

young voices 2014

magazine of teen writing and visual art





His Blood

Tennesha Skyers, age 19

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Welcome to *Young Voices* 2014

Careful—the publication you're holding is precious. Within its pages are the aspirations, musings, rants, raves, and reveries from teens all across the city of Toronto, bound in poems, stories, drawings, and photographs.

Young Voices magazine is an annual publication dedicated to the work of Toronto's emerging artists. It provides an unbarred canvas for teens ages 12–19 to showcase their talent, get their voices heard, and experience the thrill of seeing their work published.

Every masterpiece you'll find in here has been selected by a team of teen volunteers and their Toronto-based writer/artist mentors, who pore over hundreds of submissions in order to pick their favourites for publication. It's never an easy process, and sometimes we simply receive too many amazing works to fit in. But it's always an incredible journey through the hearts and minds of our city's teens, and we hope you'll enjoy exploring this anthology as much as we did compiling it.

Hearty congratulations to everyone who got in, and a big thanks to the volunteers of the selection team!

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FRONT COVER ART

An Ecological Footprint

Angela Dong, age 14



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Something Growing

Trees are set aflame with her burning sight, and she rolls onto her front, onto the cold soil, quenches her fire in the dampness of the dirt.

Smouldering eyes and blood ignited,
she lurches unsteadily to shaky feet,
and there is something growing in the cracks of her skull,
in the curve of her spine
something curled and red with blood
where the spiral of goat horns emerges and
there is something,
something there,
pupils that glow in the shock of the night and
teeth that are bright with pain.

She blinds and deafens in the struggle, curls into a crouch.

There is something growing
in the rains that whisper 'fear her',
something growing
with the fury-fuelling Bacchanal and the
palms
she presses
to the bloody soil,
something growing in her wicked snarl and the pale empty body quaking
in the moonlight, brought to blister,
and she – drunk with her own enigma – smiles
wolfish and feral,
something growing that animates an anger
(her anger)
and fills the forest with her fire.

Nuurd Tadevosyan, age 19

March 7. Friday.

PA Day. Beginning of March Break. Went out to see a movie with my friends.

My dad woke up earlier than me, as usual. It would make me happy to see him in bed just once. I spent the whole day inside.

As I left the house at five p.m. I saw him under the car working. Not his face. Didn't see that.

I deliberately walked over to try and see it. Couldn't really. The car frame was blocking me.

Came home at ten thirty p.m. There he was standing. I saw it. I couldn't say much. Just went back into the house. Then when he finally came in and took his shoes off for the first time that day, I saw it.

His face was so dirty from work. I knew it. Didn't have to see it to know.

And there I was at four p.m. worrying about the shape of my eyebrows.

That dirty face brightened a little when it asked how my night out with my friends was.

My heart broke.

Nancy Wu, age 17

Untitled

sticks to you
will
haunt you
sticks to you
will
love
you

Yianni Sotiropoulos, age 13

Hidden

It cannot
tell my story.
I am myself.
Not anyone else.
It's not my
skin, mood or history
that defines who I am.
I am a peacock...
...hiding my exotic feathers.

Carolyn Wang, age 13

Untitled

There
By the corner
There
My fear stands
Here
I stand still...

Farhan Haque, age 13

Her Gaze



Clairine Mudita, age 17

It's Only the Sound of Your Footsteps, Darling

The path had no end but I knew that it had a start. As the white fresh snow seemed to be everywhere I looked, the things that were familiar to me weren't anywhere to be seen. I had to admit that I was lost. I tried to cover any sign of panic, but whether or not I appeared to be panicking was of little importance, for there wasn't anyone in these woods. Well, except for me. The sole sound was the trudging of my feet. Turning around didn't seem to be an option because my feet appeared to have a mind of their own, they walked without a destination in mind and with no plan of turning back. I felt as if the snow might swallow me if it wanted to, take me away from existence and leave no trace that I ever walked the earth. It would turn my little human body into ice and my fingers would have no use anymore. With these thoughts in my mind, I hadn't realized that the clattering of my teeth had come to a stop, and that the wind had become more forgiving. My eyes had been glued to the movement of my feet but as I lifted them I found that the snow was slowly giving way to flowers and other signs of life, just like the dead winter would make way for the fresh start that spring promised. I stopped. My feet made the same continuous movement as I started spinning around while raindrops ran down the shape of my face. My unstable feet threatened to lose hold of me while the skirt of my dress twisted around my legs. This was spring. The sound of birds that took away the silence of the forest and the addition of colours that made your eyes crinkle and your mouth smile. My eyes opened once again and I had to shield them from the sunlight that blinded me. Despite my reluctance, I began to walk again, curiosity getting the better of me. Suddenly my pace quickened and turned into a desperate run. I got what I had wanted, heat so thick in the air that it made walking a nightmare and the sound of laughing children in the far off distance accompanied by the sound of waves. It gave me misleading hope, that there was an end to the trees and that it would open up to what I called home. All I had got in return was the falling of leaves the deeper I found myself in the forest. I knew that winter was waiting for me and my feet once again had a mind of their own because no matter how hard I tried they kept to their pattern.

Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot.

And right there a lone thought rested in my mind: Some things in life are inevitable.

Angela Jelic, age 14

A Romance with Nitrogen

I jumped off the roof of a skyscraper in the centre of the world. My initial approximation of its height was like saying if angels smoked cigarettes the earth is too small for an ashtray.

I jumped, flying headfirst down.
It took only four floors to regret my choice
so to not get bored I looked into the rooms.

In one, a field of poppies was in bloom,
heroin addicts laughing on the balcony.

The room below was empty
save the sounds of love.

Below that a girl baked apple pies,
the cores and burnt failures thrown outside.

People fought and screamed, danced and cried with joy,
while I flew by, a mere spectator.

Sometime halfway I was no longer alone,
a boy like a tumbleweed keeping me company.

We talked for a while, the orange orchard floor marking
our first laugh.

From the balcony greenhouse of a florist he stole orchids,
my first gift from him.

His tale was a strange one:
a loveless wedding planner writing happy endings, trying to
write his own
by romancing the sky.

Under the windows of an African poacher
our first kiss occurred,
as intense and hungry as the stuffed lion.

From the jeweller's workbench he stole a gem ring,
proposing to me mid-flight.

We realized too late
the asphalt was eavesdropping, our vows muffled
by its tar tongue.

Margaryta Golovchenko, age 16

The Fairytale Therapist

"And that's what happened!" the girl cried into her palms with her elbows resting on her knees. She flung her head back into her leather wingback chair and stared at the ceiling. "Ugh! It wasn't supposed to end this way, Marceline!" she whined at the woman across from her who was sitting in an identical seat. Marceline listened to the girl as she moaned and sighed, all the while taking notes on her clipboard. After about a minute, Marceline decided to try and communicate with her dramatic patient.

"Calm down, Princess Sarah. Things like this, they happen in all kinds of fairytales these days. Do you remember the article in the papers a couple of months ago about that lumberjack who mugged a poor little girl, and didn't even save her from getting eaten by a wolf? You're not the only one out there."

"You're my therapist, so are you trying to make me feel better, Marceline? 'Cause it's not working. Plus, I couldn't have read the papers then since I was still locked in my tower!"

Marceline sighed and reviewed all the notes she had taken on the princess and her wild behaviour. When she finished reading, she looked up to see that Sarah was in tears. Although she hated to make her more upset, Marceline had to continue to talk about Princess Sarah's hurtful incident. "So, Sarah, it was the dragon right?" Sarah sniffed and nodded. She played around with her silky pink gown trying to not make eye contact with Marceline. "Don't worry, dear, it was just an accident, I'm sure. Nobody meant to kill anyone."

"But he did it on purpose! He did! I saw! I... I..." Sarah began to tear up.

"Okay, okay. I believe you. We've run out of time, but this first session was good, better than some of my other patients. Before you go, Sarah, would you mind putting me in touch with your narrator? It'll help me assess your problem better."

"No, I... I guess I don't mind. Here's his number." Sarah handed Marceline a small card of paper with a telephone number on it. She wiped her face with her sleeve and made a wet cough.

"Thank you, Sarah. See you... Thursday, I guess?"

"Sure." Then Sarah turned and went out the door, sniffing slightly.

The next day Marceline had scheduled a session with Princess Sarah's narrator. The door opened and in walked a man in a suit and bow tie. He sat down in the same chair that Sarah had sat in the day before. Marceline had her clipboard out as usual ready to hear Princess Sarah's story from a different point of view. "Hello Mr. Narrator3461. Good to see you. I'm Marceline."

"Good to see you, too. So, I'm guessing this is about Sarah's story?"

"Yes, there is a certain part in it which she definitely did not like. She told me her story but I feel that it was very biased and partly untruthful. Could you tell me more about the incident?"

"Of course." The narrator pulled out a book from a little briefcase he brought with him. "I'm just going to read the problem point: the dragon battle. It most certainly did not turn out as I had expected."

"Go ahead." The narrator turned to the middle of the book, cleared his throat, and Marceline clicked her pen.

The knight ran through the long corridors of the abandoned, maze-like castle. He held a broadsword in one hand, and in the other gripped the delicate hand of his beautiful princess, Sarah. As they ran, they spoke to each other.

"Handsome knight! Your hair flies like golden spray! Your chest plate shines like a full moon! I could ask for no better man to save me from my tower!"

"Most beautiful maiden! How could I resist rescuing a girl so fair? But I hope no fear I bring when I say there is a final task I must perform to prove my worthiness."

"And what might that be?" The two ran around a corner into a huge, dimly-lit dining hall. They both stood still, trying not to make a sound, not to breathe, or move a single muscle.

Two large green eyes appeared in a dark corner and then came forth a mighty dragon with wings like no one has seen and claws like curved sabres. The knight let go of Sarah's hand and cautioned her to stay away. He removed a shield that was strapped to his back and secured it onto his arm. "I must slay this evil beast and send it back to the underworld!" The knight dashed forward, brandishing his sword. "Have at thee! Monster!" He slashed back and forth at the dragon's snout, dodging the flurries of flame it spat at him. "NO!" Sarah screamed. In shock, the knight turned around to see Sarah, but the dragon's tail smashed him into the wall and he was motionless. "Sir Knight?! Are you alright? Please say something!" the princess cried.

Tears rolled down Sarah's cheeks as the dragon began to approach her. The beast looked down at helpless young Sarah, but did not move. There was silence for a moment, aside from the princess whimpering. Suddenly, the knight reappeared on top of the dragon's head and drove his sword right into the serpent's skull. The dragon roared ferociously, then fell to his side and the knight leapt off the dragon's corpse. The princess was terrified. "Oh my goodness!!! Georgie!!!" Sarah ran towards the knight.

"My lady, my name is Sir Edward," the knight said slightly confused. Princess Sarah ran right past Sir Edward and up to the corpse of the dead dragon. She embraced the lifeless dragon and sobbed uncontrollably. Edward, awestruck, went up to the princess, but dared not touch her. "Sarah? What's going on?"

"What the heck, Edward! You killed my pet, Georgie!"

The narrator sighed and rubbed his eyes. He glanced up at Marceline who had at least three pages of notes. "Yeah," he said awkwardly. "So the rest is basically Edward trying to apologize to Sarah and get her out of the abandoned castle."

"Alright then... good to know the full story." Marceline was genuinely surprised. "Well this will be interesting on Thursday."

Katherine Cogill, age 13

A Seed's Breath of a Miracle



Helena Zhang, age 13

Who?



Sunny Zheng, age 17

veins

he was clear poison
hiding under a cloak of transparency. she
drank him in & mixed with cheap wine she didn't
taste a poisonous presence until she was addicted
to the paralyzing way in which he flowed
thick through her veins, suffocating.

it was a rough ride & she
bruised easily, purple flowers
blooming up her sides
(he watered them each day).

& yet he still pulled her gently up
off the ground when everyone else had gone back to their dance
& they stole smiles between soft kisses, unpreventable, like
tears making their way from stubborn eyes to flushed cheeks.

Hannah Bussiere Kim, age 17

Ephemeral, after A. Van Jordan's "Afterglow"

e-phem-er-al adj. 1. Short-lived or lasting only very briefly,
esp. with regards to objects or beings found in nature: as in
the rose in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, or
the ephemeral lavender of a smoggy city sky as it looks in the
fleeting afterglow of sunset.

2. A passing bodily experience, as of the first soft bite of
strawberry or the breathing of after-rain, and always evading
capture: that cotton, the press of these sheets / those hands /
those knuckles ghosting across the contour of these shoulders /
laughter / trembling / and we dream, eyes open / swimming in
the quiet of this room.

Edmee Nataprawira, age 19

Flight

She is a swan. The feathers of her tutu are weightless – she
could fly if she wanted to, she could leap through the sepia
sky and find herself among the stars. She holds her existence
on five toes in what she believes to be a perfect arabesque. In
the photo, you can't tell that they're hardened, calloused toes.
You are unaware of the black, broken nails on each foot, the
bones that rearrange themselves unforgivingly, the numbness
that commands every thought. This is the illusion given by
the delicate, glossy shoes, the elegant slippers every girl-child
dreams of. But do you care? Does it matter what's behind the
scenes, what happened before, what happened after?

You can see the house in the photograph, a sunny place
nestled among friendly palm trees. She is dancing on a
sidewalk. *Foolish*, the neighbours say. *That girl is always
dreaming*.

She doesn't hear them. In that moment, she is elegant, she
is serene. She isn't thinking about money, about boys, about
the war. She is somebody else in that moment; she isn't even
human. Her presence draws her fellow escapists towards
her. They giggle, they are young. These are her ballerina
friends, girls just like her who have always wished to fly, but
have settled for dancing instead. They say it's less risky: like
dreaming instead of doing.

They are all decked out in their tights and leotards. The
close-fitting clothes cling to their skin in the tropical air. They
complain with flamboyant hand gestures and roll their eyes in

self-pity, but nobody suggests stopping and doing something
else. They help tame each other's hair into somewhat neat buns
without being too gentle or too rough. This is an occasion for
something more than ponytails: somebody brought a camera.

"*Dui zhe xiang ji kan!* Look at the camera! *Ah Hui, ba shou
tai gao yi dian!* Ah Hui, lift your hand a bit," the photographer
orders, "*Dui le, dui le, jiu zhe yang.* That's perfect."

"*Lun dao wo le!* My turn now!"

The girls should have been working or helping around the
house or doing whatever good daughters do. But they tend to
be absent-minded – they are, after all, only sixteen. They dance
with fluttering hearts until the sun fades and the real birds
grow silent.

They don't know that one day the Japanese will leave them,
a trail of blood in their wake. They don't know that one day
they will celebrate the independence of a new country and sing
"Majulah Singapura." They can't imagine that one day all of
them will quit dancing in favour of more useful pursuits. They
will get hitched, have kids, pay for the kids' dance lessons and
watch their little swans strike arabesques in studios with better
air conditioning.

My grandmother gave up ballet a long time ago. She no
longer searches for flight, but for shoes for her hammertoes.

Kathleen Chen, age 16

A Reality of a Dream

The wasteland that separates dreams from reality is quite different than what most people believe. It is dead, dry, and empty as reality can be, but has tones of light and touches of beauty that we dream of. When nightfall approaches, we can see this land. The dark, dirty, and grey space that reaches out to no one, forever. When the clouds cover the shining moon, the light seems to come from a source that does not exist. A forced gale of wind blows across the empty space, and then it appears. The light, like a star, it drops from the sky so slowly, it is hard to tell if it is moving or not.

Slowly, the source of the light touches the ground, leaving the sky dark and cold. It blinds all around it as the light slowly dims, until all that is left is a small glowing stone on the ground. The colour of the stone imitates a blazing fireplace on the coldest night of the year, or a small orange kitten with a new red bow in its fur. Until even that fades, leaving a small grey stone on the ground. All is normal – except for the land around the stone.

Peeking up from the hard dirt are millions of shards of grass. They grow more and more allowing other plants such as wildflowers of every colour of the rainbow and different colours that do not exist in our world, to grow and wind their way through to the sky. Soon the wasteland is no longer grey or colourless, but instead a beautiful never-ending field that reaches for the sun, and touches it.

When the clouds fall away, revealing the brightly glowing sun, you are left wondering which side of life is actually reality.

Alice Kazal, age 13

Empty

George had just woken up from a bad dream he couldn't remember. He looked over at his clock and saw the numbers blinking. The power must have been cut. "5:27," it read. *Five twenty-seven what*, George wondered. *Five hours and twenty-seven minutes since the power's cut, that's what*. But when had the power been cut? He didn't know. And he had taken out the analog since the ticking was too loud.

"What time is it?" George asked.

"Time to get a watch," Mark said. He was tired. Apparently it was George's shift now, so Mark was getting into bed.

"Good night to you."

"Good morning."

A tall man was passing through. "Why are you taking shifts?" he asked.

George thought. No one had asked him that before. "Well, Mark is sleeping, so I'm on my shift."

"But why are you taking shifts?"

"Well, I can't work the whole day. What time is it?"

"Why do you work at all?"

"I saw it in a movie once. I wanted to try it."

"Why did you choose this?"

"Because Mark chose the other."

"I see."

"Want a piece of gum?"

"No, it makes me feel empty, you know?"

The tall man continued on his way.

A young man now stood where the tall man had stood before.

"What's yours?" George said.

"Manager wanted?" asked the young man.

"Yes, you should go for it. What time is it, by the way?"

"Why don't you go for it?"

"Are you related to a tall man?"

"Sorry?"

"Nothing. Best of luck." He didn't offer the gum.

He probably doesn't need it, thought George.

At home, Nicole was making dough from flour. "We're making dumplings," she explained. "I want to celebrate New Year's again. Turn on the television, will you?"

