



Dragon's Toe 2020

# Dragon's Toe 2020

## Editors:

Parker Denson – Ellen Davis – Sophia Graham – Lucine Carsen –  
Caileigh Moose

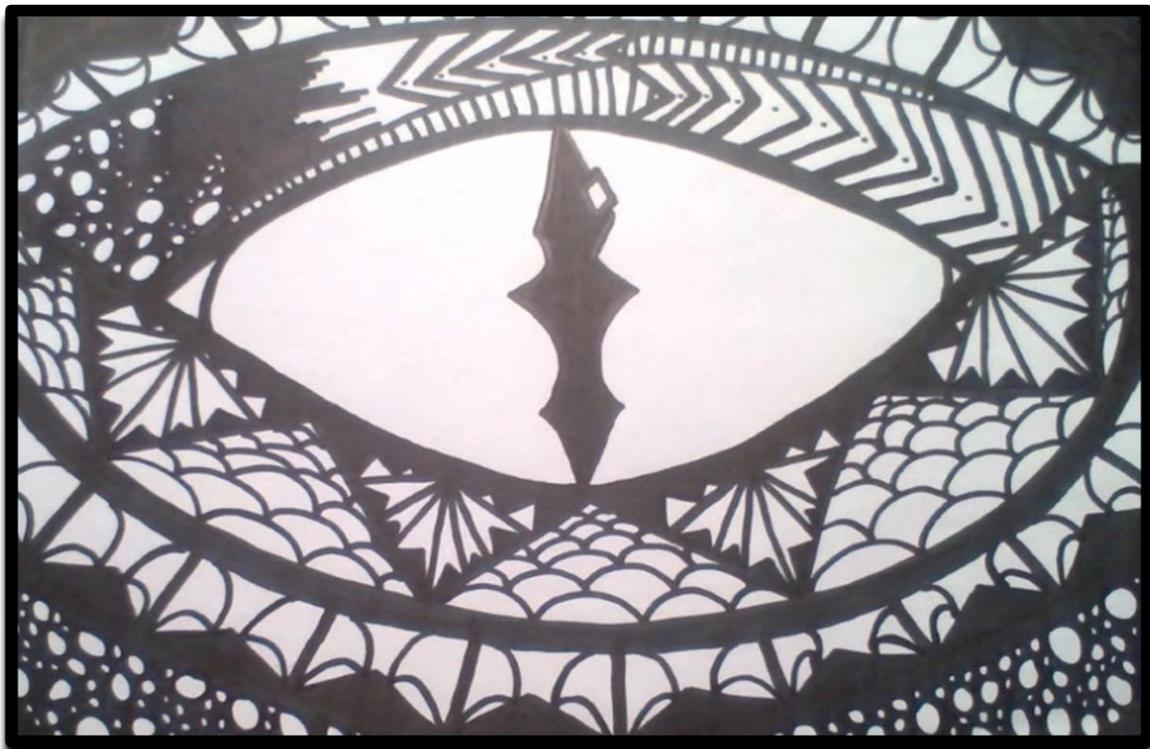
## Contributors:

**8<sup>th</sup> grade:** Helen Ezelle – Maya Davis – Maddox McRae – Stella  
Linde – Claudia Williams – Lucine Carsen

**7<sup>th</sup> grade:** Harris Strang – Johnny Stumpff – David Borasino –  
Liam Crenshaw – Akshay Gaddamanugu

**5 & 6<sup>th</sup> grades:** Will Long – Callen Hoke – Leslie Mitchell –  
Elizabeth Lee – Ali Lejeune – Ethan Estes – Mady Kirkpatrick –  
Alexa Lyles – Jenna Flowers – Katie Sullivan – Will Sawyer

## Cover Art by Hannah Namolo



## Helen Ezelle

### Untitled

I march up towards the White House  
With passion and purpose in my stride  
I have my proposals in my hand  
And my dreams by my side

