



*ink*

Volume 03

*Teen journal for writing and visual art*  
VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

# INK

Renata Lawrence, Age 18

# WELCOME TO *INK*!

2020 has been a year unlike any other, and that has impacted *ink*, like it has everything else. Our call for submissions, which normally closes at the end of April, was extended while teens scrambled to figure out what their lives looked like within the four walls of their home. Some of the work in *ink* comes from a time before the pandemic, where teens sit in classes, desks next to each other, daydreaming. Some work confronts COVID-19 directly, whether through teens' own experiences or through empathy with the situation of others.

Family is often a theme in *ink*, but never more so than this year. Poems and stories about family take on additional meaning—we see the people in our homes more than ever before, but traveling to see relatives has grown much more complicated.

This year has also been marked by social and political action, and we see that represented in *ink* as well. Teens want their voices to be heard, and they want to be taken seriously. They are ready to take action on climate change, racism, and domestic abuse. If *ink* is a barometer, the future is in passionate, caring hands.

Volume 3 of *ink* also has a healthy dose of other realities, whether science fiction, dystopia, horror or surrealist dreamscapes. Readers of all kinds will find something magical in the pages of *ink*.

Finally, we have the great honour this year of publishing the first chapter of Koa Krakowski Horowitz's unfinished novel, *Hoopoe Bird*. Koa was an enthusiastic and talented member of the VPL Teens Creative Writing Club, and her work appeared in the first volume of *ink*. Koa passed away in 2018. She wrote *Hoopoe Bird* while in the hospital.

Vancouver's teens have once again inspired us with their creativity. We extend our thanks to the writers and artists who so generously shared their work with us. Additional thanks are due to the *ink* Teen Advisory Group, for their wisdom and guidance. We hope you enjoy it!

Teen Services  
Vancouver Public Library  
2020

Cover art: *Marriage of the Moon and Sun* by Sienna Sullivan, Age 17



## CURRENT IDENTITY

Jordan Pearsall, Age 17

### THANK YOU

to all the artists and writers who contributed to ink!

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"As long as I control what I can control, and keep it as consistent as possible, I think that'll do well, especially across the course of a season." — Max Fried

"We must recognize and nurture the creative parts of each other without always understanding what will be created." — Audre Lorde

This is a collage about myself and who I think I am so far. It was the first assignment for my art class. The idea was to find myself in magazine clippings and for everything to have some sort of connection to me. A little self-indulgent? Maybe. But I am happy with it and I see myself in it. I entitled it Current Identity because I think that, though I see myself in it now, I may not in a few years.

## HAVEN IN HER SLEEP

*Nghi Nguyen, Age 15*

Levi woke up at 8:01 AM on a Saturday, with the atmosphere around her bed characteristically dead. She finished her morning routine complete with breakfast by 8:47 AM. The buzz of his text would come at 8:48.

Both of them had nothing to do that day, and when two such people had nothing to do, they naturally made every plan for each other. She'd tried to cancel their plans before. She'd tried simply not showing up. Nothing ever worked. Eventually, she'd figured that if this Saturday was his last, she would much prefer to be with him to the end.

She rode off on her bike, away from her Downtown apartment surrounded by the clamor of traffic caused by people slaving away at their nine-to-fives. She passed her faded high school filled with brainwashed teenagers who loved filters more than themselves after ten minutes of pedaling.

It would take fifteen minutes more of winding through narrow alleyways to reach his house, where he and his laughter waited, ready to transport her far away from reality.

*It would happen at 11:36 AM.*

He would be gone by the next three minutes, and the second that would follow would last an eternity. That second, full of shock and guilt and the feel of her heart and pride ripping from her chest would never dull down. At least, now, she was finally out of tears to cry.

"I would die for you," he'd said. It was a promise, a fact of the past all wrapped up in five short words she'd kill to hear again.

The many hours between it and falling back onto her bed blurred past in white noise and oversaturated images. Waiting excruciated her, but she knew not to rush. She'd mastered the art of falling asleep at the right moment, when her mind was at the perfect degree of drowsiness.

The moment her eyelids fell, she slipped back into the bliss of Haven, where he would still be.

There was no sense of time in Haven because the land and moon had minds of their own (the sun was not welcome). He and she never ran out of energy because their bodies had no physical limitations. As far as she knew, the two of them were Haven's only inhabitants (which might seem lonely to some, but who else did she need when she already had him?).

Tonight, Levi was transported to the shoreline. She breathed in the salty air and relished the feel of cold wind against her cheeks. Oh, how she had missed the waterside path. The sea, still and serene, seemed to have finally ceased grieving.

Two bikes stood on the asphalt path, one of which he occupied. Although both he and she could fly, walk through walls, and will their destinations to be right before them, their favorite mode of transportation was cycling. She rushed to embrace him, then asked as she mounted her bike, "Where are we headed?"

He pointed ahead to the twisting road. "Forward til the stars come out."

And they would ride until then, which in Daytime, took several hours, but in Haven, took no time at all, because perfection could never last too long. Waves were sloshing against the pebbled shore, and, alongside the turn of her bike chains and swish of the wind, provided the perfect harmony of calmness, graciously distant from the noise of Day, but always keeping off the lonely silence. He

signaled for her to stop as they rounded a corner of the leftside cliff, behind which hid twinkling stars against a Prussian blue sky.

