The Quill

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Cover Image: Mira Chadha

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A Letter from the Staff

We would like to start this out by thanking everyone who submitted artwork this year. Your submissions make possible the creation of this publication, and by sending in work, you have contributed positively to establishing a celebration of the arts at AMSA. We would like to especially thank the students in middle school who submitted artwork, as this is the first year that the Quill has been open to middle school as well as high school. We would love to get even more submissions from the middle school in coming years, so don’t be shy! And to all students, please continue to submit work to future editions of the Quill. Your participation is very greatly appreciated!

Also, we would like to offer thanks to the teachers in the English and Art departments here at AMSA. With their help, students are encouraged to pursue the arts, which helps our school build an atmosphere which allows better self-expression and appreciation of the arts.

And lastly, we would like to thank Mrs. Rousseau, the Quill’s advisor. Her support and guidance has been instrumental to the success of this year’s publication and the continuation of the magazine for many years to come.
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High School
"The worst was this: my love was my decay." Like the glint of the temporal morning light, a charming apparition, undeterred by a purfled existence in the Palace of Versailles.

Faded lines of enduring smiles trace the pink tint on her cheeks, the soft laugh captured for eternity where the Sun once revered in himself.

The fleurs-de-lys look on with great wanderlust, jealous they cannot come closer to respire in her floral aroma. A frisson of excitement courses through their veins, as she droops her head in discontent, jilted by her own self.

The lonely flower in the garden, straining into the sky, looking for her Sun.
Stereos

Allison Silva

I’m sitting in my car,
Wondering,
How many types of stereos there are.
If such a thing
Ever occurred upon the human brain,
To make it rain,
While he’s sitting there next to me,
With such privilege,
Like he’s drinking a cup of tea.
I stand on a ledge,
With such a stigma around my actions.
He’s untouchable.
I’m on a land with no traction,
Falling,
Down the hole of history.
But no one wants my story.
He gets all the fame and glory.

I’m at the beach in a bikini,
I get stared at.
He’s shirtless with shorts down to his knees,
No one calls him fat.
I take a walk around the town,
In a crop top.
I get comments from people all the way down.
A bridge.
That a homeless woman lives in,
Shameful.
She cannot provide for her kin,
   Isolated.
From the very society she calls home,
   Haunted.
By her husband’s rages, throwing stones
   At her meek body,
In an attempt to domesticate her,
   Like she’s worthless.
She knows this.
She perseveres.

My stereo plays a song of pain and loss,
   Glorifying
The abundance of sins we cause.
   We’re dying,
In a country built on immigrants and slaves.
   Yet we cannot look
At our fellow maids,
   All serving this bowl we cook,
Full of injustice.
And thousands of years of mistakes we took,
   All for this.
Our one country that cannot accept the fact
   That equality
Has never been achieved,
   And that we need
To come together.
And get rid of the types of stereos
That rule our lives,
From gender to class to homes.
So we can strive
For a nation filled with true acceptance,
And love,
For our brothers and sisters at any stance.
So that stereos can only refer to music,
And we can dance,
In a world free of hate,
And celebrate,
Making a clean slate,
Like it’s fate,
Having our rights take,
Control and make,
One final step to shape,
This planet, and date,
Whoever we say,
And love,
Everyone on it.
These are the things I carry, concrete memories and recollections of times past. Memories – an open casket, frills resting against her post mortem collarbone, dead and cold to touch. I carry makeup, smeared across bloodless, decaying flesh in a last ditch effort to hinder the outside world from seeing the ugliness, the lies behind caked lashes and manicured toenails.

I carry myself, my title, my worth, my name that tastes like flavorless gum, something mundane to keep my mouth busy and my mind blank.

There’s a faded scar on my abdomen from a childhood of abstraction and negligence, but it runs much deeper than that. There’s a breaking point sewn beneath my skin, a splintered heart into trillions of immaterial shards and irredeemable tissue damage.

Almost always, there’s a pencil tucked into my pocket or gritted between my clammy fingers like medicine or a lifesaver, like if I let go for a moment, I’m a goner. Sometimes I feel such rushes of ambition and inspiration that I have to splurge them onto paper. It’s a foreign sensation, really. Especially the hope that accompanies it. The hope to decipher and, eventually, cross that metaphysical, unseen boundary between our universe and one crafted on paper, where ink can hold grudges and humans can cry color. It’s always been easier for me to manage people when they’re two-dimensional, nothing more than some smudges on paper, metaphors, and jargon. It’s easier to keep life from distending into something insurmountable.