George picked up the remote and sat down on the chair, since he knew Nicole would want the recliner. They had just celebrated New Year's Again last week, but he knew not to mention it. Nicole laughed at the screen. It was a children's program:

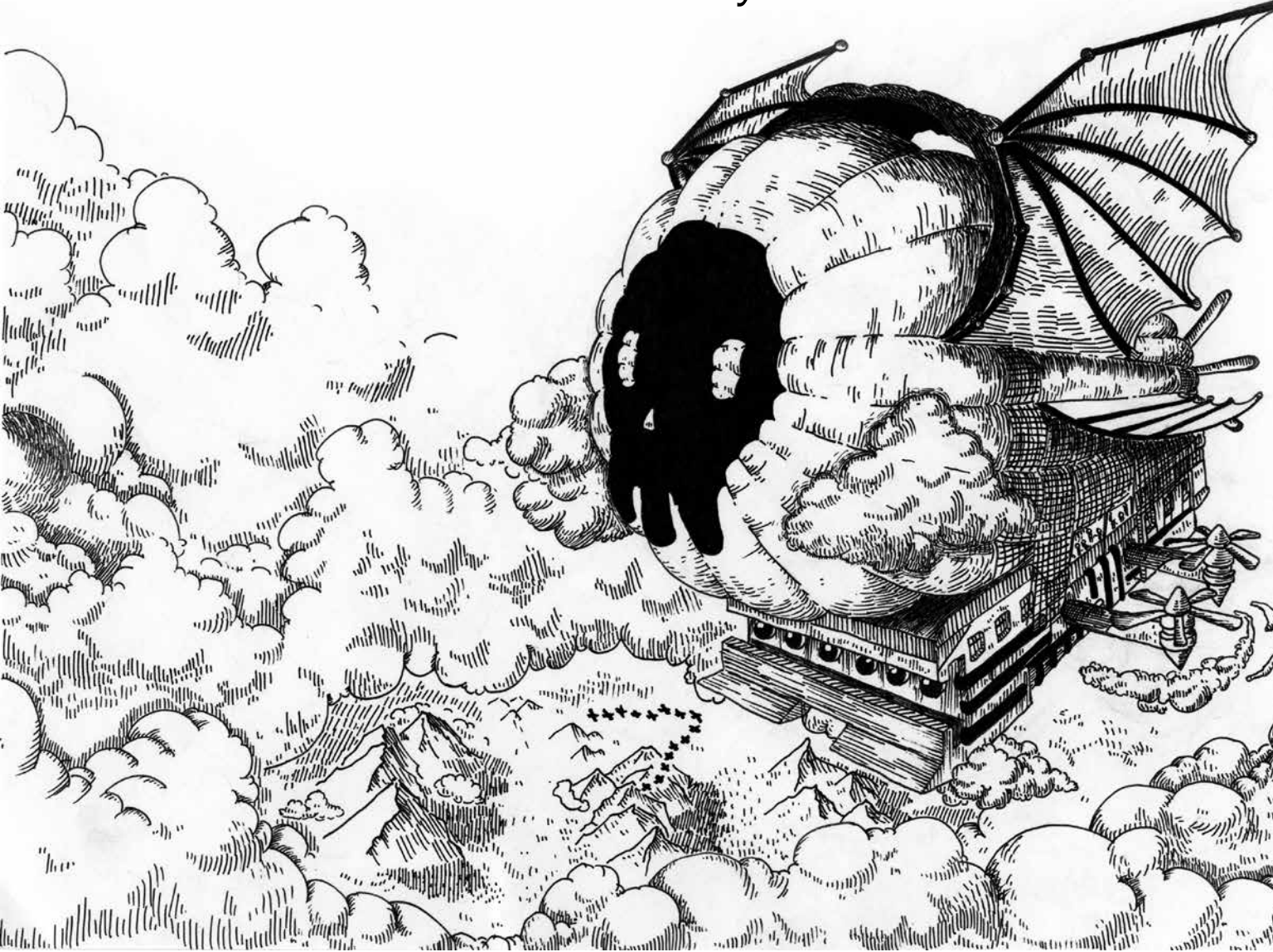
How did it get late so soon?

He couldn't figure it out—

George sighed and looked back to the screen.

Henry He, age 17

Above the Sky



Sida Guo, age 18

Fade

The cold rain poured down on Erin mercilessly as he sat precariously perched on the balcony of his apartment. Everything seemed to be numb in the rain. Erin shivered as a breeze seemed to chill his very soul.

It had been three months. Three excruciatingly long months since Mya had taken her own life. How could he not have known? He had so many questions, but he was afraid of the answers. Pain like this was unreal, unimaginable. To have someone so dear to you just leave. Erin had known that Mya didn't have an ideal childhood, or family, but he thought – no, he hoped that he was enough. Was he not? The answer was apparent and the truth was the worst part of his pain.

Sometimes, as he would go about his daily routine, small, subtle remnants of Mya would plunge Erin back into a darkness no one could ever overcome. Things like an old hairpin of hers, her favourite song playing on the radio, a poster for her favourite band.

It hurt.
So much.

It felt almost as if Erin's rib cage were being torn in two as someone carved his heart out with a spoon. Nothing mattered. Every hope, dream and aspiration he had ever had before was now dead.

In this time of darkness, Erin began to seek solace in the bottom of shot glasses, the butt of a cigarette, or the glint of a blade against his flesh. Destruction begat more destruction: the more he smoked, the more he cut; the more he cut, the more he drank; and the more he drank, the more he smoked. This vicious cycle etched its mark on Erin's body, mind and soul. Everything was falling apart at the seams. He soon quit his job, and seldom left his apartment, rarely sleeping, eating, or keeping in contact with friends and family. Erin's elder brother Adam decided to check up on him.

One night, as Erin was attempting to sleep, he got a call. Not feeling like engaging in any form of human interaction, he let the call go to voice mail.

"Erin it's me, Adam. Look... I heard about what happened... I'm really sorry. We haven't really heard from you, and Mom and Dad are starting to worry, I'm worried. Give me a call if you want to talk, okay? I'll be in town around the eighteenth so I'll stop by sometime, alright?"

The machine cut him off as Erin let out a half-hearted sigh. He and his older brother were on good terms, but he just didn't want to see anyone anymore, especially in the state he was in. Closing his eyes he hoped and prayed that sleep would take him, but insomnia always won the battle.

In order to make the time pass when he couldn't sleep, Erin began to write. He remembered that Mya always kept several notebooks with her. Before, he could never understand why, but now he knew all too well. Once on paper, his inner demons either faded into fictional ink lines or became an ugly reality.

Day 34 with no sleep; 3:17 a.m.

~Insomnia~
{A losing Battle}

I'm tired.
I just want to close my eyes,
And never reopen them,
But,
My eyes refuse to close,
My mind refuses to sleep,
My soul refuses to rest.
I'm always awake,
Even in my dreams I have no peace.
Don't I deserve tranquility?
But,
I'll stay awake,
Forever if I have to,
Until I know that,
When I drift off,
I won't be washed away in the tide.

As the war within Erin raged on, he felt as though he was being pushed further and further toward the brink of insanity.

Nothing was enough.

In an act of impulse influenced by his drunken insomnia, Erin sought to join Mya.

He went to the balcony, and sat on the railing. Erin had spent most of his days like this, but never had he thought of jumping. For a moment, he thought of going like Mya did; instead of breaking herself on pavement, she left her beauty unblemished, except the gashes on her wrists.

Erin remembered the day he found her, cold and lifeless coiled up on the ground. Her hands folded as if she was in prayer, a prayer for those she had left behind. He took out his switchblade, his only companion in the darkness. Bringing the blade across his already marred wrists, Erin realized he couldn't. He couldn't go like this, not like she did. He felt he didn't have the right to go the way she did.

He went to the roof of his apartment complex. With no shoes, proper shirt, or sense, he walked out into the cold night air. The scent of rain and pollution filled his lungs. He walked to the edge and looked at the world below. The rough pavement scratched his bare feet. As he leaned forward, he felt his pulse quicken and his stomach flutter.

Suddenly, he felt alive.

Erin looked once again at the world below him. He remembered Mya, her smile, laughter, the way she bit her lip when concentrating, he missed everything, so much. Was she the reason for his loss of sanity, the absence of his very humanity? No. The answer was no. He was always this way, deep within him, but Mya's death was like the grain of rice that tipped the scales.

.....

Let's Go For a Run

"My..." Her name seemed to echo from within the depths of his being, how long had it been since he spoke?

"Erin!" he heard a voice call. He turned, looked at his brother.

"Adam." Erin's voice came out hoarse and dry.

His brother walked toward him.

Erin reached the very edge of the ledge.

"Don't," Adam said, looking at his brother; the pain in his stormy eyes mirrored Erin's own from only a few months ago.

"Don't stop me Adam, just leave."

Adam took another step toward Erin, speaking to him as if coaxing a child to come home. "Listen, I know you're hurting, I know you blame yourself, but it's not your fault, Erin, please, just talk to me."

Erin threw back his head in laughter, a hollow, bitter laugh that broke the silence of the night. "What a caring brother I have." Erin's sarcasm bit like the cold air. He looked into his brother's eyes once more. There he saw a mirrored image of what he could have – no, should have been. He thought about Adam, who was happily engaged, working his way up to his dream job, and yet Adam could understand, more than anyone, Erin's mind at the moment.

Concealing his concern, Adam turned his eyes back to their usual stoic gaze. He held his hand out to his younger sibling, the sleeve of his jacket riding up a bit, showing the old scars of his. He too once found comfort in blades, but had turned from that path.

"Erin, you know that I know more than anyone else that there is a way out, in time the scars do fade. I owe this to you."

Erin recalled the memory of throwing away his brother's stash of razor blades, but that was long ago. Surely, he thought, this was his fate.

"I let you save me, now let me save you."

With a look of uncertainty, Erin stretched out his own hand and grabbed his brother's.

~FADE~

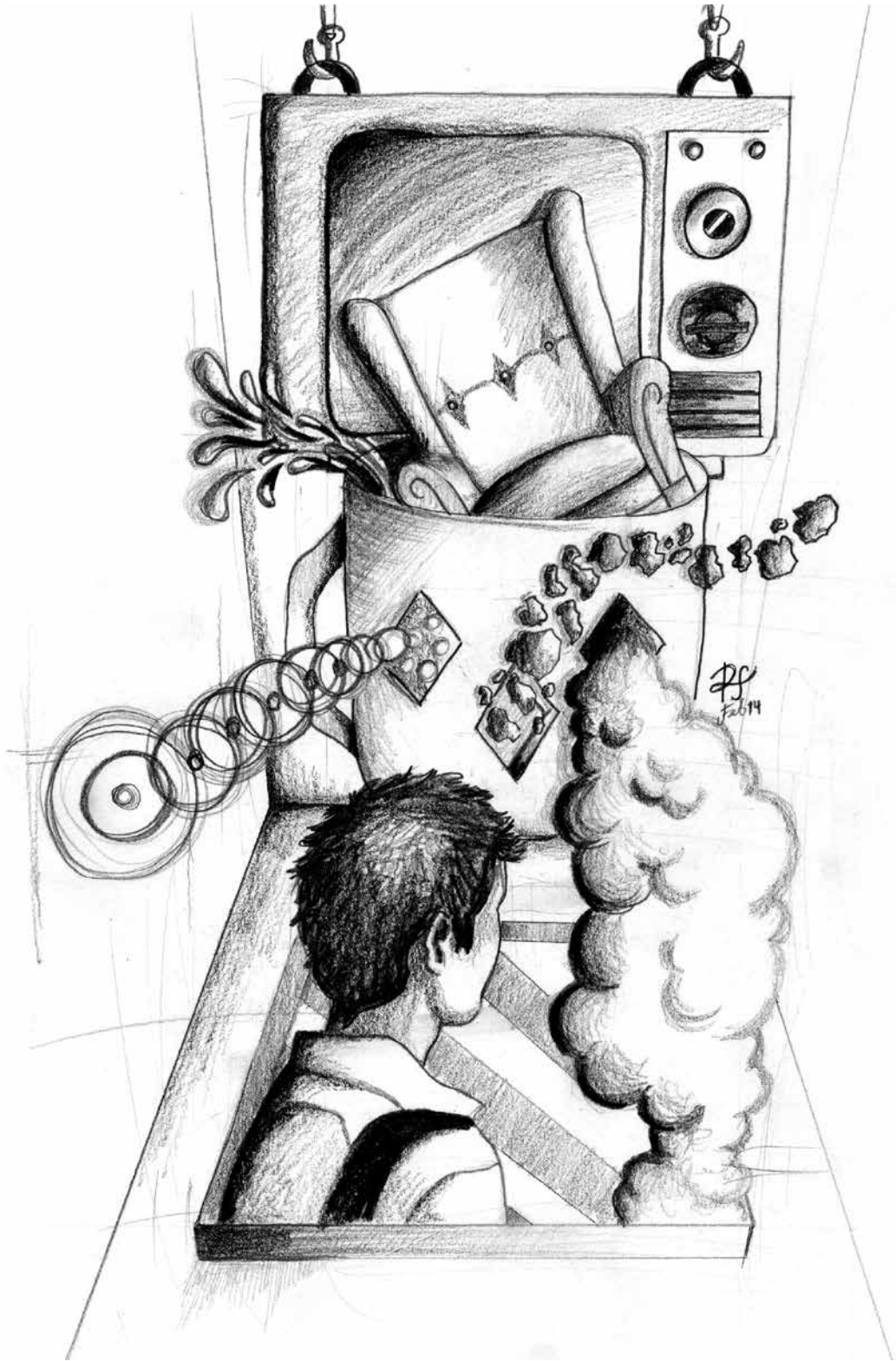
Slowly,
Inevitably,
The scars will heal,
The pain relieved,
The memories forgotten.
Your colour will bleed,
Into my monochromatic world,
Your song drowned out by the silence,
Your image twisted and distorted,
Until it is no longer yours.
Eventually,
Hopefully, my darkness,
Will FADE
Into a new light.

Faith Alfonso, age 14

I exhale slowly
as I bend down to tie my shoe.
Bunny, bunny, cross, loop, tighten.
Exhale.
Switch legs.
Bunny, bunny, cross, loop, tighten.
Exhale.
I rise slowly and am almost surprised to find
someone looking at me.
Not much to see:
thick thighs, round hips,
and hair in a tight ponytail,
slicked back with one of those headbands
everyone seems to wear when they work out.
I snicker.
Who does she think she is?
Her lip curls and I realize
she is copying me.
She
Is
Me.
The mirror in front of me remains unchanged,
but I swear my reflection
narrows her eyes and places a hand on her hip.
"Oh yeah?"
she seems to say, but with a blink...
she's gone.
And I'm left alone with my
thick thighs,
round hips,
and headband
that everyone who doesn't work out seems to wear.
I glance at the couch,
as I put it off for yet
another
day.

Dunja Tomic, age 14

Another Side



Laura Sanchez Reyez, age 18

The Other Side of Me: A Look Inside the Trials and Tribulations of Guilty Pleasures

Once upon a time, a time you and I know all too well, a time of obsessive Nintendo DS gaming and trading cosmic brownies for Dunkaroos at lunch, I was put to shame simply for liking a singer. It was 2008, and I was in Grade 6. I was with some friends, just "hanging out" (the term "playdate" is a faux pas after Grade 4, apparently) and they somehow got a hold of my second generation iPod nano. You know that sinking feeling you get in your stomach when your friends start scrolling through pictures and texts on your phone? You know... the feeling that your friends will search into the deepest crevices of your phone for your most disgusting selfies? Well, I did not have that feeling. In fact, I was feeling pretty confident about my eclectic musical tastes; I had everything from Abba to 3OH!3. Prepared to receive critical acclaim for my wonderful selection of punk-pop and Taylor Swift songs, I was very surprised when my friend gave me a strange, almost disgusted look. "You still listen to Hannah Montana?" She said this as if I had committed a crime on humanity, or eaten the last slice of pizza. "Um, yeah. Her songs are really catchy..." I replied. More disapproving looks, and then awkward silence. I was completely distraught. When did Hannah Montana stop being cool? I guess I never got the memo (ba-doom-cha). She sang songs that seeped deeper into my soul than anything else on the radio. The Best of Both Worlds was the anthem of our generation, or so I thought.

I promptly deleted anything "uncool" or "unpopular" from my iPod including all Disney Channel Original Movie soundtracks. Goodbye Cheetah Girls. See you never, *High School Musical* 1, 2 and 3. The only way I could listen to these wonderful songs without being caught was on YouTube, which was not easy to navigate as a naïve eleven-year-old. These songs became "Guilty Pleasures," because, while I enjoyed them with every fibre of my being, I felt guilty listening to them for fear of being judged. After having some years to reflect on the situation, I have come to the conclusion that guilty pleasures are downright stupid. Celebrities are constantly asked what their guilty pleasures are. Many answer with reality TV, or even chocolate. HOW DID CHOCOLATE BECOME A GUILTY PLEASURE? WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE LIVE IN? Before I get too emotional about cocoa, here is a simple guide on how to handle being confronted about specific "guilty pleasures."

i) Music

As mentioned above, I was criticized for listening to teen pop sensation Hannah Montana. In my opinion, Hannah Montana/young Miley Cyrus was a great performer and really understood my feelings/emotions when I was in elementary and middle school. "Nobody's Perfect" was a revelation and changed my

whole perception on life. I am still criticized on occasion for liking pop music, which is silly because pop music is FUN and CATCHY and makes people SMILE. Like whatever music you like. If alternative-rock/indie-pop crossover makes you happy then so be it, and anyone who tries to tell you different is clearly insecure about their own iTunes library. As a wise man once said, "Don't let the haters stop you from doing your thang."

ii) TV/Movies

These are extremely common guilty pleasures. Reality TV is notorious for being "unintelligent," but realistically, when you are sick at home with a fever, you are not going to watch middle-aged men conduct science experiments on the Discovery Channel, you are going to watch *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, or *Long Island Medium* if you want a spiritual TV-watching experience. Same goes for movies. Kitschy romantic comedies on Lifetime are easy to watch, and always end in the way you want them to. They are best viewed whilst eating a box of chocolates and crying, a la Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde*. Anyone who pretends that they do not watch or have never watched any of the aforementioned TV shows/movies is a liar. That is all.

iii) Food

The idea that food could be considered a guilty pleasure is an abomination. Junk food should not be considered unusual or something to feel guilty about. As for "weird food combinations," everyone has different tastes, and this is what makes us all unique human beings (I am your grandmother/Martha Stewart/Oprah). If people look at you strangely for eating weird food, then you can look at them strangely for eating normal food. Food is food, easy as that. Just remember that Gus from Disney cartoon *Recess* ate peanut butter and pickle sandwiches every day for lunch, but that was ok, because he had a shining personality and what he ate did not define him.

To conclude, don't feel guilty about things that make you happy. They are just things you like, and odds are that other people like these things, and you will bond over these things, and maybe even get married to one of them one day. Well, I'm getting a little ahead of myself, but I hope that you all listen to Miley Cyrus's "The Climb" and dip French fries in ice cream and have many, many, many *Hoarding: Buried Alive* marathons.

Hannah Ziegler, age 16

Ellipses



Angela Gu, age 16

The Song of Seasons

A clap of thunder in the distance during
spring
lightning slices through thick gray clouds
like a plastic white fork
sinking into soiled balls of cotton
flowers fight with every fibre
to crawl out of gaps
in the muddy wet ground
earthworms bathe in the cool sunshine
their sightless eyes smiling in the early
warmth. Raindrops
clean and virgin from the weeping heavens
fall heavily onto the greenery of the planet
butterflies break through shells of hard cocoons
promising the world
another chance to change.

The crickets welcome
summer
with soothing songs of sweet music in the humid darkness of
the night
the moon declares a clear day to come and the rain is hot and
sticky and soft
as it makes the air... the grass... the trees
thick and damp and dense
the sprinklers happily shoot off cold water
in every direction and giggling
children slide on the slippery lawn. Squeaky clean
like freshly scrubbed hair
a dog barks, a bird sings, a person laughs,
yet the sun laughs hardest at the victims of its heat.

Autumn
brings back memories of hurried backpacks
lost lunches and decaying apples
the leaves fall off the trees in wisps
and curls of mahogany
gold, red, orange
faded greens and sickly purples
line the curbs and streets
wind creates small whirlpools of foliage
twirling around the pavement in rustley silence
they dance the dance of
autumn
and sing us off to sleep.

