



teen ink

By teens, **for teens**

June/July 2022
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Creative Writing Issue

PLUS,
Celebrating
PRIDE MONTH

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BEIJING, CHINA

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PRIDE MONTH

Confused

WORDS BY LEO LUCIO, CHANDLER, AZ
ARTWORK BY AKHILA MUSHINI, NORTH ATTLEBORO, MA

I gazed at my body in the mirror. This isn't mine.

I brushed my long, frizzy hair. This isn't mine.

I looked at my face. This isn't mine.

Alone.

Scared.

Confused.

I hid my body, the curves I looked at in silent agony.

This felt better, but not right.

I dressed masculine. This was right.

I went by a different name. This was right.

I went by new pronouns. This was right.

I looked at myself and didn't see a confused girl that my body suggested.

I looked deep down, and saw a bright happy boy staring back at me.

I was right all along.

Because this body isn't mine.

But this soul and identity? That I can proudly call mine.

ARTWORK BY ALLYSON ROCKWELL, ATHENS, PA

PRIDE MONTH

frogkisser

WORDS BY QUINN YURASEK, CHESTER, CT

i carved my initials into everything i
touched
until they were no longer mine.

there are eyeballs in the electrical sockets
and an audience in my brain waiting

for you to pound on the walls and scream
for puddle jumping into the next life,

the next name. mascara tastes like baby,
please, please don't cry

i remember you like me: boy
body fairy-godmothering period stains.

put your hands at my hip dips
and tell me you don't feel the new bones?

if i change my name,
maybe i'll turn into a prince after all.





TALES OF FRIENDSHIP

924

GILMAN STREET

"Who's ready for the greatest experiences in our pitiful mortal lives!" Tony exclaimed. His voice echoed through the crowded street, surprisingly not gathering stares from the multitudes of punks with dyed hair whose voices were as equally as booming as his. Beck, short for Rebecca, rolled her eyes habitually and cringed at the noise.

Virtually surrounding the brick-and-mortar building that housed the music hangout Alternative Music Foundation, more commonly known as Gilman. While hordes of punks were clamoring in the misty dark to be let in, one man seemed out of place among them, studying them as if they came from the other side of the moon.

Lou Sage looked around nervously, like a mole who popped into the ground in Texas and found itself in the middle of Croatia. In other words, he was pretty confused about the overwhelming sight and downright rowdiness of the night's clubgoers. He wasn't sure if he even wanted to be here, but Tony was Tony, always pushing this club. He always chatted up this place, boasting about the bands he saw, the great people he had the honor of being a spit's distance away from. Gilman this, and Gilman that. Lou finally caved in. After all, midterms were done: time to make some commotion and have some fun, he figured.

Tony, Lou, and Beck attended the honorable college of Berkeley. But Lou was convinced, if they were the rulers of weirdos, he would be emperor. He has something called Asperger's syndrome, a milder cousin, once-removed, of autism. As far as the hilarious pronunciation goes, it really wasn't. His motor skills were a failure to launch, he was still crying at 21 (though in the safety of the dorm bathroom), and his voice lacked any sort of inflection, like he was exhausted all the time. He was completely certain, if Beck and Tony didn't adopt him into their circle of vast nerdness, he would be a shunned recluse.

Well, that and he was gay.

AIDS painted gay people as disease carriers, but that was a complete fallacy. People literally formed anti-gay committees and called on people to "save their children from the homosexual plague." It was almost humorous. Almost.

AIDS stirred up a big ol' pot of steaming homophobia, and it was continuing to boil over as the year 1995 ended. It was almost hazardous to be out at this time — people were being attacked just for loving who they love. He especially couldn't tell his religious parents in the little burg town of Hootie Hoot, Texas. In an act of desperation, he told Beck, the only person in the whole world whom he trusts with a secret this gigantic. And to his surprise, Beck confided to him that she was bisexual! She quickly became his MSB (aka, moral support bisexual), with whom he consulted on everything.

Lou felt a hard punch on his side, throwing him from the safety of his inner thoughts. Tony gestured frantically at Gilman, tapping his vintage watch. Opening soon. Gilman was a volunteer project, where the punks of the East Bay can be, well, punks. Disguised as a canning store (literally, it's on the side wall outside), it was like a secret hangout of absolute chaos and rocking music, according to Tony. Lou sparsely remembered some of the bands Tony name-dropped religiously: Green Day, The Offspring, Operation Ivy, Pennywise. He had not a lone clue who was playing tonight, but he hoped they would bring the house down. Privately, he adored The Offspring, praising their third album, "Smash." But he was open to anything as long as the band knew what end of a drumstick to use!

