

Maamoul



Fall 2023 Edition

Nicholas Mattheus



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EDITORS

- Editors In Chief.....*Maddie Dobias and Mahreen Anwar*
- Editors.....*Kayla Seale, Annmarie Kosak, Blaize Carpino, and Dillon Order*
- Artists.....*Nick Matthews, Kaitlyn Cordova, and Madison Rivera*

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APPETIZERS



Nick Mattheus

THE RESTAURANT OF A GROWING GIRL

ANGELICA PAULSON

in the restaurant of a growing girl
the more he orders the cooler he is
he's meant to eat,
it's uncontrollable, innate, natural
she can order with restrictions
if she'd rather not eat she's anemic
but to over-do it is to be overweight
he clears the table right after he's done
leaving her nauseated from overconsumption
and alone
to leave the restaurant is to not exist
so she sits, eating perfectly portioned salads
fixes her hair and makeup
not hoping, needing
to be ordered

MOVIE NIGHT DELIGHTS

KAITLYN CROSS

The popcorn in the overflowing bowl,
buttery goodness that fills your soul.
Perfect to use for movie nights.
Takes salt lovers to extreme heights.

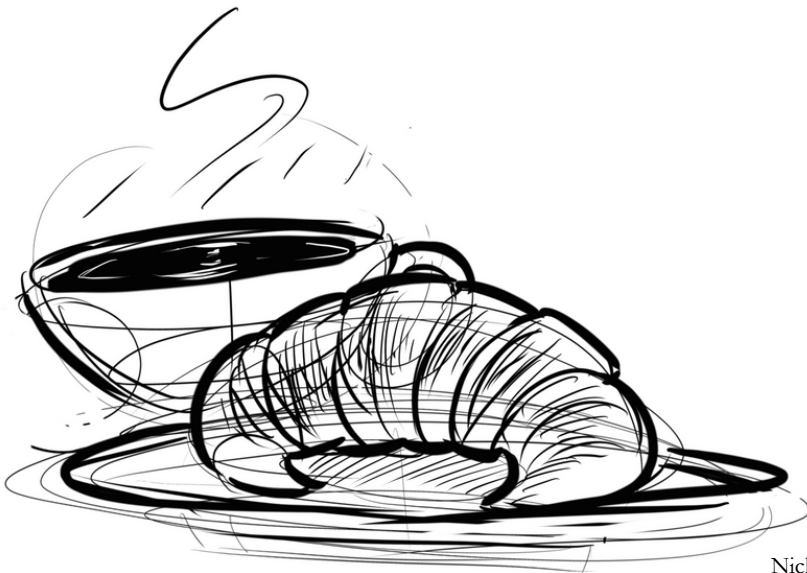
The candy boxes are being ripped apart,
as the sugar is being placed near kids' hearts.
People finding their seats,
while having a quick bite to eat.

The cracking of soda,
during the movie people sipped on their cola.
The moving of a straw,
the sound is like a flaw.

Slushies spilling into large cups,
when is enough enough?
The scream makes people jump,
and the popcorn gets dumped.

When the movie is over,
out goes the food and cups,
getting ready for the next line of chumps,
and they will sit down with big humphs.

This will happen time and time again,
as the thrill of movies keeps people in.
The joy of concessions will never die,
as long as the supply stays high.



Nick Mattheus

IT LOOKED SO GOOD ON THE MENU

EMMA SAMGHABADI

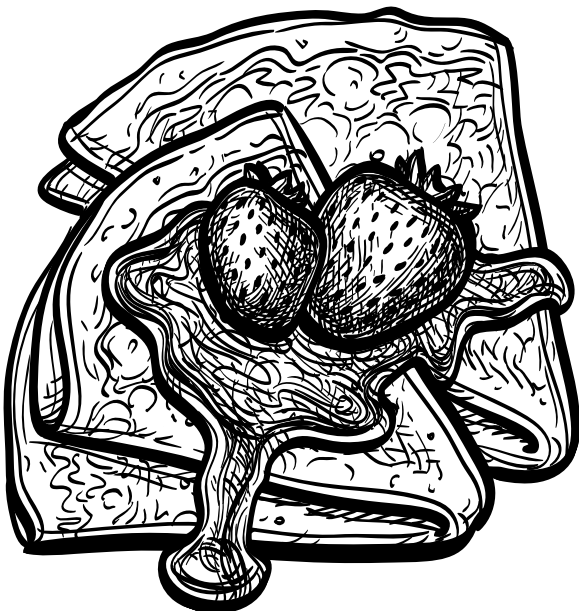
The description was tasteful and exhilarating
I thought I already knew what it would look and taste like
The version in my head looked so intriguing,
I wanted to know everything.
What was in it?
How was it made?
I patiently waited for an eternity for it to finally come to my table
to finally call it mine
As the clock ticked, my version of it grew
What was once a simple portrait
turned into landscape
.
The waiter arrived.
She put the plate down.

It looked nothing like I had pictured
It was a faded, a colorless version that looked too cheap.
It was different than I had pictured.
Maybe it tastes better than it looks?
I won't judge a book by it's cover.
I tried it.
It tasted expired, rotten and putrid.
What I hoped would be an explosion of flavors,
Was a mouthful of sandpaper.
How did this happen?
I needed an apology.
How could the menu fool me,
get my hopes up?
But it's not really the menus' fault is it.
It's mine.
For letting myself believe that it was better than it really was.

SWEET EMPTINESS

MADELYN SERXNER

I walked down the lonely, dark streets of Paris
The city was silent
I could hear my soft breath
The cold exhale made a small cloud in front of me.
The rain fell like a blanket atop my head
I didn't mind the rains presence
It had this strange way of putting my racing mind to ease.
An amazing smell filled the air
Surrounding me and holding me captive,
The smell was sweet at first and then it smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg.
I mindlessly followed the sweet aroma down the street
I was a prisoner, I couldn't break free.
I followed and followed
And followed some more.
A small cottage appeared in the near-distance, made of brick and stone.
As I approached the cottage and walked inside, I found it
I found the sweet chocolate crepes with strawberry and banana filling, powdered sugar sprinkled on top,
resembling a fresh coat of
soft
Soft
Snow
A mug filled with chai tea laid next to the crepe perfectly beside it
Suddenly I heard loud footsteps growing closer...
Closer...
And even closer
My heart
Dropped.



DREAM

ASHLEY BARTON

A world where one can escape from reality
Let go of all chaos and just be present within each moment
Filled with decisions that all come down to one's morality
Why must you torment me with a reality that is nothing more than a fantasy

There is no feeling like jumping into bed at night
Sinking deep into the mattress; So deep I could sink into another world
Wrapped up in sheets as soft as the clouds
Ready to escape this world and pause time

Every dream filled with deep meaning
Something more than just silly imagination
Taking me places I have yet to discover
All of which I experience under my cover

Dreams can quickly become sour however
Just like a spoiled meal
Nightmares now run through my mind
My way out is hard to find

I briefly convince myself, that this is not a dream
As I hear the buzzing of my alarm clock, I'm reminded that everything was imaginary
Sometimes this fills my body with relief
Other times it leaves me with deep sadness and disappointment

I laid there powerless
The dream then owns me
It was as if I was tied down in restraints
I was paralyzed in fear from my head to knee

Ever have the same dream over and over
till it makes you stop and think
Almost as if someone was trying to tell me something
Something undeniably important

And this is why nighttime gives me inner peace and horrifies me
It brings me happiness and sorrow
It leaves me refreshed and depressed
It is a time to be set free from all my problems and start fresh

FRENCH FRIES

MICHELLA PAGGY

In the realm of kitchens, a humble delight,
Golden batons emerge, a crispy sight.
From Earth's embrace, the potato transformed,
Into slender wands, by oil adorned.
Bubbling cauldrons, a sizzle and hiss,
Magic unfolds in a culinary abyss.
Peek through the veil of the deep-fry dance,
A symphony of flavors, a chance romance.

Oh, French fries, artistry in a spud,
A gastronomic tale, simple yet shrewd.
Salted whispers on a canvas of gold,
A culinary masterpiece, stories untold.

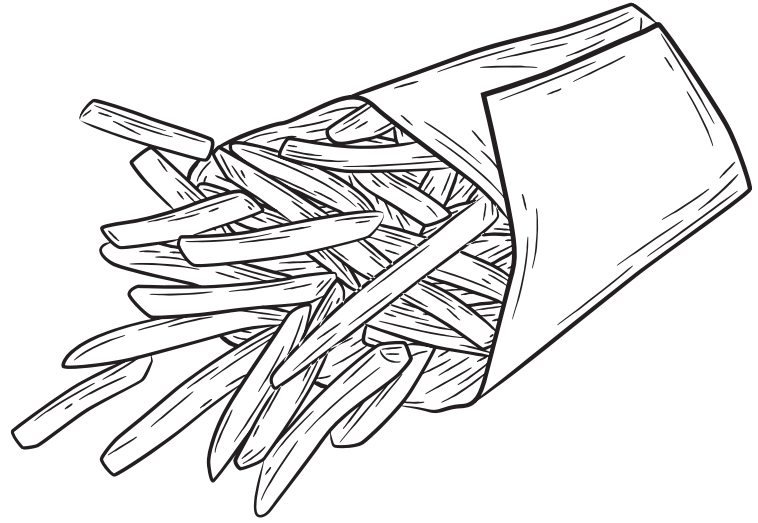
From corner cafes to grand bistros,
They grace the plates where hunger grows.
A carnival of crunch, a carnival of fry,
A dance of textures beneath the sky.

Skin-on or naked, curly or straight,
Each variety holds a tempting fate.
Tossed in sea salt or kissed by truffle,
A feast for the senses, a craving shuffle.

Ketchup's embrace or mayo's allure,
Dipping and savoring, the ritual pure.
In a red-and-white checkered embrace,
French fries unite, a global taste.

Street vendors and fast-food chains,
A global obsession that never wanes.
In paper cones or silver trays,
French fries enchant in myriad ways.

So here's to the fry, a culinary treasure,
A comfort in joy, a solace in leisure.
From Parisian streets to New York's pride,
French fries, forever, our taste buds guide.



ODE TO A GRILLED CHEESE

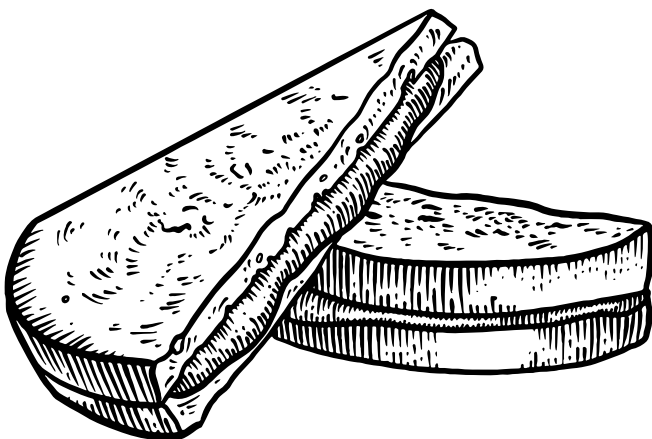
KRISTINA CARDARELLI

I love grilled cheese.
Grilled cheese tastes like love,
With different memories in each bite,
As the gooey cheese cuddles my tongue
Grilled cheese is a fan favorite
For all of consumers' delights.

Grilled cheese is a snack or a meal,
I can eat grilled cheese for a while
I will compile every loaf of bread and butter and all the
cheese in the aisle
And wait patiently for my sandwich with a gleaming smile.

Grilled cheese takes the cake on my favorite food list
It's a bliss to kiss this grilled cheese on its lips.
This sandwich is leaving my taste buds stunned. Craving
more,

I season my mouth with a few remaining crumbs As I
smack my lips and reach for the rum.
It helps take the edge off
As I slip into a depressive state.
I hope to wake up in the morning...
To a grilled cheese on my plate.



STRUGGLES OF SIMPLICITY

MADISON RICHTER

a myriad of options on a menu
You have to pick and choose
Pick and choose
And pick and choose

Page after page of items
Endless decisions to make
Endless options to choose from
Endless minutes of questioning

What if I pick the wrong thing?
What if I make the wrong choice?
How can I be certain what the right choice is?
How can I know?

It shouldn't be that hard, right?
It's just a menu
A thing so simple shouldn't cause so much distress
Just pick and choose

Yet I stare blankly at the sheet in front of me
My mind racing faster than winds at sea
It's just a menu
It's just a simple decision

Even the most vacuous of people could make a choice such as this
So why am I sent into a spiral of anxiety?
Why am I complicating such a simple decision?
It's just a simple decision

I'm told in the end to follow my heart
But what if my heart is mistaken
It's just a simple choice to be made
But is there really such a thing as simplicity?

FOAM

SIMONE PUELO

Sat in a coffee shop
typing on my laptop
faces pass me by
time is fleeting but never moving
As I sit in front of my laptop
the lights from the screen burn holes into my eyes,
searching for a way in
Still sat in this coffee shop
sometimes I think,
text I can just jump right through the screen
be apart of the projection
be one with the illumination
but I can't
I can't go through with it
Standing in this coffee shop
ghostly quiet
that fleeting loneliness washes over me
hollow but whole
settles in my bones reminding me of what is
not what should be
So I leave this coffee shop
with the knowledge that
when I'm falling
down that familiar rabbit hole of feeling
I've let gravity lull me into a sense of trust
in this world
in these people
in the projection
that's what we've all done
right?





TEA TIME

AVA KALBERER

Let's have tea together
Let us share dramatic stories
And gossip and laugh
Tell me your secrets and I'll tell you mine

You offer me a bite of your scone
I offer you half my biscotti
Its my family's secret recipe
Sacred, but meant to be shared

A recipe I will never tell you
Because I want to be the one who makes them for
you
But you won't tell me your scone recipe either
So I guess it's only fair

In the future I'll sit on my apartment floor
A cup of tea and biscotti
Warm in the hands that once held yours
Knowing that tea will always taste better with you

But for now,
Let's have tea together

CANDLES

ASHLEY BARTON

“A candle in the dark lightens a sad heart” -DB

What comes to mind when you hear the word candles?

For me I think of birthday candles
A smile spreads across my face and I am filled with bliss
I think of rainbow candles sinking into a chocolate cake

For her she thinks of memorial candles
She thinks of sadness and death
And is reminded of her father's funeral
She relives the sorrows and sadness

For him he thinks of religious candles
He prays and rejoices in the presence of candles
He praises the Lord
And thinks back to the miracle he received in his youth

For them, they think of meditation candles
They feel calm and zen in their presence
They find inner peace and happiness
They think back to how they feel in their yoga studio

For her brother, he thinks of a candle lit dinner
He sees romance and love in candles
He thinks of roses and a romantic feast of food
He feels enlightened and thinks of his girlfriend

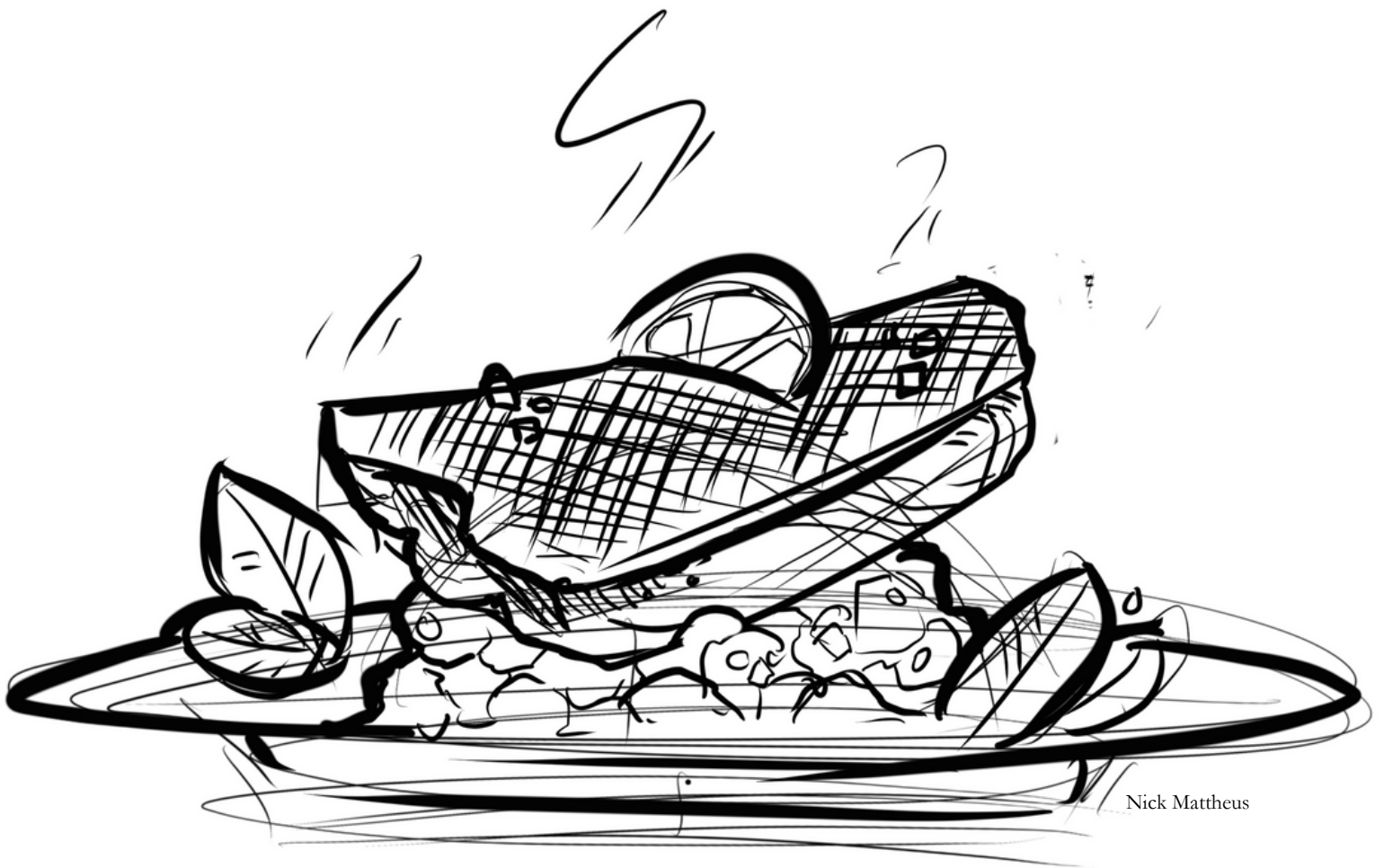
For her, she thinks of herself
She feels like she is melting into a puddle
She is as burnt out as the candle beside her
She is tired and losing the light inside of herself