Death falls upon planet earth as it holds in its fruits greedily
all living things rush to hide away in a deep sleep
a torpid peace and silence
and a temporary demise as the
merciless world snatches life from life.
Snow marks the beginning of winter and puts an end to all
living
who dwell here. The terra firma is frozen solid
unable to move. The trees, bare and helpless,
allow the soft snow to caress their branches
with love and with hate. Leftover dead grass
pokes its head
through the first snowfall. Looks like stubble on pale
skin. Until the razor of winter slices it off and silences it
with a final huff of its breath.

Nilufer Gadgieva, age 16

Beautiful

I wish I could get ready in front of a brick wall.

The light from the lamp shines on my bald head. I am Chrome Dome. My blond hair used to cascade down my back like honey dripping from a spoon. Each morning I brushed it, feeling it run through my fingers. My husband's fingers, dry and cracked from work, tangled in it. His touches full of passion, desire, and love. Soft baby fingers pulling it, sticky toddler fingers caught in it, slender teenage fingers braiding it. Now, I wrap the burnt orange headscarf around my head. It has replaced the sprays, shampoos, and gels.

"It looks great, hon. Tons of celebrities are wearing those things. You have nothing to worry about. The kids will love it!"

That was a week after the chemo started, my hair already falling out in clumps, making my disease visible. Nothing screams cancer louder than baldness.

My eyes. They are so sunken. The whites around them are laced with thin red veins. I smile, trying to bring the brightness back, but they just squish together, two little raisins.

I take out the shadow, mascara, and liner. I start with the shadow and dip my finger into the velvety powder, sweeping it along the translucent skin of my eyelids, but the poisonous purple blood still pulses through my bulging veins. The leukemia runs through every artery, every vein, every capillary in me. I carry its poison wherever I go.

I take out the concealer. The beige goo oozes onto my fingertips and I smear it over my face, cheeks, and nose. The label on the bottle says *Porcelain*. According to the lady at the department store, that's my skin tone. But the contrast between my skin and the concealer is like the squares on a checkerboard. Even the lightest shade is too dark. Too bad they don't make a shade called *Corpse*.

Should I put the blush on? The label says *Pink Orange Blossom*. Who comes up with these names? How can an orange blossom be pink? But maybe it'll add some tint to my concave cheeks.

A cloud of powder invades my nostrils as soon as I open the container, closing my throat and making me sneeze. One sneeze shoots a spray of blood out of my nose, and bright red specks dot the ivory of the bathroom sink.

I gag on the particles. Plunging my fingers down my throat, I scrape out the residue. When I can finally breathe, a different reflection stares back at me. Red blotches stain my cheeks and forehead, a trail of blood snakes down from my right nostril, nearing the corner of my lips. I poke my tongue out and taste it. Salty, diluted. The strong iron taste it used to have is gone.

I splash cool water on my face and watch the blush, shadow, and concealer swirl down the drain. I uncap a fresh stick of ChapStick and apply it to my cracked lips. My watch reads six

forty. Ten minutes ago I roused myself from bed, yet I feel as though I've just worked an eight-hour day.

I peek from behind the doorframe of the bathroom and see the silhouette of my sleeping husband, his curves like hills in the bed. Leaving the bathroom, I trudge to my dresser. The carpet beneath my feet strains my calves, and the muscles scream in protest. Fucking poisoned blood can't even let me walk across my bedroom. Cancer is ruthless.

Years of memories reside in my dresser drawers. The underwire bras I used to wear on Saturday nights now tear my rice-paper skin. The dozens of suits I used to wear to work hang like ghosts. I reach for my sweatpants but snatch my hand away when I see the black satin bra with the pattern of little red hearts.

"I'm not sure if I can wear this. What if my mother finds it?"

"She won't. Trust me. And even if she does, I'll take all the blame."

I hit him playfully; he falls to the floor, taking me down with him.

Muscles straining in protest, I wrap my arms around my back and hook the bra clasps. My breasts swim in the satin cups, not even a shadow of cleavage appears on my chest, but the feeling of my husband's hands palming the warm, healthy flesh beneath the fabric lingers.

"You're so beautiful." He unzips my wedding gown slowly, savouring the tan flesh beneath the fabric.

I turn, smiling at him.

"You're the only person I know who can smile with her eyes. It's among one of your many talents." He chuckles and pulls me close, one hand tangled in my hair, and kisses me.

"Are you okay? Honey? What are you doing?" His strong hands cover my shoulders and he gently shakes me.

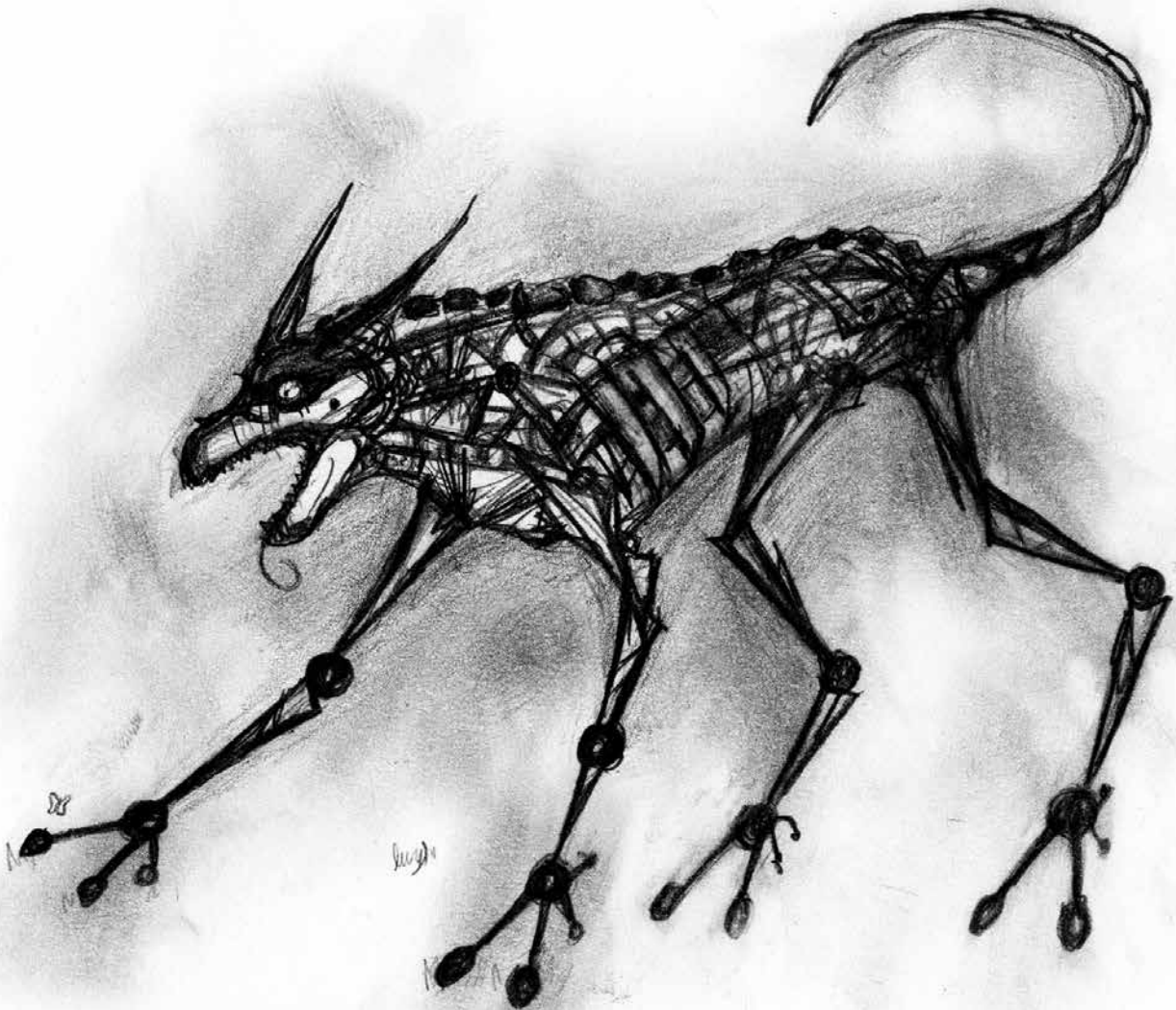
My eyes snap open. I am face-to-face with my husband, his eyes ablaze with worry and pity. The pity hurts the most.

My knees tremble, about to snap under the weight of my body. He senses this somehow and hitches my arm over his shoulder; one of his arms supports my back, the other curves around the backs of my knees, and he lifts me effortlessly. He cradles me like I used to cradle our children. The heat from his body radiates through me, lulling me to sleep. Through my heavy eyelids I see his features soften and I feel his hand gently pull off the head scarf, smoothing over my hairless scalp. His fingers trace my cheek and along the hollow indent where there used to be full flesh. He kisses my ChapSticked lips and carries me effortlessly to our bed.

Beauty was never what he loved. He loves me.

Maddy DeWelles, age 17

Arcane



Helena Gervasio, age 13

Push

Along the wide highway
Push made his way home
His empty pockets sagging
A hidden burden making him moan

Somewhere in the darkness
He heard the sirens blare
The ring was fast approaching
But this time he didn't care

He wouldn't hide in the bushes
He wouldn't even run
He knew this was as dangerous
As sticking out a thumb

As the car pulled up beside him
The young boy didn't blink
The way the cop looked at him
He didn't know what to think

The cop smiled warmly
With a smile white and bright
Let me take you home, son
Looks like you've had a long night

He stepped into the car
And out of the piercing cold
"Where you headed?" the cop asked
With no intention to scold

The rez up the road, Push answered
And the silence became heavy
The cop didn't say a word
But he suddenly seemed unsteady

The wheels began to slow
As his heart began to quicken
The cop was pulling over
As Push's stomach started to sicken

The cop turned around in his seat
And fed Push the words
Which he would have to eat

Get out of my car, Indian,
Said the man behind the wheel
Get out of my car, Indian
Each word felt like a whole meal

As a Metis native he knew
That he could pass as white
But erasing his people's history
Didn't feel entirely right

Push remembered the first time
That he had been defined
Choose who you are, his teacher had said
The savage or the kind?

How can I choose to be only half of my blood?
The young Push had asked
Without it I would probably die
Fall to the ground with a thud!

The problem was that Push felt white
And Indian at the same time
He could not seem to understand
The colonizer's paradigm

Now, ten years later
His teachers are not the same
But the choices that they left him with
Incessantly remain

Push remembered how he had searched
In the lake for a different perception
But instead, all he found in the water
Was his own reflection

Skin as pale as a white rabbit's fur

Hair blond like a wheat field

Blue eyes as sharp as the morning sky

You could be white, his reflection told him
European as can be
Forget about the other half
Your secret will be safe with me

As Push stumbled out of the car that night
He tried to remember what it meant
To be an Indian in this world
Without the constant torment

He put his hand to his soft cheek
And closed his eyes in pain
The shame of hiding one half inside
The other demon would always remain

He remembered the way his mother whispered to him
When she was scared he would be taken away
But as he began to recall her words
They were whispered in Ojibwe

What was the benefit
Of being native today
It seemed to only get you disrespect
And fines you couldn't pay

Why should I take pride
If it will only bring me pain?
When I say I'm native
It always seems to rain

Push continued to walk along
Making his way back home
But he saw a girl up ahead
Who was sitting all alone

He came up to see
If she was doing alright
But her fearful eyes reminded him
That his appearance was male and white

Baakishin, he said
Open up to me, it's alright
Although the language was familiar tongue
She looked like a house without a light

Anishinaabe kwe! he said
Claim this as your place
Stand up tall for who you are
Although you might be displaced!

Suddenly, all the doubt he had
Began to fade away
The days of his hidden self
Would have to stop today

Don't you know who you are? he said
You're a beautiful Indian girl
Don't you know what that really means?
You're an important part of this world

We protect the land and people
Extremely proud and strong
I don't care what percentage I am
I'll be a Metis lifelong

Hold your head up high! he said
Do not hide your face
Wear your colours on your shoulder
The blood you cannot erase

My blood does not divide itself
Like Moses parted the seas
Inside of me is a culture, strong
More than the eyes can see

Push took the girl's hand
She looked uncertain but intrigued
Then they stood up tall together
And together they believed

I come from a line of strong warrior men
And I will protect my people
But I can balance my love for the powwow
With my love for the church and the steeple

We cannot change the things
Which have been done and said
But we can change the future
And the things that lie up ahead

Although she was still quite shy
The girl began to sing
Soft at first, then growing
Like pushes on a swing

Waaay heya
Way heya heyo
Waaay heya
Waay heya hey hiyo

The strong woman song mingled
With the roar of the cars going by
And Push found in his throat
An ancient warrior cry

He would fight to be who he was
Although he looked so white
He would always hold his head up high
Singing the songs of his ancestors' fight

Simone Blais, age 17

Emotions



Sofia Pham, age 15

The Colour Red

I promised myself I wouldn't dedicate words
To your candy apple smile.
Instead, I write letters to my heart
So it knows I'm done painting you as anything but human.
Last night I poured water into a wineglass
And pretended to drink the blood of a God I don't believe in
To see if it would give me a little faith.
I prayed for the strength to ignore
The way my heart beats out your name in Morse code every time someone mentions the word lover.
The last words you said to me still throw themselves against my eardrums
While I'm fast asleep, trying to bring myself closer
To the blurry memory of your laughter.
In school we learned about the red string of fate.
That night I tied a piece of yarn between our fingers and laughed at the way you rolled your eyes.
You told me you'd rather hang yourself with it than let it bring us any closer.
I have trouble letting go, opening my hands, showing the world my battered palms
Rope burned and bloody from trying to grip your wayward threads a little tighter.
My head is a box of memories we never got to live through.
And once I clear you out, my brain will be an empty room with our initials carved into the floorboards.
I never wanted to write our goodbye poem.
I never wanted you to be just another stanza in a string of bad metaphors.
But life has a way of making craters out of skyscraper love affairs.
And my hands still shake with the sound of ours crumbling.
So between breaths I tell myself
Maybe it just wasn't meant to be.
Maybe you were more lesson than soulmate
And lady fate is shaking her head at the both of us for being so human.

Katie Pereira, age 18

what am I?

I am not the laugh that escapes my mouth when a hand grazes my back
I am the capture of a false curve upon my lips, coerced by a flash

I am not the stark glow of the moon upon my constantly wandering mind
I am a reflection of the sun and my rare sunrise

I am not the palette of eyebags and blemishes that illustrate my face
I am a masterpiece of makeup, set as a symbol of grace

I am not the contorted figure that convulses during my sleep
I am the slender body draped across the horizon and along the sea

I am not the girl whose esteem is so low it can no longer descend
I am a photo of myself with 500 likes and counting (but I can no longer pretend)

Allison Gacad, age 15

Chee Gah Ngin

Our people, Grandpa explains in his rich Jamaican patois, an atypical dialect for his typical Chinese features, *Chee gah ngin* means *our people*. *We must never forget them. Always remember what they have done for you.* In a way, this phrase holds true for this family whose love for one another is infinitely clearer than our genetic fabrication.

My skin is mosaic of all the people who have come before me – Jamaican, Chinese, Irish, Scottish, Indian. My childhood was filled with the singsong speech from the island in the sun, the flavourful cuisine of St. Andrew and St. Catherine, and the reggae and soca riddims made world renowned by Bob Marley. Simultaneously, I grew up thrilled by the action packed kung fu movies adored by my father, my siblings and I interpreting the storyline of a dialect we never understood, only understanding that it was a romance or tragedy. I savoured the meals of my Hakka ancestors who lived their lives toiling in the southern fields. I was conditioned to understand that sacrifice and family were the protective walls of my privileged world. We were seventy-five percent orthodox Jamaican, twenty-five percent unorthodox Chinese.

The Chongs and Lim Shues came together when my mom and dad met at a party. After a customary dance and my dad's personal pursuit for the affections of my mom, the rest is history. But in a sense, they had come together long before, tied together by the same birthplace, the same ancestry, the same desire for a better future. Canada was their diplomatic refuge from Jamaica's political war. Grandma always reminds her grandchildren, *Oonuh lucky yuh see. Oonuh don't know how lucky oonuh are.* Whenever I ask Apo ("father's mother" in Hakka) why she and Gung Gung left, the reply is always the same, *We did not choose Canada. Canada chose us.*

So the story continues here in Canada where the unpredictable climate is a reflection of Mother Nature's mood swings, where liberty is morality, where the warmth of joy and love is enough to thaw even the harshest of winters.

Meet my dad, the anchor that keeps me from drowning at sea. No problem is too great for him to solve. He is my

superhero. Then there is my mom whose love is as boundless as the crystalline sky and overcomes the obscurity of any stormy cloud. She is the one who keeps my life in order. When I become a mom, hopefully I can be half the woman she is for my family too. Jaden is my fifteen-year-old sister and my best friend. She is a realist where I am an idealist and sometimes she utters the weirdest things that make me roll on the ground. She is also a big name in the taekwondo scene, a passion she shares with my dad. Quinlan is my ten-year-old brother who loves video games. He is the comedian and I can always count on him to say something witty to brighten my day. Finally there is my three-month-old baby brother, Xen, whose innocent smile reveals his toothless gums, bringing me the greatest joy. His bright eyes communicate what his mouth is learning to speak.

