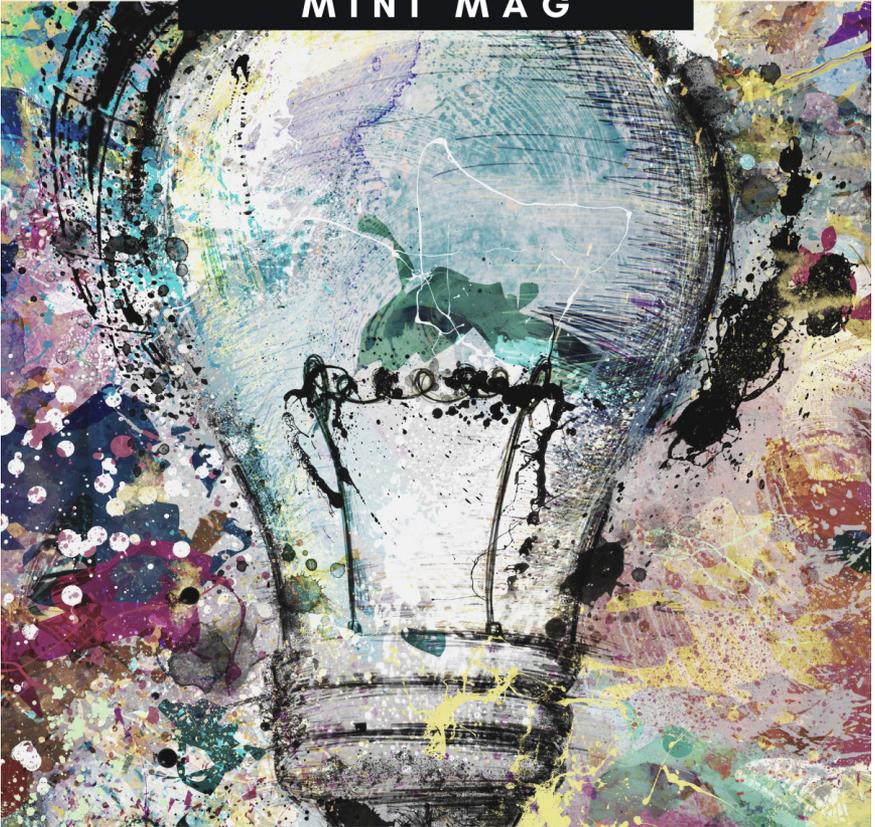


JULY 2021

THE BOOMSITE

MINI MAG



“That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.”

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

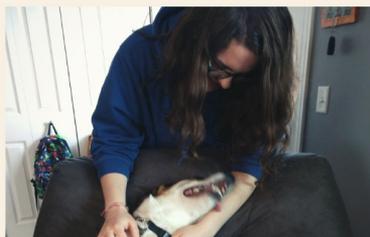


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AIDAN CONNOLLY
ST. PETER

Aidan is a horror genre novelist who is hoping to become the next Stephen King. He has a Pit Bull who loves to sing. And in his free time likes to draw and play Yu-Gi-Oh.



ERIN DAUER
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

Erin enjoys animals, Chipotle and writing poetry in her free time. Many of her hobbies are included in literature and artistic exploration. One day she hopes to be a paramedic doing writing on the side.



JASMINE DEZURN
ST PETER

Jasmine adores writing, Studio Ghibli films, and the culinary arts. She hopes to continue coming up with creative works, to advocate for change wherever they go if they see injustice, and to just give off positive energy.



JAY RODRIGUEZ
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

hey there! i'm jay and i love drawing and writing stories! i spend most of my time putting my thoughts on a piece of paper!



JACQUELINE QUACH
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jacqueline is a rising senior at Mankato East High School who loves reading and baking.



SUNDUS ABDIRAHMAN
ST. PETER

My name is Sundus pronoun is she/her hijabi lived in the United state for 6 years I from Africa Nairobi Kenya 17 year old about to be a senior love sharing experiencing to adventure



ANNA BENSON
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Anna loves to write and read all the time, while also trying to make time for hockey. She is a big animal lover with 2 cats and 3 dogs at home.



ANJA HARBO
ST. PETER

Anja spends most of her time drawing, writing, and making stories. She loves to be creative and wants to be a voice actor and an animator when she is older.



ASMA AHMED
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Asma always loved writing memoirs and has recently enjoyed other aspects of Literary Arts, such as writing short stories. She also enjoys journaling, and hopefully in the future gets into film and podcasting!



TUFAH DAHIR
EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

Tufah just graduated from Mankato East High School this spring. In StoryArk she wrote a story called "Hide amongst the stars.: It was an awesome experience and she can't wait to see what we can accomplish next year!



CASSIDY JEWISON
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

Stay peaceful friends:)

EVELYN BLUHM
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

MEL MCLAUGHLIN
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



E NAHKALA
EP, STORYARK BOARD MEMBER

For personal projects, E finds passion in fiction/fantasy prose, dreamy poetry, and engaging character-driven podcasts.



CADENCE NUNN
LITERARY ARTS PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Cadence is a singer/songwriter/musician (Bassist). She is the for StoryArk. Fun fact, she was on season 13 of America's Got Talent with her band NUNNABOVE. Cadence is the lead singer and bassist in her band. She loves anime and spending time with friends.

OPERATIONS TEAM EMERGING PROFESSIONALS



LESLEE MENJIVAR
EP, STORYARK BOARD MEMBER

Leslee attends the University of St. Thomas. Leslee loves to listen to podcast about True Crime and Horror. She enjoys writing and working as a team to create stories. Shes been part of StoryArk for around 4 years now.



SOMMERDAI KIER
EP, TECH SUPPORT

Sommerdai loves telling stories with their friends in many different ways. Whether through D&D, podcast, novels, or any other format they're offered they're always excited to try.

