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Contest Winners
Announced!*

Teens
Making a Difference



TEEN INK Contents

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Photo by James Tanner,
Greenacres, WA

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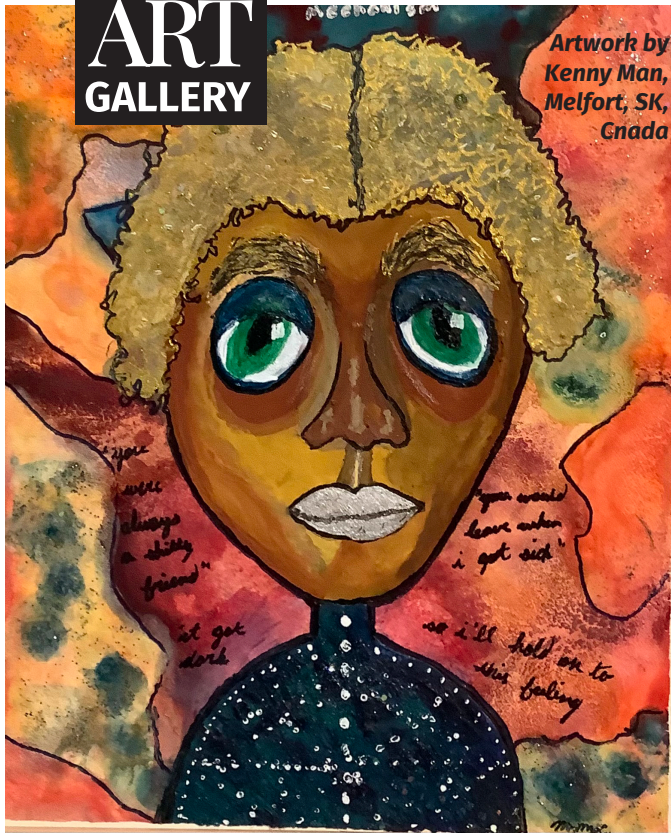
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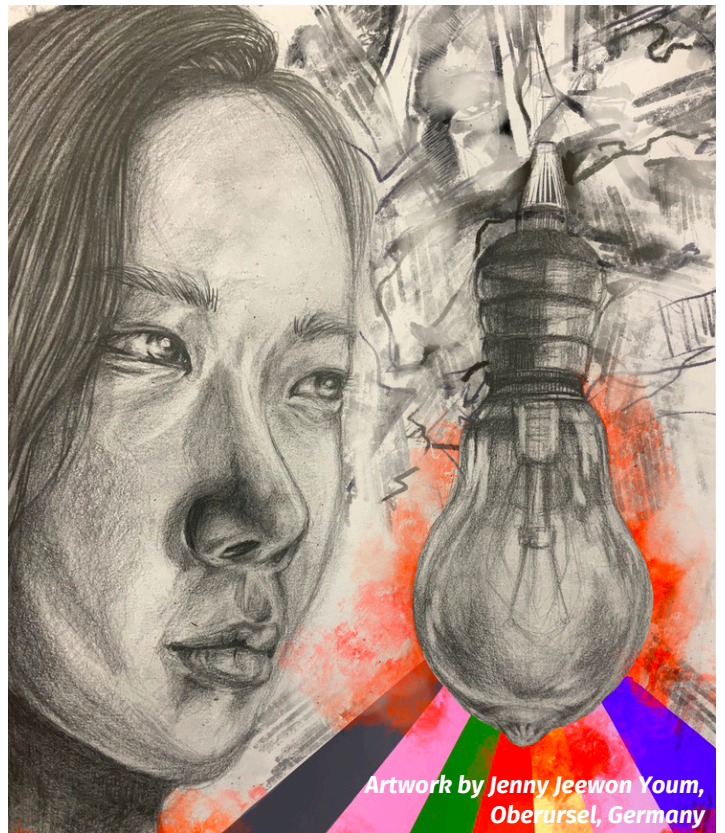
- Free verse, haiku, sonnets, & more

