

The logo for 'teen ink' features the word 'teen' in white lowercase letters on a dark blue rectangular background, and the word 'ink' in white lowercase letters on a bright green rectangular background. The two shapes are slightly offset and overlap.

**teen ink**

By teens, for teens

December 2022  
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**PLUS**  
**Art & Essay**  
**Contest**  
**Winners**

**&**

**Teens Talk:**  
**How do you**  
**find writing**  
**inspiration?**

A silhouette of a young woman with long hair, looking thoughtfully to the right against a bright, hazy sky. The text 'Teens Making A Difference' is overlaid at the bottom in large, bold letters.

**Teens Making**  
**A Difference**

## Together We Rise

JULIA MARELL, SHORT HILLS, NJ

Two years ago, I read a news article about the shortcomings of the foster care system. I was horrified to learn that foster children travel from home to home with a trash bag filled with their belongings. I decided to search for a way to help. I found an organization called Together We Rise, which works to provide children with basic necessities, along with comfort items in a dignified manner. I started a local chapter of this nonprofit during sophomore year and by senior year, we had 34 members. I never thought this organization would put me in touch with a community of like-minded peers who cared as deeply as I do for children in need.

Just yesterday, we decorated big, blue duffel bags with pictures of dragons, flowers, and underwater creatures for children we'd never met. We made colorful holiday cards, sketching smiley faces next to our signatures, and filling gift bags with toiletries, streamers, and fluffy teddy bears. After our first year of school fundraising

events, my Together We Rise community had raised enough money to provide 25 children with Sweet Case duffels. As a team, we worked together and created something that we were proud to present to the children.

There are currently over 500,000 minors in the United States foster care system. I see my role in my community — whether at home or around the world — as interconnected and interdependent. I can't solve big problems alone, but I can organize, energize, and incentivize others to join me in an effort to make positive changes for the greater good. ♦

## The Project That Changed My Life

AIDA EL-HAJJAR, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

"A project that will simultaneously help our community while using your talents," was my sixth-grade Capstone project assignment. This project was assigned to me during the 2020-21 school year, at the height of the pandemic. When I looked at the world around me, I knew my Capstone project would need to connect somehow to the pandemic. I just needed to figure out how and what I could do to help. After hours and hours of thought, I formed an idea. I couldn't see my grandparents due to their health conditions and my parents' concern about endangering their lives. For

I have completed 19 portraits thus far, and I hope to continue this project as long as I can

almost two whole years, my grandparents and I spoke on Zoom calls and over the phone; but I wasn't alone. So many other families must have faced this same predicament, especially if a loved one was hospitalized or at an elderly home. Seeing family was extremely complicated. Art was the next component of my project. I started to love art during the pandemic, and I would dedicate hours each day to improving my

techniques. Therefore, I took my concern about families being separated and my love of art to form a project. I called it "Pandemic Portraits."

I emailed the elderly home down the street from my house and pitched my idea: I would draw residents' family members so they would feel close to them, and for the families, I would draw the residents. All I needed from the family was a photograph and, most importantly, a paragraph describing the person I was to be drawing. The description of the family member helped me really capture the person's essence. I have completed 19 portraits thus far and I hope to continue this project as long as I can. I have had lots of time to think about how death is so difficult, but love is so immense. If I can bring one tiny smile or one ounce of joy, then all of my hours of drawing are worth it. It is truly magical to see how art can impact people in so many wonderful ways. ♦

tee  
 making  
 different  
 con

Contest  
Winner!

# The Cadillac

BY GAVIN ROSSWOG, PITTSBURGH, PA

I moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania about six years ago. Calling it a change of pace would have been a massive understatement — it was a complete change of setting. Going from the warm, sun-soaked residential neighborhood in Virginia to the dreary, dark hills of Pennsylvania was like going through

withdrawal. When we moved in, we were greeted by friendly faces and warm introductions to the neighborhood, which eased the blow of moving significantly.