“Good people are like candles, they burn themselves up
to give others light.” -Turkish Proverb



Nick Mattheus

ENTRÉES



A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION

BY ASHLEY BARTON

A figment of my imagination is all you were. There is now way to explain this feeling. The pain feels unreal. They say my grief will soon pass, but I beg to differ. How can I just go on with my life upon finding out my world was only a temporary distraction from the real one? They say near death experiences change you for the better, only this one didn't. This one broke me. Shattered my heart into pieces like glass being smashed. I was being impaled, only the pain was far greater. How can I live like this? Knowing the love of my life was just in the grasp of my hands, only he wasn't. How could someone be so close yet so far?

My boyfriend died several years ago. Last I saw him we were out eating at a fancy Italian restaurant. He stared at the menu scanning through his options. He tossed his hands up in the air and said, "I just don't know what to eat tonight. What do you think I should try?" I smiled and told him he should have the Fettucine Alfredo. As the waiter came over to ask for our orders, I noticed something off about my boyfriend. He seemed nervous about something, which for him was very unusual. I was always the anxious one. When the waiter came over, he handed me a cupcake with my plate of pasta. I looked around confused and said to the waiter, "Sir, I believe you may have mistakenly given me someone else's order because I did not order a cupcake." He smiled and replied, "Tis a new special of the day that comes with your pasta." I looked at him puzzled but nodded my head in approval. My boyfriend sat there waiting for his food to be delivered to him. However, he insisted that I go ahead and eat without him. Just as I slurped up my last noodle, the waiter ran over sweat pouring down his face. "My apologies sir.", he announced. "Don't even worry about it.", replied my boyfriend.

As I sunk my teeth into the red velvet cupcake before me, I felt a hard shard of metal. I reluctantly spit out the food onto the plate, only to find a ring mixed in with the mash of cupcakes. I looked up expecting to see my boyfriend smiling, only he wasn't. He sat there with his face red, eyes bulging out of his head. I looked around yelling for help. By the time the paramedics arrived, it was too late. "He's gone.", they told me. Tears flooded my eyes and I started bawling. "Why?", I yelled. "He was perfectly fine a few minutes ago." "He had an allergic reaction and went into anaphylactic shock." "But he ordered a pasta dish." The waiter looked at me frozen in terror. "You never told me...." "I didn't know... I thought you knew that it came with shrimp." I drove home that night quietly in the car deciding whether to just go home and cry my eyes out till they were as dry as a dessert or if I should drive into oncoming traffic. Doctors say I chose the latter.

I was back in the restaurant. It was empty, maybe even closed. The image of my dying fiance replaying in my mind over and over until it drove me crazy. All I saw in the restaurant was a menu lying on the floor. I picked it up, almost laughing. "Who dies of an allergic reaction?". I mean what were the chances. A voice in the distance called out, "Apparently me..." We both laughed and continued our dinner. I asked where everyone was. He said he booked a private dinner with just us. I felt a sense of safeness, his warm hand in mine. We talked about the wedding and what felt like a few hours, turned out to be a few years.

I looked around the room noticing everything was blurry and hard to make out. I was no longer in the restaurant with my fiance. To the left of me was an oxygen monitor and an IV in my arm? "What is going on?", I asked a woman in blue scrubs. The room quickly filled with people as I awoke. "Amber, it's been five years," said a lady who claimed she was my mother. I don't remember these people, but I do remember my fiance and all I wanted was him. I asked for him and as I was about to get up I saw I was handcuffed to the bed. "Sweetie...", called out the woman. "Just as a precaution. We don't want you to try to take your life again. We understand this must be hard and are offering many resources to you.", said the man with blue scrubs and a badge that read Dr. Shepard. "WHERE IS HE?!", I yelled, growing hot with anger. "Honey, he's dead", said another man in the room. "No, he's not. I was just with him." I yelled back. "We'll give you some time...", said the woman in scrubs.

No, how could they do this. I was just there with him. I was just in his arms.... Why must I relieve the pain that drove me crazy enough to attempt to take my life. The love of my life was gone, and there was nothing I could do. I was surrounded by people that said they loved me only I don't love them. I don't even know them. He was the only one who knew me. He was the only one I ever loved. He was dead and I gave up five years to spend a few hours with him, but if it came down to it I would have given everything just to see his face.

BOILING OVER

BY MADDIE DOBIAS

The kitchen was only dimly lit, just bright enough to see the glint of anger in someone's eye. The hazy light revealed the small twinge of disgust on the woman's face. She was gripping the box of pasta in one hand, the other leaning against the counter, holding her up and together. Across the small, open room was her partner, his face reflecting hers.

"This is a pointless argument. You can break it." The man let out a deep sigh at the end of that statement, as if his words tired him. He wasn't quite sure why his girlfriend was so stuck in her stance, but he didn't care.

"If the spaghetti doesn't fit in this pot, I'll just make another kind of pasta. You don't break spaghetti. It isn't the same." She wasn't making eye contact. This was the third petty argument they had this week, and the fifteenth since moving in together a month ago. But hey, who's counting? The woman didn't understand why they were fighting so much. Maybe it was the closer proximity, or some other easy scapegoat.

"The water's boiling already. I've got to put something in the pot. We've got more stuff in the closet." The woman continued, trying her best not to sound overly fed up. The quiet murmur of the bubbling water whispered in the background, almost a third party in the argument.

"You already opened the box. Why do you insist on making everything more difficult?" The boyfriend was fed up, for reasons the girlfriend wasn't quite sure of. He looked her dead in the eye as he said that, as if to add more malice to the statement. "It's like you're only arguing with me to get a rise out of me." The water heated up faster, the bubbles rising quicker now.

"You and I both know that's not true. Stop trying to get me to admit to something."

The girlfriend adjusted the pot on the burner, with the hope of getting it to try to boil slower somehow, but you can't slow something down that's already started up the way the boil had.

"I've never met a girl so stubborn as you. It's almost ridiculous. You know, all we do is argue. I'm pretty sure I'm not the problem here, but I'm dealing with someone who won't admit they're wrong over something as pathetic as pasta. Pasta, Anne. We're arguing about pasta." The man wasn't even sure what he was saying anymore, his eyes fixated on the steam arising from the pot.

"I think you and I both know we're arguing about more than the pasta." Despite keeping her cool for a while, the girlfriend's voice was rising as quickly as the steam in the pot. "Ever since you moved in, it's been argument after argument. I mean, what's the point? Why am I here if I'm just going to be constantly berated, day after day, for all the little things? That's pathetic."

The water was rapidly rising now, skimming the brim of the pot now.

"You know, I thought this was a step forward, Anne. I thought maybe, just maybe, moving in together would finally be the push we needed to commit completely. To go all in. Yet every day, you give me another reason to be infuriated. Another small annoyance, another miniscule detail about you that pushes me farther and farther away until there's nowhere left for me to go." He was almost out of breath. "There's nowhere to go." As he said that, the water hit the top of the pot.

"There is somewhere to go." Anne took a deep breath. "Out. Away. Anywhere but this apartment, because clearly this isn't working. If you keep finding details about me you can't stand, you can leave. Or I can leave. Because you're right. There isn't anywhere to go from here."

The pot boils over.

TOLERATE IT

ASHLEY BOZEK

My friends convinced me from the start that Cole was bad news. I refused to believe a man so nice to me could ever hurt me.

It was occasional. I would sit on the couch and see him reading a book on the other couch, not talking to me, but I convinced myself he wanted space. I would wait at the door for him to come home, hugging him the moment he walked in, like a little kid trying to get attention from their parents after they got home from work. He was so much older and wiser than me, I convinced myself I was inexperienced and he just didn't like that. I tried to grasp his attention, making meals for him that my mother made my father, laying the table with the fancy dishes, but he would sit at the other end of the table and eat silently. Maybe he just didn't like showing his feelings too much.

Then there were days he would buy gifts. He would come home from work early and take me out to eat, paying everything, then take me on a shopping spree to get anything I ever wanted because he was "having a good day". I was convinced it was my fault he tolerated me. Maybe he just wasn't attracted to me like he was in the beginning. Maybe he wanted someone prettier. Maybe I was putting in too much effort.

Both of us were stuck in the public's eye, people could see that things weren't looking great as there were events we attended together and I seemed upset in most photos. I was lying on the couch when he got home from work, seemingly livid. It was the first time I saw him this mad. He was never this mad. He was always ignoring me, why was he mad?

It was not the first time I was lectured like that. I was back to being a little girl being lectured and threatened by my father for not smiling in a family Christmas card photo. Except this was my boyfriend, and I was a grown woman, unable to tell the difference between tolerating someone and loving someone.

I was careful to not make a mistake like that again. I didn't want to be a 9 year old me, I would do anything to not go back there. I would do anything to not visit him again.

But apparently it wasn't what he wanted. He wanted a black haired, green eyed short businesswoman. I tried. I really did. I did my best, only to be lectured, only to be begging for footnotes in the story of his life, only to be taking up too much space or time.

I did it. I left him. I left him and moved out while he was at work. I moved in with a friend. She was proud. I was not. I didn't know how to react now. I had my early adulthood stolen, and I didn't know how to exist without him. I had to learn it over again, learn how to pull the dagger from my body he left there and heal myself.

I got texts from him. I got the "you've got it all wrong" texts, and the "it's all in your head" texts, and the "you're insane" texts, and the "you need me" texts.

Did I need him? Or was I just manipulated into thinking that?

It was my friends helping pick up the pieces of the broken vase to help piece me together again. It was a poor job, and I couldn't even use glue to piece it together. I was put back together by scotch tape, determined to fall again at the sight of him.

It took a while to even tape me back together, but I finally rented an apartment a couple blocks away, and on move-in day, I was ready. A new portion of my life was beginning. I got to live by myself, even if it wasn't what I wanted.

"Hey, Alina" I heard, pushing the cart of my boxes into the elevator. I looked rough, my hair in a ponytail, wearing a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt, with no makeup. No! Who recognized me?

In the elevator, holding the door open, was Cole's nephew, Hunter. He was smiling a little bit, holding a coffee, "Hey" I quickly responded, wiping sweat from my forehead. I reached over and saw that my floor was already lit up. He lived on my floor?

"I thought I would've seen you at the office again bringing lunch, but you didn't even go to the Christmas party. What happened?"

I wanted to cry. A piece of tape fell off of my vase, making that same piece crash onto the ground and split even more, "It just didn't work out between Cole and I."

Hunter took a sip of his coffee, "It was boring without you. The only reason I go is to hang out with you, 'cause my family is annoying, and no one gets along. It was worse with that girl he brought."

Aly? He brought Aly? I felt another piece of tape fall, sending another piece of my vase onto the ground and breaking again. I went silent.

"Wow, didn't end well, hm? Don't worry. It'll end between them soon. She can't match his energy. And for the record, I liked you better than the entire side of my family."

I smiled a little bit as the elevator dinged, and he held the door again, watching me push the cart out, "I'm really sorry about Cole." He said, as he walked to his door, right across from mine, "He was always that bad. Even as kids. You don't deserve it."

"Thanks."

Hunter was the exact opposite of Cole. Hunter had dark brown curly hair and brown eyes, but with a good energy. Cole had golden blonde hair and bright blue eyes, with a mysterious hidden energy.

I always got along with Hunter. I would pass him in Cole's workplace when I would drop off lunch, and I always hung out with him at family parties. Now he was across from me. Would he tell Cole? Would Cole come back to my door to beg for forgiveness again?

The next morning, I ran into Hunter again. I had my airpods in, wearing a hoodie and shorts, my eyes puffy from crying over the text I got from Cole. I knew I couldn't go back to him, but it hurt knowing that.

How come I have to run into Hunter again, looking disheveled as always. No model was perfect, and it shocked people to see the truth. Hunter looked concerned though. He wasn't immediately judging me for crying. I didn't get the "Shut up and don't cry" comment, or the "Be quiet" comment.

Instead, Hunter said "Are you alright?"

Hearing that made me want to cry again. But I just fixed my posture and nodded, "Fine" I managed to say. "No you're not. It's Cole, yeah?"

How did he know? I nodded.

"Are you free tonight?" He asked, looking at me with concern in his eyes, which were normally full of life.

"Yeah?" I responded.

"Come over at seven. I'll get some wine and you can talk to me." He said, "I don't wanna see you upset over my piece of trash uncle."

So I did.

His penthouse was nice, put together, but it had a soul. It wasn't modern and lifeless. He put life into his apartment, something I never saw in a guy before.

It was casual, where we just sat on his couch and talked bad about Cole. It was kind of fun, and I never truly realized how much we got along. I felt better talking about it with someone who knew Cole for who he truly was. I felt more comfortable. Maybe it was the champagne. Maybe it was just that I might've picked the wrong relative. Maybe I should've picked Hunter instead of Cole.

That's when a genius plan hit me. It was perfect.

Hunter worked at the same family company as Cole. Only that Hunter was five years younger than Cole, and still a higher position than him. Hunter was the son of the CEO, and he would eventually take over. Cole thought that it was unfair, since Hunter was rumored from the beginning to be the result of an affair his mother had. The family business was a mess, and I wanted to break it up even more. I had the opportunity to mess with absolutely everything Cole built in his life.

I would date Hunter. I would date the younger, more successful guy just to spite Cole.

It was always clear that Hunter did have feelings for me in a way--I knew it. He would always be staring at me during any event I showed up to be the trophy for Cole. Now I wouldn't be the only trophy. Cole was a participation medal, and Hunter was a golden trophy.

I wouldn't be alone, I wouldn't have to be shown off, and I could just be a guest without a spotlight on my every move.

So, my plan was set in stone. I started hanging out with Hunter more. I would hang out with him constantly over the next few months, and I hated to think that Hunter was slowly picking up those shattered glass pieces and gluing them together with superglue, instead of fixing them with tape. I started to feel better with him.

But it was getting too much. I couldn't fall for him ever, I knew I couldn't. I was just using him to make Cole jealous. But every time he would get in the elevator with me to head to work, a pink flower would bloom on my cheeks.

I started dating Hunter a week later. My plan was falling into place, but the pieces of the vase were falling apart again. It would hurt me knowing that Hunter actually liked me while he was only a pawn in my chess board. He treated me so well that it broke my vase in the places he glued back together.

My brain pulled me away from Hunter, while my heart kept guiding me towards him. He was so irresistible. He knew every way to calm me down, he knew how to help me heal, letting me become the independent woman I strived to be while he treated me like a princess, not dragging me down from creating my own path.

He wasn't like Cole- not at all. With Cole, I felt trapped, alone, but with Hunter, I felt loved. He was never late, and he always brought flowers if he was held up at work. He was the one to hug me when he came home from work, he was the one striving for the attention I craved just months ago. As much as I wanted to stay close to him, I forced myself to drift apart. I would go from having him glue the pieces of my glass vase together only for new ones to break off when I was away from him. It hurt my heart when I realized I didn't even know what love was. It hurt my heart when I realized I didn't know how to love him like he loved me. He wasn't like Cole at all. He was warm and he never acted like he tolerated me. He loved me.

