



Masks

Manhattan High School for Girls

A Literary & Art Anthology exploring the masks we wear

The Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship Writing Award

Manhattan High School for Girls would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Tuckel family for their contribution to our commitment to excellence. The Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship Award, created in memory of Dr. Tuckel's beloved parents, inspired the literary journal competition by raising the standard for written and artistic expression.

*Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship
First Place Writing Award*

Michal Treitel

*Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship
Second Place Writing Award*

Chana Shutyak

The Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship Art Award

*Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship
First Place Art Award*

Serene Klapper

*Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship
Second Place Art Award*

Elisheva Rosensweig

*Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship
Honorable Mention*

Yehudit Horowitz

Masks

An Anthology of Literature and Art

Cover Design

Hannah Balasiano, Grade 12

Literary Editors

Shani Hans, Grade 11

Chashie Komendant, Grade 12

Chynna Levin, Grade 12

Rachel Retter, Grade 12

Chani Weiner, Grade 12

Literary Advisor

Ms. Larissa Dzegar

Mrs. Tsvia Yanofsky, School Principal, Menabeles

Ms. Estee Friedman, Principal, General Studies

“This above all: to thine own self be true.”

- William Shakespeare

Table of Contents

Foreword by Ms. Friedman	15
On Masks by Ms. Dzegar	17
The Mask of Innocence	
By Shani Hans, Editor	20
Escape Artist	
By Nechi Bertram	21
Fine.	
By Yael Grosberg	23
The Mask in Your Hand	
By Avigail Deutsch, NYC	24
Pondering	
By Chana Leah Seif	26
An Inn Called Just That	
By Nechama Flohr	27
The Disappointed Princess	
By Daniela Kestenbaum	30
Optical Illusions	
By Chashie Komendant	32
The Face Behind the Mask	
By Chavie Dweck	34
Orphan Girl	
By Ahuva Mermelstein	35
A Soldier's Song in G Major	
By Chana Leah Seif	37
The Ballet's Facade	
By Batsheva Usher	39
In the Corner	
By Yehudit Horowitz	41
Veiled By Light	
By Chani Weiner	42
First Impressions	
By Chynna Levin, Editor	46
My Story	
By Essie Abittan	47
Transparent	
By Avigail Friedman	49
1942	
By Lele Book	50
The Author of Shakespeare 2.0	
By Suri Deutsch	52
My Mother	
By Yael Feygin	54
The Hidden Candlesticks	
By Talia Gerber	56
Gone But Never Forgotten	
By Shoshana Farber	59

The Bottom of the Garden	
By Hindi Medalie	60
Friends with Green Hair	
By Baila Schuster	62
Cubby Contents	
By Esty Friedman	64
Smile and Nod	
By Chana Shutyak	65
Covergirl	
By Shani Hans	68
Inner Workings	
By Daniella Schulhof	71
Expectations	
By Rachel Retter, Editor	74
The Bad Guy	
By Yael Weinroth	76
Unsinkable	
By Nomie Fermaglich	78
(Un)skilled	
By Chaviva Berger	80
Thoughts Behind the Words	
By Ettie Guelfguat	82
The Most Fun of Them All	
By Ruchama Biderman	83
My Famous Hidden Face	
By Shayna Eisenberg	85
Survival Stains	
By Ahuva Lisker	86
A Beautifully Broken Barbie	
By Leora Lehrfield	87
The Mountain Climber	
By Sara Nordlicht	89
Anonymous Artist	
By Avigail Spira	91
Survive	
By Michal Rogosnitzky	93
Discovering	
By Morielle Tolchin	94
Double Identity	
By Bayla Weiner	96
Colored Worlds	
By Chayie Safrin	98
Self Chosen Masks	
By Chani Weiner, Editor	100
The Eyes That See	
By Batsheva Levi	102

The Niqub	
By Gitty Boshnack	103
All People Are Complex	
By Malkie Einhorn	104
Waking Up and Realizing	
By Temima Feder	106
Screaming Colors	
By Michal Haas	108
A Standstill Life	
By Channa Gelbtuch	109
Eyes Like Shoes, Hair Like Buttons	
By Estee Gerber	111
Hidden Masks	
By Becky Masar	113
My Best Friend	
By Rena Kesler	114
Gifts	
By Chedvah Levine	116
MASKot	
By Nina Melohn	118
Mind Games	
By Avigail Ovitsch	119
Disguised	
By Ashira Feld	121
A Mile in Her Stilletos	
By Michal Treitel	122
Masked Appearances	
By Chashie Komendant, Editor	126
Buzz Lightyear Wrapping Paper	
By Chani Shulman	127
Finding Reality	
By Tamar Spoerri	129
Inner Workings	
By Elisheva Rosensweig	131
Behind This Face of Destruction	
By Tirtza Jochnowitz	132
Masked Attempts	
By Shoshana Farber	134
Colored Appearance	
By Riki Rowe	137
A Mask of Perception	
By Zahava Giloni	138
Sleep That Never Sleeps	
By Noa Hacker	140
13	
By Minka Nussbaum	142

Blossoming: Sculpture Art	
By Nechama Fermaglich	144
Through the Looking Glass	
By Rachel Liebling	145
Transparency	
By Elisheva Rosensweig	147
My Daddy, My Hero	
By Elisheva Hollander	149
Shattered Perception	
By Serene Klapper	150

Foreword

By Ms. Friedman, Principal

This past fall, we invited our students to explore the masks we wear, masks which prevent us from speaking our truths, behaving with courage, living lives with authenticity and perhaps most tragically, the masks we wear which alienate us from ourselves and force our souls into exile. How much peace and joy there is for us when we can expose our truest Self and experience the joys of deeply rewarding friendships and life experiences. How much freedom there is when we take the time to confront the masks we wear and set out to shed them and discover who we really are and what we really want of our one precious life. Mary Oliver, one of my favorite poets, recreates that experimental struggle for us here in “The Journey.”

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice --
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do -
determined to save
the only life you could save.”

This literacy project bonded us together as thinkers, writers and artists. I am so proud of our editors, students and teachers for sharing their voices in this collection of authentic communication and excited for the joys that await us as we begin to each recognize our new voices.

Many heartfelt thanks to Ms. Larissa Dzegar for leading this literacy enrichment project, to Miss Chani Schwartz for the layout, and to Miss Ayala Magder for all of her editorial and organizational support. To our most masterful teachers, Ms. Rachel Langosch, Mrs. Raquel Benchimol, Dr. Shaina Trapedo and Ms. Larissa Dzegar.



On Masks

By Ms. Dzegar, Literary Advisor

Earlier this year, a student asked me what vulnerability means. Since my literature, composition, and public speaking classes all focus on power, confidence, and inner strength, I invoke the word often, though I had not thought much about its meaning. “You are only as strong as you are willing to be vulnerable,” I claim. “Soften,” I command. “Let us in.” “Be seen.” “Take off the armor.” “Write something true.”

It seemed fair that I should be able to offer a definition. If vulnerability means exposing our truths, then it follows that those truths are covered some, if not all, of the time. As I contemplated the concept of vulnerability, I realized I was simultaneously thinking about social masks. I became interested in that cover, and the many masks that are exclusive to the human experience.

In the process of socialization, a mask is inevitable. I go so far as to say it is essential for survival. We train ourselves to mask our insecurities around our peers, we need our leaders to hold themselves together in the face of a crisis, and we often need to speak in euphemisms if we care about other people’s feelings.

The challenge is that reaching our full potential depends on being able to connect to others, and true human connectivity cannot occur without removing those very masks that impede unmediated empathy.

We cannot connect with people if we don’t know who they are. Seeing only someone’s strengths is not seeing an entire person. We can’t curate our personality for others if we want to draw them closer. And one of life’s most rewarding experiences is to know and be known.

It takes real strength to allow others to see you for who you are, and to be kind to yourself in the face of this exposure. Removing the social mask and being vulnerable is a risk. It’s allowing yourself to tear up, laugh at yourself, blush and struggle.

But it’s worth it. We are alive when we are real.

The arts give us an opportunity to try on various identities, and lasting works of literature and art comment on the tensions of the human experience. This year’s Literary and Art Journal explores the complicated relationship people have with masks. Students were encouraged to look at social masks, perceived masks, cultural masks, imposed masks, masked language, and even literal masks. They sought to find what lies beneath, but also what drives people to put on those masks every day.

I did not succeed in offering my students a neatly packaged definition of vulnerability, but it turns out I did not have to. They explored it themselves, and the result is in the pieces that follow.



The Mask of Innocence

*“It takes great courage to see the world in all its
tainted glory, and still to love it”*

– Oscar Wilde

The Mask of Innocence

By Shani Hans, Editor

I often wonder whether innocence is good or bad. On the one hand, sheltering people from the evil of the world can be helpful because they will be able to grow up still believing that the world is full of goodness and nothing can harm them. However, that is not removing the evil, it is just masking the evil that continues to exist. Growing up too sheltered from the “real world” can be damaging. It can cause people to become naive, and will likely result in confusion, hurt and pain when they actually enter the world. As Oscar Wilde says, “It takes great courage to see the world in all its tainted glory, and still to love it.” It is when we continue to love the world despite seeing all of its flaws that we become courageous.

In Sheva Usher’s “The Ballet’s Facade,” we see that innocence can sometimes be beneficial. She presents two different perspectives of a girl dreaming of the future, and a woman who has achieved her dreams but regrets following that path. By preserving the young girl’s innocence, it gives the character the opportunity to continue dreaming without knowing that in actuality her dreams may not be as good as she thought.

“Veiled By Light” by Chani Weiner takes a different approach to innocence. In her story, the child’s innocence protects him from thinking negatively about his father. After he finds out that “his Daddy is one of the men in white,” the image of his father in his mind is shattered.

In “The Disappointed Princess” by Daniela Kestenbaum, we are introduced to the other side of innocence, and see how it can be detrimental. The young girl feels like she can get whatever she wants, that nothing can get between the relationship of her and her mother, and that everything she does will be accepted. If she had not been so sheltered and seen that life doesn’t always work that way, maybe she would have not been so “disappointed.”

All these incredible pieces work together and create a perfect image of innocence. We can use these works to navigate our own journeys, and find the balance of innocence in our lives.

Escape Artist

By Nechi Bertram

The day begins cold and gray, with nighttime's lights twinkling just outside my window. Though just half awake, I yearn to touch them before they fade in the day's harsh light. They seem to be yelling, but they are too far away to be heard. And so I run, as fast as I can, out the window and onto the branch. I cut myself, but I do not allow the red to drip anywhere; it would ruin the leaves of the tree I am on. I continue higher and higher. And louder still, I hear the lights calling me, led by Venus, the morning star, telling me to jump; I leap. The wind carries me in swirls and flurries over rolling hills, towards the ground. I land in a village, dark and soft, the yellow sunrise just a whisper in the distance. Chickens coo and babies cry; Oh, I have missed the sounds of morning. As I wander through the village it grows, apartments turn into homes, church bells ring signaling a new day. This half-asleep village is bustling, unlike the place I'm running from. I am fleeing a place that is dark, dingy, and dull; the only colors there are grey. Here the lights seem to twinkle.

I feel a tap on my ankle, and peer down to see large doe like eyes peering back at me.

"Hello," he says.

I do not respond; I am on the run and I cannot afford to talk to strangers. He doesn't seem to care. "My name is Cent. I live in that little house over there. I have four older sisters. They are annoying and bossy."

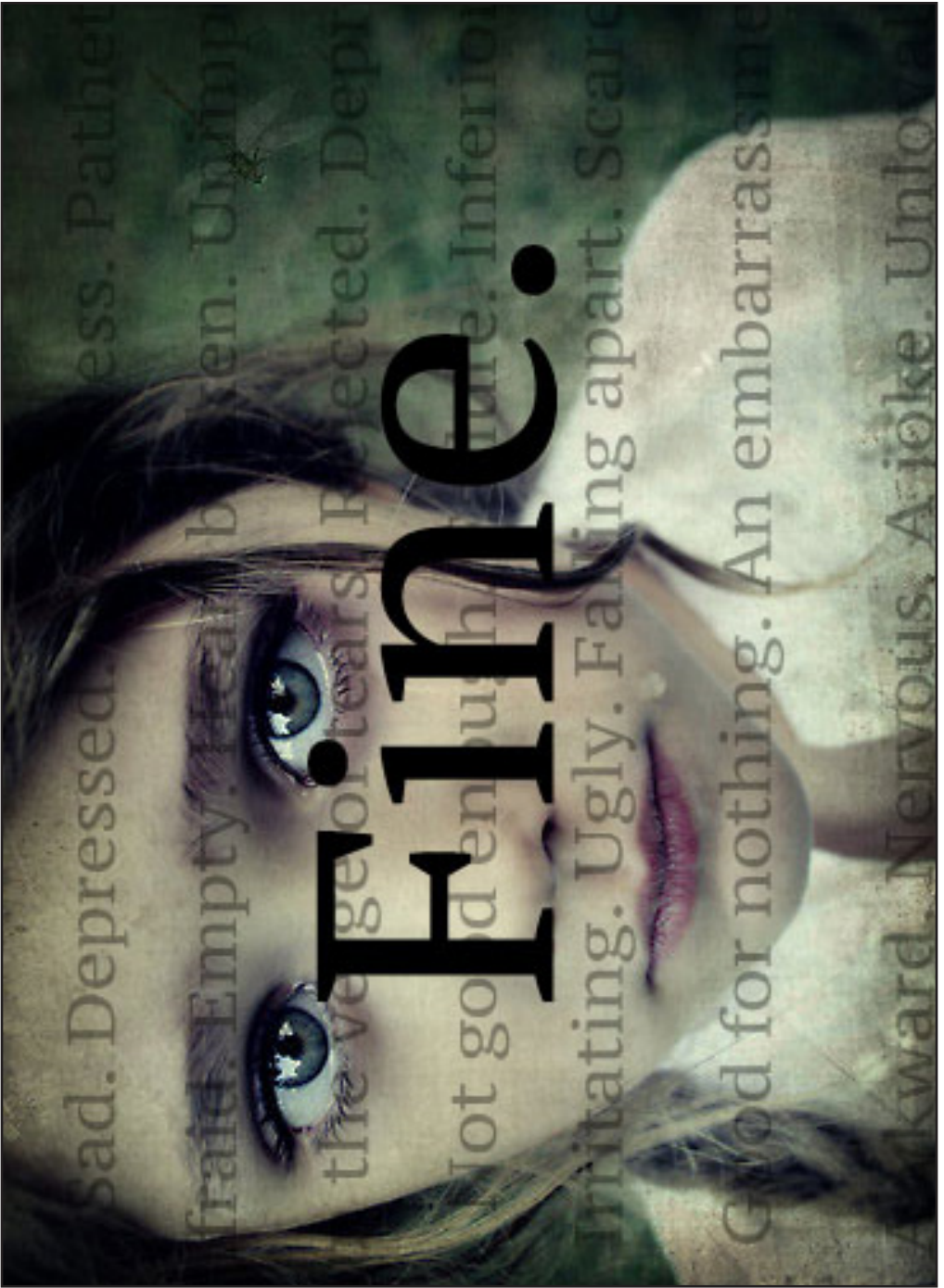
Why is he talking? I was enjoying the peaceful quiet sounds of my escape. Cheerfully ignoring my silence, the boy continues: "It's not polite to ignore people, or at least that's what I'm told." I stare at him - he reminds me of my little brother, Theo, when we were just kids.

I have to lose this boy, and so I continue on my path of silence, but allow him to stroll alongside me. "Isn't the sky pretty? Look at all the fluffy clouds. Don't they look like pillows?" His grin falters, "Sir are you not able to talk? I can tell you are nice so you aren't ignoring me because you're mean." He looks up to me as he says this

and doesn't wait for a response. He then tells me a tale of the sky. "I have named each fluffy cloud. They are my friends - that one is Èmile and that one Paul. They are dancers. They dance across boards, similar to a stage but greater. I watch them dance, every day they blend together, some days they are angry at each other. I do

**I have to lose
this boy and so I
continue on my
path of silence**

not know why but on those days it is cold and the sky is grey, but in summertime when my mamma makes the best peach pie, they are happy, probably because of the yummy peaches, and they dance so beautifully. I lay in the flowers and watch until one of my older sisters yells at me that I'm getting my trousers dirty and they spent an hour already cleaning them last night and so I have to get out of the dirt. But I don't listen because all I hear is the clouds and their music." I smile at the young boy.



Fine.

By Yael Grosberg

The Mask in Your Hand

By Avigail Deutsch, NYC

Anna pulls out her phone to listen to a song, but her headphones are not attached. She remembers that she lent them to her friend Gabby and sends her a quick message.

“Hey can u bring my headphones to skwl tom?”

She sees three dots pulled up on the screen, in a speech bubble.

“I’m soooooo sorry I lost ur headphones. Will bring an extra to skwl tom”

“OMG rly dont worry about it, its totes fine”

As Anna writes this she is really fuming, How could she lose my headphones? I got them as a birthday present from my parents, I waited a whole year for them and now she LOST them!



Have you ever had a conversation with someone without actually speaking to them? You probably do this about 100 times a day. You can be laughing or crying and the person will never know. This is texting.

In communication, body language is so important. When you text another person they may not know what you’re really feeling. Sometimes you can write “LOL” or “OMG”, but really feel like crying or that it is not funny. But the other person will never know that because today, technology helps us mask our true feelings. It hides what you’re really thinking and puts everything in a few short exciting, happy letters and emojis.

Now, imagine this story happened face to face. The outcome of this conversation would have been very different. Gabby would see how Anna feels immediately when Anna’s eyes turn downward with a quiver in her lips trying not to cry, as she responds with a shaky tone of voice, “It’s okay.” Anna would have told Gabby how she really felt if she was talking to her, face to face. Even if she chose to say nothing, her face wouldn’t be able to mask her disappointment.

**Have you
ever had a
conversation
with someone
without actually
speaking to
them? ... You
can be laughing
or crying and
the person will
never know.**

∞

Anna texts her Mom.

“Hey I lost my headphones could we pls order a new pair?”

She sees three dots pulled up on the screen and awaits for her mother’s genuine, or not, reaction.



Pondering

By Chana Leah Seif

An Inn Called Just That

By Nechoma Flohr

In the depths of Northern England lies a town named Wiltenshire. It is like nearly every other town in the region, surrounded by other Shires. The town is home to two inns; "Nealy's Inn," and the other simply, "Inn." There was once an "O'" before Nealy's, but times were tough and repainting your inn's sign was an unnecessary luxury, so the "O'" was flung to the breeze. And thus, a particular Mr. O' Nealy would mutter hateful things about war and such every time he walked out the front door of his inn.

Inn's creaky wooden sign hanging over the wooden front door still read "Inn." But the letters were, at this point, seriously considering joining Nealy's "O'". However, the owner of Inn had an old can of whitewash to prevent such plans from reaching fruition.

Inn had been in Wiltenshire for over three hundred years; Nealy's Inn, for about seventy five. It had come to be out of necessity; before its creation, if one desired to visit Wiltenshire, they had to either stay at family, friends or a lodge in a nearby town. That is not to say Inn had no visitors. It had many. But it was they who kept others from staying there. Every organized crime family in Great Britain had ties to Inn. Many of the Europe's most infamous heists and robberies were planned in the parlour, and the world's top forgers completed some of their best work in the guest rooms of Inn. The most notorious of mob bosses graced the halls; freely bragging of their illegally, and at times cruelly obtained wealth. They sold artwork and arms without fear of being caught. They were the people most feared by law enforcement and the general populace, yet they got along marvelously with the staff of Inn, and were not in the least bit feared by the people of Wiltenshire. They were not all bad people, rather their methods were not approved of. One Sunday morning in mid June a car came rumbling down the streets of Wiltenshire. The presence of a car usually meant Inn had guests, but this particular car, a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, signified the arrival of Arthur Benedict Leeds III. A rather thick leg popped out of the car in question and it bumped to a halt outside Inn. Out jumped a marvellously fat man dressed in a three piece suit he was practically bursting out of. His somewhat balding head was covered in a straw boater hat with a nice red and blue striped grosgrain ribbon around the crown, and he wore shoes of such shine, it quite hurt to look at them for more than a moment. He marched up to the door and flung it open, sending it into protests of such abuse.

"Mr. Leeds!", a maid exclaimed greeting him at the door. "We were not expecting you!"

“Very well,” he answered.

“But your room is not ready.”

“Wonderful. I shall wait in the parlour. And I have a guest coming, so another room must be prepared. Kindly tell her to meet me in the parlour when she arrives.”

In the parlour he sank into an overstuffed armchair before the unlit fireplace. A maid came in and began polishing one of the wooden tables.

“Helen,” Mr. Leeds called to her across the room.

“Yes?” she answered and approached him.

“I must ask, why did you come here in such a hurry?”

“I have found a wonderful asset. The forgeries she makes, you have never seen anything quite like them. I had to come here before the Dunhams got her.”

“Your family is going to start a mob war, Arthur. What, with your nephew killing his, this may very well be the last straw.”

Mr. Leeds waved her comment away with his hand. “Pah! He never liked that nephew anyway.” It was really very unlikely for the Dunham family to start a mob war over this, but it was preferable to conduct business at Inn where his safety was guaranteed.

“And Helen, she will be sending and receiving telegrams each day.”

“Telegrams?”

“Yes.”

“I will tell the others.”

Mr. Leeds’ guest, a young woman in her twenties named Alice, arrived a half an hour after this conversation took place. Alice was commissioned to forge seven Caravaggio and Poussin paintings over the next few weeks. And indeed, as Mr. Leeds promised she continually sent and received telegrams. These telegrams were written down and given to the cook along with other staff members.

They were the people most feared by law enforcement and the general populace, yet they got along marvelously with the staff of Inn.

On her third day at Inn, one of the maids, an East Londoner with a thick cockney accent named Ella, found a radio in Alice's room.

"Ello, look at this will you," she said lifting the radio out of a trunk. "She's got a radio." The radio was turned on and began emitting a series of beeps. "It's morse code!" she exclaimed. The other maid sat silent for a moment. "It's a number station," she said.

Over the next few weeks, the telegrams and morse code were deciphered by particular people of Inn such as the cook, and found to be classified allied plans Mr. Leeds' guest had obtained. When her time working for Mr. Leeds came to an end, she boarded a cab provided by Inn, meant to take her to London. Three quarters through, the driver pulled over to relieve himself. Alice got out to admire the rustic fields until she was shot in the head by the driver, and dumped in a ditch on the side of the road. Soon after, one of the local farmers covered the ditch with dirt. And she was never heard from again. When the news of her death reached Inn, a somber air resided there over the next few days.

The staff had grown to like the Austrian spy. She had been rather agreeable and a fabulous artist. (Those working at Inn all acquired a tremendous liking toward art.) But Helen did not understand why Mr. Leeds suggested she was a spy. It was on the last day of his visit when she asked him. She found him in his usual arm chair, reading a newspaper and looking exceptionally pleased with himself.

"I don't understand Arthur," Helen said. "This is not your line of work. It's ours. The British government created Inn, and allows criminals to stay and operate their businesses here with full immunity. All the staff here work for the government, our job is to stop the spies who stay here because they do not believe they will be caught here. Everyone assumes your family and the Dunham family have control over the local government."