Unpleasant Truths

Developed by: the Literary Arts Team (all members)

Written by: Cassidy, Jasmine, Melisandra, Asma, Aidan, Evie, Anja, Jay, Anna, Jackie, Sundus, Erin

Edited by: Eli, Cadence, Tufah

A dark figure stands, breathing heavily. It turns its head left and right to scan the surrounding area. It stoops low for a moment and reaches an arm to the ground. It picks up a bullet, misshapen and coated in blood.

Does every murderer feel this sense of thrill? It's nothing like the movies... the blood and gore is real but they leave out how much fun it is. Should I find so much pleasure in the kill? Where is my humanity...

The figure examines the body that lies at its feet. With this final glance, it turns and shakily walks away.

Detectives Oliver Birmingham, Amy Higgs, and Sophie Le have always been close friends, though Sophie and Amy were a lot closer due to their similar struggles of being women in a male dominated job. When the case on the murder of Elias Kemp was announced, all three detectives jumped on the opportunity to be the case detectives.

"Elias Kemp, 52," Amy said. "Found dead and washed up on the beach last night. He had a bullet wound through his chest but the cause of death remains unknown until the morgue gets back to us."

"Wasn't he the big shot who was polluting our city?" Oliver asked.

"I believe so, but that doesn't make his death any less important. Our job is to solve murders, not hold grudges against the victims," Amy said.

Sophie nodded. "Amy is right. Despite how bad of a man he might have been, that doesn't make our job any less important, he had a wife and kids. We need to give them the closure they deserve."

A phone rang and Oliver answered. He listened for a moment before hanging up. Oliver clapped his hands together. "Alright team, they are ready for us at the beach. Let's hop to it!"

"Oliver, are we all riding with you like usual?" Sophia asked.

Oliver grimaced, annoyed. "My car is low on gas, I think that damn tank is leaking again."

Amy stepped between the two and opened the door. "We can all pile into my car for gods sake. Let's go before Kemp's body is too decomposed to get any useful information from."

With that all three detectives got into Amy's car and they took off to the beach where the body was found.

Sophie, Amy, and Oliver arrived at the beach where the crime scene was.

"I think we should start by looking all over the beach and asking people around before we go to the crime scene," said Oliver.

"That sounds like a good idea," Amy replied.

They looked around for any information that could be valuable to the case. They walked across the shore to look for any clues. They found a lady who was walking across the shore and looking into the water like she was searching for something.

"Ma'am, were you a witness of this crime?" asked Sophie. "Or do you know any information on who the killer could be?"

The lady said, "Oh no, I was here a few days ago, before it happened. I came back because I believe I lost my necklace in the ocean."

"Well I hope you find it, and thank you for your time."

“Of course, and good luck solving this case.”

The three detectives continued walking on the beach and saw a couple sitting in the sand. Sophie started walking towards them.

“Are you folks a witness of the crime?”

They glanced at each other. The girl looked up.

“Yeah, we saw someone with their hood up walking away from where the body was found.”

“Could you describe what they looked like?”

The guy shook his head quickly and spoke before the girl could. “We didn’t see their face, we just know the person came from the direction of where the body was found,” he said.

Oliver nudged Amy and whispered in her ear, “I don’t think they saw anything. They sound like they are making it up out of thin air.”

Sophie glared at Oliver, but said, “Thank you for your time.” Sophie turned to Oliver. “We don’t know anything about the crime, so any information is valuable and now is not the time to be a mind reader. Plus, why would they have a reason to lie?”

They continued to walk across the beach and were walking towards the crime scene where there were two police officers observing the body. The water was getting darker as they walked closer to the crime scene and it smelled like a body had rotted there.

“How do you think the victim died?” Amy asked one of the police officers.

“We found a bullet wound in his chest,” said one of the police officers, “but the paramedics think the bullet didn’t kill him right away. The bullet exited the body, so we don’t know where it is,”

“Blood loss probably had something to do with the death,” the other officer said.

“That explains why the water around the body is darker than the rest of the ocean,” said Sophie.

Oliver stood behind both her and Amy, looking around slowly.

“And they also found water in his lungs, so they also think that the victim might have died from drowning,” the first officer said. “They haven’t figured out what killed him first.”

“Did the paramedics roughly figure out when the victim’s time of death was?” asked Amy.

That’s when a young guy walked over to the detectives and where the police officers were, and they all turned their heads towards him.

“Is something wrong, sir?” asked Oliver.

“Yeah, my name is Kyle and I am the lifeguard at this beach. I was the one who found the body at the shores and called 9-1-1.”

“Kyle, did you see anyone walk away from this scene or possibly know who the killer is?” asked Oliver.

“No, I was on the other side of the beach and was over here because I lost my whistle and while I was looking for it, I saw the body.”

“So I see your whistle is around your neck, did you find it before you saw the body or after?”

“Um, I found my whistle in the sand back there.” He pointed to the far right of the beach. “It was after I called 9-1-1. I didn’t want to stay next to a dead body.”

“Okay Kyle, thank you for telling us, and if you find anything else or any other information that could be valuable to this case, you just call my number,” said Amy and handed him a note with her number on it.

“Kyle, I think you should walk with me down to the station and put a statement in,” said one of the police officers. Kyle took the note and walked away from the scene with the police officer. Amy knelt down near the body and put on some plastic gloves and tried to examine the body.

“Do you know what kind of bullet was shot at the victim?” asked Amy.

“Yes, it has been identified as a .44 caliber lead ball bullet and is from a walker colt gun,” said the police officer.

“I’ve never heard of that kind of gun, have you Oliver?” asked Amy

“Oh, my dad has a gun like that,” said Oliver.

“Well, those guns are very rare, are you sure your dad has one?” asked Sophie, skeptical of what Oliver said.

“Well, no obviously I meant that my dad has one that looks similar to it,” said Oliver, laughing. “You think I have the money to afford one of those?”

Sophie smiled, enjoying the moment of levity before they got back to work.



Scan the QR Code
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Coffee and Tea

By Erin Dauer

“You’re not my cup of tea, I’m more of a coffee kind of guy.”