Art Galleries

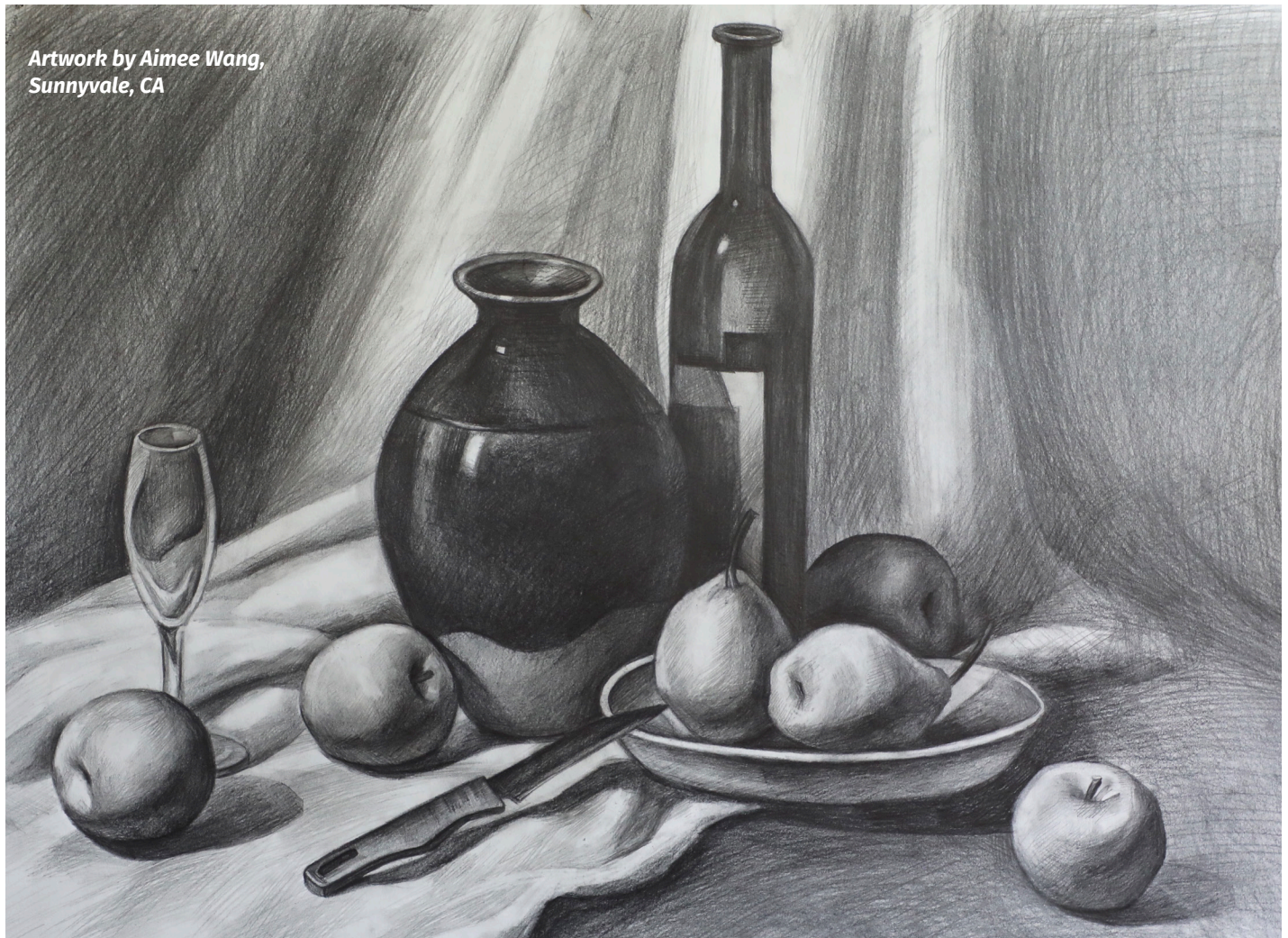
- Photography, watercolors, charcoal, oil paintings, & more



Artwork by
Kenny Man,
Melfort, SK,
Canada



Artwork by Jenny Jeewon Youm,
Oberursel, Germany



Artwork by Aimee Wang,
Sunnyvale, CA

Reaching Out to the Elderly During COVID-19

By Sonia Bhayani, St. Louis, MO

Though it is well documented that medical outcomes for older adults infected with SARS-CoV-2 are grim, there is another important aspect of the pandemic that has also had a profound impact on this vulnerable population: the isolation caused by the lack of social interaction.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the toll of COVID-19 has weighed heavily on older adults. As of March 17, 2021, there have been about 517,575 overall deaths in the United States. Over half of those deaths — 304,794 — occurred in people over 75 years of age, and the majority of the remaining deaths — 190,413 — occurred in people 50-75 years old.