At the same time, it’s wrong; it’s gross injustice to reduce living things to scrawls of graphite. Futile thoughts, passive actions. I’m deluded, hauling around literature like people are characters and the present is just a wily plot, the resolution has yet to be determined.

I carry a watch, a warden of time, of illusive todays and tomorrows. Time comes and goes like a jet ripping through the sound barrier. Bang. Eyes snap open and I slam down on the alarm clock, my heart pounding. Illusions don’t last long around here.
The sunlight streaming through the windows paints the room a lovely bright umber. The sole occupant of the room is a man who gives the large ceiling to floor windows of his office a cursory glance. He can’t help but to wonder if this moment is the last time he will be privileged enough to experience the beautiful sunset of the country he loved from his office.

He knows that the answer to his question is yes, he just likes to entertain the thought of alternate, rarer futures and fates.

He is startled out of his thoughts by his secretary. His secretary was a timid man of few words, and yet the man in the office will dearly miss him. His secretary stands in the door flanked by the one woman he desperately does not want to see.

“Your visitor, sir,” his secretary says.

He absently notes that his secretary would be great company where he’s going. He knows that his future is grim, and is certain that any little joy he can take with him will be cherished.

“Yes, come in, come in,” he says. The smile on his face feels painted on and fake, but he knows that it looks easy going and natural. He smiles too often for this one to be any less than perfect.

As the woman enters, the sound of the radio wafts in around her, almost as if she is projecting the noise from within.

*Freedom from oppression*, the announcer whispers, *freedom from the oppressor*.

He gestures at the chair across from him, and the woman takes a seat. They sit together, the silence pierced by the announcer whispering, *freedom from Kantzahn*.
Rejoice, rise up and rejoice, the announcer commands, for freedom is near.

“This is an office,” the woman states.

“I am a commander,” the man explains, “I have no desire for a throne.”

The woman leans back in her chair, and she fidgets with an ornate clock. The face of it is no larger than a pocket watch, and it is covered in intricate detail work.

He hates that wretched clock.

“Perhaps I should introduce myself,” she begins, “but I doubt you don’t know who I am.”

“Of course I know who you are,” the man says, “you are Annika Arkhenian, and you will most likely succeed me. Our forces have been fighting for this position.”

“Succeed you? You make it sound like I’ll be continuing your dreadful regime, Guardian Kantzahn,” Annika leans over the desk, and balances her weight on her crossed arms, “or should I just call you Victor? Even though we both know who won our little battle.”

“I know about my loss,” Victor says, and at once the little smile drops off his lips, “and I don’t need an idealistic child telling me about it.”

Annika doesn’t respond immediately. She leans back in her chair with a small smirk on her face. She keeps twirling that clock around her fingers. In and out it goes, winking out of existence only to return shortly after.

It is time, the announcer continues uninhibited, the people have won.

“I get it. You’re a man who has never known failure before,” Annika says in a soothing tone, “but you need to come to terms with what has happened these last few months.”
“Do not patronize me. I haven’t resigned quite yet, and I require the respect my position demands.” Victor stands suddenly. He walks away from the desk and stands in front of the windows, as if to watch the extraordinarily long sunset. Almost as if even celestial bodies don’t want this day to end.

In the words of our fearless Annika, “it is time to take back your country,” the announcer says, Victory is within our grasp. It is time.

He turns towards Annika slightly, and asks her, “do you know why I called you here?”

“I presumed to resign,” Annika says, “but I would never take you to be that level of a coward.”

Victor looks out the window upon his people, the people ten years ago he swore to protect with his whole being. He watches one woman in particular dance in the street, her hair lit ablaze by the sunset, her movements fluid as she expresses her joy with her body.

“Tell me, Annika, what is a Guardian?” Victor doesn’t bother to look at Annika. He knows what he will find on her face - confusion, or the specific brand of smugness that Annika always manages to express. Instead he watches a young child of barely 5 toddle along with his father, their hands clasped tightly together.
In Which I Am Eaten by a Giant Sunflower

E. Khodier

My path was quick and deliberate,
On a day ripe with spoilt molasses,
Through the shallow decaying meadows of
Angry purple and orange grasses.

A waning moon had taken their place
In the balcony, watching the reel run,
Waiting for flutters of hornets,
Needing something more to chew on.

There the meadows lie to tell
What might be when one steals a glance
Of the Earth who thought they were concealed,
Caught dead in their oscillating trance.

Grass melted in the pressure increase;
It collected on my feet,
Now covered in ghoulish wax,
Smelling a sour kind of sweet.