Each time I would drift from him, my heart hurt, and I knew I couldn't leave him-- like there was an invisible string tying us together.

Guilt ate me alive as New Year's Eve rolled around the corner, when Hunter was asking me to go to his family's annual New Year's Eve ball. The same ball we met three years ago.

Guilt ate me alive when I saw that black sparkly dress hanging on the door of my closet-- the dress I knew he bought for me.

Guilt ate me alive when I saw the price tag.

Guilt ate me alive when I saw the silver heels.

And guilt ate me alive when I found myself walking into that party, hand in hand with him.

My heart jumped when I saw him--Cole. Cole in the corner of the party with a drink in his hand, glaring at me. I felt Hunter's grip on my hand tighten, just as the vase cracked and

broke again. Everything rushed back to me, and I remembered everything Cole did to me over the years we dated.

“He won’t hurt you while I’m here.” Hunter said, and we split from Cole’s line of sight.

I talked to his friends and family to distract myself from the pair of beady eyes I felt, and I would turn back eventually to see his cold stare, that same cold stare I recognized even when I was blind in love. Only this time, I saw the stare for what it was. Hate. Jealousy.

Exactly what I wanted him to feel. I wanted him to be jealous. So, I kissed Hunter’s cheek while he was talking just to show Cole that I moved on.

I didn’t let that cold stare ruin my night. I spent the night happily until I left Hunter to go to the bathroom.

“Nice plan, Ali, you succeeded. Now, break up with my nephew.”

I turned to see Cole, standing by the bathrooms, “Don’t call me that.” I responded quickly. Those pieces of tape my friends helped me put together, the pieces Hunter hadn’t gotten a chance to fix yet, broke apart and fell to the ground as my heart fell into pieces.

“It worked, I’m jealous. Break up with him now.” Cole said, glaring at me, “Move back in.”

“No.” I responded, “I’m happy for the first time in years, and you’re not coming back to ruin me again.”

“You don’t love Hunter.” He said, “You know you still love me and that’s why you’re here. That’s why you said yes, and that’s why you haven’t even walked away from me yet.” He stepped closer.

My heart was beating so fast, and I simply backed up until I hit someone. Out of reflexes, I turned back to apologize, only to be faced with Hunter who heard the whole thing.

He had that look in his eye. That look I recognized when I found out that Cole had cheated on me.

“Hunter.” I said, quickly.

People around us were counting down. I had forgotten it was New Years.

Hunter just turned around and began walking away. I followed him.

Hunter was the one person I could rely on. I didn’t even think of Cole when I was with him. I only thought about how he could hurt me, yet he never did. He had so many opportunities to hurt me, and he didn’t. I was the one who hurt him, and I didn’t want to. I didn’t mean to. I should’ve thought of the consequences before I did this.

Before I knew it, he slammed the door of a cab in my face and took off, leaving me in the rain, seeing the ball drop a few blocks over, confetti everywhere, seeing couples kiss, hearing that one song by Frank Sinatra.

The glass vase of my heart shattered. Each glued and taped piece fell apart and crashed onto the marble floor.

I realized that my actions didn’t just hurt Hunter. It hurt me. It hurt me more than I thought it would. I loved Hunter, and I couldn’t let him leave, because the vase that once belonged to Cole was fixed by Hunter, and Hunter never stole it, he only protected it.

And now he was gone. Whisked away, and the vase that kept my heart concealed on the ground was going to be forever broken without Hunter there to fix it again. Now, it was lying on the concrete sidewalk, broken into small shards, which kept breaking every time i saw a couple kiss, maroon dripping from inside



"THE NIGHT I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF"

AVIANNA CAMPBELL KARKOTA

My eyes began to flutter open, slowly gaining sight after being blinded by the natural light that seeped through my window. It had been the first night in a while I had slept the entire duration. As I sat up, adjusting to my surroundings, I heard the bed creaking, light breathing coming from my own body and faint sounds originating from outside the door of the room I was confined in. As I began to look around, I started to think of where I was and began to adjust. I didn't understand and I simply couldn't understand where this familiar feeling was coming from; almost *deja-vu* like but it was missing certain parts that left me dumbfounded. To add to my adjusting senses, I was detecting the aroma of sweetness and cinnamon, a scent I would never forget in my entire life. It was coming from the other side of what I remembered to be my bedroom door, although when turning the handle I was anticipating what would be on the other side as if I hadn't been here before. Strange.

As one foot followed the other, the clanging of pots and pans along with the constant sound of running water filled the house. It seemed as though the hallway had a beaming foreign feeling, giving me permission to move forward. Walking to the kitchen I had seen a woman, a very bright, radiant, young woman, wearing what seemed to be her pajamas, although the fabric told me that maybe our sense in night clothes may be different. Although I had only been facing her backside, she began speaking to me, sensing my presence.

"You woke up awfully late. Hopefully you're ready enough to start helping set up the table, sweetie," she spoke. The name *sweetie* repeated in my head over and over again like a melody. I had felt a pang in my stomach filling me with the same feeling as I felt a few moments before in the room, except this time I wasn't feeling as safe. I hadn't realized how long I was in my head until I had been called by what I thought could've been my name. It was unexpected. Being collected in my thoughts caused me to be unable to hear the beginning of the statement, missing the title.

"... are you going to help set up or just stand there with that silly expression the whole time," she laughed. This time, she was facing me. The moment I made direct eye contact I felt a connection with the face I was looking at.

"Of course. Let me help you with that, Mom." That felt peculiar. Like it wasn't supposed to be coming out of my mouth at that moment.

"Thank ya' Doll," she said with a bright smile. I double-checked her visage before grabbing plates and utensils without a second thought of where to look. She had been wearing makeup, not too heavy, but there was enough for me to notice. I began to notice small things on her, her fine lines near her eyes and mouth showing how much she smiles, her bright white teeth being hard to ignore seeing as though she couldn't put them away, (one of these which I remembered). As I continued setting up, I could feel eyes on me. I turned around to discover the origin of the feeling. She was looking at me, and almost through me. It was sort of a look of admiration, gratitude, and sadness, and by looking into her eyes you could see and even feel the emptiness behind them.

"He's going to be home soon so why don't you make yourself a plate and i'll finish this up,".

"Alright, thanks.." As I walked over to the hot stove to make my plate, I stared at the dishes laid out for me, and while picking up and placing the food down felt illusory, I ignored the feeling because this was where the scent I had been smelling was coming from. Not forgetting how she failed to mention who 'he' was, I had known I had to eat but I simply wasn't hungry. Everything felt too surreal to eat.

I sat down with my back facing toward the front door and face looking at the kitchen. When I heard the door open and shut, I didn't dare turn around, fearing I was going to see something I wasn't prepared for. A hand grazed my shoulder greeting me and my "mom" with a booming sound.

"Good morning to you ladies, hope all is well during this fine afternoon," said the loud voice. You could hear the smile as he spoke. I still hadn't looked up from my untouched food until two chairs were pulled out in front of me. They both sat down at the same time making small talk to one another, but whispering it as if I shouldn't be listening. This didn't feel like a meal all together, no, more of an interrogation, questioning, or investigation. I felt as though I was in trouble—no, I was definitely in trouble—and I seemed to have no idea what for.

Even though my head and heart began racing, I raised my eyes slowly just to stop on the couple's plates empty. There was no food on their plates, was the food just for me? My gaze lowered one more time and there wasn't even food on my plate anymore. 'What the hell?'

I said to myself as I glanced up. I heard no more conversation between the two, and to somewhat of a surprise they were both already looking at me.

'Why are they looking at me like that' 'What happened' 'I don't like this' 'Are they gonna say anything', all these questions filled my brain at the same time but all came to a stop when I heard my name come out of the man my father's mouth.

"Emilie, this has to stop," he warned. 'I knew it, I did something bad'.

"You need to go back."

"What?"

I was starting to get confused with what he meant.

"You can't keep meeting us like this, it's not good for you or us." my mother stated.

"I don't understand. I woke up here. This is my home, I LIVE here," my voice began to get shaky. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I don't even know if I believed what I was saying.

"Not anymore, go back" stated father.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I lied.

Yes I did. I didn't belong there. I don't deserve to see them, eat with them, greet them, after all I've done.

"Please let us go," said the woman in front of me, becoming less and less recognizable by the moment.

"Please forgive me," I pleaded to the pair.

"Stop. Go back. We will always love you, Our daughter, Emilie" said the man in front of me. All that's left to hear was my cries coming from me knowing this is what I deserved: despair. My eyelids were getting heavier and heavier until I couldn't hold them open.

I was woken up by a slam on the floor in front of me, metal clanging echoing in the room I was confined in. I was quickly taking in my surroundings, facing the reality occurring around me. I looked at the grisly guard through the metal bars as he started speaking with an antagonistic tone

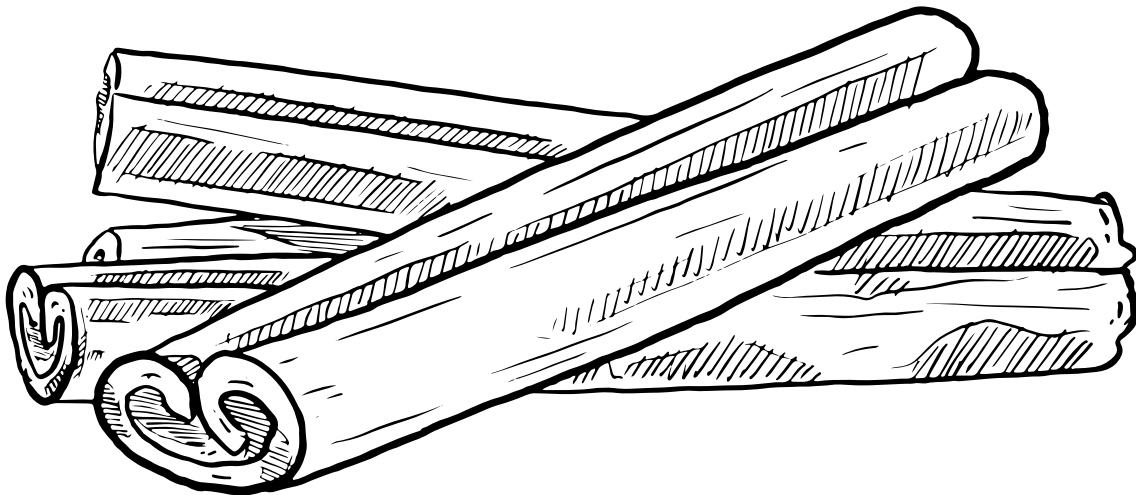
"Prisoner 846: Emilie Sparwald. Convicted of the murder of her family and others included. Please stand up and choose your final meal" As I looked at the metal clipboard that was thrown to me previously, I started to think of what I would eat before I face the consequences of my actions. Most would ask for 100 burgers and fries, over 50 items from different restaurants. Most people would pretend to have a hard time with a decision to hope to stall for this upcoming moment in time. I had time to think about what could really satisfy me to the fullest, seeing as though that's the least you can get for doing bad things to good people.

I didn't even feel the need to write on the clipboard what I wanted. It wasn't necessary due to how the guard could understand this request from a mile away.

"Sir, I have decided on my final meal," I said.

"And that will be?" he questioned.

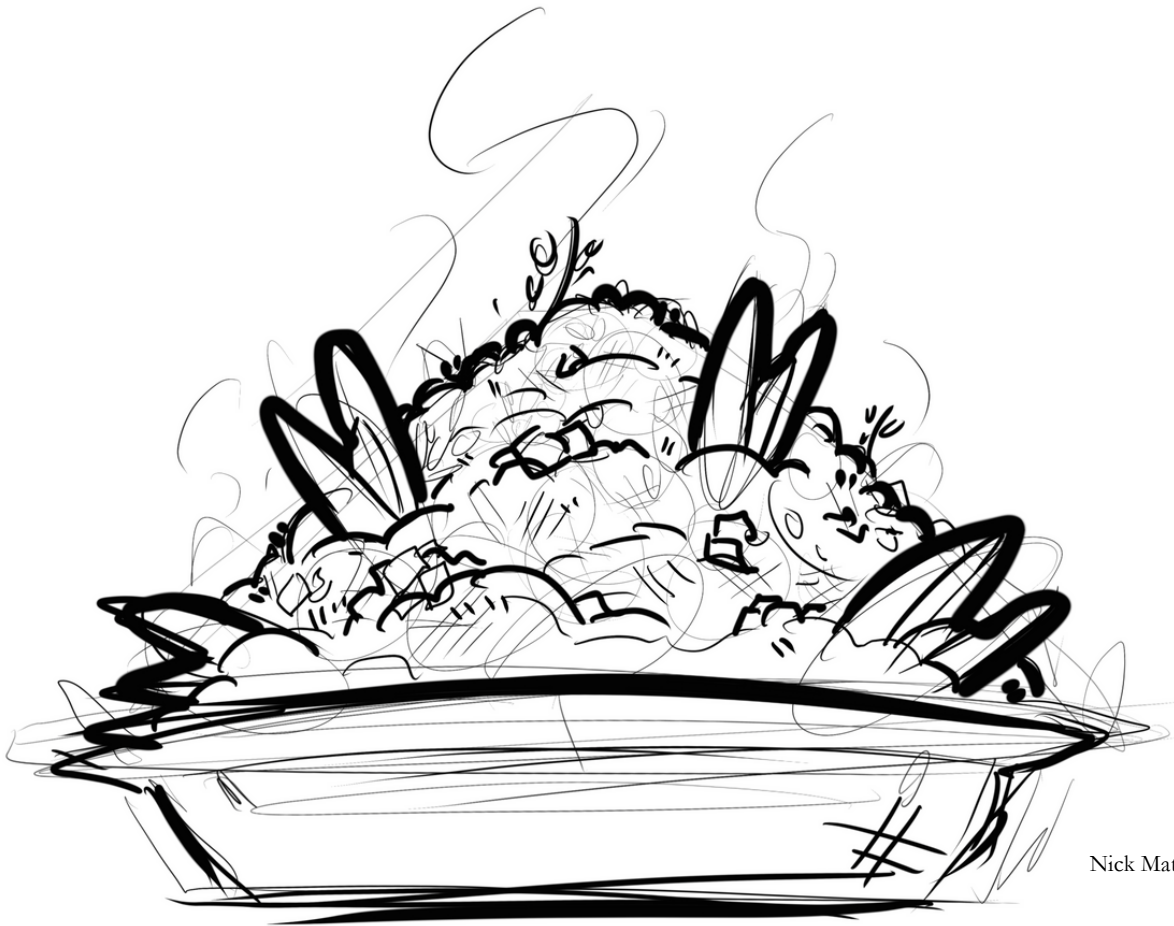
"Something with the taste of sweetness and cinnamon."



JOURNEY OF YOUNG PASSION

DULCEBELLA HERNANDEZ

Everyone has their own preference of food, or enjoy food from where they originate from. The food that comes from my family is Mexican food. As a young kid, it was always fun cooking and baking. From the everyday food my mother produces like tortillas de maiz (or de harina) con arroz or enchiladas con salsa roja, to helping out on the holidays producing the best meals, like tamales de pollo or pozole, it's all a fun process, even standing over the gas stove for the first time learning to flip the tortillas by hand without burning myself. It's hard not to burn off the tip of my fingers making gorditas for a family of 10+. Baking is also an exhilarating process with my mom. She never lets me make the caramel for the flan whenever we make it, she claims if you ever accidentally touch it you'll end up in the hospital, but now since I'm older, she still cares, but I make it anyway. Conchas are very fun to make too, despite it being a messy process with the sugar. Now I am in culinary classes learning how to go just beyond what I grew up with. Meeting new people who have that same passion as I do for food or those who want to start learning. Food will always be fun to make, from cutting everything, to adding the spices that give them amazing flavor, to putting all on the plate for the rest to enjoy. Great food is what binds people together.



THE MAZE

SAMANTHA BRUNO

It was a dark night, the only light coming from lamp posts and open store windows. It was so cold, Noah could see his breath as he walked the empty streets. It had rained all morning, so it smelled like grass and wet dirt. There were lots of puddles on the ground that he splashed and stepped in as he walked. He passed the familiar line of houses, humming a song that had been stuck in his head for days. Noah never went out late at night, but he had to today, it was an emergency.

Picture this, Noah had been going about his normal life, looking for something to eat. He opened the cabinets to reveal that he was all out of fruit loops. He was horrified. So now here he was, walking alone at night, to get himself some fruit loops.

Thankfully the store was still open, its big neon sign brightening the way. He walked in the store and took a deep breath of the supermarket air, then quickly walked to the cereal aisle. As he walked, he noticed he was the only person in the store. Normally this would be a big red flag, but it was late at night, so Noah didn't think about it too much. Maybe he should have.