Suddenly, the doors slammed open and the crowd rushed in, a flash of color, in a mad dash to be up close and personal with the performers of the night, Tony quickly in tow. With as much enthusiasm as a politician droning on about the annual budget, Beck grabbed Lou, who was standing around awkwardly, by the hand and dragged him along. The duo was met by a young man, with a charming smile and ripped jeans. On a raggedy shirt that designated him as a volunteer of Gilman, he wore a name tag with a Q pinned above his heart.


**Q WAVED HIS ARM DRAMATICALLY
AND ALLOWED THEM TO PASS, LIKE
HE WAS SAINT PETER AND GILMAN
WAS A KIND OF HEAVEN,
RESERVED FOR ONLY PUNKS**

CHILLS & THRILLS

the carnival child

WORDS BY ANONYMOUS, OSWEGO, IL
ARTWORK BY ARIN ROCKWELL, ATHENS, PA





I follow the freckled, red-haired child through the crowd of beautiful figures — styled, pierced, and tattooed, all in their summer night attire. Her unusually delicate hand intertwined with mine as she led me on. The scent of fresh-baked funnel cakes, hotdogs, and popcorn fills the air from all directions, keeping my head on a swivel.

The child's piercing, emerald-green eyes glance back over her shoulder to make sure I, the stranger, am still following her as promised. The shudder of cogwheels turning, twisting, and rolling gradually becomes louder as rides come alive beside me. Glass bottles clink in the distance as rings loop around their necks and another winner is declared. The luminescent colors of the strobe lights lining the carousel make the fair-skinned child shine brighter in the dark surroundings.

We trample along the faded grass on the way to who-knows-where. Suddenly, Little Red breaks from my grasp and bounds cheerfully into the night, giggling wildly with excitement. Her strides elongate as she runs faster into what I thought

Slipping inside with a lasting smile, the child was swallowed whole by the portal

was the uncertainty of darkness. With the smells and lights faint behind me, she enthusiastically halts at a splintered, dark oak door at the edge of the festival. The door stands as the gateway of a small worn-down shack, no more than seven-feet tall, four wide, and four deep. And though impossible-seeming, the shed was not present just moments prior. The girl's flashing eyes flicker from me to the frail, mysterious hut and back again. She flings the door open and golden beams tear through the abyss of darkness, as if her treasure lay beyond the doorway. Slipping inside with a lasting smile, the child was swallowed whole.

Approaching the building further, the voices of the carnival seem to fade even more as the carnival's fragrances dissipate in the air along with them.

I open the door with excitement, hoping to see the wonders that the unusual child saw. In the dim light, I could make out the dangling ceiling lamp swaying left and right, flickering before it sizzled on and blinded me. The wooden walls of the shack instantly fade away, replaced by nature's beauty. What a sight to behold.

Looming before the land, mighty oaks stand tall, swaying in the wind. Nearby, silver fish swim freely in the clear blue stream. Flowers of every color imaginable are strewn about the land, creating a picturesque landscape. So engulfed in the land's attraction, I don't notice as the doorway behind me shrinks slowly, withdrawing me from the world before. The red-haired lass is seen on the other side of the brook, frolicking in faded lavender flowers in the middle of the prairie. The warmth of midday sunshine hits my shoulders, reminding me of summertime as a kid. A strange déjà vu hits me, but I rub it off as I rush out to meet the child who's taken me to this heaven. She takes my hand and twirls me with ease. I dance familiarly with her under the big blue sky, which houses cotton candy-like clouds and majestically colored birds. Though my dancing partner led me to this unknown place randomly, I feel comfortable in the universe of sun and nature — and in the company of this stranger.

At last, I see the flowered prairie for what it really was. I pinpoint where the colorful carousel took the place of the stream, and the towering trees became the Tilt-O-Whirl ride. Where the lush grass was turned to gravel, and the vibrant yellow, orange, and violet flowers became crushed beneath the soles of thousands of families visiting the carnival every year.

