

a newfound mantra

Julia Lima

11th grade, Miramonte

there was a new voice
that kept you company

it lingered around
the feet that kept you grounded
and made you say
“yes i am”

it swayed beside
the hips that kept you untamed
and made you say
“yes i am”

it nestled between
the breasts that let you bloom
and made you say
“yes i am”

it stung inside
a mouth that set you free
and made you say
“yes i am”

it burned
in the eyes that kept you alive
and made you say
“yes i am”

and as the voice grew louder
and louder
the only thing you could do
was listen

the new voice
was your own
it made you
“woman”

A Means to an End

Michael Lin

10th grade, Miramonte

Saren Slater took a puff from the vaporizer, taking a deep breath to make sure the fumes got where they needed to go. His body gave a small cry of protest against the perverseness, the unnatural invasion of dopamine and bottled happiness. He gave a small cough and stuffed the cylinder deep into the pockets of his long brown trench coat. The coat and everything about him, from the sleek silver vaporizer to his immaculate white shirt, was the epitome of 22nd-century fashion. The overly superfluous age of the 21st century had been over for decades now, and nowadays to be fashionable was to be smooth, sleek, and utilitarian. Saren coughed once again, then wiped his nose on a handkerchief.

In the first decade of the century, the third World War had raged throughout Europe and the Americas. Nuclear bombs, amassed by both the European Union and the Americans, were deployed countless times across all seven continents, leaving devastation in its wake. Cities, and also the millions of people living within, became cannon fodder as governments began to sacrifice whole counties, states, countries to the enemy. After twelve long years of misery, the remnants of the United Nations had collectivized whatever salvageable land it could find and formed the World State. A council of twelve scientists known as the Commune eventually stepped up and replaced the UN, and in the years after their ascent to power rapid recovery took place. The Commune, traditionally ignored and belittled by the Old Order politicians, had abolished governmental structures. Ruling by decree and supported by both factual findings and results, a near utopia had been established across the World State, and whilst one lived there was always happiness available to those who wanted it. Brain-altering chemicals were now found in vaporizers, condiments, food, water, even the air, all so that all sadness could be eradicated. The depression epidemic had ended twenty years ago, and since then there had been no complaints, no dissent against the Commune's policies and decrees. After all, if the government could satisfy

the people's wants, what was there to complain about in the first place?

It began to rain. A week ago, the Commune had announced that there would be a two-hour rainstorm in the area, and as such everyone was prepared. Across the city, umbrellas opened up, clogging the streets like sprouting mushrooms. Saren felt around his waist, then looked around him. He had left his umbrella at home.

The walk home was an unpleasant one. Having squeezed past countless people's umbrellas and raincoats, Saren stood at the threshold of his nondescript one-story house dripping and soaked to the bone. His trench coat had become stained and wet, and in some places the fabric had torn. He decided that he would have to throw the coat, the fruit of two whole months' worth of wages, out. Finding his keys, he opened the door and emptied his pockets before throwing the coat into the household incinerator without a second thought. It had failed him, and Saren had no use for failures.

A cup of coffee had to be made before starting work, and Saren moved quickly to do so. He sat down at an old mahogany desk with coffee in one hand and a briefcase in the other. Taking papers out of the case, he examined the question at hand: should he evict? As the city housing executive, he played a large part in the makeup of the city and its population. Yesterday, a group of radicals had broken the law and furnished their apartment complex with hand-crafted contraband. Saren took a look at the photographs of the so-called "art". An ungainly wooden horse. Naked, limbless torsos dancing on a canvas. A half-finished granite sculpture, exquisite and precise down to the last detail, of two men embracing. Saren didn't have to think much before picking up the phone. "Saren Slater, exec. from public housing, requesting to speak with Wilfred Hughes, exec. in reformation." He waited a bit of time before a click told him that Wilfred was now online. Saren coughed.

"Wilfred, please know that I have reviewed the case you sent me and that I have decided in the affirmative."

“So the reformers’ assistance is needed?” Wilfred replied. A stick of a man in real life, his deep voice made him sound much older and larger than he actually was. “Please hold for a bit.”