They stopped along the path and willed a bench where a bench was needed, for the act of kicking down their bike stands was not nearly as charming as resting their bikes against the ornate seat.

"See that?" He pointed to a glowing cluster of stars which connected themselves into constellations of mythical beasts. "I told you they'd be here."

And she hadn't not believed him in the slightest, but she knew how passionate he was about the stars. They made the sky feel endless in a world where the clouds were the limit (trust, she had tried flying to there before). So together, they sat on the bench to watch the stars, his arm over her shoulders and her body safely tucked into his. He pointed out and named every constellation.

Although she'd no way of knowing, she believed in the accuracy of every name because there was no way for one to be wrong.

Everything was right in the Haven.

"You can't stay here anymore," he said.

"What?" She said it louder than she'd have liked. Surely she had misheard.

His arms tightened around her. It was suddenly hard to breathe, and as she sat, frozen and gasping for air, he explained to her in words she hadn't known she never wanted to hear.

"You haven't tried anything new in sixty days, Levi, and I'd really hoped that you'd finally learn to accept that there was nothing you could change." His calm, sweet voice started to break.

"But you've started making my worst fear a reality. You're becoming comfortable in the Loop. The Haven isn't reality—"

"I don't wish to be in reality," she whispered harshly, as tears streamed down her face.

"You can't stay here forever, and it's already been too long."

"Only three hundred and ninety-five days—"

He drew back so his eyes looked into hers. She hated the pity in them.

"Oh, Levi, surely you've miscounted. It's been so, so much longer."

How much longer, she was dying to ask. But then the sea rose up to roar. She knew exactly what it meant. She'd heard it so many times before. In her seat, she was paralyzed, unable to stand to change her fate. So she simply gripped onto him tighter, dug her cheek deeper into his chest, and waited for the wall of livid sea to come crashing down.

She woke up at 8:01 AM. It was Saturday, like it had been for the last thirteen years.

# 58 SECONDS UNTIL MIDNIGHT

*August Kirste-Yee, Age 17*

11:59:02 footsteps.  
11:59:03 shouts.  
11:59:04 glass shatters.  
11:59:05 time  
11:59:06 slows  
11:59:06 to  
11:59:06 a  
11:59:07 stop.

And in the void,  
It rises.  
Clawed fingers  
Stretch,  
Curl.  
Its eyes  
Slowly  
Open,  
It blinks,  
As time  
Remembers  
To tick.

11:59:08 a siren screams to life.  
11:59:09 rain pounds, relentless.  
11:59:10 a tree  
11:59:11 crashes  
11:59:12 to the ground  
11:59:13 barely making it  
11:59:14 before time forgets.

In the void,  
It lifts its head,  
Lets out a roar  
That echoes,  
Rattling  
Everything.  
But no one  
Can hear  
So time  
Ticks  
Again.

11:59:15 a child screams  
11:59:16 loud enough  
11:59:17 to shatter a window  
11:59:18 and  
11:59:19 it  
11:59:20 keeps  
11:59:21 on  
11:59:22 screaming  
11:59:23 and then silence.  
11:59:24 time cuts off like the aborted scream.

And now the beast  
Is awake,  
Its appetite  
Piqued,  
The child  
Sparking  
Its craving  
For more.

11:59:25 it fails to notice  
11:59:26 that the clock  
11:59:27 has continued  
11:59:28 to tick.  
11:59:29 and the end  
11:59:30 is  
11:59:31 approaching.

11:59:32 they ignore it, the people  
11:59:33 it's just the storm, they say  
11:59:34 as the chills  
11:59:35 running down their spines  
11:59:36 scream  
11:59:37 RUN!  
11:59:38 they wonder why  
11:59:39 they've never  
11:59:40 been this afraid  
11:59:41 of some thunder .

11:59:42 it must be  
11:59:43 the fact  
11:59:44 that storms  
11:59:45 don't  
11:59:46 normally  
11:59:47 eat  
11:59:48 people.  
  
11:59:49 the beast  
11:59:50 roars  
11:59:51 and this time  
11:59:52 they  
11:59:53 can't ignore  
11:59:54 its victorious cries.

11:59:55 but  
11:59:56 a monster's belly  
11:59:57 is  
11:59:58 never  
11:59:59 quite  
12:00:00 satisfied.

## CHURCH GIRL 1 JOHN 1:9

Emily Shi, Age 16

Hear my cry, hear my prayer  
Hear me shout out my sins  
I am broken and wretched  
You have not replied  
I am guilt, I am sorrow  
Do you hear? Do you hear?  
Why ask for forgiveness,  
if you do not care.