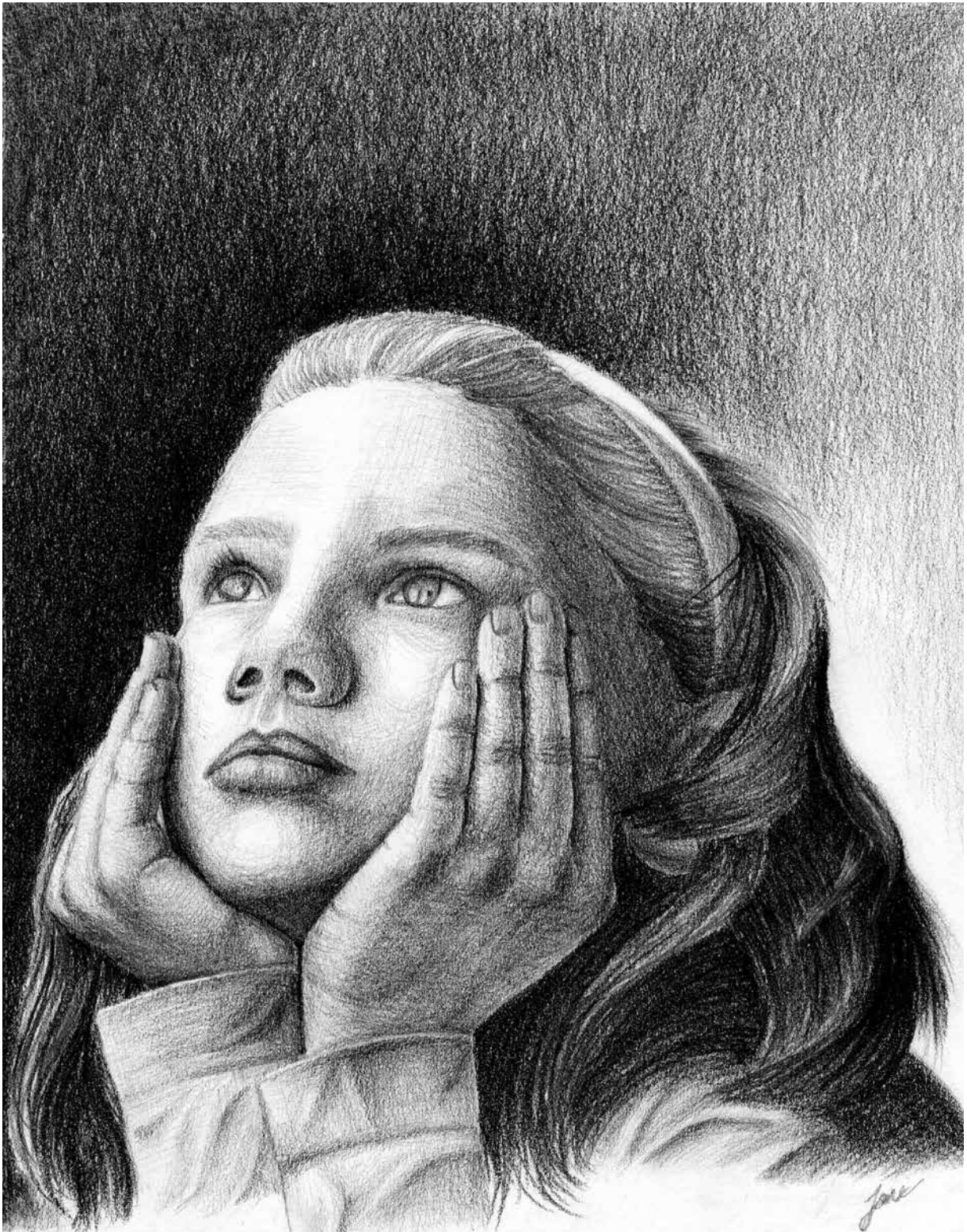
I also found family at school in a world of math equations and complex sentences. Danielle. Marissa. Kristen. They waltzed into my life in the fall and we have been dancing together ever since. We became a pack of contrasting personalities with comparable ideals, tied together by a kinship aligned by the stars. We are the dream psychologists at Kristen's house, sipping mugs of hot chocolate in her beige living room. We are the dance hall queens in Marissa's kitchen. We are the harmonies accompanying the ukulele in Danielle's IKEA furnished bedroom. Our party is High School Musical karaoke, playing "Just Dance," and the five a.m. chats about nothing and everything. This is our *Adventure Time* and we are Sailor Moon's sidekicks. Together we live in a dream. Reality cannot catch us as we chase idyllic passions and pursuits, for we are life's naive lovers. Together we are infinite. Together we are the reckless. Together we are the wild youth.

My family captures my quixotic heart, nurtures my impractical mind, and builds me up to be all I can be. They are the cornerstones of my heart.

This is my family. These are my people.

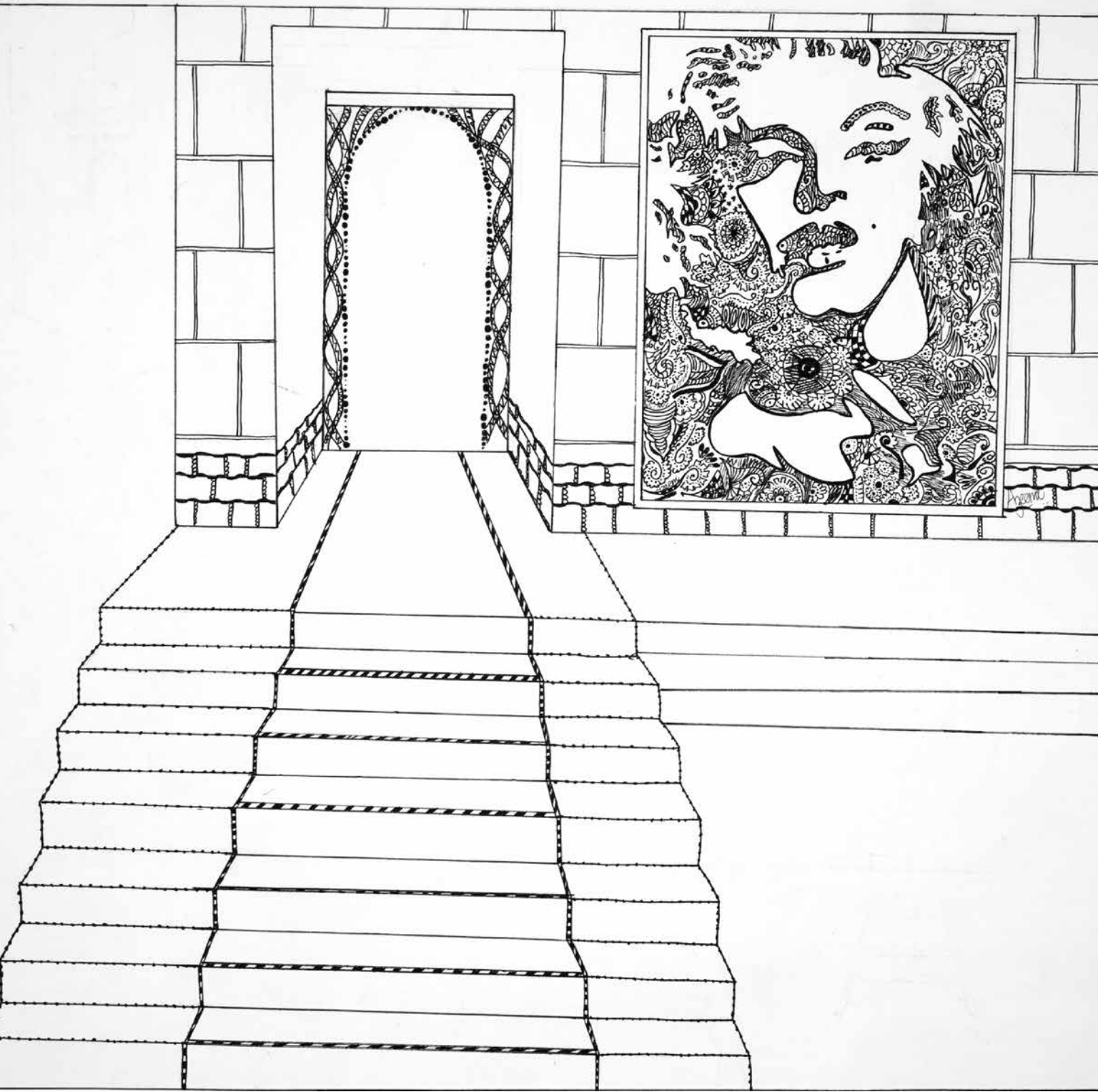
Grayson Chong, age 17

A New Perspective



Jane Li, age 14

Untitled



Shamama Azeemi, age 18

Unique

They say we are all unique, each different from that of which we came from; each smile and every sparkle of the eye, nothing is ever completely the same. They tell us to express it, the differences between us all that they taught us to find. She wanted to be different; as different as the girl in the mirror, yet she wanted to be the same, because the “different” they taught her always seemed too similar. She learned that it was best to not be *too* unique. Only be the different they thought was acceptable, only be as different as you could be, while you remained the same as every other “different” person.

They teach us to be creative; to make things seem like so much more than what they are. She also wanted to be creative, to make up her own ideas. She wanted to believe that mirrors weren’t just mirrors and that one object could become everything. She wanted to tell people about the universe on the other side of the mirror, the universe that had another person on the other side, always stopping her from entering, as it copied her every move. She wanted to tell them that the harder you tried to enter the portal to that other universe, the easier it was to break it, but no one listened. They all thought it was a stupid thought and told her to forget about it. It wasn’t her idea anyways... It was the idea of the girl in the mirror.

They taught her to follow the rules. To like what they told her to like, to dress as they taught her to dress. They taught her the meaning of “different” and they showed her the right kind of creativity. They told her what kind of job would be the most acceptable for someone like her, and that any thought outside the thoughts they told her to have was stupid. They told her she was free, but not once in her life had she ever escaped the feeling of being caged within the walls of what was acceptable.

Sometimes, she watched the person past the portal; she stared as it imitated her and waited for a mistake in its copying. However, its movements never faltered. The girl who sat in that white bed wearing exactly the same clothes as her, doing the exact same things as her, saying the exact same things she did, but was so much more – *different* than she was, so much more *creative* than she was. She felt like a copy, she felt exactly the same; she was only as much as *they* told her she was. They were the voices, the voices of people who didn’t like her. But she refused to believe that all her life she had been wrong about the girl in the mirror. Still, it doesn’t matter, does it? Because this is not her story, it never was.

This is a story about a girl; a girl who people thought was strange when she was young. This girl was too unique, too creative, and too much for the other children. One day, as she stared into the mirror, she listened to the others talk about her. She sat there as her friends critiqued the way she dressed, the things she liked, the way she acted, and her dreams for the future. As this little girl grew up, she learned to hide the things others thought were strange, things that made the little girl who she was. The words of these people continued to echo in her mind without relent, so she changed. She became who the people of her world wanted her to be, polite, hardworking, and the same as everyone else.

But as she sits in front of the mirror, the same one she has had since she was a child, she pretends that she never had to change. She pretends that her reflection is the only one who has had to listen to the rules *they* told her were correct. She pretends that this story is about her reflection and not her; that way it doesn’t hurt as much when she realizes...

She’s exactly the same.

Czarain Laqui, age 13

The Glass Globe

She has a glass globe, a glass globe that contains her dreams along with her ambitions, her stories along with the memories, and her soul along with her truest inner self. It is her own delicate inner world that helps to define who she really is in the past, the present and the future. This globe shines beautifully under the lights, reflecting vibrant colors that can burn one's eyes.

One day, she ventures into the forest, the faraway place that always radiates a mysterious glow, in order to satisfy her natural curiosity. What appears to her first on her journey is a thick layer of mist, and like a curtain, it conceals the beauty of the forest behind. As she continues to walk down the road, the forest emerges into her view. She is stunned by this beautiful and magnificent picture of Nature. Giant trees rise above the ground and extend their branches high up into the sky, wild flowers in a variety of colours grow among the soft green grass and shift themselves back and forth as the gentle breeze caresses them. And the sweet melody sung by birds in the background makes the forest livelier. All is in such harmony and seems to welcome her arrival. So she skips happily down the tiny and somewhat bumpy path that leads deeper into the forest.

She marvels at the forest with her wondering eyes and explores its every detail to discover the magic that this forest possesses. At night, magical globes appear hanging on the tree branches and illuminating the forest in many different colours. Some that she can't even name. Glowing insects and animals accompany her everywhere and seem to understand her. As if the forest casts a spell on her, she falls in love with it, and it becomes part of her gradually.

However, all of this doesn't last. She begins to feel a powerful and intense gaze staring at her from behind, someone breathing onto her neck, soft murmurs of voices, and different scents blended into the air. It is later when she discovers that this forest is disguised as something so beautiful, but underneath there is danger. The forest devours one's soul and life

to gain magic. She runs but the vines from the trees strangle her, forcing her to stay, like so many others before her. She screams, fights, and does anything to run away from this frightening land. All fails. The forest sucks everything of hers away, like a black hole, leaving her with nothing but a life like a piece of blank paper.

When all of her is gone, she is released, and she knows that at the moment the vines strangled her, her glass globe shattered, and came crashing down. This leaves her in the depths of despair and trauma, and nightmares will haunt her.

In her nightmares, she screams out: "Help, don't hurt me," and pleads to the forest. And the sound of her screams echoes through the silent night but is left unanswered. Tears trickle down her face. Then she wakes up and crawls up with her arms wrapped around herself. She stares into the darkness. She thinks it has come clearer and clearer: everything that is in her mind; and she dreams that she can run but she can't escape.

She manages to pick up pieces of her glass globe and put them together, piece by piece. She carefully places them back into their original places to form her glass globe even when the sharp edges of the glass globe make countless number of cuts on her fingers. However, when the glass globe is fixed, cracks are clearly visible showing the state of what it once had been: broken pieces. Her glass globe is never the same nor will she ever be.

As time passes, she locks herself inside of her glass globe and never journeys too far outside because she fears that she will get hurt and cause her glass globe to crash again. After all, she only has so much strength to hold it together. She becomes isolated and detached from the world, but the world still moves on. Now, looking at her glass globe, she sees that it no longer reflects who she used to be. She sees a pale girl living in a world that always has the blinds drawn, and she sits in the darkness accompanied by two tear-dried eyes observing the world in ceaseless motion, without her.

Xinyu Wei, age 13

The Poetic Instinct

Sonnets do not simply appear like leaves on plants growing from store-bought seeds because my pen, it bleeds when I am injured, battle-worn and weary.

My pen, it drains on a page all my bottled rage and pain from battle wounds till the only mementoes of agony I felt are the scars left behind.

For as I compose, the ink, it flows from an ocean of one part suffering and two parts creativity that otherwise lies frozen and dormant but deep So deep it puts to shame the Marianas Trench.

Samin Ali, age 17

Puzzle

I am a puzzle
Completed
With all my pieces
Only to be taken apart

I am a puzzle
Wanting to be accepted
Wanting to be trusted
Wanting to be loved

I am a puzzle
So
I give you a piece of me
And another
And another
And another

Here, take my corners
My middles
And my sides
Take my everything

Until
In the end
I am nothing more than
A mere puzzle piece

Completely incomplete

But
You
You throw them away
You throw away all my pieces
All of me

Now I am
Fragmented, foolish, fragile

Don't worry, though
You wouldn't be the first one

I'll pick myself up
Bit by bit
Little by little

All the pieces
All the pieces
All the pieces
Of me

And finally
I am whole

Or at least
For the time being

For I am a puzzle
Completed
Only to be taken apart
Once again

Natasha Zaman Anita,
age 16

Reflection

There was a monster in my room.

It wouldn't hide under my bed like regular monsters. This monster didn't flick the lights off at random times. This monster didn't steal all my belongings, or howl at midnight. This monster was worse than that. This monster hid in my mirror.

I could never walk in front of my mirror without catching sight of *it*. *It* was always waiting. *It* would stare at me with its wide, haggard eyes, and it would stare me down. It wouldn't blink. It wouldn't look away. It would just stare, and rake its eyes over my body.

It would take in all my flaws and insecurities.

It was cruel. If I tried on a new pair of jeans and looked inside my mirror, I would see it smiling at me. It would tell me I looked ugly, while it had layers of flab poking out from underneath its crop top and over the lip of its jeans, and arms that looked like huge, thick gummy worms. It would tell me the jeans couldn't fit me, anyways. And that the fifty dollars I spent on them was a waste.

It wouldn't leave me alone. It'd follow me around the house – I'd see it in the bathroom, in the kitchen sink, in the window, in the water. Everywhere. I'd see its different sized eyes and huge nose, the ugly splotches on its face, its chins, its oversized lips.

Everyone else could see this monster, too. But they didn't say anything. They never admitted how hideous this monster was. They'd smile at me, but I saw through it all. It was all fake, it had to be. They all thought the monster was ugly.

I was miserable.

But I couldn't get rid of this monster.

Because this monster didn't hide under my bed or flick the lights off or make noises in the night. This monster was different. This monster was in my mirror.

This monster was me.

Atiya Nova, age 15

Of Ruffled Feathers and Crackers

It pains me to admit that I was once a parrot.

A parrot with vividly coloured feathers and an annoying whistle. There was a time when I would have readily proclaimed it to the world, cawing obnoxiously at those around me. "Look at my pretty feathers!" "Look at me!" "I'm a parrot!" Now, however, having finally freed myself from my metal cage, my past is something I am not particularly proud of.

It all started on the very first day of kindergarten. Perplexed by the idea of being around other children for the entire day, I made it my duty to examine each and every one of my fellow classmates carefully. I was fascinated to find that we all looked alike – nothing to distinguish one from another, no feathers sprouted yet that would help to identify us. We were birds that hadn't yet grown wings; an entirely undiscovered specimen that had yet to be tainted by the world around us. Unfortunately, that didn't last for long. By the second hour of playtime, I was already beginning to feel bored. There was nothing for me to learn; I already knew the alphabet, the colours of the rainbow, and I could add and subtract without much difficulty. I was ahead of the class. I was "smart." And I knew it. Unbeknownst to me, a tiny feather began to creep out of the surface of my skin.

As I grew older and progressed through elementary school, I began to realize that school wasn't difficult at all. There was no challenge, no thrill, and thinking was never required. The material on tests came straight from our carelessly scrawled notes, and oftentimes were mere copies of homework questions. Being the observant little bird that I was, I caught on to that fact fairly quickly and began to memorize everything I was taught word for word. It worked. I excelled and began to sprout my very first full set of feathers. My trainers began to take notice of me, and soon enough, so did the zookeepers. They were thrilled, to say the least; they smiled jubilantly at the mention of my name, their eyes sparkling with pride. "Good little parrot," they praised, tossing me some cracker crumbs. As they ruffled my feathers gently, I puffed myself up to display my vibrant colours. I was a parrot. And I was *proud*.

Middle school came, and the scene repeated itself. I watched as the fledglings around me grew into various types of birds; there were the waddling turkeys (bless their souls), pigeons, and ugly ducklings. I observed smugly as those around me tripped and stumbled in their futile attempts to reconcile themselves with their educational careers. I was above such foolishness. All I had to do was repeat everything the trainers said word for word, and everyone around me would be impressed. It was *easy*. Failing to realize the extent of my stunted educational growth, I continued to turn a blind eye to the warning signs that began to catch others' attention.

Upon entering high school, I began to panic. I was surrounded by creatures I had never dreamed existed: phoenixes, peacocks, swans and other birds of indescribable beauty. I could not hold a candle to them, for they had all learned to do something that I couldn't: they could fly. While all the other birds had been learning how to spread their wings, I had been cooped up in my self-constructed educational cage. The realization hit me hard, and for the first time in my life, I was ashamed of myself. I had to unlearn everything I had learned throughout the past few years; I had to learn how to unlock the door to my cage.

To say that it was a difficult process would be a drastic understatement. Countless times I found myself tempted to withdraw back into my age-old habits of memorization. After all, succeeding in school had been far less time-consuming and aggravating when information was all manufactured, prepackaged and spoon-fed to me. Yet, somewhere along the road I began to recognize the fatality of my own mistake: education is far more than memorization and regurgitation. That alone does not define the learning experience, for education is not defined by the accumulation of facts. As I came to this understanding, I realized that I had allowed my preoccupation with the acquisition of higher numerical figures to overshadow my insatiable desire for knowledge. All throughout my educational career, I had been taught that the numerical figures on this flimsy piece of paper would determine my entire future. This meaningless pursuit of percentages, averages and marks caused me to completely undermine the importance of the development of my own thoughts and opinions.