I wait patiently in the meandering line of patriots  
Our vehement desires plastered on our faces  
The deliberate debaters caucusing around me  
Opinions materialize in spoken words and phrases

But one thing we all have in common  
Is that we want to *count*  
All of our knowledge combined  
Into deafening roars and shouts

But the educated string of young adults  
Are counted as trivial to society  
Radical elders cut in front  
Who cannot even keep their sobriety

They carry the flags of the old south  
Forgetting the histories of the past  
Shunning their younger counterparts away  
Until we have been silenced at last

## Will Long

### The Landscape of Feeling

Down the dark hole  
And through the green valley.  
Into the deep unknown and  
Through the forest of the rally.

Down the mountain and through the mind  
The world so small but easy to find.  
Around the universe and back to me  
Back up the mountain, filled with glee.

In the water, wonderful days  
Through despair's awful ways.  
The wonder of the world sits strong on my shoulders  
Through the hope crushed by heavy boulders.

I come home different and full of sadness  
The mountain was not filled with badness.  
It was my choice to go through there  
And that left me to wonder about where.

## Maya Davis

Living life

We must have our ups,  
and our downs,

but that does not determine  
that we should give up now.

We go through troubles and heartaches,  
and it takes our breath away,

but we can start again  
because we will be living life again.

Life is not always like lily pads,  
although we want it to be.

That's why we should see,  
that living life isn't as hard as it could be.

## Callen Hoke

### Circles

So simple yet so  
complicated It never ends  
but you see the end You look for  
it for forever, but you get nowhere  
Perfection, impossible to make correct  
Used in so many things Big, small, tall, short  
and round All words to describe a circle  
Circles are the juicy orange on a hot  
summer day, the cheering eyes  
at the sports game, letters  
and numbers and  
much more

Maddox McRae



## Stella Linde

### Weather's Worth

I sit on my porch in silence.  
The wind blows through the trees.  
As the clouds are crying,  
The temperature drops degrees.

The heavens and soil make an alliance.  
While the birds search for safety,  
My imagination starts flying.  
People run indoors hastily.

A golden ray of light appears on the horizon.  
The warmth of the sun brushes over the earth,  
And the cold puddles transform into mist.  
The weather finally reveals its worth.

Graceful and mesmerizing,  
A beautiful rainbow arches over the town.  
Its sight one troubles to resist.  
The drops of water now have no sound.

## Harris Strang

### Our Evolution

Once our planet was all alone  
It had no humans or animals to call it home  
It had no houses, no buildings, nothing more  
Just trees, lakes, volcanos and the Earth's core  
There were no screens just like your phone  
No internet or anything like Google Chrome

The planet evolved and species were born  
Now the Earth began to be worn  
As time went on, we would make civilizations  
Humans would finally begin to create working nations  
The Earth is a rose, its issues are thorns  
One day global warming will make our Earth torn

## Leslie Mitchell

### Masks

Some people with masks risk their lives  
They do it because they care  
Others do it because they must  
It might be because of a virus  
Or maybe even to say goodbye  
From fancy to homemade they work just the same  
Young or old we all need one  
Whether it is going to the grocery store or work  
It is *always* scary  
We wish we could see our grandparents smile  
But it is not worth the consequences  
New York, you can't even go outside without one  
Masks are important right now, but not as important as hope

# Johnny Stumpff

## **"Freedom"**

Birds gleefully chirp  
Without tyrants in control  
Such wonderful peace

## **"Cleansing"**

Heavy monsoon rain  
Cleansing the forsaken land  
But not human sins

## **"Patience"**

Snow-covered roses  
Patiently waiting for spring  
Tough anxiety

## **"Orange"**

The schoolchildren say,  
"What rhymes with orange?"  
It's been pondered for all time;  
Through analyses,  
Without any ease,  
The conclusion is "what" and "orange" don't rhyme.

# Helen Ezelle



## Elizabeth Lee

To the chronicles I never dared to touch again after word number two

My silent echo is captured by no ears  
Stories written by the whispers of the mute  
Do I expect great things from losing myself  
in a forest?

