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THE
PEN

The Pen
CCRI's Literary Magazine
Issue 2, Volume 1
May 2023

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**Cover Art by Eric Mateo,
CCRI Student**

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From the Editor

It brings me such joy to present the second issue of *The Pen*! I live in constant wonder and awe at the depth of creativity the CCRI community produces, individually and collaboratively. In this issue, we see works cocreated by students for class and in conversation with existing texts. We also see individual works of introspection, foresight, grief, healing, and, apropos of spring, renewal. Enjoy!

To submit for future issues, please send submissions to thepenlitmag@ccri.edu. Please limit prose to 2,000 words or fewer. In the meantime, enjoy the creativity flowing through *The Pen* at ccri.edu/thepen.

Best,
Jessica Araujo
Assistant Professor
English Department
CCRI-Knight Campus

Wolf's Arrow

By Pierce Holden Abosso, CCRI Student, Instagram: pierkyab0ss02

Some decades ago, a newborn wolf received a special gift, sociability and curiosity in the Beautiful North. The puppy meant joy for the family of the little wolf, blessed with his heritage and the recent addition to the colony and the ability it bestowed. The gift remained untouched inside the wolf puppy for the first year of his life until a light day turned dark as a jealous bow and arrow, like a coyote waiting for its prey, lurked behind the pup and proceeded to strike the gift like a lightning strike. In a minute, The puppy and an arrow stuck to his head created a new sense of intelligence in the young wolf's mind. Still, because the needle of the arrow was on the damaged present, the sociability vanished away like forest mist. The arrow also hit the wolf child's brother, who emerged unscathed from his gift.

After several years strolling by, the wolf child could not talk or interact with someone without raging fire or crying a rainstorm, as his intelligence side was growing sealed shut inside a tree hole. When the wolf pup was happy, he was unaware of passing wolves in his colony and bumped into each passing one, much to the dismay and embarrassment of his family and territory. The wolf still had his gift, but the arrow sabotaged the gift's job and would not complete its task. As the wolves looked into the pup, the arrow was more of the attraction rather than the pup's needs, and they saw him as more of a mosquito other hand pushing the sharp arrow. A caregiver blindly caught the trust of the wolf pup's parents, and the only thing the caregiver did was create scary loud noises so that being petrified would make the caregiver happy. Of any noise, he came across, thus taking advantage of the arrow. The wolf thought he had many friends during this time. Still, he instead was ridiculed for his arrow, and the premature fear of noises would make the other young wolves persuade the young pup's that loud noises were about to sound, causing the young wolf to be anxious about anything. The pup only be remembered for his arrow instead of his gift, it was like the arrow,

and his talent was battling in a brawling stampede. As much as the pup tried to speak out his feelings and his family's plea for understanding, the arrow reminded the many wolves not to listen to the cries.

The wolf pup gifted with sociability and curiosity, but with an arrow stuck in his head that damaged the gift, was exiled from his colony and faced ridicule and rejection. Unfamiliar and scared with the new settlement, the puppy felt the tsunami within him as many new puppy wolves expressed their curiosity but frustration. The ignorant continued to see the arrow as something more of a laugh show rather than a need for acceptance, While the smart helped the pup in little time, pulling the arrow. The trend as the years strolled, as new wolves met the wolf with the arrow; he became accepted by many, but wolves pushed the arrow as fake as a waterfall made by hunters. To the wolf pup, his new life was going to be far from likely to be hell-like as his original colony, which was faithful to the wolves that were loyal to the arrowed pup but to some wolves, friendly in disguise, the truth would clear the wolf's sense of reality. The fakeness slipped the puppy-like insects into the wolf's fur when he reached his teenage years. A beautiful and bombastic wolf informed the innocent and insecure wolf about a wolf controlling her life in a way she never wanted. After the innocent heard the alleged story, his arrow was ripped out by a little who freed the tsunami demonstrated years ago. As the tsunami finished, The beautiful wolf left the innocent behind with a lie linked to him, leading to his family and the colony punishing the wolf child by further pushing in his arrow, shunning and ridiculing him for his damaged social gift. Though injured in a social light, the wolf gained more perspective from his intelligence. With no sadness in his heart, the former innocent wolf felt that the beautiful and bombastic wolf in his life was not worth the arrows pushing, cutting ties with her. The arrow was now where the gift could interact without battling. Every real wolf friend the wolf pup made, the present and arrow, presented as a sight of pride and resilience; however, that slight pride only pushed the arrow deeper with every hint of fake he sensed in his friends. A hidden pattern for the next two years occurred; without the knowledge of the wolf but one of those friends would shape his friend cycle forever.

Later, the wolf's arrow grew more profound into the wolf's head even further by his 17th birthday. Up until his birthday, his best friend was always joyful to see him, even with the revoking arrow to his head. To the wolf, she would always be there whenever rain poured onto his day, and nothing would ever push back her care for him; however, her side had a whole new meaning. She vanished into the wolf pup's light without a spoken word. The optimistic and patient wolf looked at his current acquaintances and friends in case his friend decided to return. Though the young wolf successfully interacted, his flashbacks of his best friend covered him in darkness. Months crawled up as the young and disturbing wolf defied and wondered. The wolf could not wait for his friend's sudden departure, so he set out on a journey to find his friend through painful rocks and treacherous rivers along the wolf's journey. After a day of strenuous hiking, the wolf finally found his friend; however, he realized that she was happier with another wolf, and this realization left him feeling heartbroken and defeated. As the wolf returned to his colony, sadness lurked in the pup's mind as more and more knowledge of the people he once loved began to betray the wolf, making the arrow push deeper and deeper until the wolf fell ill.

The wolf, stuck in his anxious and depressive mood, catches up to him with sickness. Sores scattered around the young wolf's body, and any worry about his sores would build up more sores working with the arrow's devilish side and the gift's damage. Many reminders of the wolf's loss of his past friends only made him more in the shadow, confusing and doubting the young wolf for what he was. Darkness and the arrow were about to be the only thing that would stick with the wolf's reputation until one day, he found a wolf flock celebrating who they were, and one of the wolves approached the sick wolf and decided to interact with him. After the ill wolf expresses his problems, the prideful wolf reminds the young wolf that even though wolves could push him down, that does not mean he should listen to them, and the only wolf he should listen to is himself more than any other wolf. This advice stuck with the young wolf for most of his life, he lied about himself as just a pest in the woods ready to be hunted, but the prideful wolf's advice saved him from any further doubt the young pup put on himself.

After the interaction, the young wolf flipped his life but the opposite of what the wolf used to be. He hiked more into the forest he loved, gaining a love for nature and exercise. In the wolf's social life, he gained more confidence to find new friends who benefited and admired him. Unlike the fake wolves in his earlier dark. Realizing he was not the only wolf with an arrow to his head, he educated himself over time to understand people of his kind and shared that education with others. As this progress rolled around, The wolf's gift and arrow were no longer a rival inside of a wolf's head but allies to help with the young wolf's mind as his life rolled around. Though the young wolf still had the arrow on his head, he accepted it for what it meant and that no other wolf in his life would control or back him down on what the wolf intended it to be.

Author's Note

This short story has been on my mind in some fragments, throughout most of my life. I had to go through many obstacles to find myself, like overcoming artificial fears (sudden fire alarms), dealing with bullies, fake people, illness (ulcers, NAFLD), and fake promises. In my eyes, many people's responses to Autism make it a polarization to many because of how people present it. I have always considered parents with children having autism as role models

(including my own) but from my view, the people with Autism are always going to be the primary source for this topic. A lot of people with autism try to present themselves to an audience, some were well praised which make my heart warm while some ruin the Autism credibility by defending their actions in the name of Autism to any type of criticism which has always annoyed me. Even with adversities that came my way, I did not fall flat and let those adversities roll me down.

The close to twenty one years of my life has not been an easy ride like most people my age, but even with that, I still enjoyed life like hiking, traveling to new places and exercising even with my Autism lingering in the distance. I cannot thank the people who have been with me enough for the compassion and understanding they have given to me and if it was not for them and the strategies used along my path, I would not have been the person I am now and I cannot wait to see what the future holds. To any person with autism who is overcoming just as much as I have, Do not worry what people think about you. You are loved for who you are and are not afraid to love yourself. Focus on yourself and your goals sometimes, There is a time to be selfish and a time to be selfless.



Blue by Zoe Guzman, CCRI Student

vsco Gallery: <https://vsco.co/zoe-elaine03/gallery>

Lasping Brooks

By Jady Q. Moccia, CCRI Student,

Instagram @sugarhi444_poetry

The familiarity of a collapsing ceiling does not mend it,
you showed me broken temples and made me nest there, made me name
my firstborns familiar to my kin.

Yet the familiarity does not mend them.

They are as restless and sour as their birthplace, and heed not to the
ivy they untangled beneath themselves, instead, they look upwards.

They will embody every untamed element, and every quiet brook you
dismiss, and even when you finally catch up,

even when you finally catch them,

you may not punish what does not belong to you



Goodbye, Winter by Moises Lopez,
Programmer Analyst, CCRI Enterprise Systems,
Instagram: @the_world_and_love

What Did You Actually Learn from It Though

By Kat Taylor, CCRI Student/Unfiltered Lens Section Editor/Peer
Writing Tutor

Well, if it happened again I would just...
No, I guess that wouldn't work...
Ok, but now I know how to handle it when...
Oh yeah, I guess that doesn't help either...
Well, now I know that I can...
But maybe I won't be able to...
How about if I were to...
Never mind, that doesn't make sense...
But then I could just...
Yeah, I know, that never worked before...

So then, what did I learn?

I learned that it could happen again...
But that I will prevail.
That I might not know how to handle it...
But that I will be triumphant.
That I might lose my way...
But I will find it again.
And that I may be left scarred...
But that all the greatest warriors are.