"Don't be dense, Helen. I am most known for my art heists. Now, if you would allow me to return to my paper, I am reading a particularly lovely article about missing museum pieces. You know how much I enjoy reading about my work."

The Disappointed Princess

By Daniela Kestenbaum

I see the car pull up in front of the house and Mommy comes out holding something in a blanket. I jump off my swing and run to her. Mommy said she was bringing me a present, I hope this is it. I know it has to do with the big bump inside Mommy's tummy. I wonder what she's been hiding it in there. I love presents, especially big ones. Mommy calls me her little princess. I like that because it means I get her all to myself. Daddy says I'm the best girl ever, because I'm the best behaved. I always listen to what Mommy and Daddy say. Mommy has been away for a long time. I'm so happy mommy is back. I have been waiting so long for the special present that Mommy promised me.

When I reach Mommy, I give her a big hug. I look at her tummy. It feels smaller, but it's still pretty big. I look at the new doll Mommy got me. Its eyes are closed, it's tiny, squishy, and bald. I never had a bald doll before. I tell mommy, "Thank you," and put my arms out for her to give it to me. "No, silly," Mommy says, "This is your new baby sister!"

I start to feel mad because I wanted my special present to be a doll. A doll with curly blonde hair just like mine. Not one that has no hair on her head!

"Mommy, please buy me a doll! I don't want this one."

Mommy tells me I'm a big sister now. I don't want to be a big sister!

"Please pick me up and put the baby on the floor," I ask mommy.

Mommy doesn't seem to hear me. She's too busy with the baby. Mommy tells me to go play in my room because she needs to go feed the baby.

Mommy doesn't seem to hear me. She's too busy with the baby.

A good little princess is supposed to listen, so I run to my room and take out all my paints. I decide to make a picture. I paint pink princess crowns, colorful rainbows, and flowers. When I'm all done I stand back and I look at my art. The wall looks just perfect now. I know Mommy will just love it. Mommy always loves my art work.

When Mommy sees my room she doesn't like it. I never knew Mommy's mouth could open so wide. Her face turns pink and she doesn't look happy at all. Mommy turns to me and her eyes get so big they almost explode. She punishes me and tells me to sit in the corner. It's not fair! I guess Mommy doesn't like my painting after all. Why is she being so mean? Mommy asks, "Why aren't you behaving like my good girl today? You're supposed to be my little princess."

But Mommy already has a new little princess.

I ask Mommy, “Can you please put the baby back inside your tummy? I will be your little princess again.”

Optical Illusions

By Chashie Komendant

It's funny how the whole world wants to be me, little Miss Popular. Seems like the ideal rich girl's life: pretty, friendly, gushed over, and the ability to avoid punishment for coming late to class. How everyone wishes that they could ride along in life without a single worry to their day. Humph. How they would run the other way if they knew what I had to really deal with daily.

I'm pulled out of my thoughts as the dismissal bell rings and one of my close friends, Sarah, comes running through the crowd of chattering students. She waves and yells, "Hey Jenny!" A few students turn their heads in my direction and smile. I hate all this attention, and wish I could melt into the green lockers behind me and disappear forever. Instead, I have to casually lean against the lockers as if I want to be here. It doesn't help that my expensive designer knapsack painfully digs into my back. I make sure to keep my lips turned up into a smile as I return all the stares I receive. I bite my tongue as my former friend Kali walks by with her shoulders bent over from the weight of her heavy backpack. My heart begs me to at least say hello, yet my popularity instinct informs me to stay quiet. I watch with a heavy heart, as she disappears into the sunlight.

Sarah finally makes her way through the sea of students and I quickly turn my attention to her. She asks, "So, what's the plan for the rest of the afternoon? Kaylie, Mia, Rachel, Helen, and the rest are wondering."

What I want to do: go home, shut the door to my room and relax with a good book.

What I am expected to do: drop off my belongings, take a quick drink and then sprint out the door to orchestrate a fun afternoon for my large group of friends. The rest of the world would look on with jealous eyes at all the exciting activities we did and wish they too had been invited.

I shrug and say, "Oh, you know, maybe head on over to the mall or something."

Sarah nods once in understanding, blond curls bouncing up and down. She quickly whips out her iPhone7 from her bag and sets her thumbs racing across the screen. I bid Sarah a quick "See ya later" and set off for the black limousine parked at the curb of Midtown Park High School. The only tear in my perfect appearance comes after the chauffeur closes the door

I hate all this attention, and wish I could melt into the green lockers behind me and disappear forever.

behind me. There, on the green grass of the school yard sits bright, smart, quiet Kali. Memories of lazy afternoons spent laughing and talking about the absurdities of life, while snacking on popcorn, rush into my head. It's unfair the world expects me to be "Miss Popular Trend Setter," and I was forced to cast her aside against my will. She was too nerdy to be seen with me, with her taped glasses, wardrobe from Walmart, and the lack of Vogue earrings. Since then, she always looks at me with pained eyes and my heart wrenches at the unfairness in it all. She is the only one who knows how little I see my parents at home, and how alone I am in the eighteen room mansion. My "cool" friends don't know anything about my home life, and only met my parents on one occasion.

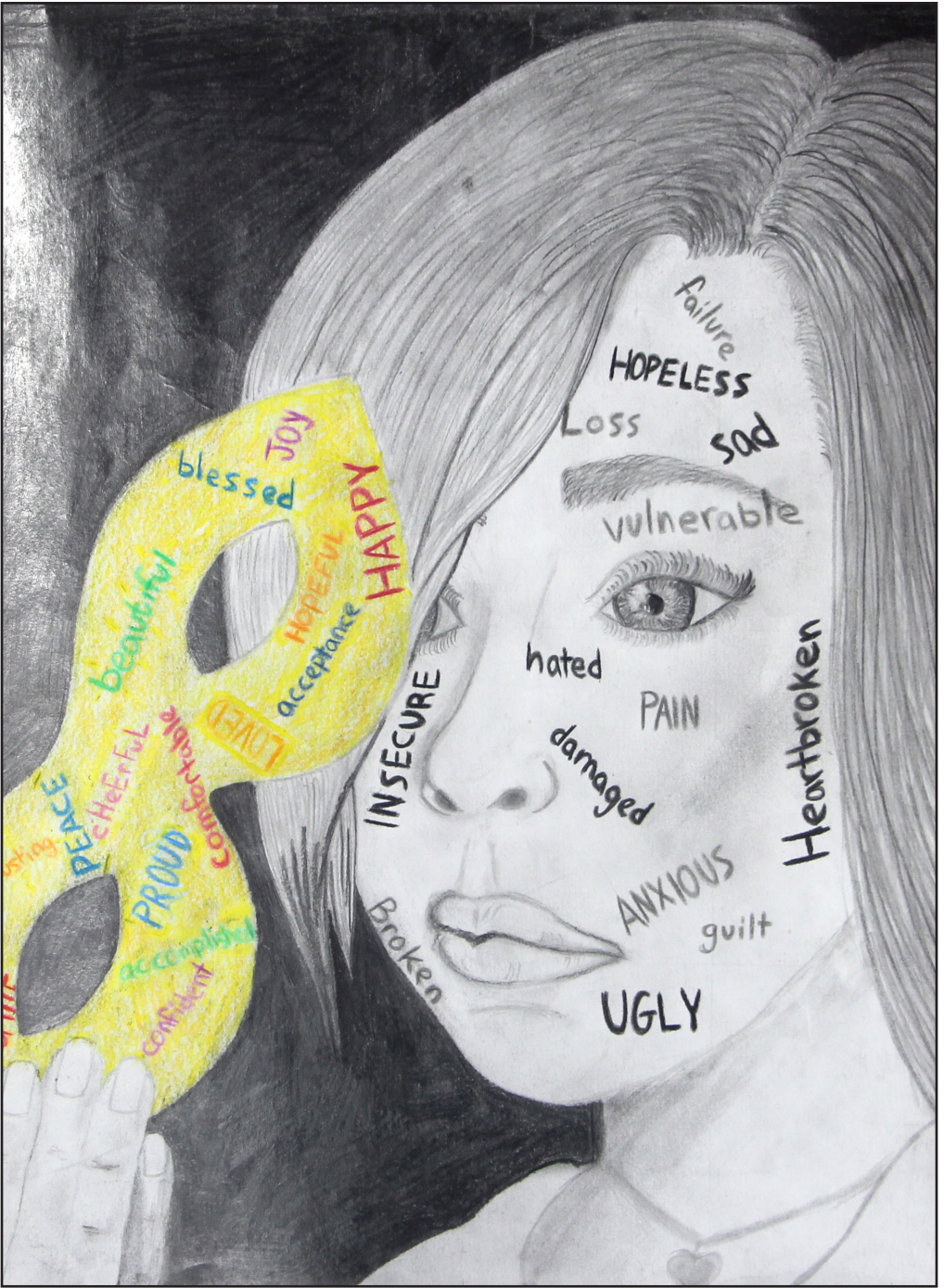
As the limo pulls out into traffic, my phone buzzes with a text from Sarah. "See you in five." I lock eyes with Kali and it's then that I know the unfairness of the shallow life I lead. I quickly send back, "Can't make it. See you tomorrow." As the dozens of questioning texts come in, I ignore them and dial Kali's number. For a single afternoon, am I not allowed to shed the facade? Can I not hang with the person whom I value most?

The sweetness of Kali's voice reaches me with her tentative, "Hello?"

I want to cry and nearly do. "I'm so sorry about everything I've done these past months. Do you want to come over for the afternoon like old times?"

I hear the smile on her lips as she says, "Yes." It's then that I cry.

Tomorrow, I promise myself, I'll replaster the glowing smile of the most popular girl in school back on my face, but for this afternoon I'm just Jenny.



The Face Behind the Mask

By Chavie Dweck

Orphan Girl

By Ahuva Mermelstein

A single sphere of light emits a spark of hope in my bottomless pit of darkness. I hasten towards the golden glow of a lamppost and to a peaceful, clear lake. My throat is parched and I'm panting heavily. Simple necessities such as clean water, an established shelter, and always having a satisfied stomach aren't ones that I'm privileged to have. Often, I do wonder if my life has a purpose. But my nightly rituals to the lake are sometimes all that's worth living for. A sunken, tired face in disheveled clothes blends with the moonlight as it gazes back at me in the surface of the water. My fingertips leave ripples that slowly fade away. If only all my problems would vanish so simply.

I lay down on the lush grass and enjoy the peaceful lull of the lapping water. Another rise and set of the sun has passed by. The bench that's my home is sometimes lonely, but I do receive visitors. The old man with a white beard strolls past my bench once a week and hands me a crisp, green dollar bill. He always looks at me with a pitying smile. Daily, when I awake, there's a mysterious, small package of food waiting by me. It's so pleasant to wake up in the morning and smell the scent of something slightly sweet and bread-like, drizzled with a sticky sauce. I haven't yet discovered the name of this clandestine deliverer. When I walk down the block, I hear whispers of "orphan girl" and they look at me with empathetic glances. The clothes I receive are more rags than real garments. And the shoes I'm given are either too big or too small, but I accept them as they are. After all, what choice do I have?

**When I walk
down the block,
I hear whispers
of "orphan
girl" and they
look at me with
empathetic
glances.**

The stillness of the night makes me restless so I regretfully heave myself up and begin to walk back to my bench. Suddenly, an icy hand firmly grips my arm. I look up into the cruel eyes of a tall, opposing stranger, his face masked in shadow by the tall evergreens behind me. My heart rate quickens and my breath starts to come in short, ragged gasps.

"Please," I plead, "Please leave me alone. I'm only a child."

Two other men approach from the shadows and surround me like predators closing in to capture their prey. I look around and all that meets me are nasty, staring eyes. My labored breath turns into panicked sobs and I try to slowly back away. The hand on my arm tightens and suddenly I'm heaved off my feet.

“Please don’t hurt me,” I whisper.

My pleas fall on deaf ears as I’m flung into a car. My jaw feels like it’s been clamped shut and the faint taste of rust fills my mouth. Steel begins to lacerate into my wrists. A long, wailing siren pierces the silent, midnight darkness. A rough voice cackles over the radio,

“Roger. Suspect 402 has been captured.”

In the backseat of the police car as it pulls away, I wonder what everyone will think of their poor, orphan girl. Especially when they hear that I am guilty of murdering my parents.

A Soldier's Song in G Major

By Chana Leah Seif

The colors of war are documented in the blacks and whites of the piano keys. As I place my hands on the keys, a lifetime of experiences finds its way to my fingertips and my hands explode with the expression used to speak to a crowd. I become the storyteller and suddenly I find myself in a familiar place. I am back on the battlefield and I spill my soul.

As I play the piano, I am transported back to Afghanistan. I smell the sweat and taste the soot on my lips. My lungs burn from the smoke. I see the grenade and yell at everyone to run. But I am too late. The earth shakes and I fly 20 feet. My ears ring as I struggle to stand up. Something is wrong. I cannot yell for help.

My fingers dance on the ivories. Each note flows out of me with a tear down my cheek and sweat down my neck. My music sings my past of pains and losses. It is a release of the story I kept hidden ever since I received a Purple Heart. What happened to me there has to stay private, but I want everyone to know the toll the war took on me. The damage it did to my voice is irreparable. Words do not work for me anymore. My arrangement gives opportunity to articulate my experiences and move on.

I encapsulate the war into a musical tornado. No one has to know every detail to empathize. They hear the madness and relate.

The war is hidden within each note. Each day in a measure. Most memoirs are written in a pattern of 26 letters; my memoir, my journal is a cluster of seven. "A" I enlist. "B" I train. "C" I am deployed. "D" I am attacked. "E" I see the grenade. "F" I yell to run. "G" I am too late. "G" I am too late. "G" I am too late. I was always too late. Music is my therapy. I still hear the gunshots, the yelling, the grenade. I write it down in music. This is my biography. I can't speak words anymore so I communicate in melodies.

Music has a power that words do not possess. They can mask a complete story into a simple melody. Vivaldi told a story in the form of music. Vivaldi made "The Four Seasons" depict each quirk of the season. His violins, the birds, my chords, my noise. I organize my chaos into measures.

**Each note flows
out of me with
a tear down my
cheek and sweat
down my neck.**

I always struggled to tell my story. People never seemed interested in listening to a stutter. Instead of boring the crowd with an attempt at a speech, I present

an aria. I do not tell my story to a group therapy of 15 war-torn veterans. I present my sonata to a crowd of 1500 in Carnegie Hall.

I want to write exactly what happened in Afghanistan. However, the delicate lives of those I lost cannot be elucidated in the written word. The only way to achieve an understanding is through music. So in the realm of music, I present my journal.

It is written in code; a code made up of ellipses and lines. Each ellipse adds to my story. It is a journal not meant to be read, but heard. Through music I can let go. There are days when I can still hear the cries of those I could not save. I acknowledge them and leave them at the bench of the piano.

The Ballet's Facade

By Batsheva Usher

It is finally starting! My short curls itch my face, but I don't brush them away, Mama had specifically curled them for this occasion. Mama is also very excited. She bought me a pretty silver dress with pink trimming, but the best part is the big velvet bow on the back which matches my hair clip perfectly. I love it. I look down at my dress and then up to Mama, though she has already seen the ballet she looks just as excited as I am. She sits upright in her chair, her face lit up. I wait impatiently with my feet crossed. They hang in the air, too short to reach the ground. I turn to the curtains willing them to open. I can't help feeling almost nervous. What if it isn't everything I dreamed it would be? I'm anxious but eager to see what awaits behind the closed curtains, and curious to see what secrets they hide. The lights in the room dim and the curtains shiver, signaling that the magical evening will begin soon.

"The curtains, they're open!" I say tugging excitedly on Mama's sleeve. She turns to me and gives me a smile that mirrors her excitement. Finally, I will see what the curtains are hiding. In a flash, bright lights flare from invisible spaces in the sky. The beautiful melody swirls around and fills the theater. Princesses and swans twirl about on the stage before me. I stare up in awe at their angelic grace. The princesses all wear golden masks that glitter and sparkle. The swan's masks don't sparkle. They float. Their effulgent masks are magical feathers that carry the dancers to make higher leaps and faster twirls. The swans are my favorite. They really can fly. I can't help feeling as if I'm in a magical fairy tale. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a fairy flit by, her iridescent wings sparkle in the air. I can see pixies and elves dancing to the same alluring rhythm as the swans. Mama was right, this really is a magical evening. The curtains had opened their secret to me and I had discovered their hidden treasure.

**The curtains
had opened
their secret to
me and I had
discovered their
hidden treasure.**

I smile through the pain. I grimace as my deep curtsy increases the throbbing in my aching feet. I look toward the crowd sitting before me, cheering. In the front row, I spot a little girl, her curls all done up, her face alight in excitement. Her lovely pink dress was probably purchased just for this occasion. She looks as if her dreams have come true tonight, as though she is a witness to them firsthand.

As if someone drew back the curtains just for her so she can glimpse the magic of the theater. How naive she is.

They tell you, "Follow your dreams," and, "You've got real talent," and, "It'll be the adventure of a lifetime." They lie. I followed my dream and where did that get me? Bloody feet? A cramped studio apartment, that I can barely afford? Is it worth the tears I cry, and the distress I feel after every performance, when I'm told exactly what I did wrong?

Three agonizing hours later, the curtains close and I glance around. The feathered masks of the swans lay on the floor in crumpled heaps. Their elegant facades are permitted to fade now that the crowd has left. I look to my left where the janitor is hastily mopping up the sticky floor. His face expresses anguish, as if he is pondering how his life has gone so wrong. To my right, I see tears rolling down a ballerina's face as her instructor scolds her for falling out of her final pirouette too early. All around me I see misery. The curtains hide the truth, the pain, and the sadness that really lives behind the dance.

I don't hear anyone congratulating and thanking me on a magnificent performance. No one seems to care much about how I feel. The ballet is nothing more than a pretty flower. The flower seems vibrant, beautiful, and alive, and yet, if you cut it, it may only survive for a few hours until it withers and dies. The dance that used to bring me to life, only drains me now. The bright spotlights that used to excite me, only blind me now. I used to tremble from anxiety and excitement before every performance; I remember the way my stomach would flutter and twist. The moment the curtains would open and the lights would turn on was when I felt blissful, for the twirls, spins and leaps thrilled me.

Now, my body moves mechanically, and my disloyal feet move of their own accord. I don't feel the rush or excitement that I used to. I don't feel anything at all. I've become numb. The routine is slowly cutting me away from the love that I used to have for the ballet. I reminisce back to the days when I used to feel the enchantment of the theatre, but now all I feel is its curse. How wrong that little girl is.



In the Corner

By Yehudit Horowitz

Veiled By Light

By Chani Weiner

Henry ran inside, the sticky Birmingham air squeezing in behind him. Mother shuffled towards him, balancing a tall glass of sweet tea while trying to comb Henry's sweaty hair out of his eyes. Henry looked at the floor, Mother's gaze burning holes through the top of his head. She paused, as if daring him to respond. "Why do you always have to come back such a mess?" she asked finally. "Go on up and change for dinner, boy." Henry started down the hall, trying not to mess up Mother's rugs. Whenever he was gone, she was always grumpy, Henry thought sullenly. He grabbed the starchiest shirt from his closet and combed his hair.

"It's gonna be a big one this time, Carlene. Won't know what hit 'em. Gotta get everything read-."

"Daddy!" Henry bellowed rushing down the hall. "You're home." Daddy picked him up, spun him around the foyer, ignoring Mother's scornful glare.

"My my, soon you are going to be as tall as me son. Look at you followin' in the steps of your Daddy." Henry beamed as they walked to the dining room for dinner. After a lot of talk about sit-ins and buses, Daddy excused himself from the table. Henry hugged Daddy hard, wanting to hold him there forever. Daddy gently lifted Henry's head and kissed his forehead. "You sleep tight now young'n, don't you go giving your mama no trouble." Henry kissed Mother's cheek before heading to his room to go to sleep.

Henry woke from a sudden noise. He climbed out of bed quietly, careful to step around the plank that always creaked and woke Mother. He tiptoed down the hall hearing voices in the foyer. Before Henry could reach Daddy, he disappeared out the door in a flash of white. Henry turned slowly, deflated.

The air was still, thick as if waiting to release its heavy load. He looked out the kitchen window, the yellow flowered curtains billowing in the smoky air. It was the fourth bombing, the first that killed. They said it took four hours to put out the fire. George said that it was Daddy, that Daddy was one of those men. Those men in their pointy hats and long robes. He said the wood and glass shot into the sky, swore they got stuck to the moon, ain't never gonna come back down. Henry fell into a chair as Mother placed corn flakes in front of him, sugar on the side just as he liked it. She walked the same, straight and tall as of nothing happened. As if she hadn't heard that they drove by the Baptist Church on 16th, threw it into the

**Henry hugged
Daddy hard,
wanting to
hold him there
forever.**

basement and killed the four of 'em.

The cornflakes swarmed around Henry's stomach, like the cement and debris of the bombing swirling through the air. Henry's arm twitched knocking down the sugar. Daddy hurt them. Because they were different, "Never gonna be like us," he had said. But they must be bad if Daddy wanted to kill them. Because how could Daddy kill good people?

Henry walked into Daddy's room and opened his closet. He rummaged around. It had to be there somewhere. Pressed between two suits, a gray pin-striped and a solid black, Henry pulled it out. He stood still, the weight of it in his hands rooted him to the ground. The two large holes, perfect circles, beckoned to him with their protection. He slipped it over his head, scared and thrilled by the possibility of being hidden, or rather, seen. When Daddy puts it on, he's not Henry's Daddy, he is one of the men in white.

They go at night, hidden by the dark but empowered by their stark white uniforms. Henry felt the fabric covering his hair, making him one of the crowd but giving him the courage, the spark to behave without being identified. As Henry stared at his reflection in the window, his eyes stared back veiled by light.

II

First Impressions

*“You never get a second chance
to make a first impression.”*

– Andrew Grant

First Impressions

By Chynna Levin, Editor

“Never judge a book by its cover” epitomizes the struggle of the silent exchange that arises in the first five seconds when two people first meet. In those five seconds, myriad assumptions surface and each party determines where in their mind they will place the other person. These first impressions are exactly what lead to expectations, conflict, and how each party will choose to conduct themselves in the other person’s presence. This natural urge to create judgment comes from a need for safety and knowledge of societal norms. Consequently, angry stereotypes and ignorant generalizations are born, and they are passed onto future generations.

Children of these future generations are not responsible for such ignorance, yet many have the strength of character to challenge such ideals. Hindi Medalie, in her story, “The Bottom of the Garden,” displays a girl who finds that a foreign culture is not as foreign as she had assumed. Not only does Medalie force her character to challenge cultural stereotypes, but the girl is introduced to such ideals through her younger brother, facing yet another idea born out of ignorance that a younger child is unable to educate an older one.

Chana Shutyak’s story, “Smile and Nod,” gives the opposite perspective of ignorance in society. The story follows a Ukrainian woman named Alexa whose culture is given a stereotype which she finds follows her everywhere. Alexa simply wants to apply for a position, and instead of engaging in discussion concerning her background or training, she finds that people are only interested in speaking about mother Russia, where they assume she is from based on her accent. She finds that upon hearing her accent, people place her as an immigrant from Russia and attach every Russian stereotype to her.