It became apparent early on, during the pandemic, how easily the virus spreads — resulting in drastic changes to visitor policies in long-term care facilities. These changes meant restrictions on not only visitations from family and friends, but also on volunteer interactions and some enrichment activities within the facilities. The lack of social connection and stimulation has caused an increase in loneliness and isolation in the residents of these care facilities.

Dr. David Carr, the medical director of Parc Provence, a memory care and assisted living facility for the elderly in St. Louis, Missouri, states that the residents there “have not had regular visitation from family and have been separated or isolated from other residents in our community. Many have experienced loneliness, depression, and social isolation.”

After hearing a news report about this in June, I was inspired to do something. I wanted to find a meaningful way to connect with this community which was more at risk to be impacted adversely by the pandemic.

Many of the long-term care residents at Parc Provence have dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, conditions that magnify the negative effects of the isolation brought on by the pandemic. Seniors can develop their cognitive abilities by participating in interactive

“*These enrichment activities give the residents more social interaction*”

enrichment activities, but these have been more difficult to provide during the pandemic. According to Parc Provence Activity Director Lauren Tyree, they have “had to find different ways to keep the residents engaged, such as relying on virtual activities.” I believed playing piano virtually for the residents would be a safe, risk-free way for them to have more social interaction and to improve their spirits and mental health.

In addition to the music lifting their spirits in the moment, Dr. Carr comments that “studies on the impact of music on dementia in older adults note improvements in mood, behavior, and possibly benefits in cognitive abilities.” These seemingly short musical sessions with the residents not only are entertaining, but also can potentially have long-lasting positive effects.

Dr. Carr told me about one patient in particular who “had been depressed, anxious, and lethargic in the early stages of the pandemic.” However, as she began to participate in activities reintroduced during the summer and fall, the staff could see a change in her mental health. According to

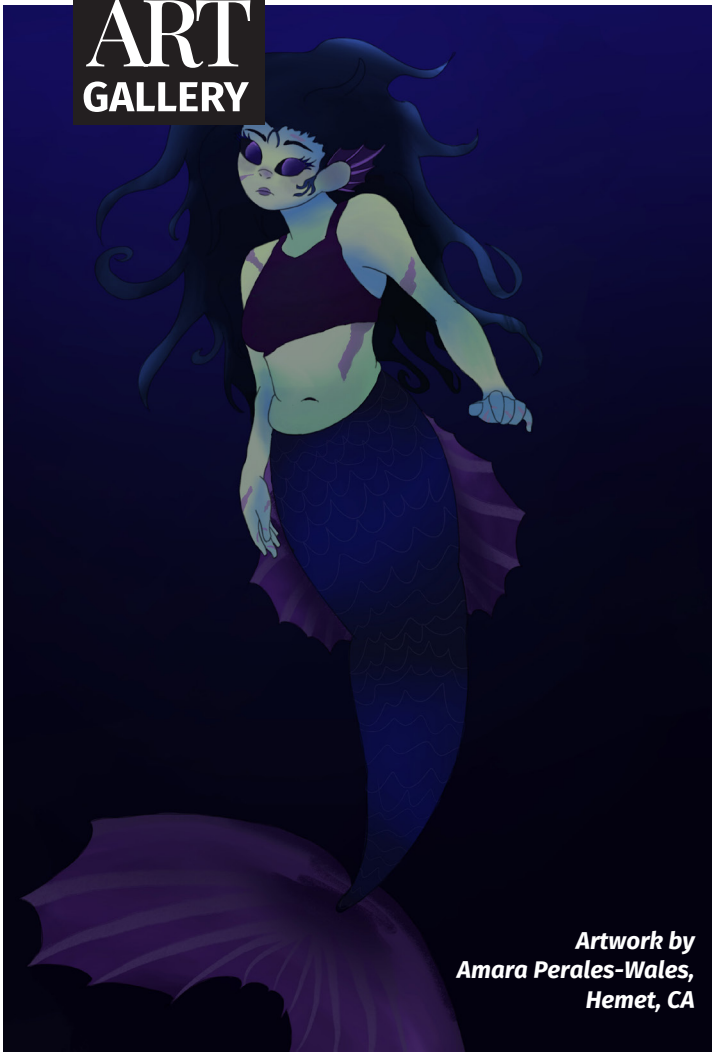
Dr. Carr, “She has become much more alert, relaxed, and appears very happy. She is especially in tune to the music activities, both live and virtual, and stays engaged during performances ... and these events have a lasting effect.” It is immensely rewarding to know the music I have been sharing with the residents weekly since June has had a beneficial impact.