You’re right

I’m not coffee

I’m tea

You never liked tea

Not the way he does

He loves tea

In a tall glass with ice or hot in a mug

Green or sweet

With lemon or honey

He helps me understand just what it is to be tea

And looking back why would I ever want to be coffee

When he loves tea

Any Borrowed Time Left

By: Jasmine Dezurn

Any borrowed time left?

Why do you run away from me and pretend as if this is a game of tag?

I just about catch up to you, only to be reminded that I can't.

Oh time, we're all a slave to you, you never stop for anybody
and that I know is true.

As my body always changes like the seasons thanks to you time, I constantly am
under pressure to live my life to the fullest, yet I have just reached my prime.

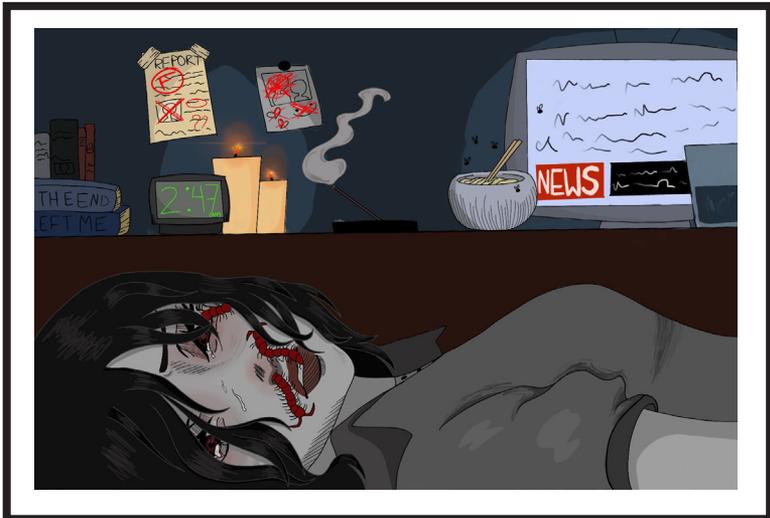
While you may not be tangible as if you were a person, I still feel your weight on
my shoulder. You are truly a burden.

I shall ask for your forgiveness, as I have been painting you in a negative light, but
please do understand you make it feel like I'm always having to fight.

Youth is like sand, I cannot hold onto every last bit of it, invariably worrying
instead of taking action, oh I suppose in your old eyes this makes me look like the
biggest hypocrite.

Everlasting Sleep

By: Jay Rodriguez



The Wave

An excerpt by: Aidan Connolly

As he takes another quick look back at Emma, I can see the worry and nervousness that's starting to form on his face. I recall seeing this face more than a few times on missions, but the most memorable was in Vietnam. He made this same face just before we were attacked by the enemy squadron. It seemed as if it was a sixth sense. So I knew that their was a reason to worry.

"The Virus forces the host die, but it reanimates the corpse with certain tendencies." He explains.

"What tendencies." I say with worry in my voice, scared, because I know he's not explaining everything to me.

"Um.. I, Uh, It's hard to explain and as I have already mentioned it's classified, so if I tell you I could lose my rank." He says.

"Are you seriously saying that you're still with the force? Then why have you been showing up here for the past six years, to keep tabs on me? Huh? What's so secret that you need to watch me undercover?" I ask him with force and authority in my voice. I look over Coles' shoulder at Emma, when I do, she looks even worse than she did less than a minute before.

Cole makes a small sigh. "Ugh the boss is going to kill me." He says almost under his breath. "I'm only telling you this to help you calm down and understand. Do you remember the health inspection that they gave you before you officially left the force, all those shots weren't to help with your PTSD, they infected you with the 'Crow Virus'." He says to me coolly.

The news hits me like a baseball bat hitting me in the chest. "But, no, I'd be like one of the things on TV. You're lying." I accuse him.

"I'm not lying. We tested it on many other subjects, they were all failures, but then one of the other doctors saw your DNA and insisted that we preformed the procedure on you. I tried to stop them but the general gave the order." He explains.

"But, wait, if I was infected by the virus then doesn't that mean that..."

"Yes. Mark Edwards died on January 3rd 2001. And subject M.3.6 was born three days later."

I am so scared and shocked that I fall down on my hands and knees unable to move. Just then Emma sits up slowly looks around the room as if she has been drugged and didn't know where she was. But when she sees Cole, she rolls up her lips to reveal a mouthful of sharp fang like teeth that had once been perfect and straight set of teeth. She stands up and makes a ferocious and animal like roar. Cole quickly turns around, just as she starts to run at him, and pulls out a gun from under his coat and empties several rounds into her until the gun clicks empty.

I look up at her dead body in horror. And I turn to face Cole. "You shot her!" I scream at him.

"I had to she was infected by the virus." He says. Cole squats down by Emma and rolls up her sleeve to reveal a scratch on her forearm, it is swollen and purple, and oozing some sort of opaque pale liquid.

"B..But you shot her." I stammer.

"I did what was needed to be done. I'm doing my duty by killing her. Protecting Subject M.3.6," he proclaims.

Where I am from and who I am

By: Sundus Abdirahman

My name is Sundus and I am from Saint Peter High School. I am Muslim girl that grew up in Africa. Certain times when people ask you where you are from you don't get the chance to explain or give them the answer you would like them to know. People have a lot of different backgrounds and beautiful stories and today I am going to tell you about mine. I am from Africa, born and raised. My mom and dad are both from Somali. I have never been to Somali but I heard a lot of beautiful stories. I grew up in State called Nairobi Kenya where people are friendly, loving and caring.

There's one language that is spoken is Swahili. My family and I lived in Eastleigh 8 Street. I lived in these tall apartments 2 bedrooms and 2 baths where from the balcony of the house you can see the city light up at night, people working hard to feed their kids and trying harder for the next day. Millions of people would come to our side of the city because we live right beside the shopping mall. I would see different kinds of people and people who come visiting a place they used to call home. Where I grew up you would pay for transportation if you didn't have a car or your parents didn't have a car. My family used to walk everywhere. It was like you needed the store down stairs. You go down stairs there, the pharmacy and every butcher would be across the street.