Surrounded by several people my age and very welcoming neighbors, I found the neighborhood to be incredibly pleasant. We were introduced to all the houses surrounding us within a day and everyone brought baked goods, dinner, or some gift to greet us.

By our first week, we had met everyone except the house that was directly across from us. They simply had not said a word. The house lay hauntingly across the street, the grass overgrown and the windows blocked by some unseen object. It was two stories with broken siding and dislodged roof shingles, and it had a backyard that looked like a jungle. My young, childish mind saw it as a haunted house, like Dracula's lair, and I had an acute fascination with it.

My parents went over with a tin of cookies and introduced themselves. An old man and his wife emerged, looking frail. They looked like an old tower that was slowly crumbling to dust. They exchanged quick conversation and without lingering long, returned to the safety of our house. We never held a real interaction with them until months later.

As I got to know other kids in the neighborhood, I gained knowledge of the rumors about the neighbors. Rumors that they hoarded old objects, and that

random stuff was piled to the ceiling in the house. Rumors that they couldn't take care of their lawn, so it would grow knee-high until some reluctant neighbor would cut it for them. I quickly gained the notion that they were "weird" and I should steer clear of them at any cost. Whenever I would question my parents about them, they would just shrug off the topic or tell me not to be nosy.

Winter came before I knew it, and snow accumulated quickly. Because of my parents' suggestion, I was walking from house to house trying to get money in exchange for shoveling driveways. After I had shoveled most of the houses I could, my Dad told me to go across the street and do the neighbor's for free. Dread filled me with the thought, but I reluctantly abided. While I was shoveling the driveway, I noticed an old 1970 Cadillac coupe in their garage. As I peered in for a better look, I was filled with fascination and awe. When I went home, I told my parents all about the car and they told me I should go over and ask him about it and maybe I would learn something about him. I shrugged off the idea like a bad joke and forgot about the car until the summer.

## It's funny how much you can mean to someone without even knowing

The summer was a profit for me. I mowed several lawns and racked up a good amount of money. After looking across the street and noticing the size of the grass in the neighbor's yard, my parents again instructed me to help them. I reluctantly trudged across the street for a three-hour-long, grueling lawn care session in my neighbor's yard. Near the tail end of me mowing, my neighbor came out to thank me and offer me money for my effort. It was the first time I had seen him face-to-face, and he looked even frailer than I had imagined. He was nicer than I thought and after going through some small talk with him, I hesitantly inquired about the Cadillac. His face lit up and he told me it was his prized possession. He also let me know I could stop by to look at it with him.

Later that night, I consulted my parents and they decided that it was fine if I go and look at the car the next day. I was still scared walking, but I felt more comfortable knowing that he wasn't the monster I imagined. The minute I got into the house I was shocked. The rumors were true — piles and piles of

# DON'T LET THE SMILE FOOL YOU



ARTICLE BY SUHJUNG KIM, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

## Ping!

Bouncing off the side, the Pringles can gracefully arched into the bin. The crowd erupted into cheers, signaling the first goal of the day. Congratulatory pats showered down my back as I basked in my moment of glory. It was a great 1+1 deal – I got to score and also did my good deed of the day by throwing the can into the recycling bin.

When it came to snacks, Pringles were hands-down my No. 1 choice. Not only did they serve as a form of entertainment to bored fifth graders during recess, they came in a convenient can that ensured portability as well as protection for the delicious crisps. The smile on the front always aroused good memories of sharing Pringles at sleepovers with my friends. So, imagine my surprise when my mom suddenly cut off my daily supply of Pringles. And her reason? Because they were bad for the environment! “But, Mom! Anyone can tell the can is made out of paper!” But she was insistent. No. More. Pringles.

I was crushed. Desperate to prove my mom wrong, I began to research fervently — if I could disprove her,

she could not stop me from eating my Pringles, right? But little did I know, I was the one who was oblivious to the dark truth. Titles such as “Pringles Tube Tries to Wake from ‘Recycling Nightmare,’” and “Why Pringles’ ‘Idiotic’ Packaging is a Recycling Nightmare” flashed before my eyes. Through my research, I found out that the Pringles cans were impossible to recycle due to the variety of different materials used in the packaging. Because recycling machines cannot separate the plastic caps from the foil-coated cardboard sleeves, they end up in the landfill. After learning the truth, I could not help but feel betrayed by the smile on the can.