Shred

By C.S., CCCRI Student

You must feel so sick
Beneath the heap of
I'm so sorry and
it's not your fault
behind a locked bathroom door,
over the booming bass
the banging fist,
wrapped in a black thong
stuffed in a denim pocket,
trapped in a salted drop
resting on a hot cheek
translucent to the jaded faces
of women waiting outside
colder than the grimy linoleum
lies a shameful shred
of satisfaction, in that
at least you were desired—



Unstable by Gianna Mayers, CCRI Student
IG: @giannamaria140

Observing and Reporting: In-Class

Edition

Organized and presented by Professor Eileen James with work from Hannah Diaz Butler, Logan Cleary, Ryan Connelly, Enrique Grande, Ian Gray, Edward Mercure, Joel Monterroso, Emma Mulligan, Ashley Oliva, and Kailey Smith.

Throughout my twenty-plus years as a writing instructor, I have had to develop and redevelop methods and strategies that encourage students to see themselves as writers. This can involve encouraging students to make effective rhetorical choices as they plan for any writing task with which they may be presented in the future, while providing them with opportunities to practice the necessary writing moves needed to achieve these writing tasks. No matter the class—Composition 1, Composition 2, or Advance Writing for Liberal Arts—this usually involves focusing on rhetorical principles of cohesive and coherent formal writing, searching for and using relevant and valid sources, understanding and using academic documentation formats, and participating in a writing process that contains collaborative work as part of the revision process.

Therefore, sometimes, I need to remind these learning writers that being creative can definitely be part of formal writing instruction. Typically, after we have worked through our first major writing project, I like to assign a specific low-stakes writing exercise during class.

This exercise is paired with a mini-lesson on the differences between subjective and objective writing and how to use each effectively in appropriate writing situations. The writing prompt is projected on the screen in front of class as I direct students to take their notebooks and leave class for 10 minutes to complete the assignment. This is not an exercise that I created, and I know others use this kind of approach in a variety of courses for a variety of purposes. I just made it work for my classes. The prompt is as follows:

Go to an area on campus with something to observe:

- a spot where people are gathered (e.g., library, cafeteria, a seating area, the Great Hall, etc.)
 - a window
 - a bulletin board.

Observe for about a minute (try not to be disruptive or stalker-like*). Write a detailed and descriptive paragraph about what you observe, using both objective and subjective language. In 10 minutes from now, we will begin to share some of our observations.^{1*}

I usually wait in class, watching over people's belongings and erasing the board, until they return to share what they've seen. This exercise usually helps build community in class, while it allows students to exercise their creativity as writers. Overall, this activity takes about 30-40 minutes in total. This includes the time out of class and time in class reading what they've written. I am always satisfied with what students see while roaming

1 * Because the idea of stalking is so serious, I am sure that when discussing what I mean by "stalker-like" behavior, my tone is appropriate for the situation and does not discount anyone's feelings or experiences. If a student approaches me and tells me this phrase is triggering, I will consider how to revise the phrase to still make my point.

across campus, so I thought I would share their observations. What follows is a sampling of excerpts from what students have brought back this semester.

Usually, every student gets up and leaves with the others, their chatter hushed because I've asked them not to be disruptive to the classes in session around us. This semester, one student remained, and I wasn't sure what to make of this. I guess he was staying in his seat to complete his observational writing but with no help from me as I apparently spoke to him nonstop:

Jumping up, voices rising, students rush out the door. The room began to slowly empty with the door wide open as the crowd diminished. The teacher was the only voice as the last few students meandered around. The hallway was empty as students left in a rush to get away from the bustle. Faint voices came from the rooms around us as most classes were still

in session. As the minutes passed, one by one, voices began to draw near. Students returning from their adventures had a lot to share with excited and loud voices. The room was quiet no more.

Sometimes, students brought back intriguing information about this building and what one can find within the Brutalist walls of this institution:

I wanted to walk to the art department because I had never been to the art department at this campus before, but along the way I was struck by the interesting architecture of this building. It very much seems like shapes thrown together with no regard for anything else but concrete— a haphazard blend of boxy and round forms, of old and new construction. There's something beautiful about how ugly this place is, but I also saw something that really caught my eye and fascinated me.

Up on the fourth floor, just barely within reach, near a balcony overlooking the Great Hall down there on the first floor, it was using a beam as a shelf: One or two half eaten bagels and a handwritten sign that reads, "Bagel Museum founded in 2019."

Other times, students take a tongue-in-cheek approach that allows us all to laugh and relate:

As I peered through the windows of room 6536, I noticed my good friend Taryn laughing at me. Her hair looks freshly straightened with a clearance flat iron from the back of Ulta. She's got a funky little cup positioned to the top right corner of the desk filled with God knows what. I take in the rest of the room through the window. Then I ponder: Who paid for this floor? What happened to the individual with the crutches? What has

Taryn been looking for in her backpack for the past five minutes? But who am I to question? Who am I to judge? I've been creeping here for quite a bit now.

I am observing a girl sitting in the common area with a friend. This particular girl has long blonde hair and fair skin. She and her friend are both wearing pink sweatshirts and black leggings. The blonde girl seems to be studying on her computer but isn't trying hard enough to study because she keeps talking to her friend. She seems like a nice girl when you first meet her but would definitely talk behind your back when you're not there.

Most importantly, students watch, learn, write, and share in a way that seems very important and meaningful for such a tiny part of my course's curriculum:

There are fifty-six tables set up in the common area. The place is illuminated by circular lights of varying sizes. There's a screen showing the latest news about what's happening on campus. There's a stage set up. I wonder what event we have coming up or if it just hasn't been taken down yet.

I was on the 6th floor overlooking the library which is on the fourth floor, and there I saw six tables with computers, two white printers, and five bookcases. A girl wearing a white dress with long sleeves, circular glasses, and red wavy hair was typing away on the computer. I could not hear what was happening in the library, but it seemed like a quiet place because no one's mouths were moving.

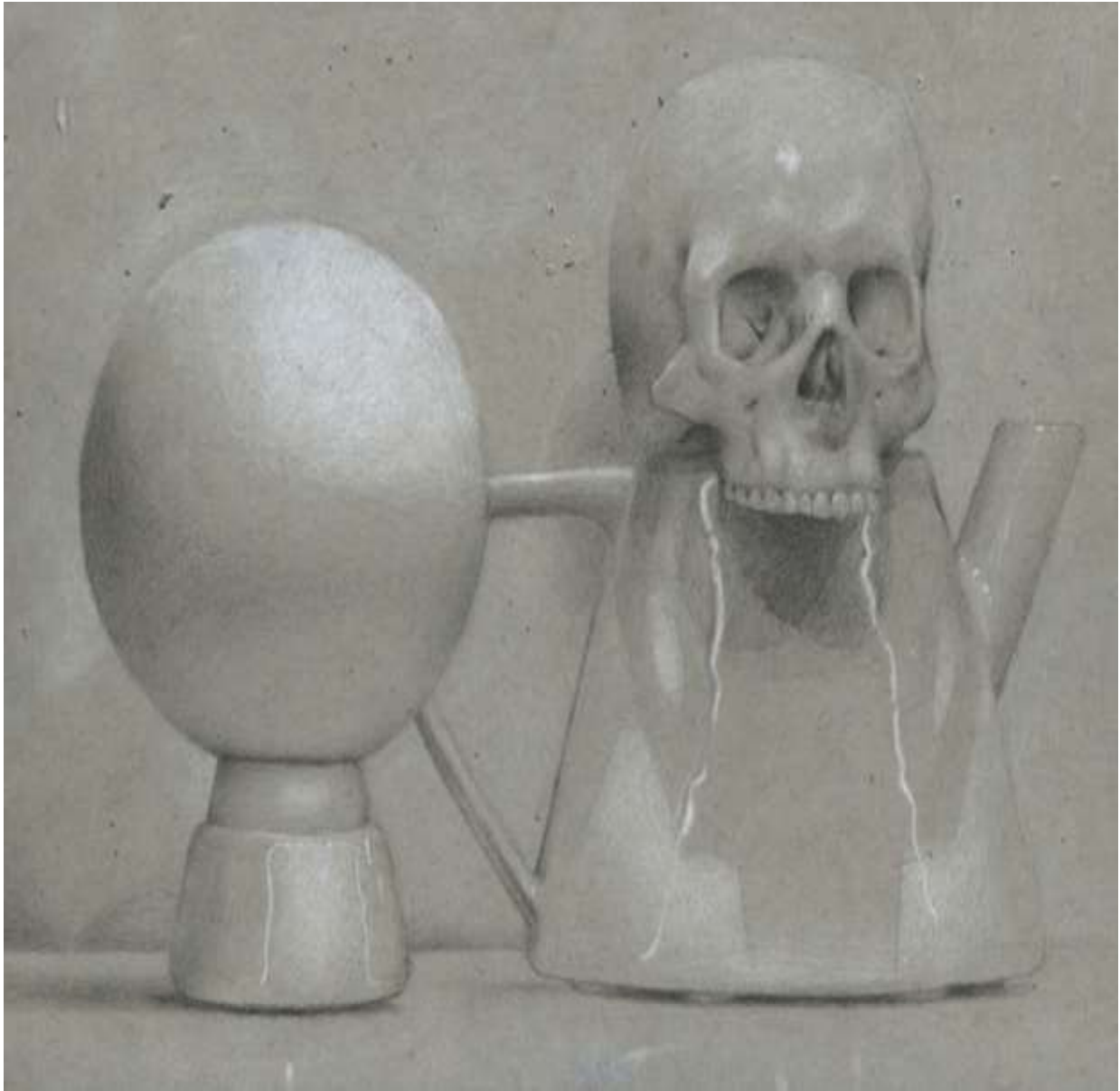
In classroom 6542, the room is filled with students diligently working to end the period. A student in a hurry to get out of class tosses his empty water bottle into the trash with a swish. Some students are in chairs with wheels; some are wheel-less. Writing utensils seem to slash across notebooks. The silence is almost unnerving. One student, a young woman with curly hair, stares curiously out the window at people walking by. Dressed in comfy green flannel pajama pants, she seems prepared for a nap. Judging by the silence in the room, I would say the class is preparing for exactly that. Scurrying to turn in their work, students gather their belongings thrusting their pieces of paper onto the teacher's desk, making a break for the door.