Before I knew it, I recognized the stranger before me. From the way her freckles spotted up her neck and ended at her cheeks, to the star-shaped birthmark on her forearm. And how her nose laid softly between her unmistakable green eyes. There I stood, dancing in a field with my younger self.



ARTWORK BY
ETHAN ANDERSON,
WRIGHTSTOWN, WI

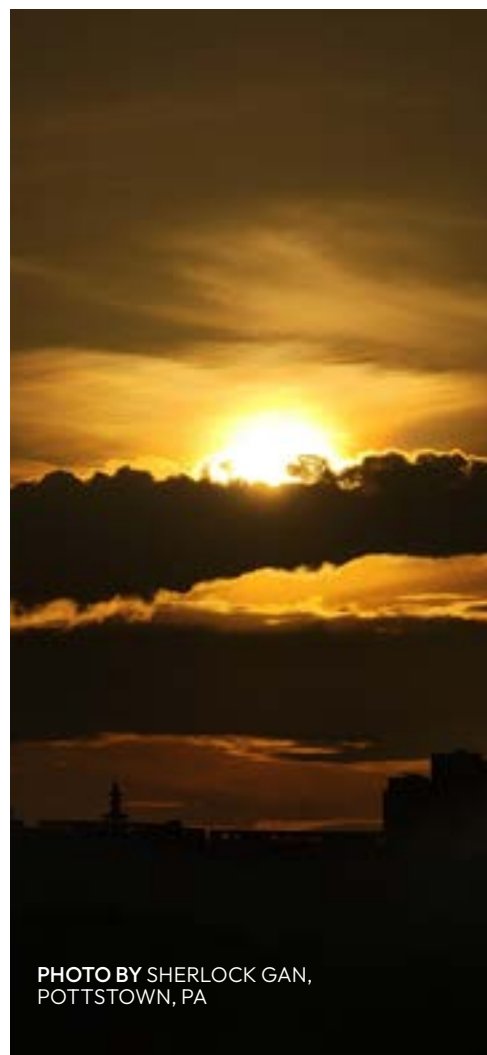
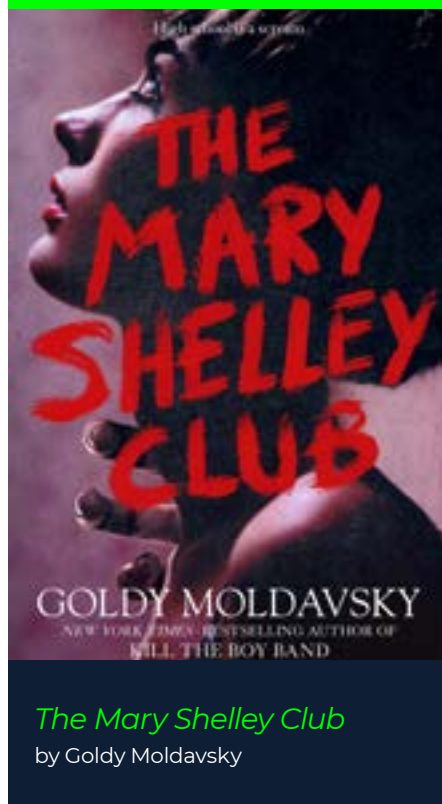


PHOTO BY SHERLOCK GAN,
POTTSTOWN, PA



ARTWORK BY NEVAEH A.,
TACOMA, WA

THRILLER



The Mary Shelley Club
by Goldy Moldavsky

**Review by Megan Andress,
Charlton, MA**

The Mary Shelley Club by Goldy Moldavsky is a thrilling tale that will surely send shivers down the reader's spine.

It is quite astonishing how beautifully written the novel is. Mystery, murder, and fear at every page. This book is recommended for all the horror, thriller, and mystery lovers out there. A five-star novel indeed.

Adventure begins with the new girl, Rachel Chavez, a junior at a prestigious high school called Manchester Prep, where privileged kids can be privileged kids. Rachel had survived a traumatic incident one year earlier in her original home in Long Island. It caused her and her mom to move to Manhattan's Upper East Side. As Rachel makes friends and enemies, she discovers a secret club called the Mary Shelley Club, named after the author of *Frankenstein*. The horror-loving members participate in a game called a Fear Test, where each member takes a turn finding a target and uses tropes from horror movies to make their target scream. Rachel has been invited to join, and accepts the invitation willingly.