I was numb from the harsh truth – I had been oblivious to the fact that the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Pringles cans I had consumed, each a shade of cheery red or zesty green, with the same smile plastered on the front, were piled up in a landfill somewhere. From then on, the only thing I could see was the face on the Pringles cans. I could feel Mr. P’s gaze on the back of my head in the grocery store, at school, and on the streets. The once friendly, but now eerie smile was a constant reminder of the horrible deed I had done.





ARTWORK BY ALLY CHEN, MCLEAN, VA

In an attempt to spread the truth, I began to nag my friends to stop eating Pringles, but like my previously naïve self, they were more interested in satisfying their cravings. But I was determined to convince my friends of the dangers of the cans they held in their hands. After hours of research, I gave a passionate presentation during class, where I showed my classmates the photos of plastic lids floating in the ocean. And, to my relief, my sincerity and plea for action got across.

My now-informed peers began to change; many started to choose more eco-friendly alternatives. And, the change quickly spread beyond my fifth grade classroom. Inspired by my presentation, some of my friends approached the nutritionist and asked her to stop giving out Pringles as snacks each week. After hearing from my classmates about the environmental damage, the nutritionist immediately agreed to drop Pringles. Instead, bananas quickly became a popular choice for both the taste and nutrition. And,

## AFTER LEARNING THE TRUTH, I COULD NOT HELP BUT FEEL BETRAYED BY THE SMILE ON THE CAN.

bananas also come in portable cases that are even biodegradable — an excellent 1+1 deal.

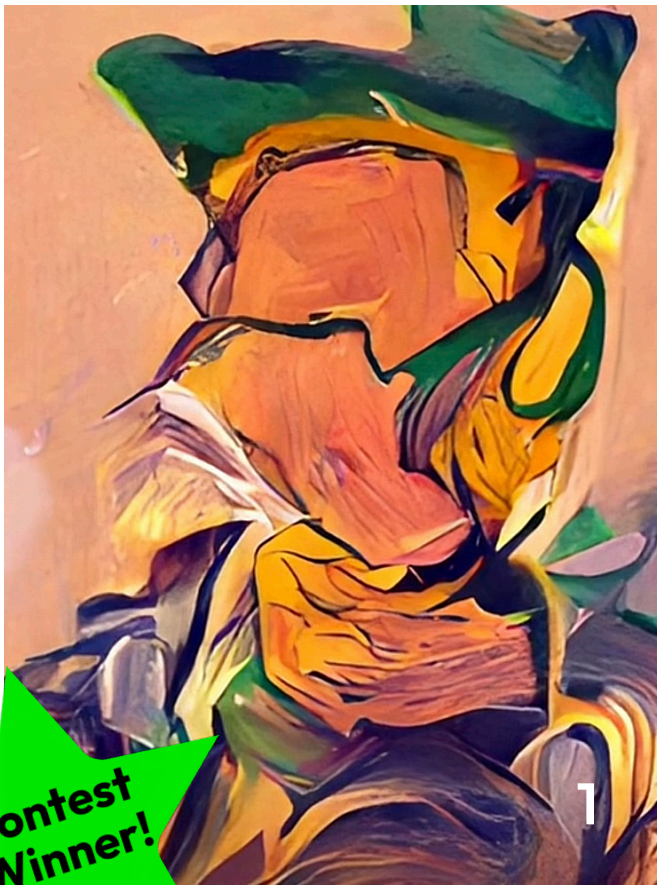
Through my voice, I had unwittingly thrown a rock that created ripples within my community. Although I had started with the simple goal of convincing my classmates, I ended up changing a part of our school community forever. As a result, all the students stopped consuming their weekly share of Pringles, which meant 972 less cans per week, 3,888 less cans per month, and 34,992 less cans per school year that were dumped in landfills. No longer fooled, I can now smile back in defiance at the Pringles can. ♦



# ABSTRACT ART

## CONTEST

def.: a visual art genre that does not represent reality, but uses shapes, forms, colors, and textures independently from real references



Contest  
Winner!