Whether it be from my music or the many other activities offered, the residents have been able to have moments of connection while the pandemic restrictions continue. These enrichment activities not only help to relieve stress from the pandemic and their current living conditions, but also give the residents more social interaction, which combats their feelings of loneliness.

Although vaccination efforts are currently being rolled out, precautions will remain in place for the near future to safeguard our most vulnerable population. I encourage everyone to find ways to connect with older adults until it is safe to be around them in person, especially those in care facilities. This could include phone or video calls, sharing stories, playing an instrument, singing a song, or sharing a meal remotely. Creative solutions for connecting will help decrease their social isolation and loneliness and bring some joy to your day as well. These acts may feel like small gestures, but they will have a significant positive effect on the lives of older adults.

To view total deaths and deaths by age, click [here](#).

**ART
GALLERY**

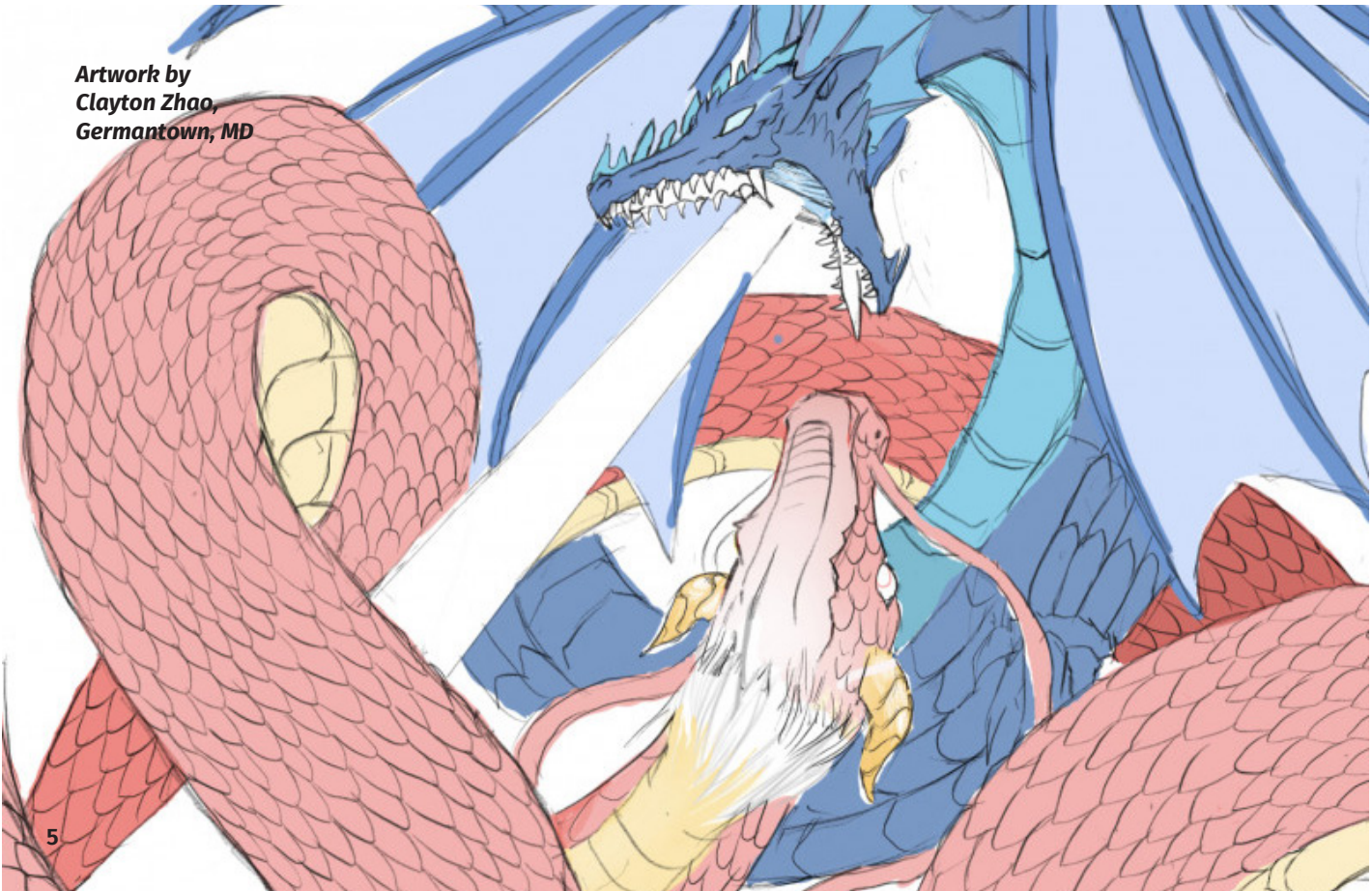


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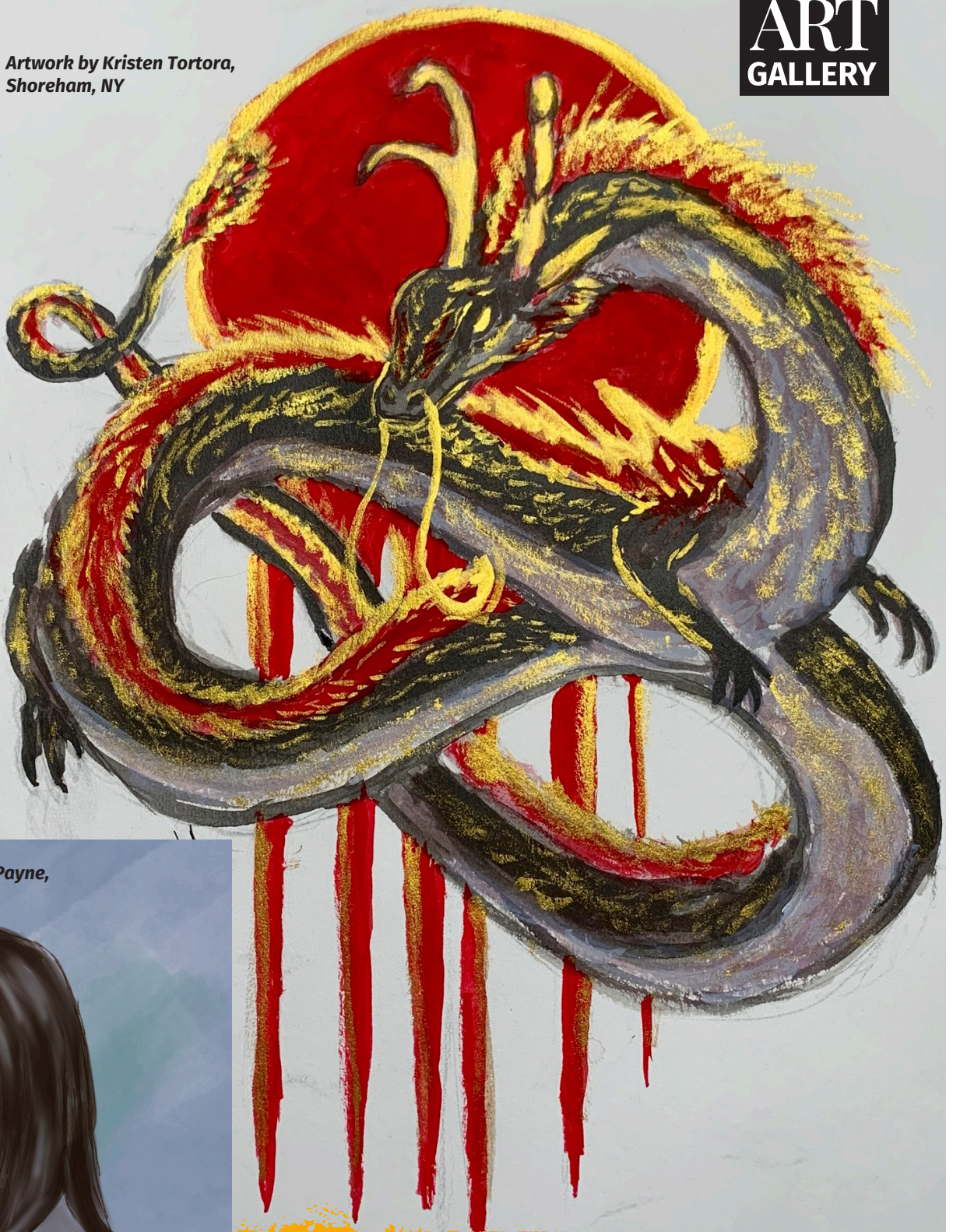
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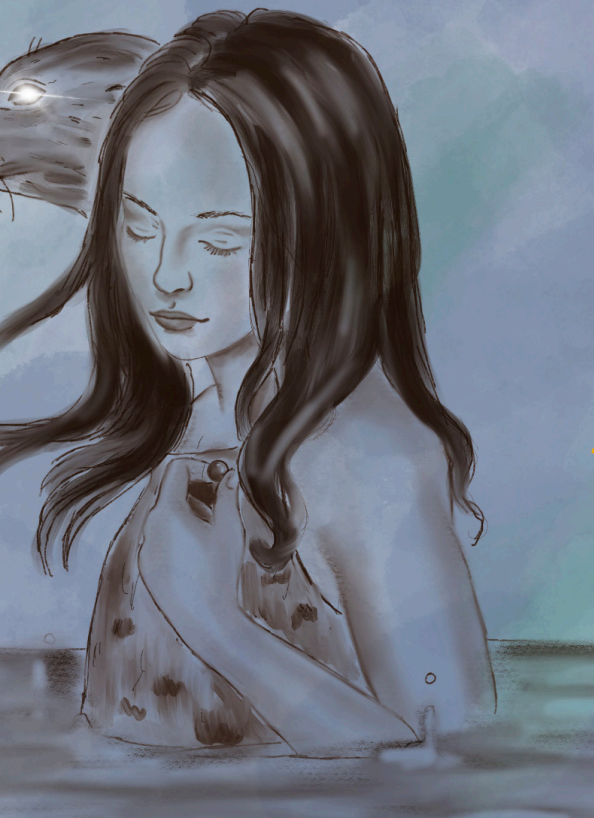
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Clayton Zhao,
Germantown, MD*