If I stray from your path,  
If my heart is not true  
Am I damned to damnation  
if I dare to doubt you?  
If I sin, I am tainted  
this was taught in your house  
But if I should confess,  
they said you'd forgive

I laugh oft on Sundays  
I curse with your name  
I dreamed about kissing  
A girl passing by  
I've thought of her smile  
Of her hair, of her face  
What if I grew to love her  
- unabashed, unashamed

Your word might reproach  
I would not repent  
Run to tear out my heart  
for someone never here  
Or stifle my mirth  
And bite back my tongue  
Make myself someone  
who might one day please you

Some say you are wrathful  
Some say you are kind  
But I do not know you  
Or what you would say  
To whoever is out there  
I hope you are kind  
that you are forgiving  
and do not condemn

Forgive me my trespass  
My arrogant pride  
The faith that I have  
A right to my life  
I confess that I feel  
No need to repent  
But if I am wrong  
Please forgive me again



## [ UNDER THE BLANKET ]

Raeanne Tieu, Age 18

Some people sweep their problems under a rug. I come face to face with mine on late, sleepless nights—under a blanket (& also babies are wrapped in blankets).



As an eighteen-year-old girl, some people may think it is a little early for me to be thinking about the prospect of having children (since finding a husband in the first place has proven to be hard enough). But with the devastating crisis that is climate change, I have begun to question time and time again whether or not it is ethical to bear children in this day and age. According to science journalist and author, Britt Wray, “any child born

today will have to live in a world where hurricanes, flooding, wildfires—what we used to call natural disasters—have become commonplace.” I don’t pretend to understand all the problems that will arise in the coming years as a result of climate change, but I have seen and heard enough for it to alter my mindset completely.

I want children; I want to be able to freely have a family of my own without feeling guilty for doing so. But when we have already destroyed so many beautiful parts of our home, I have to consider the environment my children would grow up in and how much waste they themselves would produce. To cite Britt Wray once more, “...on average, having one less child in an industrialized nation can save about 59 tons of carbon dioxide per year.” She adds, “Consider that a Bangladeshi child only adds 56 metric tons of carbon to their parents’ carbon legacy over their lifetime, while an American child, in comparison, adds 9,441 to theirs. So this is why some people argue that it’s parents from nations with huge carbon footprints who should think the hardest about how many kids they have.”

My aim here is not to discourage anyone from having a child; it is not my place to do so, and the decision to have a child is a deeply personal one that encompasses so much more than I have mentioned. Rather, my goal in this reflection and art piece is to emphasize the severity of climate change and its resulting consequences. It is heart-breaking for me to see that we are currently living in a world in which there are people who want to have children but are genuinely afraid to do so—movements such as BirthStrike are a testament to that fact.

So as a response to the people who wonder why I care so intensely about climate change, why I post 103948580 things on my story about it, and why I am so adamant about reducing my footprint, it is because this problem is not one that is far off into the future - it is one that is affecting every single person on the entire planet right now in one way or another, whether they realize it or not.

Hunt, E. (2019, March 12). *BirthStrikers: meet the women who refuse to have children until climate change ends*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/mar/12/birthstrikers-meet-the-women-who-refuse-to-have-children-until-climate-change-ends>

Wray, Britt. (2019, May). *How climate change affects your mental health*. TED. [https://www.ted.com/talks/britt\\_wray\\_how\\_climate\\_change\\_affects\\_your\\_mental\\_health/transcript#t-131549](https://www.ted.com/talks/britt_wray_how_climate_change_affects_your_mental_health/transcript#t-131549)

## REMEMBRANCE FOR EVERYDAY

Renata Lawrence, Age 18

autumn is a needle  
threading itself through winter’s frost  
hesitating before summer’s fabric  
before the seasons cross

from the bunched veins  
come the yellows, the oranges, the reds  
that red a reminder  
stories grandparents told

I take those memories  
and remove the rust  
parchment grown wings  
encrusted by dust

maybe the red no longer bothers us  
when it is far from our own veins  
but look closer  
see those red stains?

a few days ago, before dawn  
realization tumbled downstairs to greet me  
under the chant of the clocks  
H-hour, six-thirty

the sky’s thunder booms  
my mug drops to the floor  
shatters and rocks  
like pebbles washed ashore

above me, heavy timber  
in the distance, thunder’s thin hum  
I knew I was safe  
the sky darkens, ultramarine to ripe plum

grandfather’s mirror eyes me  
age spotting the glass  
I imagine grandfather  
lying in the grass

he turns to ask his friend  
*are we sure that’s not another explosion?*  
I’m glad I can’t imagine his expression  
In the trenches, darkened and ashen

look in the mirror  
take a moment to reflect  
the fight for what we have today  
I give my thanks and respect

## ETUDE NO. 18 IN E FLAT MAJOR

*Yumai Bishop, Age 18*

Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and Shostakovich. These are the four greatest loves in my brief music life. My life outside these is the four author counterparts. Music and books. Both written works live in people's hearts, and they are what syncopate my heartbeat.

I imagine my heart beating right now. It is slightly flustered, the SA node projecting the slight electric impulse and blood rushing from the pulmonary vein into the right ventricle and left atrium into my lungs where they find fresh oxygen. Then it is shoved back into the left atrium, into the left ventricle, and out again into my bloodstream. All this takes less than the time it takes to blink a few times.