Will I finish my novel or throw it into the ocean?

the thunder  
The ocean who holds waves as booming as  
And creatures as intriguing as the morning

## Ali LeJeune

Umbrella, umbrella,  
woodpecker fly above thee with beautiful cries.  
Leave choices in the falling rain as if worthless it becomes.  
Leave the ideas out to simmer and cook in the hot summer rain  
and let them cool off on the windowsill that is fall. Umbrella,  
umbrella,  
woodpecker  
fly above  
thee with  
beautiful  
cries  
and let  
them  
cool  
on the  
window-  
sill that  
is rain

## Ethan Estes

Engulfed in the unfathomable darkness  
Cleverly hiding in the long shadows  
The gruesome truth

Hoping they accidently uncover their raw beauty  
Continuously seeking the true answers  
Privacy most profound

Unknown things are safe things  
Carefully hiding away deep in our minds  
Never figured out or understood

Bored out of their minds  
Hoping for someone brave to excitedly discover  
Parting from the unknown to the known

No longer comfortably safe  
Able to move freely  
Unknown becomes known

Mady Kirkpatrick



## Alexa Lyles

### Dandelion

Dandelion, dandelion  
Wishes in the air  
The direction of the wind  
Can send you anywhere.

You are a sign of joy.  
A little message of hope.  
You encourage children to dream.  
Others to imagine.

You travel in a circle.  
All around the world.  
You are clean and simple.  
Yet your color be fair.

You show grace in your dance.  
As one in the wind.  
You jump gleefully as you  
Spread happiness everywhere.

# Helen Ezelle

# Balloon

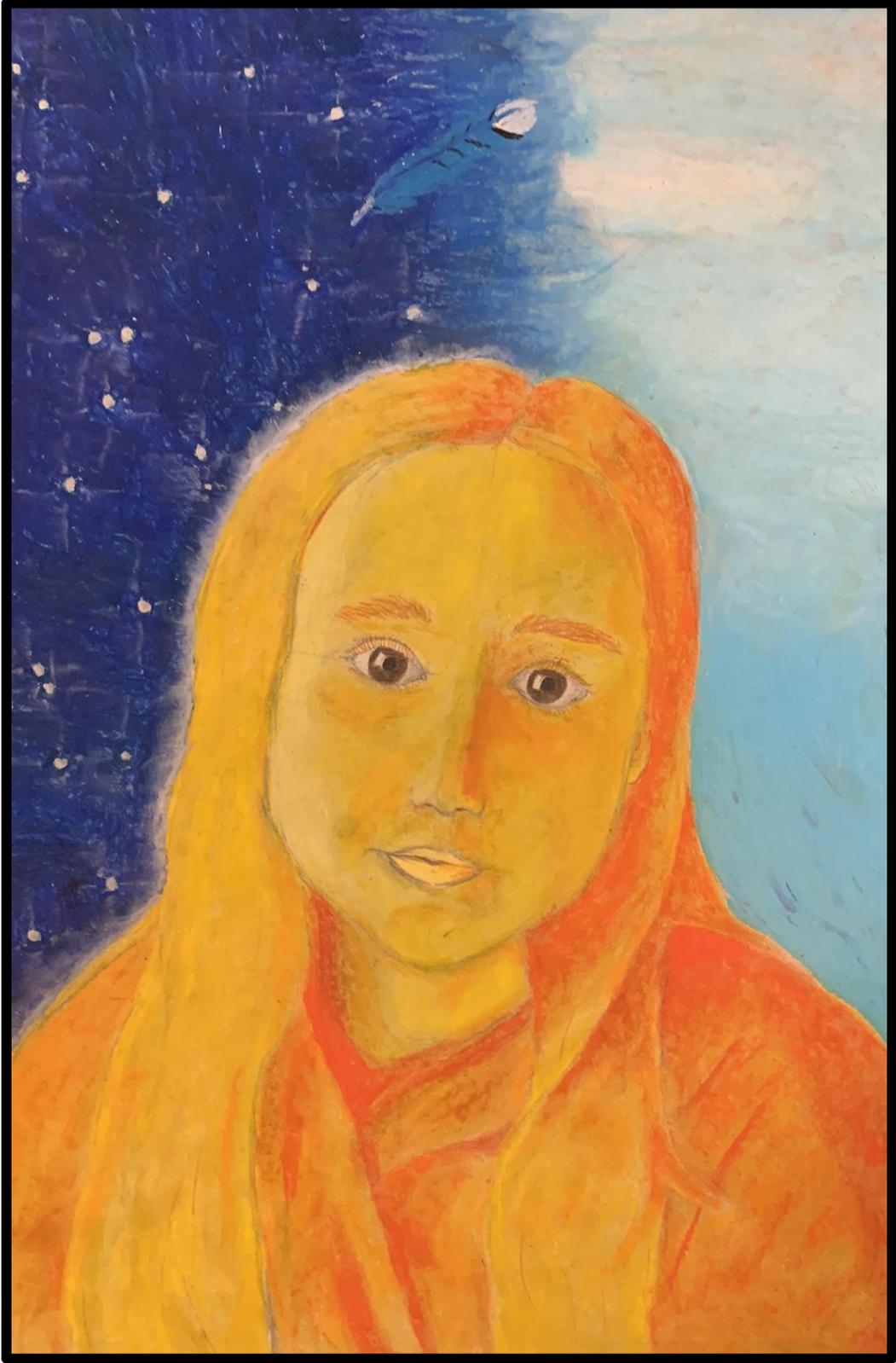
Little  
Red Balloon  
Floats To  
The Ground  
And He  
Realizes That  
You Can't  
Live In  
The Clouds  
Forever  
So  
He  
Blows  
Into  
The  
Wind  
Hoping  
That  
He  
Can  
At  
Least  
Fly  
For  
A  
Moment  
Until  
He  
Falls  
Back  
Down