Saren bit his lip. In his opinion, Wilfred was the epitome of inadequacy and uselessness. Despite being a top executive in the city’s administrative council, the man was wildly inefficient. Asking him to complete a mundane task like checking a database would take him ten to twenty seconds, much slower than that of his equals. Saren prided himself on being one of the most efficient and pragmatic workers in all of the World State, and to have to wait for that dimwit Wilfred irritated him heavily.

After twenty-three seconds, Wilfred coughed, informing Saren that the other executive had, in fact, not died before finishing the task. “I’ve just checked the database and there are around twenty free agents right now. If I took all of them, I can lock down the area in ten minutes and evict those filthy radicals in fifteen. That okay?” Saren inwardly groaned, then responded in the affirmative before hanging up the call. Rising from his chair, he threw the now irrelevant papers into the incinerator and went outside.

Half an hour later, Saren took another hit from the vaporizer as he watched the last radical, fighting against the reformers’ arms, get pushed into an unmarked black hovercar. Quickly shutting the door after the man was inside, the two agents got in the front of the vehicle and sped off. Saren scoffed. The Office of Reform, the military branch of the Commune’s social reorganization program and the administrator of the State’s numerous reeducation camps, was often so inefficient and ineffectual that Saren regularly considered utilizing the civilian police force instead. At least the police wouldn’t talk back as much. Hearing footsteps, Saren turned around to see the advancing figure of Wilfred.

“That went rather smoothly, didn’t it?” Wilfred was bright and cheerful. In his eyes, the

operation had been a complete success. Saren answered with a vaguely approving grunt and dismissed the other man.

“You know, my office received a commendation from the Commune just last month.”

Wilfred beamed. “Apparently we were one of the fastest operating units across the State. Our completion time averaged at twenty minutes for a single operation!” When he got no response from Saren, his face fell. Patting the man on the shoulder, Wilfred mumbled a goodbye to him and got in his own car, leaving Saren alone. He gave a thankful sigh. Finally, he was alone.

Looking towards the entrance to the complex, he set off to make his obligatory inspection of the premises.

Saren lightly pushed open the door and walked into the apartment. Furnished sparingly, he was immediately struck by the similarities between this single-room apartment and his own home. Although he had a mahogany desk, a larger bed, and other novelties in his house, there were no large differences between the two houses. Both were painted the same shade of dull alabaster and lacked any superfluous ornaments. Taking another puff, he roamed around the room to take a closer look. Running a finger across the furniture, he examined his dust-covered finger. The whole place was dirty - not just dirty, but also unkempt. Undisciplined. Irrational and ineffectual. Saren quickly left the room. He couldn't stand the atmosphere of excess and, even worse, the longing to be wasteful, the longing to satisfy his barbaric human desires, that arose in his breast. While walking down the stairs, he reminded himself to schedule a therapy lesson. To be open to such thoughts and feelings, to stray so far from the pragmatism and logic of the Commune's teachings, was nearly treasonous. A thought crossed his head, and he smiled a bit before repressing the impulse. Perhaps he would have to go to one of Wilfred's reeducation camps.

Many hours later, Saren ordered his papers and placed them back in his briefcase. It was the late into the night now, and Saren's self-imposed bedtime of 10 PM had come and gone over

two hours ago. He had worked hard though; the whole week's work had been completed. Hence, as Saren got ready to go to bed, he felt no sense of idleness. The day, in his mind, had been a small victory. Turning off the light and climbing into bed, he gradually cleared his mind of all thoughts. He was almost asleep when the great evil, that nagging feeling of incompleteness and perverseness feel upon him again. In his mind, he watched as the carefully constructed world of the Commune fell apart, watched as the specters of art and opinions, of subjectivity and conflict rose once again. In the midst of anarchy and insecurity, figures of long-dead politicians preached a sermon of conflict and glory to the enraptured public, first using words and then using bombs to protect their ivory towers. As Saren watched the smoke and bombs and explosions grow closer, something held him back from running, from escaping the hell that was coming. So he stood still, even as he could feel the fire on his skin, even as he felt the bomb's impact reverberate in his bones, even as the explosions ripped away his skin and vaporized his flesh and erased his body, his mind, his entire existence from the face of the earth until there was nothing, absolutely nothing left of Saren Slater.