Sometimes the observations sound like prose poems, and I accept this gladly:

Looking out through the big clear window on the 6th floor of the college, the entrance and exits are my main view. White, blue, green. Small cars, SUVs, trucks, RIPTA, all types of vehicles coming in and out of the college in different patterns and with their own timing. To the right side of my view, students are walking down the sloped hill leading to the parking lot. All walk at different paces. Some students walk alone staring at the open sky, while others walk, staring at their phones. Also, some walk in pairs that engaged in conversation. The sidewalk surrounds the campus and a student down there looks like he's patiently waiting for his ride. A couple seconds later, he gets into the back seat of an SUV. Overall, I am left with the view of constant motion.

People study, they eat, they try to get multiple things done at once. They study in duos. They eat alone. They all live in their own little worlds while sharing one at the same time. I sit next to the painter. I told myself that the focus of this exercise would be the people in the cafeteria, but it's been the painter all along. I have no idea what he's painting or drawing. He seems deep in concentration, so I avoid disrupting. He is also living in his own little world, but they distract him, tell him he has to stop because they have no time left in class. Now I sit alone next to the trash can.

Then, there is me. I am the teacher sitting in front of this group of people— all of us energized, listening, smiling, nodding, and sharing. We talk about writing and word choice. The classroom is louder than usual. I am happy.



Skull Still-Life by Henry James Clarke,

CCRI Student

Significant

By Oswin Mcvay, CCRI Student

This time of nothingness to all and I,
An odd kid who has earned distance from all.
Disaster, not a creation of mine.
My snowbank throne distracts me from the fall.

This lost era of being seen and known,
When the grass was green and the world was new,
The perennial plant clasps the self sown.
Flowers wilt for the first time for some few.

Those good old wonderful forgotten days,
He was me and I was not yet all there.
A long-lost life raft rests beneath the waves.
I am me and he is still out somewhere.

The pendulum swings, another direction.
I must return to my isolation.

The Garden

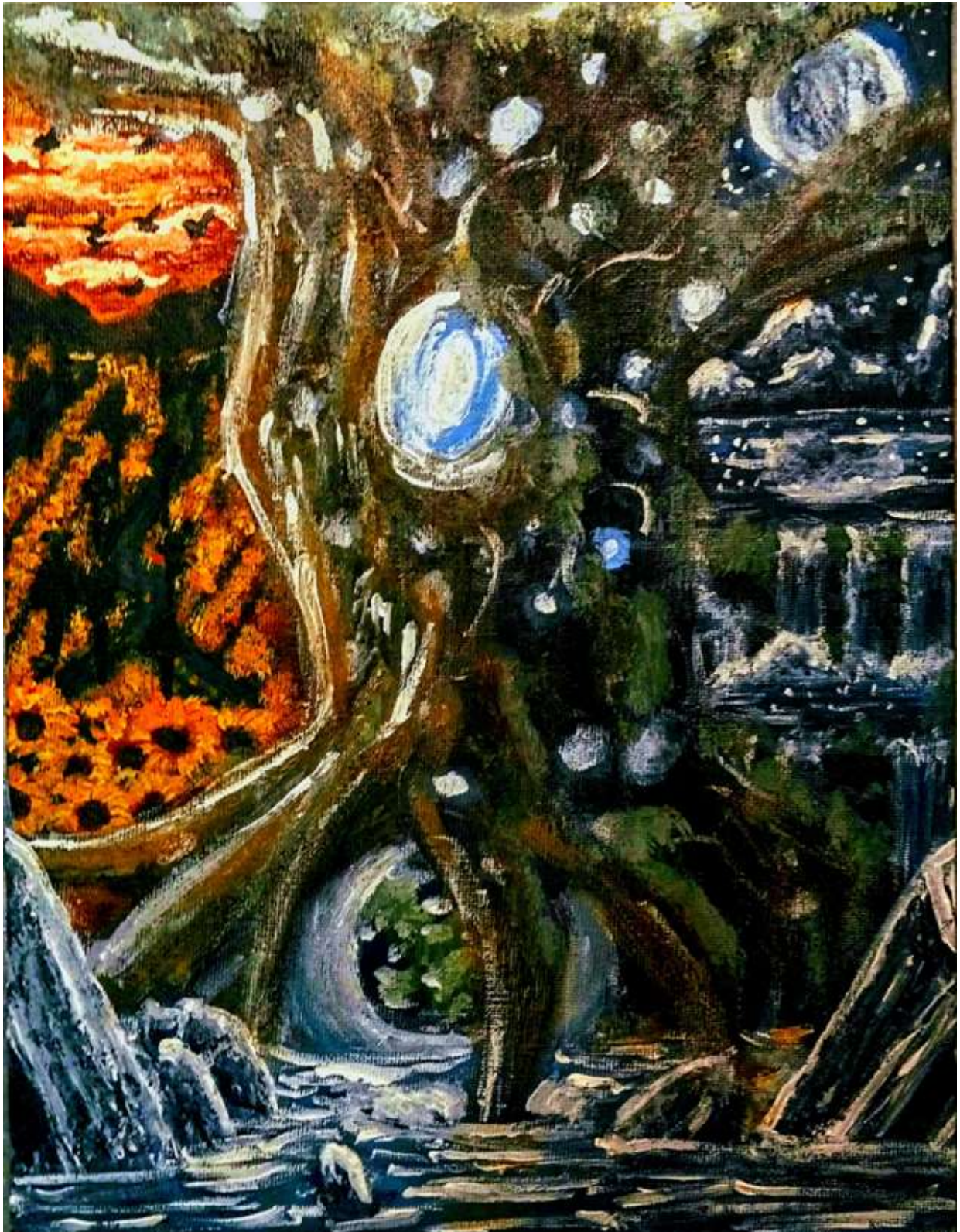
By Desiree Hirons, CCRI Student

In the forest, I find myself by the garden
A world of many possibilities, I leave behind me
My time has passed, as I waited in the garden
Leaving me, to nurture and protect what is left

"It is what it is." I tell myself
I've lived what is to live, never to dwell in its moments
The angels and their clockwork have come and passed
In this forest of time, I watch the set and rise of the sun

My future recedes into memory, in the garden
As I tend to each wilting leaf in my hands
The treasure of a life, one should expect
A Measure of love, or of respect

But time is an infinite jest
As hours tick away, leaving my life in the garden
While stars shine, spinning round the night sky
I wait for hope, what I remain to see
And the fullness of my efforts in the garden
Is the only return that I expect to be seen.



by Eric Mateo, CCRI Student

It's Been Eight Years Since You've Been Gone

By Morgin Peloquin, CCRI Student

It's been eight years since you've been gone.

Why did you have to leave the way you did?

Were you really that tired you your mind body

And soul?

Did God really want you that bad?

You never got the chance to walk me

And your baby girl down that isle.

You never got to mee your youngest

Daughters' son

It's been eight years since you've been gone.

At times it feels only like yesterday

Other times if feels like forever.

There's times where you visit me in my

Dreams and act like you've never been gone.

You act like your normal self like time has

Never passed.

When it's time for you to depart you just

Hug me and leave.

There's times where you just fade away with a smile.

Each time you go you take a small piece of me

With you.

You leave without saying 'I love you' or 'I

Miss you.'

But in my heart, I know that you do.

It's been eight years since you've been gone.

The pain of losing you has gotten easier.

It's gotten easier to share memories of you.

It's been eight years since you've been gone.

And dad I still think about you every day.

I still miss you, Dad.

It's been eight years since you've been gone.

Poem For Dad

David

By Joshua Gonsalves, CCRI Student

Virginia caught herself hypnotized under the mesmeric hum of the free-spinning ceiling fan. Lopsided posture, an upturned nose, and wine drenched breath escaped scrutiny of her husband who passed his hands through the fluid oceans of her hair. His buttcheek clung to the left arm of the rose red armchair. She misshaped herself like human origami, half her hip smooshed between the cushion and her husband's arm. David was sat on the floor, teasing the cat with a ball of yarn he hid from its sight. He put the yarn behind his back, then rotated the hand to his side, then his front again, and the cat circling his body, and fireside kindling crackling. David set the ball of yarn aside and wandered toward the black hallway.

“Hey!” yelled his father from the next door kitchen, “Where’s David going?”

Virginia leapt off her red velvet cushion, rested her wineglass on the mantelpiece over the fire and began hurried to the hallway, “David!”

“No big deal,” Terry laughed, “he’s fine, I was just trying to wake you up,” he tapped his forefingers on the periphery of the dishwasher, then edged toward the bottle of brandy, “Want another drink?”

Virginia held David in her arms and entered the kitchen. She seated him at the counter on the high rise seat and asked her husband, “Think he’s getting too big for that now?”

Terry gave it a glance, “Maybe,” he turned from the bottle and playfully veered over David, “gonna be your first day of school this week, isn’t it?”

David didn’t respond. Not even a nod.

Terry straightened his back and shot a glance toward Virginia, “Quiet today, huh?”

“No, I don’t want another drink. They make me drowsy,” she gestured to David with her neck, “and I need to be watching this one, ‘specially near the fire. And we shouldn’t be drinking in front of our son anyway.”

“Once again, the queen is right,” Terry’s chuckle burned bright enough to replace lightbulbs and birthday candles. Virginia was reminded why she married him, how his sperm came to be the decided seed for her baby’s bloomage.

In his bedroom, David clutched the stuffed frog and held it so closely, so tightly that he could feel the pulsations of his fingertips. He confused them for the frog’s heartbeat and sobbed. He felt icky, like he was doing wrong, suffocating his frog. Earlier, his high-held chest impervious before the drop - and then - he could see the looming figure: his father. A shadow from the hall.

It was Tuesday morning and Virginia held her son in her hands and told him, “Make sure everyone there is nice and friendly,” she smirked, “if not I’ll have to have a word with some parents,” and she said things like “Aren’t you glad to have a mother like me?” and David said, “Yes,” and he meant it but sounded apathetic. Virginia was worried, she pictured Johanna who stood there leering, stretching for the jambs of her childhood bedroom doorway, her laundry-listed shuns and the disappointments.