The meadows thrashed their warning at
Disruptive flinging of stuck grass off.
They were tricky with convincing,
So I made my motions soft.
But I still fell, somewhere eternal,
And stopped in the same infiniteness,
Pricked by the leather rattling of
Petals steeped in dizzying imminence.

With a phlegm-like creak, its spine curled down,
Stretching grin sizzling and sputtering,
A glitching faucet, set to rip all the trees
From the ground and leave them hovering.

Heat hazes bounced from its gelatinous fangs,
And dripped slowly into lower air,
Parting seams of breezes, leaving
Uncarbonated sparks as spares.

Air squirmed its way, and shifted,
Twisting, folding over ends.
The flower turned its eyes to mine,
And I too began to bend.

That’s how I was eaten,
Swallowed up by confused hours,
In the belly of the bluebells,
In the stomach of the sunflower.

I had appeased the meadows,
Turning perfumed in their wake,
But their insides were still churning,
And their grasses continued to flake.

*Photography by Shaleigh Balcher*
Rejection/Passion

Kazuya Erdos

I hate you
Nothing you do is going to make me say
I can truly be happy with someone
You make me believe that
There could be more to love than this
I will never imagine that
You are my best friend
And all my thoughts tell me that
Our relationship can’t improve
I can’t stand all the people who say
Two souls can love forever
I believe with all my mind that
You hurt me beyond repair
And even when
We hold hands in the moonlight
I look forward to each time
You leave without telling me
My heart breaks when
You remind me of what we’ve accomplished
A smile fills my face when
I think of moving on
Never again will I say
I love you
(Now read the lines in reverse)
I was faced with something
I had never experienced before:
Strangely, it wasn’t his silence
That I found captivating
It wasn’t his eyes
That I found fascinating
It wasn’t his speech
That I found entrancing
But rather the fact
That he refused to look at me;

The silence emanating from him
A kind of ignorance intermixed
With surprising quiet wisdom
It displayed exactly how
Uninterested he seemed to be
Combined with a constant
Chronic, ever-present curiosity
He seemed to me the very meaning
A walking, living, human portrayal
Of the word ‘oxymoronic’;
Those big brown eyes of his
With a shining gleam to them
That spoke only of kindness
Never focused their sight on me
Like Narcissus before the lake
I only wished to see myself
But upon spotting my figure
The kindness I saw before
Became stone-like and ice cold
Freezing me before him;

Instead of turning into
My personal representation
Of poor, quiet, unnoticeable Echo
He became my own equivalent
Of the Three treacherous Fates
Quietly weaving the end
Of my breathing, grounded life
Before my own innocent eyes
And with a single phrase
Like a snip of steel scissors
He had cut the string that kept me
Marooned to an earthly realm.

Photography by Alyssa Crocker
Recolored by Evangelina Burdick
When night is indistinguishable from day,
An unblinking, bloodshot eye
Condescends all other bodies,
The collapsing sunset bleeds into the horizon,
Gushing light leaks and spills gently over the blue disarray.

Contrasts in the great soil-pan create a tranquil uncertainty,
But rather the stove sits above,
In this dreamy reality a crude mirror dictates expression
From intricacy great clarity is born.

Doomed shadows advance towards the virgin sea
From an infinite distance away,
Sublime figures scratch Heaven’s back
While resting on Gaea’s head.

This scene of impending calamity
Gently holds in its soggy, bloodied hands,
A thousand dreams of a young fisherman,
Falling like raindrops into a
Pool of lives unlived.
I Want To Be Loved

Lillie Zate

I wanted to do what was right.
I wanted to have them both, despite the way-
I was trying to keep everyone happy with all my might.

She was in pain, she was in a cold, cold flight;
I tried to keep her happy, but with a price to pay
I guess I was just toxic, a big, terrible blight.

He was a force, but he was mine, despite
Everything I had to pay for, even today
I was trying to keep everyone happy with all my might.

I was stupid, I was reckless, I thought my secrets were airtight.
I did not take into account my friends, try as I may
I guess I was just toxic, a big, terrible blight.

Without my friends, I have nothing. I am just a shell, so why fight?
I want them in my life, I want people on my side, even when I go astray
I was trying to keep everyone happy with all my might.

I wanted attention, I wanted to be loved in this light
I hope that one day, everyone forgives me, I pray.
I guess I was just toxic, a big, terrible blight.
I was trying to keep everyone happy with all my might.
The snow covered everything on the eastern front: bales of countryside hay left behind by farmers, the enclosures and the farmhouses, and the innumerable frozen corpses of conscripted soldiers. Many blue, withered hands protruded from the snow. Many blue feet poked through the surface of the snow. Here were the formerly fighting, soldiering, and hoping men in their final moments, thinking thoughts of home before it was tainted by war, and their families, whose whereabouts were unknown to them.