We went to school a little less than a mile away from our house. My sister and brother would walk to school together in the morning at 7:00 to make it on time. We would get to school, get to our first class and rest our classes throughout the day. At the end of the day we would walk back and go to this place we call Dugsi. We learn the Quran there. On our way there we see people hollering for us to buy their food or support their business. Some days we would, some days we wouldn't. A place where everything you do feels free and you walk without feeling left out.

Home we just say sometime but the meaning of home has a lot to it. I call it a place where everybody helps each other with their language, the beautiful environment and how they treat each other. The respect that goes from one to another is beautiful. Your shoes would get dirty and you would pay a guy to wash it and you would come 20 min later your shoes shining clean and washed. People hear things about a place and their perspective of things change quickly.

They hear bad things about the place or a person judge it by its cover. I would love people to see where I came from and how I grew up. Different cultures you see the dances that happen in the street once in while it is crazy. There is a talent show in middle street and people huddle around. You would think something would happen but when you see people dancing to this music and the beats.

As memories I remember this one time I came from school and there were these three Jamaican guys doing a talent show. I was standing there from so little and the one was like, "I need someone to help do this next trick." He looked around and chose me. I was shocked but it was a funny trick that made everybody laugh. I love seeing my people smile their beautiful smiles even though life was hard for some people making them smile was nothing. On some days it would be so hot that the ice cream from the shops would finish and some days it would be okay humid wind but to a good degree. You would be walking near a restaurant and you could smell the well season delicious food or you would be walking and see a lady cooking potatoes on the road with sauce.

The best five parts of the day is that you can hear the mosque call for prayer and everyone is going to pray. On Friday we have Jumcaa prayers where the road would close for the people praying, the streets would stop people just praying and other people not praying are quiet for prayers.

It doesn't matter where you are from, there's always a story to tell no matter what it is good or bad. People have different struggles and to hear that sometimes makes you be more appropriate about yours. To see my mom work hard for me makes me better today. I worked hard to provide for us and put clothes on our back and paid for school and was there for us. I am writing not because I want to but because it is okay to struggle and to let people know where you are from don't be ashamed of where you come from and the place you grew up in. Some people don't have memories but you can start making them today.

A Comic
By: Anja Harbo



You could do it about something that inspires you or about something you love.

Yeah but Ms. Stenson says she might not let me pass unless I do a classic landscape piece.

hmm... well you think about it.

Well I have to go now,

but I'll see you later Sid-Squid

I hope you think of something

=kiss=

I walked to the park, hoping to find some inspiration

Or at least a landscape to paint

8 hours until the show, 8 hours to do this project

"Do it about something that inspires you or about something you love"

I have an idea

I worked all day. My project wasn't exactly a landscape, but I was proud of it

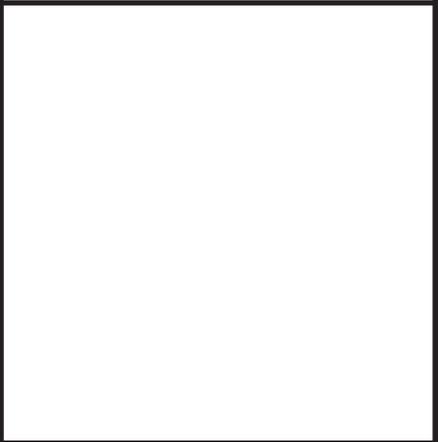
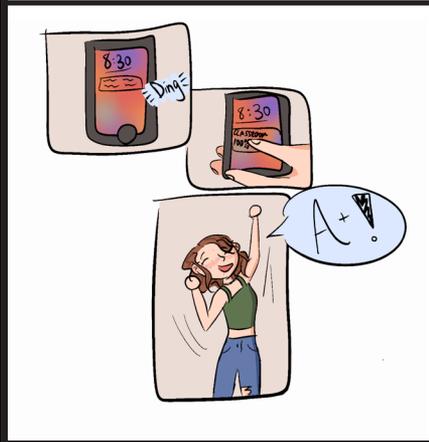
But when I finally made it to the art show, my confidence was gone.

I'm gonna fail



I wasn't sure what she thought of it. I went home that night not knowing my grade. I would find out the next morning.

The next morning...



“My Goodbye Letter”

By: Asma Ahmed

To Whom It May Concern,

The golden rule goes “treat others the way you want to be treated.” It’s what they constantly kept telling us growing up and it was the #1 rule, which is why I want you to remember that. If everyone followed it, people would be treated with respect and kindness because no one wants to be treated the opposite. And although it is a good rule to abide by, not everyone gets the memo to actually follow that rule.

It all started with my family. My mother came to America as an immigrant. Her family was spread out all over East Africa, so most of her childhood was spent living in different countries with different family members all over the region. One of her favorite things to do to keep her at peace was read, which is why she was always smart for her age. So when she did end up going to school, they found out she was above average and was offered a scholarship to come study in America. A little background about my parents is that my mom married my dad in Kenya, and he can’t come to America because he doesn’t have a Green Card. They were both close growing up together and got married when they were 17 after she finished high school. When my mom turned 18, she had my older brother so she couldn’t take the scholarship because she wanted to focus on being a mother. So she decided to stay in Kenya for a bit.

When my mom turned 23, she wanted to continue her education in the US and applied for a Green Card and got accepted. And she left both my dad and older brother in Kenya in hopes that when she gets her college degree in America, she can sponsor them to the US. Little did my mother know, she was pregnant with me, but she didn’t know that when she came to America. She told my dad and brother goodbye and eventually reached her destination. Within the first few weeks, she was feeling sick and went to the doctor.

The doctor told her, “Congratulations, you’re pregnant!”

She faked a smile, and when she went home, she cried, but she knew she was strong and brave, and that she could handle it. She told my dad and brother about it, and they were both happy and surprised. Thankfully, she had a smooth pregnancy and eventually I was born. Because she asked the doctor for the gender to a surprise, she didn’t find out I was a girl until she saw with her own two eyes.