Usually what happens is that around this point, people start to think that a) this person is a nerd and I feel uncomfortable b) this person sounds like an intellectual snob—which is true to some extent—and c) she avoided mentioning the actual amount of time it takes for blood to be circulated and omitted some of the details.

I confess, all the above are perfectly logical and rational responses. I have scared away hundreds of people in this fashion and thus am left sitting here alone in my room.

Something truly remarkable in all these abstract ideas about myself is that I am still a hopeless romantic. Ever since the time I saw the older girls with their soft hair floating in the pink breeze and crisp school uniforms, it was my goal to become just like them—a second-year high schooler.

Please don't ask me why it had to be the second year. It seemed to me that seventeen was the height of teenagehood, and all the second-year high schoolers in the books and manga I devoured were kings and queens of the teenage-verse. To them alone belonged the usual drama, friendship,

and tournaments carved by blood, diligence, and love. Yes, love. Even nerds like to imagine. Plus, I didn't realise being an Austen fan played a part in sealing my destiny back then.

But of the arts. As much as I loved the Joshi-kou-sei and their glittering nails and cute-murdered school bags loitering in Takeshita-dōri, I could not give up the idea of classical love. Love flourished in the arts: Music sang of love unrequited, books chanted love as sacred rituals. And art itself. When I went to see the Van Gogh exhibition, I secretly thought it was fascinating someone would cut off their ear for you. Not morbid at all.

Yet alas, love was not to be a part of my story just yet. I sat starry-eyed about my luscious future. It is quite another thing to live the dream.

I think of four particular love affairs I have had. Two with the arts, two that technically wouldn't count since nothing happened. In the first year of high school, I was suddenly gifted with the opportunity of studying music seriously. I'd always dreamt of my fingers waltzing around on the black and white keys. There was no reason for me to say no.

Around this time, I began to harbour ambitions of carving my mark with words. "Ambitions" might actually be too strong of a word. Nonetheless, from the strong feelings the dream elicited, it could and should be called as such. And ambitions are less apt to die. Usually, when ambitions are murdered, the person dies with it.

But the real reason I didn't do anything about the "real" love—two people I actually did care greatly about—was the gaping fear. I can feel my heartbeat speeding up simply recollecting the memory. In the whirlwind of music and words, I was drowning in life. When I turned seventeen, the "second year" high schooler, I was too busy trying to hold onto my life to pursue "real" love.

The Arts are the sort of lover that demands all and gives nothing in return but an occasional smile. They claim your life for forfeit. They bestow a "somewhat beyond basic" skill set as you spend more time, your life on them. And if only you are willing to sacrifice everything, then only may you get a lottery ticket envelope that contains an engagement ring. Even then, they could throw your life back at you like some rotten fruit after they had completely devoured it. They could very well laugh in your face as everything turns to dust and ashes.

But of course, that is being rather dramatic. The bottom line was this: I was mediocly advanced in my music pursuit, and still had a long way to go for the muse of words to smile upon me.

In the meantime, my "real" loves had faded away.

Faded. That is another word that comes to mind when I reflect on the subject of youth and love. It is like one of those sunburnt red photo albums with browning edges, the photographs faded

from age. I see Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and Shostakovich. I see the four authors who reign in my heart. I see the two people who had become my "what-ifs". They are all documented neatly in clear plastic pockets, sunburnt and brown and faded.