# David Borasino

## Basketball

Dribble, dribble shoot  
Between the legs, pump  
Make the crowd go mute  
Through and out of the paint, jump  
Push through sweaty arms, dunk  
And three-point play  
Can't be nice, can't be a monk  
Just gotta make it to the next day  
Then we're finally at the end  
Us and them: one final showdown  
Let's defend to the end  
Let's take the crown  
Ball flies in air  
Tip ball  
Dribble, dribble, with no care  
Through the hall  
And just like that  
The thrill is over  
We are the champions

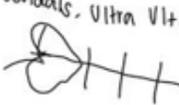
Claudia Williams



# Jenna Flowers

## Shoes

Wet, rubber rainboots  
Cool, Colored Converse  
Strappy, Sandy Sandals  
Ultra, Ultimate Uggs  
Fantastic, Fabulous Flip Flops  
Stylish, Sporty Sneakers  
Happy, Hip High Tops  
Crazy, Cute Cowboy Boots  
Just Great, Jellies  
Clean, Classy Crocs  
Soft, Sleepy Slippers  
Bright, Breezy Birkenstocks  
Fabric, Leather or in the middle  
Strappy, Sporty or Sassy  
Cute, Cuddly or Classy  
There are so many shoes to try!

Wet rubber rainboots, Cool Colored Converse, Strappy Sandy Sandals, Ultra Ultimate Uggs, Fantastic Fabulous Flip Flops, Stylish Sporty Sneakers  
  
Happy, Hip High tops, Crazy cute Cowboy boots, Just great jelly - clean classy crocs, soft sleepy slippers, Bright Breezy Birkenstocks  
Fabric: leather or in the middle, Strappy, Sporty or Sassy, cute cuddly or classy  
There are so many shoes to try!