I was born with a darker skin tone than the rest of my family. In my family, the majority of them favor brown skin and if they are dark skin, they use whitening cream to lighten their skin, but it never works out in their favor. For most of my childhood I went to daycare because my mom either had to go to work or school. So most days consisted of going to daycare and when I was old enough to go to school, I eventually did. The daycare I went to wasn’t fancy but it was just me staying with my relatives and cousins. I was a shy kid so I never really socialized with people, and I was also following in my mom’s footsteps because I loved reading as well. Most of my relatives saw that and they told me that I was wasting my time reading books, and I should learn how to cook and clean because one day I would get an arranged marriage. I didn’t want to do any of that but at home my mom always said to respect my relatives and make them proud, so when they started teaching me how to cook meals, I pretended I was willing to learn. When I was with my relatives, they would always tell me a girl doesn’t belong in school or in the public eye because it would be humiliating to her and her family. They would also bash my mother for coming to America to finish school and make a life and normally, they

would talk about her behind my back, but one day, two of my aunts were talking about my family right in front of my face while they were both trying to teach me how to cook rice.

“She should have stayed in Kenya and told her lazy husband to come to America and work. Maybe that’s why he married her because he is lazy,” said one of my aunts.

“I know, and the fact that he is in Kenya raising one of their children. It doesn’t make him far from a woman,” said the other aunt.

I was shocked and embarrassed because my uncles in the living room overheard what they were saying and they started laughing. When my mom picked me up from their house that day and I told her everything and somehow she seemed absent. She wouldn’t even look at me when I was talking to her.

“Are you listening to me, mom?” I asked

“Yes dear, I just have a lot of homework to get done tonight, so could you please go to sleep early?”

So off I went to my bed right after and I couldn’t sleep. I just kept thinking about everything that went down. How my relatives always bash my family, especially my mother when she is a hard worker and is independent, and how my mom didn’t even listen to me when I told her everything. It was like she was ignoring me, and I thought she was gonna be mad and tell me that I was never going to go to their house again. I looked at my alarm clock and it was 2 am and the living room light was still on and I was pretty sure that my mom was talking to my dad in Kenya since it’s the afternoon for them. So I didn’t think anything of it and I went to the bathroom and I could hear someone sniffing and whimpering. I walk towards the living room and I see my mom crying.

“Is the homework hard mama? Could I help you with anything?”

“No, but don’t worry about me, just go back to sleep, okay? But just so you know I am going to quit going to school and I am going to pick up more shifts,” said my mom.

Speaking of school, I went to a predominantly white school for most of my life, and the kids there were brutal. My relatives basically bullied me, so I knew from the beginning that I was different physically than them and the kids did too. They would constantly tell how their parents told them that kids like me aren’t supposed to be smart, or that I can’t graduate because of the way I look. I never really understood what that meant for a long time, but all I know is that my teachers loved me because I was an excellent student. I was eager to learn, excelled in almost every subject, and was willing to go above and beyond to be the best student I could be. So after my 5th grade graduation, we went to one of my aunt’s house and ate some food. And my mother asked about school and what I enjoyed about it and I told her everything: how the teachers loved me and how the kids treated me. That’s when two of my aunts pulled my mother aside and talked to her about my skin tone and how I should start wearing makeup when I start school. When I heard them talking about it I felt like I wanted to cry. It felt like a 100 needles in my back when I was trying to hold back my tears. My mom just nodded when they were telling her about me and what they think is wrong with me. When I came home that night, I went straight to my room and locked my doors. I cried so much it felt like I was drowning in my tears.

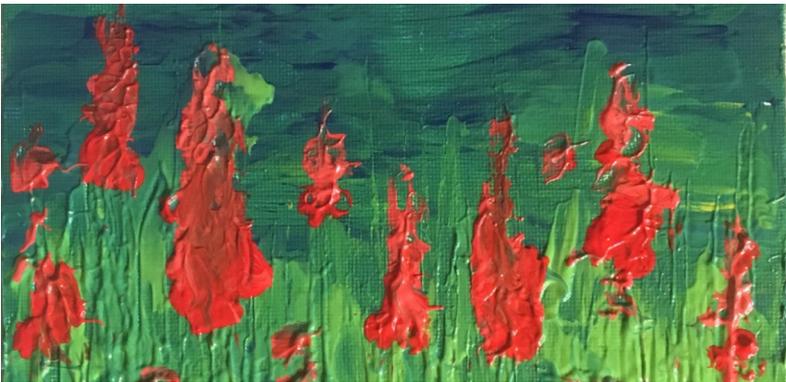
So when middle school started, I wore a lighter shade foundation and I would put it on any and every inch of my exposed skin. I did this every single day until I graduated high school. And when I graduated, I wanted to travel all over the world and become a journalist, but my mother said otherwise, as well as my father. He said that I should come to Kenya and get married and have a family and settle down. He also said that I was selfish for wanting to achieve those things and instead I should allow my brother to

come to America and achieve his dreams. When I look back now I feel sorry for myself. I shouldn't have felt that way about myself and how I was created. But unfortunately I didn't have anyone in my corner. At school, kids made fun of differences, my family would do everything to shield my differences, and my relatives would look down on me based on my differences.

To whomever is reading this, I am truly sorry for the pain that I cost you, but I don't deserve to feel like I am only tolerated and not loved. I don't deserve to feel like I am a weight on everyone's shoulder. Everyone has made it evident that they don't want me here so why even try to force it. And clearly everyone's life would be so much better if I wasn't here. Once again to whomever is hurt by this decision, I am sorry. I've lived a hard life and as I am looking back while I am writing this letter, I realized no one ever wanted me. I didn't make this decision to hurt anybody, so please just act like I never existed. Don't let this decision that I have made hold you back from living your life, I just don't want to feel pain anymore. And honestly I am just done. I went through a dark tunnel my whole life and I think this is my light at the end of the tunnel.