As Noah reached the cereal aisle, he looked at all the colorful items on the shelves. His eyes lit up as he found his cereal and quickly grabbed the box of fruit loops, a smile of victory on his face as he turned to walk to the cash register.

He heard a soft bang and quickly spun back around. A box of cereal had fallen off the shelf and onto the floor. He slowly walked over to it with a puzzled look and bent down to inspect this fallen box of cereal.

How did it just fall on its own?' he thought to himself as he went to pick it up.

He grabbed it with caution, like something was going to happen the second he touched the cereal. He grabbed the box, ready for something to jump out at him, but nothing ever did. When he realized he was safe, he laughed at himself and put the box back on the shelf.

He turned to go pay for the fruit loops, but something was off. The aisle seemed longer than usual. Noah walked down it normally; he thought it was just in his head and that everything was fine, but he never seemed to make it near the end of the aisle.

Walking turned into jogging, jogging turned into running, running turned into sprinting. Noah was now sprinting through this supermarket, trapped in a loop. All the products on the shelves repeated themselves as he ran through this loop over and over again.

He told himself he would never use his powers in public, but he was so desperate to break free from the stupid loop that he didn't care. The lights flickered as he summoned all the energy he could and blasted it at one of the aisles, creating a huge explosion. There was now a big hole in the aisle that Noah could fit through.

Before he could escape, something went over his head and all he could see was darkness. It was some type of bag that he struggled against, scratching at the arms that were keeping him there. He was getting very light headed but continued fighting. The person didn't say anything or try to move Noah, they just kept the bag over his head and tried to get him to go peacefully. Noah could feel his eyes growing heavy and everything was dark for a second time.

Noah quickly sat up, trying to catch his breath. The last thing he could remember was a bag being put over his head. He quickly looked around at his surroundings. It was morning now, the sky was lit up by the sun. He was in the middle of a field, laying on top of the damp grass. All around him were trees and- wait, were those walls? He quickly stood up and spun around, trying to examine his surroundings better. Stone walls with vines on them, separated in the middle to create a narrow opening. The tall walls were all around him, boxing him in, the only way out being the small opening.

His breathing started to pick up as he panicked, the smell of grass was suffocating. Even in an open field with trees all around him, he couldn't seem to get any oxygen to his lungs. How did I get here? What is this place? Am I stuck here forever? Thoughts spiraled through his head.

He calmed down and walked over to the small opening, trying to better grasp the situation and figure out what to do. As he walked, he looked around. Nothing changed much from where he woke up. The trees started to disappear as he got closer to the wall, but that was the only change. Same wet grass, same stone walls that would drive him insane.

The walls were huge, Noah looked like an ant compared to them. He looked through the small opening but didn't see much. It just looked like a big hallway. Slowly and skeptically, he walked down the stone hallway. It was long with vines covering the stone. At the end of the hall, it opened into two different directions.

Noah looked at both options before going to the right. He was still super freaked out, but now that emotion was overtaken by curiosity. He took more time to look around for any clues. All the walls were the same, he kept walking down different paths, he turned the corner, hoping to see something new, but was only left with the same stone walls.

Noah was completely lost. He had been going deeper and deeper into this maze, turning every time he could, but now he couldn't remember how to get back. As he came to this realization, he started running faster. He ran everywhere he could, trying to find something that would tell him his way back, just something that wasn't those damn stone walls. Noah should have been careful what he wished for.

As he ran down the different paths, he heard mechanical movement that stopped him where he was. He turned and saw some type of creature. It was very slimy and looked like a brain was placed on mechanical spider legs. Noah didn't know what he was looking at but he couldn't look away. He was paralyzed with fear.

The creature spotted him and growled at Noah as it ran towards him. Noah quickly realized the situation and ran, desperately trying to get away from this thing. He looked back at the creature as he ran, it was now trying to stab him with some type of needle, Noah ran faster. It chased him down every path he took. His legs felt like they were on fire but he didn't stop, afraid of what would happen if he slowed down for even a second.

As Noah ran, a metal bug crawled on the stone walls, unnoticed by the victim, a metal bug that knew the answer to all of his questions, a metal bug that watched silently as Noah ran for his life, death right around the corner.

The metal bug was a man that watched Noah with close eyes. The man sat in a dark office, the only light coming from the monitors. The man made no move to stop the creature from attacking Noah. The man was the one that kidnapped Noah on that fateful night and put him in that maze. The man was Noah's father, watching his son run for his life, and he was getting frustrated. Why wasn't his son doing more to get away from this thing? He knew what his son was capable of, so he turned up the creature's lethal settings.

Noah desperately tried to lose this creature as it ran closer and closer, the needles swinging at him from all angles. Noah looked back to see the creature. While he wasn't looking, he tripped on some vines on the floor. Noah panicked as the creature attacked him.

He could feel the creature rip into his skin as he tried to break free. His mind went blank and all he could think about was the awful pain he was in. He could feel the metal limbs digging its way through his body and ripping him apart. He screamed as loud and as painfully as he could, a scream that made his throat hurt and bleed, but made him feel better.

In a desperate attempt to get away from this creature, he put his hand out in front of him and on the creature, using all of his energy and whatever was around him to electrocute the thing. It went flying away from Noah and across the floor.

He didn't check to see if the creature was dead, he just laid on his back and looked up at the sky, trying to catch his breath. His heartbeat was in his ears, he couldn't hear anything else but that. He could feel the different, uncomfortable ways his body was torn apart. He tasted the blood in his mouth from screaming and being torn apart.

He didn't move, just stayed in the sticky pool of blood he was laying in, the metallic smell making his head hurt. He could still feel the metal limbs in his skin, even though the creature wasn't near him.

Noah's dad watched excitedly, his experiment had worked! He now had the perfect visual of how his son's powers functioned and how powerful his son was. The serum he had given to Noah could now be modified as needed for the next generation of test subjects. Nothing could shake his good mood, not even as Noah's breathing became shallow, and his eyes slipped closed.

THE GIRL WHO FELL FOR THE SKY

MACY CARTER

The overthinker's conundrum: how to decipher the difference between what you want and what you want to want, or want to want... The point is, a busy mind is not for the faint of heart. I've been praised for the work of a complex mind, of knowing things, but in the mind of a true over thinker, nothing makes sense. Ever. I don't think I've ever known anything for sure.

See, I knew this girl once, and she was so sure of herself. I wouldn't really classify her as this great confident force, but she could easily decipher her feelings, free from the burden of a heavy mind. Everything she knew, she knew for sure, or at least it seemed that way.

Meanwhile, I struggled to tell if I envied her certainty or maybe her life or maybe her feelings or maybe I wanted to be her or love her or know her and I knew there was something about her that I wished I could have that I never could, but I couldn't figure out what.

Anyway, one day this girl fell in love. This I knew I envied, or maybe it was better that I couldn't fall in love... The point is, her love was not a common one, for she fell in love, deeply and truly, with the sky.

There was no doubt that the sky should be loved, but the average person could never love it every day. You know, those days when the clouds block out the sky into a monotonous gray, or when the sky is such a clear blue it looks empty. But this girl cherished it every day without fail. She wanted to touch the sky, to swim in it.

She held about as much envy for me as I did for her, though really she would envy anything that could touch the sky. She was Icharus, she wanted to feel the heat of the sun, unafraid of getting burned. She couldn't seem to see that loving wasn't easy — that maybe the sky wasn't worth it.

You know how planets look like stars without a telescope? It's something that makes me unsure of whether it's a trick of the eye or a trick of the sky. Something about it made me lose my taste for sickly sweet twinkling diamonds in the sky. Sure, the sky was beautiful, but how is it worth it to give your love to something that will never show you the truth, to something that cannot return it?

I suppose I should redact my previous statement, you'll have to go back a ways to find it, but the overthinking mind cares not how far an event is, it will analyze anything it can. Anyway, I've never touched the sky, rather the sky has touched me. The sky was something with which I could coexist, something to appreciate or envy or hate, but one day I found it had taken to me. I'm told that I can be approachable, though I don't really see it, that I watch the world with focused eyes, and that people love to watch someone who watches things with intent. But, the sky was not a person and I was not meant to be loved.

It was a disturbing matter at first, then something I briefly considered, then an embarrassment, and then I thought of her. When she discovered it, I was sure she would hate me, but her eyes were glassy, fragile and beautiful, not hard and hateful. God, how I envied her. I wondered if she could ever hold hate in her heart or if she could only pity herself and look on others with grace and care. I mean, just looking at her face almost drove me to tears.

And yet, somehow, she continued to love the sky. I was left questioning how you could be so certain of something that you might let it drive you towards an unwise decision. How could she love something that could not return it? How could she love something that didn't deserve her? How could she love something so desperately that she would live and die for it, that she would fall out the window with silk and satin just to touch it?

It was the moment before she leaped when I stood in the frame of her door, staring into her beautiful, fragile, glassy eyes, asking her how she could make up her mind so definitely at something so illogical.

A silent tear rained down her cheek as she looked straight into my mind and said, "Even when the world isn't fair or kind, the sky is always beautiful."

"But how can you disregard all of its wrongdoings?" I protested.

She smiled, "Forgiveness is not an easy thing, but it does take the weight off of my soul."

She paused for a moment, then walked to the window, "You've been given so many things that you couldn't possibly take. You are plagued with too many obstacles to handle, but they are set at a definite amount. For me, it is nothing or everything. One is consuming, the other encompassing. The choice is illogical but I must make it. I don't want to be consumed."

With her final sentence she stared into the night, took a deep breath, and blew out the window. I think she dissolved before she left, though of course I never can be certain, but I believe I saw flower petals touch the moon in the gust of wind that she had stained. Lotus blossoms, they looked like lotus blossoms... I think.

With her final fall, I retreated into my mind to make sense of it all. I find no sense, but I do find a sentence. I think it and I say it and it echoes in the corner of every star; look at the girl who fell for the sky. Look at the girl who fell for the sky. What does it mean? For her, for me, for it? Look at her, see her. She fell for something.

The overthinker's conundrum: how to decipher the difference between what you want and what you want to want, or want to want to want... The point is, a busy mind is not for the faint of heart. A busy mind may never decipher what it means to fall for the sky.



Kaitlyn Cordova

THE BEAUTY OF INVENTIONS

MADISON MAIDA

To look throughout history, I mean look at the power of creativity. Personally, I've never understood the importance of art class, especially with many people not going into a focused art career. Not only that, there are a lot of arguments stating how art isn't exactly the most successful or profitable career choice to major in. Yet, art is a huge building block to so many different career options. It is so important to be well rounded in trying to be creative, to be able to express yourself and especially to be creative. I mean just hearing how so many inventions were created like vaccines or heart medication. Fun fact about heart medication: some were actually created by snake venom. Who on earth would just guess that? No, you need a creative and artistic mind

What about math? When people invented math, they may have had to be thinking logically, but also exploring and understanding concepts.

English, don't even get me started especially on topics such as poetry. Some of the greatest stories are known for their creativity, such as Shakespeare, who created a new form of writing called iambic pentameter where the sounds of the words follow the heartbeat. That's really creative. Everything needs art, it's important. Art has been a building block to science, math, english, and so many other subjects. Truly I say, as a world, we should show more appreciation for the concept of creativity and the importance of art.

MAKE YOUR TASTEBUDS SMILE

SOFIA FEBLES

Le menu translated to English is the menu. When we think about a menu we usually think of food, specifically food in a restaurant. What food are we going to order? What am I in the mood for? Do I want to eat healthy, or indulge? I know that these questions run through my head when I'm ordering food, and I'm sure it happens to you too.

In society today, there are many options to choose from when you're hungry. We have fast food, restaurants, bars and delis. Personally, I like going to restaurants. When I go to a restaurant, I know I'm going to get brilliant food that will make my taste buds dance.

To describe my experience with dining out, I would rate it a 7.5 out of 10. When I ate, my happiest was at Texas roadhouse.

The steak they serve is absolutely immaculate and the atmosphere is exciting. When the food is served with everything you picked and wanted, your taste buds start watering. When you decide to take that first bite, your mouth starts to do a little happy dance.

A perfect side dish can make the meal even better. For example, the creamy mash potatoes and steak fries were incredible and delicious with every bite. It's not only about having good and healthy food but about the atmosphere. When I entered the restaurant, I felt like I was in the south, because of all the signs, and the rustic interior. They had great customer service and everyone was smiling.

It felt like home in one way or another. When you have good food and a fun experience, both your taste buds, and yourself start to smile.

THE RUSSELS

MICHELLA PAGGY

In between 37 and 39 Raymore Avenue is a house with a leafless lawn and a perfect family. The Russels consisted of blue-eyed, brown-haired Alice and her bald husband, Dan, and their three little ones, Ethel, Thomas, and Henry. The Russles were well known around their community for always helping out in church and always organizing fundraisers for those in need. They were kind and generous. Everyone knew everything about the perfect family. But what the small town of Greenville didn't know about the Russels is what happens in their perfect house with a perfect lawn.

October 1st was when the first kid, Dean, went missing. Two days later he was found dead with a bloody note in his mouth that read, "Death looms around us". The town was unsettled by his death. . They gathered around Dean's favorite spot, the park, and lit candles in his honor. Dan, being the sheriff, instantly started searching for the killer of the young boy but to no avail. Dean's parents were heartbroken, and his little sister and brother wished he'd just come back home.

On October 5th, Ethal's best friend Josie went missing. Josie was a sweet girl and loved hanging with Ethel. I guess you could say that Ethel took that a bit too literally when Josie was found by the small creek with strangulation marks around her neck and a broken spine. For days, Dan searched for clues. asking her parents and friends questions about her whereabouts and if she said anything about meeting someone. The parents were confused and scared that Josie could've been with someone she didn't know. Her friends cried everytime Dan, or any other police officer tried asking them questions.

By October 25th more than 14 kids around Greenville went missing, creating more deaths than leads for the investigation. The deaths were all different, never like the one prior to it. The 7th kid, Monty, from down the street, had burn marks around his body but Maya, the 13th victim from church was found with a various amount of potassium chloride in her blood.

The town of Greenville went into a state of fear. Schools were canceled, and the town went on lockdown. The streets became bare, and little to no kids peeked their tiny feet outside their doors. Parents took off from work to make sure their kids were safe, and made sure they knew where they were at all times.

On October 31st shocking headlines were in every newspaper around Greenville. The Russel family was questioned for the deaths of 17 young kinds around the small town.

After several days of interviews and grilling interrogations, they admitted to such crimes and were arrested. In one newspaper it read, "Death really was looming over us but not in a way we expected. Dan, Ethel, Alice, Thomas, and Henry Russel weren't the people that the community loved that lived in between 37 and 39 Raymore Avenue with a leafless lawn and a perfect family.

They were D.E.A.T.H.



I HATE YOU

RYLIE PARSONS

Ever since they were little, they hated each other. In kindergarten, he poured water all over her and soaked her clothes.. In elementary school, he would tease her and make fun of her on the playground. He made it a point that he didn't like her. In middle school, he would get his friends to mock her and make her self-conscious. Now in high school, they still hated each other just as much. He hated her and she hated him. That's how it always would be.

When she walked in on the first day of high school, he was in her first period class, science. The teacher told everyone to stand at the front of the class. The teacher said that there will be assigned seats this year. Just her luck, she got sat next to him. This would be a fun year for the two.

A few days passed. He was still just as mean. She still had the same amount of hatred for him. The teacher announced that they will be starting their first project—with their table partners. He asked the teacher if there was any way that he could switch his partner. She got offended but happy he asked because quite frankly, she didn't want to work with him either. The teacher said a firm “No.” as they both sighed. They exchanged numbers for the project and they got started that night. “Wanna just come to my house?” She asked him. “Fine” He said back.

That night was a turning point for them. He was sweet to her. He was respectful to her parents. He made a good first impression. When they got to her room, she couldn't help but look at him. “What has gotten into me?” She thought to herself. He caught himself staring quite a few times as well. Somehow, they got into a conversation about something silly.

“How much money would it take for you to eat a cockroach?” He asked her. They talked and laughed, they barely got a quarter of the project done. This was very unexpected coming from them.

After she woke up in the morning, she made it a point to look nice for him. She didn't know why, something came over her. She was actually excited to go to school for once. He did the same. He did his hair, wore fashionable clothes and he even did skincare, just for her.

Since they were little, he had a crush on her secretly. He was so mean to her because he didn't know how to show his feelings. Now that they had been talking for a while, he felt closer to her. He missed her when she wasn't there and he always wants to talk to her. He regretted not being nice to her all this time.

Weeks passed, they started dating after he confessed his feelings to her. She told him that she felt the same and they were really happy together. In school, everyone knew that they were in love, up until today.