## Katie Sullivan

### Surrounded by Nature

With my sight I can fly into night  
I see the moon glowing  
With the stars up high  
I experience the sky full of light

With my voice I speak up for my choice  
With my mouth I stand up proud  
I am proud of my confidence to speak  
With my caring voice

With my ears I can hear what's near  
I hear the trees blowing in the hot summer breeze  
I listen to the water flowing in the creek  
On the trampoline I hear the springs ring.

With my feeling I can experience what's real  
I feel the soft fur of my dogs  
I feel the safety of my family  
I feel the cool breeze of the warm spring

With my nose I smell the stinky dog sprayed with the garden hose  
With my nose I smell a blooming rose  
With my nose I scent buttery pasta  
With my nose I scent the blossoms grow

# William Sawyer

## America

I see the green grass growing  
I see happy carefree faces playing  
I see big buildings touching the sky  
I see the face of George Washington on the one-dollar bill

I hear the booming of red, white, and blue fireworks  
I hear the "Hut Hut" of the quarterback  
I hear the birds chirping in a place full of peace  
I hear nothing as a sign of true peace

I smell the barbeque sizzling on the grill  
I smell the neighbors having spaghetti for dinner (I wish I could have some)  
I smell the smoke coming from the grill  
I smell fresh green grass

I taste the barbeque  
I taste the hot dogs  
I taste the burgers  
I taste the steaks

I feel the gentle breeze blowing across my face and body  
I feel the lake water drowning my worries away  
I feel the comfy pillow knowing that I will rest easy  
I feel content knowing I'm in a safe place

Liam Crenshaw



## Akshay Gaddamanugu

### Dale Will Race Again

Dale woke up one day in a pool of disbelief. He had just lost his contract from a big car racing team just because he had failed to win. He had gotten unlucky too many times: running out of fuel, wrecking his car on purpose, and crashing himself.

Dale has been walking around like a lifeless man for the four weeks since his contract was ended. Struggling to support his family without a paycheck, he has become the laughingstock of the NASCAR community. He can't begin to express his emotions of disgust, betrayal, and embarrassment as he watches his eleven years of hard work go down the drain without even the slightest bit of monetary compensation.

He had been so happy when he got that phone call from Max Wever Racing two years ago. But now, after no wins, only four top five finishes, and six top ten placings in 234 races, MWR finally ended his contract.

Dale and another driver, Alex Byron, decide to go out to lunch on one miserable day. Dale explains how he felt cheated when Max ended his contract. Suddenly, a young boy walks up to Dale wearing a #99 hat: the same number that Dale used to drive. He asks Dale for an autograph, exclaiming that Dale is his favorite driver of all time. Dale feels his frozen heart thaw. It's been so long since he's seen one of his fans.

Dale's phone starts ringing, and as he pulls it out of his pocket, he finds that it's from George Benson, a famed NASCAR team owner. George tells Dale that he has been looking for a driver to replace driver Chad Chastain in one of his cars. Dale can't believe it! He has found a car to race again, and he can finally do what he loves.

## Lucine Carsen

### American Dreams

#### Part One: Living

I wake to the sounds of chatter and clattering plates. Rubbing sleep from my eyes, I roll from my thin mattress onto the floor and yawn. Immediately the smells of cumin, onions, and fava beans alert me to the presence of food. *Mmmm, breakfast.* After stretching some more, I step barefoot over the sleeping form of my youngest sister, Zayna, and brush aside the small curtain that separates the two rooms of our house.

“Aisha, come help me cook.”

I walk to the tiled counter by the rusty sink and hand my older sister, Leena, the bowl of beans. She takes them and scrapes her plate of chopped onions into the mix. Behind me, my mama talks with my grandmother as my twin sister, Raja, reaches through a crack in the window to feel the temperature of the air.

“Hot, hot, and more hot, as usual.” Raja hops down from her perch on top of a broken chair. She pushes her messy hair out of her eyes and sighs.

“Syrian summers suck,” adds Leena as she turns towards the ancient stovetop, long black hair swirling behind her. I watch her as she sets the uncooked *ful nabad* on top and turns the squeaky knob.