“If any of those kids try to hurt you or make you feel bad or guilty or *anything*, let me know. I don’t mind making calls to parents,” Virginia’s eyes were decidedly sharper, splitting David in half, her hand rested on his shoulder, “I love you. Have a great first day of school. Remember: *I love you.*”

“I love you,” David said and he hugged her hips.

David was tiny, even for his age, and his mother helped him get into the backseat booster. She buckled him, kissed his forehead, looked at him with admiration. She thought: he is going to be a great man.

His dirty blonde hair jerked to the wind on the way. The bright sun blared light in his face so his eyes could never be more than half open. When he shut his eyes all the way there was a quiet stinging pain. Behind his tightened eyelids was a warm red color pouring through the usual blackness, and sudden electric flashes of lightning bolt blood vessels. He pressed two fingertips into each respective eyelid and made little black circles spin around the growing warm red. Then the car stopped.

“Here it is,” his mother poked at the car window, the glass tapping, there the sign read,

Tiny Teapots Daycare & Preschool.

When she walked in the door, the teacher and assistant flocked with open arms.

“Is this David? Isn’t he the cutest thing?”

“Cute as a button,” the assistant agreed.

“Hi David, I’m Ms. Wesley.”

“And you can just call me Sheryl.”

“Miss Sheryl,” in butts boss.

“Miss Sheryl,” Sheryl confirmed.

Virginia careened toward the nearest corner and signaled the women over. As she spoke to them her threats were plastered beneath a warm smile. The eyes said, “If he gets hurt, you get hurt,” and the lips said, “Gooday, ladies.”

“We like to make this the safest environment possible for the kids. He’ll be safe with us for the day, we can ensure.”

“He better be,” an unmoving smile, and . It’s safer than home, she thought. At least no one’s drinking. Sheryl.” “Miss Sheryl,” in butts boss. “Miss Sheryl,” Sheryl confirmed.

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She kissed his forehead, held him tight, and left.

David didn’t think much of preschool at first. He sat in the corner for a while watching everyone, then went to the teacher, tugged on her shirt and asked, “What are we doing?”

“It’s free time now,” the teacher said, “you can do whatever you want. The sky is your limit!”

He looked behind him, two boys were fighting over a plushy t-rex, heated in a frenzied tug-of-war.

“Julien! Marcus!” shouted the assistant, “Cut it out!!”

David returned his glare to the teacher, whose shirt he still had a hand on, a tepid frown. The teacher smiled, “Don’t mind them. There’s lots of kids here to play with. You’re okay.”

Do you want me to maybe introduce you to a group?”

David nodded yes and lifted his hand off her shirt. She held her palm out to his back without touching it and directed him toward a group of girls, most of whom lying belly first on the carpeted floors, loose markers and crayons strewn by their sides, assaulting coloring book pages; wearing thinner, wearing thinner.

“Hey girls,” said Ms. Wesley, “this is the new member of our team, his name is David.”

Can you all introduce yourselves for David?”

A girl wearing a white doll’s dress raised her hand halfway with crouching fingers, “I’m Cathy,” she felt funny. Usually she didn’t like talking to or looking at the boys, but David’s posture and oval face, the nigh neurosis, but forgiving. In plain words, she liked him.

Cathy broke the ice for the others to introduce themselves in her footsteps; there was Sara, Chira, Ellie, and June.

“Hi, I’m David. Would you mind if I colored with you?”

“No,” Cathy said and smiled.

Coloring with the girls, David had a chance to breathe. He heard his father’s voice calling him, “David!” but shut it out when he heard the ripping paper, and Cathy shrieked, “MS.! MS.!”

Wesley came running over, “What did he do?!” she yelled, and David felt her shadow, unbreakable bearing over him, credulous to its prison, and Cathy held the coloring book in her hand from the next pages edge, and off Wesley’s leftside hung the smudgy half-torn page. “It ripped!”

Ms. Wesley put the pieces together and almost sulked. *You’re a professional, Jean, stand up tall and correct yourself.*

She tilted her head sideways, meeting her eyes with David’s, who sat there helpless like a baby owl, and said nothing. David held

back his tears, what with the hub-bub around him and the classroom stars swarming rings over his head, the shameful halo. Wesley tried to offer that helping hand, if only from a glance, but stepped toward Cathy and held her arms out saying, “No, Cathy, it’s okay, we can get you a new one.”

“But I don’t wanna new one, it’s ruined!”

Ruined! Ruined! Ruined!

And when she said hello with those eyes gleaming blue, the hair so blonde it was as if the pearly gates had opened, David was at ease, but what had he done? The frightened looks, the desperation, the ruin, the hallway. Only five years to show for it and David was a fugitive of the soul.

Virginia, downing another glass, instinctually jolted forward, her strode shoulder blades touching her earlobes, and the wine-stained breath now married with wine-stained lips and a wine-stained upper-blouse. Terry set the bowl aside on the couch, glanced inquisitively, his eyes like a baby owl’s. His sighed smokepuff asking, “What?” and jabbing glare answering, “Our son.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Terry said, and laughed, only this time his laugh was none so charming.

Later that afternoon, Virginia snatched open the *Tiny Teapots* door and marched to her son, lying tranquilly in a sleeping bag beside a girl with shimmering hair, the teacher and her assistant trailed behind the staunch mother with panicked remarks of, “So nice to see you,” “David had a great day,” “It’s naptime now,” and the lone speaker on the desk attached to cupboards casting a twinkling ambience to their ears.

She crouched over her son and nudged his shoulder, “David, David,” and when his eyes began to open she smiled. He sprung gently into her arms. She held him close to her heart, carried him with poise and headed out the door.

She told the teacher, “Thanks for watching him. See youtomorrow,” and rushed out the door.



Birds of Rhode Island by Linda Park,
CCRI ESL instructor
Artwork on Instagram @KoreanLinda,
Writings on DefinitelyNotOkay.com

“Ode to Sleeping in My Clothes”

By Kyle Denson, CCRI Student, Instagram handle: kden029

They couldn't see my face
my parents
nor the world
Attempting to peek
in at my teary eyes through
the vibrating car windows
which reflected my pain like a cracked
mirror while the worn strings
of my midnight blue
hoodie collected my
face's sobbing residue
some teardrops traveled
soaking down deep into the crevices
formed in my ripped
black jeans as the
words voiced prior echoed
on the intercom
within my mind
I blocked out all other noise
trying to facade
the entire situation
mere minutes before
my biggest worry
was the unlaced pair of white
nikes bestowed upon
my left and right foot
but now I can't remember
the difference between time
lost and forgotten
It's getting hard to tell the disparity
of sweat and tears when either liquid
could probably burn

straight through a door of steel
every other relative
of this fate has wound up six
feet under the surface
and that scary thought
won't still my shaking hands
as the watch on my wrist suggests
I start a workout, prompted by my alarming
heart rate spike that could power
the vehicle we inhabit but your words
pierce through my walls
I know if you
say it will be okay
then it must.



Untitled by Hope Allison, CCRI Student

The Bad Boy

By Hope Allison, CCRI Student

I'm pregnant
I'm alone
I'm crying every night

I didn't want to live anymore
Until I met him

The bad boy

He hit me everyday
I had bruises of a thunderstorm on my arms

Everybody wanted to protect me but him
He stole all my belongings
He lied and cheated

Then one night
I seen it

I seen the pain in his eyes
I seen how hurt he was from life
I seen the future in mine

Wanting to have a future
Not being like him

I wanted more
Not just for me but for my son

I told the bad boy goodbye
I told me welcome to the good side

From the Editor

The following stories are a collection of submissions from students in my Readings in the Short Story literature course this semester. This creative writing assignment asked students to write a prequel or sequel to any of the readings we read in class. This short story course has students engage with a variety of genres, e.g. crime, science fiction, magical realism, etc., from the nineteenth century through the 2020's. As you will see, there were some standout favorites: "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Arrest of Arsene Lupin," but the students really mined the characterizations of each character in each story and aimed to stay true to that while still providing a new and exciting plot.

Here are the original stories that inspired the prequels and sequels:

"The Arrest of Arsene Lupin," – Maurice Leblanc

"August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" -Ray Bradbury

"The Red Lipstick" – L.M. Quinn

"Ghosts, Bigfoot, and Free Lunches" – Dan Stout

"A Mysterious Case" – Anna Katharine Green

Tears Can Kill

by Jared Ladino, CCRI Student,

(Prequel to the short story, “Ghosts, Bigfoot, and Free Lunches”)

Samuel’s heart frantically pounded as he desperately ran through the deserted woods. He clumsily climbed over rotted tree stumps and slippery rocks while dodging sharp overgrown branches. He was running with fierce determination to avoid the inevitable, his death. Wiping the sweat from his face, he noticed his bloody arms, but he dismissed any pain as he quickly ran without any hesitation through the thorned bush. Samuel needed to get to safer grounds. He had to escape at all costs. Unexpectedly, his foot got caught in a deep crevice and immediately he tumbled to the hard unforgiving ground. Stunned by the impact, Samuel searched for a way to get up. His hands kept slipping on the cold wet leaves and to no avail he laid there. His heart raced as he could hear it getting closer and closer until he could smell its rancid breath. Suddenly, it pounced on him and with a deafening growl it ravenously tore into his neck without mercy. As Samuel is writhing and dying in unbearable pain, the old adage creeps into his mind “Dead men tell no secrets”.

Awakened by his own screaming, Samuel sat up in a cold drenched sweat as he tried to recover his breath. “Breathe in slowly. Pause. Exhale slowly.”, he methodically took breaths. He carefully recited his breathing exercises from his last therapy appointment. He had been having the same haunting nightmare for weeks. His counselor told him the reason for his nightmare. It was guilt and fear from his current job. He had no choice but to tolerate this cruel madness. It was his perpetual penance. However, he was resolved to find any opportunities of sanity and quickly got out of bed.