### CREDITS

**1 HINDSIGHT**

BY AVERY-GRACE PAYNE, CYPRESS, TX

**2 COLORFUL PAINTING**

BY KRRISHA PATEL, SECAUCUS, NJ

**3 GRAY STUDY**

BY LYDIA QUATTROCHI, SOMONAUK, IL

**4 ABSTRACT**

BY KYLIE BROOKSHIRE, MIDLAND, TX

**5 SPRINGTIME BLUES**

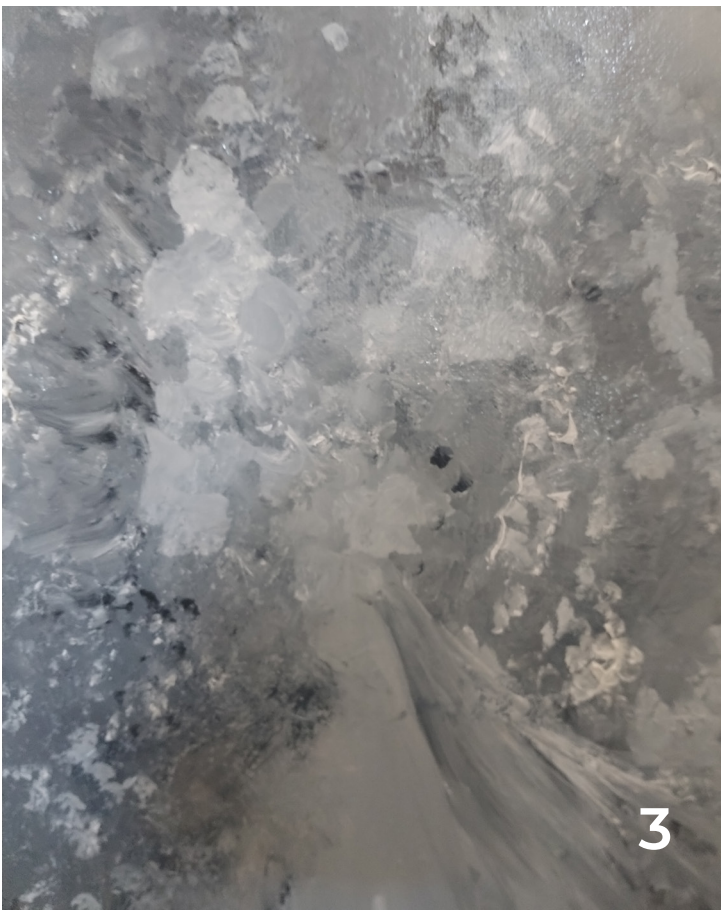
BY AESHA JACKSON, LOUISVILLE, KY

**6 RAINBOW**

BY TABITHA DICARLANTONIO,  
ORLANDO, FL









HEALTH



**the collapse of health care and**  
**INSULIN**  
**INACCESSIBILITY**

ARTICLE BY ALEXANDRA MALKIN, ARDSLEY, NY

PHOTO BY EMILY G. EASTON, PA



I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could a school deprive children of the best tools needed to keep them healthy?

A few months ago, my friend told me that some diabetic children were unable to receive the newest technology to help track and maintain their blood sugar levels routinely throughout the day — simply because they didn't have the money or insurance to afford it.

I couldn't wrap my head around such a circumstance. Imagine living through every day with a disease that requires treatment limited to specific insulin-injecting and glucose-tracking technology. Now, imagine this technology is ancient and not up-to-date with current research. It seemed absurd that, on top of the stress caused by managing diabetes, these kids were expected to use glucose monitors that didn't give them the most effective treatment on a day-to-day basis.

