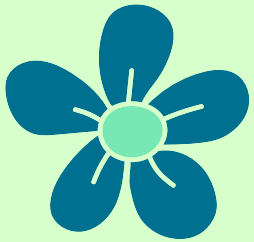


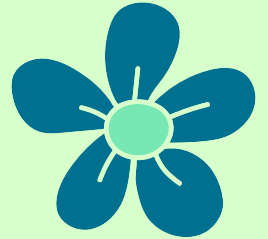
ISSUE #18

JUNE 15TH, 2026



Wildflower Post

Newsletter



TODAY'S WRITER

Amelia Zhu

Zhuoqiao Zhu (Amelia) is a 13-year-old international student at BASIS Bilingual School in China. English is her second language. She writes about the cold spaces in apartments and the things people keep for no reason.

The Man Who Fixes Toasters as a Hobby

AMELIA ZHU

I have forty-seven toasters.
They are in my garage.
My wife left because of the toasters.
She said you can't fix them all.
I said watch me.
She watched. She left.
The toasters are still here.

This one is a Sunbeam from 1954.
The heating element is a coil of lost conversations.
When I plug it in, it hums the song my grandmother hummed
while she ironed my grandfather's shirts.
He died in a toaster accident.
That's a lie. He died of a heart attack.
But the toaster was there.
It was a toaster from Sears.
It had a lever that stuck.
He made toast. He ate the toast. He died.
The toaster did not kill him.

But it was the last thing he touched that wasn't a person.

I bought that toaster at an estate sale for \$3.

It's in the corner. The lever still sticks.

This one is a modern toaster.

It has a digital display.

It says *ERROR* in green letters.

The error is not mechanical.

The error is existential.

The toaster knows it was made to be replaced.

The toaster is depressed.

I understand the toaster.

I spend my Saturdays taking toasters apart.

The screws are tiny. The screws are the size of my patience.

I line them up on a magnetic mat.

The mat is from Harbor Freight.

The mat is also depressed.

Everything is depressed.

Depression is not a mood.

Depression is the default setting of all appliances manufactured after 1991.

My therapist says why toasters.

I say because they are simple.

She says nothing is simple.

I say toasters are. Bread goes in. Toast comes out.
She says you don't eat toast.
She is right. I don't eat toast.
I just fix toasters.
I fix them and I put them on a shelf.
I never plug them in again.
The fixing is the point.
The fixing is a prayer that something broken can be whole.
The prayer is not answered.
The toasters are whole. But they are still toasters.
They do not thank me.
They just sit there, chrome and patient,
waiting for the next thing to break.

Last week I fixed a toaster from 1982.
It had a bagel setting.
I do not eat bagels either.
But I pressed the lever.
The heating elements glowed orange.
The color of a sunset I saw once in Arizona.
I was happy in Arizona.
I was happy for three days.

Then I came home.
The toaster was still broken.
I fixed it.
Now it is not broken.
Now I am not happy.
But the toaster is not broken.
That is a kind of math.

I will keep fixing toasters.
I will die in a garage full of toasters.
Someone will find me.
They will say why.
They will not understand.
I will not be there to explain.
But one toaster will be on.
A single slice of bread will be inside.
The bread will be burned.
The smoke alarm will beep.
And someone will finally change the battery.
That is my legacy:
one functional smoke alarm and forty-seven toasters
that work perfectly
and are never used.

The Chair That Faces the Wall

AMELIA ZHU

The chair that faces the wall is not for time-outs.
It is for looking at the crack in the plaster.
The crack is shaped like a river in a country I made up.
The river has a name that means I am still here.

It is for looking at the crack in the plaster.
The plaster is from 1972. The crack is from 1987.
The river has a name that means I am still here.
I named it after a sound my kettle makes.

The plaster is from 1972. The crack is from 1987.
I have sat in this chair for three thousand hours.
I named it after a sound my kettle makes.
The sound is a whistle that never arrives.

I have sat in this chair for three thousand hours.
My spine has learned the shape of the fabric.
The sound is a whistle that never arrives.
The wall has learned the shape of my breathing.

My spine has learned the shape of the fabric.
The fabric is beige. Beige is the color of waiting.
The wall has learned the shape of my breathing.
The crack has grown a centimeter since Tuesday.

The fabric is beige. Beige is the color of waiting.
I waited for a letter. The letter came. It was a bill.
The crack has grown a centimeter since Tuesday.
I measured with a ruler from a school I no longer attend.

I waited for a letter. The letter came. It was a bill.
The bill was for a service I did not request.
I measured with a ruler from a school I no longer attend.
The ruler is wooden. The wood is splitting.

The bill was for a service I did not request.
The service was called being alive.
The ruler is wooden. The wood is splitting.
I taped it with tape from a drawer that also contains a single shoelace.

The service was called being alive.
I did not sign the contract. The contract signed me.
I taped it with tape from a drawer that also contains a single shoelace.
The shoelace is from a boot that fell apart in 2009.

I did not sign the contract. The contract signed me.
The chair that faces the wall is not for time-outs.
The shoelace is from a boot that fell apart in 2009.
I keep it because throwing it away would be a decision.

The chair that faces the wall is not for time-outs.
The crack is shaped like a river in a country I made up.
I keep it because throwing it away would be a decision.
The river has a name that means I am still here.