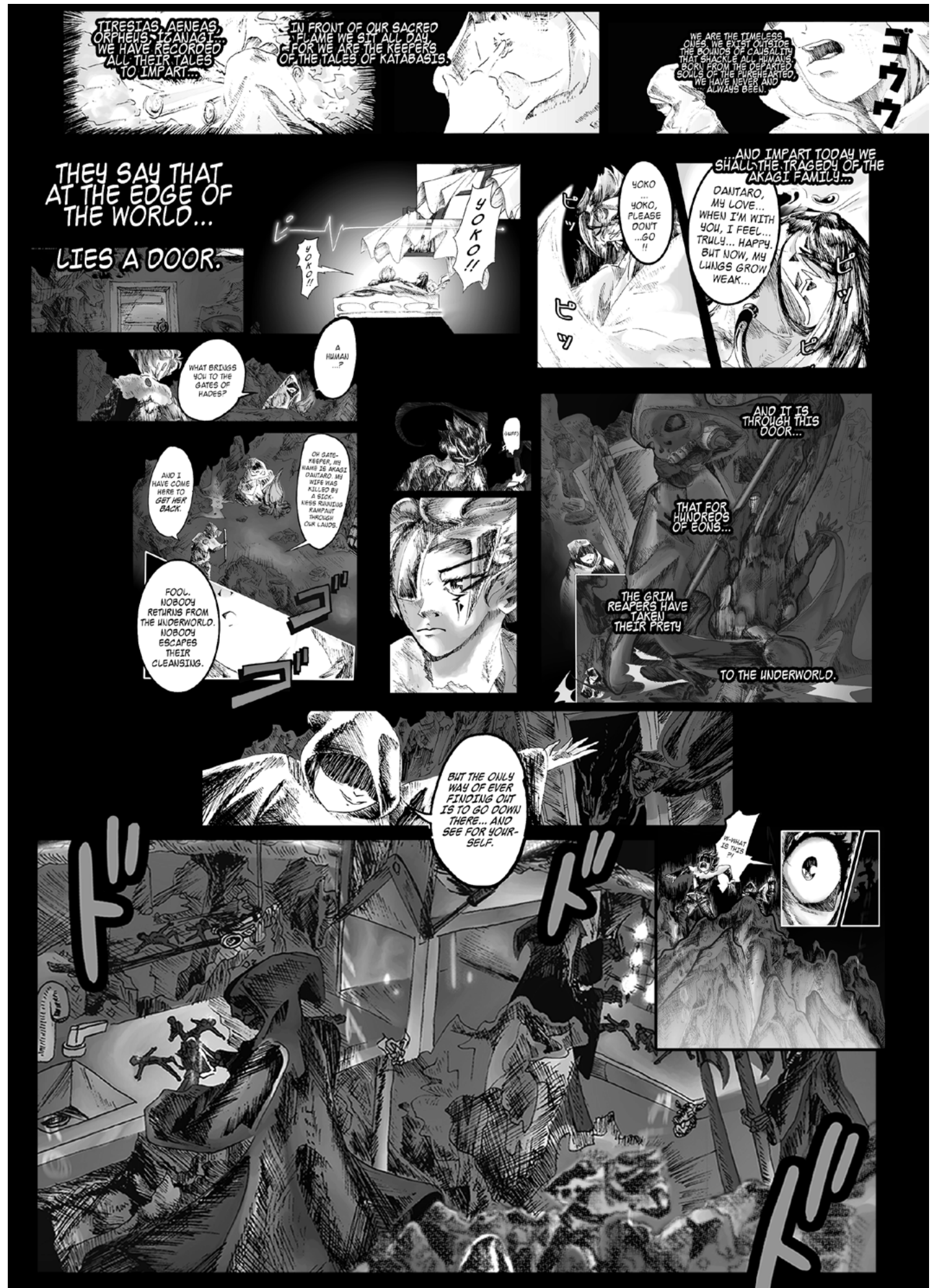
I am still a hopeless romantic. It just took me longer to realise that being a romantic and actually living as a romantic were two completely and immensely different things. I cannot marry ideas. I cannot go back into the past and pursue the faded "what-ifs". Some things are simply not compatible.

I am no longer a second-year high schooler. To that extent, I am no longer a high schooler. That time of my life is coming to a close, to be kept in a red album to sunburn.

It is why now, I would write an etude. Number 18, E flat major, the key I like best. Youth and love. Antiquity and modernity. Faded and crisp. An extended note of I love you.



PLEASE READ FROM RIGHT TO LEFT



# EXCERPT FROM HOPOE BIRD: A STORY OF A SLAVE, A CROWN PRINCE, AND TWO LEGENDARY THRONES

*Koa Krakowski Horowitz*

## Chapter One: Hope

*From the perspective of Hoopoe Nakamakos*

Darkness surrounded me and covered me in shadows—shadows that should have protected me. But now I was here. Stuck on a plantation, a breeding ground for slaves. I pulled my scraps closers and wished the night chills would pass by my tent. Next to me, the dark-skinned girl tossed and turned in her sleep. “Maybe she had nightmares?” This is something my dead mother would have said. The girl looked weak to me. Maybe it was because I had spent my time being trained as an assassin, but then I remembered how helpless I had felt during my capture, too.

It had only been days since my Island, Gios, was attacked. I remember the sounds of the seagulls as they panicked, watching our enemies ransack the island and rape and kill our women. I remember, clear as day, my escape to the cove on the west side of the island where my father had kept an emergency dingy for years. My brother and I were the only ones left. Our mother, had sacrificed everything for us, including her life. We had no idea how close the soldiers were. I remember my brother’s last words: “I think they found us, Hope,” and then he was dead in front of me. The rest was blur. I heard screaming; who knows if it was me. And then I was here on a plantation in East Africa, thousands of miles from home. Trapped, with no way out.

I could have escaped, but I didn’t know Africa. Queen Sheeba’s scouts were the best trackers in all the world; at least that was what my mother told me. My parents, Devon and Alesandro, had once been enslaved to the royal family of Africa (then led by King Hrishma), and the scouts had

never stopped searching for them. At least that’s what I knew from bedtime stories and my own enslavement. I was also “a pale skin.” I stuck out like a sore thumb with my pale skin, green eyes, and chocolaty hair. I was considered beautiful on my island. The very fact that had been to my advantage all my life was the thing that I now hated most about myself. I wished I were dark skinned. I wished I were African.

I hid in the shadows and waited for my captors to enter my tent, as they did every morning. They wanted information on my parents, on my island, on Greece, on the King. I wanted to talk to them, but my Mother’s words haunted me. “Never talk, Hoopoe, never,” she had said. Hoopoe was my real name. She said I was named after a prophecy, and that the Tribal Witch had named me. But, truth be told, I thought it was shitty astrology that only someone as weak as my captors would take for truth.