Shocked and inspired, I began to discover more disparities that diabetics had to live with. It seemed that the complexity of the disease and its treatment had influenced a common ignorance — specifically a lack of knowledge and education about type 1 diabetes. These children, in the process of managing their disease and the financial burdens associated with it, lacked support in dealing with their day-to-day finger pokes, injections, and other discomforts.

The situation only gets worse. In addition to the high prices of technology, such as glucose monitors and insulin pumps, I discovered there had been a dramatic increase in costs of the one specific medicinal item that is necessary for diabetics' survival: insulin. In the United States specifically, this vital hormone has become so expensive that a large number of diabetics are beginning to skip necessary insulin doses

on a daily basis. Such deprivation of medicine has even caused the deaths of diabetics.

Diabetes is not necessarily a fatal disease. It should not be the cause of death for those whom it affects. Yet, somehow, the U.S. health care system has allowed management strategies to become so financially burdensome that diabetes is

Collins (R-ME) have been fighting against the dramatic increase in insulin prices. The issue has gotten so severe that the Insulin Act has been presented to Congress, which would encourage insulin manufacturers to reduce list prices to a point where the medicine is affordable to all diabetics. It would also push for more competition among insulin producers, which

## NOW, MORE THAN EVER, THE YOUTH OF AMERICA NEEDS TO GET INVOLVED IN MAKING LASTING CHANGE



becoming a life-threatening illness — one with no cheap solution.

It's about time that the U.S. government fulfills the promise it made to the American people in the 1940s, when it — along with 47 other nations — signed a mutual United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document clearly states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family, including ... medical care.”

Luckily, the younger generation has the power to acknowledge and address these alarming issues through advocacy, grassroots campaigns, innovative thinking, initiatives, and more. In July 2022, the problems with insulin costs were addressed on the Senate floor with the proposal of the Insulin Act.

Over the past few years, Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Susan

would in turn create broader access to insulin products. Unfortunately, the Insulin Act did not pass in the Senate, and the issue of affordable insulin continues to haunt the diabetic community.

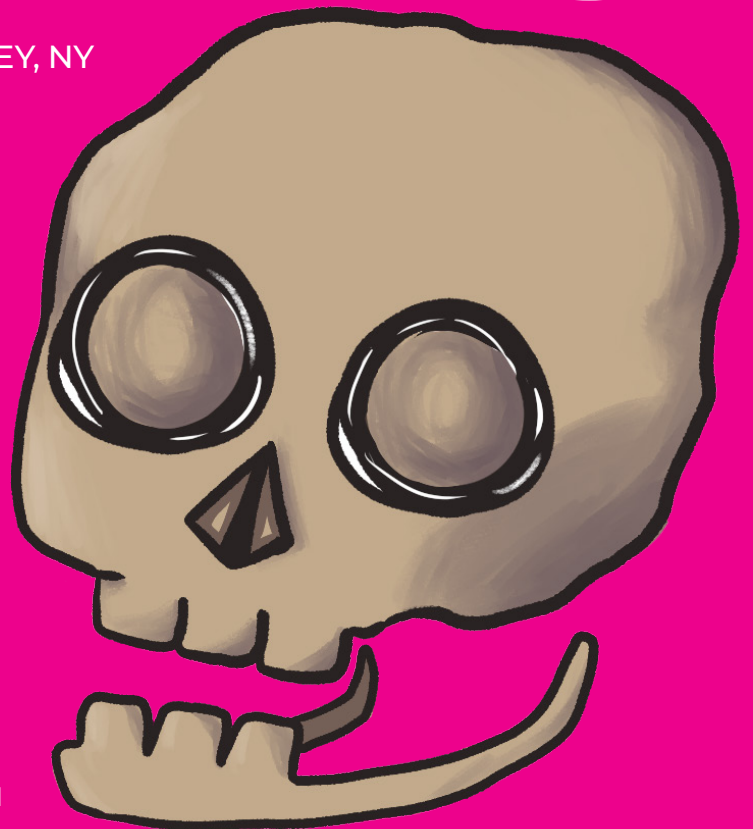
Now, more than ever, the youth of America needs to get involved in making lasting change. JDRF and other organizations are giving teens the opportunity to write digital, personalized messages to government officials to encourage their support of insulin price caps and the well-being of the American diabetic population.