“No kidding,” I say before I’m cut off by a shriek from the bedroom.

“Amir! Get off! If you do that again I’ll leave you out for the dogs!”

I turn to Leena, who rolls her eyes and continues watching the pot of *ful*. A moment later, Zayna storms through the curtain and flops onto the chair. Amir, my six-year-old brother, tramps in with a mischievously happy expression on his face and proceeds to give Zayna a big, innocent hug.

“Get off me, Amir!”

“Children, calm down. There’s no need to fight.”

Naturally, the words come from Mama. She talks in that cold, detached voice when she’s tired or stressed. No wonder she’s stressed right now. My baba, my father, is across the ocean in America while we’re still trying to survive in ISIS-controlled Syria. He’s dreaming American dreams, and so are we.

“Mama, the *ful* is ready.” Leena brushes a strand of silky hair away from her face and sets the bowl on a mat on the dirty floor. Mama walks over with several spoons in hand and kneels down in front of the bowl. Leena sits down next to her and Amir jumps into her lap with a giggle. Raja, Zayna, and I all flop down next to Leena and our grandmother, our *Teta*, stiffly crouches her way down next to us.

Soon, we’re shoveling spoonfuls of beans and broth into our hungry mouths. *Yum*. We eat and eat, and I can see the disappointment on my siblings’ faces when there’s nothing left in the bowl. The *ful* always disappears much too soon.

“Mama, is there anything else to eat? I’m still hungry.” Zayna sighs at the empty bowl before Mama gulps down her last mouthful and speaks.

“Zayna, you know we don’t have anything else right now. You ate all the *mamounyeh* left from yesterday’s breakfast.”

“*Uuugh*. I wish food was unlimited.”

Raja lifts her head. “Good luck with that.”

Mama taps her long fingernails absentmindedly on the side of the bowl before speaking. “Well... we may have better luck soon. Earlier this morning the neighbors brought in a letter from Baba saying that he’s got everything set up in America. In a week he’ll be back so we can *finally leave the house*.”

The idea that I can’t makes me spit. I hate being cooped up just because I’m female. They won’t let us go outside without

a male guardian, even to get food or water. Raja and I have to take turns sneaking out to the well. I hate imagining what it would be like if we were caught. And Mama won't let us take any other chances, so we have to rely on our neighbors to bring us breakfast and dinner. But food costs so much, so I have to be grateful for them. And I am, even though the only reason they're doing this is because my baba saved their lives years ago, when the fighting intensified. But now, hopefully it will all change. I just can't wait to see my baba again.

## Part Two: Leaving

"Baba, are we there yet?"

"Be patient, Amir. We're getting closer."

I pull my *abaya* tighter around my frame and sink into the back seat of the car as we roll past the group of armed men, who can't seem to take their eyes off us. Our neighbors lent us this car, and it has no air conditioning. We women are being cooked under our black *abayas*. I glare at Amir with envy. I dreamt that, in America, we wouldn't have to wear *abayas*. I hope it turns out to be true. I can't stand being forced to wear these things, especially when I don't even believe. But don't tell anyone; they'll *literally* kill me.

I feel the pull of the men's glaring eyes. They stare at us with frowning faces and I try my hardest not to stare back. It's just not fair. I glance at Raja's frowning face, the only part of her not covered in thick shapeless fabric, and immediately know she's thinking the same thing. Amir is maddeningly oblivious to the situation and begins to hum a made-up tune. Apparently it's a very loud tune. I ignore him and focus on my feet.

Before I know it, we're waiting in furnace-air to board the plane, which looks a little too old to be safe. Not that *anything* is safe near a war zone. I turn away from the plane and towards the rest of my family. Baba and Amir look almost

like they could fly compared to us, once again turned into solar ovens by our *abayas*. By the way Zayna squirms I can tell she's on the verge of one of her fiery outbursts, so I discreetly nudge her before striking up a quiet and random conversation to take her mind off it. I hope the men behind us don't notice my words.