When he walked into school he looked around for her, he couldn't find her. He decided to go to their secret spot to meet up. She was there, but kissing another man.

“I hate you,” he said.

“LAYLA”

THOMAS MCGUIRE

The phone rang an inch away from my head. It was drowned in fuzz, my head sitting in a cloud of my own making. I took another puff, and lazily plucked the phone from the nightstand.

“..yea, hello..?” I answered with a dull drowsiness.

“Yo bro, it’s Kurt. You coming to this party, man? You said you were gonna bring the stuff.” I sunk a little into my couch, my embarrassment flooding my head like a wave.

“Oh crap, yea man. I’ll be there. It’s...it’s your place right..?” I could barely keep my head off the back of the couch, my hand scrubbing my eyes although I hadn’t been sleeping.

“ Yes, you dope. My house in 30 minutes, be there!” Before I could blurt out a response, the screen went black. I looked at the roll of leaf and paper in my left hand, and with an apathy put it out on the tray next to me.

Save that for later, I thought.

I got to the party at 2:42. I was late. I didn’t care. I was the supplier for the night anyway. There must have been 50 people crammed into Kurt’s house. His parents were out of town so, per the cliché, a huge party was thrown. The air of the house hummed with sound. Music pounding from the speakers, footsteps and conversations bouncing in and out the walls. The very walls of the home seemed to heave with a lively breath. The air smelt warm, heavy with food and musk and smoke. If it weren’t for the people, it would’ve been a pleasant feeling. Matt was always chasing someone, so of course there were plenty of chicks around as well as guys we knew from school. I could’ve lived without all of them there.

I sat in the den with Kurtt and a few of his buddies. Kurt was a big guy, and he looked old for his age. Even though he was only 19, he could probably bench a cow if he tried. Big red beard, green eyes and a hearty laugh to match. I liked him, a good friend of mine for many years. It’s the only reason I came really. We all sat in a cloud that clung to our heads, breathing it in with every inhale.

“Yo bro.” Kurt said slowly.

“..yea, wassup man..?”

“This is Jan, and he... brought some stuff too.”

He gestured to a guy to his left. Even high, I thought he was gross. He had a hunch to him that could only be rivaled by a Cheetos Puff. His hair was long and clearly unwashed, which hid under a gray and tattered beanie. His shirt was draped over his ragged frame like loose skin. And when he breathed, the unshaved hairs under his lip stirred this way and that, like the whiskers of some rodent trying to find his way in the dark.

“Wassup man, I hear you're into some of that hard stuff?” I looked at him through the film over my eyes, confused.

“I mean... kinda. Not really though.” He looked almost satisfied with my answer.

“Wanna change that?”

That’s when I noticed what was in his hands. He had a spoon, bent and burnt with a black liquid inside it. He held a lighter underneath it, as it started to bubble.

“Hey man,” I started to say “I’m not into that kinda-”.

Kurt’s massive paw thudded against my chest. “Duuude...” I always hated when he said that word that way.

“Listen man, I’ve known Jan for, like, 2 years now. He wouldn’t steer you wrong. His stuff is clean. And trust me, it’s a trip.”

“I... I don’t know man. Isn’t that stuff, like... bad for your heart?.. Or something?”

I was clutching at straws and I knew it, and so did Jan and Kurt.

“Don’t knock it till you try it?” Jan said slyly.

Kurt was always trying to get me to do stuff I didn’t want to do, but most of the time it turned out right in the end. I held out my hand to Jan, as he and Kurt chuckled in delight. Jan took my arm with a great fervor, and quickly produced a handkerchief. He tied it around my arm and, just as my vein began to bulge, I had a needle in my arm. My body was being pumped with the black, hot stuff. Not long after, they followed suit. We all sat there and waited for the effects to kick in.

That’s when she walked in.

I saw her walk into the doorway, with her black dress held just so around her beautiful form. She held the frame with one hand, which was adorned with silver bracelets and rings. Her raven hair fell gently upon her shoulder, covering one enchantingly blue eye. Her lips were painted a deep red, and had a slight smirk to them.

“How’re you boys doing in here?” Her voice was like velvet, so soft and smooth.

”Fine, fine.” Kurt said, as he stumbled his way off the couch. “Hey man, this is Layla, Jan’s sister and a friend of mine from school.” She walked forward towards me, or floated, and held out a hand.

“Pleasure to meet you.”

“...hi...” I stammered out. She took my hand, and it felt like heat was emitting from her. She was a gorgeous wave of warmth that flowed through all of me. She said something to the other guys, but I wasn’t paying attention. When she began to walk away, she looked back at me with that one ice blue eye, gave me a smile and a wave of her fingers, before her figure disappeared into the mass of party-goers.

I saw her many times after that. It was odd because she always seemed to find me. I didn’t mind, because she made me feel amazing. I wasn’t much for relationships, but she was different. She saw me, unlike anyone else has. Her presence was warm and enticing. I had also just so happened to see Jan a couple times when she was around too. Although I don’t remember hanging out with him, people would tell me I was. I guess I didn’t notice, I only remember Layla. Only Layla.

Speaking of Jan, I had just gone over to his house to grab some stuff from him. Kurt was right, he did have the good stuff. I didn’t speak much to him, just took the stuff and left. I just wanted to get home. The sooner I got home, the sooner I could see Layla. I got home, opened the door to my basement and stumbled for a spoon. Within moments, I had a needle in my arm. I needed to see Layla. This was the only way to see her, and I needed to see her.

“Hey, baby.” Her velvet voice came from my door.

“Come on in.” She came down the steps in that gorgeous black dress, made of the finest of black silks. Each step she took looked like a dance. She looked at me, with that one turquoise eye through long and luscious lashes. I looked back, hopelessly devoted. She put a hand on my shoulder as she laid down next to me. She laid in the hook of my arm, her head resting on my shoulder and her form up against mine. We looked at each other for a long while before either of us said anything.

“You know I love you, right?” she said with that soft and warm tone to her voice.

“Always.” I said back, my voice strained.

She looked at me with that soft and seductive smile, as she layed in my arms, and we both began to drift, in blissful and utter need of each other. Because I needed her.

I was addicted to her.

THE CHERRY TREE

ALISA SANTONASTASI

Emily was a short, skinny, young girl with brunette hair and big green eyes. People would say she lit up any room that she walked into. She had a big heart that was longing for love. She waited patiently as she had always believed in love at first sight. This big heart carried many things she cared about, her family, her dog, her friends, her favorite books, and nature (specifically waterfalls and mountains). But there was something missing.

One of Emily's favorite places to go was the park. When she was younger, she would grab her favorite book, which, at the time was the Hunger Games, and walk through this park that was full of lush green trees, and chunky well fed animals. She would sit under a cherry tree, and read to escape from her overwhelming reality. The park was her safe space, even on rainy days.

On one bright and sunny day in May, she walked through the park and noticed a young blonde boy sitting under her favorite cherry tree. In the seventeen years that she had been going to this park, she had never seen anyone sit under this tree besides her. After all, it was a small town, and she had never seen this person before, yet he seemed familiar. As Emily approached the young boy that was engrossed in a book, she noticed his captivating smile. She wasn't sure if she should talk to him or just leave, but curiosity got the best of her, and she couldn't resist starting up a conversation.

The young boy's name was Ethan. After about ten minutes of talking she discovered they shared a passion for books and nature, specifically waterfalls and mountains. Ethan was charming and had a witty sense of humor. and as they continued to chat she felt like she had known this boy for years although they had just met. She explained to him that she would sit under this cherry tree to read for the last seventeen years. She would come here every day so she didn't have to hear her parents fight. she would go on about how her parents needed a divorce. As long as she had this park, everything would be alright because it was her escape. Ethan invited her to read with him that day, and for several weeks after that he would be in the same spot with Emily's favorite book series, and sometimes flowers, or a snack for them to share. They exchanged numbers and would talk to each other about their day whether it was good or bad. She learned that Ethan moved here with his dad after his mom died, and he was exploring when he came across the beautiful cherry tree that day. He said he couldn't explain it, he just felt like he was meant to be there, so he sat down to read when Emily arrived.

As their friendship blossomed Emily found herself falling for Ethan, and she couldn't help but wonder if he felt the same way. On a slightly chilly day in November where the leaves were starting to brown and the petals on the cherry tree were starting to fall, she finally built up the courage to tell him about her feelings. She brought his favorite snack and drink, and told him to meet her at their spot at sunset. Emily looked into Ethan's bright blue eyes and nervously confessed she had deeper feelings for him and that whenever she looked into his eyes she felt like he was the missing piece to her big heart. To Emily's delight, Ethan's blue eyes sparkled with joy, and he admitted he felt the same way.

Ethan and Emily's friendship turned into a beautiful love story they embarked on countless adventures together, they explored many mountains and went on various hikes that resulted in waterfalls at the end. They shared laughter, tears and everything in between, supporting each other through thick and thin. As time went on their love grew stronger and they celebrated anniversaries with romantic dinners, and sometimes picnics at their spot. They would exchange heartfelt letters and surprise each other with thoughtful gestures. Their love was like a warm embrace, providing comfort and security even in the darkest of times.

A couple weeks after Emily's twenty-third birthday, Ethan decided it was finally time to ask her a very important question. On a warm day in May he told Emily to meet him at their spot at sunset. As she walked up to the cherry tree, she saw Ethan standing in front of the cherry tree wrapped with beautiful white lights. Once she was about three feet in front of him, he knelt down on one knee and said "Emily Grace, will you marry me?"

With tears of joy running down Emily's face, and a shaky voice she said, "Of course Ethan Gray".



TASTE FACTORY

DONOVAN HUNT

Being a critic isn't easy. When you've been doing it as long as I have, you have to focus to really taste the food. To be perfectly honest, food to me is just dull. I've already tasted every piece of food to the point where it's not even enjoyable anymore. It's like the flavors have been sucked out. After all of the restaurants I've been to, I've lost the joy in it.

For all of these reasons, I am retiring. I have enough to provide for my family and I, and then some. My final critique will be of the Twilight Bar. It has the most mixed reviews I have ever seen; some loved eating there, some despised it. I just hope it lives up to my expectations and legacy.

Twilight Bar Critique, From The One and Only:

When I entered the bar I noticed a good number of people horking down their food like there was no tomorrow. In my line of work, that is either a good sign or a bad one. When I was offered the menu I saw the same things I always saw: Fish and chips, caviar, tiramisu, wagyu steak, blah blah blah, But then, something caught my eye

There was something on the drink menu called "The Taste Factory." In the description, there were no ingredients--only the phrase:

"Drink this and enjoy the true magic of the Twilight Bar."

At first it confused me, but the more I looked at it, the more I couldn't resist. When the waiter arrived, I asked for one Taste Factory. I got the drink along with a platter of bread.

When the liquid touched my tongue, I tasted a slight sweetness, but nothing else. It was incredibly disappointing. But then, I grabbed my bread and took a bite. The taste of the bread was incredible. I felt like I was eating bread for the first time again. I consumed piece after piece with no concern for daintiness. The crispness in the crust mixed with the salty soft dough gave me an experience I have never experienced before. By my sixth piece, the feeling faded away. I was back to eating boring bread.

No, I couldn't go back to this lesser living. I called the waiter and with integrity, asked for another Taste Factory and some fish and chips and tiramisu. The man didn't respond, just smiled and walked away. I couldn't handle the waiting. Sweat dripped down my brows as I grew more and more impatient. When the drink arrived, I grabbed it as fast as possible and chugged it down. I sliced a piece of fish and chewed on it.

The taste of batter felt so perfect. And the fish felt so juicy and flaky. It was like I was chewing on a crême filled pastry. How could anyone give this place mixed reviews?! I grabbed a scoop of tiramisu and put it in my mouth. My mouth started frothing from the sheer deliciousness of this tiramisu. The combination of coffee, chocolate, and cream gave me a transcendent experience.

THIS WAS AMAZING. But then again, the feeling went away. The loss of the Taste Factory made everything feel worse. I tried taking another bite of the tiramisu but it physically hurt me to eat it without the Taste Factory. I yelled for the waiter. Screw pleasantries, I needed my Taste Factory. When the man arrived I ordered for five more of them. I didn't even order for more food

Waiting was hell. I could feel my hands itching, then everything started to itch all at once. He brought the drinks, and as soon as I drank one, the itch went away like dust in a breeze. I ate the fish and chips, each bite feeling better than the last. Then I finished my tiramisu. I was satisfied.

Then again it went away. Immediate itching occurred but worse. It felt like I was being stabbed all throughout my body, I drank another and the pain went away again. I then realized that I had no more food to eat. But before I was going to order anything, I could taste the air I breathed in.

The flavor of air was like nothing I could describe, it felt so crisp. I breathed in more and kept doing so until I started hyperventilating. It was one of the most enjoyable moments of my life. More enjoyable than my first concert, my first kiss, or even the birth of my child. This triumphs all of those.

I laughed as loud as I could. I was in euphoria. The feeling went away. NO! That cannot happen again! I chugged two of them as fast as possible. I now started to taste the things I could see. I tasted other people's food. I could even taste the walls. I felt like I was licking them! I looked at my hands and I couldn't help myself. I started licking my hands and oh, it was incredible--like I was tasting well cooked pork. I started chewing. Skin started peeling off, but that's alright, a little blood never hurt anyone.

Before I could achieve true happiness, it went away once more. I started violently coughing. The pain came back. Agony filled my body. I was trapped in a cocoon of needles. I used every ounce of my strength to grab the glass and put it to my lips, when I drank it down a small amount of it spilled onto the floor. I needed EVERY DROP! I licked the floor to get the rest of my Taste Factory. The germs on the ground tasted so good.

When I got up I felt happiness-- nothing can transcend this moment-- but then, I felt something else, something worse. That was my last drink, when it wears out, what will I do? The waiting for the wear off was almost as bad as the pain itself. Then finally I felt nothing again. But no pain occurred, everything just felt dull again. No enjoyment now, the taste of the air was dulled. No, no way that the only thing that gave me happiness is now dulled. Then the pain came back.

I curled over in utter despair and agony. PLEASE END IT! I looked over to the other people in the restaurant: all of them were drinking the Taste Factory and gorging down on food. Others were on the ground. At least I'm not the only one being tortured. 10/10, wouldn't go again.

GLASS HEART

A STORY OF UNREQUITTED LOVE

ETHAN PLACENCIA-NAZAREO

His hair is curly and soft, full of kinks and curls that bounce as he walks. His tan, olive skin. Deep, brown eyes. He is perfect. The way he walks, the way he speaks, the way he exists is perfect. He is talented and successful in all that he does. His work ethic is like no other. The best thing about him is how he cares for me. I don't know if he feels the same about me as I do for him, but I don't care. We are best friends. He means more to me though. I know that it will be hard to love him, not knowing if he will love me back but when I look into his eyes, all things worrisome fade. Let's call him Trevor. Trevor loves sports, hugs, and naps. He likes it when I play with his hair, separating his curls one by one. He has a thing for physical touch. Whether it's playing with my fingers, leaning on my shoulder during long car rides, or simply holding onto the sleeves of my sweater, like a child scared of being lost at the mall. He can be hard to read sometimes. Some days he's just being friendly, but other days it's as if he likes me back. As if he wants me just as bad as I want him. Sometimes we'll be so close that I think we might just kiss, but it never happens.

I want to tell him. It hurts to hold in the truth when I see him everyday. Like a case of proteus syndrome, the truth is growing too big for my body. One day it'll be too big. It will rip me apart. But I can't tell him. It will ruin everything. Absolutely everything.

I can happily say I love Trevor so dearly. He's always on my mind. Every night I generate the same dream, a dream of pure, romantic love between him and I. But every morning I wake up to the same nightmare.

I have his undivided attention now. He stares into my eyes. Nothing but enthusiasm. You can tell he wants to be around me. I love that. He's rambling on and on about some nonsense. It probably isn't nonsense. I should be listening. But I'm distracted. I can't pull away from his eyes, staring at his lips as he talks, enjoying every bit of time I have with him. Cherishing it as if someone will snatch him from me at any minute. Any second. As he talks to me, he fiddles with my hand, interlocking his fingers with mine, then rubbing his finger in the palm of my hand as if he's reading it like a psychic. If only a psychic would tell me what will happen next. I have his undivided attention now. He stares into my eyes. Nothing but enthusiasm. You can tell he wants to be around me. I love that. He's rambling on and on about some nonsense. It probably isn't nonsense. I should be listening. But I'm distracted. I can't pull away from his eyes, staring at his lips as he talks, enjoying every bit of time I have with him. Cherishing it as if someone will snatch him from me at any minute. Any second. As he talks to me, he fiddles with my hand, interlocking his fingers with mine, then rubbing his finger in the palm of my hand as if he's reading it like a psychic. If only a psychic would tell me what will happen next.