Hopefully, you haven't thought that I committed suicide or hurt myself in any way. The decision I have made is I am going to pursue my dreams of being a journalist and am going to cut all contacts with any family members or anyone I have left behind. In the beginning of this letter I mentioned the golden rule and how you should treat others the way you want to be treated, and I realized that is what I have been doing all my life, but somehow that treatment hasn't been reciprocated. I spent the majority of my life trying to realize why and question if I was the problem. The truth is I was never the problem, the actual problem was people were projecting their fears onto me. They would fear that I would be too powerful, or I would succeed as a dark skinned woman, or I would be treated horribly because of my differences, or I would diminish their egos, or worst of all - fear of standing for what I believe in and standing up for myself. There are two ways to rise to the top and one way to rise for some people is to bring down the people who are already above them, which is what most people in my life have done. I chose to do it the second way, which is to better myself, encourage myself, and most of all - follow my dreams. I have now flown to London to pursue my dreams of becoming a journalist, and will continue to rise. I hope you all do the same.

Sincerely, Layla Johnson



Painting by E Nahkala

Her Silent Companion

By: Anna Benson

The darkness loomed before her, pressing closer with every breath. The stairs hadn't seemed so daunting while she was in the safety of her room, but on the landing where soft light met the pure darkness, she hesitated. Her imagination and gut telling her something was there watching, waiting, closing in. Someone coughed, she bolted up the stairs to her room. As she closed the door, her cat stared at her from the pillow on her bed, startled awake by the commotion. In the cat's eyes, there was no annoyance, only slight concern, and curiosity. She took a deep breath walking slowly to the bed in the soft light cast from her LED lights. As she climbed up the bed she apologized to her cat and pet it till it settled back down again. As she thought of the foolishness of her actions and previous confidence in her ability to go downstairs without a light. Even though she had known she'd been off her medication for a while and her anxiety had been plaguing her more than usual recently.

She knew she wasn't being rational, there was nothing there. But that never seemed to calm her mind, keep her from hurriedly turning on lights or racing upstairs. Sometimes it felt like something was always watching her, behind her, or in the darkness. She was never certain if that was what kept her up, what fueled her feeling that she had to stay up or didn't want to fall asleep. What she imagined watching her was never human, it was always something else. Humans were fallible and could be dealt with. The fear of not knowing what it was only seemed to amplify her fear. Though she didn't like horror movies she'd seen enough to fuel her imagination for years. Though at times it was only a feeling, that she was being watched, or that she would see something move out of the corner of her eye.

She knew it was impossible and that she was being paranoid, but she couldn't help it. So she stayed awake, with the lights on, and her back to the wall. If she could help it she would never be alone when the thoughts or feelings haunted her, being around others always seemed to break the illusion.

She knew it was beyond childish but those feelings never abated. Not until either the next morning or she distracted herself enough with mind-numbing entertainment. Escapism was her favorite tactic to use. Whether it was for her silent companion, school, or just random stress. She could get away from it all with a good book or movie. In these new worlds none of it mattered, it was all irrelevant. Eventually, she would have to come back but in those moments it was bliss. When it wasn't books or shows, it was music. She could never stand the silence because when it was quiet, the roaring in her ears would begin. That or her thoughts would start to surface and would drag her down a spiral that could last for either minutes or days. The only danger with the music was that it made her more anxious of her companion, her senses dulled now made everything much more startling.

Sometimes on the rare occasion when she wasn't either blasting her music or being entertained by anything else, she would arrive upon the same question. Am I ever really happy, or am I just constantly distracting myself from how I always feel? Do I ever feel truly happy? Her mother once told her that if she didn't feel like smiling, she didn't have to. Sometimes she'd find herself alone and still find herself with a content look on her face and then simply let it fall. Over her life, she had changed her natural resting face to be more pleasant to others. How did she know if she hadn't tricked her mind into thinking the same thing? That she was content and calm.

In her room alone these thoughts would hound her, the bright blue room

surrounding her seeming to mock her and her pain. Her room seems to be the perfect example of her facade, the bright white and baby blue symbolizing purity and serenity. While all she felt was chaos and pain. Her silent companion watching, observing, and always judging. Her life, an interactive movie for them to toy with. The judgment from her peers and family would drive her insane at times, her body not feeling right, never looking good enough, and always being an outcast. At times she felt as if her companion was the only one who saw it all. How she'd fall apart and then try to put herself back together again before anyone else could see her.

Some days were better than others for her. Some days she wanted to stay in bed all day and others she needed to be anywhere but her home. When she'd go to stores her companion would follow her, noticing all the mumbled attempts to ask someone for help before giving up and leaving. Or how she'd practice over and over again what she'd say when ordering food. All the little insecurities, whether it was how she'd dressed or if she misspoke, her companion saw them all. Though the days when she did nothing were always the worst. She'd not want to do anything, and she wouldn't. Then the judgment from herself would consume her with how she could waste a day and be so unproductive. The vicious cycle of having no motivation but then feeling the guilt of her lack of action. The silence of her companion and the weight of the unsaid words laid an unseen burden on her shoulders. Which only furthered the cycle.

Though she spent much time in bed, sleep was never easy. She would want to sleep, she was fatigued from long days. Something would always keep her awake despite that, and naps were impossible since she never truly fell asleep. Her companion wasn't constantly incredibly prevalent in her mind. When they weren't she would just feel numb, as if without them she didn't feel anything at all. Without her companion, her anxiety, her fears, her depression, she felt nothing.



Painting by E Nahkala

Say What You Mean

By: Jacqueline Quach

All my life I have dealt with microaggressions and racism. From the snide comments about my lunch to the mocking of my slanted eyes from my peers pulling their eyes upwards. I never really paid much attention to it though, because no one else did either. As a child, I was tricked into thinking this type of harassment is normal. Now I look back at how I was treated and how I felt, and look at my younger brother. I wonder if he is being treated like this in school and because of the normalization of racism towards Asians, thinks that this behavior is okay as I did.