In the wake of the Aug. 7, 2022 decision to block insulin caps, it has become the responsibility of the younger generations — diabetic or not — to step up and protect the rights promised to us long ago: the right to health, well-being, and — for the 37.3 million diabetics living in the U.S. — affordable insulin. ♦

here's a crazy idea:

# LET'S STOP FALLING IN LOVE WITH SERIAL KILLERS

ARTICLE BY ALEXANDRA MALKIN, ARDSLEY, NY



ARTWORK BY LUCÍA GÓMEZ, PALMA, SPAIN



Say it with me: I will not fall in love with a serial killer just because they are portrayed by a hot actor.

I hate to even bring this up because I am just another one of the millions of people that will now be talking about Jeffery Dahmer and giving him attention when he deserves none of it.

For this reason, I will refer to him as 'Stinky' throughout this article because I don't want to give the dead guy the satisfaction of having his name everywhere.

We need to stop giving our attention to horrible people, and we definitely need to stop romanticizing them and allowing ourselves to become blind to their actions simply because we think the person portraying them in a role is hot.

Not only is it gross, insensitive, and, just plain weird, but it gives these monsters the wrong kind of attention.

Where I think it all started:

In case you have no idea what I'm talking about, let me introduce you to where this issue of romanticizing serial killers all started, and that is with Zac Efron. Efron portrayed a serial killer whom I also will not be naming because trust me, he's gotten more than enough attention over the years.

Efron, a star almost every woman has swooned over at some point in their life, played a serial killer that lured his victims with his looks. It makes sense, I'll admit that much. He was cast because he's a good actor and he does look like the guy in a way. The problem is that people failed to see past his looks and the line between Efron and the person he portrayed began to blur.

The issue with loving the characters:

People quickly become desensitized to the awful things this man did because his looks became the star of the movie. This film did a great

job highlighting the infatuation women had with this criminal and showed how disgusting it was that they loved a man that killed people with no remorse.

People completely missed the message and started seeing the killer in a light they never should.

Hey, we're all guilty of it. I'll admit I do it, too. There are so many celebrities I've convinced myself I love and when I go to follow them on Instagram or watch interviews, they are nothing like their character.

It's a trap everyone falls into; we fall in love with a character, not the actor yet we can't seem to distinguish one from the other. This

This sudden trend over the past few years is disgusting. It is important to learn to distinguish the actor from their role, especially in cases like this. They are horrible people who did awful things, and romanticizing them does no good for anybody.

Loving Zac Efron and Evan Peters and appreciating their acting skills is one thing. It goes a step too far when people begin to idolize criminals and care about them; it needs to stop. Both actors did a fantastic job, but our focus on serial killers should end there.

Final thoughts:

If we want to bring attention to serial killers and the horrible things

## IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH THE ACTOR FROM THEIR ROLE



is exactly why it is concerning when I open up social media to see people swooning over Evan Peters in the new Netflix thriller telling the story of the well-known serial killer, Stinky.

Yes, Peters is a phenomenal actor and he does a great job at portraying a disgusting, weird, creepy lowlife. While I personally don't see it, people everywhere think Peters is the next big heartthrob. As they did with Efron, they instantly fell in love with Peters. The only problem is that along with their love for Peters, they developed a love for Stinky as well.

Criminals are criminals, period.

they did, let's highlight and honor their victims, not them. They don't deserve our attention, but the victims and their families do.

Remy Tumin with *The New York Times* does a great job highlighting how the people that matter feel about this recent thriller and tells us their stories. The absolute least we could do is humanize the people that lost their lives instead of the monsters that did this to them. ◆



**FICTION**

ART BY KRRISHA PATEL, SECAUCUS, NJ

# **A HOUSE HIDDEN IN A TIMELY WOODS**

STORY BY JENNY BELANDRES, NAPLES, FL



It was warm only moments ago.