Saren was wide awake now. The nightmare over, he was painfully aware of how his body shook, how his frail humanity subjected him to the greatest embarrassment one could be condemned to: powerlessness. What could he do in the face of all that death? With a shaking hand, he reached to the side of his bed and picked up his vaporizer. One breath banished the fear, two breaths stopped the shaking, and as he took in the third draught of dopamine, that wonderful dopamine, he cast away himself, cast away all his worries and fears and anguish, until he slipped into a dreamless, guiltless sleep.

Cold September

Chaya Tong

10th grade, Miramonte

“I’m gonna blow this place,” Cora says, admiring her reflection in the bathroom mirror.

“This time next year, I’ll be partying over at St. Francis, and I’ll laugh when I think of all you stuck at Emerson or Stratford for high school.” She pats her kinky hair with one hand and makes a face at her reflection. I stand beside her, watching. She starts humming, that song that’s been on the radio lately. She must like it. I heard her singing it in the hallway.

I used to always hear Cora before I saw her. “Indoor voice” is something she clearly never mastered. The song trails off, and I watch her tug at her crop top in vain, trying to cover her stomach. Maybe I should offer her my hoodie. She shrugs before continuing, “Yeah, eighth grade’s kinda a drag, you know? Like, come on, you know I’m just waiting for the party to start in high school. I’m gonna go to proooooom.” She drags the word out, adding a smirk at the end. “Bet Ms. Larkin won’t give me a dress-cut for that dance.”

I roll my eyes. “Cora, she gives you a dress-cut for every dance.” I grin, remembering Cora’s outfit from last year’s winter formal. I don’t think what she wore covered enough skin to even be called a dress. She got sent home to change in less than five minutes that time. Cora pushes the bathroom door open, and cold September air hits us in the face. We walk up the steps and onto the blacktop. It’s the same routine every morning. We start in the bathroom, go up to the blacktop, and then walk the concrete

that circles an oval patch of lawn. Right now, it is abandoned, but it will be filled with screaming children at recess. She talks the entire time while I inspect the latest holes in my Converse.

“Oh my god, I just found the perfect prom dress yesterday. It’s pink and it has a cute cutout on the back...” I tune out just a little. I’m not sure how many years we have till prom, but I know she’ll probably be waiting a while to wear that dress. I wonder if we’ll both even make it to prom. We keep walking, round and round the concrete oval. The wind keeps blowing, the trees keep swaying. Cora keeps talking; she’s moved on to a new topic. Boys. I truly have nothing to say on the subject. She’s really alive now, going on and on about some guy she met at the dance with St. Francis. All the girls at school rave about the St. Francis boys. Honestly, I don’t think they are all that. Sometimes, foreign things seem more attractive, especially in a small school.

Cora is the first person I see everyday, waiting for me in the time before school starts. She could easily sleep in, but she knows I don’t have that option, and that I like the company. It’s not like Cora needs more social time. She’s already everyone’s best friend. I’m pretty quiet in the morning. I barely speak. Morning is my time to listen. I talk more during the day. Never as much as Cora though. “Luca is so hot,” she says emphatically. I glance at her, knowing I should give her a reaction since she’s really excited.

“What exactly did you find attractive about him?” I try.

She spreads her arms, “EVERYTHING!” she yells at the top of her lungs. “Oh my god, Chaya, you should’ve been there.” I cringe, knowing what’s coming next.

“Seriously,” Cora says, “all you have to go to is one school dance this year.” She smiles slowly. Uh-oh, I know that smile. Is she plotting something? I shake my head vigorously. Leave the school dances to drama queens like Cora. “Oh come on,” she pouts. I know I’ve disappointed her. She used to complain that our grade was “boring.”

But there are a lot worse things our class will be. Like frightened. And angry. And empty.

Tilting her head, she considers for a moment, then nods decisively.