The moment the false reality tore apart in front of my eyes and was exposed for its true grotesque form was ninth grade. I was nonchalantly scrolling through my instagram feed when I happened upon a video of a young Asian American woman. She was a food blogger and the video was a recording from a live stream she had done inside a restaurant. The woman was no more than twenty-five and all she was doing was eating her food quietly and reading comments. Suddenly, two middle-aged white men who were walking past her, shoved her frail frame into the booth she was sitting in and started yelling out a cheap imitation of mandarin while tugging at their eyes. They were laughing as this poor woman shrunk in her seat and tried to smile. She didn't say a single word, and this, this was real funny to them. They pushed their faces closer to hers and laughed.

As I watched this video my stomach churned. I watched in horror as no one around her did a single thing. Not one person in this crowded restaurant batted an eye. I looked for articles, threads, comments about this situation and came up nearly empty handed. Only a handful of people had spoken out in outrage and no one had reported it. This was the moment I realized that no one cared.

I thought back to all of the teachers who ignored me as I was harassed on the playground. All of my peers who stayed silent as others made microaggressive comments like, "Don't you eat dogs?" As if it mattered whether or not I did. As if, if I did, I was disgusting. As if my existence was to be regarded as lower than a dog. I thought back to the infamous question everyone seemed to ask, "So, what are you?" Saying it as if I was an object they were questioning the make and model of. And when I told them I was Vietnamese they replied with, "No you're not, you're Chinese." As if they had any say in who I was.

The more I reminisced, the more fed up I became. This anger simmered over time, only growing exponentially in size as more things I had never thought about came to light. The constant discrediting of my achievements to my being Asian. It was inescapable everywhere I went. In school even, when studying for standardized tests, I discovered that Asians were given four-hundred penalty points on the SATs while other minorities got bonus points. As if America's dark and oppressive history with Asians never happened, as if yellow peril didn't exist. To me the whole system was just constantly twirling around ribbons saying, "We don't care about you," instead of having the balls to say it to my face.

To be quaint, I was sick of it. The erasing of POC's history, the underrepresentation, the whitewashing, the microaggressions, the blind eye that always seemed to be turned my way. Yet that wasn't the end of it, nothing was ever the end of it.

As the year 2020 ascended, Asian hate crimes started happening all over the world. Our old getting killed upon the streets, pushed into the tracks of the subway. Teenagers chasing down Asian men and beating them. A Hmong woman getting raped in the streets screaming for help and no one listened, and her dead body was found in a river the next day. Everyday I woke up and saw another article from what seemed like the only

establishment reporting on these crimes, and everyday I would see nothing on the news about the murders, assaults, vandalism and crimes happening. The worst part? This had all happened before, yellow peril, Vincent Chin, yet this was all seemingly new because it had been erased from our history books.

All the while, I saw the “fox eye trend,” a trend where non-AAPI people were drawing their eyeliner and doing their makeup to specifically make their eyes look more angular, more slanted, and posing with their hands pulling up their eyes. The same pose these same people used to mock the features of Asian people. The same pose that haunted me through my life, making me feel ugly for how I look. And now, it was a trend. To say that this was upsetting is a gross understatement. Witnessing this was a slap in the face.

The situation showed me that all of these people just wanted the aesthetic of having such features without the consequences of being the race. Let’s call it what it is, yellow face. And when these people were called out for their actions, one after another, they came out with apologies. Except these ‘apologies’ were just convoluted ways of saying, “I’m sorry you were offended, but I did nothing wrong. You’re just too sensitive.” Except, I wish they had just said that instead, because at least it would be the truth. Because that was what they really meant. They didn’t feel bad, and weren’t sorry. I wish people would stop trying to lie through their teeth, stop trying to say things just to say them. Because if people just said what they really meant, we would all be able to get to the root of the issue faster.

Then, the worst happened. The Atlanta shooting of three spas in March, and suddenly I had a new fear. Eight people died, six of them Asian women. Before, I felt anxiety only when I left the house, wondering if today I was going to be the next hate crime reported. Now, I was scared not only for myself, but for my parents who had to go to work in a spa. Wondering if today I was going to get a call that half my family is dead. When the police addressed the press and said the suspect had “a bad day” and it was a crime rooted in sexual addiction, I was infuriated. The shooter knew what he was doing. He shot up three different spas whose workers were Asian. You know who really had a bad day? The victims and their families.

It is heartbreaking that it took this tragedy for people to open their eyes to the racism towards Asians. The horrible portrayals of Asian women as meek, or as sex-driven creatures, the demasculization of Asian men, and the blatant yellow face in all forms of media was finally being addressed.

The truth is, this is an uphill battle, and when I was young, even though I knew something was wrong, I was too afraid to fight it. But never again will I stay silent. I will say what I mean with my back straight and my eyes forward. I know what I have experienced and don’t want my brother to experience it, I don’t want anyone to experience it. I will say what I mean, and I hope you will too. It is the first step to being able to understand the error of our ways and begin to understand how we can educate ourselves and move forward.

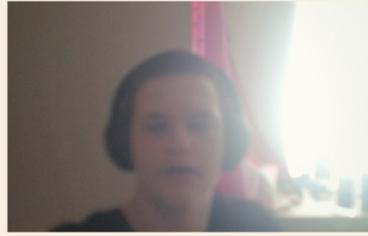


Painting by E Nahkala



AHMED HASSAN
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

I love to talk and play soccer. One thing I've really loved doing is working on the podcast and expressing myself to another audience and meeting new people. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for me.



HUNTER MUDGETT
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

Hunter is a pretty level headed person. He's a lover of video games, comedy, and is a master of sarcasm.



KEN MUELLER
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ken Mueller is a Junior in High School. They have always been thoroughly involved with human rights activism, modern political affairs, and reading.