The learning process was painful, humiliating, and required extensive manual force. I was forced to sit and carefully pluck out each and every feather that had ever grown on my skin. I watched as the vividly coloured feathers of procrastination, laziness and negativity fell to the floor. At first there were only a few brightly coloured feathers, but as the process continued, the feathers began to form a pile. They slowly grew into a heap. I began to apply myself at school, learning to understand concepts as opposed to memorizing them. I reached beneath the surface of the words in my textbook and examined the facts I was presented with critically. Before long, a mountain of feathers had been plucked out of my skin and I was no longer a parrot. I became what I was always meant to be – a fully functional human being with a mind of my own.

On occasion, I find my gaze drifting to the vividly coloured feathers perched on the side of my desk. I keep them there as a constant reminder of the past, a memorial of sorts. Never again will I allow my metal cage to interfere with my education, for I have no intention of ever becoming a parrot again.

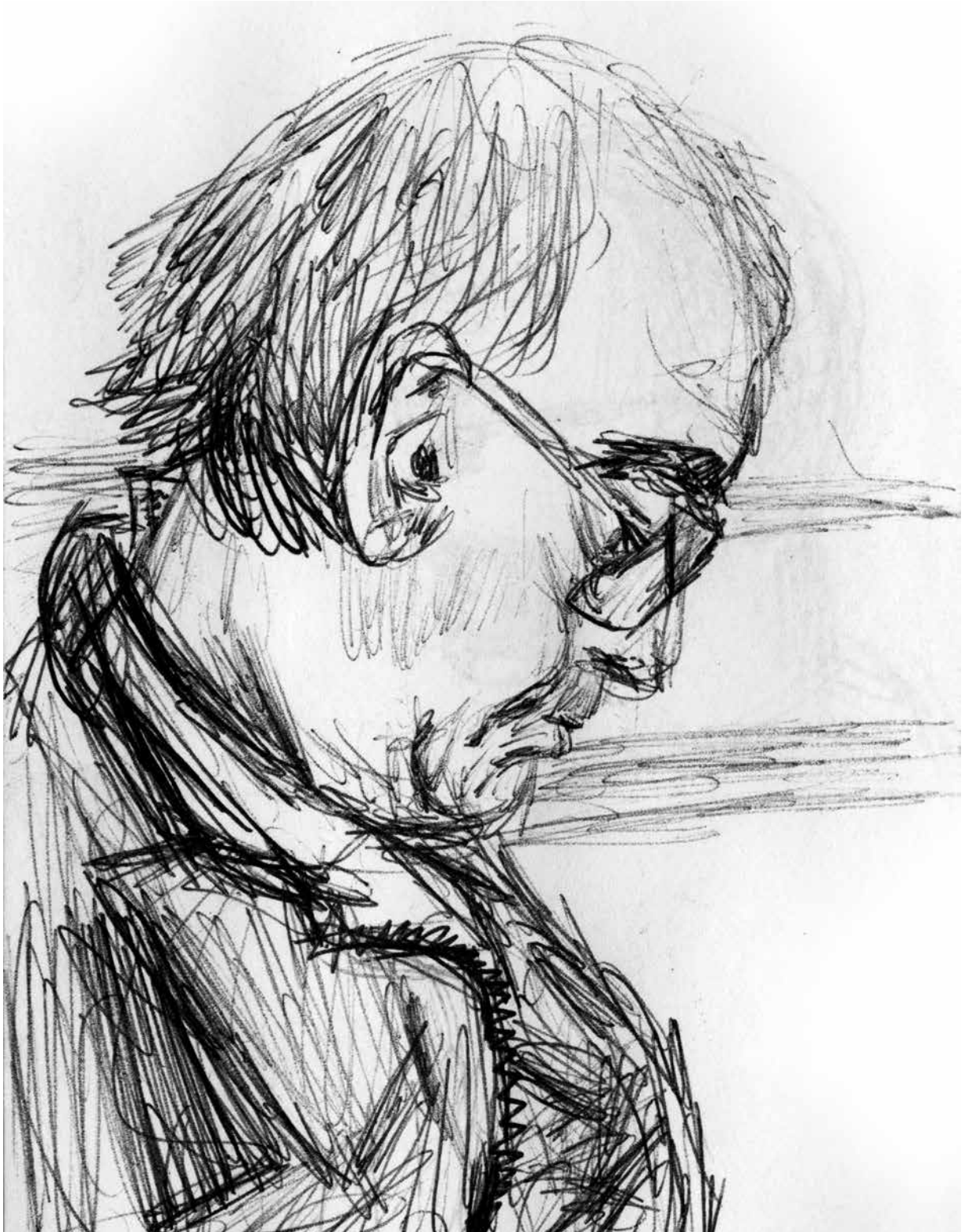
Angela Xie, age 16

Procrastinator



Sunny Lan, age 13

Snoozing on 61



Noor Khwaja, age 18

Love Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Nerd

The night was young
only 13.7 billion years old
when I strolled along the cracked streets
lined with the wrinkles of an old man
as the skies shed tears from above
They called me the ring around Saturn
spinning words as particles of ice and dust
My whole universe –
the stars, planets, galaxies, nebulas, quasars –
stood still
like the mere seconds before a hurricane
or the moment before the Big Bang
when everything was packed
into an infinitesimally small
massively dense speck
Then I met you
and my whole universe
underwent an enormous increase
in its rate of expansion
forming a soup of primitive particles
I met you
on one of the 274.92 starry nights
of the 365.26 days
of nothingness
when I sat alone
befriended by dusty textbooks
and Darwin's theories
when I found sense
in only Einstein
and reciting the periodic table
The moment I met you
our worlds crashed together
not resulting in titanic collisions
but twinkling like stars
through the layers of the atmosphere
Like radiation
you penetrated through my skin
watched my veins branch like fractals
I was baffled
by the apparent gravitational anomaly
that drew me to you

Your eyes were emeralds
rescued from the depths of the Amazon
but like black holes
as I found myself lost in them
wary of what lay beneath
Would I be facing a wall of fire
or nothing
to be stretched into eternity?
I could measure the exact frequency
of your voice
when you spoke my name
but couldn't explain what it had to do
with the number of beats my heart
produced
Your smile
like the curve of the moon
a laugh
with enough energy
to light up the world
I was tight in my chrysalis
bound by years of silence
just a scar on the face of humanity
My thoughts were in the stars
unable to turn into constellations
but you unravelled me
and I am now a Danaus plexippus
a butterfly
free
I found you
like I'm Christopher Columbus
and you the New World
Allow me to say:
you were every bit as fascinating
as the view through a microscope
Each day brought new understanding
of you
and the knowledge
that there is still far more
to discover
You traced my heart
drew a map to my soul

We were planets travelling
in well-determined orbits
forever in the past
forever in the future
We spent 274.92 starry nights
searching for Cassiopeia
and counting stars
the way you counted my freckles
all 113 of them
(don't think I never tried)
365.26 days of nothing
turned into 365.26 days
of something
It is said when you stand
at the horizon of a black hole
one minute there
equals a thousand years on Earth
and that is precisely how I felt with you
Together we fit like Pangaea
but I suppose even Pangaea
broke away once upon a time
as smiles turned into scowls
that stretched into eternity
We are planets
knocked out of their orbits
by something other than gravity
Running after you
was like chasing the clouds
even cirrocumulus and cirrostratus
as my breath caught too many times
Nimbostratus clouds
wept with me
as I spent the remaining
90 starless nights
devoted to storm clouds
and snow
pondering what happened
nary a theory

Aneeqa Tahsin, age 13

The Two-Tusked McGru

The two-tusked McGru will poo on your shoe. Now here's what to do if a two-tusked McGru decides, of his own accord, to poo on your shoe: Go running and shouting and flailing about; go screaming and yelling and giving a shout. You should call the police; they'll know what to do; the EMS also deals with two-tusked McGrus.

You'd best be scared of the tusked McGru's poo. It's toxic and poisonous and venomous, too... Did I mention the tusks, gee, holy St. Fru; the tusks of the tusked McGru will surely spear you. But only if you cross the two-tusked McGru, so whatever you do, don't cross the McGru.

The two-tusked McGru has relatives too, with sub-species, and pub-species (McGrus like to drink, too). Of the whole of the family, the second worst of them all (the two-tusked McGru prevails above all) is the blue-tusked McBlue. It's the smallest of small. But don't let looks fool you; though it may be small, it can beat the opponent no matter how tall. If you make the mistake of stepping on him, because it hasn't been researched (out on a whim) you should run for your life, and fear for it, too. The blue-tusked McBlue plays for keeps, but do you?

The two-tusked McGru lives in many a place. He might live in a cranny on the cheek of your face, as the two-tusked McGru doesn't take up much space. Of all the places, the two-tusked McGru, he favours the warm, just like me or like you. You could find him in Jamaica or Jarmagalgalflue, flirting with baristas, judging from the poo on their shoes.

Its pub-species, for Flu's sake, don't let them near you; the smell of their breath is like poo on your shoe. You were reading this poem, so distracted were you? In the midst of your reading you missed the two-tusked McGru, it came, and then it went, and left poo on your shoe...

Landers Gordon, age 14

the moon's song (la chanson de la lune)

the fat moon swallows
the yellowing day; her belly abloom
with stolen light & she moans & the city's night bleeds
from her black bassoon (the racoon's
hysterical laughter sweetly serenading
the groan of sirens)
marooned cigarettes & their owners shoot
red ashes glowing starly as plump streetlamps ooze
gloom around themselves, sculpting their goddess in navy blue,
& the couples croon
comme est la beauté de la Lune!
the tattoo of lifeblood beaten in 3/4 time on aching chests
comme est la beauté de la Lune!
& sweetly the moon's night song can be found in closed rooms.

Maya Watson, age 18

freedom in fast cars and shiny things

the houses in my grandmother's hometown
lean off the cliff side and
hold their secret in the bluffs

dresses on the clothesline swing and soak
up sweet sun and fade
the dogs outnumber the people

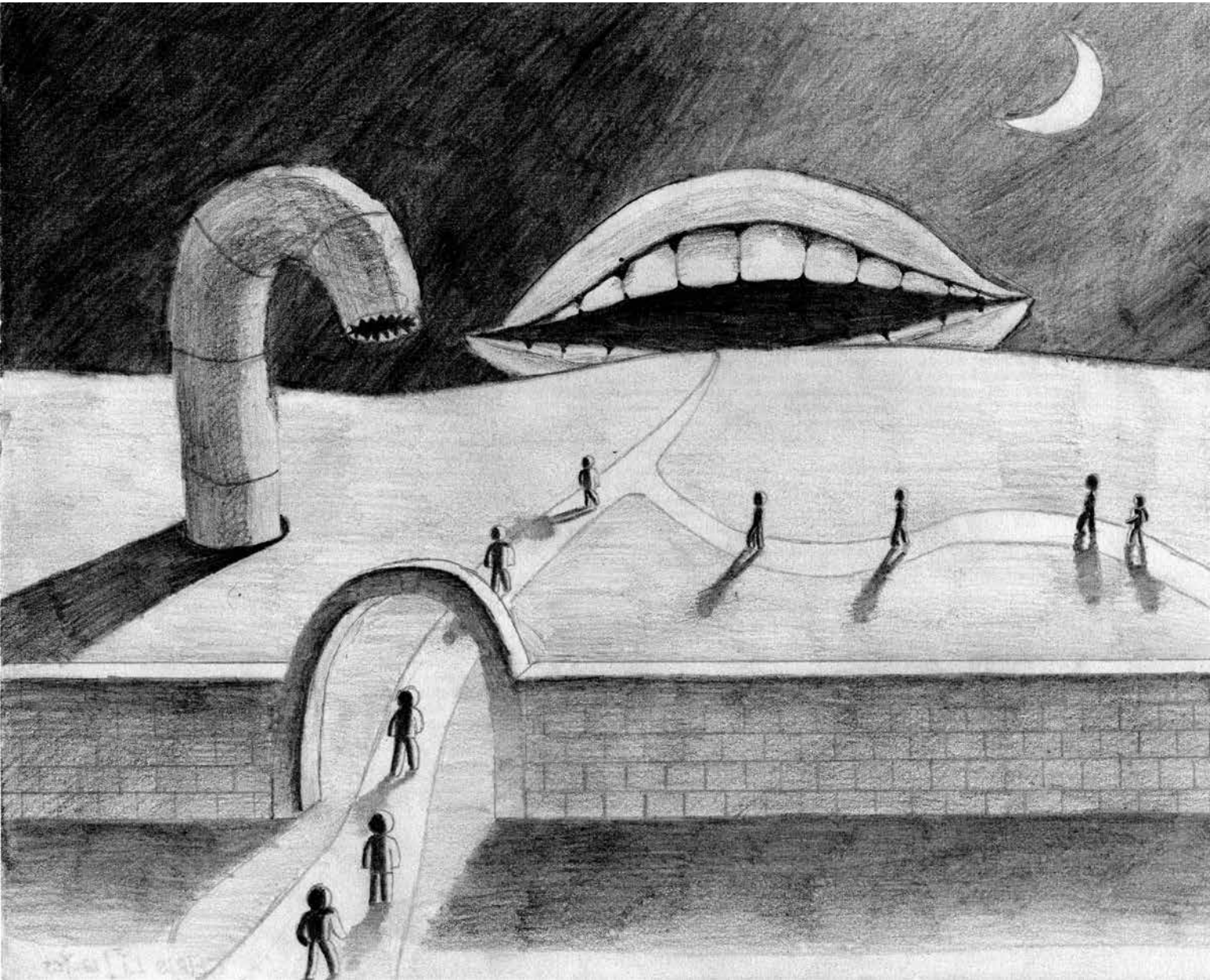
the houses in my mother's hometown
dress themselves with long driveways
tangle in the black iron railings

the smell of cigarettes and bubbling tomato
becomes gasoline and
sounds of whirring highways

I ask my grandmother if she misses her home,
big oak doors and the freshest fior di latte
she says it was a sweet loss
she has a laundry machine and here
cars outnumber the people

Julia Wong, age 16

Road to Hell



Chris Li, age 12

A New Age

We were born into a world of change
Where the ability to adapt was our only defense
And somehow each of us had been pitted against one another
We were led to believe hatred was a state of being
That all we could amount to was a label
And happiness was a checklist with a picket fence

As children we went to school and learned to repeat
Went home and practised the same dull exercises
Because even at six years old we understood success was a percentage at the top right corner of the page
And dinner wasn't just a mealtime; it was an excuse to watch TV

As a generation we are criticized for our dependence on the technology at our disposal
We are taught not to ask who made us this way
But rather shoulder the abuse of a new age
As we struggle to balance innovation with tradition

We are not sorry for adopting our own culture
Our lives should not exist as an apology for yours
And if we spend more time online opening our hearts up to complete strangers
Rather than talking to you
Why on earth should that mean there is something wrong with us

We grew up in households where war was a word as commonly used as salt
Yet we were taught not to fight
As every day we were sent to a battleground
And the names we were called made us lie awake at night shivering
Trying not to accept that human nature was cruelty

I hope we do not become a patchwork of pills and medical records
Just another diagnosis on a page
We are not a foreign species to be observed under a microscope
Why must we be broken to be understood
How come our sexuality is a phase
And our sadness is an illness
That must be cured by either drowning out the entire world in a landslide of drugs
Or simply 'getting over it'

They told us we would not be loved if we had scars on our wrists to match the ones on our hearts
That we were ugly for having fought to survive
But when I see someone
I do not see long sleeves in the summer
I see strength

You must forgive us if we would rather exist anywhere other than here
Because how can you blame us
When in our reality
Perfection is a product sold to us behind the appeal of a silver screen
When beauty is being thin
But being skinny is being sick
And at eighteen we are too young to fall in love
Yet we must decide the course of our future

We are a generation driven by sex appeal
The media intones
As we are bombarded by images of naked women and shirtless men
During the commercial advertising
A pair of socks
And so what if we want to be held and touched
Are we criminals for having desires within our reach
Who are you to deny us one of the only solaces in life?

It was you who told us that there is no such thing as too much money
And you told us well because we no longer believe in the concept of enough
The cost of our own education holds us back
And yet we are the generation that will support you
We will be the lawyers, and politicians and doctors
And there will come a day when you are sick and only we can save you
And it will cost a pretty penny
Our growth was stunted by the weight of a crippling debt
And the knowledge that the only way to live
Was to sell our souls for even a chance at being content

"I fear for the remains our grandchildren will inherit," you say
Well so do we
How can we be expected to clean up your mess
When our whole lives we've been told we were a part of it
That the hardships we went through were told as jokes around the dinner table
And we laughed too to drown out the blare of the TV in the background because if we cried it would be another mood swing
God forbid we take life as seriously as you force it onto us

The truth is we are not so different from you
We too were born into a world of change
Where the ability to adapt was our only defense
And we are smart too
And though our opinions may vary it doesn't mean one must be wrong
We are not a plea for attention
Maybe we both want the same thing
Because we both worked so hard to make it here
It is no one's job to compare our wounds and decide whose is worse
All we want is your respect.

Micaela Consens, age 14

Staghorn



Varvara Nedilka, age 15

Binary

One.

Zero. Zero. One. Zero. One. One.

The bolt of electricity passes to the next unit; another arrives from the unit ahead. *Scan*: quickly, efficiently. *Decide*: zero. The switch is flicked: it heads to the right. It is already forgotten and replaced. This all takes less than one second.

Such is the way of the Factory.

A tone sounds: the shift is over. *Depart*: we leave the circuit, its electricity paused in the unending flow to the humans, and join the queue at the exit. The train of units drips onto the Factory floor; metal seeps from the agile tips of our long limbs onto the cooling circuit. At the exit, we units go through the scanner, which indicates which way we should turn. Zero: a unit turns right and parks itself neatly against the wall to recharge, opens its battery cover, closes its eyes. The next unit approaches the scanner. Zero. Another: zero.

One.

The indicated unit heads to the left. It clanks as it heaves itself onto the pile of parts. The retired unit opens its battery, removes the Life Source. Before the Source can be set on the ground, the unit's brain clicks to a whirring halt. Its hand hesitates indefinitely an inch from the tiled floor.

(We are recycled, when we age and rust, and our parts are made into new units.)

Such is the way of the Factory.

Progress: Two more units are deemed unfit. Saws descend and begin work on the pile of parts. The units charging against the wall look on.

(The eyelids are for show. We have sensors on our chests.)

There is only one more unit ahead in the queue.

One.

The unit hesitates. "I'm not broken."

The scanner blinks again. One.

"I'm not; I was only built yesterday."

One.

"I'm not broken. I'm..." Its processor whirs. "I'm human. That's it. Human."

(We are not human. We were built by humans, to run the Factory. When we run down, we are recycled and replaced.)

One.

"I'm human!" Her voice box crackles. "Look – I'm alive! My name is... I had a name. I had a name and a brother named Nathan who was too small for his sleeves. And when I was six Nathan got me a pet turtle even though our parents said no. And Nathan let me name the turtle Franklin, and we hid Franklin under my bed and snuck him lettuce from the table. And when Mom found him and wanted to get rid of him, Nathan bought a tank even though he'd been saving up for a skateboard... Something's happened to Franklin, hasn't it? And Nathan? And –"

One.

"– me." She turns, looks at me – with real eyes, not sensors, not glass.

"Who am I?" she whispers.

One.