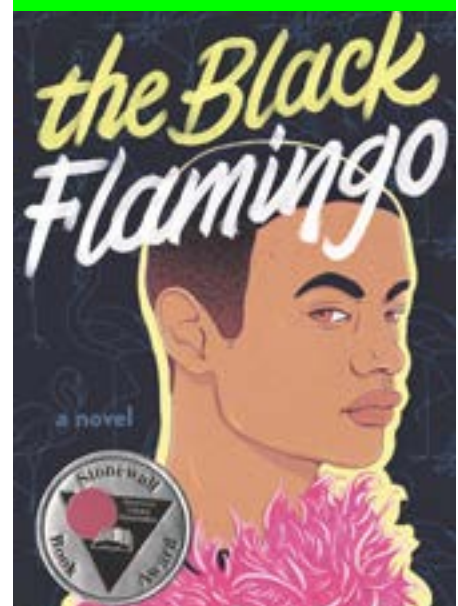
Unfortunately, Rachel's dark, traumatic past

decides to be a member in the Mary Shelley Club as well. Moldavsky will make the reader be on the edge of their seat at all times. It is a novel no human could put down. It leaves the reader tossing and turning all night with the itch to continue reading it. Moldavsky's writing will make the reader feel as if they were Rachel. She will make you feel the terror of being a survivor, the guilt and grief that follow death, being a new kid at school, the happiness of enemies being

YOU ARE NEVER GOING TO WANT TO TRUST YOUR GUT INSTINCTS AGAIN

scared out of their minds, the feeling of having friends, and the anxiety at high school parties. It is all wrapped up in a beautiful, exciting package. The reader's trust issues will be toyed with. To tie it in a pretty bow, Moldavsky's ending will catch you off guard and wanting more. Don't blink or you might miss something. You are never going to want to trust your gut instincts again.

YA FICTION



The Black Flamingo
by Dean Atta

**Review by Mack High,
Fort Wayne, IN**

The title of the book I read is *The Black Flamingo*, written by Dean Atta. I chose to read this book because I thought I might be

UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

ARTWORK BY YEONY JUNG, DUBAI MARINA, UAE

WITNESS *OF* WOOD

WORDS BY GRANT YANG, SCARSDALE, NY
PHOTO BY ANONYMOUS, NJ



ARTWORK BY YEONY JUNG, DUBAI MARINA, DUBAI

The dirt is disturbed. The metal encloses my roots in its undead grasp, lifting me up and away from the soil where I once stood. By the time the moon wanes back into darkness, I meet the ground again with a tremble of relief. I have been moved. However, the darkness reveals nothing but the picture of harmony.

The old oak no longer sits in a cluster of mushrooms, and instead an exquisite elm raises its branches across a creek that bisects the land. With the sunrise comes a startling surprise. Light peeks above the horizon, illuminating a horrendous scene that unfolds itself around me. Symmetrical tendrils of stone streak across the grass, crushing any life beneath. A massive maple is dwarfed by the towering stone structures that jut into the sky, higher than the birds flew, shadowing the small creatures scuttling about. Behind metal casings, autonomous beasts awaken from their slumber, releasing honks

HELPLESSLY, I WATCHED AS A PAIR OF THE HUMANS DESCEND UPON ME IN SOME FIT OF HYSTERIC, COMPARABLE TO RABID RACCOONS

that rival even the loudest geese. These creatures — humans — seem to enjoy creating noise in the most pointless ways.

"Papers, papers! Get the scoop about the shmoop in the White House!" One yells with reckless abandon.

"No, you move, goddammit!" shouts another as it shoves its way through the crowd.

They don't stop talking. These humans are creatures I have yet to understand.

Strength in numbers. A basic philosophy even the most simple

of creatures follow and respect, so it should be no surprise that these humans do the same. Every horde of the bipedal creatures that tromp by jostles me to the roots, as if I may jump free from the ground. My roots already reach deep into the dirt, feeling past stones and sticks of brethren long gone. The earth has been the only constant through this odyssey, and I slumber in its comforting grasp.

By some dark deed done in the night, I have suffered the wrath of these beings. Helplessly, I watched

The Carousel



WORDS BY EVELYNE BREED, ARLINGTON, VA

ARTWORK BY BIANCA WERTHEIMER, WESTWOOD, NJ

I was brand-new when she came for the first time. Shiny, golden, a jaunty tune spilling out of the speakers hidden in my mirrored ceiling.