Many times, because of the assumptions created when first meeting a person, people will choose not to reach out and learn exactly who the other person is. Baila Schuster’s story, “Friends with Green Hair,” shines a light on a girl who does reach out and finds that externalities are what keep people apart. She learns that when we take the time to develop relationships with others, we will realize that we may have deeper connections with each other than we realize.

These stories, among the many others in this section, bring a unique perspective on the importance of refining our snap judgments and first impressions. Whether this is regarding individuals, cultures, or nations, we must keep in mind that despite our external differences, we are all human beings with the need to love and be loved. When we can break down the barriers of first impressions, we can build up one another.

My Story

By Essie Abittan

"I can hear them! I have to go. Know that I will always love you...and my country." I shut off the radio and stuff it under my pillow, then walk to my closet.

I remove my yarmulke to put on the red checkered kaffiyeh and white thawb. I must change into my Arab garb one last time. Maybe I will not get caught. Maybe I can keep my cover. Tying this kaffiyeh has gotten easier over the years. I remember my first days in Argentina, when I was extremely nervous. I felt great excitement to finally start my mission, but now, I am nervous for a different reason.

There's the black tuxedo that I wore during all of the parties I threw. How easily they gave up their secrets, once we became acquainted, and they became drunk. Foiling their plan to dig a channel to Jordan in order to block the water leading to Israel was one of my greatest feats. Perhaps that was the beginning of the end.

There is the maroon scarf given to me by George Saif, who felt so untouchable high up in the Military of Information. The last time I wore that I was in his office reading important papers, just before a high official came in. He became very angry with Saif for allowing Kamal Amin Ta'abet to read official documents. If he'd only known that wasn't my real name. I remember the beating of my heart, but I kept my cool and did not let him see the fear in my heart. Saif protected me and told him that I was a close friend, so he let it go.

This checkered blazer was worn when I went to the Golan Heights. It was a highly secret military mission and nobody was allowed to know about it. Of course, I was chosen. The Syrians were building forts to conceal weapons. I was the one who advised them to plant two trees next to every fort. I told them this would help two ways: it would mislead the Israeli troops and also give shade to the Syrian soldiers. Of course, they never guessed my underlying reason was to let Israel know where the forts were.

Ah. There is my khaki uniform, with the many medals and badges from when I was appointed Syrian Deputy Minister of Defense. This garment allowed me to learn even more secrets than before and fortify Israel's national security.

**Foiling their
plan to dig
a channel to
Jordan in order
to block the
water leading to
Israel was one
of my greatest
feats. Perhaps
that was the
beginning of the
end.**

It also aroused the anger of Colonel Ahmed Su'edani, the commander of Syrian Intelligence, who sneered whenever he saw me wear it. My wife hated it too. I can still hear the Israeli officers begging me to return to Syria one last time, but Colonel Ahmed Su'edani's wrath made me rethink my decision. In the end, the Mossad persuaded me. Even now, I know it was worth it. I have no regrets.

There lies the letter I wrote to my wife earlier today. Reading it will inform her that I have been captured. She will be reassured that I love her and our children. I wish I could have done more, but now my time is over. She will no doubt be surprised to learn I've been living in Syria as a spy when she thought I was working in Europe. A hint of regret overcomes me. I wish I could see my family once more.

From the window I see the Syrian satellites in the area are off, except for my Israeli satellite. That must be how they found me. I see them coming. I must pretend once more. I will not give up any secrets, no matter how much torture I must endure. I am a spy, but first I am a Jew who loves his country and his people. It is this thought that resonates as I hear the violent knocking at the door.



Transparent

By Avigail Friedman

1942

By Lele Book

They were coming. At least that's what mamma said. I never believed the horrid and gory stories that passed through our small ghetto. I thought they were horrible fairy tales that abusive parents would tell their children to frighten them. And now they were coming to my little village in Warsaw - to take us away, to destroy us forever. They despise us. Their eyes glare like predators in the night as they pass us. I am Jewish, but my silky blonde hair and shining diamond blue eyes speak for themselves. I look like a German.

With glistening eyes, Mamme instructs me to flee.

"Go to Zeidy and escape this nightmare."

She says if I roll up my sleeves and open the top button of my shirt, I won't be questioned. I listen out of fear of the tears that were being pushed back into Mamme's eyes. I fill a little bag with my most precious possessions and after much contemplation and many sobs, I am forced to depart.

As I frantically scurry through the street, my vision gradually worsens from the clouds of gray foggy smoke. My ears fill with the screams of women and children as they are being dragged to their deaths. I hear gunshots. Bullets that are aimed with no mercy, but with laughter. The stench of destruction wrinkles my nose. I stumble through the gateway of my ghetto and look back for what may be the final time. My Mamme's pain stricken face peeks through the ivory curtains of our front window. I need to stay strong. My German facade must mask my Jewish identity. Unwillingly, my feet carry me through the crumbling streets.

Over my shoulder, I see many people. Sewn into their ragged jacket sleeves is the degrading yellow star defining them as a Jude. The star I should be wearing. The people I should be representing. My fellow brothers and sisters are being grabbed by the neck and thrown into the ditches of the broken roads. As I head for the trees of the Parzew Forest, I glance at a little girl standing on the broken dirt road. An innocent child with a full life ahead of her; a life she will never experience. An evil figure clad in a green and red uniform embroidered with the cursed, crooked symbol meticulously sewn into the sleeve of his pristine uniform upon his carved biceps, grabs the helpless girl's neck. Out of reflex, my hands automatically reach for my own smooth neck as if to feel if it

**Out of reflex,
my hands
automatically
reach for my
own smooth
neck as if to feel
if it is still there.**

is still there. My fingers grasp around something cold and rusty. The silver chain rests between my fingers. In the palm of my hand is the key to my identity. It's the Star of David. I panic.

I glance at the Nazi in the near distance. He will notice and it will be over. My sweaty fingers reach to close my buttons, roll down my sleeves and pull down my skirt. But I am already covered. With a startling jolt I remember refusing to stray from my principles of modesty and tradition. Inwardly I am relieved, but I know that the danger is not yet over. After what feels like days of running, I know that in just one more block I'll reach the wealthy, Christian gated community in Lublin where my Zeidy resides.

Feeling as though the shadows themselves are watching me, I nervously turn the corner. I struggle to drag my collapsing body to the entrance. The old wooden door slowly creaks open and I look up to the glistening blue eyes and shining smile of my grandfather, his once blonde locks now grayed with age. Not sure what to do, and being the mere young age of twelve, I run into Zeidy's arms and lie my head on his shoulder. He gently places me on his couch while I catch my breath and satisfy my grumbling stomach. When I can finally talk, I tell him the story.

As I hold his wrinkled hands, I close my eyes and sigh "Thank you. I love you Zeidy." Before I fall into a deep slumber he says sternly.

"It's not Zaidy anymore. Call me Großvater."

The Author of Shakespeare 2.0

By Suri Deutsch

I was supposed to be legendary. You know, those kids who get invited to talk shows to flaunt their prodigious talents and make the rest of the ordinary people of the world feel like unimportant players in the dugout. That was going to be me. Since the ripe old age of three, I planned big. I had all the blueprints scripted for what would be a fantastical life.

Upon entering kindergarten I would have learned to read and write so well that I'd be published in the "Harvard Law Review." I would become the author of the new Shakespeare, yet another text that'll be mindlessly studied and analytically dissected in high schools starting in year 2100. By the time second grade would end I'd possibly even be President of the United States!

Then my blueprints were rained upon.

A book. So innocent, with its plush, colorful cover safekeeping the story entrusted on the papers which it binds. About ninety-five percent of people in this world would read *Debbie Makes Her Bed* and gradually advance to higher reading levels. My story is relevant to the remaining five percent.

As I read the book aloud in class for the first time, I struggle as any normal six-year-old would, with the intimidation of my classmates' eyes wedging their way into my brain. I breathe in deeply, thrust away their piercing stares, and read: "*Deddie Makes Her Beb*. Deddie got up anb rolleb out of deb." Something sounded funny. Did I read it wrong? "*Deddie Makes Her Beb*. Deddie got up anb rolleb out of deb." No. I must have a misprinted copy. I read on, maybe the next page is correctly printed: "Deddie ate her dreakfast." Oh gosh! Either my book is incorrect or I am already an old man. At this point, the teacher, Ms. Peters decides to abruptly end reading time and moves on to math.

After what seems like the longest math lesson in the history of math lessons, Ms. Peters asks me to follow her to her office down the hall. Oh great! She probably thinks I misread on purpose. I enter the office, and my mom is sitting in one of the two leather chairs in front of the gigantic, oak desk. I assume the other chair is for me, so I make myself comfortable on its cushiony seat. Ms. Peters arranges herself and slowly sits down while keeping eye contact with my mom. She then goes on to inform me of the condition that would eventually earn me my legend-

Since the ripe
old age of three,
I planned big.
I had all the
blueprints
scripted for
what would be a
fantastical life.

ary name.

Dyslexia. I have never even heard of it. All I know is that it is the condition that will ruin my meant-to-be-legendary life.

I am told to wait outside Ms. Peter's office while she and my mom discuss my situation. After what feels like the longest ten minutes of my life, Ms. Peters motions for me to reenter her office. As I sit down once again in the cushiony, leather chair across the gigantic oak desk, my mom tells me that, starting next week, I will be switching to a special school for dyslexic children.

Great. Now my dreams are officially over. Instead of growing up a prodigy, I am now destined to grow up as a child with special needs. Walking out of Ms. Peter's office, my feet drag along the hallway tile as I think how my day would've turned out differently if I hadn't read *Debbie Makes Her Bed* aloud. I could've continued to live my dream as a child prodigy.

On Monday, I experience my first day as a student at the STAR School for the Dyslexic Children. As the next few years go by, I slowly begin to build up my writing skills and climb reading levels. By the end of Eighth Grade, I earn myself the title that I have always wanted. Actually, I exceed my own expectations. I am newly known as the child who wrote the new equivalent of Shakespeare, despite being dyslexic. The phone is ringing off the hook with talk show hosts begging for my appearance on their shows. It turns out that what I had thought to be my biggest nightmare was actually a mask through which I can foster a talent that I had never dreamed of.

My Mother

By Yael Feygin

I had never seen her like this before. They told me it started happening a couple of years after I was born. I wondered sometimes, was it my fault that all these things were happening to her? But Grandma always told me not to blame myself and that the best way that I can help my Mother was to be a good girl. There was something weird about Mommy. It looked as if she was on top of the world, and nothing could stop her. She looked really excited about something, and when I asked her why she was so happy, she would get angry and say that there was nothing wrong with being happy and that she was one hundred percent fine. I mean, I think that's what she said. I couldn't really understand everything she was saying because she was talking so fast.

When I was tired, Mommy wasn't. Which was weird because all the girls at school said their mommies were always exhausted. I could hear her awake until late at night, way past her usual bedtime. I knew something strange was going on, but I didn't know what it was.

Then, a few weeks later, something else began. Mommy would always be awake to wake me up for school, but then it started to change. She began to wake me up five minutes late, ten minutes late and I understood that Mommy would continue to sleep through her alarm, eventually forgetting to wake me up for school. So I started waking up and getting ready for school by myself. I didn't go on the school bus because Mommy said we couldn't afford it, so I still had to wake her up in the morning to take

me. It took a very long time until she would finally get out of her bed and get dressed. I would come late to school and walk in the middle of class.

During recess, girls would crowd around my desk and ask me why I was late. I would always make up a believable excuse like, "my mother let me sleep late" even though I let her sleep late. Sometimes at the end of school days, she would forget to pick me up. I would have to wait in the school office until my Mom or Grandma picked me up. When we would get home on a regular day, Mommy always liked to help me with my homework. On her moody days, she would tell me that I was a smart girl and I could do it by myself. She would always keep a bottle of sucking candies with her, and she would swallow them from time to time.

**There is
something weird
about Mommy.
It looked as if
she was on top
of the world,
and nothing
could stop her.**

Once, I asked her if I could try one and she started screaming at me and telling me never to take any of her pills, otherwise I would become like her. I don't know what I did; I just wanted a candy.

A couple days after that, Grandma came and gave Mommy new candies and she calmed down. It was like she was two different people. The normal Mommy and the scary and sad Mommy. Grandma would come, bring her new candies, and things would go back to normal. When there was a school event, she would swallow her candies and go to school. I would stay with Grandma, worried that she would say something weird or scream at my teacher. She would come back home and tell me how proud she was of me. She would act normal as long as she took her pills. She would remember to wake me up, drive me to school and pick me up. She even helped me with my homework. Then some days she would forget to take them, and she would get very moody and sleepy. She would even stop eating and forget to make me food. But even with all of this, I still love her.

The Hidden Candlesticks

By Talia Gerber

The young girl with soft black curls drifted off to sleep, wrapped in the woman's warm embrace, as the woman finished her tale of the pretty princess in hiding. As the young girl's eyes fluttered shut, her mother softly sang the words, "Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad," as she routinely did every night to her precious Sophia, just as the child's eyelids would droop closed. The mother, Josephina, rose from Sophia's bed and made her way to the hallway, stopping to kiss the imaginary rectangular shape at the doorpost. She quietly shut the door, ran her nimble fingers down her black curls and exhaled deeply, wondering when her secret would come back to haunt her. Ever since Sophia's birth, eleven years ago, the family had been struggling to hide their Judaism, at risk of the death penalty. Life in 1503 was precarious for Spanish Marranos.

With the sun brightening the new day, two young girls, both eleven years old, sauntered around the market place, hand in hand, giggling animatedly. Sophia and her best friend, Maria, had twin smiles on their faces that matched their identical favorite red dresses and sparkly silver slippers. The only difference between the two girls was the stark contrast between Sophia's raven black hair and Maria's golden curls. Sophia and Maria were given three gold coins to spend at the market place as a reward for sitting so ladylike in church.

"Muchas gracias, Senor Valdez," Sophia exclaimed. "Those pastries were moi delicioso!"

The more the girls laughed, the more crumbs dirtied their satin church dresses as they gobbled pastries from José Valdez, their favorite baker in town. Time flew by as they circled the marketplace and wandered down its cobbled alleyways, sampling treats from the vendors. Suddenly, as Sophia saw from the corner of her eye that the sun was beginning to set, she jumped up and told Maria urgently, "The sun is setting and it is Friday! Mama always likes me home by sundown on Fridays!" She waved goodbye to Maria as she skipped home.

Josephina glanced right and left out the window twice to make sure no one was watching, and she furtively retrieved her golden candlesticks from their hiding place. She placed the two precious candlesticks, engraved with filigreed designs, onto the low child's table, fit for a toddler and hard to spot from the street. The candlesticks transported her back to an earlier, happier time in her life. In her mind's eye, she could still see her beloved parents gifting her with those candlesticks on the same day G-d gifted her with her little miracle. Her father's words came back to her, "Your mother and I well understand the perilous times we reside in, yet we must continue to remain faithful to ourselves and to our legacy

of Torah. We mustn't allow our beliefs to be swayed by the Christian oppressors. Promise us you will raise our granddaughter with an understanding of who she is and who her people are; Am HaNivchar." He put his hands on her head then, and recited the words he had said to her every Friday night for the past 35 years, "Yisemaich Elokim K'sara Rivka Rachel V'Leah. . ." That was the last Josephine saw of her parents before they fled from the Inquisition.

Maria shivered in the cool air as she watched her best friend disappear. She gathered the empty pastry bags and suddenly realized that Sophia had left her what had remained of her three golden coins! In a flash, she took off in the same direction as Sophia, intending to return the coins. As she approached Sophia's Moorish house, she slowed down to get the key from under the red flower pot, as she had seen Sophia do countless times. Letting herself into the dining room, Maria immediately noticed her friend's mother crouched down covering her eyes as she rocked back and forth. The light of two candles reflected off of her friend Sophia's face. Mesmerized, she watched Josephina put her hands on Sophia's head and mumble some words from a language she could not recognize.

"Sophia!" Maria blurted out.

Josephina froze in place, her hands shaking and her smile disappeared. She felt the air quickly disperse from the room, like a hot air balloon deflating. "W-w-what are you doing here?" Josephina stammered.

"I came to return your coins, Sophia," Maria responded in a stilted voice. "What's going on here?" A confused look enveloped her face.

"Oh, this?" Sophia naively answered, "This is just our Friday night tradition! Do you want to join us for dinner?"

"No, I think it is best if Maria headed home now as it is late and her parents will be worried," Josephina stammered.

As Maria returned home, she was still pondering the strange scene she had witnessed at her friend's house. "Father, I observed the strangest thing at Sophia's house. Her mother was lighting two small candles! Can Mama do that, too?" So-

**The more the
girls laughed,
the more crumbs
dirtied their
satin church
dresses as they
gobbled pastries
from José
Valdez, their
favorite baker in
town.**

phia exclaimed.

“You saw that, child?” Sophia’s father questioned, “Did Sophia’s mother also bless Sophia?”

“Yes! How did you know that!”

“Never mind, child, but these are matters that require my immediate attention.” Maria’s father went to retrieve his Grand Inquisitor’s hat and marched out the door with a purposeful stride.

Not long after, the Grand Inquisitor banged open the door of the moorish home and found an elaborate meal, untouched, on the dinner table. His eyes fell on the small table in the corner, and noted the drops of wax that covered its surface. Both the candles and its owners, however, were nowhere in sight.



Gone but Never Forgotten

By Shoshana Farber

The Bottom of the Garden

By Hindi Medalie

Things are different in Johannesburg, and it isn't just that department stores sell groceries and seasons don't really exist. We were visiting my grandparents in Johannesburg from Brooklyn, where everyone but my father was from. It was Shabbos afternoon when Momo began to complain about his unbearable boredom and longed to play any form of ball with anyone. Although we are from Brooklyn, where there are always kids around to play with, it's also a place where it would be deemed socially unacceptable to just show up to someone's house uninvited. However, my mother is diligent about his Shabbos excursions, so Momo is always occupied with his play pals every week, but not this one.

From my comfortable spot on the couch, I glance over at Momo and see him staring out into the garden. After one more paragraph of my book, I look up again and see he is gone. I figure he saw a lizard worth chasing, but after twenty minutes my anxiety starts to creep in. I tiptoe to the garden and am dumbfounded by what is in front of me. When I turn my gaze to the rest of the yard, I see several black children of various ages talking and playing together. Before I have time to take the scene in, a girl's voice addresses me. "Your dress is so cool."

I take a moment to process the normality of the comment and merely respond, "Thank you, it's Zara." I was even more taken aback when she knew what Zara was and told me how much she loves their clothes. I soon learned that the complimenter's name was Thorie and that she was eighteen. Her cousin sitting next to her was Polica and the boy aside her was Thabang, who would soon become Momo's best friend for the trip. There was also a boy my age, whose name I'm ashamed to say I was never able to pronounce it. I also learned that the six-year-old boy Momo was playing with was called Dumi. When the group found out Momo and I were from New York they went ballistic. They asked how many celebrities we had met over and over as though I was meeting more by the minute.

After speaking for a while, Thorie suggests a few games for all of us to play

**As the fair hand
of my brother
slapped the pink
palm of the boy
on his right, I
thought about
how unusual
it was for
teenagers to sit
around playing
and singing with
such little kids
without getting
paid to babysit.**

to pass the time, and Momo is the first to sit in the circle. For the next four hours (four!) we played hand games. As the fair hand of my brother slapped the pink palm of the boy on his right, I thought about how unusual it was for teenagers to sit around playing and singing with such little kids without getting paid to babysit. Most of all though, I realized it was not their Shabbos, and while they could be watching TV or texting their friends, they seemed happy to be sharing and laughing with us. They were so happy to just be sitting and talking to people. Unfortunately, the day came to a close, but the impression of it never did. Over the two weeks of our stay at my grandparents', we became fond of the kids who lived in maid's quarters at the bottom of my grandmother's garden. As my parents were laboring to get our suitcases to close at the end of our trip, Momo went to my mother and put in a request: he asked if we could get a garden at home in Brooklyn with a backhouse so that he could always have non-Jewish kids to play with on Shabbos.

Friends with Green Hair

By Baila Schuster

Murphy's law is alive and well in my life. If something can go wrong, it will, but this summer taught me that my life doesn't have to be controlled by that. I spent last summer working in a camp designed to give girls a once in a lifetime experience while reconnecting them with their heritage. Each staff member is paired with a camper as a mentor and role model. On the first day, I was eagerly awaiting the campers' arrival to see with whom I would be partnered. Watching the girls descend from the bus, I was struck by a girl with short green hair and multiple piercings. I could see the edge of what looked like a tattoo curling around her neck and could only imagine what it was supposed to be. Her thick black mascara and eyeliner, paired with an aggressive facial expression, completed the effect. Compared to the other cheerful faces, she stood out as someone who clearly did not want to be here and had no intention of just going with the program.

Of course, I was paired with her. The first time we got together, I was trembling. We seemed to have nothing in common. The conversation began haltingly. We covered superficial topics like the weather, camp food, and animals, such as those that camp had roaming around. As we spoke, it turned out that our mutual love for animals gave us a common ground.

Over the next few days, we spent time sitting on the grass, playing with bunnies and grooming horses, and somehow we began to understand one another. As our conversation topics broadened, her meaningful words brought me to tears. She spoke about being bullied. Her appearance represented the insecurity she felt inside. During our time together, I realized so much about myself and people in general. Inside every person there are secrets, but sometimes we never get to see the other side of the story. Her green hair changed in my mind from being artificially colored strands to being barbed wire and armor-protection from this harsh world.

**Her green hair
changed in my
mind from being
artificially
colored strands
to being barbed
wire and armor-
protection from
this harsh world.**

My summer flew by. What I once thought were differences that would divide us, actually united us. Our combined passion for learning made this a unique experience. She taught me about who I am as a person and what friendship means. I didn't have to change my values in order to understand her and neither did she. There were commonalities that bound us and allowed us to find our true selves

individually, and become better people together. Externalities that made us seem diametrically different actually come from the same place inside. Her green hair was there to protect her and to find her place in our painful world, while my contrasting brown hair and compliant nature protect me and make me feel loved. In order to accept each other, we needed to get past the protective barriers. We learned how to connect and make meaning.

Smiles can mask sadness, and hair dye can put up walls to protect secrets, yet we can always find a way to go beyond that barrier and form a connection. I learned this from the girl with green hair.



Cubby Contents

By Esty Friedman

Smile and Nod

By Chana Shutyak

I run through the subway, dodging the crowds of humanity to get to my destination. The trains race across the tracks through tunnels of gray and darkness and the music of self-taught individuals playing for a donation distracts me as I try to navigate the station. I frantically pace around, ignoring my watch, looking for a subway map or directions. I spot a policeman and run over and explain my situation. He stares at me and very slowly says, "Go down this hall and take the Uptown A," and then wildly blinks at me as if I'm the crazy one. Following the teenagers jumping over the turnstiles, I finally locate the correct platform and wait amongst men and women, students, businessmen, all hustling to get a seat or space to stand on the packed train at rush hour. After five stops on the overpacked, humid train, I get out on 168th and dash to my destination. I run across the street with an assembly of angry, honking New Yorkers, high heels tapping over the pavement, snippets of hair flying out of my tight bun while I straighten my blazer.