This morning, they did not waltz in with ornament-like uniforms, or their dogs, or the torturers. Only the slave master of the plantation came along with one other official. His uniform was the flimsiest of them all. The African royal family had been plagued three years ago with an infection commonly called yellow fever. It was a threat to us all, they said. “At least one hundred thousand dead in their capital,” another slave had told me. It sounded nothing like the plagues of home, which were deadly due to insufficient doctors rather than the pure power of the disease. The plague had left living only two members of the largest royal family in Africa, the Crown Princess and her younger brother. The kingdom decided that for the first time in its lengthy history, it would crown a woman Queen: a Queen with absolute power.

Queen Sheeba was 20 at the time. I had met her only once, when they first brought me to the camps. She was nearly 6 feet tall and taller than most of the men. She had been the only one of the captors who truly threatened me. I had yet to meet her younger brother. Crown Prince Dorian was tall and handsome, but that was not where his talents lay. Apparently, the Crown Prince entertained more women than the Queen did, and rumours among us slaves said that he was a master of the “finer arts of entertainment.” One of the slave women said he even brought Roman lions to the palace once.

Beyond his ridiculousness, the Crown Prince was an expert rider, runner, and soldier, and he was the one who lead Queen Sheeba’s legendary scouts to the Island of Gios, my home. Crown Prince Dorian was the one who broke down my family’s door, killed my mother for fun, and chased me, my father and my brother. He killed my brother with an axe, and then acted like he was our ally. He let my father go free on one condition: that he come back to Africa to meet with Queen Sheeba. My father agreed, but when I resisted, they captured me. I thought that my father would protect me, and he did. But he betrayed our kin and the spirit of my mother when he gave up the crucial military moves Greece was planning. And now, I wouldn’t let my father help me. I would not let a betrayer be my saviour.

“Long time, no see, Hoopoe Nakamakos,” Dorian said to me as he entered my tent. His eyes were gleaming.

“You killed my mother and my brother, and you made my father a traitor. I will never respect you, Pallos.” The slave master gasped at my insolence. No one addressed royalty by only their last name, no matter how influential said surname was.

“See Marcus, this is why I came back for her. She hates us. She’ll even express it. She’ll even withstand torture,” the Crown Prince said calmly, as if the words were still coming to him as he spoke. But I knew better than to believe him.

“Umm, I could have brought Dr. Fghina with us if you had given me the notice, Your Majesty,” the slave master said quickly. He seemed worried and stressed, not that I cared. Torture was the least of my worries. And the slave master keeping his employment didn’t quite bother me either!

“No, Dr. Fghina’s torture doesn’t affect Miss Hoopoe at all. I propose the solution I told you about earlier,” the Crown Prince continued.

“But that is preposterous, Majesty. I cannot have a slave working the job of a ladies’ maid for the Queen. Especially not a slave who hates us and would torture, poison or even kill us. She would be a liability, Dorian,” the slave master said.

“Give her two weeks, if we arrive and nothing terrible has happened, then hire her. But, if she does anything dishonorable, let her go to the lions.” And with that, the Crown Prince left, leaving me with the slave master, two hungry dogs both willing to kill the other for any reason. I glared at him.

“I know Dorian, he would never do this. He’s out of his mind.” Then the strangest thing happened. The slave master looked right at me. “Hoopoe Nakamakos,” he started, but I stopped him.

“‘Hope,’ you and everybody else, better start calling me ‘Hope,’” I said.

“Hope, I don’t understand why you hate your true name. ‘Hoopoe’ is actually kind of plain and it doesn’t even have a crown, but still is beautiful. At least King Solomon thinks so. Did you know he had a lost sister? Her name was ‘Hoopoe.’”

I glare at him. Even when he’s whipping me, this man talks my ears off. It’s torture enough being around him.

“But you probably don’t care about that. Why do you think Dorian would do this? He’s usually much more murderous, and I’ve never seen him be merciful. What he did on the island for your father and you— it was truly miraculous he didn’t murder you on the spot!”

I look up to the slave master, straight into his eyes, green just like mine. "You were there on the day of my capture, weren't you?" I asked.

"Yes, I was," the slave master said, but then he looked back to me. "You still haven't answered the question Hope."

"Thank you," was all I said. And then it came out of me, the theory I had cooked up. "Crown Prince Dorian is in love with me."

The slave master, a man only a few years my senior, cocked an eyebrow, chuckled, and then said, "Yes, now I see it."

"Incident one: he thought my brother was a bandit, trying to rob me, which would explain why he cut off my brother's hands and then said 'theft dies hard in Europe, doesn't it, my lady?'"

The slave looked at me. "Dorian is stupid when he's in love," was all he said.

"And then he offered my father and I the deal."

"Also Hope, he didn't kill your mother; she stabbed him. He fought back, and well, you can imagine a forty-six year old woman against a trained killer? She had no chance."

"So his excuse for killing my mother is because she challenged him to a duel?" I asked.

"In Africa, deaths during a duel are considered victims of a game, not murdered," the slave master explained.

"In Greece, where the incident happened, death is death, and murder is murder. There are victims to a game, there is murder in cold blood, and there is also challenging an opponent in game you are sure to win," I said right back to him.