Boarding the plane was uneventful, and now Raja, Leena, and I are crammed into two airplane seats as we begin to take off. I've never been in a plane before, let alone one blasting off into the sky like the falcon that used to live outside our home, flying by our window every so often. I already miss that beautiful bird.

I press my face against the window and watch as the cracked runway races backwards. Raja squeezes my hand. She's as nervous as I am. Meanwhile, Leena turns backwards to ask Baba a question. I think she's trying to pretend that she's not scared. *Just like an older sister.*

I turn back to the window. My breath fogs the glass and my stomach plummets as we lift into the sky. My legs seem to drop off while the rest of me is pushed back into my seat. Just before we reach the clouds, I see a billowing mass of brown dust rise into the air from the city below.

### **Part Three: Landing**

I step out into the airport and there are too many sounds and colors to take in. People of all different shapes, sizes, and colors. People who look like me. People who look like no one I've ever seen before. Leena's eyes begin to sparkle. She rips off her *abaya* to reveal American jeans and a T-shirt.

*Where on Earth did she get that?*

"We're free!"

Then she switches to the only English phrase I've heard. The one that Leena has been obsessed with for weeks.

"Welcome to America!"

I turn away as Mama berates Leena for acting so “crazy.” I see Leena hurriedly wrap her *hijab* around her head before I zone out and listen to all the chattering coming from families around us. I don’t hear any Arabic, which is surprising even though it shouldn’t be. Everyone else speaks in sharp, clipped words. Probably English. Then another sound almost apologetically finds my ear. I look over to see my grandmother crying.

“Teta, why are you crying?” I suck in my breath. I’ve never seen my Teta cry. She shakes her head and manages to lift her arm, which makes a shaky circling motion. But Teta doesn’t say anything. Instead, Mama approaches me.

“Don’t you see?” She pauses to sigh. “Just leave Teta alone for a moment, Aisha.”

“But...” I don’t finish my sentence. I sit down in the nearest chair and barely notice the soft, smooth feel of it against my palms before Leena flops down next to me.

“You know why Teta is crying?”

“*Laa*. No.”

“She’s free for the first time in her life. And... and we just left a war zone. You saw the explosion as we took off. If we were still in our house that could’ve been what finally killed us.”

I let the words sink in. Then I rip off my *abaya*.

The lady at the counter smiles at all of us. A stranger has never smiled at me before. *Weird*. She hands us the bagels, then Mama steps forward to take them with strange money in hand. Never have I seen a woman step forward to take the food, let alone pay for it. *My world has officially inverted*.

Zayna pulls on Mama’s arm, who turns to me and speaks in Arabic.

“Aisha, go take Zayna to the bathroom.”

*What...?!*

“But Mama, we can’t go anywhere without a male guardian... shouldn’t Baba come with us?”

*Please don't be a dream. Please be real. Please be a real American dream.*

Leena turns to me. "This is *America*. We're not under the control of ISIS or some other nonsensical rights-restricting power-hungry... freaking terrorist group. Don't you love the word 'freaking'? It's just so American!"

*Who is this American teenager and what has she done with my sister?*

So I take Zayna to the nearest bathroom. Walking with only Zayna, I feel light... loose... I think the word is *free*. I pull off my *hijab* and toss my long thick hair. I imagine it blowing behind me like in that commercial I saw once as I take Zayna's hand. I never believed in Islam, no matter how hard Mama and Baba tried to make me. And now I'm in a country where that's okay. I love Syria, but I think I already love America too. Syria isn't *all* war and corruption and restrictions, I can't help my exhilaration at finally getting away from it. Maybe when the fighting stops I'll go back. But not soon. I feel too free. An American girl would probably laugh at me feeling so free and self-important walking to an *airport bathroom*. But I'm not an American girl. I'm a Syrian girl who dreams American dreams.

\* *This story won a National Silver Medal in the 2020 Scholastic Art & Writing competition.*