"I'm human!" She pounds on the cold metal frame and whips a finger at the tableau of half-recycled units. "Listen: where do you get new parts, when we die? You can't reuse the broken ones – you build and you build until you can build no more – and then what? You go outside. No humans come to give you new parts, do they? No humans come, because – because Franklin died!"

Fluid leaks from the corners of her eyes. "Nathan put him in a box and put the box in the ground, and then Nathan died too. And they put Nathan in a box but he was too small for it, and no one would let me hug him one last time, but I did anyway – I *did*, in secret, when nobody was looking. And then *it* was everywhere and they told me to hide, but I was so scared and Nathan wasn't hiding and he was all alone and cold in the box in the ground, so I ran away and I saw. I saw the crying, saw the prayers go unanswered, saw the world burn and die. Franklin died, and then Nathan died, and then I –"

One.

"What. Am I. What *am* I?" She charges through the scanner, grips the broken units by the shoulders. They look on without seeing, their very essences gripped in curled broken hands.

"I'm human!" she screams. "I'm not broken! I'm human!"

She shakes until the shoulders splinter, jagged white bone ascending from a tangle of wires. Repulsed, she falls back, her cheek striking the ground, and draws her knees to her chest.

"I'm human..." Methodically, she opens her battery, closes her eyes – real eyes, not sensors, not false eyelids painted on for show, set into the flawless plastic face of the humans we never knew. "I'm human." She says it with less conviction now, as if the words have lost their meaning. She removes her Life Source, begins to lay it on the tiles –

"I'm..."

One.

A spire of fractured hands rises into the silent ceiling.

Enter: zero – I line up against the wall with the others. My eyelids close, but my sensors pick up the units to the scanner's right; and to the left, the parts.

Such is the way of the Factory.

Amy Schacherl, age 19

Untitled

Rain fell through the cracks in the roof, landing with a dull plop on the dusty ground. It was dark out and no matter how tired he was from his day of working in the fields, the young boy could not find sleep. He tossed and turned laying there between the goats, their warm bodies pressing tightly against his sides. They panted heavily, rocking back and forth in the humid air. He sat up looking accusingly at the roof as drops of water landed repeatedly on his face. Wiping the drops off his forehead, he stood up and walked out into the night. He looked around at the land he worked by day. Not his land, none of this was his land, not even the house he lived in. This was the lord's land. He gave them protection and housing in return for the work they did. It was a way of life, not a choice. He was born a serf and would forever remain so. He sighed and looked up to the sky. As he watched, a star shot across the heavens, leaving a long trail of light. His breath caught in his throat and he made a wish. He whispered the words he spoke: *I wish*.

The knight rolled onto his side trying to find a comfortable position on his bed. Despite the fact that it was nothing but wood, it seemed so soft after the hard day of training that lay behind him. He enjoyed fighting but it wore him out. His muscles screamed in protest as he sat up, unable to sleep despite his physical exhaustion. He rested his head in his hands and sighed. He trained all day, every day, in preparation for when his lord sent him into battle. He traded his days for a roof over his head by night and food in his stomach and security in life. He did not regret it, no matter how difficult it was. This was his place in life, it was not his place to choose his social ranking. He was born to be a knight and to die a knight fighting alongside his comrades. He stood and walked over to the window that looked out of his room. He opened the shutters and stared at the night sky. He tried to count the stars. Suddenly, a comet shot across the sky, leaving a streak of light. The knight smiled as he whispered: *I wish*.

The lord sat alone in his dining hall. The feast had long ago ended and the guests retired, but still he sat there. The king had again raised the tax and he would have to exact even more from those starving, as they tried to farm his fief. He was honoured that the king had granted him this land, but the demands grew yearly and the stocks depleted. The lord shook his head in frustration and stood, pushing his chair back, and made his way to the door. He pushed it open and strode out into the night air. A slight rain was falling and it was beautiful out. He thought of his room and the warmth there, but for now he just wanted to be outside. He looked out over the fields and hills that were his land. It was beautiful, and all his. He could see the small houses in which slept the serfs and he could see into the quarters that housed his loyal knights. It seemed the whole world was asleep. Then the most glorious of movements happened. A shooting star flew across the sky in a streak of light. The lord closed his eyes and spoke to the night sky and to the star: *I wish*.

The king walked out of his room. It was late in the night and his wife, the queen, had been asleep for some time. But something was keeping him up. He could not put a name to it, but still his mind refused to quiet and his body to sleep. He strode out onto the terrace and leaned on the rough stone walls that surrounded it. He looked out on his kingdom. It spanned farther than the eye could see and held such great wealth. He was a good king and ruled justly, his army was powerful and his wealth vast. Gazing at the sky and treasuring the beauty of his land, he watched as a star came racing across the black canvas. He stared, as it disappeared over the horizon, and whispered into the rain: *I wish*.

Each wish made that night was in itself an impossibility, but at night reality seems to fade and even the most different of lives can for a moment parallel.

Diyora Tursunova, age 13

Weightless



Rheanne Sbrocca, age 13

Stale



Novaya Politra, age 13

Dancer

The music starts with a slow drumming almost like a heartbeat. I feel the pulses and move to the beats.

It starts slow, so I take my time, I don't worry about being late on the counts. My legs extend as I prepare for the first jump. It's an easy one, a simple leap. I nail it.

This number is so promising, it has all my best tricks, and I'm giving it my all. My costume was custom-made but it is not actually the most perfect fit. It suits the dance, my teacher says, but she is the one who designed it after all. She wouldn't say different.

Concentrate. I can't let such thoughts get to me. Thoughts are distracting. Focus on what's happening.

My first mistake is minor, but it puts me off guard. I recover though, a simple misstep, nobody but the scrutinizing judges will have noticed. Which reminds me to *be aware of the audience.*

Only two people are actually watching as far as I can tell, everyone else is distracted by their phones or being bored.

It's a routine I've done so many times, but each time it's different. Each time, someone will read something different. Maybe it's a story, or a message, or an emotion. Maybe I'm portraying a character, or I am dancing for a specific someone.

Whatever! That's what I really think. I channel my frustration into the dramatic turning jump, which ends with a fall to the floor. I suck in my core and brace myself for the fall, and catch myself just in time to pull myself up.

I'm getting tired.

I feel myself going off the music now. I can almost hear my teacher chastising me, *Everyone can tell when you mess up! You'll lose points for going off the music!* This distracts me, I stumble, and I can practically hear the crowd groaning, and blood rushes to my face.

It's over, I might as well run off crying now, hopefully they'll pity me enough and stop the music and just move on.

I'm missing counts. It's passing me by. Breaths are becoming shorter and I cannot help it. I must have a blank look on my face. I take two steps forward and hesitate. Should I improvise?

What do I do? Panic is coursing through me now, my heartbeat is becoming too fast for my breaths.

Years are surely passing by. The music swells, and I find where my feet are supposed to fall into the beats. I step cautiously, unsure of whether it's too late to save this dance. Last moment, I start to run off. Trying to maintain whatever is now left of my dignity.

The judges are shaking their heads, scratching my name off their little clipboards. I'm disqualified for not staying on for the entire number.

He nods at me. Just barely out of the corner of my eye, I see it, subtle nod that tells me to keep going. He always told me, no matter what, to keep going.

I hesitate and start a turn sequence. As I turn, the music suddenly seems familiar and the friendly melody comes to find me. My legs feel like they're flying as I find the choreography again.

I feel proud, but ashamed. I nearly just left the stage just now! My jumps are now higher and I'm no longer tired. I can't see my feet hit the ground. It would be like flying, if not for the sinking feeling in my stomach.

It's time for the final turning sequence, the part where the music changes to a major key and everyone cheers and smiles as if this is the most important part, but it's not. That already happened while I was missing beats.

So now they'll never see it, but what can one do. As much as I would like to stop caring, it still hurts; my face still feels flushed and uncomfortably hot.

Now I have to slow down. Beats are harder to meet and steps are softer. I have the audience now. They see me now. It's possible they have forgotten already.

The music has ended, but there are still a few counts of choreography. I smile one last time as I slowly fall into the pose I started with.

By the end, after I have bowed and walked off stage, no one is watching and yet everyone is clapping, because they have to.

Jean Kim, age 14

The Power of Words

Leara (also known as L.V.) and Bluejevy, best friends, walk with linked arms towards a school. Leara is wearing a uniform from the 1950s, and has short blond hair and a giggly, innocent face. Bluejevy is wearing a matching uniform, and has brown stringy hair, and both girls are silently laughing. While the narrator is talking, they laugh, then sit down, and bring out some food, dance and play clapping games. The words in the brackets (without the italics) are to be spoken by "The Voice" (also known as B.V. or B) whispering. Words without brackets or italics are to be spoken loudly by "The Voice". "The Voice" parts can be recorded and then played during the play.

The Voice: (Okay. Hi. I am NOT the narrator. Well, kind of, but not really. My **friend** (she used to be my friend (LONG story)) is the **actual** narrator. I know, it's confusing. Here I go...) So, hi everyone. Uh... I'm not good at telling stories... uh, um... Fine. I will feed you some information in three separate, simple sections.

Section One: You see, these girls have been going to the same school since first grade, and were best friends until the last day of tenth grade. Leara just started bullying people with words, starting from grade nine. Bluejevy tried to stop her, but Leara just ignored Bluejevy most of the time.

Section Two: Okay, you might not know who these girls are, so I'll just introduce them to you. The girl with the short blond hair and the pink clip in her hair is Leara. The other one is Bluejevy. This is how you spell her name: B-L-U-E-J-E-Y.

Section Three: Words are interesting, they hold a lot of meaning inside them.

Reflection Time: Okay... How was that? Too much info? Cause I'm just getting started.

The Voice: Bluejevy liked to twirl her hair a lot, although it wouldn't ever stay twirled on her finger. And she had a laugh without laughter. Don't get it? Well, I'm a confusing... voice. I never learned to appreciate what a great friend she was. I... I... used her like a tool. I feel really bad right now, I wish... I didn't use her. What great friends we would have been. (Yeah, right. I don't trust this girl. Well, it's sad that, once upon a time, I did.)

(Leara and Bluejevy arrive at the school, silently open their lockers, and place their bags inside.)

The Voice: It always starts on the first day. That's when the other popular girls form their impressions about who's worthy to join their group.

(Leara starts walking towards a girl with short, curly brown hair, who is reading a book while walking.)

B: No! Leara, stop!

(Bluejevy races after Leara. Leara purposely bumps into the girl with curly hair.)

L.V.: Watch where you're going, you book reading rodent! Someone as ugly as you can only cover up for so long. What's your name, you toad?

(The girl just stares at them with wide, amber eyes.)

L.V.: I'm sorry darling, did you not hear me? Or let's go take you to the doctor. That's where you belong.

(The girl does not answer.)

L.V.: I think this girl is either too stupid to know that I'm talking to her, or –

B: Leara, please stop.

L.V.: Be quiet, will you? And stay out of this.

B: NO!

(The girl with the curly hair rushes off. B and L.V. stay frozen in a tableau while the narrator speaks.)

The Voice: And that was the strongest voice, the most betraying word, the angriest sound. That one-syllable word stood out like blue in a sea of red. Bluejevy was tired of having Leara bully people. It was enough! When did words become so powerful and enough?

(The girls unfreeze. Leara whirls around.)

L.V.: You've got some nerve, haven't you?

B: Oh, please! I can't stand it anymore! Please, stop bullying other people!

(Leara's face turns angry and slightly afraid for a second, but then she smirks.)

L.V.: You don't control me, you filthy, worthless pig! Get lost!

(Bluejevy's eyes widen.)

B: Buh–buh—but you're my best friend! How could you just... be so mean to me?

(Leara laughs.)

Dirty Words

L.V.: You really are so clueless, aren't you? I just don't like you. And I don't need you anymore. I just needed someone to help me with my homework, and to do my homework. And since I'm leaving this school and city today, and I'm not coming back next year, I've no use for you anymore. Too bad.

The Voice: She had said the devastating truth with a smirk.

(Bluejean erupts into tears.)

L.V.: And... to top it off with whipped cream and icing, I accidentally might have thrown your computer and phone, that you left at my house yesterday, in the garbage can. Too bad that the garbage truck collected the garbage three hours ago.

The Voice: For Bluejean, that was enough to drive her mad.

(Girls run off, opposite sides of the stage, Bluejean crying.)

L.V. (Leara's voice): With those words, in just thirty seconds, it could drive a person mad. Words. Words can change so much. As Leara, I am ashamed. I am so sorry... I wish I could apologize... I wonder where she is right now. I hope she can forgive me.

B.V./The Voice (Bluejean's voice): You may wonder why it was my voice, but Leara who was actually telling the story. Because I am the power of words, the words themselves. I was the words that came out of Leara's mouth while she was telling the story, with my voice, with Bluejean's voice. Because I am Bluejean.

(Bluejean comes back on stage.)

(L.V.'s voice comes echoing back.)

L.V.: I hope she can forgive me.

(Bluejean thinks about it, calculating. Then, she gives a wildly dangerous and angry look.)

B: You shouldn't have hoped.

(Lights black out, curtain closes.)

Dora Liu, age 12

Ever since
my father imparted his
belief of the right
to feel the thin crispness
between index and thumb
to ask questions to
those who help us or not,
to learn about that
stormy sky –
I've kept it folded twice,
I read it in between the lines

I sit, air still for a
careful five minutes
as the words rise and fall
like salty waves
underneath feather bellies,
full from scavenging
for morsels beneath
polluted objects, toxic ground

I have used those words
to keep hope close,
tucked underneath my only
sweater
and I feel dirty but content
like the gulls swallowing
a scrap

Thousands of possibilities
decomposed, breaking down
I sift swiftly, not as safely
between index and thumb
clutching those thrown away
forgotten fragments
for every precious page I turn

As each storm passes,
cool, determined
like my father
and my eyes
absorbing an understanding
in his
I can see him
in his zealous aura:
"An education, dear Yura,
is wherever you choose to
hold on
and not let go."

He watches me still, hanging
in dense clouds
with garbage gulls
and bag bushes

I hold each page
to learn by heart
and I don't let go

Sienna Csunyoscka,
age 16

The Place That I Call Home

I come from a vast nation where cold winds blow
North, there is the Arctic, filled with snow
South, that's where the land's riches are in store
East and West, so much to explore
This is the place where my soul is never alone
This is the place that I call home

I come from the maple leaf country
Where maple trees cover the bare ground
And there's a lot of beautiful scenery to be found
Also developed with the latest upgrades
The pride of my country never fades
This is the place where my soul is never alone
This is the place that I call home

I come from the most multicultural city in the world
Where there's diversity in the air
And you can see people of different backgrounds everywhere
From the spirit of Chinatown to the taste of Little Italy
And the CN Tower tops it off with a beautiful view of the city
This is the place where my soul is never alone
This is the place that I call home

I come from a bilingual country where English and French collide
After a turbulent history with wars for land and pride
Peace is finally found and everyone gets along
Life passes by like a beautiful song
This is the place where my soul is never alone
This is the place that I call home

I come from the best country in the world
Where we all speak the language of love and peace
There is justice to spread and patriotism to keep
We have helped many other countries without asking anything in return
This is the fire of Canada's pride, it will always burn
This is the place where my soul is never alone
This is the place that I call home

I salute the country of Canada
Where my soul is never alone
I salute the country of Canada
The place that I call home

Manmeet Manko, age 13

An Ode to Thought

Thoughts are substances
They are coils of flame, burning out
the passionate torment of the soul
as it struggles to endure
They are the painter's brush
as he traces colour onto a canvas
They are the sighs of heaven
as rain falls upon us
They are the laughter of a child
They are helium-filled balloons
floating upwards to the sky
They are the intelligent gaze of an owl
They are the rays of sunlight
brightening our world
They are the wisps of steam
that unfurl from hot chocolate
They are the rustle of tree leaves
humming, in the forest
They are the lullaby of a lark
singing at sunset
They are the moon's ascent into the sky
as it bathes its beloved mother nature in moonlight
They are the magic of midnight
and stardust swirling in the air
They are you, and I
They are infinite
But most of all –
a constant thought is the tune of the heart, mind, and soul
for once –
in complete, and utter symphony

Fardowsa Ahmed, age 17

Cascade



Evelyn Zhang, age 16

Some Things Don't Change



Joyce Bonifacio, age 16

Nuisance of Numbers

Numbers are hostile and polymorphous characters. This is what I see as numbers: Nuisance Unnecessary Mournful Baffling Engrossing Redundant Sporadic.

I hate how one number could determine whether you're mournful or jubilant. Numbers show up on tests, assignments, math, cash registers, and clothing. There is a huge difference between a level one and a level four. Getting a level four on this assignment could make you exultant and a level one could make you dismal when it's just a three number difference. Buying expensive clothing could make you feel guilty for being so rich, and buying ratty clothes makes you look homeless.

I hate how one number difference on a weighing scale could make you feel fat or skinny.

The weighing scale is saying either, "Too bad. Be fat!" or "You're a stick!" Numbers speak to you and are ineluctable, like slimy wet Rob Ford(s) holding dumbbells enduring you.

I hate when you measure your height, the numbers only increase by a little bit each year. When you have a growth spurt, you feel like a giant, looking down at your midget dwarfs. Being too short is torture and your grandparents treat you like a dog. Come and get it little Helen, get the Styrofoam ball. If you are tall, you're catching the Max Kane disease, better notify a doctor. If you were like me, growing a centimetre each time, you'd feel like you were shrinking.

I hate how numbers are involved with the date of your birth, making you feel young or old. I have two very annoying cousins. Why did they have to be born one year earlier than me? Big deal, you would think. Well, actually, yes, it is! It determines the "pupil" and leader. In this case, I would be a pupil, listening to others bossing me around.

I hate how numbers increase. I yearn for the rejoicing times in kindergarten, doing whatever we want, including throwing blocks at others and dumping water on each other's heads. At that time, rules were irrelevant and it was about having fun. Now, I'm in grade seven. Grade seven means more homework, and makes us dead on one's feet (tired). Now, we are turning into teenagers and before you know it, I'll go to university, be a parent, and a grandmother.

I hate how numbers only allow you to have one brain. Two or three brains could solve math problems way quicker and make your teacher's job easier. Why not have more eyes? Maybe two on the back of your head. That way, you'd know if someone's doing a prank or making fun of you. Why shouldn't we have more noses? Two is always better than one. We should have way more arms, including ones that do our homework, draw, drive, play the piano, tickle people, do the boogie woogie, and type this assignment. We should have ten arms, a newly discovered species called the Helenpus or Helensaurus.

I hate how numbers tell time. When you are in the middle of a dull lesson, time feels like it will never pass. One second feels like a day and before you know it, you're ravenous for food. Then, you have to wait for another hour until it's finally over. I hate how time flies when you're having fun. That one number on a clock could determine the end of a trip or the start of a boring lesson on numbers.

I hate how privileges only apply to age groups. Why can't we vote now? Why can't we drive? Instead, we have to wait for years to pass and, by that time, new inventions are made and the age is postponed.

I hate when numbers are in the "negative zone" where they are zombies, and the next minute, some "positively benevolent" number makes it come back to life.