Finally, I reach the brown building, and frantically try to locate someone to help me get to the office of Mr. Anderson for the meeting I am late to. The receptionist gives me an elevator glare, which is one of the American terms that my daughter taught me. It's when people judge and overanalyze your outfit from bottom to top, and if they approve, will talk to you. The receptionist shakes her head in frustration and asks me why I am here and if I have an appointment. I tap away at my phone and open my email to show her that I received a confirmation.

"I have meeting about interview job today, Mr. Andersen sent me conforma-tishin email, look over there."

Her agitated veneer softens and she politely directs me to the elevator, even accompanying me as we ascend to the fifth floor. I adjust my outfit and hair in the elevator, hands clammy and nervous, while she observes me with the gaze of a stranger; xenophobic and hypocritical. She begins to gush about her cleaning lady, Natasha, who is also from Russia, and that Natasha's accent is heavier than mine, so that's why she was able to figure out what I was "trying to say." But I'm

**I adjust my
outfit and hair
in the elevator,
hands clammy
and nervous,
while she
observes me
with the gaze
of a stranger;
xenophobic and
hypocritical.**

not Russian. I'm Ukrainian. They are two separate countries with different, distinct cultures. And to think that New Yorkers get insulted when you think they are from New Jersey. At least it's the same country, just states separated by a murky river filled with pollution. The woman accepts my smile, wishes me luck and directs me to Mr. Andersen's office.

I quietly enter a room with windows that stretch from the floor to the ceiling, and a large mahogany table in the center, with ten people sitting around it. I try to smile with confidence and meet their eyes as I settle myself in the only empty seat at the end near the door. I begin by apologizing for being late.

"Uhh... subway schedule so crazy. I leave house early, one hour, and when I get to train they say somesing about unexpected delays."

Everyone around the table looks at each other and throws out reassuring comments like "that always happens here" and "don't worry, we weren't ready to start yet." Mr. Anderson, the CEO, announces to the table that he is going to call the front desk for water bottles, and offers everyone. He sees me and grins while dramatically apologizing for not having vodka. "Sorry, had I known you were Russian, I would have bought some. Never mind some. A lot." He picks up his phone. Everyone around the table laughs so I politely laugh along, not because of the comment, but because of Americans' sense of cultural differences always amuses me.

We all introduce ourselves, our names, hobbies, how many dogs we have, and other random pieces of ourselves that have no relevance to anyone. My turn comes and I feel the table stare at me.

"Hello, I am Alexa. I chave one daughter and two boys. I love to cook, read, clothing shopping and play tennis. I moved here in 2014 to study Master program, and I chave been working in behavioral neuroscience research since so far 2012." In reply, I am asked, "How is Mother Russia?"

Does he really want to know about the economic, environmental, political, social or cultural aspects of the Ukraine today? What does he expect to deduce from his feeble question about an entire country, more historically relevant and diverse than America? I could tell him all about our unstable government and why I left, our crumbling economy, or our strong traditions and cultures. I could tell them that the Ukraine is the fourth most educated nation in the world and that our values and determination to achieve have placed us there. I could tell them that the deepest metro station in the world, Arsenalnaya Metro Station, is located

in Kiev, our capital, and that the world's third most visited McDonald's is in Kiev. I could remind them of America's notorious crime, homicide, and drug abuse that ranks in the top ten in the world. I easily could compare the adult obesity rate of the Ukraine to America's, bringing America to shame. Seriously. Can't a Harvard graduate pose a more enlightened question?

Instead, I pull on a perfect Russian doll face, naive and clueless to the world, and play the immigrant they know me for. I smile and reply, "It is good."

Covergirl

By Shani Hans

Natalie stares at her computer monitor wondering how to best phrase a rejection letter to the latest interviewee when she is interrupted by her vibrating phone. The caller ID shows “Grace’s School.” She grabs for her phone and tries pointlessly to compose herself.

She stutters, “H-he-hello?”

“Hi. Is this Ms. Parker?” says the voice at the other end.

“This is she. Wha-what’s wrong with Grace?” Trying to mask the fear and desperation in her voice, she could hardly get the words out.

“Everything is okay. Grace had a small episode in class and she is on the way to Columbia Children’s Hos--”

“I’m on my way.”

Natalie throws the phone in her bag and lunges for her keys.

On her way to the hospital, her mind flashes back to the morning. It had started just like any other day.

∞

What if my boss didn’t like the font I used for the employee memo?

Thoughts like these had been ricocheting around her head for hours on end. She rolls over and glances at the clock. 4:32 AM.

I may as well get up now. It’s not like I’m going to fall asleep at this point anyway.

She rolls out of bed and makes her way to the bathroom. She takes her Clarisonic face brush out of the perfectly organized drawer and adds a dollop of her dermatologist prescribed face wash. Next come her teeth. She brushes her teeth for exactly two minutes until their porcelain-like surface feels fresh, smooth and clean. She rinses and flosses then heads back to her room. She picks up the outfit she carefully laid out last night and her mind begins to cycle:

When did I last wear this jacket? Was it last week? Will anyone notice that I’m wearing it again?

Maybe I should wear the burgundy one with the fringed trim and gold buttons instead?

Stop it! Pull yourself together! You prepared this outfit for a reason. It’s just fine. It’s perfect.

She pulls on her tailored slacks and tightens her cognac leather belt. As she buttons her pressed “non-ironed” white blouse another thought distracts her.

Maybe I should have used Calibri instead of Arial. The letters are slightly wider showing more power. Now everyone will think I am weak. I knew I should have used Calibri! Stop it already! Snap out of it!

She shakes her head trying to rid her mind of the disruption as she puts on a hunter green blazer with buttons in the exact shade as the buckle on her belt.

∞

Suddenly Natalie realizes that she is parked in the hospital lot. She hurriedly grabs her bag and slams the door behind her. As she rushes to the Emergency Room her eye does not even process the hords of people around her. How could her precious Grace be one of these people?

She reaches the desk and practically spits out, “Grace Parker!”

“One moment Ma’am,” says the infuriatingly calm woman across the desk.

“Where is my daughter?!” she cries.

A plump woman with dull hair and faded blue scrubs, surveys her computer screen patiently while Natalie stands there, her heart beating so fast it threatens to break free of her chest.

“Grace is stabilized in room 202.”

Natalie rushes into the miraculously open elevator and jabs the button for the second floor. For the short respite between the two floors she straightens her blouse and combs her fingers through her hair trying to appear calm, more for her than her daughter. As she walks into room 202 tears fill her eyes as she sees Grace. Her beautiful Grace. What could have happened that was too terrible to tell her over the phone?

“Mommy!”

Natalie turns toward the familiar voice of her daughter. Grace jumps out of the bed and rushes into her arms and clings to her neck. A lanky man with dark hair steps forward to introduce himself followed by an average looking woman.

“Hello. Are you Ms. parker?” Without waiting for a response he continues: “I’m Dr. Carter and this is Dr. Anne Allister.”

Why would there be two doctors? What happened? Why won’t anyone tell me?

“Unfortunately I need to run off to take care of another patient, Dr. Allister is one of our finest child and adolescent psychologist. She will happily explain everything to you.” He glances down at his phone and exits the room.

“I don’t understand what happened. Why does Grace need a Psychologist?” Natalie exclaimed, her voice slightly raised. “Nobody is telling me anything!”

“Grace sweetheart, do you mind waiting with the nurses at the station while I talk to your mommy for a little bit? I know for a fact they have a secret stash of candy in there.”

Grace quickly scampers off and Dr. Allister finally begins to explain:

“Ms. Parker, Grace is fine, but she had a panic attack in school. Apparently Grace was in English class when she began experiencing feelings of breathlessness, as if she was going to pass out. Fortunately, the teacher remained calm thinking she was experiencing an allergic reaction, and phoned the ambulance. A panic attack is a common way that anxiety can manifest itself. It is usually accompanied by feeling faint or dizzy, numbness in the fingers, extreme fear of dying and difficulty breathing. Based on an evaluation of Grace’s symptoms, we believe she may have Generalized Anxiety Disorder that caused her to experience a panic attack. It is unclear what exactly triggered this, but hopefully through further evaluation we will be able to get a clearer picture of what is going on.”

Natalie had already stopped listening once Dr. Allister began listing the symptoms.

How could this happen to my daughter. Where is this even coming from? My perfect little girl!

**A plump woman
with dull hair
and faded blue
scrubs, surveys
her computer
screen patiently
while Natalie
stands there,
her heart
beating so fast
it threatens to
break free of
her chest.**



Inner Workings

By Daniella Schulhof

III

Expectations

*“To free us from the expectations of others,
to give us back to ourselves – there lies the great,
singular power of self-respect.”*

– Joan Didion

Expectations

By Rachel Retter, Editor

Expectations are a powerful force, driving much of our behavior and greatly affecting the way we view ourselves. Everywhere we go, we are met with assumptions and predictions about who and what we should or should not be. They come from the people we know, and the strangers we meet, from the people we fear, and the people we love; even, and especially, they come from within ourselves.

It is tempting to try to mold ourselves to fit these expectations, as the alternative exposes us to the terrifying prospect of letting ourselves and others down. In this way, we slip on a mask, basking in the comfort of becoming the vision that everyone wants to see. It takes a special kind of strength to battle these expectations, but those who succeed have much to gain. The security of becoming someone else comes with the heavy price of losing yourself and what you value most.

Avigail Spira's piece, "Anonymous Artist," is centered around a young artist with tremendous skill and passion for his work. However, his father expects nothing from him but ignorance and ineptitude, and in this heartbreaking example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, the boy struggles to reveal his talent to the world.

"The Most Fun of them All," by Ruchama Biederman, tells a humorous account of a young Dr. Seuss's decision to adopt a pen name, so as not to defy his mother's expectation of him acting normal. The piece gives us a perspective that allows us, as readers who grew up loving Seuss's wacky and whimsical ways, to consider the stifling nature of expectations, and the freedom and creativity that stands to be gained by challenging them.

"A Beautifully Broken Barbie," an uplifting story by Leora Lehrfeld, skillfully contrasts the unforgiving assumptions of adults with the innocent and open-minded psyche of children. While the adults look sadly at the young girl in a wheelchair, expecting her to be pathetic and depressed, the other children stare with wonder, coveting the "chariot" that she gets to ride. Only they possess the ability to see past exterior, and know her true happy, playful self.

Chaviva Berger's piece, "(Un)Skilled," is a girl's witty narrative of her experience as a decently smart student in an exceptionally brilliant school. Although the tone starts off with light, playful musings, it grows heavier and more intense as the pressure to succeed and exceed others builds. This story is a prime example of how the expectations we create for ourselves and our lives can be just as damaging as the ones imposed on us by others.

Expectations are not inherently bad. They can be helpful tools, effective in pushing us to improve and succeed. The problem arises when we are no longer in

control of how we are affected by them; when we allow ourselves to be changed by expectations not because we choose to, but because we are afraid to challenge them. When that happens, we risk compromising ourselves and what we believe in.

The Bad Guy

By Yael Weinroth

The first time I met you, you were three. Your mother had just found the colorful self-portrait you drew underneath the mirror. She was not happy to meet me. But that was just the beginning of our friendship. I was there to stay.

I am reminded of our first meeting often. Usually in playgrounds, and at bedtime. Your memory floats with me as I visit people of all shades and ages. Just this week I was hit with a wave of longing as I watched a concerned mother have a long parent-teacher conference about my newest friend. I was instantly reminded of your mother having a similar chat with you in the kitchen in fifth grade. After half an hour of yelling and crying, you were told to let me go, to never see me again. But you and I both knew that I wasn't going anywhere.

I wish that we were still friends today and we could laugh and whisper secrets like old times. I thought of coming back to visit you in college for your birthday but thought better of it when I recalled what happened when I visited your classroom in eighth grade. I introduced myself to your strict teacher and to your newly-made friends. I made your family aware that I was still around. I showed them that I knew everything about everyone even though they knew nothing about me. That was the time I got you into big trouble. None of your new friends wanted to talk to you anymore. Because of me. I guess I often scare people away, but it's not because of my personality. It's because of my shaky reputation.

I remember the exact day you also began to shut me out.

My new friend also sees a therapist. Every week when I go with her to her sessions, I stare at the same framed inspirational quotes and the same maroon couch as I did when I went with you. I can't help but remember the hours we spent in this office, ignoring the calm therapist. We made sure that there was nothing she could say that would convince you to part with me. I was your protection from the world. Your mask, your shield. You were my best friend and no one understood you like I did. I try to convince myself that I can do the same with my new friend, but I already see her believing the calm therapist and shutting my friendship out.

I remember the exact day you also began to shut me out. It was the day your other friend met me. She knew I was your friend but pushed that knowledge aside until my reputation caught up with her. She drew a line between your friendship with her and your friendship with me. The line was clear and thick, as if drawn in permanent marker. Much like the marker your replacement is using in today's

therapy session.

We stayed awake for a week trying to come up with strategies and plans to sneak past the line but in the end your decision was made. You valued her friendship more than you did mine. You were determined to forget our adventures and parties, my help with your grades and making new friends. You didn't care about my closeness anymore. I would not cost you the only person that mattered to you most.

Looking back, I wish I had fought harder for our friendship, but it was a losing battle from the start. You went on trips with your family and the calm therapist, leaving me trailing behind. You left me in stages, each time cutting me out of your circle a little more. After a month with the inspirational quotes, I was only visiting you once a week. Soon I only came to visit you from time to time. You were not sorry to see me go.

My new friend is taking me on her class trip to Washington if I behave. We wait with a bunch of our classmates at the bus station with the big clock. I obviously can't help but think of you as I glare at the short hand forever stuck on the nine. This was the last place I ever saw you. You were boarding your bus to college. Your other friend was there too. You didn't need me anymore. You had a fresh start and the weight of my reputation and deception was gone. You were happy, and that's when I knew I was here to say goodbye for the last time. I was there only for a few seconds when you told your mom that you will miss her when you go to college. I still imagine the frozen hand on the nine as you said those last words. I could almost see you wave goodbye. That was the last time you ever told a lie.

Unsinkable

By Nomie Fermaglich

Underneath my gloves, my hands are shaking; the urge to paint is uncontrollable. I want to paint until the aching goes away, until I could forget about all the people controlling my life. Tears roll down my cheeks. I take a deep breath of the salty air and walk into my parents' cabin. As I wipe my sweaty palms on my dress, I repeat the same words I have said for the past three months. My father does not approve of art school; he believes that a normal job is more practical. Like a spider web that is so strong yet so easy to ruin, my life is coming apart. I am done begging and walk onto the deck, full of people free to make their own decisions. All this thinking is making my head hurt, so I sit down to rest.

On this trip the closest I get to relaxing is Mary. I feel I can confide in her and, not only does she hear, she listens. Mary shows me the light when I see only darkness. I walk over to her and we begin to talk. As the time goes by I forget about the burdens, about the expectations. For once I feel like a regular girl. We share pieces of our lives together. Mary is on a great voyage to live with her aunt in America; her family cannot afford to raise her. As we talk, my stomach growls and, before I can object, I am walking down the corridor towards Mary's cabin. As we laugh I spill my glass of juice all over my designer dress. My breathing is becoming shallow, I don't know if it is from my corset or the anxiety of these past two weeks.

**This bland
dress is the most
beautiful one I
have ever seen.**

Mary looks at me and says, "Why don't you change into my Sunday dress? I know it is not as fancy as anything you have but at least it will keep you from catching a cold."

As she hands me her dress I cannot help but think that this bland dress is the most beautiful one I have ever seen. I take the dress with gratitude and we continue our evening. As the sun goes down so does the temperature, almost as cold as ice.

I suddenly feel a jolt. I stare right into Mary's frightened face. We run out of the cabin to find a commotion. We push ourselves to the front to see the cause for all the yelling. I can't believe my eyes. The third class, with me included, is trapped like animals in a zoo. The bars constraining us have been shut by the crew. We search and search to no avail. There is no open exit.

As Mary and I look at each other we understand that it is vital for us to get out. Something is terribly wrong. I take Mary by the hand and march up to one of the crew members.

“I am the Captain’s daughter,” I say, “kindly open the gates for me.”

As I wait for him to reach for his keys he looks up at me and says, “You can’t be the Captain’s daughter, look at the dress you are wearing!”

Before I know it, I am surrounded with ice cold water. Through my shivering teeth I call out for my father. As I lay in the freezing water, I think how fitting it is that the Captain’s daughter is in the water while he prevented someone else’s daughter from being saved. This thought remains until the ice overtakes me.

(Un)skilled

By Chaviva Berger

You haven't fully understood the word genius until you've come here. Ever felt that sense of not belonging but all the people around you do so they can't relate? That's how I've felt everyday since I've come here. I'm not smart, though I hang around intellectuals hoping their smartness will jump from their minds to mine. I try to understand their language, but it's too overwhelming. I've heard that the world is made up of 99.9% genius and 0.1% other. Because of my "other" status, I am a shadow in a world full of robots. Everyone walks around in their crisp shirts, pressed pencil skirts and impeccable posture while I lounge around in my untucked top and floppy skirt. My mop of curls is no match for their tight buns. I was told the first step to being smart is looking the part, so I tucked in my shirt and tied up my hair. Nothing happened. My mom came home from PTA one evening and said, "Your professors said you're doing great and that you're extremely book smart, so why do you always seem miserable?" I replied, "Unless they mean the kind of "book smart" that knows the correct sized books to cover up my entire face while watching the clever kids, I don't think they knew who they were talking about."

I also wanted to tell her how hard it is living in a society where having two perfectly circular sunny side ups and a 7 ounce glass of orange juice every morning for breakfast is the norm, or finishing work at anytime later than seven pm was disappointing, but I couldn't do that to her. I want to make her proud.

In school, I try to make it seem as if I agree with everything anyone ever says because why bother disagreeing and sounding stupid. In class, everyone uses their wide eyes to soak up the fountain of knowledge spewing from our teachers' mouths. I overheard them speaking with the teachers as I walked out. They sound like aliens speaking gibberish. I tried to think of questions on their caliber like "What if it was summer all year? Would the effects of global warming increase?" But I didn't even voice my inquiry because I don't want the pity look.

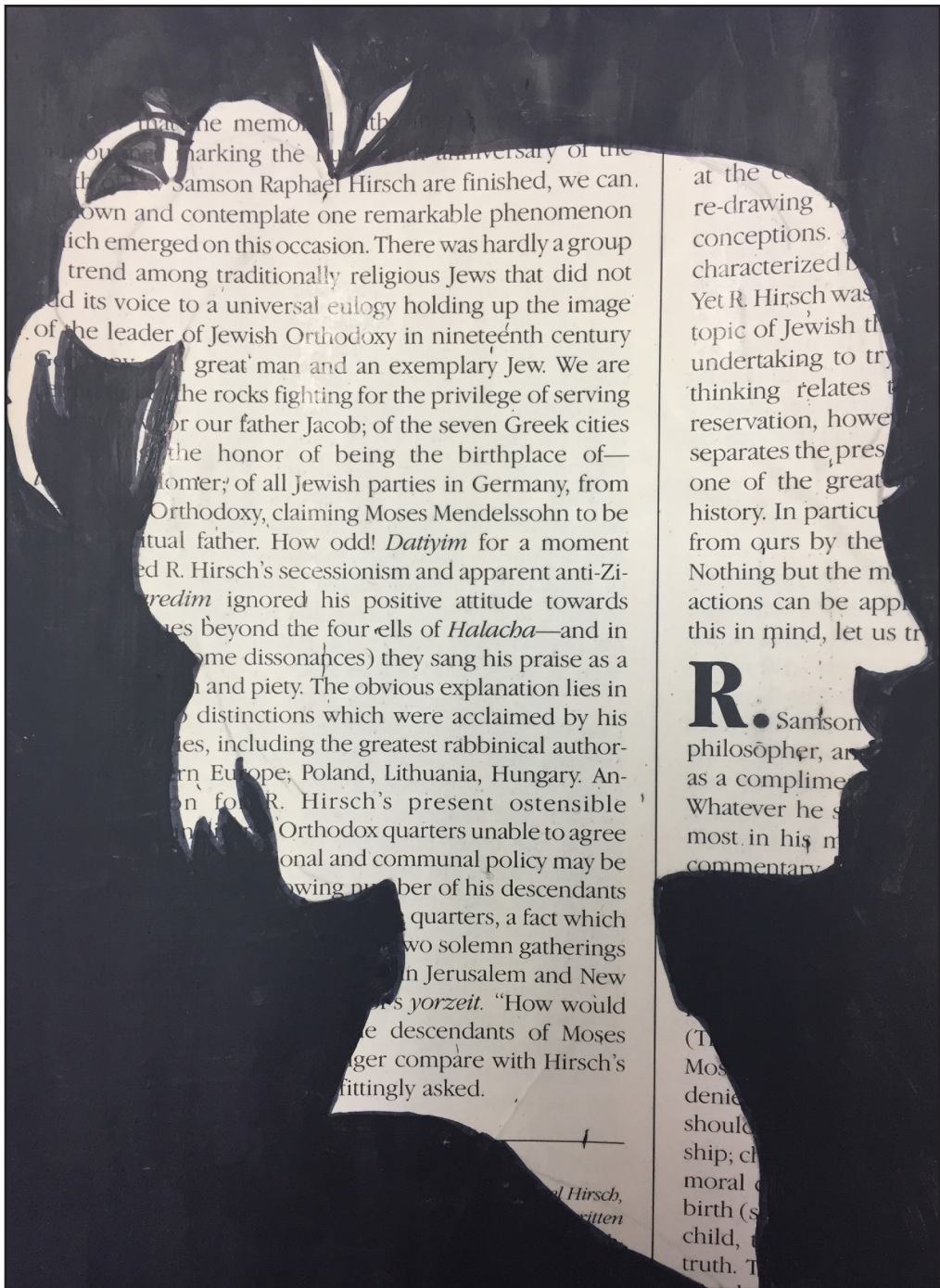
My mind is imploding on itself. Every week has about three essays and a test everyday. Then an email is sent announcing the details regarding the latest competitions. I chuckled. Who in their right mind would waste time writing when there's much work to be done. Three months later we were all called for an assembly to award the competition winners. I too tried to participate in the annual

**I felt as if a
motorcycle
started revving
up its engine in
my face.**

Oscar Wilde competition. I studied and memorize my script two weeks ahead of time. But when the seemingly glorious event arrived, the day quickly turned from sunshine and rainbows to thunder and rain clouds. I took my place among the other contestants in the front rows. As each student performed, my heart sank closer to the ground. Everyone was more brilliant and eccentrically presented than the next. I didn't know what I was thinking. My throat closed. The air was as thin as sharp sheets of ice, as if there wasn't enough to sustain my collapsing lungs. I felt as if a motorcycle started revving up its engine in my face, pushing large, puffy, charcoal-grey clouds into my mouth. When they asked if anyone else was performing, I just shrank back into my seat, trying to keep my coughing to a minimum. I tried to step out of my comfort zone but my vulnerability has gone unnoticed. There's no use.

The school-wide newspaper that comes out annually is starting to accept submissions. Only the the best, most sophisticatedly intense pieces get featured. I sat myself by my computer one dark and stormy night and tried to get into their mindsets. I started writing but after six hours all I had was, "It was a dark and stormy night." After another good five hours, I'm was quite certain that my masterpiece was done. I imagined opening the publication to page 53 and seeing my Pulitzer prized piece staring back at me. To my mind's utter dismay, the index did not have room for my name. I don't belong in this world full of elite beings who only share cognitive content among themselves. Valuable insights should be spread across the population and not just locked inside one's mind.