*Artwork by Kristen Tortora,
Shoreham, NY*



*Artwork by Avery-Grace Payne,
Cypress, TX*



Artwork Contest
**Mystical
Creatures!**



From The Rivers

By Isabella de los Rios,
Boca Raton, FL

I have always struggled with my lengthy, ethnic, and complicated last name; “de los Rios” has not only been difficult for me, however. It has been especially difficult for the cashiers who have to ask for my name in order to look up my account. On the off chance they happened to speak Spanish, I’d say “Isabella de los Rios” and hoped they would type it in as fast as “Mary Smith.” Instead, they froze and hesitated to type. Almost every time, they’d look up and, with a smile, ask: “Is that all together?” or “Could you please repeat that?” or “Sorry, could you spell that out for me?” So much so that D-E space L-O-S space R-I-O-S has become a code that I recite every time I’m checking out at Barnes and Noble or Urban Outfitters. So much so that I wished I wasn’t Hispanic and wished I wouldn’t have to drag these three words along with me for the rest of my life.

It wasn’t just these weekly, mundane

moments that irked me, however. It was also how people butchered my last name. Over my 18 years of carrying the burden of having such an intricate last name, I’ve gotten: de la Rosa, del los Rios, delosrios, or De Los Rios. Most of these have the same sound, but they are still spelled wrong. Hearing my botched name spat out of the teacher’s mouth when calling attendance made me wince, but I would never tell them because it’s my fault for having such a bothersome last name in the first place.