Stuffy air dissipated to the freshness of green. The cold cuts through me. My lungs feel as if they are made of glass; they crackle with each breath. Being made brittle down to the bone, a slight tremor rippled through me. And yet, it was refreshing. Each bite of wind nipping at my nose and cheeks blushed them bright red; it was welcoming.

I stood on the edge of a forest. A wall of trees just steps away. Their musk filled my nose. Running between two grand oaks, a common path led deeper into the woods. Beaten, but clean of footprints. It guided its traveler around a bend, the end out of sight. One step after another, I began walking. The trees sang to me their siren song.

Hardly any sounds creep through the brush and branch. Not an animal's scurry or a twig's snap, all absent from the noise. A tranquility wanted to replace any fear. I hadn't laid eyes on these woods, these trees, or this underbrush, but they wanted to welcome me like it was home. Twisting arms of the dark oak lulled me, seeming to grow close enough to touch if I stood staring too long.

Dirt turned to stone as the path curved. At the end, there laid a house. Mist covered the details of the door and the cobblestone path. A few steps forward, and I only feel the rigid and uneven edges announcing their presence under my feet. The house was basked in shadows as the sun fell. I could see an outline—tracing the stone and wood walls, the ragged roof, and the brick chimney—a window, and the faintest light of a burning fireplace through the cloudy glass. The wind dropped the whistle of its melody; the leaves tripped over their dancing feet.

Back here, it looked like a picture. A painting. I can almost feel the texture of the oil paints on my fingertips. Or maybe I can still smell the acrylic, even long after it has been dried. The still strangeness of the forest crept up my spine. It was a hitch in the universe's breath. It felt real, as a dream can be to a dreamer, but I don't recall falling asleep.

Any memories of before these woods were trapped in a haze. A wall of fog, much like the one that separates me from the front door. I don't know why I recognized the house. Maybe it had come to me in my mind before, maybe it existed in a past life. It feels like visiting your childhood home, after somebody else has already moved into it. Their personal embellishments through just living there cloud the memories of days long ago.

I have already said this, but there's nothing quite like it. The unease from the sounds of a different world, and the comfort of the cabin, create a dissonance. A harmony, not yet resolved. The crunch of the notes filled my ears with a ringing.

There were flowers along the front next to the steps of the porch. Irises and lilacs were planted beautifully, outlining the base of the house. As I got closer, a line of glowing fire peeked out of the crack from a door that was weathered down, no longer big enough to fit its frame. Cinnamon trailed out of the house; the warmth drew me closer. Aged steps creaked under me. I pushed the door open.

**“YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST TRAVELER TO STUMBLE UPON MY STEPS, NOR WILL YOU BE THE LAST.”**

A woman stood with her back facing me. She was thin but not frail. In fact, she looked rather strong for her age. Her back did not slope downward, she stood tall and confident. The brightness in her face met me with a smile as she turned at the sound of my footsteps. Kind, soft eyes and rosy cheeks, she looked like a granny from a fairytale.

“Hello, dearie,” she said.

My hand still held the door. She did not seem at all concerned with my intrusion. Quite the contrary, she looked elated. “Hi,” I said.

“Come in, not a reason to be shy. Step out of the cold.” Her accent is not unlike mine, at a first-time listen. But the dialects of foreign lands shape her words in the rules of their own languages. The voice of the old lady floats in an in-between, neither here nor there. Enigmatic.

A strong, crisp wind tried to push me a step further into the house. Her unimpeded gregariousness was what a parent warns their child to be wary of, but my fingertips were losing feeling. The little heat from the sun was quickly escaping the world, and it was as frigid as could be.

“I'm sorry,” I stammered. “I'm not sure how I got here.”

“Not a worry. You are not the first traveler to stumble upon my steps, nor will you be the last.”

She rattled this off as she mixed something in a pot on the stove. The inside of the house was a mesh of the old and new. Electric appliances, coal furnace and fireplace, a quill and ink bottle on a desk against a window, a grand bookshelf took up an entire wall.

I cleared my throat. "Sorry to ask but, where am I exactly?"