One month later the publication is distributed. I open up to page 53 for a good laugh. Something has just occurred. I feel my mind expanding, letting information flow in freely like soft rushing water. My heart is trembling, fearing this newfound experience. I felt as excited as a young child does when the windows are finally frosted and the snow season begins. Though I hardly realized it, this was a gradual experience and not instantaneous one. I'm beginning to fully comprehend their ways. My mask of inferiority starts to crumble. I'm finally matching the cadence of the genius's gaits. This school has reached inside my small, insignificantly dumb self and pulled out a confident, smart-minded, young adult. I finally belong. The world is now 100% genius.



Thoughts Behind the Words

By Ettie Guelfguat

The Most Fun of Them All

By Ruchama Biderman

They call me Seuss for no more reasons than one; I'll tell you my whole story, come join me on this journey. It all stemmed from the need to find a way for mother's love to burst free, lest her life span be cut short due to the Heavenly decree.

I am the man who speaks for the trees. "I speak for the trees for the trees have no tongues." I wondered if I should let the world know the name of the man who speaks for the trees. Should they know who speaks for the "perilous pants eating plants," red and blue fish, and even eggplants? They would not call me whimsical after a glimpse into my world. I would be linked to words such as childish and irrational- words mother would use to shriek at me with her shrill voice after I would balance my fish bowl on an umbrella and a cup of coffee on my headband. That coffee spilled on mother's new oriental rug, which caused me to stop receiving anymore of her never given hugs. Little did she know that the cat with a striped hat would be able to do all that, while giving a twist to his tail as he balanced on a ball like a seal. Or maybe mother could know, but how interesting

**I wondered if I
should let the
world know the
name of the
man who speaks
for the trees.**

it would be if she did not know that the book was written by me. I wondered if knowing that there are others as crazy as myself would affect mother's health. I knew that the more mother reads, the more things she will know, and the more that she learns, the more places she'll go. I wanted to take her on a journey, the ones I experience each day, all I had to do is get her to read, yes I needed a way. I knew that as long as she does not know that these are works of her son's imagination then I would be able to throw a nasty grinch into the equation.

And there went my psyche, an idea was transformed, I decided to write with a name that has yet to have been born. If I use a false name mother will have no one to shame. Mother will be forced to agree that she has been transformed into a creature that is magnificent and carefree. Mother will want to play on a stormy day just like the Lorax, a talking rat, or maybe even like The Cat in the Hat. She will call over Thing 1 and Thing 2; She will be a different woman who is completely new. There will be no more crocheting or fun delaying. It all may just be because mother does not know it is me, but who cares! Mother will learn to get off her rocking chair that has not been capable of swinging for the past 1500 years. I'm done with anything concerning her high pitched, scratchy voice conveying mes-

sages of *concern* for my mental health. I am no longer associated with words such as childish and irrational. It's Dr. Sues's job to deal with those that make him feel impractical.

“Look at me!

Look at me!

Look at me NOW!

It is fun to have fun

But you have to know how.”

My Famous Hidden Face

By Shayna Eisenberg

My body is totally numb as I soak it in an enormous ice bath. I can barely distinguish between the pain of the arctic like temperature created by ten thousand ice cubes or the pain and swelling pulsating through my swollen joints.

The years have taken their toll on this once statuesque powerful body. How many more years can it hold up to the veritable beating it takes on a daily basis? Squatting for endless hours at a time has destroyed my body and knees, as I fight through the pain to stay focused to avoid getting pelted by a 95mph white object that is hard like a rock and has no mercy on the object that it contacts. The hand-eye reflex is starting to fail me but I don't know why. The pressure to perform and endure is increasing with every day.

All this effort and suffering for something that I once loved to do as a kid is no longer a joy, but a burden. It is now just a job, that keeps my wife wrapped in her Versace gowns and elevated in her Prada shoes. My kids expect the business class seats to Hawaii and the smooth drive that our Mercedes 5500 provides. I am a slave to buying the next "Apple I thing" and it won't be long before they want me to purchase a personal drone to bring them their Fro Yo faster in order to feed their growing impulsive millennial expectations.

I used to be bothered by the fact that all of my teammates are more easily identified as they strut around with unobstructed faces and enjoy more fame and fortune than me. My face is always concealed and largely to protect my jaw from the ball travelling at 102 mph. I am best known for the number on my back. But, as my performance continues to decline, that number is more often criticized by "adoring fans" who expected I would always be the same youthful player they once knew. When the time comes for me to unveil my face and remove this catcher's protection, I will feel liberated, albeit at a financial cost. I look forward to live more safely and in a pain free world. Until then, the family will be very well dressed and live out their fantasy until mine begins. Until then I have to deal with the post game call from my barely sixteen-year-old son, "Dad, I found a great deal on a new BMW when I get my license." My knees begin to ache further.

I hear a knock on the door and my manager walks in. "Good news Champ! looks like your #7 has been re-signed for another three years. "Thanks coach, my kids will be so excited to hear."

**The pressure
to perform
and endure is
increasing with
every day.**



Survival Stains

By Ahuva Lisker

A Beautifully Broken Barbie

By Leora Lehrfield

The black Lexus stopped some five feet to the right of the school's oak doors and everyone noticed that Ella was different. The parents and teachers noticed that she was different. And the children noticed that she was different.

A car door opened and a blue Nike sneaker emerged, followed by Ella's mother. She opened the trunk and extracted a folded up but still bulky wheelchair, which she carefully set down on the sidewalk. As she opened the side door and carefully lifted her daughter into that conspicuous wheelchair, the parents sympathized for the four-year-old's differences. She was the odd one whose body would never do what the other children's could. She was the one who had to watch the other tykes run and skip with glee into the building while she longingly peered at them as though through iron bars of her wheelchair.

As the wheels of her chair spun through the classroom's doorway, little pigtailed heads turned around excitedly to examine their new classmate. As they gazed at her, they instantly realized that she was the privileged one. While they had to walk unceremoniously into the classroom in their velcro sneakers, she entered riding in a chariot like Cinderella's.

During playtime, the teachers casted looks toward the poor soul in the corner. Pity clutched them as they noticed her perpetual dazed grinning as she sat amidst the kindergarten commotion, oblivious to the happenings around her. As if she didn't know what was going on; she just grinned. Bookshelves! Grin. A brown door to the right! Grin. The ceiling above with little black specks on the white tiles! Grin. Her mouth curled up at the edges every time her eyes took in a new object.

The kindergarteners noticed her expression too; they noticed her smile. When Allie told Ella how, last night, her mommy cooked meatballs for the second night in a row, Ella smiled widely, because it really was quite funny that her mother made meatballs twice! Ella's smile widened Allie's and made her shake her head and chuckle at Mommy's silliness. And Ella laughed because Allie laughed.

**She entered
riding in a
chariot like
Cinderella's.**

When the little girls converged on the Barbie house and playfully negotiated and bickered about who got which doll, Ella's thin fingers willingly curled around the one-armed, chopped-haired Barbie while the pudgy hands of the other children grabbed the flawless, unblemished figurines, each afraid of being the last one to pick and being forced to play with the "injured" Barbie. The teachers shook their heads and sympathized with the young

girl who would never be as whole as the Barbies chosen by her pickier classmates.

But a funny thing happened. When Ella's doll ascended the shining silver throne and sat on those imperfect legs, her classmates observed the doll's imperfections melt away as she became a princess worthy of such a throne. They recognized that although their blonde beauties had two arms and long, even hair, they were on the floor, below Ella's impaired doll which sat high up in the Cinderella-esque chariot.

When Tinker Bell's shorter wing pointed to the three of the classroom clock, the girls flocked to the school's entrance area and waited for their mothers to arrive and listen to the day's tales. The mothers filed in and as they searched for their daughters, they noticed a new mother pushing her wheelchair-bound daughter, and they looked on with pity. They considered the woman whose life was bound to her frail daughter and the disabled girl who was bound to her wheelchair.

But outside, as Ella and her mother stopped by their car, the four-year-old girls watched Ella's mother place a hand on the back which had rested against a chair that was like the chariot of a princess, and the other hand under the legs that a disfigured doll sat upon and became more beautiful than all the other dolls. As her mother softly put her into the backseat of the car, Ella waved a hand that had picked the Barbie with one arm and an almost-bald head. The door slammed shut and her fellow kindergarteners turned around and stood on tiptoe to look at that perpetually smiling face by the window and wave back.

And as the mothers listened to their daughters excitedly chatter about Ella and watched them vigorously wave to her retreating car, they noticed that bigger than the differences between the girl with cerebral palsy and her able-bodied classmates were the differences between their own adult minds and the beautiful pure minds of the kindergarteners. The black Lexus pulled away and drove through the parking lot's gates and the parents noticed how different their adult selves were from their four-year-old daughters.

The Mountain Climber

By Sara Nordlicht

I brace my knees upon impact as I hit the bottom of a bottomless pit, thus creating a complete conundrum, of course. This pit had opened up beneath me without warning. It is, therefore, to my utter shock, dismay, and confusion that I find myself reaching rock bottom, scarcely after I had come to the realization that I was falling. I cough on the dust that is stirred up upon my arrival. I wonder how long it has been since anyone has last been here.

Having nothing better to do, I begin to walk in a strangely static landscape. If I look up, I can imagine seeing the top of my bowl-shaped prison. Nothing changes in my gray, dusty surroundings, until quite suddenly, it does. A brick wall soon impedes my passage. I stare at it in a kind of bemused state. The wall seems familiar somehow. It seems as though I am returning to the same place I was prior to my falling, which of course made no sense.

**A brick wall
soon impedes
my passage. I
stare at it in a
kind of bemused
state.**

There is no use trying to ignore the wall, nor in trying to bypass it. It exists; real, infinite, crumbled brick red. Well, that is, about as infinite as the bottomless pit is infinite, in other words, for infinity it is surprisingly finite. I must implode its foundation and completely eradicate it in one fell swoop. I proceed to do so.

Okay, maybe it was not entirely worth all that effort, blowing apart that old wall. For now, as I squint in disbelief in the face of spontaneous strong spotlights, I see an infinite number of people glaring back at me. Or so it seems. As I have already established, infinity exists only in theory. Here and now, only I exist.

These people have no individuality, they are just a blur of faces, such as one might see when on a train pulling into a station. The vastness of this group scares me, their discriminatory eyes evaluating me, daring me to rebel. Yet I can and do overcome them, simply by remembering that I am every bit as worthy as they, despite their being infinite. Some infinities are greater than other infinities.

At last, I come to realize the source of all my troubles. That pit had not come from nowhere, it had only opened up beneath me upon my monumental decision to do something inconsequential simply to avoid doing something else. This strategy works quite well for one wishing to evade any sort of commitment to a necessary, if decidedly unpleasant, course of action. Unique to this plan, too, is its property of being boundless. An infinite number of itineraries exist that one

can opt for, aside from that which you ought to be doing. Unfortunately, this only led me to the bottom of a bottomless pit.

The wall is formed of my doubts in my ideas and my uncertainty in my ability to convey them properly to others. It is not a lack of concepts in my mind, but rather a lack of confidence in me. I must remove the farce that I am somehow less than that wall, for until I do that, it will forever stand in my way, not allowing me to move forward.

The mass of people is single-minded and does not follow any form of logic or rationale. It inspects me, with those powerful, white-hot spotlights, to find and interpret my flaws. It demands of me to join with it, act like it, and join in accord with its desires. It challenges me, tempting me not to be different. Yet I resist and remain steadfast. I must think my own thoughts, and thereby gain ownership of myself, without influence of it. Thereby, I am able to rise above it.

Thus tells the tale of my traverses through the Pit of Procrastination, the Brick Wall of Writer's Block, and the Mob of Mindlessness. Needless to say, I survived to tell the tale. May you be as fortunate as I.

Anonymous Artist

By Avigail Spira

My favorite piece was gone.

Sold into the hands of the unworthy.

It was a mix of paint and tears that swirled around the canvas in daring strokes.

Chunks of my souls will now be paraded and plastered on the wall of a home that will not even recognize its meaning.

And I didn't even get to say a proper goodbye.

I remember the night this painting was born.

It was a windy night, the type of wind that blows through your thin skin and worms its way into your bones. I felt the cold on my fingertips through the icy window of the gallery. I stared outside at the long line forming at the door. Women adorned in fur coats clutched their husbands possessively as they waited impatiently for the doors to open and invite them into the warm, well-lit art gallery. When the clock struck eight, I

finally unlocked the sturdy wooden door and invited them in. The once shockingly silent room is now a colorful array of hushed speaking aristocrats. They sip their wine prettily and comment on the art displayed on the walls. They each suddenly become experts on art and are very eager to display their knowledge. They don't know who painted them. Not even my father, the gallery owner, knows who the anonymous artist is. My father is no artist; he does not even like art but what he does like is the cash it flows in. He struts his way through the room, smiling at the ladies and offering his pathetic expertise on the paintings.

"The bright colors profusely display the artist optimistic view of the place of women in society," he purrs smoothly to an elegant couple observing a vibrant portrait of a young woman.

"Oh Jerald," the wife whines, "This painting is the one."

My father's smile is smug as he gallantly ushers them my way to pay. I give the couple a tight smile as I ring up and wrap the painting. As I gently envelope it in brown paper I run my hands over the smooth strokes one last time. Most artists hate when people touch their paintings, but not the artists of this piece.

**It was a mix of
paint and tears
that swirled
around the
canvas in daring
strokes.**

As soon as the last guest leaves, I lock the door and pull out a broom to remove the remains of the night. As I sweep the broom across the floor I imagine I am painting the ocean. I paint thick frothy waves and then choppy rapid ones. I am so engrossed in my invisible creation that I don't hear my father walk in until he grabs the handle of the broom.

All at once every muscle of my body freezes up. I become a marble statue.

His face is void of the smile that was plastered there all night. His eyes are full of venom. I try to cover my flinch as his hand flies across my cheek with a satisfying slap.

"Stupid boy," he grumbles in a dangerously low tone, "you can't even sweep the floor properly."

His gaze is full of disgust as he regards his only offspring. I fight to keep the tears from forming in my eyes and I bite my tongue to keep from responding.

I am pathetic. I wish I had the courage to look him in the eye and unveil who I really am. But he would never believe me; he would just scoff in my face. So I remain silent, I keep my face a mask.

As soon as he leaves the room I feel my fingers twitching. The suppressed emotions are bursting from my fingers, waiting to be brought to life. Like a man grasping for air, I run frantically to my dim lit attic room. A beautifully blank canvas is waiting for me. My nimble hands have a mind of their own. As the colors swirl across the canvas a sob erupts from my chest. The soft droplets make their way to the painting, blending skillfully into the image. When I finish I feel calm. With a clear head I fall across my bed and slip into a deep slumber.

When I wake it is gone.

Panic courses through my body and my heart contracts.

"BOY," my father's course voice vibrates up the stairs.

"Get down here and wrap this painting up for Mr. Wholf."

Mr. Wholf! My magnificent masterpiece is being bought by a crook. A man who swindles for money and sneers at women.

Being the dutiful son I am I slowly wrap my soul up and hand it over without meeting his eye.

And I remain behind wraps; fear holds me back from removing my mask and revealing to my father my true identity.

I am the artist.



Survive

By Michal Rogosnitzky

Discovering

By Morielle Tolchin

Watching the train station blur behind him, Jason reminded himself that a blur is all that it was and that he was going somewhere better.

Growing up in Abbot, Maine, he had always yearned for the “city life,” AKA anything but the “Abbot, Maine life.” Although waking up overlooking Piper Pond was a beautiful sight, recently all he thought about was how endless it looked. He felt that he was just repeating the same process day after day. Wake up, go to work at the grocery store five minutes away, come home, and repeat.

He needed a change.

Just two hours earlier he had set out to buy himself a one way train ticket. Having not chosen where he was going to go, he packed himself two suitcases and drove over to the train station. He decided to take the earliest train to the farthest location, which was New York City. So now here he was on the train, alone, headed towards a place where he knew nobody. But he was confident New York City was the place for him.

He had always loved it, or rather loved the idea of it. He had never actually been there. His bedroom was draped with the Manhattan skyline. His nightstand housed a six by six picture of the rush of people in Times Square. And his walls were decorated by subway stickers, one on every side. One may properly say that he had an obsession with this city.

This train ride was going to be his ticket not only to New York City itself, but to everything that comes along with it. There were four hours left of his ride and with each minute his eyes became more glued to the window with hope.

Upon arrival he would be greeted by a sparkling sign that read, “Welcome to New York!” People would greet him quickly, but warmly, in the typical New York way. He would find Central Park on his own, like a New Yorker. He would then sit on a bench in Central Park enjoying the music of a soon to be discovered pop star. He would feel fulfilled and----Eeeeeek! Greeted by the ear-paining noise of the train, he had arrived.

One may properly say that he had an obsession with this city.

The previously calm train immediately turned into a battle ground- each person fighting to retrieve their belongings and rush out. There was no sparkling welcome sign, and no quick but warm welcome. Jason stood on the train platform in utter shock. Was this the New York where all of his dreams would be fulfilled?

He struggled to drag his suitcases up three flights of New Yorker filled stairs. With each step, he lost more hope. At the top, he was greeted by a whiff of garbage-truck-air and a homeless man shivering, begging for money.

Was this New York- *bis* New York?

Double Identity

By Bayla Weiner

The mask I wear I do not see.

I enter the school building walking alongside my mother. It's the beginning of fifth grade and my hopes are high as I start at this school. We just moved to a large brick house with granite countertops, fresh grass, and best of all, my dream room. A freshly painted light purple bedroom with a beautiful chestnut colored bed. A large walk-in closet lined with rows of clothing and shoes. Paintings and portraits line the walls. My two wonderful parents and I on my first birthday, the drawing I made in art class last year. I am excited for all the new opportunities that await.

As I walk the school hallways there are strange looks being thrown my way. The kids stop talking as I pass by. I huddle closer to my mother. Why is everyone being so cold? Is it because I am new? Surely they get new students from time to time. Why are they casting glares towards me? Am I dressed the wrong way? Are my shoes the wrong color? Is my hair out of place? I slowly begin to notice that it is not me they are looking at; it is my mother. I look up at her and she looks just as beautiful as always. Her makeup done in good taste, her hair blown out just last night. She is wearing her new light blue summer dress. What it is about her that is attracting so much unwanted attention?

We finally reach my classroom and the teacher is quick to welcome me as the new student. "Well, hello Amanda," she says, "So nice to have you join our class. I see that your nanny has brought you to school today. Is your mother at work already?"

I just stare at her in confusion. My mother? She is right here beside me. Then I slowly realize what everyone has been acting so strangely about. My mother, she is not white like me and the teacher and most of the other children, she is black. My wonderful loving mother who has taken care of me my whole life. My mother who has given me hugs, kisses and warm food. She adopted me at birth and has raised me as her own when my birth mother could not. Back where we used to live everyone knew I was adopted. They accepted me and treated me normally. I never felt out of place or excluded. All these years I have become used to it. All of a sudden people don't know my history and they find it strange. Now my mother is assumed to be a nanny.

I slowly begin to notice that it is not me they are looking at.

"Amanda's mine," my mother responds with dignity. The teacher just stares

back at her, shocked and embarrassed. My mother has raised me to be color-blind, to look beyond the exterior mask of color. I suddenly feel sorry for my teacher, the other children. I pity them their narrow mindedness. Will I be able to learn from a teacher who is so quick to jump to conclusions? Someone who makes assumptions based on skin pigment? I look up to my mother and she knows what I am thinking.

My mother turns to me. "It's ok, they will learn. You will teach them." She gives me a soft kiss goodbye and I know that I have the best mother in the entire world.



Colored Worlds

By Chayie Safrin

IV

Self- Chosen Masks

*“People seldom change. Only their masks do.
It is only our perception of them and the perception
they have of themselves that actually change.”*

– Shannon L. Alder

Self- Chosen Masks

By Chani Weiner, Editor

Masks are not what is given to us, but what we choose for ourselves. When we fall into the traps of society and allow it to dictate who we are, we end up masking ourselves and becoming the imposed version of ourselves. The most damaging thing we can do is wear a mask for so long that we forget who we are underneath.

When we decide to mask who we are because we are scared, terrified of what the world will think about us, we lose some of ourselves as well.

What do we do in order to ensure that no one sees who we are inside? We accessorize ourselves with material items, prestigious titles, and academic achievements. We fear that if we do not adorn ourselves with exteriors, the world will find us ordinary. Overtime, these facades become difficult to maintain. We end up burnt out and exhausted from maintaining the exterior we think others want to see, instead of being ourselves.

“A Mile in her Stilettos” by Michal Treitel captures the unique way in which an individual is happy with who she is but is unhappy with the way she is perceived, as an ordinary girl. To fix that, she revamps her entire head to toe look, accessorizing with high heeled shoes, a new bag, and makeup. Only after changing everything about her appearance and even her drink preferences, does she realize that who she is and who she wants to be that matters more than what society wants her to be.

In her work “A Standstill Life,” Channa Gelbtuch depicts the denial of humanity and how we become so focused on obtaining physical objects and exterior achievements, that we forget about the gift we have been given, life, and the opportunity to make meaning and purpose in this world. Through the simple narration of a mannequin, the story forces the reader to stop and question their actions and values. Similarly, in Malki Einhorn’s piece “All People Are Complex,” the reader experiences the fear of one character who decides that she is no longer going to define herself by society, but rather is going to step out of her comfort zone and do the opposite of what is expected of her. Her character comes to the complex realization that every individual is not one thing. We each have the ability to decide who we want to be, regardless of what we think others expect us to be.

The character in Temima Feder’s piece, “Waking Up and Realizing,” slowly cracks under all of the pressures and responsibilities that she takes upon herself to cover up her grief and pain. Like her character who, six years since losing her father, cannot manage to recover from the grief and be present in her life, many times we take on projects and try to lose ourselves in our work in order to hide our feelings. Likewise, Nina Melohn’s character in “MASKot” struggles with who

he wants to be and who he will be if he removes his mask. The mask he chooses to cover his face with enables him to be part of a reality he would otherwise be excluded from.

While it is easier to shape ourselves and our aspirations around the molds we convince ourselves we need to fit, we must work to remove those masks so that who we are does not get lost.

As Susan Sparks eloquently said, “We weren’t born with masks. We put them on, so we can take them off.”



The Eyes That See

By Batsheva Levi

The Niqub

By Gitty Boshnack

It was the Tuesday after 9/11 when the policeman stopped her in the street.

“Excuse me, Ma’am. What’s in your purse?”

Startled she looked up “Wha... Oh! My stuff.”

“Well Ma’am, I’m going to need to see some I.D.”

He didn’t say it like a question, more like a command. He didn’t say it with respect, more like a taunt. Like because of how you look, because of who you are...

“I’m going to need to see some I.D.”

Reluctantly, she pulled out her wallet and handed him her I.D.

“Rachel Young... Is that your real name?” He asked accusingly. He inserted it into his scanner.

“Yes.” She responded although slightly perturbed. “Why did you stop me?” she asked

He pretended not to have heard. “Here you go, Miss.”