Following his mundane daily routine, Samuel wandered into his small cluttered kitchen. He slowly filled his reliable old tea kettle with tap water and put it on stove. He put a new teabag in his stained cup and sat it on the counter as he waited for the familiar whistle of comfort. He fed his trusted goldfish, Lucky. It happily swam around chopping its food. His bowl fit perfectly on his bookshelf surround by a hue of color. As Samuel drank his tea, he gazed around at the lush flowers in his apartment, especially at his newest beauty he found last night. It was fate as he was at the very end of the trail when he glanced down and saw it under the moon light. Its beauty enchanted him. Samuel joyfully carried it home and immediately placed it right above Lucky's bowl. This was a place of honor for only his prized possessions as his other flowers in his collection were scattered throughout the living room.

Admiring their beauty, he drifted into a daze. He was soon entranced in the vivid, peaceful memories of his adventures in obtaining his precious souvenirs. He could feel the cold brisk morning air, the smell of the gentle dew on the grass, and the feeling of wooden trail beneath his feet as he was happily running through the woods. Running was his escape. He didn't have to think about the horrors of his job. Each step was a comforting step towards freedom as if he was running away from his own unstable fragile life filled with undeniable mistake after mistake. In order for Samuel to remember to have hope, he deliberately searched for unique flowers for his unusual collection on his runs.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Hearing the ticking of the clock brought him back to reality. He casually glanced around at his serene garden of beautiful flowers enjoying the sweet subtle fragrances. Although his apartment was filled with a wide array of his souvenirs, he always wanted to find more. Tick. Tock. Tick. He had to follow his pattern...his life demanded it. Wake up. Run. Quick shower. Dress. Tea Time. Feed Lucky. These were his enjoyable easy tasks. Then it was his commute into work. To avoid traffic, he would deliberately leave 60 minutes earlier than necessary to only work 8 grueling hours of tedious work.

Samuel's job was seemingly simple. As a trustworthy looking accountant, he diligently worked with reports of countless numbers. He managed department budgets and the company's expense accounts while making sure everything was in their respective categories, but he was the master of illusion. Samuel had created the perfect mirage to hide all the deadly secrets of the nefarious "Mayor" and his personal connections. Since he managed all the Mayor's accounts, Samuel handled all the blood accounts and any other dangerous dealings the Mayor did on the black market. He made it a point to memorize all the victim's names on the Mayor's ever expanding hit list as well as the private "contractors" who executed them. Samuel carefully orchestrated the payment for each murder using the highway expansion project accounts. Each victim had a number, which matched with an exit number on the highway. In a blink of an eye, the funding just appeared and disappeared, and no one thought it was unusual as union contracts were constantly being negotiated and postponed. Also, Samuel was responsible for the special shipments that would flood the streets causing a rise in overdoses, violence and death. He knew everything about the Mayor, including his occult practices, which made Samuel question if he was really working for the Devil, himself. He despised him with a passion. Samuel was stained with dirty transgressions and guilt and no amount of showers and charity donations would take that fact away.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Samuel glanced at the wall. 10 minutes left. He saw an invoice for another special contract. He picked up the phone and called the answering service with the same message he always used. He hated his job. He wanted out. He looked at the clock again. Four minutes left. Yet, knowing the danger, Samuel downloaded all the files. He wanted to be free, but he felt like he was suffocating. One minute left.... he had the encrypted files on his SD card. He quickly grabbed his raincoat and walked out his office.

Samuel entered his apartment and immediately felt a cold shiver down his spine. Something was different. An ominous feeling filled the

room. His ice blue eyes scanned the room for any threats. Samuel thoroughly searched his apartment and although he couldn't find anything he couldn't shake off the feeling that he was being watched. Once he was assured he was alone, he checked the heater to make sure it was not on. He couldn't afford another high energy bill. Samuel glanced at his flower collection for solace and found the perfect hiding spot. He taped the SD card on the bottom of the vase of his newest flower, and he thoughtlessly straightened the flower that had drooped into Lucky's small fish bowl.

Tick. Tock. Tick. 7pm. It was time for his night routine. Samuel ate his sushi, watched some old TV shows, brushed his teeth, fed Lucky, and got into bed. As he laid down, he thought about his day. He felt lucky to be alive. Lucky. Lucky. Wait. Was Lucky's eyes really red? He glanced at the clock... 1:00 AM already. He was too tired to go out to examine Lucky. "It must be my imagination.", he thought as he began to drift off to sleep. "In 5 hours...", he mumbled.

The Escape of Arsene Lupin

Sequel “The Arrest of Arsene Lupin” by Benjamin Webb, CCRI Student

So here I am, stuck aboard this ship with my hands behind my back. I still can't figure how I found myself in such a predicament, was it my patience? Or perhaps a lack of judgement that ultimately led me to my capture. Trapped and entangled with people of lower intelligence looking at me as if they were telling me they were of higher intelligence. That shmuck looks in Ms. Rozaines eyes, proud that she has me in her custody with her quirky smile, she is fully convinced she is some kind of hero. I can see it now head Linnars across the world “The Arrest of Arsene Lupin” and in texts the papers will glorify her. “Where are we going Mr. Ganimard?” I asked with anticipation of planning my escape as soon as I found out where we are going. “Don't worry about it lupin, it's all the same to you.”

It must have been three days before I heard the bells ringing to alert every one of our port stops. As I stood up, I began to realize where I was, is it fate, I asked myself. Port Coinjock, an antique some may say of a port, rainy and lurid, hides in the rolling fogs that set over the docks and the smell of fish surrounds the open air as if you were in a meat room of some kind. “Finally,” said Ms. Rozaine “we can finally bring justice to this degenerate self-righteous baboon.” Detective

Ganimard was sure to pick me up quickly with little time to spare. “Get up Lupin” he said to me as I cherish my last minutes aboard the U.S.S. Minnow.

I know time is of the essence, I have no time to spare although who am I kidding I am Arsene Lupin, and I will be damned if my name is soiled in such fashion! I began devising my plan to break away from the cold grip of Detective Ganimard and the surreal eyes of Ms. Rozaine staring at me with that shmuck look still. Squeaky and questionable the dock rattled in the wind the seagulls chirping in their endless flight against the gusts of winds that come off the water in a hurry. We walked the dock, taking every opportunity to scout the old port with few buildings and homes and an old creaky port bar ran by the old stinky fisherman in his yellow raincoat.

It began to rain, little drops and faster and faster the drops became more and more aggressive, the wind howling away and the ocean beginning to whale at the docks. “Lupin, we are staying at the sea marina and inn.” said Detective Ganimard “Is that so Mr. Ganimard?” I said in return “Yes, and don’t get any ideas you will be locked up safely away from escape.” said Detective Ganimard. The only port with the closest jail being a half hour away, too far for us to travel in these weather conditions, I knew I must take advantage of this as we board in making sure I observe my surroundings as much as possible.

I was in one room with Detective Ganimard, Ms. Rozaine down the hall and all the other occupants are spread out through the ship and the hotel. My room is dark and dingy, something you would expect from a town of this magnitude. Cracked porcelain seats, crusty yellow walls, and stains on the lamp shades, this is jail as it is. “Im hungry, and I could use the restroom” I said to Ganimard “Fine, I will fetch food and lock you in, you may use the bathroom as you please.” What a fool I thought to myself, this is the man that I praised with great reputation. As he walked out and locked the door, I began looking out the windows finding what I could, if I could escape, I knew my way to the nearest town I thought. Looking to my left I found an old rusty paper clip lying on the guest desk tucked away in the corner of the room. I watched Detective Ganimard walk across the street to the crusty lagoon bar running in the blinding rain, I knew I had time, but I had to be fast and smart as anyone could catch me and warn every one of my great escapes.

Left, right, and right there is the rear entrance I spotted as I was dragged in, observant as I am and as witty as I am I knew if anyone I Arsene Lupin the gentleman thief of a thousand faces. Ever so I began to pick the lock, hearing Rozaine down the hall I stopped the dinging of the door as I break away would surely give me away. My heart raced as I heard her stop at my door, my heart pounding and my head racing. Then she walked away and went to her room, a moment of pure anxiety and nervousness. I heard the pin pop, and I was free, but I had to make sure I didn’t run into anyone, peaking my head slowly and carefully

looking left, and then right with a clear coast I took off for the rear door, when all sudden hear Detective Ganimard's voice echoing through the chilling cabin like halls of the inn. I ran for the door with disregard of others that may try and stop me.

The wind screaming and the rain hitting you as if little pebbles were hitting me in the face, I followed the buildings to the closest taxi, I climbed in and told him to take off. "I know where he went." Said Ganimard "To the Taxi!" he screamed, as the others and himself began to run for the Taxi. But after all I am Arsene Lupin I knew that by the time I ran across the street I was seen by the famous Detective, as I watched them chase down an empty taxi laughing at their stupidity running in the rain of the dirty streets of Coinjock. I work my way back to the hotel to disappear into the engulfing woods, as I know where I am, and I know my way to freedom. This is a friendly reminder to myself that even someone as lucrative, smart and attractive as me must be careful.

There Will Come Soft Rains: The Prequel

by Avia Schweizer, CCRI Student

David Johnson arose from his slumber, finding himself feeling rigid and sore instead of the warm, pleasant feeling of his plush blankets and smooth sheets that would generally greet him in the early dawn. Upon noticing this, he lifted his head from its position in his crossed arms, bent over his work desk, and slumped over in his office chair. The five monitors he had fallen asleep in front of were still blaring the obnoxious blue lights that soon caused a fresh migraine to sprout in his head. Groaning with grogginess, David rubbed his eyes harshly with balled fists before shutting off his monitors entirely.

'What time is it...?' David thought to himself, his head feeling more weighted than usual. His neck was aching as well, only adding to his miserable attitude. He knew that it had to be around eight or nine since that was the usual time he would sleep in on the rare days he did have that privilege; he would normally be out of bed by five-thirty. It was now a Saturday, one of the few days that he didn't have to attend meetings and slave away at paperwork for his high-profile bosses. David had a lot of influential colleagues, and it caused him to learn a lot of unnecessary information about the United States government.