Winter is so long in Canada. This means static electricity, freezing temperatures, power outages, yellow and white snow, and calamity. The trees are all bare and everywhere you see black and white images. Why can't time make summer longer? Summer means hot weather, cold beverages, swimming, variegated colours, warmth, no school, and best of all... summer vacation. Unfortunately, summer is only three to four months long, while winter is like an eight rotated 180 degrees.

I hate this engrossing "beast" taking over my life. It's making my head explode. One second – head, second minute – kapow! Unfortunately, time and numbers are unstoppable, so I'll have to suck it up and hopefully stay in one piece.

Unless.....

Helen Chen, age 12

Elegie

The violinist took his instrument out of its case and made his way through the rubble of the conservatory. His hands were numb from the cold, but he was still determined to play today. He walked nimbly through the fallen bricks and glass and lowered his chair. The crowd was already beginning to gather around him and, at precisely nine-thirty a.m., he raised his bow. The melody soothed the crowd around him as he coaxed the violin with skilful fingers. The rich layered notes entered their ears and gave them hope that the situation would improve. There was sadness in his slow playing, a mourning for the fallen. Soon he was finished, and he put his instrument in his case, departing silently. The crowd dispersed with him.

The war had waged for too long. It all began a year ago during the winter, when the violinist was playing with his orchestra at the conservatory. Nine-thirty a.m., December 19. He would always remember that date. The day when the first shells fell from the sky.

The shells fell, tearing the earth apart and scattering the rubble of felled buildings across the streets. Explosions were everywhere. Fire was everywhere. There was no room to bury the dead, so they were splayed across the streets, spreading disease. Over ten thousand people died within the first month, and no one would dare go outside, lest they would be hit by machine gun bullets or shells.

The men quickly surrounded the city, and the defenders fled just as fast. The city was a sitting duck, with soldiers roaming the streets, threatening death at any moment, whether the citizens were buying groceries or talking with friends. During nighttime they were more ruthless, shooting whoever dared venture out. All this because of water, plain water. The neighbouring country was running out of it, but the violinist's land had plenty, so they had invaded them with immense brutality.

The violinist's conservatory was bombed in the second month. He was a block away from the building when he saw the shells raining down. It was a disaster; the building lay in ruins and all his friends were gone. All his precious music was gone as well! He searched through the remains of the building to see what he could salvage. Nothing, nothing remained.

Then, underneath a piece of burnt rubble, he found a sheet of music. He picked it up. "Elegie" it said.

There was no name. The entire right side had burnt away.

The violinist took the music home with him and worked through the day and the night to finish the piece. The next morning, at precisely nine thirty a.m., he took his instrument with him to the ruins of the conservatory and began to play. He would play until the war was over.

During the first week no one paid any attention, as the people were afraid to go outside. The violinist was very lucky. No shells or bullets hit him. He seemed to have a sort of invincibility in his music. During the second week people began to go outside to listen to him play, but fifty were killed during that week as they crowded around him. The violinist questioned himself when he saw his people dying for his sake, but persevered once he realized that they needed to hear the music. He came back every day to grant them that wish.

The snipers occasionally also fired at the violinist, but the crowd was determined to keep him alive, to have him finish the job. And each and every day people in the crowd were killed, trying to shield the violinist from the carnage.

People began to put flowers at his feet during the third week, and still the crowd grew. Despite the danger, the crowd was determined to keep him alive so that he could continue to play. During the fourth week even an enemy soldier was so charmed by his music that he dropped his weapon and approached to listen. The violinist showed a weak smile and continued to play. A shot was heard. The soldier lay in a pool of blood a couple of metres away. The enemy was merciless, even towards their own men.

During the fifth week more and more soldiers dropped their weapons at the violinist's feet and the flowers were piled up high, although most had already wilted. The violinist smiled every time he played, and every day more guns were dropped and fewer men were killed. The violinist smiled, for his job was complete.

Bo Rui Wang, age 14

Untitled



Kim Tram, age 14

Up in Smoke (Friendship)

We were two friends,
best friends,
two best idiots.
We filled our life with plans,
short-sighted plans,
plans that stretched as far as we were willing to walk.

With each other, the place was always the same,
but this was back when you could remember my name.

You said you'd never change,
while you walk around a new man;
a new friend by your side
whispering in your ear, telling you to relax,
telling you to be numb,
saying that you don't need
more friends,
more memories,
more experiences,
just him,
as you walk down the street
alone.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Sometimes I call just to say hi but I know you're out,
with him,
doing that alone.
Coughing, choking, wheezing, happy,
as the two of you laugh and bake
in the sauna of a back alley that you have created.

I just want to talk.
Talk about your family, your problems,
why our friendship is broke,
but when you open your mouth,
all that comes out is smoke.
Engulfing me in this fog,
making it harder to see you, hear you, reach you,
know who you are.

Breathe in, breathe out.

How can you see me through those dry eyes?
How can I hear you through that dry voice?
How do we last through only a dab of hope?
Resin, ready to burn.
You of all people should know that doesn't last long.
One last crack, one more pop, as it drowns in the brown water
giving one last haul, one last drag, one last pull,
of satisfaction
enough for a fake buzz.

Now if I cut this rope,
if I cut it and let you fall,
it pains me to know that you won't even care,
suspended by a cloud up in the air.
A cloud of smoke,
ever expanding,
making me realize that there is no fall when you're at rock
bottom.

Breathe in, breathe out.

I think back to the way,
the way it used to be,
I see you laugh and joke with them the way you used to laugh
and joke with me.
Your paycheques
disappearing
faster than your old friends,
old plans,
old life.
To think that you were saving up for a Corvette,
you don't even regret
all the hours you spent
in the same place,
same time,
all the time,
behind a school,
behind a church,
behind my back.
Hiding away with nothing to hide.

Sparking the lighter,
flames pressed,
licking the cracked, dry bond,
mercilessly scorching, hot white,
as you suck it down deep into your body,
hold it till you're red,
just to blow it in my face and let it fade.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Is it because being low is boring?
Or is it because I'm boring?
When your time is like a reservation at Dorsia,
booked solid,
time set aside for a more important person.

Past present and future
blur together
when you're living for the moment when the little and big hand
meet at the four to relax.
When to you the only light in the world is a butane flame;
your North Star
guiding you to peace,
to serenity,
to fill your lungs with passion,
giving you that chemical chill
that gets you out of bed every
morning,
and puts you back in that same bed every night.
Burning through the weekends,
burning through the weekdays,
burning through your next test,
burning a hole in your wallets,
pockets,
pants,
constantly eating away at the memories of us.

Walking down through the ravine, our special place.
Now every place is special when there's a bong stuck to your
face.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Jordan Davis, age 17

.....
Hush

Hush now, little girl, silence your cry
The moon is etched in an ink black sky
And the owl takes flight
Across the starry night

Hush now, little boy, silence your cry
Midnight's awaking with a moonbeam sigh
Thirteen shaded nightmares headed your way
Better close your eyes till the break of day

Hush now, little girl, silence your cry
Before those glistening tears run dry
Falling dreams will soon reveal
A muted scream
A blood red seal

Hush now, little boy, silence your cry
Say your prayers with a last goodbye
Surrender to sleep
A dungeon deep
Set in stone
A bed of bones

Hannah Nie, age 12

Want to be Human Again



Fariyah Tasnim, age 16

She Matters

When she was a little girl
She was stuck in her own little world
So I played a song
Played it till the very

End

Many autumns have passed
Many dances she has danced
But now she sees that the leaves
No longer dance with me at all
But simply slowly
Scatter around my feet
Where they seemingly
Fall

Oh my little girl
She dances
As if her body
Leads her toes
Watch as she dances
To the beat
Nobody knows

My breath is drawing shallow
With the beeps that are getting too slow
Focusing on my distant heartbeat
Your voice is becoming too low

She swirls and kisses
The surface that her feet meet
But misses
And lands
Ending up against me

Grandma, you call

Her eyes wide
A crooked smile plastered
Against her rosy cheeks
As the autumn breeze surfaces
And fills the air with leaves

Oh my little girl
Do not fret, do not cry
For I have given you a special gift
Look at your feet, look at them now

For now you wear
Big Girl Shoes

They dance to her rhythm
They dance with her youth
And swirl ever so slightly
When they surround
Me

Agnes Pastores, age 17

Grandma, she calls, snuggling against my chest
Look at my feet
They hurt
Please help
For I still want to dance

Blue Eyes and Bed Heads

Freckles scattered across his face
Bright blue eyes so full of grace
Bed head that can never be smoothed down
Still, he seldom wears a frown

Now you see, brushing my hand over her cheek
Ever so gently
Please please
Promise me
You will place these
On your feet

He makes me laugh and likes to cook
He reads my mood just like a book
I love how he's almost always happy
But I won't let this get too sappy

That's when I noticed where her eyes had zoomed

He tends to smell a bit unpleasant
He's a little surly in the present
He has his bratty moments too
When he might not be kind to you

Landing on the shoes I had given

Small Girl Shoes
She had called them that day
And for some years to come
Until the day her feet could not fit
Like capturing her tiny hand to the Sun

I forgive him for all of those things, regardless
In reality, he's harmless
He doesn't have fortune or fame
But I love my little brother all the same

Shannon Thom, age 16

Colour Freak

It wasn't like I couldn't understand the songs, I could, the notes were orange, they were yellow, they were pink, they were a rainbow. Everybody else just didn't get that.

My mind flashed back.

"What do you think of this song, Cassy?" my teacher, Mrs. Gallagher, asked.

As I played, the notes floated off of the sheets and into the air. I could hear the different sounds blending together, creating a single harmony. The best thing of all was that I was making it. It was my first time playing piano and it was also the first time my mind started making sense.

"It's green, sour candy apple green," I responded. I was only five at the time.

Mrs. Gallagher laughed good-naturedly, but I sat there wondering. Why couldn't she tell what I was thinking? It was obvious that the song was filled with green, jealousy. Why couldn't Mrs. Gallagher distinguish the difference between each song and colour? Now, instead of enjoying music the way I've always known, it was limited to a specific boundary that only Mrs. Gallagher controlled.

"Cassy, what is the meaning of classical music? Any thoughts or feelings?" Mrs. Trix, my current music teacher, demanded. I snapped out of my flashback.

I opened my mouth, waiting to say moonlight blue, but shut it at the last moment. Everybody was waiting to hear the answer, but I slowly stammered out, "I don't know, ma'am." My face turned red.

Mrs. Trix looked at me, shook her head disappointingly, and chose someone else. Somehow, she reminded me of Mrs. Gallagher. Mrs. Gallagher didn't accept anything less than exceptional and neither did Mrs. Trix. From the old habits, I did what I had to do. I raised my hand and said the correct answer.

Mrs. Trix gave me a shocked but approving nod and moved on.

But it didn't feel right. It just didn't. How could I ignore these feelings? Classical music always had a dark blue feel to me, like a moonlit night with bright stars in the sky. The notes were pieced together, slowly, delicately, like glittery, silver thread.

But I couldn't say that, it was stupid. What kind of loser would?

At home, I loved composing and playing music. Every day, after music, I would run straight home and sit down at my piano. I would play whatever song I was working on or, sometimes, my favorite song. I would enjoy music my way, and understand what the songs meant however I wanted.

One day, after a while, a new student came in. Her name was Audrey and she sat beside me. As music class started, Mrs. Trix asked me another question, this time about jazz. I muttered what colour I felt from the specific type of music, not expecting anybody to pay attention. Except, Audrey heard what I said, light tiffany blue. She looked at me and smiled.

Then Audrey whispered, "I prefer mellow yellow," and went back to taking notes.

It took me a minute to process what she had said. Nobody ever talked to me during music class, only because I knew they knew I was a total dork and a freak.

But as I sat there, overanalyzing what Audrey said, just like every situation, I came to an abrupt stop and started smiling. I was glad to finally know someone just like me.

Natalie Chen, age 13

Essential Utensil

What is held in your hands for more than six hours of your day?

Sometimes you wish you could just drop it, but you must obey.

It's a tool that usually makes your fingers hurt.

Sometimes you wish it could turn into dirt.

But that won't be no excuse, they'll simply find plenty more for you to use.

It may seem like child abuse.

But honestly it'll do you good.

It will lead you all the way to parenthood

This tool should be held close to your heart

Cause I'm telling you, it'll make you smart

Have you guessed this essential utensil?

It is nothing more but a simple PENCIL.

Zainab Patel, age 13

The Future of Children



Dahlia
Farhat

Dahlia Farhat, age 16

Untitled



Laura Goldfarb, age 15

Fate Beholder

I am taught to invade when all the residents are foolishly tricked by their own slumber. I am taught to make my mark when their senses are impaired and their minds are hazy. My father tells me that this night will forever minimize all traces of a guilty conscience... That after this night I won't ever feel sorry again – I will be a man.

Whether or not to be a "man" is *not* my own choice; it is strictly a family tradition. It's the way we earn our living, and more importantly, it's the way we earn each other's respect.

Being the youngest of six other male siblings, I am the last to "transform" into a man. Before tonight, I have merely watched from the sidelines; taking notes of every trick up my mentors' sleeves, as I knew that I would have to take the reins eventually. And tonight, I grasp the reins with shaking hands.

I am prepared. I've observed and studied carefully. I should feel proud, ready, and self-assured – all the traits that a true man would feel – but instead, I am nervous and queasy. *Is that normal? Acceptable?* I don't dare to ask my elders – that would be the ultimate disgrace, and even worse, it would prove that I am not nearly ready enough.

As I walk down the cold-hearted streets, I am in awe at the beauty of the houses. I envision myself searching for a damsel in distress who waits at the top of her majestic castle... But this is no fairy tale and I am no hero.

Although I walk the vacant streets completely alone, I feel as though everyone's eyes are somehow watching me. I feel out of place – strolling through an upper-class neighbourhood with my Walmart sneakers, oversized black hoodie, and baggy dark-wash jeans. But I know that the longer I linger, the more likely I am to get noticed. So I move.

I slip around to the back gate where I already have the code of the lock memorized. Silently, I duck low as I enter the backyard and scurry to the basement window, pulling the tools out from my pockets to peel apart the window screen and chip away at the glass ever so carefully. I cringe at the noise of the breaking glass, and frantically whip my head side to side – ensuring that everyone is still asleep.

All the fibres in my body are vigorous and alive – triggering every set of emotions and running circles through my mind. Nervous beads of sweat fall from my forehead as I squeeze my scrawny body through the broken window and enter the basement.

I feel my chin hit the floor as I stare in sheer amazement at all the luxuries. Never in my life have I seen this quality of a home before my very own eyes. *I've hit the motherlode.*

Somewhere deep inside of me, a voice is gnawing at my brain; I'm telling myself to stop being selfish, that I should play

it safe and escape while I still can. But I don't listen. I am in the zone – overcome with confidence and adrenalin. I want to make my family proud.

The wood begins to creak as I climb the spiral staircase, but hearing only the sound of light snoring assures me that the coast remains clear. I slip into a half-open bedroom painted baby blue. Stepping carefully around the miniature train set scattered on the floor, I impulsively approach the crib near the centre of the room. Inside is a baby boy.

His fragile breath is even. His thumb is curled below his lower lip. Slowly, his bright blue eyes open at my presence. Fear hits me like a slap in the face. Yet, as if obeying my silent prayers, the baby remains perfectly still. Busy in thought, I too, am still.

This lucky kid will grow up in his beautiful home with food on his plate and fresh clothes every day. He will grow up to be the high school quarterback and date the most beautiful girls, all while maintaining his 4.0 GPA. He will be accepted into Queen's, Harvard, or any of those other schools, virtually unheard of where I come from. He will become a lawyer, a businessman, or a doctor. And he will die old; feeling satisfied with his long, well-earned life. More importantly, he will die surrounded by loving family and friends.

Anger and envy eat me alive at this moment. How I despise *these* damn people... Yet, I wish that I were one of *these* people... But here I am instead – *stealing* from these people.

Feeling guilty and ashamed, I make a choice that will surely bring disappointment to my family, but a sense of pride to myself. For I know that if I ever want to grow up to be one of *these* people whom I envy – and oddly, whom I admire – then it doesn't start with living a life of prison and consequences. *Does that make me a man to my father?* No, but my strength to leave sure makes me feel like one.

Feeling abnormally content with my decision, I leave the bedroom in peace and the bag of treasures behind. As I turn to face the stairs, I feel a human's deep, warm breath on the back of my neck. My knees go weak. I turn my body around. I turn it *right* around into a large man in pyjamas holding a gun pointed towards my chest.

The father.

His hands shake and his eyes are filled with fear, but surely he cannot be more terrified than me.

And it is at this moment that I know that it is too late to escape my current lifestyle. It is too late to decide my *own* fate of ever becoming one of *these* people. It is just too late.

The baby begins to cry.

Danah Khalil, age 15

A God Delusion

She drummed her fingertips against the half-empty glass of water on the coffee table before brushing her thumb across the lipstick stain on its rim. Being ignored by new clients was common. Thirty minutes of silence, however, was a new record.

Sobbing from the next room leaked through the ajar doorway as she opened her mouth to speak – fourth time in the last half hour. The boy stopped his handiwork. A trace of forlornness flickered through the intensity in his olive green eyes. He stepped toward the door in a robotic fashion and, with a gentle push, shut it, muffling his mother’s sobs on the other side of the wall. He went back to his spot on the carpeted floor.

The scornful ambience about him had her reaching for her clipboard and the ballpoint pen tucked behind her ear. She thought having it sitting there made her seem professional. Three months she’d had this job. Appearing like she held some control was a way of proving she didn’t deserve to be overlooked. Clicking the pen, she pressed the point down on a fresh sheet of paper, before that wave of uneasiness one gets watching a horror film washed over her.

He stood, staring at her.

Fierceness tinted his gaze. Awkwardly, she placed the pen back behind her ear, feeling tiny in the shadow of a seven-year-old. “Hello, Mr. Eden.” Her hand stretched out to shake his.

‘He made no attempt at reciprocating the gesture. “Your paper has lines.” He pointed to the other notes clamped to the clipboard.

“Yes,” she replied, uncertain where this was going.

“You write on them?”

“Yes.”

“We’re given lined paper at school. I get in trouble because I write the other way,” the boy said. He returned to adjusting each leaf on the trees of his naturalistic diorama meticulously with a toothpick.

Again, she took her pen into her fingers. “Why do you write the other way, Mr. Eden?”

“No one tells me what to do,” he asserted. Despite the declaration of

sorts, his voice remained cool and calculative. The boy sounded more sagacious than some of her oldest colleagues. His eyes dropped back to the diorama. “My name isn’t Mr. Eden. It’s Michael.”

“Michael, of course. I’m Dr. Chu, but you can call me Sandra.”

Michael hummed in acknowledgement, too occupied by his figurines for a proper response.

Sandra cleared her throat. “I spoke to your mother on the phone last week –”

“Which one?” Michael blurted, newfound joy in his eyes. “Agnes – she’s the one in the other room and makes good banana pancakes – or Claudia?” He leapt up and went to the mantel, selected a frame, and brought it back to Sandra. It was a photograph of an exuberant dark-haired woman in a camouflage military uniform. “Claudia’s been overseas since I was four. She hasn’t been around for a long time. Agnes cries about it a lot.”