A few seconds past and then he said “You know, we want to trust you guys, but you don’t blend in.. anymore.”

Yea, right. Like she and her niqab ever blended in. Now, not only did she not blend in but she stood out. All that day people shot her accusing looks. Some even crossed the street as she approached. And this got her thinking. Suddenly, the protective, modest garments weren’t as demure and didn’t feel quite as safe anymore.

Suddenly, the protective, modest garments weren’t as demure and didn’t feel quite as safe anymore.

All People Are Complex

By Malki Einhorn

There's a huge group of girls; ten of them, in fact. They're all enjoying themselves. They feel the confidence internally and amongst the group to let it all go. Feel the music and let their troubles slip away. I watch them from the chair on the side. I wonder why I can't be like them. People tell me to push my boundaries, go out of my comfort zone. But even being here takes me out of my territory. If I take even one baby step more out of my region, people will no longer be able to recognize me. I feel like I'm safe from embarrassment and judgment, from the sidelines. No one can see my horrible, stick-like dancing or hear my tone-deaf voice. I envy the girls who do what they want, without the feeling of fear holding them back.

Just days later, we're all enjoying ourselves. It's an average sized group of us, around 10 girls. We are enjoying the company, singing off key and dancing even though we really don't have any talent, it's okay. Because we know our flaws, not everybody is perfect, and that's an accepted fact. I don't feel like I can do anything that will embarrass myself. I look to the girls who sit on the side and feel for them. I know what they are thinking and want to tell them to put all negative feelings aside. Even that is too much to think about at such a time, so I put that aside and focus on the now, the fun that I so want when I am forced by myself to sit on the side. At the end of an exciting, exhausting night, we fall asleep smiling, content with the great fun we had making fools of ourselves.

I am constantly overthinking and when I'm not, my mind replays what happened later on and rethinks it then.

My mind slips back to these two incidents and is confused. How can I feel two contrasting feelings with only a few days in between? I get my answer after much thought and consideration. In short, people are complex. However, in the expanded version: it's normal for people to have different feelings, that's what makes them human. People have to recognize that they will have the desire to sit on the side. However, each person will feel that way to different degrees.

I want to feel comfortable to join in at all times. My answer doesn't fulfill that desire. I don't want to overthink anything anymore. I am constantly overthinking and when I'm not, my mind replays what happened later on and rethinks it then. I am desperately waiting for the thing that makes me understand why I can't, what's holding me back, and how I can change that.

I was looking at my contacts' profile pictures one night when I was bored on my bed. I went down my contacts in alphabetical order. When I got up to Katie, my mother's best friend, I saw the best thing I've ever seen. Her profile was a quote by Hans F. Hansen, the famous football player, and it read, "It takes nothing to join the crowd. It takes everything to stand alone."

These two sentences made me think about my whole life with a different perspective than I did for the past 18 years. Now, when I get the usual and normal sensation of not wanting to join in on the fun and chaos, I don't pity myself. I don't think that I am pathetic and worry about my social and mental health. Instead, I remember the saying that is now ingrained in my brain. I can stand alone, or sit alone on the side, and be ok. No one has to sympathize with me because I don't have enough confidence to join because that's not the case. When I sit on the side, either alone or enjoying the presence of other girls who aren't in the mood to join in the uproar, I make a conscious decision to do so. I accept the fact that at this moment I want to sit and maybe next time I will join. Coming to that knowledge has made me a stronger person. It made me be able to understand one of the most confusing things in my life. It made me believe that even though at some points I choose to sit alone, I am strong internally and amongst the group.

They're all enjoying themselves. They are acting silly and goofy while I sit on the side and watch. When I feel like standing and moving my body along with theirs and releasing my voice in song, I do so. We are a nice sized group, approximately ten girls. I sit on the side; I am like all the rest. I dance with them; I am a part of them.

Waking Up and Realizing

By Temima Feder

This morning, I woke up with something new. It was scratching at the walls of my stomach. It squeezed itself inwards like a weight in my center. It wasn't anxiety. There were no butterflies flitting around inside of me, tickling my heart. This was harder, heavier. It's the moment when you realize you're unhappy and you double over and lie in your rumpled sheets staring at everything and realizing how much you hate it. I can't describe it. This hatred makes me feel like I'm stabbing everything I look at. Cutting each thing open and letting its innards overflow. But then I blink and everything's perfectly intact and the only thing overflowing is me. I lift myself up with the weight and get dressed. I have no choice.

You can't take on everything. I knew I would shatter but I was delusional. I pretended so hard, I believed it. Now all my muscles are sore from moving them in the wrong directions. The first stage of grief is denial but I've been wallowing in denial. For six years.

The problem with realizing that you're miserable is no one else knows about it. It doesn't give you the set of rights you'd expect. You're limited by the frame you made yourself. I've imprisoned myself. I shouldn't have held back. I shouldn't have.

So I walk into work and say hi to people. Distant conversations are doable because they're supposed to miss the pain behind your eyes. At least these distant relationships are real. It's the shams of close friendships that I can't face. I'm terrified. Nonetheless, I walk with firm steps and a straight posture. Even my walk is a lie. I step into my office and sit down. There are piles of paper on my desk, the phone ringing is like needles in my ear drums and someone turned over the garbage can. Again. I sit down and heave. Numbers whiz past my eyes. Random amounts of money, each blurring with the next. I don't want to calculate the sums of these numbers or advise faceless people on their finances. I want the numbers to crumple, fold in on themselves and fall away. I want to walk away from everything I spent so long hiding in. It seems my hideout has become bigger than me and it now threatens to choke me.

**It seems my
hideout has
become bigger
than me and it
now threatens to
choke me.**

I sit in my chair, my head heavy when Marcel pokes his head into the room. "Hey, listen, I'm running out to grab lunch so could you cover for me if anyone asks anything?" He winks. "Sure. If anyone asks, you're printing something." I

wink back. "Oh, and Edna told me to remind you about the file you need to hand in by tonight. See you later. Thanks!" I nod weakly. Did those words just come out of my mouth? I don't even remember saying them. I simply felt them glide off my tongue. It's like I'm on auto-pilot. My brain knows what to do when I don't. My muscles are used to moving in the wrong directions. I turn to my desk and begin. My hands feel like lead and my heart won't stop throbbing.

At lunch, it's too much. Every encounter took a little more out of me till I hung limp. Because each time I felt like I was pretending for people who aren't worth it, people who only know the 20% of me I filter out to them. These are relationships I made so my life would feel in order. But it's not. Too many numbers and due dates take up space in my head. I hate this job. I hate that I'm here. I hate that I can't push this away.

Because six years ago, my father died and I watched my mother crumble. But I walked away because I needed to live a life. And my mother agreed. So I ran off and told myself to let it go, but I didn't give myself time to grieve. So here I am, living a shell of a life. The pieces are all there, I'm just not. I tremble in the face of this realization.

Then I get up and dump my lunch in the garbage. I tell a few co-workers I'm really sick and must go home. They smile sympathetically. "Good luck with all the work. See you tomorrow!" "Thanks, you too." I say automatically. Another lie slides off my tongue. I don't plan on coming back.



Screaming Colors

By Michal Haas

A Standstill Life

By Channa Gelbtuch

Every single day, as I stand in the same exact spot, striking the same exact pose, you walk past me. You look at me, but never see me. All you see are my beautiful garments and accessories. You fail to acknowledge me as one of you. However, as far as I am concerned, we both are the same, both of us having arms, legs, a face, and a body.

What exactly classifies you as human, and me, as merely an object?

You say it is the fact that I am hard and solid on the outside, yet light as a feather because of the emptiness inside of me, while humans are filled with flesh and bone.

You say it is the fact that I absorb nothing, not even air, deeming me incapable of feeling, while humans feel emotions.

You say it is the fact that my head is empty, mindless, with not a thought passing through me, while humans are cognitive with a fully-functioning brain.

You say it is the fact that I am heartless, without a shred of sensitivity for another being, while humans can feel sympathy and love for others.

You say it is the fact that words travel through me as soundwaves, nothing more, while humans can listen and learn.

You say it is the fact that I am paralyzed from head to toe, forcing me to live a life of not moving forward, nor backward, merely standing frozen as time passes, while humans can move past their obstacles.

You say it is the fact that growth is impossible for me, for I was cast in a concrete mold, not meant to expand from its preset size, while humans can “break out of their shell.”

You think this is what makes us different, but in reality, it is what makes us so very much the same.

You build thick walls around yourself in order to disguise the emptiness within you. You adorn yourself with the most extravagant clothing and accessories to mask your insecurities. You concern yourselves with things so unimportant and weightless, they may as well be air. You act so foolishly, it is as if you have no brain, and so selfishly, it is as if you have no heart. You don't listen or value the words of others, thus never learning or accepting new ideas. You are so complacent with where you are that you are unable to move forward. You don't grow because you are afraid to step out of your comfort zone. You model your life after what you think others want to see, whatever will “sell best.” You delude yourself into think-

ing you have changed, when really you've been standing in the same place the whole time. You let your life pass you by.

You are in denial, just like me. I attempt to fool myself and others into thinking I've grown, putting myself on a higher display, creating the illusion of me being taller, while in actuality, the only thing that has grown taller is the platform I'm standing on. However, you can't fool me, for I have been watching you ever since the day I was placed in this storefront.

The only thing that distinguishes you from me is that you alone possess the unique ability to transform your life into a one filled with purpose. Contrary to myself, who is not created to do anything other than display goods, garments, and baubles made by other people, you have the ability to create meaning and shape your own life. So, please, use your extraordinary gifts to start living as a human and stop living like me, just a mannequin.

**You think this
is what makes
us different, but
in reality, it is
what makes us
so very much the
same.**

Eyes Like Shoes, Hair Like Buttons

By Estee Gerber

Mama tells me not to look at Them. She tells me to look at my new blue suede shoes with the little sparkleys on them, that twinkle when I kick my feet up on the swings. I love going on the swings! Me and my two best friends, Ingrid and Angelica, always have races for the swings. Usually I win. That's because I have good genes in my family. My papa fought in a war and won a medal and mama says it's because we have good genes.

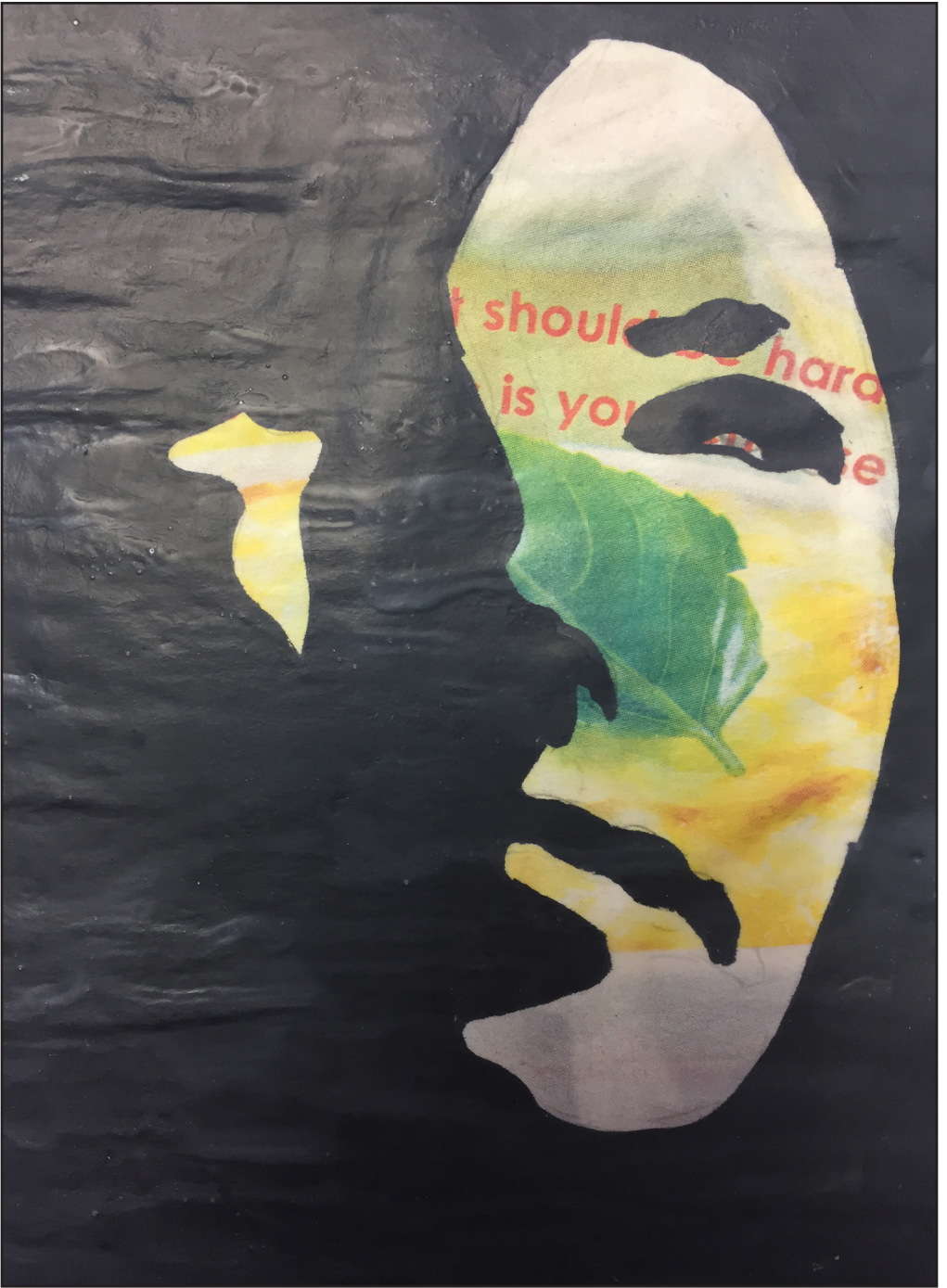
But I always look. I try to see what makes mama look at the pavement, and squeeze my hand tighter and pull me faster behind her. But They don't look scary. They don't frown their smiles or stick their tongues out at me like Peter. They don't hit me with a pocky pointy ruler like Ms. Margrit does. Ms. Margrit always hits me for talking to Ingrid, when really we're not talking with our mouths like mama and papa. We're using our super secret language (ok fine I'll give you a hint; we wave our hands and squint our eyes) that I made up all by myself, and even mean Peter, who says he knows everything, doesn't understand. But he pretends he does even though everyone knows he doesn't. He's just not as smart as me.

They always smile. I try to tell my eyes to look away, like my mama tells me to, but my eyes don't listen to me and stare at Their gold buttons that are so shiny and pretty. They always reach into their big dark green pockets, that look like the forest where me and mama used to have picnics when there was enough food, and slowly take Their hands out with soft caramel candies. I love caramel candies. Especially the melted ones. And papa never brings them home anymore. He says there's no more sugar for us, but that doesn't make sense. Sugar comes from the ground, plant more sugar and then I can have more caramel candies that melt in the hot, hot sun! Papa laughed really loud when I told him this, his laugh sounded like an echo in a well and his dimples showed and he said, "Leisle, never grow up." Sometimes I don't take the candy and turn away from Them, hiding the scratchy letters or heavy bread under my green wool coat. But usually I take the candy and They talk to me and ask me my name and tell me jokes. When mama is with me Their eyes get small and mean and stand taller and straighter, like giant rocks.

**I always move
my blue suede
shoes fast, as
fast as my good
genes let. I'm
always careful,
because I
know what will
happen if I'm
not.**

Papa tells me not to look at Them. He tells me to think of only one thing. I say I can think of many many things at once because I'm so smart. He nods seriously and says, "You are smart, and careful." I nod, I am. Very, very careful. I always make sure the letters are folded so so carefully so they don't make any noise. The bread and margarine is always wrapped in the shopping bag so no crumbs fall out. I always look behind me, at the alleyways that never confuse me because I'm so smart, and at Them to make sure they don't follow me. I always take the "packages," as mama calls them, from the little man with the little hat carefully, my hands never trembling like mama's when she sees Them. I always move my blue suede shoes fast, as fast as my good genes let. I'm always careful, because I know what will happen if I'm not.

They seem to like me. But I know they don't. They like my shiny gold hair, like their buttons, and my blue blue eyes, like my shoes. They don't like mama's brown curly hair or papa's brown eyes. But they don't know me. They don't know I'm not one of them. They don't know I'm the one they hate the most. They don't know I'm a Jew.



Hidden Masks

By Becky Masar

My Best Friend

By Rena Kesler

I am her best friend and she doesn't even know it.

We first became acquainted when her beloved grandmother passed on to the next world. It was a bright and sunny day, she was getting ready for her best friend's enormous birthday party. She walked outside and it smelled like freshly cut lawn. The golden sun blinded her bright blue eyes. She was exceptionally happy. She felt that nothing can ruin this pleasant moment. In one split second all of her happiness dispersed.

Her grandmother was bedridden in the dim and gloomy hospital after experiencing a devastating heart attack. Her mother knew that Grandma's last days were fast approaching. Mom tried to get her daughter to spend as much time with Grandma as she could, but this moment arrived way sooner than expected.

The daughter heard her mother's ear piercing scream and hysterical sobbing from inside the house. This young and innocent girl felt utterly heartbroken and completely crushed. She always dreaded that this day would come.

The girl had totally forgotten about her best friend's birthday bash. She had promised her friend that she would be there. Taking a deep breath she resolved to share in the joy of her best friend's 14th birthday. One side of me saw her crying heart, while the other side had a glowing smile and wished her dearest friend a happy birthday. No one suspected a heart broken mourning girl but rather an upbeat, charming girl celebrating a friend's birthday.

As she walked to school the next morning. It was a torrential down pour. She had salty tears streaming down her face. She still couldn't believe the shocking news about her cherished grandmother. As she wiped away her countless tears, I put a confident smile on her face as she stepped into school. She used me again without even knowing it.

I've been with her since she was a mere five years old. She was too innocent to even notice my presence. I am forever taped on her face for all the lengthy hours of the day. I know and understand her complex feelings more than her

**She doesn't
know that she
exercises my
availability. She
doesn't even
know my name.
She needs me
because I am
her separation
between reality
and her fantasy.**

loving parents do. I have always been there for her through the interminably hard times and the fleeting good. She doesn't know that she exercises my availability. She doesn't even know my name. She needs me because I am her separation between reality and her fantasy. I am the one who puts a radiant smile on her face and tells everyone she is perfectly fine when she is definitely not. I am the one who makes her look exceedingly happy even when she gets her tests back and it is a fail. I am the one who tells her grandparents that she had an amazing day even when she didn't.

Gifts

By Chedvah Levine

My necklace lies close to my heart, but the symbol on my necklace, and the turmoil within me couldn't be further apart. The sterling silver cross dangles from the end of a long chain, every point on it feeling like another prick at my conscience. My room is silent, but my mind is howling louder than a pack of hungry wolves. The familiar trees sway outside my window, and I try to listen to the whisper of the wind, for maybe it has the answer to my dilemma; the average encounter that feels engraved into the back of my memory. I feel like it has some connection to my mother, some relevance to her life, which I know next to nothing about.

It was a cold summer day in Rhode Island, where it is typically very humid, when my life got knocked off course. The kiosk in Warwick Mall looked like any other, a small table covered in little odds and ends, but there was one necklace that caught my eye. It was hardly different than the one that hung around my neck for as long as I could remember. It too was a silver necklace, with a long chain and a symbol. But this symbol seemed so foreign to me, yet strangely familiar. At the bottom of this seemingly ordinary piece of jewelry was a six pointed star. I racked my brain but to no avail. I finally asked the man by the counter what the symbol was, and he told me it was a Star of David. "Some kind of Jewish symbol," he added after a moment.

But now, as I sit in my dorm room in a Catholic boarding school, I wonder why this affects me. I love my life-- my family, my friends, my school. This is the one thought that overshadows my happiness. Whenever I'm not busy with anything, thoughts of my dead mother fill my brain with uncertainty. The tension within me consumes my every moment, and my doubts are tearing at the very foundations of my beliefs. And this unremarkable encounter is so confusing for my typically sharp mind.

I've always been a curious child, full of awe at the universe we live in, and my thirst for knowledge keeps me learning more and more. In my school, we are taught to accept everything we learn as true. There is only one underlying rule: no questions. To be honest, you can ask questions, but you never get an answer. All I hear in response to my constant flow of questions is: "As a good Catholic girl, you should believe that everything you learn is true." But is it really? I have so many questions, but no answers. I have a father, but no mother. I have a religion, but no beliefs. I have so many contradictions spinning around my life, jumbling everything I thought I knew and adding on to the list of what I don't.

For my last birthday, my grandmother gave me an old album she found in the back of her closet, which was the most precious gift I have ever received. It is

a dusty album full of pictures of my father, my mother, and sometimes also me. I look at the images and stare into my mother's eyes, wondering what I would say to her if I saw her again. So many times I dream of meeting my mother again. I wish I could give her one more hug, speak with her for one more minute, tell her how much I love her. My mother has the same startling green eyes as me, with dark brown hair. My father is always so proud of how similar I look to my mother, and I can see the gaping hole in his golden heart every time his stare gets a little too long and emotional.

My eyes wander away from her eyes and scan the rest of the photo. I stare my mother up and down, and then turn the page and see a frightening image. It brings so many questions to mind and confusion spreads within me. My mother is on a hospital bed, with my father by her side. She is wearing a Star of David necklace and has her right hand over her striking green eyes, and my father has tears streaming down his typically joyous face. Why is there a picture in a hospital room? Why is her hand over her eyes? The scene is so strange.

I dial my father's number and immediately ask him about this mystifying photograph. As he speaks, my eyes widen and my throat tightens. If I didn't have the unsettling memory in the back of my mind, of a silver necklace with a six pointed star, I never would have believed my ears. He says that he didn't plan on telling me yet, but since I asked, he explains that my mother was a child of Holocaust survivors who feared that the Holocaust might be repeated so they told her to hide her Jewish identity. There was just one item they gave her, along with a lesson. My grandmother gave her a necklace from before the war with a Star of David on it. And every night in bed, my mother used to say the Shema. My father disclosed that my mother had repented on her deathbed and returned to the faith of so many generations before her. He concluded with a final fearsome statement: "And now, Rachel, it's your turn to decide. Which ancestors do you wish to follow?" My mother's past was enshrined in layers of mystery, and now that I have uncovered the past, it is my chance to choose my own future.

There was just one item they gave her, along with a lesson.

MASKot

By Nina Melohn

Twenty seconds left on the clock. The cheerleaders scream, throwing their pompoms up to the fluorescent ceiling. That's my cue. I put on my sweaty tiger mask, racing out into the orange streamer filled gymnasium, making a grand entrance. I have not missed a game since freshman year. The crowd is roaring as I do cartwheels across the shiny court. Seven seconds left and we have the ball. JT pulls up at the three point line, and with ease sinks a three pointer. The Tigers win!!!! The team runs past me, our hands touching as each teammate slaps me five. O'Connor shouts, "We couldn't have done it without our mascot!" I remember when that was actually true, when I was the one shooting the winning basket. My hand reaches under the mask to wipe away the beads of sweat. I feel the chunk of skin missing from my left eyebrow and instinctively trace the scar all the way down to my chin. The fire one year ago left my face looking like a vulture's victim, robbing me of my ability to see from my left eye. I can no longer stand in a crowded room without covering my face. All mascots wear masks, and this is the only time I get to feel normal.