“It’ll be healthy. Good practice before things get serious in high school. At this rate, you’ll probably hang around outside with the Rubik’s Cube gang.”

“I like Rubik’s Cube,” I protest. “I find it relaxing.”

We start another lap around the oval. I almost wish she wouldn’t talk about next year so much. My friends and I agree that we are all pretty bummed about going off to different schools next year. Not Cora. She’s been pining for high school since seventh grade. People are starting to filter onto the blacktop now. I check my watch. School will start in a few minutes. “Think you’ll miss us next year?” I ask. She laughs, “I mean yeah I’ll miss you guys, but...” I shoot her a look. She nods at a girl sitting on a bench nearby. “There’ll always be another Julia.” We see a group of girls walking toward the basketball court. She ticks them off on her fingers. “And another Alice, another Lilli, another Kendra. Who knows? Maybe a new and improved Talia will show up at St. Francis!” I smile a little, but can’t seem to name what I feel on the inside. Cora may think we can all be replaced, and maybe she’s right, but I know there will never be another Cora. She

keeps a personal wardrobe in her locker. Her missing homework lines every hallway. She is a jock, but she wants the community service award, not MVP. She'd make a great character for a novel. But some novels will never be written.

The bell rings. We abruptly break the circle we are walking, and head to class. We don't say goodbye. I know I'll see her in English class second period. And of course, I'll see her tomorrow morning.

Except that I didn't.

The last time I saw Cora she was encircled by flowers, and she didn't say a word.

It's September now again, Cora. The rest of us went off to high school, just like we talked about. And sometimes, when I'm alone before school, I pretend you're walking beside me, talking my ear off about a boy you'll never dance with, a dress you'll never wear, or a high school prom you'll never go to.

Love in Colors

Audrey Lambert

10th grade, Miramonte

Violet Adventures and Evergreen Minds

When he saw her he saw violet. She was lost, wandering, but curious. Eyes that swirled within lilac galaxies and a mind that tumbled down a rabbit hole. A soul that had aged like fine wine but still held the childishness of prancing through a winery with

overripe grapes squelching between your bare toes. She was an adventure in human form. She was lost, but without a care in the world. It was as if she was forever traveling to the most beautiful place in the world with only a bit of fog in the mornings obstructing her view. She was wonderful, iridescent in a way. Always shifting but shining brighter than the sparkle in his eyes as he watched her from the background, mesmerized by her spirit. Stuck in the complicated web she spun in satin ribbon as she sashayed through life. He was falling down her rabbit hole with her. He was as curious of the obvious mystery she embodied as she was of the pit falls and mountain peaks of life. She was violet. He was now blind to any other color.

When she saw him she saw evergreen. He was sharp and cunning but soft and out of touch. A heart of gold was shackled off within his chest to protect him from the words of those who judged him. He had a crystal mind that delved into every intellectual corner it could reach but eyes that were bored, unable to find something worthy of his interest. Until those eyes met hers, then promptly shifted away. He had boldness behind a shy exterior. Unknown but intriguing. Flowing through life waiting for something to whisk him away. He was a symphony of croaking frogs on a summer night and the vibrancy of green that only shows itself when it's gray and rainy, when everything else is muted he captivates all lost attention. He was that fuzzy feeling early in the morning when you're uncertain if your eyes are awake and your mind is asleep or vice versa. He was that spark of excitement you get when you swipe something off of a shelf or when you climb onto your moss-covered roof to watch the stars at night. As she twirled through life she used him as her spot. He was there for her, seemingly frozen, never moving. She was his next corner to search and she loved that. His golden heart gushed open just for her and as she peered through the cracks she caught a glimpse of his eyes crinkling with a sonorous laugh and his fingers plucking complicated chords mindlessly, mumbling jumbled sweet love confessions as lyrics. She couldn't get enough of the perfection that was him. He was evergreen and she would forever only be

seeing green.