I remembered her because she was so terrified of me. My flashing lights and loud music were all too much for a child of two, especially coupled with the horses that were too big for her to ride on and the children aged five and six who took the little carriage seat before she could. Her mother held her hand as she rode on the horse, a bright yellow dress around her knees, whimpering the whole way around. One revolution, two, three — and she was off.

I was still brand-new when she came back. It had only been a week of me being open, but already, the older children were tired of me. I knew they'd be back in time, but for now, they needed a break. This time, there was no loud crowd of pushing, shoving, squealing children. Just me. She rode in the carriage. When she left, she told me bye-bye, and I played my music just a bit happier.

I was less brand-new the 300th time she returned to ride on me. Yes, I counted every single visit. She was big enough to fit on the horses now, and her favorite was a bright yellow one with a golden saddle. It suited her. I'd never seen another child that was quite so bubbly. I'd watched her wardrobe shift over the years from brightly colored dresses to gym shorts and brightly colored shirts. Her Saturday visits were the best part of my week. Unlike all the children, I am not free to go anywhere. The only breaks in my mundane existence are the riders. She was my favorite. I'd have told her that if I could. I'd have told her that when she blew me a kiss as she left each day, my heart swelled to bursting. Or, it would have, if I had a heart.

My speakers failed the day she told me she would never come back. She popped her pink bubble gum, tossed her freshly-cut hair, and whispered to me as if it was strange to be talking to a carousel. Thirteen years old and she'd already moved away from childhood. I could still see the baby curve of her jaw and her mismatched yellow and pink socks, but she'd decided to ignore them. I wanted to argue, beg, plead my case. Being more grown-up didn't mean forgoing carousels. Stay. Keep coming back. I wasn't ready for her to be gone, and I was trapped. I had no voice with which to call her back. I had no feet with which to follow her. She was my everything, and I had no way to ask her to stay.

Three years had passed when she came back to me. I saw her from time to time during those devastating years, walking in the park. Sometimes she watched me from a distance. Sometimes she passed by without a glance. If I'd had a heart, it would have shattered into as many pieces

as the mirror that fell from my ceiling last year during a thunderstorm.

The night that she came back, I'd been turned off for the evening. The moon was nearly full and glowed in the sky. I almost didn't recognize her. Not a speck of yellow could be seen about her. Her ragged, black denim pants and black hoodie made her look dangerous. I could feel the pound of her combat boots on the ground as she leapt over the fence around my floor. She remarked that the moonlight that looked so beautiful shimmering on the duck pond made my horses look creepy. Her companion laughed, a deep, throaty sound. I shivered, and my wood creaked. Then, she did something I would never have

MY SPEAKERS FAILED THE DAY SHE TOLD ME SHE WOULD NEVER COME BACK

thought her capable of. She mocked me. She called me old, run-down, a wreck — only useful for the view. Then, she left black lipstick smeared over her companion's mouth, the coins from her pocket slipping out and sliding through the cracks in my floor. It felt wrong to me. She shouldn't be kissing someone else. I missed the kisses she'd blown at me. This was the first of several nighttime visits, each one ending in black lipstick under the watchful eye of my guilt-covered horses.

One night, she was alone, not with her companion. I was relieved until I felt the warm wet of her tears dripping onto my floor. Aghast, I watched her sob, wishing I could comfort her, knowing that she felt the pain I'd felt every day without her. It's the pain of being without the one you love.

She came to say goodbye when she left for college. I wasn't expecting her to, but she did. She was still wearing ripped black pants, but her shirt was pretty and flowy, white with little yellow flowers. Black lipstick was replaced with red. She looked too grown-up. Call me overprotective, call me old-fashioned, but I didn't want her to look like that. I saw the looks she got as she walked in the park and almost wished she'd return to the oversized black hoodie and go-away lipstick. She watched the children ride around and around, laughing and giggling as the horses went up and down. I played my music a tiny bit louder, just for her. Then, she blew me a covert kiss and walked away.

She visited once during college, passing by through the snow-covered park on her winter break. The park was empty, and she gave me a tentative wave. No words were said, no kisses sent, but I was glad to see her. I was glad to know she was doing all right.

It was a spring day, and the daffodils were in bloom, but her dress wasn't yellow to match. It was pure white, falling to the grass with a large skirt about her. The flowered

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