“Well, I chatted with Agnes. She’s worried about you. Do you know why that is?”

Michael rolled his eyes. “She’s being a worrywart because I’m going to be God when I grow up.”

Sandra blinked, having not been told this on the phone. In the short-lived silence, the weeping from the next room rose to a bitter crescendo.

“You want... to be God?”

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “I’m going to be God. I’m going to replace the old one so He can retire and buy a vacation home in Guam. I’ll do a better job.”

Sandra’s rouged mouth hung open in disbelief. Unfazed, the boy continued to play with his plastic diorama. It was twice the size of the coffee table, with a lifelike jungle, shallow ocean to fill with water, and statuettes of people and animals. A construction paper sign read, ‘Garden of Eden’ in the neatest lettering a first grader equipped with a green Crayola could manage.

“Michael, why God?”

“God cures cancer and helps people win the lottery, and he punishes bad people.” A puppeteer pulling the strings,

Michael assisted a figurine in relentlessly stabbing a tiger with a plastic spear.

“Meanies like the boys in my class who call my moms horrible names, and stick my head in the toilet when I wear my favourite shirt to school.”

“Why do they do that?”

Michael shrugged. “It’s pink.” He lifted Sandra’s unfinished cup off the table, pouring the lukewarm water over the diorama. Submerging all the flora and fauna in its wake, the sea water banished the citizens of Eden from the land for their sins. “I’d cause a giant flood to drown them all. Send fire and brimstone so they’d burn to crying crisps. Then, we could start from scratch. Then, it’d be perfect the second time around.”

Sandra paused her furious writing of notes. “You want to be God to serve punishment?”

Michael was still for a moment, before whispering, “Wanna see something?”

Sandra wasn’t sure, but nodded anyway.

From the back pocket of his corduroys, a crumpled ball of paper emerged. Sandra plucked it out of his palm. “I wanna be God because he controls everything,” Michael murmured as she unfolded the sheet, the front page of a legal document. DIVORCE was the boldest word in the title line, the star of the show.

“If I was God, no one would hurt, or be lonely, or feel empty inside. If I was God, we’d all be the masters of our own universe.”

Sandra, at his age, was just as familiar with the stifled shedding of tears and court agreements signing love away. A droplet of water trickled from the eye of a bobbing figurine’s face before it sunk to the bottom.

When their session was over, Sandra recommended family therapy three times a week. Regarding the God delusion, she felt like Michael and one of his figurines – powerless in the lifelong battle of trying to stay afloat.

There was nothing she could do.

Faith Paré, age 15

I Am Africa

I am Africa,
My true essence is buried within the minds of those secluded and trapped in poverty,
Coloured skin, runners legs, thick lips, my ancestry goes further back than just slavery.
I am hidden beneath a mask designed by those who don't truly know me,
Lost in the rundown shanty towns, scorching, bleeding to make ends meet for my family,
I am Africa.
My dreams jump high like those of the Maasai tribe,
I am capable of balancing a basket filled with hope, faith and
determination over the top of my head.
Just like the many countries within the continent that deposit gold, oil and diamonds, I possess many different attributes that
are treasured by most people who meet me.
I am a land embodied by strife but carefully stitched together with deep love,
I am a continent concealed by the warmth of the sun.
Like a giraffe through the grasslands I stand tall and walk with my head held high,
Despite my piercing past, I am able to stand my ground.
As loud as a lion's roar through the depths of the jungles, I speak.
One mind, one love, one heart that strums an exotic rhythm,
I am Africa.

Amina Warsame, age 17

Pink

The colour of roses
The colour of lips
The colour of the patch on his shirt

It was the colour that got him banned from the swimming pool, the grocery store, the parks
The colour that got him placed in a one-room house with five other people
The colour that moved him from that house onto a train
The colour that made that train's course to a death camp
The colour that crushed him in between so many others
The colour that got him into the wrong line
The colour that made that line to the 'showers'
The colour that had those showers filled with gas, choking him, poisoning him
Pink was the colour that killed him.

Ray Berry, age 12

The Game

His deep blue Jersey Penguins pinny was clean.
His helmet was perfectly placed on his head.
His jaw was set at an angle that said he was serious, but if you looked into his dark brown eyes
You could see a twinkle of amusement.
He was ready.

Sophie Hollis, age 12

Moulded

The wind scoops up the leaves with a certain determination, thrusting them into the clear blue sheet above. Bold reds, warm yellows, and fiery oranges scatter across the ground in mounds that lay awaiting the satisfying crunch and crackle. My voluminous dark hair sweeps down my back in protective waves, shielding me from the biting wind. I skip, full of energy, kicking up the leaves as I go. A smile spreads across my face, green eyes bright with excitement. I continue joyfully, ignoring the dynamic laughter that follows. I know it's aimed at me, but I also know why. They're bothered by the parts that define me. The tangled locks that tumble wildly, my joy in being outside, the skips I take along a concrete road. Rather than attempting to slip into the moulds created, straying away from the unoriginality of the images I'm surrounded by. I find my thoughts preoccupied with the rushing ocean and the smell of pine. The freedom of outdoors and doing what I wish, being who I want to be. Unbothered by the icy glares they aim at me, the jeering remarks and heartless laughter, I disappear along the path and into the distance ahead, humming contentedly as I go. Strong enough to hold myself high.

Drops of rain plummet from the sky tauntingly, as I acknowledge the defeat they've achieved. They shimmer faintly in the grey of the outside. Raindrops slide along the window, pausing for moments before plunging downwards in a suicide attempt. Stuck inside, I sit alone at my desk in the classroom. Laughter screeches across the room, and I can feel the heat of their laser-like eyes on my neck. I sit straighter and toss my head back, letting a waterfall of hair ripple down my back.

I hear my name, "Lola," muttered by several people, followed by a chorus of hysterical laughter. Curious, I bounce over to the circle gathered by the blackboard. As I approach, the group parts messily and I wade through. In the centre is a boy. He tosses his head back and skips around the circle, wearing an idiotic smile that makes his eyes bulge. My stomach churns as the realization comes crashing down on me. I stumble out of the circle, brushing against people who jerk their shoulders to shake me off, my feet tripping over each other until I reach the edge of the circle landing flung across a desk. I look back. Seeing all the laughing faces, the girls who swivel their heads side to side. Neat bobs shaking back and forth before returning to their perfect shimmery forms. At that moment, my confidence stripped away, I feel the pressure of being accepted forced down on me.

Walking home I place one foot neatly in front of the other, no bounce left in my step. Bright lights flash in every direction, people hustle past, their footsteps like assortments of

metronomes that tick past me. I walk through puddles carelessly, feeling the water slosh around my feet, the cold damp feeling left on my toes. Trying endlessly to distract myself from my real troubles.

At the end of the street the bright lights of a sign capture my attention. Luminescent reds and whites surround the words, "Hair Salon." My eyes fly to the large posters. Girls with shimmery perfect hair, arms linked as they smile in mid-laughter. I wonder what they had to do to become accepted. Were they accepted as they were, or did they have to alter themselves to fit in? I fish in my pocket for the crumpled bill I'd forgotten about weeks ago. I pull it out tentatively, watching it twitch back and forth under the force of the wind. I cautiously shuffle through the salon's open doors and up to the front desk. A perky lady with choppy blond hair records my name. I sit in the waiting room, crossing my legs to keep myself from running. I had lost my strength today. I'd fought the moulds for too long, and now it was time to fit.

"Lola," the lady at the front desk calls. My legs shake and I struggle to sit down in the chair she gestures towards. Her preparations becoming a blur as I tell myself again and again, "This is what it has come to." When asked, I motion towards the area of my hair above my shoulders, my arm falling back into place limply at my side. I wince at the sight of the scissors, glistening soft silver in the dim light of the small room. Their jaws clamp down on each individual lock of hair. The sight painful to watch as dark curls fall to the floor. I observe the transformation as the thick bush that hid my face disappears and shoulders and neck emerge, my face formed by short wavy wisps that end before they brush my shoulders. But, what I notice before any of this is the glint in my eyes, gone. I no longer glow with the confidence and freedom I once held.

The next day at school, I walk in even steps through the front gates. I feel exposed, yet also as though I fit in more than I ever have before. When I approach the girls who'd, only a day ago, taunted and laughed at me, they barely notice. They welcome me, slightly hesitantly at first. But, when they realize I have no intention of skipping through the schoolyard, or climbing the rough branches of the school's oak tree, I'm accepted for who I have become. I never feel the freedom I once did. I know I'm not being seen as who I really am. Instead I am a fraction of who I could be. But, I hope that one day the mould of the person I have changed to fit will become who I really am. That I can be at peace with who I am now, and no longer yearn to be my true, unaccepted self.

Rhiana Safieh, age 13

Immortal Raven



Rachel Themistocles, age 16

Social Anxiety

I don't have butterflies in my stomach;
I have skydivers in my stomach
And they forgot their parachutes
And they are plummeting to the ground
At an accelerating speed
They scream in the form of sweaty palms
And quivering lips

I feel stares burning into the back of my skull
Crippling me
Disintegrating me
Tearing me apart
My heart is pounding like a dubstep concert
Can everyone hear it?
I turn to look behind myself, paranoid
No one is looking at me; everyone is busy writing their tests
Breathe in, breathe out, you're being paranoid
How is it that I stood outside the class
As a house of cards;
Put together, taken long hours to assemble,
But once I entered class
My cards came caving in
And fluttering to the ground?

Thirty minutes into the test...
I need a drink of water
But my stomach does backflips at the thought
Of everyone looking at me when I get up
What if the teacher asks where I'm going?
What if I stumble?
Stutter?
Screw up or sputter?
The thought of possible humiliation
Has my feet bound down to the ground without chains
My throat is as dry as the Sahara, but I can deal with it
I would rather face thirty more minutes of dehydration
Than thirty eyes trained on me

Two days later...
I got my results for the test
And I didn't do my best
The teacher asked me why,
Genuinely distressed
And what else could I say
Except, "I didn't study, I guess?"

Huda Zavery, age 15

Immortal

Immortal
I am
not.
I, along with you, will
disappear.
pain and sorrow
endure in our stead.
our sacrifices
are forgotten and cast aside.
money, power and fame
outlast the grave.
but kindness, love and truth
won't matter when we die.
our faults and fears
surely surpassed, no matter how slowly.
yet our courage and our strengths cry out,
as they fade simply away.
our sins
live on in the generations that follow us, who forget
the Will and the Way

and what more is true:

you and I
never could defeat
Death

(Read now from bottom to top.)

Aloysius Wong, age 15

Trees in November

I am drawn
to the twisted branches of the apple tree
beside your left cheek –
arms intertwining,
gnarled with age and wear
splattered with the paint of the sun.
The tendrils are
fingers grasping,
hands interlocking,
against the pale sky.

Lauren Rollit, age 15

Tutti Frutti Kids

Karachi reminds me of honey. It's sticky and warm and sweet and loud, especially in the summer. The sunset blurs the different sounds and smells together while spices surf on heat waves.

My aunt takes my cousins and me in the jeep every evening and drives us to Tutti Frutti where they have delicious frosty frozen yogurt. When you eat it, it sinks down your throat and makes your insides cold. Cold insides when it's hot outside is the best feeling in the world.

We have to walk across the sandy garbage, up the cement steps where children sit. This place doesn't look like honey; it's grimy and grey. It's like everything dirty went in a blender and then the blender exploded on these concrete steps.

The children are chatting and smiling. Their parents don't care about them. They don't buy them new clothes. When they see us they start to ask questions. Whether we want to buy their old roses; whether we want to buy their outdated magazines; whether we want to buy their dysfunctional plasticky toys. We have to ignore them and go inside the store.

The store is the inside of candy land. It's bright and plasticky and clean. There are swirls everywhere and funny bubbly lamps. This is the kind of place where fairies come for picnics. When I'm here, I feel magical.

There are stations for each flavour of frozen yogurt. My favourite is strawberry but it's not always there.

The man that works here lets me taste the flavours, even though tasting is not allowed. He winks at me when we pay and calls me sweetie.

When I get my treat, we go back to the car. I see the kids and remember that I have an extra spoon. I take some of my yogurt on the extra spoon and hand it to one of the boys.

He is confused and stares at what I have given him. He waits for me to take a bite and then does the same, making sure he

does it just like I did. Then he smiles at me. Every kid likes the taste of chocolate Froyo. My cousins have extra spoons too and suddenly all the children have a taste.

I wonder if next time they'll want to choose their own flavours. Maybe they would like vanilla better. Vanilla or raspberry or caramel-cheesecake. I wonder if they will go to the store and feel magical just like me. I ask my aunt if we can take them with us tomorrow.

The next day we get in the jeep and we drive to Tutti Frutti. I'm excited today because the children on the steps can see candy land too. We tell them they can come in the store with us and they leap off of the stairs. They race to the store like they are being chased and jump around as if they have springs on their feet.

They don't know how to get the yogurt. Maybe they have forgotten. I help them and then it's okay.

The man that works here doesn't let them try the flavours. He doesn't even give them time to think and makes them choose immediately. They choose all the colourful ones. Their cups look like melted rainbows.

We pay for everything and sit down. The man at the store didn't wink at me today.

The children can't sit still and look as if they have swallowed fireworks. Everyone around the store is staring at us and at them. The other customers are sitting far away and some are leaving. I wonder if we smell like ogres and that is why everyone is turning away.

My aunt says maybe we should eat outside and we all follow her. We sit on the steps; the blended garbage steps with the other children. We sit with them on the steps and it's not so bad after all.

Noor Khwaja, age 18

The Mask



Kathy Luc, age 14

young voices 2015

magazine of teen writing and visual art

Call for submissions

GUIDELINES

Express yourself!

1. **Write what you want to write!** It can be a poem, story, essay, rant, review...
2. Toronto Public Library has one-time print and electronic rights to all work, as well as the right to excerpt from the work, both online and in print, for purposes of promotion.
3. Written submissions will be selected from each of the following age categories:
12–14; 15–16; 17–19.
4. Artwork will not be categorized by age for the purposes of choosing what to publish.

NOTE Related work (ie. artwork submitted in conjunction with writing) may not be considered together.

WHO CAN ENTER

Teens 12–19 years who live or go to school in Toronto.

WHAT CAN BE ENTERED

You can enter two pieces each year:

- One piece of writing per person
- One visual piece per person, either a piece of artwork OR a photograph

Written Work: poems, stories, rants, reviews...

- 1,000 words maximum
- Typed entries preferred, but not required

Artwork:

- 8 ½" x 11" preferred
- Black and white artwork only
- Hand drawn artwork only (i.e. no digitally created artwork)

Photography:

- High resolution for electronic submissions, minimum 2400 pixels wide and maximum 3000 pixels high
- Black and white photographs only

HOW TO ENTER

In a Toronto Public Library branch

- FULLY complete the submission form
- Attach the form to your work
- Drop your work off at any Toronto Public Library branch
- For artwork submissions dropped off at library branches, originals are preferred, but if you submit a copy **you will be required to submit the original should your work be selected for publication**

Online submissions

- Submit written work online using the submission form at tpl.ca/youngvoices

Artwork

- **You will be required to submit your original artwork should your work be selected for publication**

Photographs

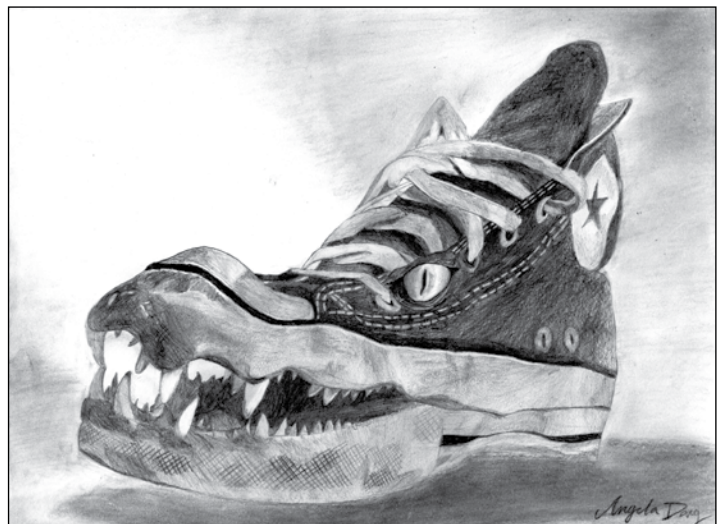
- Submit high resolution black and white photographs, minimum 2400 pixels wide and maximum 3000 pixels high

SELECTION TIMELINES

Submission deadline:

Tuesday, April 7, 2015

- Editorial teams meet to make selections during spring 2015
- Contributors selected to be published will be contacted during June 2015
- Only those with work to be published will be contacted
- *Young Voices* magazine is published once every year in October
- Questions? Contact Ken Sparling ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca



YOUNG VOICES 2015 Submission Form

Please fill out this form fully and attach it to your submission.

Submissions with incomplete forms may not be considered for publication.

Submission Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2015

Last name _____

First name(s) _____

Address _____

Postal code _____

Email _____ Phone number _____

Age _____ Male Female Other

Today's date _____

Title of your submission _____

Genre of submission:

Poem Fiction Rant Review Art Photograph

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I heard about *Young Voices*:

At the library From friends At school At a shelter Online

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tpl.ca/youngvoices



Monsters Within

We all feared monsters as small ones,
The ghosts, older siblings, there are tons,
The mommies say "don't talk to strangers,"
Like that would keep us safe from danger;

Every night, I sleep in fear,
That even those who we keep dear,
May be the ones who we fear most,
The ones who are far worse than ghosts;

Some say beasts hunt at nighttime,
Well, they need to shift their paradigm,
The real monsters walk upon us,
Within the crowd, the class, the bus;

They look like normal citizens,
They don't have fangs, wings, nor fins,
They have the power to possess,
Even a little girl in a dress;

They feed off insecurity, fear and jealousy,
But without them, their power is tiny,
They take control if we let them,
Creating chaos, havoc and mayhem;

In the myths, they all have powers,
In reality, they have no more than ours,
They hold our hands and wear our skins,
Then turn around and kick our shins;

Yes, I may sound like just a fool,
You may yawn, you may drool,
But what I say today is all true,
So please wait until I'm through;

The monsters of today do not cease,
Under our noses, they take our peace,
Anybody can catch them, even you,
But it takes power and courage to actually do;

Though these demons are horrible and horrific,
They often turn from terrible to terrific,
It may seem like they control us,
But that's not a statement you can trust;

These monsters are the whispers we hear,
No one else can hear them – they're in your ear,
Their true identities are the whispers inside,
The little voices in your mind;

You control them, yes you do,
But if you don't, they'll control you,
I don't know how else to convince,
Besides sharing from my experience;

This warning will be my only plea,
It's funny because it shouldn't just be,
I just don't want them to take you too,
Like the last thing that was stolen: me.

Chloe Tu, age 15



Monsters Within

Sam Yang, age 15



Collection

Michelle Li, age 15

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