Burnt Skies and Neon Lights

When she saw him she saw orange. Not traffic cone orange or pumpkin orange, but the kind of orange that lights the sky on fire and burns it down to the coal color that it inhabits at night. The kind that spreads embers into the sky, transcending into twinkling stars. He was the burnt end to all of her cigarettes and the glow of the lava lamp of your twelve-year-old selves' bedroom. He was passion as a person. The suffocating yet invigorating feeling in your chest as cold air attacks your lungs late at night, your feet slamming into the pavement of a suburban street, flickering street lamps shining upon your back. His smile was a rarity but sent fire ants crawling up her heartstrings. He was Orange Fanta that had gone flat but still stung when he made her laugh so hard it shot through her nostrils. It stained her white shirt. He had left a stain on her heart.

When he saw her he saw neon blue, so bright it stung his eyes as she became the light of his life. She was azure and it wasn't just because that was the name of the dye that painted her hair. She was as vibrant as one could be. She swirled within the psychedelics of the 70s. She pranced along with the obnoxiously loud pigment of leg warmers from the 80s. She danced to the iconic 90s blues of Nirvana's Nevermind album and Weezer's Blue album. She became all of these rolled into one transcendent being that embodied the strobing lights of the modern day club. She was car lights reflected on wet pavement and Christmas lights draped throughout an otherwise drab room. She caught one's eye in the way a neon sign does when one letter has lost its light. She was studded heels and bare shoulders that he couldn't help but warm with his own hoodie. She was the feeling of closing your eyes and seeing lights interrupt the illusionary abyss created by your eyelids. Her light had permanently imprinted his abyss.

Crimson Speech and Sweet Peach

When he saw her he saw crimson. Lips painted with what she described as the blood of her enemies but what he knew was a healthy slathering of Chanel Number 5 Allure Velvet. She was bright red stilettos holding up a weightless girl who couldn't help but lose her balance when too many tears fell on one half of her perfect face. She was cuts and bruises and minutes staring at a face in a shattered mirror. She wasn't who her reflection defined herself as and only he knew that. She was the red Ferrari every kid said they wanted when they were young, speeding down a road with no end. She was both the glamour and the secret scandals of old Hollywood hidden behind fake smiles painted red. She was a mannequin for her 'perfect' family, a pawn in their one sided game of chess. She was red roses sent from a secret admirer and silk pyjamas bathed in red wine. She was maraschino cherries plucked from beneath the ice of a Shirley Temple and tying their stems into a knot with her tongue. She was late nights staring up at her ceiling, contemplating life, wishing he would call her so he didn't have to. She cried on his shoulder but wouldn't tell him why. She spoke in red but felt in blue. She was bitterly broken, hurt more than anyone else and in return he forgave her for breaking his heart. His heart bled for her and she bled into his open wound.

When she saw him she saw peach. He tasted sweeter than ice cream on a day so hot your thighs were just as sticky as your hands as you lick sugary drops from your fingers. He was the crisp pop of opening the .99 cents can of Peach Arizona Tea, feeling your mouth dry before the sweet taste reaches your lips. He was fun in the scene he could conjure a smile from tear stained cheeks and simple situations. He was quiet with anyone but her, but not so loud that he didn't absorb every word she said and soak up every tear that fell from her eyes with the open pores of his heart. He was poetry in a human vessel, using words that were unexpected from a boy who skateboarded more than he read. He was glasses slipping down the bridge of your nose and sleeping outside in the humid heat of summer. He was the heart skipping feeling of slipping a Gummi Peach Ring onto the finger of your crush in the middle of

recess, down on one knee, begging for affection a young mind couldn't really understand. He radiated an energy that wasn't exactly happiness, but understated content and musical empathy. He was brown eyes that looked golden in the light of the sun and hair that was one shade too dark for his personality. He was long hugs and gentle kisses and hands pushing on your back as you fly off a swing and land just awkwardly enough to get tan bark stuck in your shin. He was her personal emotional support person. She took a bite of his peach and the skin got stuck in her teeth.