I snapback to reality. I only do so because I realize he isn't looking at me anymore. Sound fills my ears. It's noisy, people all around us are talking. I watch his eyes. He's looking at someone. Then she walks by.

Today my heart burns up into nothing. It dissolves within my chest, leaving a void. I'm a void. Nothingness that takes up space. No purpose, no meaning, no love lives in a void. My heart is made of glass. Delicate, transparent, and now shattered. It breaks inside of me, shards of glass bursting through my chest. The glass falls to the ground. It flies everywhere. It cuts my legs as it ricochets off the floor. I'm looking around, expecting everyone to see the broken pieces that are scattered. No one reacts. I notice quickly that only I'm able to see the glass, see the cuts on my body, blood pouring out of the holes in my serrated chest, only I heard the glass break, only I had tears rolling down my face.

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"Hi trevor!" she says.

"Hi.." Trevor says flustered, cheeks warm.

He's looking at her in the way I've only dreamed for him to look at me. She's gorgeous. She looks like a model. Her long, dark hair fell to her waist, her perfectly straight teeth glistens as she smiles. I block out the rest of the conversation. I refuse to hear it. I just want to pick up the pieces of my glass heart and leave. All of a sudden, I hear my name. I blink. Trevor is looking at me, with those sincere eyes he always wears.

"I'll be right back, I'm gonna walk with her for a second, she needs to show me something down the hall." he says.

He squeezes my hand reassuringly- and leaves with her. I sit alone for a few moments before picking up the glass from the floor that I still can only see, and leave and go home. As this story comes to an end, I realize that I cannot write anymore because my emotions have too much to say. Not even a bible of words can be enough to express the love that I once held in my glass heart.

I learned very quickly that no matter how hard I love him, it wouldn't be enough to stop her from walking by. It wouldn't be enough to stop him from looking at her. He will get up and leave me every time. And my glass heart will shatter every time.

MEALS OF MEMORIES

HAYLEE ROBERTSON

Ever since I was a child, the art of cooking had always fascinated me. I remember watching my mother as a young boy. I would watch as she made something from nothing, always done with the mastery of a professional chef. I watched as she slaved over the stove, mixing and chopping and blending and slicing. She moved so quickly it was hard to keep track. Any chance I got I would try and help out, always offering to slice, peel, or do whatever she would allow me to do. The few times my mother would allow me to assist her in the kitchen were the core memories of my childhood. I, unlike other kids my age, never saw the fun in activities like playing an instrument or a sport. I always thought of cooking as my instrument. If played correctly it could become something extraordinary, but with even the smallest mistake it could become disastrous. It was always a thrilling game that few others my age then, or now, understood.

As I got older, I began to realize my talent. I'd never been one for bragging, but when I took my first cooking class in high school, my dish had been mistaken for the example dish prepared by the teacher herself. When I learned I could use this skill in life, I began to prioritize cooking above all academics and extracurriculars. I'd spend hours past sunset slaving over the stove, like my mother had years ago. Shortly after the beginning of my sophomore year of high school, my mother fell fatally ill, and me being the only other occupant of our apartment, bestowed the responsibility onto myself to make sure she was as comfortable as possible.

There wasn't much I could do to help her, but I felt that if I cooked, and I cooked well, I could keep her and the memory of what she once was healthy and strong. I cooked many meals of my childhood for her, hoping the familiar tastes could act as an antidote for her illness, but alas, the disease only spread. More times than not, I cooked macaroni and cheese. It was such a simple dish but it contained memories so strong I had to stop whatever I was doing when I ate it, overwhelmed by memories of my childhood. As my mother's health deteriorated, cooking became my one and only friend. I cooked dish after dish, some miserable disasters, some extraordinary. I began to dream of one day calling a restaurant my own, of happy families waltzing in to have a lovely dinner together.

I thought of how food critics would swoon over the dishes we would prepare for them, and how customer after customer would rave to their friends about how amazing their dinners were.

My mother had always had a similar dream. She would put up posters of famous restaurants, and always kept track of the open spaces in case we ever stumbled upon enough money to start our own restaurant. I felt that sharing the same dream as her would help her get better, but as before, it did not.

My mother passed on a scorching day in June. It was the hottest day of the year so far, but to me it felt as if I was walking through an icy day in January. The funeral only consisted of a small number of people; me, my mother's brother and his family, and a few of my mother's coworkers from before she fell ill. The service was short, and it had been decided that afterwards our party would go to the local diner to reminisce on memories for a little while together. Personally, I wasn't the fondest of the idea, but I was very curious to learn more about my mother for she was always very secretive about her life before me. When we got situated in our seats, and began browsing the menus, I immediately searched for their mac and cheese. I had wanted to reminisce in my memories while I ate, but the more I thought about it, the more I resented the idea. I swam in the memories of the dish so often that if I didn't come up for air every once and awhile I feared I might drown. So I picked another dish, the ribeye steak. The dish resonated with me in a way a simple dish shouldn't. Maybe it was because of the grief I felt, or just because of my tastebuds, but the dish made my day just a little better. Now, instead of thinking of the immense grief I felt on that day, I thought of how spectacular my steak was, and I liked to think that was a gift sent from my mother.

I worked extensively after that. Without my mother at home waiting for me, I had no real reason to return to the apartment except for sleep and showers. My life for the next few years became a blur, a wondrous blur of cooking, cooking, cooking. I took up a job at the local restaurant and quickly worked my way up the ladder. Soon I was managing multiple different locations. I was very happy with my work, but I was never quite satisfied. The dream of owning my own restaurant never faded.

If anything, it became stronger as more and more time went on. I worked harder, moved up farther, until eventually I controlled the entire chain of restaurants. I made lots of money. Enough that, if I wanted to, I could quit at that very moment and start my own business. But I knew I still had lots to learn, so I stayed. I did regular checks on the restaurants. I would sit down and eat a meal and talk to the workers.

One day, I sat down at my usual spot at a location, on the island by the window facing the highway. I knew my job was to try different dishes, but I always settled for my usual turkey sandwich and coffee. On this day, I sat waiting for the waitress to come take my order, when the most beautiful lady I'd ever seen sat down beside me.

"I'm not sure if you've dined here before, or if you even fancy desserts, but may I recommend the chocolate cake? This place does it like no one else!" she said, excitement pouring out of her like she had been waiting her whole life to make the suggestion to someone. She was very tall with short brown hair cut at a downwards slope, and dark green eyes. She was dressed in a light blue blouse without sleeves, although it was near freezing outside, and she had on ripped jeans with patches over the tears. I'd gotten a few suggestions on my trips to the restaurants before from Sumerians, and normally I would laugh and tell them my position, but today, I decided it was time for a change. The waitress came over, a familiar smile on her face, "Hmmm, let me guess. Turkey sandwich, no tomato, with coffee?" "Actually," I had responded, "I think I'm going to try something new today." That day, me and my now wife of 35 years, feasted on chocolate cake together. The cake was delicious, but her smile is what made my day a little sweeter.

We started meeting weekly for our chocolate cake, and although I never had a sweet tooth, I began to try different dessert recipes. To me, cooking was always making meals, never desserts. I vowed to myself that if I ever started a restaurant, I would have a beautiful dessert menu for the customers. Not long after our first meeting, me and Evelyn began dating. She gave me something to come home for, which I thought wasn't necessary after my mother passed, but she taught me how important home was. It wasn't just a place to rest, it was a place to grow, to open up without feeling judged. I began to love being home with her, and I changed my hours to spend more time with her.

We began making renovations to my old apartment I grew up in. I had left it neglected when my mother passed, and it looked as if it had stepped out of the 1930's. I cooked for her my cherished meals, and she was always the first to taste my desserts.

I found the art of desserts very enchanting, I loved the bright colors and flavors. It turned out Evelyn was an amazing decorator, and if decorating cakes was an art, which I believe it is, she was Picasso. With her help, we began a small business through our apartment, making desserts for whoever saw our ads in the newspapers or posters on the streets. When we married several years later, we had more desserts than was necessary. We sent home with every guest cookies and cakes and pies and brownies, all homemade.

The only dessert that we didn't make ourselves from scratch was our wedding cake. Some complained it was underwhelming, but we saw the beauty in it. Our "wedding cake," if you could even call it that, consisted of just two slices of chocolate cake from the diner we had met at many moons ago.

After our wedding, our lives went on as they did before. We went on our honeymoon, of course. We went to a far away tropical place to celebrate our first few days of marriage before returning back to our home in New York. Life continued as it would for any happily married couple. We went on dates, we took annual vacations, and a few years later, we were expecting a child. Me and Evelyn decided on Joseph if it was to be a boy, and Katherine if it was a girl. I had a lot of fun during the pregnancy, I would eagerly wait for Evelyn to tell me a craving she was having, which was normally two food items I would never even think to combine. Then the game began, it became my job to combine the two foods in a way that a not-pregnant person would deem delicious.

We found a few combinations that were oddly delicious, like pickles and peanut butter, which I turned into a sandwich or wrap, or jelly and mozzarella cheese, which I made into simple mozzarella sticks with a side of jelly. It was such a fun time for both of us, and even now, years later, we still eat these meals together.

A few months later, we welcomed Katherine into the world. It was quite a stressful time when she was born. I even took a break from my job, which I had never done before, to help Evelyn out. It took a little while, but eventually, we became what I would like to think of as a perfect little family.

Little Katie grew quickly, and try as I might, I couldn't get her to cherish cooking like I did at her age, instead she cherished the art of music. I'd sit on the couch for hours as she played piano for me and my wife, or as she tackled the guitar. She was like the Gordon Ramsey of music. She did, though, very much enjoy the weird food combinations we had discovered before she was born. We began to call these meals Katies Katastrophes, although they were anything but. When Katy turned three, Evelyn became pregnant with our second child, a boy named Paul.

Paul was a very shy kid, and usually kept to himself during and outside of school. Although I sometimes feared he wouldn't make many friends, I was overjoyed when he came up to me one day while I made our dinner, a soup that Evelyn always raved about whenever we had it, and asked if he could help me.

He was a very quick learner, and he favored cooking breakfast foods, which he said was because he loved to cook as the sun rose. We never complained, because that meant we got to wake up to the smell of sizzling bacon daily. When Paul came of age, I got him a job working at one of the diners I managed, and like me, he quickly moved up. He took all of the cooking classes I took in my teen years and more. He used cooking as a form of comfort. If cooking was an instrument, he was Vivaldi. I had always cooked every meal for my family, but I had no problem stepping back and allowing my son to take the reins, if that's what he wished for. I glowed with pride for my son whenever I saw him cooking. He moved so quickly it was hard to keep track. In a way, he reminded me of my mother.

We went on like this for many years. I kept my position managing the diners, Evelyn continued to work as an elementary school teacher, and we watched as Katherine became a well renowned musician, and Paul became a professional chef at one of the best restaurants in the city.

When I turned sixty five, I retired from managing the diners, although I still visited them regularly. I spent a few years at home, everyone thought I had retired and this was the end of my career, but I considered this time off as just a little vacation. Although I wouldn't call it a vacation exactly, I spent much of my time looking for any abandoned lots or spots I could transform into the restaurant I had always dreamed of.

Eventually, I found what I was looking for, a small location, on one of the side streets of the city, hidden away from tourists and time square. A place where the main customers would be locals, I hoped. It took time, and it took everything I had not to tell Evelyn or the kids. I had talked about this dream I had so much, it became one of their dreams too. Finally, after about a year, I had transformed the small abandoned spot into a cozy vintage diner.

Like how my apartment once was, it looked like it was from the 1930's. It was cozy, with an island for people to sit at and enjoy coffee with new and old friends. It had booths that were colored a faded red although they were new, and there were many pictures from the time of my childhood until now. I dedicated an entire wall to my loved ones, an entire section to my mother, a section to my wife, and a section to each of my kids. And although I loved the diner, my favorite part was the menu. Although the menu looked like any old menu, to me it was a story of my life. My childhood, or the kids section, consisted of the basics, of course, but it also had my homemade mac and cheese, the exact original recipe my mother would make for me. There were a few steak options, but the ribeye was the one I felt connected with. I included the exact steak and sides that I had all those years ago when I was grieving the loss of my mother, and realized I must continue with my life. I had sandwich options, specifically the turkey sandwich with no tomato I would eat regularly during my time as the restaurant manager. The dessert section was like the one I had dreamed of, many kinds of cakes, cookies, pies, and other sweets, but at the top, in bold letters was our signature chocolate cake. There was a section for people willing to try something new, which I, of course, called Katies Katastrophes. And of course there was the breakfast menu, including all of the specific dishes Paul would cook for us every morning.

The only part of this beautiful restaurant that troubled me was the name. How could I think of something to describe the feelings I have for this place? After many nights of thinking, I decided on the only name that I thought could sum up all these years in a way people would be able to recognize. The name was simple, something anyone could think of. Just my first name and what this place was about, but to me, it was exquisite: Mark's Meals of Memories.

A SECOND CHANCE- TO JELLY

JILLIAN QUELLER

the first day we met, you welcomed me into your kitchen. i was shocked and honored. i'd never met a chef with an energy and passion quite like yours.

the first item on our menu was one of your recipes. grilled cheese with apples, mustard, and gouda cheese on the sandwich. it seemed like such a weird combination at first. i was hesitant, but i trusted you and tried it anyways. it was delicious; i absolutely loved it. i told everyone i could about that grilled cheese. they thought it sounded weird too, but i assured them they would think differently if they had tried it. regardless, i didn't really care what they thought. all that mattered to me was how excited i was to have cooked it with you and tried something new.

second on our menu was a recipe we found online for eggs benedict. you were in charge of the hard part which was poaching the eggs. i was in charge of the hollandaise sauce. i thought i had followed the recipe perfectly but when we tried it there was too much lemon juice. it was much too sour and you quickly became sour too. only the second dish and i'd already messed things up. i tried to fix it. i said i'm sorry over and over again. we both knew that wasn't enough. you didn't want to cook with me again for a while.

for a while we only shared occasional store-bought snacks together. stale pretzels, half-melted mochi, seeded grapes.

then, after many months, you decided to trust me in your kitchen once more. i was so grateful for this chance. during this time apart i hoped i'd become a better chef. i needed to make things right this time. we made our third dish. together, we decided to make two different types of crostini. one sweet with strawberries and creme and one savory with onions, peppers, and balsamic glaze. we did each step together to avoid any mistakes. it came out perfectly. when working together, we made this amazing recipe that balanced our palettes the way we balance each other.

now, your mother's pasta recipe, baked brie, a beautiful rosh hashanah challah, honey truffle chicken, and even soup wontons.



IT LEAKS THROUGH

MAHREEN ANWAR

Sun beams illuminated the room, filling it with a soft, warm glow. Love filled the atmosphere as the family shared their time together, enjoying every bite of food, every sip of tea, and every minute that went by. Though not many words were exchanged, they were all content with the simple luxury that was their quality time. The act of sitting together, and indulging in fried snacks and warm tea was common in their culture, and the tradition had transcended countries, continents and generations. The time would vary, following the sun and its path, its usual allotment being just before sunset. In the warmer seasons they would sit in the backyard, gathered around a small table, taking advantage of the beautiful weather. When the cold came along, they would huddle in their cozy living room, and share blankets on the sofa. Regardless of what the time of year was, the memories made were some of the best that the family shared.

In theory, this hour that the family spent together were moments that created a strong bond between them. And occasionally they were. However, when compared to the events that occurred during the rest of the day, the beautiful, warm memories were sometimes easily forgotten.

The relationship between the children and the parents was interesting to say the least. For the children, trying to make it through the day without their parents criticizing every detail of their lives was a constant uphill battle. Though home was supposed to be a safe haven, in theirs, they were always on edge. Their blood pressure spiked when in conversation with their mother and father, as they were perpetually waiting to be scolded for simply living their lives.

Their parents found nothing wrong with this. Where they were from, this mental pressure that was put on children was passed down, just as their tea time was. To them, their children's lives were like plays, and they wrote the acts. The idea that maybe their son and daughter would grow to want to make their own decisions about their own lives was a concept that was absolutely foreign. Their controlling tendencies were something that they thought made them successful parents. They had a strict conformation of what they wanted their children to be, and they would not compromise on that ideal, even if it was at the detriment of the children themselves.

The only relief that the family had felt, the only time that they all could breath, was during that sacred hour before sunset. In that hour, all grievances were ignored, and the love that hid underneath all the tension, and the hurt, and the doubt, and the control, it peeked through. It peeked through just enough for the children to sense it, and for them to assure themselves that there still was some connection between their family, and that maybe, just maybe, it wasn't all poison. The tea was pure. It was made with care, with the best ingredients, and with family in mind. It was like an elixir that cured every ailment that could possibly harm their dynamic. It was the plaster that mended all of the breaks and distance in their bond.