Had they starved in Stalingrad? Had they been shot as traitors by a political Commissar, unfeeling in his dealing of capital punishment and invincible in his blood-red overcoat? Or perhaps they had been sent to the Gulags of Siberia. Even in their final moments, as explosive shells rained down from above, the fifty members of the 117th Shtrafniki division were thinking of their loved ones instead of themselves.

The sounds of impending death whistled from above, but from behind, the fifty men of the Shtrafniki division heard a shrill and imperative shout “Order 227! Not one step back. Those who retreat will be shot by my own revolver!” The fifty men of the 117th, forced to supplicate to the Commissar, were killed in one fell swoop when they could have readily escaped death. Better to die in combat and be redeemed in the eyes of the state than to die the same death at the hands of the Commissar but be remembered as a coward, they believed.
It was upon the same expanse of snowed-over farmland that fifty more men of the 117th Shtrafniki advanced. Vasily’s wet boots dragged wearily through the knee deep powder, occasionally brushing with the icy hands of a fallen comrade, and tripping on frozen bodies. “Stop and be shot! Keep advancing if you want to be redeemed in the eyes of the state!” the Commissar would bark from his seat of safety in the center of a small retinue of the most well-armed, zealous guards. Weary, fearful, and shivering, poorly fed and emblazoned only by the occasional ration of vodka, they trudged on past the field where the fifty dead men drew their final breath, into another field where another fifty men would draw theirs.

Heads hung low in anticipation for what might come, but not Vasily’s. His mind was filled with delusions of regaining his post as a faithful guard of the Commissar. The blind hope of regaining his honor, stipend, and rightful place in the hierarchy of his motherland kept him resolute. It was, in fact, his dedication to the regime and the rebirth of Russian greatness, combined with his hatred of the deceitful grey oppressors, that landed him in a penal battalion.

Months ago, a fellow guard was openly questioning the regime, Order 227, and even the great leader. Vasily had claimed this guard’s life. The Commissar wrongfully believed it was Vasily’s intention to desert the battalion, and that he killed the guard to do so. Vasily believed firmly in the soundness of Order 227. In the face of an enemy so daunting, so advanced, and so close to driving a knife into the heart of Russia, retreat could not be tolerated. Since Order 227 was issued, Vasily observed from his disgraced position that the men fought with more animalism, determination, and reckless abandon.

Contact with the enemy, at last. A chance for Vasily to fight once more! To redeem himself! His blood pumped with enthusiasm. He was not a coward, but the men next to him in this battalion of the disgraced, sent to the most dangerous sectors to the dirtiest work, were. Their blood pumped with fear, not enthusiasm.
They charged. Fifty became forty, and forty thirty, and thirty became twenty and then ten. Men did not stop to seek cover. They could have, for upon seeing combat erupt across the open plain, the Commissar and his retinue made a ‘strategic withdrawal’ to a farmhouse a kilometer away. Vasily knew this; the other men didn’t. He once made many strategic withdrawals, in his days as a guard, in order to protect their courageous Commissar.

Vasily took command of the ten. “Charge! Forward! Weapons at the ready!” He led from the front, nicked painfully, but not fatally, by incoming fire on more than one occasion. They reached the enemy defensive position. Vasily prayed that the Commissar was watching through binoculars, seeing his act of valor and devotion. Only five men remained. What ensued was a brutal, bloody, hand to hand clash in the defensive structure erected by the grey, faceless enemies. Five men went in, one came out: Vasily. He had used a knife, a blunt metal rod he found on the floor of the bunker, and his eye-gouging fingers. All three of which were stained with the blood of his enemies.

It was a warm, protected cottage where the Commissar and his retinue passed the battle in safety, drinking profusely by a fire. In a dazed stupor, the Commissar withdrew his binoculars and peered to see what had happened a kilometer out on the front line. He saw one lone, brown clothed and bloodied shape ghosting its way through the white landscape, back into the field where the first fifty Shtrafniki lay.

“Commissar! Commissar! I have redeemed myself and returned a hero! A hero! Look what I have. Look at the blood of our enemy! I have redeemed myself!” shouted Vasily, upon seeing the Commissar’s shadowy figure in the window of the cottage. The figure in the window however, remained still. He had not heard.
“That’s Vasily, men!” declared the Commissar to his guards. “He’s screaming and crying, that damned coward. Order 227, not one step back! How dare he retreat and squander this chance to redeem himself? Mikhail, give me your rifle.”