"Your choice in what you believe. I believe that the Crown Prince is truly a good man, and you don't. But that is a choice that you now somehow have to make," the slave master said. I understood what he meant. I didn't want to, but I did.

"When do I start work?" I asked.

"Dawn, tomorrow" was all he said before dramatically leaving my tent. Suddenly awash in the day's heat, I hissed with anger. I had a strict rule about keeping my tent arranged so as to allow for the cool flow of air. Even my torturers knew to keep it that way, or otherwise...

End of chapter one:)

## DETERIORATION (OR: DELICATE ART OF FINDING AND FORGETTING)

*Maya Mior, Age 15*

The world is abstract,  
Office buildings and kitchen cabinets painted in dripping colours,  
Viewed through a solid sheet of water, a caricature of frosted glass  
As they spill off the canvas.

The everyday plays out to a soundtrack of music almost forgotten  
And nobody else can hear the record crackle.  
Mumble through the words of this song I've heard a thousand times,  
And wonder why I can't recall the verses.

This feels like a liminal state,  
Detached, floating over paths I once knew well.  
But the colours drip over the road signs as the landscape blends,  
And I'm lost.

A sea of unrecognizable faces surrounds me at events  
Found in a calendar I don't remember marking.  
A carbon-copy of my handwriting fills each square.  
Days guided by reminders I never set.

I suppose it's the natural order of things.  
Every action must have an equal and opposite reaction.  
We form and we fade, and hopefully accomplish something in between.  
And then, we move on.

I move on.

## VIVID

Megan Seong Althaus, Age 16

I can't move my legs. I'm stuck, gilded by an eerie street lamp under an inky, starless sky. Though the other lamps near me seem to be dying, the thick, golden range of the crooked lamp beside me is strong. It's searing the top of my head and my arms, drawing steam. I can't feel it, but I can smell the horrid stench of burnt flesh and hair wafting around me. This dream is vivid.

I scan my surroundings and quickly recognize them. It's my block but twisted. The houses resemble my neighbours' and my own, but painted in faded pastels with boarded-up windows. I can't help noticing the severe lack of evident life. The trees seem to be especially artificial; smooth, striped, and rooted in a ground of nothing but blue concrete.

I feel my pulse thumping against my ribs as blood rushes to my legs. My nerves scream at me to run as my shoes begin to bleed a molten rubber river down the side of the curb. I feel panic, like a million maggots tearing at dead muscle, worming its way into my chest. It sends tremors coursing through me. My lungs compress and burn with great anguish. This dream is vivid.

I book it like my life depends on it. Every street lamp I pass under flickers to life, cooking me with every lunge. The rotting boards nailed to every window frame splinter into millions of crispy wooden shards, revealing giant eyeballs with pulsating pink veins bulging from within. Their bright irises mock me from behind as the doors to all the houses fling open to cackle at me.

My shoes dissipate into the hot ground as I hit a steep incline, leaving nothing but colourful froth by my ankles. I try to make it up the hill, but my momentum fades quickly. Funny, the words on my tongue have never been more colourful. I abandon the gravelly incline to spare my scraped feet. I attempt to make another leap, but that sends me

hovering a good six feet above the sidewalk, slowly falling back to the ground. It's like my innards have turned to helium in a balloon casing made of skin, with my thick winter coat barely weighing me down. Gravity is in a mood. This dream is vivid.

I direct my attention to the sound of car horns blaring in the distance.

"A traffic jam?" I wonder.

The idea of seeing other people is more appealing than not. I drift toward the noise like a swimmer in midair. The closer I get to the traffic, the quieter the horns become. I'm confused, but I keep moving. I hit the main road and fall to my knees — I'm no longer able to float. The cars have gone silent. The vehicles before me are all light blue-grey in colour, abandoned, and have the same worn-down interior. I reach for one of the car's handles to see if it's unlocked, but I do nothing but trigger its alarm system. All of their alarm systems. The sirens wail together to form a deafening symphony. No words are spoken, but I can hear their pain, their loneliness. I don't know how to feel about it at all. I press my hands against my ears and crumble, staying hunched over on the cracked road. I feel my eyes, like glass orbs, shatter from the noise. Instead of pain, I feel "sharp." I imagine it's how a vase must feel after being dropped from a height; in a million jagged pieces. This memory is vivid.

The ground below me opens its filthy maw and swallows me whole. I am blind, falling, accelerating per passing second. Cold air is engulfing me, pumping me full of adrenaline. This memory is vivid.

I hit the ground with a dull thud. There is a strong scent of sweet peppermint tea by my nose. I hear a sparrow conversing with a crow. The birds' voices are a clear contrast between sweet and bitter. I

feel groggy and sore. This memory is vivid. I crack my eyes open. Though blurry, my vision has returned. I can make out the shapes of my bed, the legs of my desk, and my octagonal window by the ceiling. I'm lying on my bedroom floor; I must've fallen off. Oddly, my torso feels wet.

"Wet?"