But overtime, the bad outweighs the good. And overtime, the poison leaks through the cracks. It drips slowly, but surely, and once it does, no amount of tea can stop it. It makes its presence known, and it infiltrates that one reserved hour of the day. It creeps into the food, and makes the fried snacks go soggy, and the once pure tea bitter. It infects everything it comes into contact with, and does irreversible damage. And when the children consume these foods, it leaves a terrible taste in their mouths. It makes them nauseous, anxious, and delirious. It starts to absorb their being. It controls them, it breaks them. It kills them.

When grieving their late son, they sat together, the three of them, just before sunset. On the table were fried snacks that remained untouched. In each of their hands was a cup of tea. It was deceiving. The drink looked calm, unassuming, almost as pure as it was before. A look of regret was stuck upon the parents face. It seemed that maybe, possibly, they would finally end their years of toxicity, and fix the walls of their dynamic. But the daughter, she knew better. She knew that no matter how hard they tried, the layer of hurt was too thick. They wouldn't be able to develop the tools to stop them from continuing their path of destruction. She knew that there was always going to be poison behind those walls. And she knew that there was always the impending doom of the hate dripping through, and poisoning their tea.

THE BEST THING I'VE EVER EATEN

TERRANCE DEEGAN

There I was on a Valencian farm with no prior cooking experience with an old spanish family, who knew a whole of five english words, trying to help cook paella for thirty people.

First we walked the farm finding the freshest peas to pick. They were between six and twelve inches long with dark green softly textured pods. About five of us surrounded a table ripping the peas to threes and putting them into bowls.

We then surrounded a massive pan whose diameter was probably six feet. We watched as the master chef slid the most delicious looking chicken I have ever seen into the pan as it prepared to be cooked. The chicken bathed in a sizzling golden oil till it too turned a glowing golden brown. The smell of the beautiful bathing chicken spread throughout the vicinity of the farm overloading my senses creating a sudden sense of hunger.

As the chicken continued to cook, we poured the previously picked peas into the pan, along with tomato sauce to give the chicken, and the soon to come rice, an irresistible sweet and savory taste. I mixed and flipped the food in the pan like a witch mixes her poisonous potions. The food snapped, crackled and popped in the oil like the famous Rice Crispy cereal does in milk. The sizzling and popping continued as I stirred the food to the point where oil began to shoot out at me, burning my hand, neck and face as well as staining my clothes.

We added the rice which was soon to turn a nice looking golden brown like the chicken. The rice, the chicken and the vegetables sizzled away as the chef added the final touches to the meal. The rest of us set up the 20 foot long table preparing for what was to be an incredible meal.

When it was time we all got up and surrounded the pan taking plates full of paella, saying "gracias" to the very lovely Spanish family that invited us to their home for this meal.

While the food was one of the greatest things I have ever eaten, it was more the love and authenticity that went into creating it that made it stand out compared to many other things I have eaten.

For an inexperienced chef I would say I did a deluxe job for one of my first times cooking.



BREAD AND WINE

ANNMARIE KOSAK

“Whoever eats of this bread will live forever...”

Sunday Mass, I tend to tune it out. It’s not like I denounce God. Religion just isn’t what it was like before. For some people, it’s all they have, but to me it’s just holding everyone captive.. They could be starving on the street and they’d just start praying as if it would fill their stomachs. I never understood that part of faith.

All there is to eat is the bread and wine from the church. They get the most supply of food since it’s for “religious purposes”. And because they’re so “giving”, they offer up bread to the people weekly.

People line up outside the church doors to collect their food for the week. Of course, the food doesn’t come for free. We hand them slips of paper, each representing an hour of labor.

Body and blood for bread and wine. That’s the idea. We work the land and get a loaf we broke our backs to make.

Ten slips will earn you a small loaf of bread and a cup of wine, barely enough to last a day. Even the hardest workers only end up with four loaves in the end. Then they work themselves to the grave. I don’t work that hard, usually earning two or three loaves.

“Whoever eats of this bread will live forever...”

I don’t know who said that, but it’s a load of crap. I’ve been eating their bread for months and I still feel just as close to death. But you haven’t seen hell until you’ve seen the residences.

It takes everything in me to look away as I walk past. It’s mostly children who are thinned out and lying in the gutters. Some of them are still alive, uttering prayers. They would’ve been better off trying to lap up the sewer water than begging for God’s forgiveness. I can’t afford to feed all of the hopeless souls. If I give in to one of them, I’m sure I’d give in to the rest. And before I know it, I’ll end up being the one drinking sewer water through a straw.

A small hand hits my boot. I look at him. His arm lies across my foot. It looks thin enough to snap. His hair is overgrown and mangled at the ends. Dirt collects at his fingertips, encasing his hand in a blanket of dust. The edges of the rag he wears are frayed and the sole of his left shoe is missing. His pale lips quiver. I lean closer to listen.

“Give us... our daily... bread... bread...”

I don’t understand. How can he be praying at a time like this?

“Bread... Give us... bread...”

I look away.

“Bread...”

To give my bread would be giving up my life. But who am I to play God, deciding who lives or dies? I pick up his hand off my foot, placing half a loaf of bread into his palm. I can’t afford to give it all away.

The next week I couldn’t look away from the children. Their cries hadn’t fallen on deaf ears, so how can I go on living with myself if I let them starve? I start with only giving half a loaf. Then a whole one to a kid. Before I knew it I was giving all of my bread to help them.

The next week, I wasn’t able to work enough hours to get any bread. I was too exhausted to even get out of bed. I fell into that familiar trap—letting feelings take over. Allowing for empathy to beat survival.

I stare at my ceiling. I go to grab my cup of wine. Just lifting my hand fatigues me. I knock the cup over, spilling it onto my clothes. I try to bend my neck over to lap up the water from my shirt before it soaks through. No matter how hard I think about moving, I can’t. There is nothing I can do to stop myself from starving. There is no one I know who will offer me bread. No one who would work an extra hour to provide me with wine. All I can do now is pray.

And so I did.

CONCEPT OF LOVE

MACKENZIE LEDERER

I swore myself off the thought and concept of love a long, long time ago- ever since my first heartbreak, when my parents got divorced. I grew up with the idea that love was broken, and only getting married would further prove that. The idea of love has scared me since I got sat down on the couch a short twelve years ago by my two parents, saying they do not love each other anymore, that they cannot be together, that our family was broken, and there was no fixing it, whatsoever. It's been years since that, and obviously I've moved on, well sort-of. However, the concept of the divorce wasn't actually the reason for my ban of love, but it was instead the state of my mother after the divorce. I had to take care of her for months on end. She was in a crumbling, lasting depression, and it made me realize I could and would never feel like that, especially if it was because of a man. A gross, unfunny, creature that is a man. So for the next decade of my life, it would be mostly dry of any romance, except for the mild hookups that would occur and the tiny work crushes that would fade in and out. And that was that, and it made me content. Until him.

Ever since I had started the new “big girl” job, I had no time for a single thing. Whether that be hanging out with my friends, or even simply just doing something for myself, I couldn't, and I didn't. This new job, however, didn't just bring me long, sleepless nights at the office, or no social life, it also brought me him. “Him” meaning my coworker/boss/person I made eye contact with once and haven't stopped thinking about since. It's weird though, I've never felt the attraction like this with anyone else. Not a simple hookup attraction, but a dating attraction, an “I want to marry you and have your kids sort of attraction.” And I've known him for maybe two days. At first glance, I knew I was in trouble. The way he looked at me, well not at me, but at the computer screen in front of himself. The way his eyes twinkled at the screen and his hair that fit perfectly with his facial structure. It was love at first sight. If he even looked in my direction. From the moment I laid eyes on his face, those eyes were scarred forever. I swore myself off love, but what if it's right, I told myself. What if this is it. No, definitely not, definitely, definitely not.

Everyday since that first day of seeing him, I was a mastermind, trying to get him. Trying to get him to like me. Trying to get him to even look in my direction. Whether it be taking the same path to work, (as an accident, of course) or memorizing his bathroom trips so I could go at the same time as him, I'm pretty sure I had gone psychotic. Because nothing would work. There were the friendly “hellos and how are yous” as if we are just coworkers and not destined to be together. It was obviously not reciprocated and it was known I liked him. I think he honestly was scared of me, at this point. Nothing worked, for a long, long time. Until it did. After months of pining for this blue-eyed, brunettes man's attention, I finally got the hint to stop. So I did. I finally realized maybe I am banned from the concept of love. Maybe I am supposed to be alone. Maybe my parents divorce made me who I am today. I should've protected my peace like I've done this past decade. I should've known I wasn't actually capable of love for once in my life. I should've known that all my reasons for my ban of love were because of this exact reason.

Until all of that was a complete lie, and he started chasing me the same way I did, all those months prior. “And that's pretty much it, guys, that's how I met your daddy.” I say. “Tell it again, mommy, again!” my daughter yells as she looks up to me with the same eyes I fell in love with a short twelve years ago.



THE ROAD

JACQUELYN RUGGIERO

The street had sat empty for years, but it was darker on that night. Colder. More menacing, and the fog that was always there was thicker. It was a street that led somewhere surely, but one could never be sure where it led. It was something that had a presence, as if it were alive. It was an evil street, and anyone who had ever seen it felt that way.

In the middle of the street on that particular night, there was a cat. The cat had huge eyes and dark fur, but it was impossible to mistake for a cute cat due to the unnatural air that surrounded it. It was a strange little thing and it liked to play with its food. The cat was always skulking around, and its eyes were the only part of it that you could see in the darkness. Lazily stretched out, the cat tormented a dead bird to amuse itself. The cat probably shouldn't have been in the middle of the road, but it was, and that was okay because it was that cat on that night. The darkest night of the year in a month built on the bones of the dead. This was the cat's favorite night of the year. The night of the year where the cat got free rein to do what it pleased.

The cat had sat on that road for hours, waiting for something to entertain it. The moon's glow was barely visible through the clouds that covered it. Eventually the cat heard a car coming and instantly the cat became more alert. The cat rolled onto its back and started meowing pitifully in an attempt to get the person to stop driving. When the car got closer, the driver spotted the cat's bright eyes and immediately slowed the car down. That was a horrible mistake to make on that night with that cat but the man was none the wiser to what the cat was. The person that got out of the car was a man wearing a black coat, he was balding, and the hair he did have was turning gray. The man had a tense expression and he had the look of someone who carried the weight of the world on their shoulders. The cat instantly recognized who the man was and it made the cat feel an evil sense of glee. The cat started purring loudly and when the man spoke he did so in a quiet voice as if he were afraid someone would overhear him. The man's anxiety was obvious and the longer the cat looked into the man's eyes the more the cat knew everything about him. The man wasn't innocent and the cat knew that.

The man looked less and less anxious after standing there, and after a while he decided to sit in the road with the cat. In the back of his mind the man probably felt that something was off about the cat, but the man was too tired and beaten down to care. The cat took advantage of the man's dark mood and started rubbing its head on the man's arm. This made the man get a bit sad and he started petting the cat. After sitting there in silence for what could've been hours or minutes the man decided to speak to the cat. He started confessing everything he'd ever done, but in hindsight it was a pointless thing to do.

The cat already knew the story and how it ended which is why they were both in the middle of the street on that night. The cat stopped purring and just stared at the man, into his soul, and what the cat saw made it deeply disappointed in this man. The man had given up everything out of anger and he'd never recovered from his selfish decisions.

The man looked up at the sky and the cat took that as a chance to do what it needed to do. The cat strolled slowly towards the opposite direction the man's car was going and let out a loud meow directed to the sad man still sitting in the street and looking up at the sky. The man turned toward the cat and sighed, because the man may be stupid but he had realized that the thing that was staring at him with glowing red eyes and shadows swirling around it could only mean one thing.

"Is it really that way?" the man asked but the cat just kept staring at him, staying silent.

Eventually the man decided to stand up and walk slowly towards the cat. When the man reached the cat he looked down at it and there was a grim resignation in his eyes. After a small pause the man kept walking. The wind started howling and the trees shook but the man continued on until he reached the point where the fog was heaviest. He turned around to stare at that cat who was still watching him.

"Tell her I'm sorry," the man said.

The cat went still for a moment and then slowly nodded, accepting his request. The man turned back around and walked into that cloud of fog with his back hunched and shoulders sagging. After the man was gone, the cat watched the fog for a few moments and then looked at the car ruining its perfect road. The cat hissed at the car and it exploded. When the cat was happy with the appearance of the street again, it sat down to resume playing with the dead bird.

A noise came from the woods and the cat, suddenly agitated again looked up.

"Cerberus," the woman said.

"Hades," the cat replied.

PINKIE'S COLORFUL HALLOWEEN

KATELYN GYASI

In a town called Prismville lived a very unique and colorful community. With friendly people, bright skies, all the vibrant painted houses, and the colorful attire the people loved to wear, Prismville was almost never dull. Here in Prismville lived Pinkie, a soft-hearted seven year old girl who used to go by her actual name, Penelope. That was until she realized how much of a connection she felt to her favorite color, pink. It is happy-spirited, sweet, cutesy, and full of love--just like her. Pinkie's adoptive mother was her teacher, Miss Rainbow. An energetic, scattered, kind, and optimistic lady she was. Miss Rainbow was the teacher of the 2nd grade Class of Colorfulness, and the runner of most clubs and organizations in Prismville. The classes, organizations, and clubs Miss Rainbow ran based mostly around helping townspeople find themselves and what made them special. Discovered just 6 years ago by Miss Rainbow when she first moved to town, it was the only way to be free from Prismville's curse.

The curse of Prismville took away the color from what was once known as the most colorful place on earth. It took away every citizen's color, memories of color, and ability to see colors. For a while, townspeople had skin and clothing in grayscale, and vision in grayscale. If you were lucky, the curse only affected you partially. Pinkie was one who was especially lucky. The curse did not affect Infant Pinkie at all. For years, any mention of color here had you deemed as crazy and shunned away. But after adopting Penelope and getting a job as a 2nd grade teacher here, Miss Rainbow soon discovered secretly, through observation of her daughter and students, how to reverse the curse. She soon shared her discovery with the town, and this led to the new Prismville--colorful, and almost back to rainbow roots. And it became more and more every day.

Act 1

Today is Halloween in Prismville. Miss Rainbow's Class of Colorfulness is all decorated for the occasion; Halloween-themed posters and drawings on the wall, jack o'lanterns on every table, different types of candy at the front table by the chalkboard. The students are talking amongst each other, all dressed in different costumes.

Pinkie: (Cheerfully) I'm so excited, guys.

Blucy: Me too!

Greenessa: Me three!

Greenessa: (Looks around) Hey Pinkie, did you draw those Halloween posters?

Pinkie: (Bashfully) Yes. Me and mommy drew them together.

Greenessa: They're so good.

Blucy: Yeah.

Pinkie: Thank you.

Blucy: (Disappointed) Unlike my costume. (sighs) I'm supposed to be a dolphin, but everything looks wrong. (Tears start coming out of Blucy's eyes.)

Greenessa: (Nervous) Wait, don't cry! Your costume is not bad!

Pinkie: (Comforting) I really like your costume, Blucy. It's cute, pretty, and shiny.

Blucy: (Sniffles) (Shyly) You really mean it?

Pinkie: Yes.

Blucy: (Wipes tears) Thank you... I love your costume too. It's so cute.

Pinkie: (Bashfully) Thank you.

Pinkie: And Greenessa's is cute too.

Greenessa: (Awkwardly) (blushing) Heh-heh. Thanks.

Pinkie: Mommy has a lot of fun things planned today. I can't wait!

(Just as Pinkie was saying that, Miss Rainbow enters the classroom dressed as a rainbow clown. She skips to the front of the room and begins to talk amongst all her students.)

Miss Rainbow: (Cheerfully) Good morning, everyone! Happy Halloween!!!

(The students cheer and clap.)

Miss Rainbow: Halloween, a holiday known for its spooky-scariness. But, it's also a day where we all dress up and express our individuality--something that could grant us all our special colors!

Redeve: (Shouting) Like red!

Miss Rainbow: Yes, Redeve. Like red.

Redeve: Yeah! Check out my cool devil costume, everyone! Nothing can top this!

(Students stare at Redeve's devil costume and go "Oooh!")

Blucy: (Sad again) (sigh).

Kaiden: (Rolls eyes) She wears devil horns everyday. I don't see a difference.

Redeve: Shut it, "Colorless". You can't even see it right!

(Laughing) Hey, none of the colorless kids could even put on any costume without it turning gray! Sucks to suck!

(Then a lot of the colorless students in their grayscale costumes frown.)

Miss Rainbow: Redeve! Be compassionate before I send you to the principal!

Redeve: Aww, Come on, Miss Rainbow. Let it go for a day, It's Halloween!

(Miss Rainbow sighs, tries to ignore Redeve's comment, and continues talking to the class.)