JT lifts me onto his shoulders. As the celebratory screams fill my head and flashing lights surround me, my mind travels back to that life altering night one year ago. The orange streamers turn into a blazing fire engulfing me. Smoke billows through the streets. A firm hand straps an oxygen mask to my mouth, trying to escape the sea of flames. Dr. Bron unwraps my face in the hospital one week later. Handing me the mirror, I am no longer Max; you might as well call me Monster. Hot tears are streaming down the blisters that cover my face, like acid rain eating away at the remaining flesh. My chin flushes a discolored fuschia resembling a bruised plum. The right side of my face is peeling off like dried glue. "How did this happen?" I cry. My parents look at me. My mother grabs my father's crumpled shirt. I'm broken. More horrific than the unbearable pain were the horrified stares that greeted me the following days. The whispers still keep me awake at night.

Over the next few months, I withdraw under my mask of embarrassment and longing. All that's left of the old me is so far buried beneath layers of cautious armor I've created for my protection. I stand in the parking lot alone, wishing I could stay in that gym with my mask on forever. Behind every mask lies a soul, and behind that, a story.

**Behind every
mask lies a soul,
and behind that,
a story.**

Mind Games

By Avigail Ovitsch

I know this is the only way I can survive. Where I come from, the death penalty is imposed on criminals found guilty of homicide. I wasn't guilty, but the world chose to believe otherwise. I was framed by the real criminal, the man who haunts my dreams at night and never leaves my consciousness. He walks a free man, blending into the same society he deceived, while the man he killed would never have justice avenge his blood. They found me in my house on that fateful night with the evidence surrounding me in a pile of guilt. Before I knew it, handcuffs shackled my wrists, cutting off my circulation. Even now, years later, I can still feel those cold, metallic claws of injustice which no amount of scrubbing can remove. While they dragged me away, the pungent smell of burnt plastic filled my house as my dinner melted in the oven, and that scent never leaves my nostrils. The raw, broken voice I could not even recognize as my own that pleaded innocent on that night, still echoes in my eardrums and haunts my thoughts. But, it was all to no avail. My trial didn't even last a day. I looked like him, I sounded like him. In their eyes, I was him. The worst betrayal of my life, coming from my very own flesh and blood, my identical twin brother.

My lawyers told me I would die for my crimes and there was nothing they could do. I believed them. In my youth I thought nothing could be worse than death, so I did the only thing I could to escape my fate- I pled insanity. The judge accepted my plea and they put me here to suffer for my false confession for the rest of my life. I am supposed to be psychotic, so I pretend to see things in the shadows and hear voices in nothingness, so they don't find out my secret. Today, as I roam the halls aimlessly, with no direction or destination in mind, the other patients stare at me with bloodshot eyes, burning through my soul like countless wicked flames. The vacant eyes of others follow me with every step I take down the empty halls, and even after I close my eyes, they still seem to mock me with their empty stares. The screams of those most deeply affected by diseases I cannot name, pierce the air and shatter the protective glass that surrounds me; the wall I erected to shield myself from unspeakable horrors. Even after I pass the other patients, their voices echo in my head and bang against my skull, never leaving me to my own thoughts. I automatically gasp for air, choking on my own breath as my eyes search for a way out. My hands go rigid as I fight the instinct to hurl myself at the

**The pungent
smell of burnt
plastic filled
my house as my
dinner melted in
the oven.**

guards and break free. I know I can do it, and that is probably the worst thing. Because I realize as soon as I do, my little stunt will be over and I will have to face what I have done.

Every day winning the game seems a little more impossible. Today, my shaking hands and delayed movements are a testament to the degree of my torment. I can't keep this up much longer. I know I am despairing, but suddenly, the image of my mother floats into my head as clear as the last time I saw her. I see her smooth, trusting face and feel her soft touch against my cheek. I see her blue-gray eyes searching my face, exposing my secrets and crying for her child's misfortunes. Big, silent tears, because that is the only way my mother ever cried. I start to think about how she would react if she knew where her beloved son ended up. If she knew what lie he concocted to fool death while she never could. I can almost feel her cool breath on my ear as I imagine her whispering for me to keep my dignity within this white walled prison, so I vow to continue playing this game for as long as possible. For her. I promise myself that I will not end up like the hopelessly lost souls that wander through this place, not even knowing the human being next to them exists. I am not insane, and I will never allow myself to be.

This is how I have been for the past five years. I used to think anything was better than the alternative, but I am not so sure anymore. Despite my efforts, knowledge of the outside world disappears with each month, and sometimes I catch myself losing my grasp on reality. I try to hold on to the image of my dear mother and keep my promise to her, but every day I am stuck in this pristine white prison, her image fades a little more from my memory and my promise slips away like a forgotten dream. When I look in the mirror now I don't see the man who gave up everything all those years ago to escape his fate. The man who cheated death and vowed to do everything in his power to remain unbroken. I see those broken, lifeless souls reflected in my eyes, my disheveled hair, my tattered yellowing asylum gown. Yet, I am not insane. I will never allow myself to be, though they say denial is the first sign of insanity.



Disguised

By Ashira Feld

A Mile in Her Stilettos

By Michal Treitel

I never thought my metallic fanny pack could look this good. My fresh new Skechers accentuate its luster like never before, so I complete the look with double knotted neon yellow laces and wear the sneakers out of the store. I glide on a coat of grapefruit Chapstick, and I'm ready to make my way back to the mall parking lot.

And that's when I see her.

She's no one in particular, but I know her all too well. I see girls like her all the time in fashion magazines when I'm in line at the grocery store. Her hair has this magical shine that puts my fanny pack to shame, and she carries a navy leather purse that matches her pinstriped pencil skirt perfectly. It makes no aerodynamic sense that she can walk in those sky-high stiletto heels, which go click click click as she sashays by.

It's not that I'm unhappy with myself, it's just sometimes I wish people would look up to me like that too, both figuratively and vertically. I suppose if I want to be that kind of girl, I need to elevate myself, too; I cannot go walking around with the entire soles of my feet touching the ground like a peasant. So I go buy stilettos of my own.

There are no Skechers at Bloomingdale's. Only a million stilettos on glass displays and chrome shelves climbing up the walls. I peruse each collection in search of the perfect pair, but every shoe is more striking than the last. Thankfully my fairy godmother, the glittery lady working in the shoe department, helps me choose a chic patent leather pair four inches high, with no platforms because apparently platforms are out of style. She also tells me that it's always okay to splurge on shoes, so for the first time ever I don't bother checking the price at the cash register. Feeling even sparklier than all the shoes I just tried on, I shove my sneakers into my fanny pack and wear my new stilettos out of the store. Click click click.

From the ankle down, I'm glamorous. But there's still the rest of me to deal with. I imagine I should be wearing makeup to complete my look. The only issue is that the closest thing I have to makeup is that grapefruit lip balm, so I go to Sephora to swap my Chapstick for some lip gloss. While I'm at it, I also buy three types of foundation and every color eyeshadow the store has to offer. I take a look in the mirror on

**From the ankle
down, I'm a
supermodel. But
there's still the
rest of me to
deal with.**

my way out. I am four inches taller than the old me, and my lips shimmer with the sheen of Maybelline. I am radiant.

Revamping my existence leaves me rather thirsty, so I visit a posh cafe on the fourth floor of the mall for some refreshment. I like diet Coke from the vending machine better, but my shoes need to be here for the aesthetic. I pick up an orange juice. Then I ponder the orange juice. And with the new executive power vested in me by Salvatore Ferragamo, I veto. Girls with high heels should have high standards too, so no orange juice for me! I must sip something more sophisticated, so I put down the orange juice and order a nice tea with a name I can't pronounce because I don't speak tea. It tastes like hot diluted Koolaid, but it's fine because it comes in an elegant glass teacup.

After finishing my drink, I want to head back to the mall parking lot, but I need to stow my new makeup somewhere. I'd put it all in the fanny pack, but it's already stuffed with the shoes from my past life, and besides, I shouldn't be wearing it anymore anyway; metallic is so last season. So I go back to Bloomingdale's and buy an oversized tote bag. I hide the fanny pack in the big pocket and drop my makeup in on the sides. I slump the bag over my shoulder, and suddenly I'm sideways. The fanny pack once resided squarely on my waist and kept me centered, but now my tote only weighs down my left side, and I tilt more askew with each wobbly step.

But I persevere. I'm still walking in my heels, yes, click click click...

And smash. One wrong click and I'm sprawled across the floor. My left shoe and makeup bag land three feet behind me, and the other shoe still dangles on my pinky toe. With a deep breath, I gather my scattered products and senses. I refasten my fanny pack around my waist, put my Skechers back on, double knot the neon yellow laces, and pull myself up.

After walking a mile in her stilettos, I think I prefer flats.

V

Masked Appearances

*“Everyone sees what you appear to be;
few experience what you really are.”*

– Niccolò Machiavelli

Masked Appearances

By Chashie Komendant, Editor

A person can only see the mask that another puts on. Someone can appear to be a funny, happy person, when in reality they are a sad, depressed human being. People put on these masked appearances to either fit into a group, or to conceal how they are feeling. To the world they are one thing, but when they lock themselves in a room by themselves, they shed their masks and become something entirely different. Niccolò Machiavelli wisely says, “Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are.” The only person who knows who you truly are, is you. You can reveal bits and pieces of who you are to different people, but no one will know who you truly are as well as you do.

Minka Nussbaum’s “13” sheds light on how everyone appears to be something they are not. They must conform to the group, be one and the same, lest they be left out and pushed to the side.

Elisheva Hollander’s “My Daddy, My Hero” tells of the relationship between a father and son. Dan’s father must appear to be this high- class office worker to push his son to be more than he could ever be.

“Masked Attempts,” by Shoshana Farber, addresses how we can try to mask who we are to be something we are not. Ally is not a scary person, yet she goes out to buy a mask to scare her brother, Jacob. She did not know the consequences she will have to live with for the rest of her life.

Chani Shulman’s “The Misconception of Buzz Lightyear Wrapping Paper” illustrates how we can try to create an image that people want to see. Allison thought that the Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper will make Josie like her present more. Once you remove that specific image that people want to see, you can be left with disappointment.

Putting on these masked appearances can lead to changing who we really are. The pieces in this section illustrate how careful we must be to not lose ourselves in the masks we wear. While we can protect ourselves in the masked appearances we provide, we must remember to stay true to ourselves and the values which we hold.

Buzz Lightyear Wrapping Paper

By Chani Shulman

As I was approaching Josie Briggs's house on the day of her birthday party, I pulled my sweater close together to protect myself from the cold, crisp air that Autumn brings yearly. Birthday parties were a huge deal in fourth grade. They could make or break one's social status. The politics of them were simply dependent on a Bouncy House. Those who would have a bouncy house would automatically receive the class's approval. Everyone knew Josie was not going to have one at her party. Yet everyone was eagerly awaiting the day her party would arrive because Josie was the daughter of Emma Briggs, the best chocolate chip cookie chef in town. And there was no doubt that at Josie's party, there would be Mrs. Briggs's delicious chocolate chip cookies.

As I climbed up the stairs to her front door, I took in the sight of Josie's house. A bright pink house was a lot to take in. With my present in hand, I rang the doorbell. I began to fumble with the wrapping paper on my present for Josie. Wrapping paper is the most essential part of a present. It is what the birthday girl or boy sees first. My mom went to eight different stores to find the perfect wrapping paper. Finally, we settled on the world renowned Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper. Wrapping my present in the Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper would up the status of the gift itself.

**Finally, we
settled on the
world renowned
Buzz Lightyear
wrapping paper.**

Suddenly, the door swung open with momentum. "Allison! We are so glad you came!" There at the door stood Mrs. Briggs in her slightly worn out baking apron. She was a plump woman with short brown curly hair which resembled that of a bird's nest. Like always, she was smiling a genuine smile from ear to ear. Next to her, Josie stood timidly, attempting to pull one of her uneven braids- the shorter one, to reach the length of the longer one.

I peeked my head into the house and realized that I was the first to arrive. As I looked back at Josie, I noticed her eyes reverting to my present. She smiled cheekily as she muttered under her breath, "The best ones always come in Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper."

When Mrs. Briggs invited me inside, I handed my present over to Josie, whose face reflected her great excitement. Immediately, when stepping inside, my eyes were drawn to the decorum of the house. The furniture looked like it badly wanted to emulate a different era in time, but it could not decide on which one.

So it went with all of them. Mrs. Briggs motioned for me to sit down on the yellow leather couch as she went back into the kitchen to tend to her cookies. Still in her hands, Josie looked down at my present, seemingly contemplating if it would be rude to open it then and there. I suddenly began to fidget in my seat and stared down at my Mary Jane shoes, feeling quite uncomfortable. What if Josie does not like the present I got her? What if my Buzz Lightyear wrapping papers tricks her into thinking she will like the present and then crushes her when she realizes she doesn't? The suspense gripped the air, leaving no room for me to breath.

Not being able to take it any longer, Josie ripped up the wrapping paper like a hungry predator rips up its prey. RIIIIIIIPPPPPP! Then, there was a moment of intense silence. My worst fear began to unravel as the pinching screams and cries of Josie Briggs swarmed my ears, causing immense pain. "WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT A STUPID BOARD GAME FOR THEIR BIRTHDAY?!" Josie screamed. I guess Josie Briggs is not a big fan of Scrabble.

The Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper disappointed both Josie and me. I thought that since all "cool" presents were wrapped in Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper, if I would wrap mine in that type of wrapping paper, it would somehow automatically give my present a high status. It was a tough lesson to learn at the tender age of nine and a half, but that day I learned that the Buzz Lightyear wrapping paper was not only capable of fooling others, it could even deceive me.

Finding Reality

By Tamar Spoerri

Playdough scares me. My teacher's hands reach for that something-is-very-wrong-color-yellow container with its bright pink lid. While she sets it on the table, I look around for a place I can hide before she sees me. But it's still my favorite subject. I love digging my fingers into the cold blob, squishing and shaping it. Everyone in my class does. It's after snack when we sit at the table and make people. It bothers me that everyone is such copycats, making the same triangle nose, U-shaped mouth, and eyes that don't have any pupils, all in the wrong colors. My classmates end up with seventeen faces all the same as each other, but the parts are all wrong. I know how to do it right. I shape those red veins in the eyes even though they're yucky, because I'm making a real face. My classmates think that eyes are just blue circles. To them, all hair is blond and straight, but that can't be right because I have dark frizz. I want to make a real face, so I copy from a real face, not from what the girls next to me think. I don't forget that people have nostrils.

At first no one notices, but then my teachers and classmates see my work and how it's different. My friends stare and come tell me, "Becky! You're doing it all wrong!" "Becky, eyes are round, not pointy at the ends." "Becky, don't you know faces are circles, not weird ovals?" "Becky, hair is brown and orange and yellow, not black!" I've always liked playdough, but now I'm not so sure.

I'm scared because they'll treat me differently. They'll squish me at circle time, and they won't let me take a turn at jumprope. So the next playdough time I try to make my face look like theirs. I take a deep breath like that special teacher showed me, and walk up to the table. I'm

going to be just like them. I talk about headbands and bracelets and nail polish, and act like a copycat because our playdough people have to be the same.

I start off with the skin. Like all my friends, I smooth out yellow into a circle. Why does everyone's look like Big Bird? It looks like Charlotte across the table is putting tan ropes next to the face for hair and twirling them into two spirals at the bottom; I do the same. Deep breath. I push an orange ball into the center like Emma. Was that supposed to be a nose? No wonder playdough people can't smell. I tell that voice in my head to go for a walk, and check out what Madeline is doing next. Okay, a red curve for a mouth. One lip probably makes it hard to talk too. Copying is so hard, and it's making me upset, but I need to keep going. All that's

**I start off with
the skin. Like
all my friends,
I smooth out
yellow into a
circle.**

left are the eyes. I look around the table as everyone flattens two balls of blue into the face, and leaves the table one after another. I do the same, and look into my face's new eyes. I can't see anything in them. No. No. I won't turn this person I'm shaping into another bunch of parts thrown on a circle. I gather up the leftover playdough, sneak them to my seat, and think about how I'll redo the face my way while everyone's busy playing house. I'll mix some pink and white into the face to make the skin the right color. I'll poke my pencil twice through the nose and make two nostrils. I'll bend the hair hanging flat and let a few pieces fall into the face.

I look down at what I did already, and I don't know what to think. Even though I copied the other girls' playdough faces, mine looks nothing like theirs. I now notice the lines around the eyes, the eyebrows people usually forget, the dimples like my sister's, these features I've been trying so hard to hide. It's not a copy of theirs, but it's not my work either. It's a person about to smile, but the eyes are empty. There's no feeling, but there's no boredom either. It's just a blank. Until I lift up the empty irises, put whites shaped like almonds underneath, press two black pupils into the blue, add dots of white for sparkle, and make the eyes smile too.



Inner Workings

By Elisheva Rosensweig

Behind This Face of Destruction

By Tirtza Jochnowitz

It all started with the fire. I don't remember much of it, but I do know that I will never sleep with my door closed at night ever again. I won't even put a lock on the door, never mind. The little push pin positioned ever so innocently on the interior of the flat surface of the door knob. That shiny door knob with its deviled lock that made me ugly. Yes. I said ugly. And when you see me in the hallways do not avert your eyes, like a student does to a teacher when they don't know the answer to a question. I am not a question that the answer is unknown to. I am a person that mishaps have occurred to, but don't we all have unfortunate callings? The difference is that I wear it on my face. And I am not proud of it.

My parents had recruited me to therapy, but a paid person won't do the job of telling me I'm pretty and that all my good qualities lie beneath this deformed face of mine. And so I retreated behind closed doors for quite a while, not talking to anyone or socializing on social media. No selfies... after all no amount of glamping can cover up what is painfully obvious. No group photos, because I have no one to take them with. And status updates definitely aren't an option; what about my life was attention grabbing right now? I definitely didn't want to bring to light the scars on my face that tell a most horrific story. Boredom struck me over and over again, like a merciless huntsman stabbing his prey repeatedly. So as I sat on the edge of my bed day in and day out, browsing moodily on my macbook like a moody two year old, feet swinging back and forth like a pendulum, my mouse scrolled over the makeup page on the Saks site. And that's when it all changed.

**I definitely
didn't want to
bring to light
the scars on my
face.**

Those next few days I was considerably happier; my moody two year old self was offered an oversized red lollipop that would last me for days. Then, came the day, the one where my package arrived as it dutifully should, and lo and behold, a box the size of Saks itself was sitting on my doorstep. The wrapping paper flew away in the wind as I tore through the brown box like a savage, eagerly awaiting its contents. Metallic lipstick tubes roll out onto the floor, brushes of all different sizes scatter, their soft tops fanning across the carpet, creating beautifully intricate shadows. By the while, powders of various colors, all in a circular pallet, roll around me. I stay where I am playing with my new toys, taking new steps and making new leaps. I am completely immersed in my element, my hand crafting and artfully swirling the brushes in intricate motions across my high cheekbones.

And so I walk the endless hallways, hidden beneath this mask of confidence; and instead of people glancing away from me, they all look at me with wonder. How can I, a 16 year old fire survivor show my face to the world? And so the answer to that question that has your eyes glazed over remains: I am a beautiful being who hides behind the face of destruction.

Masked Attempts

By Shoshana Farber

My brother is possibly the most annoying kid in the universe.

I was sitting in my room, listening to music on my iPod while sketching ideas for the fashion line I plan to create when I graduate college. The smoke alarm went off. I figured my mother must have put something in the oven before leaving and forgot to tell me. I ran to the kitchen, expecting the oven to be smoking, but it wasn't even on.

I took a dish towel and waved it under the smoke alarm till it stopped beeping. Then I went back to my room to continue drawing.

Singing along to my music as I drew, I felt something brush up against my foot and heard scratching from under the bed. I ignored it and continued drawing, playing it off as my imagination.

Then something pinched me. I knew I couldn't have imagined that. I slowly pulled my foot onto the bed and leaned forward to look under. I thought my mother had taken the dog for a walk but it was possible she left him at home and he was hiding under my bed.

I decided to get back at him using his own method of hiding and jumping out at people.

I pulled up the bed skirt when suddenly, my brother popped his head from underneath, yelling "Boo." I screamed.

When I recovered from the initial shock, I started to get angry.

"What's wrong with you?" I yelled. "Get out of my room!"

Jacob was too busy laughing to hear me. "Your face! Priceless. If only I had a camera."

I rolled my eyes at him.

"Did you even realize that I was the one who set off the smoke alarm? I knew you'd go check on it and I'd have to perfect opportunity to sneak in here."

"You're such a dweeb," I told him. "Now get out of my room!"

He ran out still giggling and I slammed the door. I marched over to my bed and grabbed my phone.

You won't believe what Jacob just did, I texted my best friend, Lexi. He set off the smoke alarm and then hid under my bed when I went to check on it and

then he jumped out at me. I almost ruined the dress I was sketching.

Ever since Jacob realized I am easily scared, he has been hiding in random spots and jumping out at me when I pass by. This has been going on for two years already and I always beg my mom to get him to stop but she said he'll grow out of this childish stage and I shouldn't let it bother me.

I hear my phone ping and I open it up to see a text from Lexi. *OMG! He's so annoying. You totally have to get him back this time.*

I do, I text back.

I start thinking about all the ways I can scare him. I decide to get back at him using his own method of hiding and jumping out at people.

I hear Jacob calling me. "Ally, I'm going to Dylan's house to play soccer."

"I don't care," I yelled back. I heard the door slam shut.

I looked back at my forgotten drawing. I was too annoyed to finish it, so I decided to go for a walk to clear my head. I came upon a costume shop I had never noticed before. It looked pretty creepy. The sign on the door said "Open," so I went inside.

"Can I help you?" asked the man behind the cash register. I noticed a really scary looking mask on the wall. It would be perfect for me to wear when scaring Jacob.

"Actually," I said, "How much is the mask on the wall behind you? The red one."

"Are you sure you want that mask?" he said creepily, "That one is a very special sort of mask. Maybe you'd like one of the other ones?"

"No," I replied tentatively. "I want that one."

"That'll be thirty dollars then."

I began to rethink the mask idea. Was thirty dollars really worth it just to scare Jacob? I decided that it was. I paid the man and started walking back home.

When I got home, I knocked on Jacob's door. There was no answer. I figured he must still be at Dylan's house. I walked into his room to find the best place to hide. I decided on the closet. I walked to the mirror and put on my mask. It really was very creepy.

I heard the front door open and Jacob's voice yelling, "I'm back." This was

it. This was the moment.

I ran to the closet and quickly hid inside. Just as I was closing the door, I heard him walk into the room. He was whistling. I heard the bed groan as he hopped onto it and I decided that if I was going to scare him, it had to be now. Slowly, I started scratching the door.

“Hello?” I heard Jacob call. I started scratching more furiously.

The springs of the bed creaked as he got up slowly. I heard him walking tentatively to the closet door. I waited another second and then slammed open the door, jumping right on top of Jacob.

“Ahhhhh!” he shrieked, as we both fell together.