Four drunken, inaccurate shots cracked and echoed for miles over the white and red landscape.

Vasily was hit by one.

One was enough.

In the field where many blue, withered hands once protruded through the snow, and many blue feet poked through the surface of the white expanse, there now protruded two more hands, and two more boot tips.
Middle School
The Sun

Hannah Mason

One day the sun will fall
When it does all dreams will die
All children will cease their cries
And a dark silence will settle over our world.

One day the sun will fall
And when it does all happiness will disappear
And people will not be important anymore
Until we die out, because we will. Eventually.

One day the sun will fall
And all we will have is the moon
As it weeps over it's lost friend
And we lie in peace and wait to die.

One day the sun will fall
But for me it already had
And now I am blind and meaningless.
And I am broken and bleeding.

All because my sun fell.
Her long, curly, turquoise hair flying behind her, Tusami raced along the surface of the great wide ocean. She was the Goddess of the Water. Everyone loved her for she controlled how much fish the mortals bring in when they fish. She could shape-shift into any sea animal or become fully human. Tusami could breathe underwater, but also breathe air. Her eyes sparkled like blue diamonds as she dove into the deep ocean. Tusami always saw many types of fish in the oceans of Vanlases: Bluegills, Guppies, and…. Trash? The closer she swam to shore the more trash she saw. There were candy wrappers, crushed soda cans and their plastic rings, and broken glass bottles everywhere. The usual crystal clear waters were brown and mucky. She peeked her head over the surface of the water. Tusami was closer to shore than she had ever been in her life. There were hundreds of dead fish and sea animals lining the shore. Some were strangled by the plastic soda rings, some were drenched in black sticky oil, and some… some looked untouched! The only thing that was wrong with the fish was that they were dead!

These sights enraged Tusami. Not only were all of her beloved subjects dying by the thousands, but the mortals did not care. Tusami saw them weaving in and out of cars parked along the roads, sitting under trees, walking on the sidewalk, and all of them were staring at their cell phones. They were not picking up trash, in fact, they were just throwing their trash onto the pile!

She knew what she had to do. Tusami dove backwards towards her castle, The Seashell. When she got there, she warned her subjects to stay far away from the land, for she was sending a wave larger than life to the shore. The wave would send all the trash flying onto the shore so they would have to pick it up.
Tusami raced to the surface and jumped out of the water. She jumped up and down, up and down, up and down. Small waves were coming from where she was jumping. Finally, the wave she had made was larger than a cruise ship that could fit 10,000 people. She pushed against the wave as hard as she could. It flew, silently towards the land. Tusami knew it would have enough force to knock over a large building. She followed the wave closely behind, waiting for the Island to come into view. Tusami decided it would be better to get a view from higher up. She dove underneath the wave and ran across the surface. She knew, if she wanted to, she could out run the wave. When Tusami reached the shore, she wanted to go on land, but she was scared. She knew if she wanted to see the wave hit the land, she had to go onto the land itself. She spotted the second highest hill on the island and began climbing. As she climbed, she noticed that many animals had gathered on top of the hill too. The animals knew what was coming and they prepared well.

Tusami watched as the wave swam into view. It moved as if it were wheels on pavement, rolling peacefully and noiselessly. Just as the wave arose from the far horizon, many people started pointing, gasping, sitting to watch. These foolish acts made Tusami grin. For only she and the animals knew what their fate would be.

As the Great Wave grew closer, the beach began to empty. The mortals were now noticing that the wave was larger than they thought, and Tusami realized too that the wave had grown since she had made it. It was now the size of two large cruise ships stacked on top of each other. The hill was still large enough to protect Tusami and the animals, but many of birds had flown higher, towards the mountain behind them. Tusami knew this would hurt the people, but she did not care. She wanted to get back at them. The wave swelled and swelled until **CRASH!** The Great Wave slammed into the shore sending wet sand and trash flying everywhere. The mortals scattered farther into the city while Tusami snickered evilly. Houses, streets, buildings, gas stations and parks: all were drenched by this Great Wave.
People stood on roof tops while some outside their houses on top of hills. They stuttered so hard that they even mispronounced Tusami’s name. “Tsunami! Ts...Tsunami! S-She did this t-to us!”

Soon after the Great Wave passed, the people snickered about their stutter. They decided to call the wave Tsunami after it. They all goggled at the trash littering their streets. That day, the mortals made the largest sacrifice to Tusami they ever had. The mortals agreed to never throw trash into the water again. For if they did, they knew Tusami would make them suffer through another Tsunami.
ZONA DE AMENAZA
TSUNAMI
HAZARD ZONE

Photography by Allison Silva