It was always discomfoting to hear my name being butchered at every assembly and graduation ceremony. It was like they were talking about an entirely different person, and that I shouldn’t be the one standing up to receive that diploma. They called for Isabella de la Rosa. I’m Isabella de los Rios; she should be getting it, not me. I hesitated to walk to the podium to receive my diploma and it felt like the chair

was grabbing me, whispering, “Don’t go up there, that’s not your name.” When I would receive certificates with my last name misspelled, I always wanted to hand them back and say, “This isn’t mine, it doesn’t say my name,” but I never did. I just hid them in the drawer filled with other misspelled certificates. I would never confront someone who mispronounced my last name because it wasn’t their fault: it was mine.

So, over the years, I’ve adapted my last name to take on different forms such as “dLR” or “Rios.” You know, something easier and faster for teachers and cashiers to say or write. It was a little odd being called something that wasn’t my name, but I went along with it. Then, I realized it wasn’t just as simple as erasing the “de los” from a piece of paper and leaving my name as “Isabella Rios;” it was more than that. I was inherently erasing away a huge facet of “Isabella de los Rios.” I was removing my

Artwork by Wendy Yu,
Windermere, FL



heritage, my culture, and everything that was held within those three words and four syllables.

Sometimes I catch myself writing “Bella Rios” on a quiz or essay, but the regret hits as soon as my pen leaves the paper. That’s not my name and that’s suddenly not my work. Why would I waste my life calling myself by a name that isn’t real? This made me feel worse than any teacher butchering my name during attendance because I had become the one abusing my last name and turning it into something it is not.

I would tell people that I was going to legally change my name when I turned 18 to “Bella Rios”, just to make life easier for everyone who had to write or say my name. But now at 18, I have no desire to alter my last name and disregard its significance. My last name literally means “from the Rivers” and to me, “from the Rivers” represents the sound of Latin music filling the living

room, the smell of sancocho in the kitchen, and the warmth of family crammed at one table eating arepas with carne desmechada.

I could spend hours lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, just thinking about how different my life would be if I wasn’t Hispanic. Would it really hurt to lose such a big facet of my life? Would losing that “de los” really mean that much? I would think about how different my life would be when I married someone with a common last name and, therefore, would never have to worry about it being butchered again. That didn’t necessarily erase my heritage, but it would be a good way to cover it up. Sometimes I would wonder how different my life would be if English was my first language. Would that change how people viewed me? I wondered if my parents were born in America and not Colombia and Venezuela, what type of food would we eat? Would we even know what arepas are, or

would we just eat hamburgers? Would we drink chicken noodle soup on our sick days instead of ajiaco? Or what if my parents played *The Beatles* instead of *Maná* on road trips?

It came in short bursts of realization, like a light bulb twinkling until it gleamed. I realized that those three, troublesome, and tortuous words were not something just meaninglessly written on a quiz or a certificate. What they represented flowed through me. It was the blood that travels through my veins and the DNA that differentiates me. Those three words, “de los Rios,” are a marvelous burden. So, I made a promise to myself that I would never let the extra ten seconds that it takes to spell out my last name to a cashier, or the one second someone mispronounces my last name, undermine its significance. My name is Isabella de los Rios and I will never become another impersonator or fraud of my own self. 🌟

The Replacement

by Vanita Shih, Taichung, Taiwan

A *doppelgänger*. Something that's neither a spirit, nor a creature. Nearly human, yet still far from it. Stories of our look-alikes date back to ancient times. Some claim that they are bad omens, that those who caught sight of their mirror images were doomed to death or illnesses far worse. Others believe they are spirits who failed to inherit the physical body you were born with. Thus, they take your form, follow you, observe your every move, and when the time comes, they rid themselves of their temporary shells for your everlasting one.

Amira's eyes scour the page as her fingers trail the grains of the paper. The book captivates her unlike any other, and she ponders the possibility that somewhere in this universe was her *doppelgänger*. Would they look just like her? Talk like her? If they replaced her completely, would Mama and Papa even notice?

The library is colder now. Amira gathers the end of her large overcoat so that it covers her legs and pulls the gas lamp closer. She digs into her bag, fishing out an unfinished croissant and

shoving it into her mouth. In the ceaseless silence of the library, Amira's soft chews ring like bullets down an alley. Perhaps it is the lonesome moonlight casting through the stained-glass window or the quivering shadows cast onto the wall by the lamp, but Amira is suddenly aware of how alone she was. How long has she been the only inhabitant here?

