was harsh. I saw all the medical attention that was being done. I stayed with her through the night. The next morning, she woke up, she looked around the room dazed. Then, she saw me.

"Who are you?" she said, coughing at the same time.

"Last night you were stabbed. I saw it and saved you."

"Oh, I remember now."

"Ok then, I'll get the doctor, so he can check on you."

"Ok."

"Well, it's nice that you're alive."

"Ok."

"So, what happened?"

"Can you just leave already?"

"Oh, ok then."

"Oh, and, if I die, I want you to have my ring. I don't want Louis to have it."

"Nah, you shouldn't say that, you'll get through it."

"Ok, just promise me that you will take the ring."

"Alright."

As the day became dark, I stayed to make sure she was ok if something went wrong during the night. I couldn't help but notice how beautiful she was as she was sleeping. Why would anyone ever want to do this to a loved one?

The next morning, she was gone.

The doctors tried to do everything they could.
Nothing worked.
I've never known this person.
Why am I feeling grief?
I remembered what she said yesterday: "Take my ring..."
I didn't feel right.
It never will.

I took the ring off her finger. I didn't want her to rest in pain knowing that her husband might take her ring. It was the last thing she wanted besides living. That night, I went home with the ring in my pocket. I felt lost in myself.

The next morning, I went to the police station. I asked if there were any leads on this case. They told me that they have successfully pin-pointed a location where the murderer might be. He said the officers were going to investigate today.

"I'm going with you guys." I said firmly.

"No."

"Yes, I will."

"NO, you won't."

I held up the ring to the desk worker.

"The person I tried to save died last night. I will go talk to the man that did this."

"Fine bro, chill. You can go, but you'll have to stay in the car." That night I arrived at the time he told me to come. I got in the police car. We arrived, and it was late at night. We were at an empty parking lot.

I watched the police go and investigate. I stayed in the car as I promised. I was thinking about life. What I wanted to do with it. I heard shots. I looked up, the police men were on the floor. Dead.

I see the man and woman emerge from the darkness. I press the emergency button, so that backup could come. I got out of the car. They immediately noticed me.

I asked him, "Why did you do this?"

"Do what?"

"You killed your wife."

"What? What do you mean, you saved her, didn't you?"

"She died in the hospital."

"Stop lying to me."

He pointed the gun at my ready to shoot.

"Go ahead shoot me. I not scared of anything."

At that moment I held up the ring. The light from the post lamp glinted of the diamond and made it shine.

I saw him drop the gun.

He dropped to his knees.

His girlfriend looked at him.

"So, you're saying that you still have feelings for that girl?"

No answer.

The sound of the gunshot crackled through the air.

She looked at me.

Pain in my chest.
I hear the backup police arrive.
It hurts, but I'm a man, my momma told me not to cry.
"See you soon, Laurel."

For I Will Consider My Shoes

For I will consider my shoes.
For they provide plush cushioning like clouds for my feet.
For they will protect my feet from cuts and scratches.
For they will protect my feet from the germs and bacteria of the outside world.
For I shall clean them every few months to keep them in good condition.
For I have created a bond with them.
For you probably shouldn't leave home without them.
For they give you something to look at when you're waiting in line.
For everybody needs shoes.
For they get scratched by my cat.
For they are mine.