Mellow Situation and Lunar Vacation

When she saw him she saw the mellowest of yellows. He was blonde hair scruffed from salt water and chlorine and the Beach Boys blasting as the sun tans your skin. He was lemonade that didn't quite have enough sugar so the bitter taste gave you chills as it scratched your throat on the way down. He was Vans worn so often you could see your miss-matched socks through the hole your toes poke through. He was daffodils growing in February even though the groundhog said spring would come late and daisies growing through cracks in the pavement. He was blissful oblivion laying on a beach chair relaxing in the eye of a hurricane, burning your toes in the sand. He was the hopeful hopelessness of blowing an impossible wish away on the fluffs of a wishing weed, knowing it won't happen but wishing anyways. He was the utter paradise of napping after a day spent in a pool, microwaving your skin to the point where using a blanket is an absurd idea and aloe vera won't do much to prevent your impending sunburn. He was floating on your back in a pool, your eyes closed, hair billowing around your head, losing your sense of touch and your grounding to the universe as all you can hear through the water drowning your ears is the echoes of cannonballs and water fights. He was melting sun screen and hair stuck to sweaty temples. He was her sunshine and even her blinds couldn't block him out.

When he saw her he saw moonstone. She was gray but not in a bad way, no, he

could never think bad of her. She was the craters in the moon and the clouds on a rainy day. To him, she was a lunar vacation. A destination away from the rukus of the universe, a place to stargaze without city lights and airplane flights. She was stuck in zero gravity, weightless as her tears floated upwards, away from her face with the ominous feeling of being lost in space, watching the world grow smaller as mundane connections dissolve along with the oxygen inflating her lungs. She dodged asteroids aimed for her heart and shot comets at those she perceived to be enemies, waiting for someone to state that they come in peace and not ask her to take them to her leader. She was the flashing of the T.V. illuminating your face in a dark hotel room and eating ice cream at 3 A.M., even if it made your teeth ache, because what else was there to do when sleep didn't come so easily. She hurt all day, but in the middle of the night she felt okay. She was thick silver chains as accessories and a trademark layer of chipped black nail polish. She claimed she didn't believe in horoscopes but when your eyes are filtered through the lense of a telescope it's hard not to question the fate your constellation assigns you. She was an everlasting twilight, playing on loop in the background of her life and old-timey black and white movies stitching their way into a timeless mind. She was the moon and he would change science so that his sun could orbit around her.

Ivory Fear and Bronze Ginger Beer

When he saw her he saw ivory. She was white, not because of her complexion but because of the eggshell fragility of her soul. She was not pure in the way that white declares itself on a flag but in the way that she was the purest form of spilled milk waiting to be cried over. She was invisible ink upon a blank sheet of paper, hiding in plain sight. She was snow shoved down one's back and a swan's confusion when her beloved lake has frozen over. She was cracked porcelain and soft linen sheets. She was the reflection on the whites of one's eyes and headphones tangled up in one's pockets. She was cold hands upon warm skin and the first cherry blossom in the spring.

She was lace on the tops of your socks and the little bow that decorates the center of your bra. Her mind was a white line leading her forward and no fears could tarnish the untrodden path she walked. She was brittle bones and wishing stones that look plain until they're brought into the sunlight to sparkle. Her teeth dawned the blinding color of her personality and once they clenched onto him he didn't feel the need to tell her to let go.

When she saw him she saw bronze. He was leaves crushed under slow-moving feet and socks sliding over hardwood floors. He was a poorly built treehouse with spiderwebs in the corners and exerting a little too much effort to take a bite of a stale biscotti. He was pages in a book, browned from age and moist along the edges, embedded with the scent of mildew, hiding, forgotten in a cardboard box in a basement that floods during the rainy season. He was the preference of cold ginger beer as opposed to warm apple cider. He was dust kicked up by dragging feet and names inscribed in dirt with sticks. He was the memories flooding in from one glance at your favorite teddy bear or the scent of your grandmother's famous snickerdoodles. He was the mild anarchy felt in the stomach of a small child who makes the odd decision to always bite the head of a gingerman first, whether to spare them the misery or for the simple invigoration of destroying the helpless cookie, never a thing to cross their mind. He was butterscotch found at the bottom of one's jacket pocket, its wrapper medned to its side, but popping it into your mouth anyways because candy was candy and a little paper never hurt anybody. He was the caramel drizzle over her vanilla ice cream, and she refused to eat any other flavor.