Miss Rainbow: (Happily) Anyways, all of your costumes are very lovely! I have planned special Halloween party activities for you guys today, and we're not going to do any work.

(A majority of the students cheer again)

Miss Rainbow: Now, before we get started, I have a special announcement to make! Gloria got her special color, indigo, yesterday, within just 3 days of her color-searching week! Let's all give her a round of applause!

(Many students clap and whistle.)

Gloria: (Smiling) You guys can call me "Indigloria" now.

Redeve: Nobody cares about Indigloria, It's Halloween!

Indagloria: (Sad) Hmmph.

Redeve: Get the fun started, Miss Rainbow!

Miss Rainbow: I-

(Then, oddball boy, Tealandon, who's been silent the whole time, moves from the wall he's been standing at and was completely camouflaged with.)

Tealandon: Yeah!

(Students scream.)

Tealandon: (Gleefully) Halloween's the best holiday ever! I finally get to use all these camouflage costumes I made for everywhere in Prismville!

Redeve: See? Sandbox Kid knows what I'm talking about!

Tealandon: (Gleefully) I love traumatizing people!

Redeve: Me too!

(Redeve and Tealandon high-five.)

Miss Rainbow: Children-

Redeve: And I'm ready to spook everyone!

(Mischievously) Hey guys, have you heard that Prismville's curse might just return this Halloween?!

(Many students start to whimper from this comment, filled with uncertainty and sadness.)

Miss Rainbow: (Angry) Redeve! That's enough!

(Reassuring) Students, it is not true. Once you get your color, it's with you forever and the curse is not coming back. Redeve, I don't think you would enjoy it at all if you lost your color.

(Redeve pictures it for a second and flinches.)

Redeve: That would be horrible...

Miss Rainbow: Now you see.

Anyhoo, let's get this party started!

Then Miss Rainbow put on famous Halloween music and began the fun Halloween activities. There was pumpkin carving, Halloween bingo, a mummy wrap challenge, and many more games. The class also shared lots of candy.

Act 2

After school, Miss Rainbow takes Pinkie and her best friends, Greenessa and Blucy somewhere for an interesting version of trick-or-treating. Redeve comes along too, to bother them.

Pinkie: Mommy, where are we going?

Miss Rainbow: (Singing tone) You'll see, Pinkie! We're almost there!

Redeve: (Sneaks up from behind Greenessa) BOO!

Greenessa: AAAAAAH!

Blucy: (Annoyed) Seriously Redeve? That's like the 5th time today.

Redeve: (Laughing) And it's funny 'cause one of you three jumps every time. Wimps!

(Pinkie and Greenessa frown. Blucy groans. The group continues walking.)

Miss Rainbow: (Singing tone) We're here!

(The kids look in awe. The place Miss Rainbow led them to was cave-like. It looked almost like a real cave; wide, long, hollow, and dark inside with a rough exterior.)

Miss Rainbow: (Happily) We're going to play the Candy Cave game!

Pinkie: How do we play?

Miss Rainbow: It's simple. Inside that cave are scattered pieces of candy in all different locations. The person who finds the most wins!

Greenessa: (Frowning) Miss Rainbow, this is a big safety hazard.

Miss Rainbow: (Lighthearted) Which is why I have all these flashlights and we're all going as a group. I'm not that scattered!

(Just as Miss Rainbow was about to flick on all the flashlights, all the backs came off and all the batteries started rolling down the cave.)

Miss Rainbow: NO! (chases after batteries)

(Miss Rainbow kept running and running, and tumbling, and crashing, chasing after those batteries. Soon, the kids couldn't see her anymore.)

Pinkie: ...Mommy?...

Greenessa: (face palms) Oh my.

Redeve: Welp, beat you wimps to the end!

(Redeve dashes far in the cave and starts grabbing candy.)

Blucy: (Sad) We're NOT wimps!

Uggh! Girls, we can't let her win this!

Greenessa: (Scared) Are you saying we go in?...Did you not just see what just happened to Miss Rainbow?...

Pinkie: I'm going in 'cause I need Mommy.

Blucy: Come on, Greenessa.

Greenessa: Well...(takes a deep breath) Alright...

(The three girls walk through the cave together. Blucy is mostly focused on grabbing candy. Pinkie is focused on finding Miss Rainbow. Greenessa does a little bit of both, feeling terrified the whole while. This goes on for a couple of minutes.)

Blucy: Look girls, I found 17 already. I think I might actually beat Redeve at this.

Greenessa: Speaking of which, where is Redeve? We haven't seen her the whole time.

Pinkie: I don't know...

Blucy: (pointing) Oh, she's over there.

Pinkie: (GASP) All her color's gone!

Greenessa: HUH?!

Blucy: Redeve lost her special color?!

Serves her right for being such a jerk to everyone!

Pinkie: I-I thought our colors stayed forever...

Blucy: Hey Redeve, I guess karma finally hit you. Hah.

(But Redeve doesn't respond.)

Blucy: Redeve? Are you okay?

(Then Blucy pokes Redeve, but what she feels isn't flesh. Redeve is not only colorless, but stone-frozen and hard like a statue. She stands, lifeless.)

Blucy: (Horrorified) REDEVE?!

Guys! She's all stone!

(Then Pinkie, Greenessa, and Blucy all started screaming and running back to the start of the cave in terror.)

Greenessa: (running) THE CURSE IS BACK AND WORSE!

Blucy: (running) We've gotta get out of here!

Pinkie: (running) Wait, but I need to find Mommy! She'll know what to do!

(Then Pinkie turns around and runs back just as Greenessa and Blucy are running out. Soon, the group separates.)

Pinkie: Mommmmy! Mommmmy! Miss Rainbow?

(Pinkie keeps calling out for her mother, but there is no response. She decides to find her friends again with a hope that they'll be extra help. Pinkie finds a flashlight and some batteries along the way that she uses to light her way.)

Pinkie: Girls! Greenessa? Blucy?

(Silence.)

Pinkie: Greenessaaaaa?! Blucyyyy?!

(Then suddenly, Pinkie spots her two friends. They are together, like before. However, both of them are colorless, lifeless, and stone-hard frozen like statues.)

Pinkie: (Horrorified) G-Girls?....

No...Please, No...

(Pinkie hugs her lifeless friends and starts to tear up.)

Pinkie:(Voice breaking) Greenessa...Blucy...

(At the top of her lungs) MOMMY! MOMMMMMMY!

(Pinkie runs around the cave and looks all over for her mother. She trips many times and finds herself running in circles, lost. She checks every area of the cave. Eventually, Pinkie finds Miss Rainbow. But, just like the others, she is all drained out of color, stone-hard frozen, and lifeless.)

Pinkie: (Voice breaking) Mommy...

(Pinkie gets on her knees and hugs her mother.)

Pinkie: (crying) Who are you?!

“...”

Pinkie: Please, please, bring her back...
Bring them all back...

“...”

Pinkie: (Hysterical) THEY DIDN'T DESERVE THIS!THEY DIDN'T!

“They needed it”

Pinkie: Bring them back! Please, BRING THEM BACK!

“...”

Pinkie: PLEEEEEEEASE! PLEEEEEEEASE!

(Then suddenly, everything goes dark for Pinkie. Then she slowly opens her eyes. She sees her mother hugging her, and Greenessa, Blucy, and Redeve surrounding her.)

Pinkie: M-Mommy?

Miss Rainbow: (Hysterical) Pinkie!

Pinkie: Mommy! You're back! (Looks up) You're all back!

(Pinkie gives them all tight hugs, crying tears of joy. She even gives Redeve a hug.)

Greenessa: Umm, We were all here this whole time...

Pinkie: Oh. Huh?

Miss Rainbow: (Hysterical) You passed out, Sweetie.

Blucy: You sorta saw a spider and it scared you.

Redeve: (Annoyed) A plastic spider. We barely got into the cave, Wimp! But now it's late.

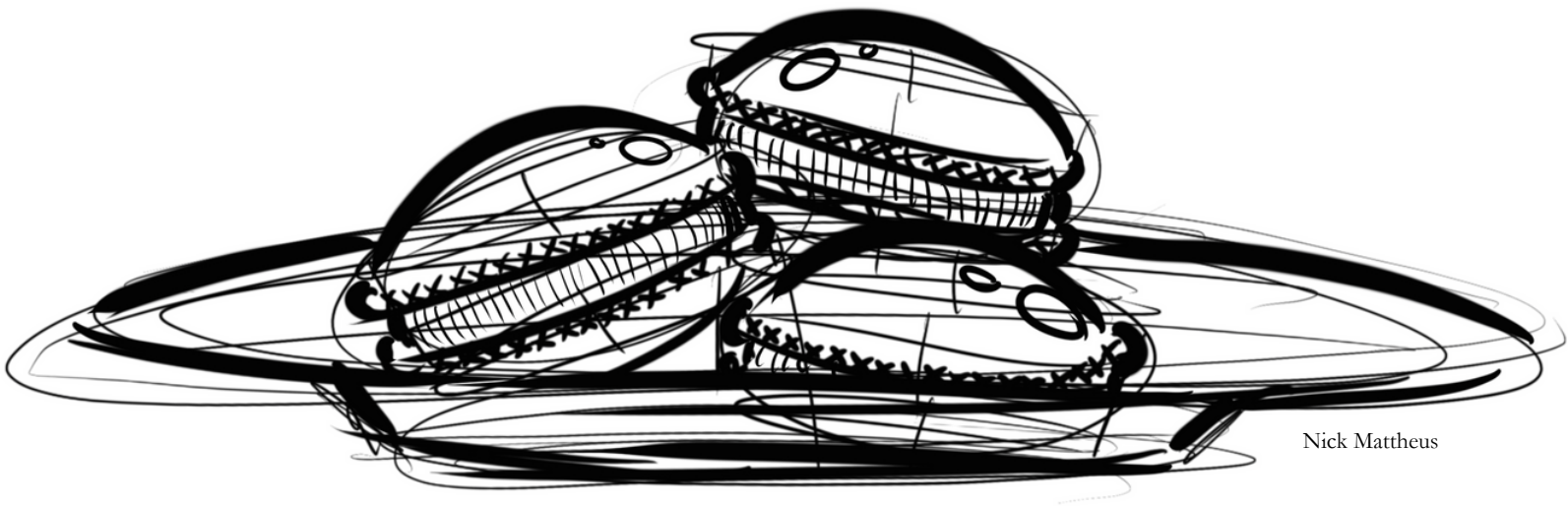
Pinkie: Oh.

Miss Rainbow: (Tearful) Forget the cave, let's go home, Pinkie! You other girls can go trick-or-treating with your parents.

(So Miss Rainbow takes all of Pinkie's friends to their parents and takes Pinkie home to rest.)

The End.

DESSERTS



Nick Mattheus

THE CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE CONNOISSEUR

SARAH SEALE

I like to consider myself an expert on all things chocolate chip cookie related. From homemade to store bought, and even just chocolate chip cookie flavored things, I have had it all. Now obviously people have different preferences but here I hope to prove that, with my extensive chocolate chip cookie knowledge, I am able to compile the most elite list of the top five chocolate chip cookie related things. Fair warning, if you don't like chocolate chip cookies, I would turn back before it's too late.

Starting strong with store-bought chocolate chip cookies in the number five spot. These are the cookies that one gets at their local grocery store, Walmart, or Target. While sometimes they hit the spot, most of the time they are more of a convenience than a desire. No one craves chocolate chip cookies and goes to the store to pick up a box of them. Store bought cookies are for the sole purpose of not having the time or energy to make something homemade when expected to bring something to a party or gathering. While appreciated when out in a public setting, store-bought chocolate chip cookies are the bottom of the barrel of chocolate chip cookies and are therefore number 5 on this list.

Moving on to number 4, we have cookie dough ice cream: an absolute staple for cookie lovers everywhere. What's not to love about two treats in one? The combination of vanilla ice cream and little bits of cookie dough is unmatched. While cookie dough ice cream is top tier when it comes to ice cream flavors, it doesn't quite crack the top three of this list. It can be a hit or miss sometimes depending on what brand it is and it just can't compete with the chocolate chip cookies that rank above it. If I'm craving chocolate chip cookies, cookie dough ice cream is definitely not my go to, but as a summertime treat it is the perfect option.

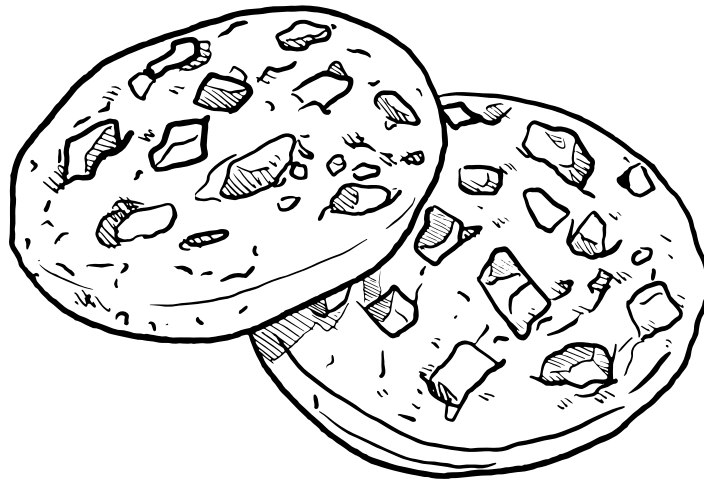
Coming in third place in the ranking of chocolate chip cookies is raw cookie dough. Now when I say raw cookie dough I'm not talking about the new stuff that they make specifically for eating raw. That stuff is not authentic and quite frankly isn't as good as the real thing. When making cookies, if you don't eat at least 10% of the dough raw, then are you really making cookies? It's just so good how could you not. And yeah people love to say "you could get really sick" or "be careful, you could get salmonella", but I have never gotten sick from eating cookie dough raw, nor do I know anyone who has. Raw dough is just the sushi of chocolate chip cookies: a delicacy that deserves to be enjoyed by all.

The second place finisher is the classic homemade chocolate chip cookie. When baked to absolute perfection there is nothing better than an ooey gooey chocolate chip cookie. They are super easy to whip together whenever and there are so many variations you can make. In the mood for small cookies? Make them smaller. Large cookies? Make them large. Want to add M&M's? Add M&M's. There are so many different recipes that don't really require any other ingredients than what is usually needed and you can make anything in order to satisfy the craving for a chocolate chip cookie because of this. Delicious and versatile, homemade chocolate chip cookies are one of the best versions of the chocolate chip cookie.

And coming into the number one spot, the best of the best of chocolate chip cookies... the fast food cookie. It doesn't matter where it's from, I have never met a fast food cookie I didn't love. McDonald's makes super soft, chewy cookies and they're the perfect size for a little treat after dinner. Subway also makes some delicious cookies. They have all kinds of cookies available, but their chocolate chip cookies are hands down their best. They have all kinds of cookies available, but their chocolate chip cookies are hands down their best. They are very similar to the McDonald's cookies in size and texture and they make great little road trip snacks. My absolute favorite fast food cookie however, is the Chick-fil-a chocolate chip cookie. No other fast food cookie can compete.

It's a bigger cookie and a bit more crispy than the others. The dough has oats incorporated into it, giving the cookie a bit of a different texture and it uses chocolate chunks instead of chocolate chips which makes them super melty and chocolatey. Fast food chocolate chip cookies almost always come at the perfect warm temperature and they are so easy to just grab-and-go. There is truly no greater chocolate chip cookie than a fast food chocolate chip cookie.

I love chocolate chip cookie everything. There are so many different chocolate chip cookie related things in the world, some absolutely fantastic and others subpar, but these five things are by far the most superior. As a self appointed chocolate chip cookie connoisseur, I approve this message!



Contributions



EDITORS IN CHIEF

Maddie Dobias
Mahreen Anwar

EDITORS

Annmarie Kosak
Blaize Carpino
Dillon Order
Kayla Seale
Maddie Dobias
Mahreen Anwar

WRITERS / ARTISTS

Angelica Paulson
Kaitlyn Cross
Emma Samghabadi
Madelyn Serxner
Ashley Barton
Michela Paggy
Kristina Cardarelli
Madison Richter
Simone Puelo
Aya Kalberer
Avianna Campbell Karkkota
Dulcebella Hernandez
Samantha Bruno
Macy Carter
Madison Maida
Sofia Febles
Rylie Parsons
Maddie Dobias
Thomas McGuire
Alisa Stantonasi
Donovan Hunt
Ethan Placencia-Nazareno
Ashley Roberton
Ashley Bozek
Blaize Carpino
Jillian Queller
Mahreen Anwar
Terrance Degnan
Annmarie Kosak
Mackenzie Lederer
Jacquelyn Ruggiero
Katelyn Gyasi

ADVISOR

Mrs. Montgomery