Suddenly, multiple recollections started to drift back into his mind, once more generating a ripple of pain to soak into his brain. He could recall the immediate notifications that had been slapped on the documents that he had reviewed the night prior, which were warnings of a possible nuclear testing site. Apparently, some brand new, heightened, and refined technology had been discovered multiple months ago, and those advancements, new missiles, were in the middle of being materialized and experimented with. David was attempting not to think too much about it, but he couldn't help but feel a little suspicious. He had trust in his coworkers and bosses, of course, although he wasn't sure if it was enough to be absolutely sure that they wouldn't test out a nuclear missile somewhere in their own country.

Those paranoid thoughts also contributed to his headache.

David retired from his home office and made his way into the kitchen for something to eat. Thankfully, the breakfast cyborg hadn't tossed out the eggs and toast it had cooked yet. He helped himself to a plate, breaking the yolk of the egg and dipping the corner of the toast into the drippy goodness. He glanced out his kitchen window, immediately spotting his two children, Darryl and Christina, chasing each other around in the side yard. He wasn't sure where Melody, his wife, was, but he was sure she was somewhere outside as well. Promptly after finishing his breakfast, he dumped the plate into the sink and joined his family outside so the cleaning cyborgs could get to work without him getting in the way.

Taking a step outside the darkened house and into the bright sunlight caused a wave of dizziness to waft through David's senses. All of those hours he had shoved into the computers the previous night were definitely returning to haunt him. His eyes were singed by the sun, along with his pale skin. He shielded himself from the violent glares as he looked around, mentally noting that the lawn definitely needed a trim.

David could hear his beloved kids running around the front yard, possibly catching butterflies or messing around with the bugs in the grass, making them clash together or playing 'family' with ants and beetles. It caused him to smile and appreciate life just a little more. "Honey!" He suddenly heard his wife shout from the opposite side of the yard, startling him quickly. "Did you manage to recalibrate the breakfast maker yet? It was throwing off all sorts of sparks this morning..."

"Uh... Did you want me to?" David called back hesitantly. The chores he was supposed to complete were entirely wiped from his memory, probably due to the several hours of working on multiple brightly-lit screens for income.

"Yes! I told you last night! Too wrapped up in your business..." David could barely hear her whisper the last part of the sentence.

He rolled his eyes, mumbling nonsense under his breath before he shifted his attention toward the shed in the distance, cracking his knuckles with a sigh.

"Too bad they haven't developed a lawn mowing-cyborg yet..."

David started his walk over to the shed, but something instantly halted his steps; all of a sudden, there was this deafening eruption that had come from miles away, far enough that they couldn't see it but

frighteningly close enough to hear it thoroughly. It caused a jolt of an extreme shock to flow through David's body, and his mind immediately shot to his family's wellbeing.

"Melody! Kids! Are you okay!?" David hollered, charging over to them. They were all fine, but they were just as puzzled as he was. "What in the hell was that!?"

"It sounded like it came from over there..." Melody pointed into the vast distance; the family lived in a significantly agrarian area out in the middle of a plain field, with trees swaying in the far-off forest. The four members soon spotted several animals fleeing the woods as if their lives depended on it. The children marveled at the sight, never having seen deer scurry like that before.

Suddenly, David's stomach dropped to the bottom of his soles. He could feel the sweat begin to pool within his clothes; an outbreak so close to his house, the warnings he had read on those documents, the rumors that were floating around... It couldn't be a coincidence. Was there anything he could do about it? Should he tell his family? Would that even change anything? Numerous thoughts were whizzing around in his brain, not able to clutch onto a single one of them.

He decided to keep his mouth shut indefinitely, but he would immediately call his boss after he finished mowing.

"I'm sure it was nothing... Perhaps somebody's oven just blew up?" David spoke as more of a question rather than a statement.

"Their... oven?" Melody lifted her eyebrow questioningly, but David gently guaranteed his family that there was nothing to fear. It took a little while of convincing, but he was ultimately successful. Dragging the lawnmower out of the shed, an unexplainable feeling of dread began to wash over David like a harsh wave on the oceanfront. It was something he couldn't explain, so he simply shrugged it off and began to mow the side of the house. He could hear his children arguing over passing a ball and Melody hushing them so she could pick her flowers.

As hard as he tried, however, even if he cracked a smile, there was this feeling deep inside his gut.

'It's so peaceful...' David thought. Although he had his concerns regarding that massive explosion of sorts, he felt at peace for some reason during the time he was mowing. The laughs of his children and

wife, the wind gently blowing across his pale face... He was happy.

Then, a flash of white swallowed everything; anything it touched immediately pulverized to dust... Including David's entire family.

The house stood alone, however, surrounded by the events of what had just occurred.

August 4th, 2026

Saturday

The Vanished Family
Prequel to “There Will Come Soft Rains”
by Alexia Evangelista, CCRI Student

The voice clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!*

“Today is August 3, 2026,” said a voice from the master bedroom, “in the city of Allendale, California”.

In the kitchen, the stove made a dinging sound and popped out eight cinnamon rolls, while the coffee maker was pouring two cups of steaming coffee into mugs, and the fridge dispersed two cups of milk. The dining room table was set for a family of four. Each seat at the tables had a plate, fork, knife, and napkin. The dining room’s bay window provided a stunning view. The sunrise resembled a painting. The morning sky was quite colorful, and there were vibrant green trees on the horizon.

Cora and Landon sprung out of bed feeling motivated to start off their Sunday. As Cora pulled on her robe, the aroma of breakfast cooking filled the room. Breaking News: Nuclear Bomb Threat Rumors in California for a Third Time This Year, said the TV’s news headline. In distress, Landon approaches the living room.

Landon screams, “Cora, we need to pack up everything in this house and leave immediately.”

“Shhh”, she says, worrying the kids will hear him. “Everything is going to be fine. Remember this happened last time and nothing happened? Relax!”

Landon thought back to the last two times a threat happened and realized his wife was right, it’s just another threat and nothing is going to happen to him or his family.

“Good morning Mom and Dad!”, the children screamed while running down the hallway to eat breakfast.

“Good morning! Who is ready to eat breakfast?” Cora asks.

“I am, I am!” the children chant.

While the family was sitting down eating their cinnamon rolls, Cora and her husband were reassuring the children, Nadia and Noah, that everything is going to be fine. Cora explained that they are going to stay home and that there was nothing for them to be afraid of.

After breakfast, the tiny warrens in the wall opened up, and tiny robot mice darted out to clean. The tiny robot mice washed the dishes, cleaned the counters in the kitchen, and re-set the table to prepare for lunch.

All four members of the family went to get ready for the day.

In the bathroom mirror, Cora combed her long brown hair before applying mascara to her long eyelashes, which highlighted the blue in her eyes. Landon, her husband, dressed in his outdoor clothing and groomed his chestnut brown hair. Cora assisted her daughter, Nadia in putting her hair up in a ponytail and assisted Noah in choosing a matching outfit.

The voice clock sang, *Tick-tock, twelve o'clock, time for lunch, time for lunch, twelve o'clock!*

The kitchen tossed together a sandwich and salad for each member of the family. During lunch, the family discussed their plans for the afternoon and how beautiful the weather was. Their afternoon plans included yard work and playing outside.

Once again, the warrens in the wall opened up, and the tiny robot mice darted out to clean. The tiny robot mice washed the dishes, cleaned the counters in the kitchen, and re-set the table to prepare for dinner.

Cora went outside and breathed some fresh air. In her free time, she enjoyed gardening. Her husband walked up to her and said, "I am so glad I listened to you. The bomb threats are getting out of hand. It is just so scary knowing that another threat can happen at any time". Cora smiled, feeling accomplished knowing that she has proven her husband right, once again. Landon walked away and began to mow the lawn. Cora started working in her garden when she heard her children laughing and smelled freshly mowed grass. She glanced over at Nadia and Noah who were playing catch. She smiled to herself feeling so accomplished with how her life turned out.

Cora went inside to get a vase with fresh water since her flowers needed to be picked. She heard on the television when she was inside that the nuclear bomb threat may be real this time, but she argued that they were mistaken. She turned off the TV and fled back outside.

Not even ten minutes later, a nuclear bomb exploded. There was a bright flash, then smoke and dust everywhere. The whole neighborhood was silent. The entire west side of the house was black, except for five outlines. Landon's silhouette was of him mowing the lawn while Cora's silhouette is near his, bent down to pick flowers. Noah's outline was of his hands in the air while running, while Nadia's hands were raised to catch the ball. The outline of the ball was above everyone, since the ball never came down into Nadia's hands.

The five outlines— Landon, Cora, the children, Nadia and Noah, and the ball remained. Everything else was a thin layer of charcoal. The house remained intact, and the robots inside survived.

That night, the house continued its daily tasks, with no family there. The house felt empty inside. After all the chores were done and the lights were off, the house went to bed, wondering if the family will return tomorrow.

Grass to Grace to Grass

Prequel to “The Red Lipstick” by Precious Lijofi, CCRI Student

The sound of car horns, screeching tires, and loud traffic noises while driving by the road instantly made Sergio remember where he was and what got him there. Sergio is a 45-year-old, five foot 6 inches, hardworking man who has been through so many obstacles in his life before he became ‘successful.’ He worked as a mechanic at Vasa Automotriz Auto Shop for four years until he decided to create his shop. Sergio felt underpaid while working at the mechanic shop, so he took the money from his savings and started his own business.

On a Saturday morning, Sergio stood outside Speed Car Mechanic, his auto shop, and felt proud of his accomplishments. Seeing his ten employees attend to several customers made him smile. Here is a man who grew up poor and could barely afford to wear shoes to elementary school. He has several employees working in his auto shop and is doing pleasantly well. His wife, Maria, also had a little grocery shop and was doing well. His five daughters attended a moderately good school. Life felt good until it did not.

Maria woke up on a fateful Tuesday and noticed numbness, tingling, and stiffness in her back. She was confused about why this was happening, as she had felt good the night before. Maria could barely walk as it took her ten minutes to gather the strength to walk to the bathroom, but she needed to figure out what was happening with her back. She booked a taxi and went to the hospital for a check-up without telling her husband.

Upon arriving at the hospital, the smell of antiseptic and a metallic tang from stainless steel in the open air and bleach wafting from bedding made Maria nervous and afraid. Maria hated hospitals. The last time she was in the hospital was when she gave birth to her last daughter, Jessica. Since then, Maria has never visited the hospital; she took local herbs whenever she was sick.