JOSILYN HOLLAND
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON



PEYTON ZIGNEGO
PODCAST PROGRAM DIRECTOR



BENNETT NUNN
EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

POV: YOU LISTEN, WE TALK [SHOW]

**A PODCAST BY: AHMED HASSAN, HUNTER MUDGETT, JOSILYN HOLLAND, KEN MUELLER
WITH SUPPORT FROM PEYTON ZIGNEGO & BENNETT NUNN**

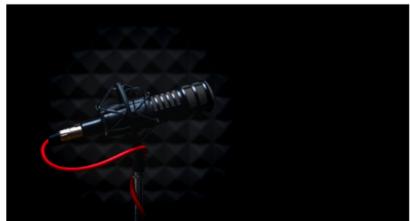
*This podcast is structured as a talk show centered around societal gender norms and racism, but there's some lighthearted talk as well :)
These conversations are student led and unfiltered, so please enjoy
"POV: You Listen, We Talk"*



Scan the QR Code
to listen to the Podcast



POV PODCAST EPISODE





ARIANA REYNOLDS
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ariana loves to watch movies and tv shows with her cousins. She also loves listening to music with her mom. While she still hopes to figure out her career path before starting 11th grade, she dabbles in film and podcast sometimes.



DANVIR MAHARAJ
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Danvir loves to play video games, sleep, and watch anime. This is his first year in StoryArk.



JULES STEVENS
MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jules loves taking pictures and writing stories.



PARIS HERME
JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON

My name is Paris Herme. I am 16 years old and go to JWP high school. My favorite thing to do is play video games.



EMMA HALLEEN
FILM PROGRAM DIRECTOR



HAILEY SCHMIDT
EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

"DISCONNECTED"

A FILM BY: ARIANA REYNOLDS, DANVIR MAHARAJ , JULES STEVENS & PARIS HERME
WITH SUPPORT FROM EMMA HALLEEN & HAILEY SCHMIDT

*A girl tries to tell her best friend she has a crush on him but
zoom technical problems keep getting in the way*

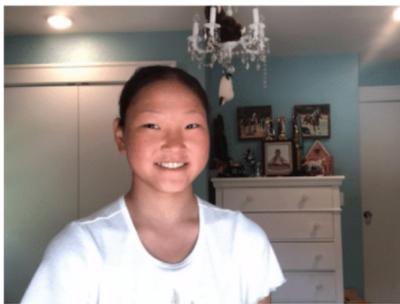


Scan the QR Code
to watch the Film



"DISCONNECTED" SHORT FILM

STORYBOARD



Shot 1

Mom leaves. David comes on the call



Shot 3

David: Practice. I've got 5 min... something

INT. SKYLAR'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

SKYLAR (16) an average girl with daddy issues and an anti-social disposition flips open her laptop to calls her friend. Facetime rings as she waits for him to pick up.

MOTHER (O.C.)
OOOO, sweetie is that David? Are you finally going to tell him

SKYLAR
MUM!

MOTHER
You've liked him for so long.

DAVID (16) a charmer who doesn't excel at maths but is a good laugh and an even better smile finally picks up.

DAVID
(distracted)
Hey Skylar, what's up?

SKYLAR
What do you mean? We call at this time every week.

DAVID
Oh sorry, yeah - I'm about to go into practice-

The connection glitches.

SKYLAR
You have to go into what?

DAVID
Practice, I got five minutes though - you wanted to tell me something?

SKYLAR
(oh boy)
Yes. Um... yes. Um, you know, we've been friends a long time. And I feel like nobody knows me better than you. And you know, I know a lot about you. And we still like each other. It's a miracle... hehe, um, what I'm trying to say is... David, I really like-

The connection glitches.

DAVID
 Oh, sorry, Sky. Connection dropped
 for a minute
 (David sniffs his socks
 before putting them on)
 What were you saying?

SKYLAR
 Oh. Yeah. Um. I was just saying
 that... um, we've known each other
 a long time and I've realized that
 I really like-

Connections glitches.

DAVID
 (sniffs armpit. It's
 probably fine)
 Sorry, one more time.

SKYLAR
 David, I've realized that, I.. you
 know, I... I really like -

Connection glitches

SKYLAR (CONT'D)
 Oh COME ON!

DAVID
 (fixes his hair in zoom)
 What's up?

SKYLAR
 David, I really like you!

The screen goes black. The call dropped. We see Skylar in the reflection of her screen, devastated. Her laptop pops up with a text -

DAVID: Talk later?

She sighs - she's very disappointed.

DAVID: I want to come visit you this summer!

Skylar slowly texts back.

SKYLAR: I would love to finally see you in person.

DAVID: It's a date ♥.

Skylar gets up to dance in her room.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

StoryArk helps students in middle school and high school initiate creative teams in which they communicate, collaborate and connect with each other to imagine and produce narrative podcasts, short films, and a literary magazine that publishes prose, poetry and visual arts. We ask youth, "What's your story? How do you want to tell it?" They respond in ways that transform not only themselves, but also the audience who gains empathy and understanding of the student experience.

Student initiated, student led, our creative process focuses on building life skills through a passion for storytelling and the desire to communicate and be in relationship with each other. In our creative process, students lead students and professional writers, actors, directors, filmmakers and editors serve as mentors who share their skills and wisdom as needed with youth. As we work together and support each other individually as artists, quality content naturally emerges. Ultimately, our artistic success is determined by how well we develop students as individuals and as team members.

VISIT US AT STORYARK.ORG

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SOUTHERN MINNESOTA
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Collaborating for Regional Vitality

THIS ACTIVITY IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE VOTERS OF MINNESOTA THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE PRAIRIE LAKES REGIONAL ARTS COUNCIL, THANKS TO A LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATION FROM THE ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND.

THE SOUTH CENTRAL MINNESOTA YOUTH STORYTELLING CAMP IS PART OF AN ACHIEVEMENT AND INTEGRATION COLLABORATION BETWEEN MANKATO AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, SAINT PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND JANESVILLE-WALDORF-PEMBERTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITH SUPPLEMENTAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE SOUTHERN MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FOUNDATION AND PRAIRIE LAKES REGIONAL ARTS COUNCIL.