She lifts her gaze, scanning the walls for an indication of the time but finds none.

Somewhere down the hallway of bookshelves and shadows comes the faint sound of wheels, raising every hair on Amira's neck. As the sound amplifies, she deduces that they haven't been oiled in forever. Scurrying to grab her book, she sits crossed-legged on the rough carpet, pretending to immerse herself in the reading.

The squealing gets closer, now accompanied by the unmistakable sound of footsteps. Where is the sound coming from? From her left? Her right? Behind her? No.

In front of her.

She lifts her gaze through her thick frames and lashes to find a woman staring down at her. Amira knew better than to judge one's appearance, but the woman looks, for a lack of a better description, morbidly unpleasant. The heels of her shoes had broken off, and her unembellished brown dress strained against heavy layers of fat. What unsettled Amira the most were her eyes, hidden behind a pair of intricate goggles. Carved out of gold, they shielded the woman's eyes with obsidian lenses. With wrinkled hands on a trolley full of nameless books, she looks toward Amira, her opaque lenses momentarily catching the reflection of Amira's lamp, conjuring an illusion of glowing eyes. They are unraveling Amira's secrets, tearing away each layer. It is like a dream – a nightmare perhaps – as she pulls her eyes off Amira, grabbing a handkerchief from the back pocket of her dress. She dabs at the thick sheen of sweat on her forehead, and Amira shuffles uncomfortably.

“A *doppelgänger*. Something that's neither a spirit, nor a creature. Nearly human, yet still far from it”

“Why are you still here at this hour?” she huffs, wiping at her forehead, as it was newly coated in another layer of precipitation. Amira's eyes dive down, noticing the pocketwatch the librarian wore around her neck. 11:28. Its clicks signal the impending end of the night. Amira brings her eyes back to the old woman and contemplates a lie.

She tells the truth. “I wanted to stay and read.”

“Read?” She scoffs. While the gas lamp burns, the woman's shadow seems to grow across the wall, cornering Amira's to the edge. “Do you wish to die?” Her goggles flash violently as she edges closer.

“Sorry.” Unsettled, Amira begins gathering her belongings. “I'll be leaving right away. Please don't hurt me.”

“Hurt you?” A pulse of confusion strikes the old librarian's features. “Do you know what day it is?”

Her mind turns like clockwork then, working out each outcome she would endure for each action she could take. “What day is it, ma'am?” She chooses compliance.

The librarian leans in closer with an ominous air. “The day.”

“The day?”

“The day,” she repeats.

The answers strike her.

Why there wasn't a soul in the library other than the librarian. Why the silence on the streets was louder than screams. Why it was so cold that Amira realized it wasn't purple lipstick on the librarian's lips.

Terror floods Amira's features. The rustling sound of chains draws

her attention toward the librarian, who had pulled off the pocketwatch around her neck, tossing it to Amira.

She catches it.

“Go. You have half an hour.”

Grabbing her bag and lamp, Amira runs, catching one last sight of the librarian's face, a shallow depth of wordless sympathy. The heavy doors shut behind her as she threw herself into the ruthlessly cold night. It's an unfamiliar scene. The barren streets are washed in an aegean glow under the light of the half-masked moon. Sprinkles of white dust collect on Amira's lashes as she gazes down to check the pocket watch.

Midnight is drawing near, and Amira's running out of time. Wasting none, she pulls the watch over her neck and flies down the frosty stairwell.

It takes no time for Amira to arrive at the closest trolley station, a lone platform marked by a wooden billboard displaying the times of arrival. She hurries up the stairs toward the billboard, hands on the watch, ready to match the time. Amira's heart sinks upon reading the large words painted across the billboard.

No trolley services, Dec. 31.

No trolley services.

A sudden numbness creeps up Amira's legs, and she falls onto a step of the wooden stairs, crossing her legs under her coat.

Of course, everyone would be home by this hour and trolley





*Artwork by Magdalene Xin Heng Lee,
Hong Kong*



*Photo by Ella Snyder,
Winter Springs, FL*



Artwork by Emma Baumgardner-Shipp, Ravenna, OH



*Artwork by Mór Szepesi,
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Bhopal, India

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