“I am sorry, Maria, you have multiple sclerosis (MS),” said Doctor Lopez. Maria’s world came crashing down. Last night, she was excellent. Now, she had to start using a wheelchair due to multiple

Sergio got to the hospital thirty minutes later and took his wife home.

Over seven months, things in Sergio's home have gotten worse. Maria's MS was worse and needed money for regular upkeep. Her medicine was expensive and was necessary if she wanted to reduce the relapse of multiple sclerosis. At the same time as his wife's MS diagnosis, things had been slow at Speed Car Mechanic, his auto shop. Customers were not regularly coming in to fix their cars, hence no sales at the shop. Sergio got frustrated and had no choice but to withdraw their kids from school and place them in a school where he did not have to pay school fees. Sergio saved some money by doing this, but it still was not enough.

Sergio made an essential yet hard decision. He sold his shop and decided the shop was not worth keeping if no sales were being made. He used the money from the sale to buy medicine for his wife and the rest for house upkeep.

Two months after, all the money made from the sale was gone. His wife's medicine needed to be refilled, and their kids needed money to get new clothes, as the ones they had were bad. Sergio decided to look for a position at his previous job, Vasa Automotriz Auto Shop. Luckily for him, the owner was willing to hire him again. Sergio started work at his job and was making some money. The money was barely enough for the expenses, but it covered some.

A few months after Sergio started his new job, his third daughter, Marie, fell sick. She was diagnosed with severe cholera and dysentery due to poor sanitation in the home they were living in. Sergio had no money to take her to a doctor; he had just used his salary to pay for his wife's medication that month. The next thing Sergio did he did out of frustration.

Sergio had gone to work early, as requested by his boss, to help take an inventory of the new expensive car parts the shop had just received. After carrying out inventory, Sergio noticed he was alone in the shop as his boss had gone out for lunch. Sergio observed to make sure that no one was watching. Immediately, he grabbed three new car parts in the auto parts garage, placed them in the trunk of his car, and covered them with trash bags to prevent anyone else from seeing

Sergio's boss entered the shop and said he was going to his office to make a phone call. Sergio walked past his boss's office door and overheard him calling the cops to report a theft in his shop. Immediately, Sergio sprinted out to his car and drove home with so much speed. He rushed home and told his family, "We must leave for another state right now." Maria was confused and wondered where this was coming from. He did not give room for explanation and yelled at everyone to pack as much as possible.

Sergio and his family left for Jalisco, the closest state to Colima. On the way, he called his friend, Mario, and told him everything. Mario told him that someone in Jalisco helped people get to the US. On the way to Jalisco, Sergio had many thoughts going through his head while in traffic. "What if the US is worse than Mexico?" "What if the same thing that happened in Mexico happens again?" Maria looked at him and said, "Well, only time will tell," as if she had been listening to his thoughts.

Prequel to “A Mysterious Case”
by Joshua Gonsalves. CCRI Student

Madeline had made a habit of staring for many hours at herself in the tall mirror tilted at an awkward angle on her bedroom wall. Her bedroom walls were painted blackening brown, like the walls of a dark cave. She was at turns transfixed, bemused, and mortified by the imperfections or, as she labeled them, “deformations” of her figure. How her bosoms were too far apart, her shoulders too broad, her nose long and perhaps a nanometer too wide. Every second or third tooth hadn’t the proper shape, some were jagged like cliffs, others tiny like kernels of corn. Gawking at her gut, she saw a sagging anchor forever keeping her happiness hostage.

If only Henry were here, she thought, I’d have stayed in shape for him. We could’ve lived on a farm together. I could work the plow as well as any woman. Milk the cows. Good, honest work. When Henry *was* there, she had brushed his farm scheme off, she wanted instead to live in a coastal chateau. She wanted butlers falling over trays to meet her demands. She wanted a bell to ring, summon some palefaced butler to her room, “Massage my back!” “Water my plants!” “Bring me my wine!” She dreamed of days in bed wearing a tattered white dress, practically see-through, and waiting many hours for her husband to move his lips about her body which languished so ravishing and feminine on their big brass bed. But Henry was never going to be rich. He was never going to kiss her all over. When he told her, through tears, that he wanted to be respected as the man he was, not the man she wanted him to be, she had folded her arms, pouted, went so far as to sleep outside to prove some undefinable point. Now that Henry was gone, she wished she had slept in bed with him that night, that they had kissed each other on the cheek and drifted together to sleep.

Handsome Harry wiped a fogging pocketwatch with his coat. The coat was wooly and brown and warm. The sun was out that day but he wore his coat anyway because it made him feel so handsome. He had just stopped by the newsroom where, on slower days like today he would hover creepily about the rows and rows of eager (or, more

commonly, exhausted) young women typing in practically cattlelike unison. One girl in particular had caught his eye. She was frantically typing a letter to Mr. Blakely's cousin Caroline. Apparently Blakely could not make the wedding, but everyone should be sent his regards, and under any other circumstances he would gladly attend. The letter never specified why he could not attend. Her fleet fingers paused for a beat, her head jutted upward and she locked cowering eyes with Harry Howerton, local celebrity, journalist, bachelor, all-around swell guy. That *look* he had about his eyes...the lashes soft and feminine but the pupils dug into her body, carved out a fragment of her soul, as if this soul needed lifting, lovemaking, a house & home he could provide. Her name was Addie. Addie Wilcox.

On his lunchtime walk, he reflected with bliss and stepped broadchested into the local library.

"Good afternoon, Maddy," he called her "Maddy," like a petname. Madeline's heart fluttered at the sound of his step, today lighter than usual, "I hope all's well."

"All's well," she said with a small smile, hiding the lust in her eyes by staring at the small pin on Harry's coat, never looking up from there, not wanting herself locked in his eyes.

"Splendid!" he shouted and was shushed by a spinster cowering in the corner, sorting through dusty novels about shipwrecks, "splendid," he spoke in an exaggerated whisper and chuckled to himself.

"You seem to be in good spirits," Madeline said to Harry's pin, which after all this time she still couldn't read; she thought it said "Sour," but that didn't feel right, "even more so than usual. You got any good news for me?"

"Good news? Do I ever, Maddy. You know how I always complain about my being a bachelor?...indeed, it has its advantages on late weekend nights, but it's been years now where it's not worth the strife and struggle of feeling alone in life. But now I believe I've found my match, Maddy."

Madeline hesitated a moment and even, for a window of a second, entertained the fantasy that his next words would be, "And that

match...that match is *you*, Maddy,” and in that window her insides swooned warmly, then her heart sank at the realization she hadn’t grown up, she was still a schoolgirl dreaming about the butlers. Her smile stiffened and asked, “Who’s the lucky girl?”

“Her name’s Addie. Addie Wilcox. Prettiest palest skin you ever saw. She’s young and looks like a seraph. And she can *type*, though that’s perhaps irrelevant to my being smitten with her. Hell, it’s plenty relevant! A good woman like her, she knows how to use her fingers and type like lightning. It’s important...a woman who *excels* at her work. You know, Maddy?”

Oh, I *know*, Harry, scoffed Madeline’s snarky interior monologue.

That night, the swelling clouds cried a symphony of falling rain. Trudging home with nose gloomily tucked into her shirt and shriveled hands holding the torn coat over her head, she saw only patches of the dampening black streets. A streetlamp scintillated inside a puddle which flickered frantically like reels of film. She paused, allowing the weight of the rain to trickle over her raised coat, a last bastion of shelter. I’m a woman without a place, she told herself, and the weight of the rain drew heavier. She looked like a baby turtle cautiously peering out from under its shell as she lifted her nose from her shirt and dropped the coat to her side. The rainfall looked like tiny sparks when reflected in the lamplight. A bitter taste of mud hovered over her tongue. Slowly, a low thrum of calm wafted about her body. She imagined her mind as a leaf falling languidly from a tree before resting on a bed of other leaves. She knew what had to be done with Miss Wilcox.

Prequel to “The Arrest of Arsene Lupin” by Connor Caldwell, CCRI Student

Long shadows were cast across Paris as the sun fell behind the Eiffel Tower. A young man wandered aimlessly through the crowded streets of the city center. He went by the moniker of Arsene Lupin and was a skilled pickpocket. Lupin was thinking about his next victim as he moved. He had already committed theft from some of the wealthiest households in Paris, but he was constantly seeking out new difficulties. The Louvre Museum was suddenly visible to him. Although he had never attempted theft from the Louvre before, he understood it would be a challenging target. Lupin, who enjoyed a challenge nonetheless, made the decision to take a chance. The following evening, Lupin entered the Louvre using his cunning to get past the guards.

Lu Lin grinned. Despite being apprehended, he was confident that his time in jail would be brief. He was the best burglar in Paris, and he had always eluded capture in the past. Lupin, though, couldn't help but wonder who had betrayed him as he was being brought away in handcuffs. Inspector Ganimard was the person who had taken him into custody. He was a committed policeman who had spent years trying to apprehend Lupin. Lupin was a skilled thief, and Ganimard had always admired him, but he had to be caught if he wanted to keep the police force's honor intact. He was shocked to discover that the prosecutor when Lupin was taken before the judge was none other than Ganimard.

Lupin was found guilty of theft in a brief trial. Even for a master thief, the ten-year prison term he received was harsh. Lupin realized he had fallen victim to his own conceit as he was being led away to his cell. He made a mistake that cost him his freedom because he had become overconfident in his abilities. Lupin, however, did not give up lightly. He used his skills to learn about the guards and the layout of the prison while he spent his days in prison devising his escape plan. Then, one night, he carried out his plan. Lupin used a set of lockpicks that he had managed to smuggle in to open the door.

The Return of Arsene Lupin by Althea Clark, CCRI Student Sequel to “The Arrest of Arsene Lupin”

It was September 23rd in the year 1909, when he returned. The crisp autumn air in New York was wafting down every side street and around every corner. I remember seeing him enter a pawn shop on 67th Street with a woman at his side. I hadn't seen the likes of this man since he stepped off the ship in Boston alongside what looked like a woman who was there, as well, named Nellie Underdown, *but there's no way it could be them*. Although I was already late for work, I chose to cross the road and walk past the pawn shop, just to see if my assumptions were correct.