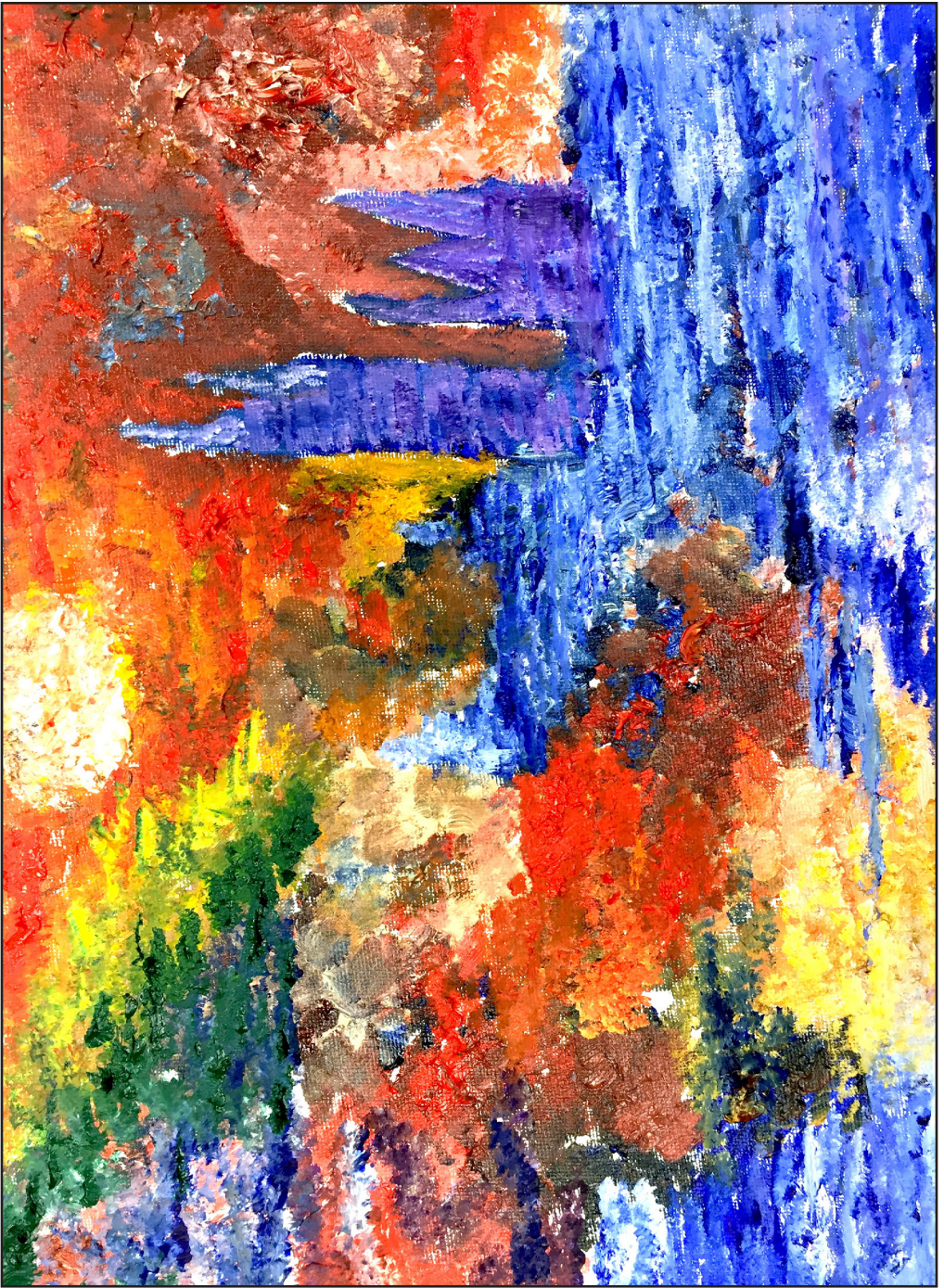
I started laughing. “Ally, is that you?” he asked me as I rolled off him. I was laughing too hard to answer and so I just nodded my head.

“Wow!” I thought, “The thirty dollars I spent on this was so worth it.”

The mask was starting to get a little suffocating. Still laughing, I grabbed the edge of the mask and tried to pull it off. I stopped laughing and cried out. It felt like I was pulling my own face off.

Jacob thought I was still pranking him. “It’s over Ally,” he said. “Just take the mask off. It’s really freaking me out.”

I tried again. Suddenly, the storekeeper’s warning echoed in my mind. “That’s a special mask,” he had said. And struggling as I might to remove the mask, I knew at that moment it was pointless. The mask was never coming off.



Colored Appearance

By Riki Rowe

A Mask of Perception

By Zahava Giloni

The air feels thick as molasses as I wait nervously for this door to open. Lingering thoughts and regrets start running through my head as my hands begin to feel clammy and sweaty. My parents created this door for me, hoping it would lead me to new opportunities. However, now I am nervous just thinking about what will happen once it opens. Although I was bullied in my previous school, I am even more anxious about the uncertainty of what lies ahead here.

I can already picture the scene when the door inches open and I will enter the classroom with trepidation. Surely, those girls will stare as I fumble awkwardly to the front of the room. I will hesitantly make my way to my new seat, barely fitting into my chair. I know that they will stare at me, eyes piercing right through my bones. It will be very embarrassing when they will see how my new pink sweater will already be bursting at the seams, clinging to my skin. It is so unfair being overweight because I know that behind this door, my hideous portrait will be revealed.



Our new classmate enters the room, and immediately we all notice how gaunt and bony she looks. Her obviously petite pink sweater hangs loosely on her, as she stands in the front of the room and hesitantly introduces herself. Shocked, we sympathetically whisper among ourselves about how frail she looks. She has such a thin frame that she could be broken into two with just the tap of a finger. It will not be too long before she becomes our class's new charity case. We all will attempt to be friends with the new girl, who is as skinny as a stick.

Immediately after she sits down at her desk, we begin to crowd around her. In an effort to welcome her, we notice that she appears to be uncomfortable with all of the attention that we are giving her. Of course, we would also feel self-conscious about being that frail.

It would be great to have made a new friend, even an awkwardly skinny one.

Class begins and we all, including the new girl, take out our history textbooks and school supplies. Her textbook falls from her desk and she bends over to pick it up. We see that she has difficulty lifting it because it is obviously too heavy for her weak muscles. When she begins to write, it is evident that her fingers are as narrow as her pencils.

As the day progresses, she is very shy and reserved as we try to include

her in our conversations. It would be great to have made a new friend, even an awkwardly skinny one. However, it is not possible because she hardly attempts to emerge from her tiny cocoon.



Walking home after my first day, I recall how my new classmates just stared at me throughout the entire day. They surrounded me as if I were a new exhibit at a museum. I know it is going to be just like my old school. I could hear my new classmates whispering behind my back; they were probably muttering when I could barely lift my textbook off the floor. They must think I am very out-of-shape. My weight has and always will define me. If only people could see through my layers of flesh to understand who I really am.

However, I am still left wondering why my mother is constantly begging me to eat. She always sends me to school with a lunch-box overflowing with food. Doesn't she realize that I am overweight? Can't she tell that eating all that food will only make me heavier? I do not tell her that I throw out most of that food every day.

Sleep That Never Sleeps

By Noa Hacker

Her body is a wall. Head falls back. She is a granite barricade, in which arrows dart off. The voluminous hair flat as a sheet of metal. The once palpating heart rests at the battlefield.

The wall is twenty one hundred pounds. It is an elephant resting on a squirming mouse. She gasps for air. She suffocates alongside her elevated head.

Her heart skips, to no avail, it pauses. Running a marathon against yourself is quite a feat. She reaches the finish line, yet she is still at the start. She receives her fleeting gaseous trophy, one that disappears as she holds it. The race up Mount Everest starts at the Dead Sea. The salty water quenches her soul while drying out her blood.

She sits up to count the stars. She blinks. Then once more, Anna's head falls back and she remembers the race up Mount Everest. And again, the two-ton wall ends the party. She lays heavily on her cotton bed lined with pillows. The squirming phone slipped under her gives a pincher bug sensation. Her body bounces, yet her brain lays still.

It all started in the second grade. Her thoughts constantly drift back. They were times of freedom and vitality. She could race, jump and cartwheel around the playground. Anna, the red haired mannequin-sized seven year old, was an olympian who could climb Mount Everest. Then, the poison entered her mouth and she got forever stung. The venomous candies, those seemingly sugar free lollipops were hazardous cockroaches, those whose itch never leaves. Her teacher Ms. Katie offered these to the young geniuses who could perform things, such as: addition, subtractions and many impossible endeavors. Diabetics were not allowed the real lollipops, so Anna got the sugar free ones instead. But Ms. Katie, the blind cave fish, left her spectacles in her car. These magnifying spectacles, those who helped her discriminate between sugary and sugar free lollipops spent their day in the car. Ms. Katie was a brown eyed soul and a blind eyed whiz. Soon enough Anna was handed the same lollipops as everyone else. The higher Anna got in the hierarchy, the bigger and more bloated she became.

**Anna suddenly
envisioned the
king of the
jungle in her
head.**

Ms. Katie's venomous lie sent her to the emergency room. Anna now spent her day in a sirens screeching car. The ball shaped mannequin was now wheeled

to her destiny. Anna, the girl who was ready to chug sugar free smoothies while climbing the Everest, was forced to gulp red toxins, only to find her dimensions extending by the lick.

For the first time Anna felt that her body was a wall. An iron door between the inside and out. Her heart sped like a racing turtle. It was the inner drumstick that played on her ribcage. Her brain grew enormous as it tried to leave the tight skull. Yet her body laid still, unable to turn, maneuverer, or sit up.

Anna suddenly envisioned the king of the jungle in her head. He climbed steps in a backwards direction. He gulped sugar free smoothies alongside her while they implanted the American flag in the snow. But once again, Anna snorted her thoughts out, forgot about the lion and her brain turned over.

Three doctors looped a cargo net under her, in attempt to sit her up. Anna now felt the phone that was trapped under her, vibrating in her heart. The heart that used to flow pure blood after runs. The same blood that was destroyed by red food coloring. Forever.

They explained that an extremely obese youth like Anna would have to actually climb the Everest rigorously in order to return to normal proportions. Anna has diabetes, sleep-apnea and is morbidly obese. She, the girl who studied at night and trained at dawn, will now sleep at night, sleep at dawn and sleep during class. Her heart, the one that used to beat healthily, will now beat slower than a car driving through traffic. Her voluminous hair will flatten around her circular face and her fingers will be as still as the guards at Buckingham Palace.

She, the diabetic little girl who earned sugar free lollipops, will now have to eat peppers to quench her hunger and thirst. Anna will have to hike up Mount Everest, alongside the lion, only in her head. For now, Anna will have to be lifted in a cargo net up the Everest until she can do so herself.

It started off with a lollipop, yet it ended here.

She slips her sleep-apnea mask on.

She awakens just only to find herself asleep once again.

13

By Minka Nussbaum

Her angelic hazel eyes peered through the back window of the cafeteria.

She was sitting alone.

Again.

She wished she could be like the rest of them.

Dress like them. Eat like them. Talk like them.

But she couldn't because what they did was not her.

She didn't like the black, leather clothing they all wore. Why did they all wear the same things anyway?

She couldn't fathom the obsession with the green leafy plants they called lunch.

She didn't understand how they could waste their precious time sitting around, gossiping about this and that.

She wished they could see through the mask they placed on her; see her for who she is.

She wished they would shed their masks of fakeness- at least realize they were on.

If the whole world is masked, shouldn't she feel relieved to be free? Better to be above them.

Yet, sitting in the corner of this giant cafeteria on the outskirts, watching the fun of the masks, she felt anything but relief.

Ostracized. Alone. Different. Sad.

But as she pondered her predicament she shed her regrets. Maybe she won't be popular in the short-term. But in the game of life, her realness would be respected. Hopefully.

For now, she would do her thing. And she would just have to wait patiently for them to realize that there's something more to a person than just their surface.

She is all of us. We are all of them. We socialize in crowds of masks, yet on occasion when we stop to reflect we realize the phenomenon around us. Too often, however, we resume the role play, we accept the status quo without being the catalyst for change.

**And she would
just have to wait
patiently for
them to realize
that there's
something more
to a person
than just their
surface**

We wear our masks to cover the secrets we hide. The secrets that give us authentic identities. But why not overcome it- embrace what makes you different, accepting your peculiarities and those of others. If we all shed our masks and show the world our true colors, our bleak world would be transformed into a rainbow.



Blossoming: Sculpture Art

By Nechama Fermaglich

Through the Looking Glass

By Rachel Liebling

Mommy told me it was high time I see the blackboard again. I kind of liked visiting Dr. Smithens, even though his office smelled funny, like the air that makes balloons stick to the ceiling. And the silver cone part on the earlookerpockystick is always cold. My picture was still hangin' on the door from last time Mommy dragged me here. And I like dippin' my fingers inside the fishtank while no one ain't lookin' 'cause the yellowy fishy's all slimy. I named him Yellowy Slimy. Dr. Smithens reminds me of a kangaroo 'cause his belly flops out a little when he wobbles. But he looked so lonely, so I slipped a baby kiss on his cheek when he lowered his frowzy mustache to shine his special secret flashlight pen into my widey eyes. He tells me every visit to make my eyes go Ahhhhhh so he could see the whole cream cheese circle around the black olive in the middle. Then he goed and whispered somethin' to Mommy from behind his clipboard, sillily thinkin' I wasn't eavesdroppin' or nothin'. "Lanie could use some glasses."

To parade my refusal, I simply stamped my feet - the tantrums that Grandmammy names horridly horrid. So Mommy cloaked her long mommy arms 'round my shoulders, gently squashin' me and ticklin' my ear sayin', "These are special glasses, they are to make you appear intelligent." But didn't I seem smart enough already? She told me that through these special glasses I could see the world in a new light. But couldn't we just change the lightbulbs? She claimed I would learn to use my special glasses to help others. But Daddy's always sayin' I'm his big girl little helper, like a travel sized elf, but I think I'm more of a fairy kinda kid. Mommy said I could breath easier now that I could scoop on in my surroundings, just like Ms. Caroline yammers at circle time, "In through your nose and out through your mouth." Yup, I could breath just fine the way I am thank you. Mommy also told me that life would be much pleasanter with my vision intact. By I hold myself to be a pretty peppy person already.

But I got Mommy confessin' real speedy like. She said what makes these special glasses special for real. She said it gives me superpowers, real ones, no fakin' - the ones Johnny has when he swings 'round the sandbox swoopin' his cape. She said that with these superpowers I could see what other people are goin' around thinkin'. So I tried 'em on and thunk real hard. Mommy asked me if I knew what she was thinkin'. I couldn't do it, the super special super power

**She said that
with these
superpowers I
could see what
other people are
goin' around
thinkin'.**

glasses weren't workin'. But Mommy said that I did know what she was thinkin', that I knew even before I put on the super special super power glasses. "I love you my baby, no matter what you put on your face," she thought.

Transparency

By Elisheva Rosensweig

It wasn't until I was ankle deep in rhinestones and crinoline that I truly understood the meaning of shoe size. Cinderella was depending on me, and the show must go on.

I carefully make my way through the room, trying my hardest not to set off an avalanche of clothing, not that anyone could have distinguished it from the tornado that must have stopped by earlier. The costume room was something always just outside the scope of my comprehension radar. Abby likes to call the room a "design lab" when she tries to put it into scientific terms for me. Rookie mistake to confuse a science major with a techie.

Regardless, I can't find a lab coat anywhere. Instead, I am surrounded by bedazzled and unraveling tutus, treated fake leather that had never exceeded three uses (but still in all efforts, attempting to appear genuinely worn out), bright colored floppy hats, and retro sunglasses. I close my eyes from the overdose of boastful colors. My mind turns the room into a grid, with pixelated obstacles of clothing, and bonus points bouncing just above my destination in the far end corner.

I like to believe that anyone and everyone deserves a small applause for making it across the depths of a classroom without falling flat on their face, but getting across the minefield of costumes deserved a royal fanfare, or at least a parade in that individual's honor. Jump, hop, leap, hop. I trip on a purse, and a loud EEEHHHH buzzer noise rings out. I close my mouth and the noise stops. Abby says there is a method to one's madness. All I had to do was find the method, find the glass slipper, return to stage left, deliver it, and then memorize every button on the mic control panel.

There was only one problem. It all looked the same. This is what happens when you send the tech crew to do a costume designer's job. Utter confusion. Each article of clothing took up too much space to let me think. They were each bursting out of their assigned cubby or clothing bag, shedding material to the heaping mounds of textures below, each trying to be seen. But it had the opposite effect, and as I began to sway they begin to blur together; into a sea of undifferentiated egos all screaming for the spotlight. Olivia does that in class sometimes, jumping out of her seat to answer a question, but she is rarely called on now. It's become routine.

It all looked the same.

How does the audience ever hear the dialogue over the screaming array of costumes? I lower my balled fists from my ears and repeat over my list. I know

I should have demanded a map before gallantly accepting my quest. I follow my mental GPS, and before I know it, “You have reached your destination.” Eli says it isn’t normal to talk to yourself, so it’s a good thing the costumes are listening with bated breath, hoping I’ll pick them to bring onstage.

It was in the top drawer, the last place I checked. I don’t know why I would keep looking if I had already found it. I clutch it tightly, making my way half across the room. What was it that Mrs. P always said, about walking a mile in someone else’s shoes? That couldn’t be comfortable in this case. Against every instinct, I stop, and slip it on, just to see if they really just fit Cinderella. It gets quiet, everything noiselessly bouncing around me as if I am underwater. For a moment, the room made sense. Everything begging for an audience, begging to share its story, whatever knowledge it had. The shouts became an orchestra, and for a moment I listened.

My Daddy, My Hero

By Elisheva Hollander

My daddy is my superhero. We start our day together and we end our day together. Every morning he wakes me up and I dress for school as he gets dressed for work. He wears his best suit, a dress shirt and a nice tie. His freshly polished leather shoes glint as he strides to the kitchen where we eat breakfast together. When we finish, I grab my backpack, he picks up his briefcase and proceeds to walk me to pre-school.

My daddy tells me every day, "You are smart, Dan and you will succeed in life if you succeed in school."

He will pick me up as he does daily and will be waiting for me after a busy day at his office- a tall skyscraper with lots of windows and a beautiful view of the city. He's got a secretary and many people working for him. He sits in board rooms and has meetings where everyone calls him "Sir." My daddy is quite special and I want to be just like him when I grow up.

∞

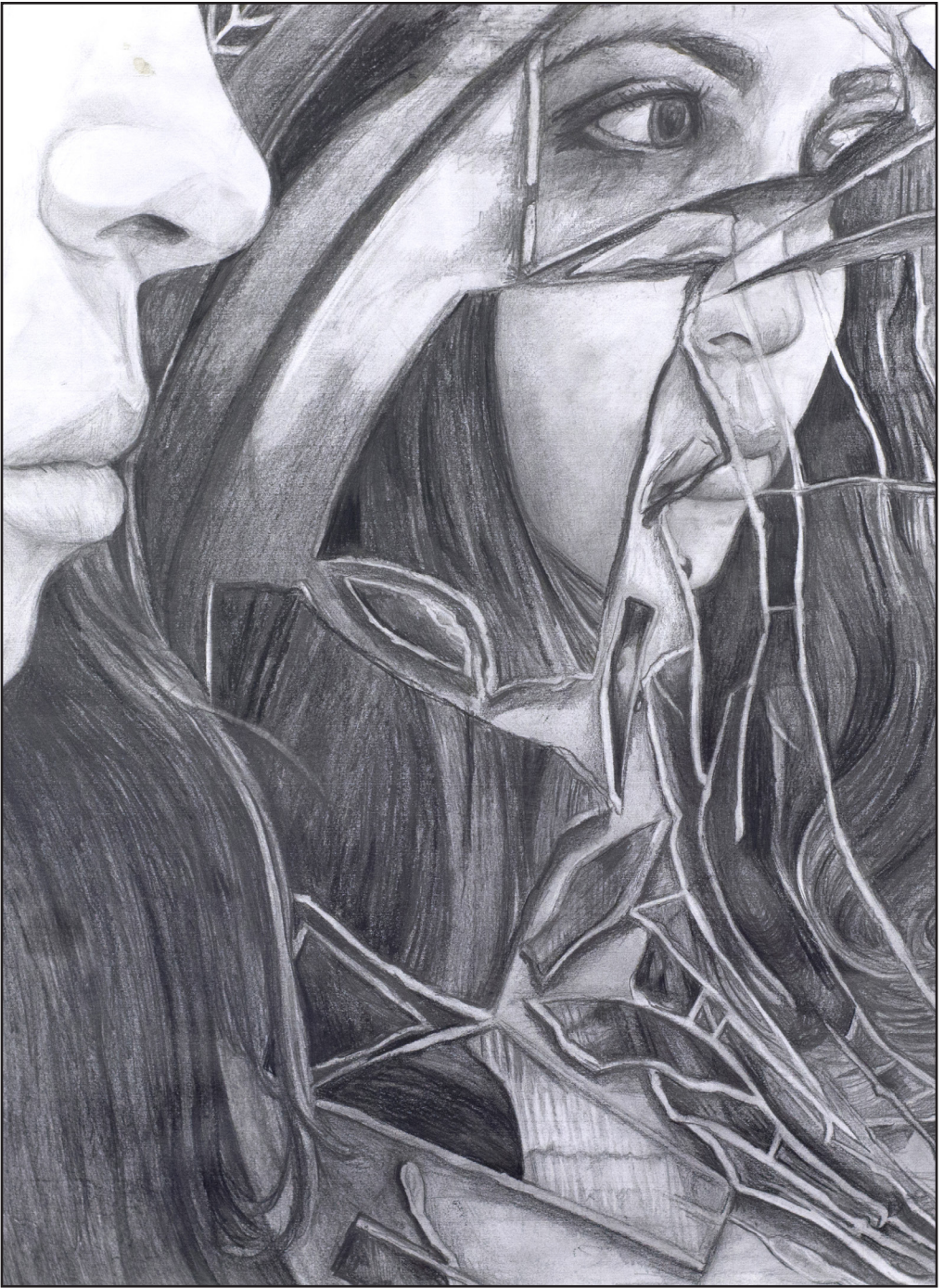
My son is my superhero, but I wear the mask. At five years old, he is wide eyed, curious, a bottle full of energy and asks lots of questions. Each morning as we get ready for our day, I tell him, "Dan, you will be somebody when you grow up and you will travel many places. You will be successful and make lots of money because you are smart and inquisitive. You need to apply yourself and succeed in school, and the world is yours."

**My son is my
superhero, but I
wear the mask.**

This is my daily routine before I drop him at pre-school. I watch him enter the building and then I slowly walk to work. When I arrive, I remove my polished leather shoes, my best dress suit, my starched shirt and squarely knotted tie. In the locker room I change into my battered working pants and a stained long sleeve t-shirt. From my leather briefcase, I pull out heavy boots, rubber gloves and safety goggles.

When sifting garbage at the landfill, no suit or tie is needed. Neither is a briefcase or perfectly polished wingtips. I know Dan thinks I sit in a corner office in a high rise and have important meetings where people call me "Sir."

But he will have opportunities I never could have had for myself. As I pick him up from school in my barely worn suit and tie, I see the hope, the promise of success. And I know this mask is worth it. For my Dan, my superhero.



Shattered Perception

By Serene Klapper