"Wherever you would like to be." She walked to the wooden table that sat in the center of it all, two mugs in hand. Placing one down at the chair closest to me, she said, "Sit, child. And stop apologizing."

I closed the door behind me and walked to the seat. I should be afraid. What seems too good to be true often is, but as if she had cast a spell on me, I felt comfort in this old woman's presence. She busied herself with the empty pot and cleaned her kitchen. Her movements were smooth, graceful gestures knew the orderliness of the house. Everything had its proper and perfect place.

The drink warmed my chest delightfully. Hot chocolate with cinnamon, almost exactly what my grandmother made in my childhood. I had not tasted it in years. The cold brittleness melted away, and my shoulders relaxed with nostalgia.

"You must be very trusting to let a stranger into your house," I said, taking another sip.

With her back still turned to me, she responded over the sound of running water. "My home is a home for all." Once the pot was full, she left it to sit in the sink. The old lady walked to sit in the seat opposite me, grabbing the handle of her mug. "Only those who can be trusted are able to find it."

"Then it wouldn't be 'for all,'" I said.

She hummed her question.

"You contradict yourself. You said, 'your home is for all,' but also for 'only those who can be trusted.'"

A chuckle under her breath, her smile shifted to a more cheeky one, and eyes that glimmered in recognition. She knew something I did not. "A smart one you are," she said, "A very keen listener will make a very successful somebody."

My mind was still running. This must be a dream. There was no other explanation. A mysterious house, a puzzlingly hospitable old lady, fragments of memories scattered within these walls, the unknowable woods surrounding us. And me—who becomes anxious and overwhelmed in any new situation—I am completely comfortable.

The crackling fire filled the silence. I looked at the full bookcase. Endless novels lined each shelf. Scanning through each title, I noticed something. Each one had



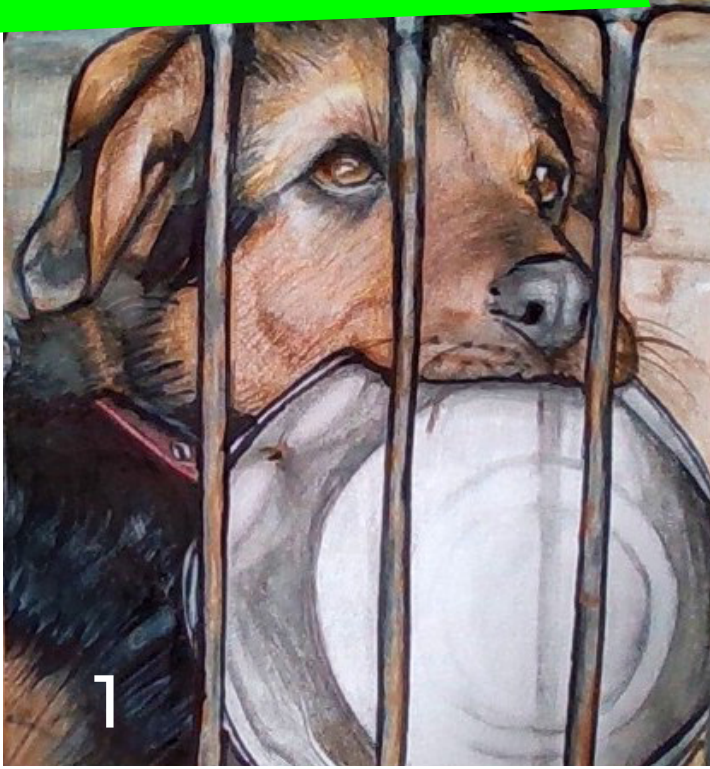
ARTWORK BY ANONYMOUS



# ART GALLERY

## CREDITS

- 1 ARTWORK BY AESHA JACKSON, LOUISVILLE, KY
- 2 PHOTO BY ZHITONG ZHOU, SHENZHEN, CHINA
- 3 PHOTO BY DANIELLE MOTTA, PLEASANTVILLE, NY







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PHOTO BY JIAYIN ZOU,  
MCLEAN, VA