Stopping underneath the run-down sign that read “Frank's Pawn” in chipped green and red lettering and had most definitely seen better days, I peeked into the window to get a better look. To my surprise, it was exactly who I thought it was, Arsene and Nellie! I reach for the door handle on the equally run-down door and pull. The ding of the bell above my head shocks me and the smell of old and antique things hits my nose as quickly as the wind did outside.

“Hello, sir,” the nice-looking man behind the counter says. “Is there anything I can help you find?”

“No, no, thank you. I'm merely browsing,” I replied, sounding as calm as possible. Noting, while speaking to the man I can only assume is Frank himself, that Arsene and Nellie have made their way around to the back area of the establishment.

“Well, look all you like, son. I have plenty of knick knacks,” he waves to the stocked shelves that go on, row after row and then hastily lifts his newspaper and replaces his glasses back onto his strong nose.

“Thank you, sir,” I reply and then make my way to where I last saw Nellie round a corner.

Turning at the end of the long shelves, I see them. While watching for a few moments, I observe some quiet whispers, a few glances at the shelves surrounding them, and I think I might have even seen Nellie pick a small antique and quite expensive looking trinket box off the shelf and slip it into her waistcoat pocket. Almost a second later, she looked up from looking at the vase on the shelf where I swear a

trinket box just lay, and saw me. The wedding band glints off Nellie's finger and it draws my attention almost immediately and upon further inspection, it seems as though Sir Arsene Lupin is even wearing a band on his wedding finger.

"Oh, my goodness, it can't be," Nellie gasps, placing a hand over her heart as if I scared her. "Darling, look who it is!"

"Monsieur Rozaine, it's a pleasure to see you again," Arsene puts his hand out, as if for me to shake it. Which I do, albeit begrudgingly.

"The pleasure is all mine. My how things have changed, I see congratulations are in order," I motion to the pair of rings they wear together.

"Why thank you, Monsieur. It happened mere months after we docked in Boston. Almost as if it were love at first sight," he looks upon his wife dotingly, though something appears to be off. The look of a slight smirk lays in both of their eyes before their faces turn back to me.

"Shall we go for an early lunch? I do think there is some catching up to be done," Nellie suggests.

"I would have to agree," I motion for the two of them to move ahead of me, as any gentleman would. Upon reaching the front door, yet again, we are bid farewell by Frank and are on our way to the restaurant down the street.

We arrive at a small pub around the corner from the Pawn store and we immediately sit down at a small booth in the back. Since leaving the store, I have noticed the hushed side conversations happening between Mr. And Mrs. Lupin. Odd, I think to myself. I brush off the suspicion and jump into friendly conversation.

"So, what have the two of you been up to since arriving in America? Anything of interest?" I ask, not being specific. The two of them together has always been suspect to me.

"Nothing but travel and being happy together, Monsieur. The two of us have been to Newport, Charleston, and even so far as Chicago, my friend! Tell me you've traveled since arriving here." Arsene says joyfully, all the while motioning a waitress over.

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen," Nellie moves to get out of our small booth. "I must use the powder room before the food, Arsene, please order for me?" She gives him a pointed look, quickly reminding

me why I stopped to intercept them.

“Of course, honey. The two of us will be right here awaiting your return,” he smiles at her, adding to my suspicions. The way they interact gives me cause for concern. *Maybe I should call the authorities...* But my thoughts are interrupted when Arsene turns back to me with a pointed look on his face.

“So, Monsieur Rozaine, what is your real interest in revisiting this old friendship of ours for the day?” He asks me right as the barmaid brings us two ales and a glass of water, presumable for Nellie.

I raise my hands as if I were surrendering, “I promise you, Sir Lupin, I am interested in nothing other than catching up with two old friends whom I have not seen in a long while.”

He studies me for a few minutes and as he opens his mouth to speak again, Nellie joins us back at the table. The barmaid, standing around one of the other 8 booths in the cramped pub, notices and comes back over to take our orders. Once the three of us have placed our orders from the very minimal menu, I excuse myself for the restroom.

While I made it appear as if I was using the restroom, I split the opposite way and headed for the tightly cramped kitchen where I knew one of the few phones was in this building. I end up reaching one of the detectives in the New York Police Department and he explains to me that there would be some officers here momentarily and to keep them occupied until then. Upon hanging up the phone, I swiftly but calmly made my way back to the booth where Nellie and Arsene Lupin waited for me.

“Good friend, I was worried you fell in!” Arsene exclaimed as I took my seat on the opposite side of the table from them. Keeping calm was proving to be more difficult than I had previously anticipated, but I hold my own as best I can.

“Oh, I am more poised than that and we all know it,” I laugh off the comment he made and reach for a sip of my ale.

“Oh, Monsieur, it has just been so wonderful seeing you,” Nellie dotes.

“And likewise, it’s been a pleasure being able to reconnect with the two of you,” I lift my glass in a cheer just as the door to the pub

bursts open on the opposite side of the room.

“You,” the detective points to our booth in the corner just as Arsene’s eyes go as wide as saucers. “Practically every city in this country has been looking for you.” He storms over as Nellie and Arsene attempt to run for the exit, and as they do, a swarm of officers enters the hallway into the pub from the kitchen.

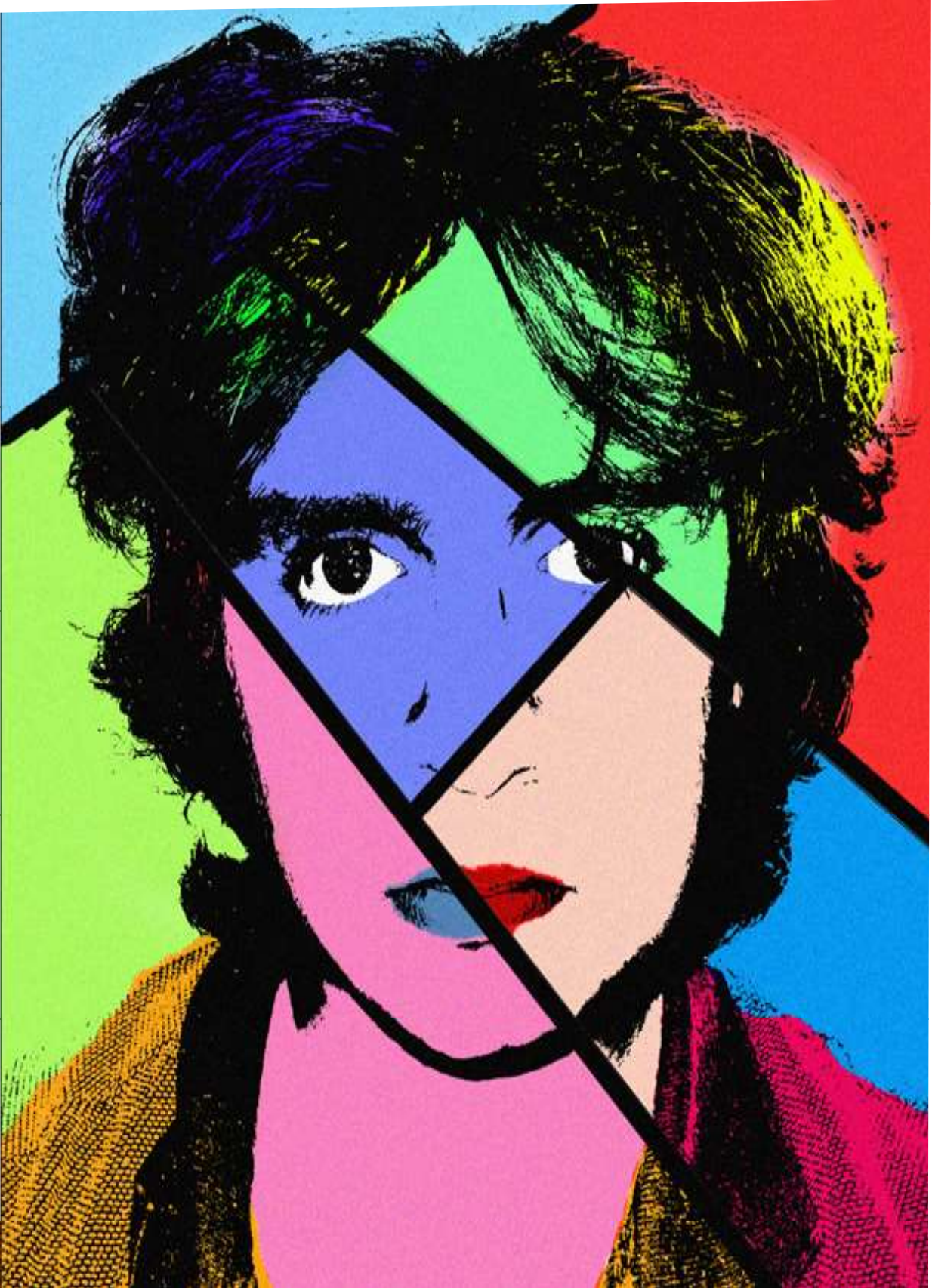
“Don’t think the two of you are getting away that easy,” the same detective walks up to Arsene and turns him around, pulling out a pair of shiny silver handcuffs and quickly clicking both into place around his wrists. “Sit Arsene Lupin and Miss Nellie Underdown, you are both under arrest. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.” Another officer places a matching set of handcuffs upon Nellie’s wrists and the two are led out of the pub in a most embarrassing walk of shame.

And that is how the elusive Arsene Lupin was caught.



Myself, by Shengyu Li, CCRI Student

Myself uses sketches, cardboard, broken headphones, and paint. Size: 24inX24inX7in. This photo represents my own life. On the left and right are my two pets, a cat and a dog. The sketch on the back represents my favorite painting. The earphones represent that I like to listen to music. The other meaning is that the earphones are connected like a tie and represent my life.



Rush Hour by Andrew Dawson, CCRI Student

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