I extend an arm to feel around the top of my desk. I snag the resting glasses from my computer key-

board and adjust them so they can sit snugly on the bridge of my nose. My sight sharpens, allowing me to better define my surroundings. The blue mug I was drinking out of earlier has been knocked to the ground, soaking my carpet and t-shirt with its contents. I struggle to my feet, leaning on my bed for support. I reach down to place the cracked mug gently back on its coaster. I sit on my wrinkled sheets and glance at my alarm clock. It's four-thirty in the morning. I sigh and flop onto my back. This dream is vivid.

## MIND LANDSCAPE

Jordan Pearsall, Age 17



## WOUNDED WHISKERS

Isabelle Chang, Age 16

sometimes, i feel disoriented  
like the world around me has shifted  
shrunk  
locked me in

my eyes see oceans and mountains and  
love  
but my hands—  
i reach out only to hit a wall  
unmoving  
desolate  
cold

is this what loneliness feels like?  
to see people so close  
spirits flying high above the clouds  
happiness swelling within  
only to be blocked off?

to not feel anger nor joy nor fear  
just a burrowing emptiness that makes you ache for something

a something on the other side of the wall  
a something that always seems to evade you  
a something that always becomes nothing.

This piece is about feeling caught between two places.

Earlier this year, I participated in an exchange program in which I was to live in France for three months, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to cut it a month short for my own safety. When I got back home I felt like I wasn't supposed to be home yet, that I had left France too early. I felt like I wasn't really home yet because I was still in the vacation, expedition, French mentality, not my regular home, day-to-day, Canadian mentality.

This drawing expresses that. In the background, there is a small house, my home in Vancouver. In the foreground, there is a church, the church that sat in the center of the town I stayed in while in France. I chose the water because I find water calming and thought it represented the flow of my mind going back and forth between here and there. All of the swimming figures represent both myself and my memories from home and over there, all of them stuck between the two places, keeping afloat and enjoying the calmness of the water.

## THE EGG

*Zed Hoffman-Weldon, Age 17*

The horizon had just begun to blush when we set out into the forest. The forest is old; towering trees rising implacably into the pale red sky. The forest is old; I was told the first tree was planted at the beginning of time (but I never believed it). The forest is old; our brindle boots crush a century of fallen twigs.

My sister and I are hunting for ghosts. They tell me I was born five minutes before her, but really, she's older. We're going to the glade where you can find ghosts. The glade is surrounded by the tallest trees in the forest, and it never gets dark; light hangs in the air like dust, and your shadow echoes when you speak.

My sister's brown hair falls like water to the small of her back, small rivulets lapping at her ears and chin. My hair is like a lion's; my curly mane ripples around my head as I pick my way through the forest. They tell me adult lions defend the pride.

They like to play dress-up, cramming their great hairy ham hock thighs into grey slacks, hiding their sweat-stained armpits with matching blazers, cutting off the oxygen to their brains with silk ties. They often look out on the forest from bay windows and marvel at its beauty (but there's always an ax in their back pocket).

The sun begins to perforate the canopy and we stop to eat our packed lunch. We're too old to be hunting ghosts. Soon, we'll be finished with school and off to more school. My sister is majoring in engineering, but, even though I didn't know it at the time, I became a journalist.

In school, they tell me I'm too political (but really, who isn't?). They love to play with my hair and do my makeup, because they too are political.

My sister and I pack up our lunch and are about to start back when I spy an egg. Neither a hard-boiled egg we brought for lunch nor a freshly

laid bird's egg, it is granite, resting in a group of amanita mushrooms. The egg repels sunbeams, it is dark master of its mushroom dominion. The egg repels me, and I must have it. There are times where something is so abhorrent that one begins to desire it uncontrollably and unconditionally (and when you have enough, what's really the difference between pleasure and pain?).

My sister thinks I shouldn't take the egg. I try to explain, but I was always better in writing. Speaking confidently makes people defer to you, but I was always better in writing. They tell me I'm too vague, but I was always better in writing.

We trek back home and I am lost in thought. I don't know it yet, but the egg became a permanent fixture in my life. I wake up to the egg darkening my room. They razed the forest to the ground but they never found any ghosts. The ghosts weren't real of course, but in the end who is?

They called me a postmodernist, because I was always better in writing. They called me a postmodernist, because I was too political. They called me a postmodernist, but we have never been modern.

My sister and I moved away, and the forest didn't follow. There are more ghosts in Vancouver, but not as many forests. Vancouver used to be a rainforest, but now it's just rainy.

All bodies are political. My body, your body, the ghosts' bodies. Why is it that we get a say but they don't? Forests aren't human; they never learned how to lie.

They say what makes us human is being aware of our own finitude, knowing we will die but being powerless to stop it. Do saplings know they're going to die when they doggedly claw their way out of the ground and toward the pale red sky?

They razed the forest to the ground, and the forest couldn't speak up. Then they razed me to the ground, and I couldn't speak up. Then they razed you to the ground, but the ground was so red and oversized with blood and ashes that it didn't take.

Mars is the red planet; it is covered in rust. Mars is the red planet, the bringer of war. Mars is the red planet; it is covered in blood. When we use up Mars like we used up Earth, will we come back to the red planet?

When we take off all our clothes, the silk ties and matching suits, we're all really just a bunch of pigs. We build our houses with sticks and straw, cowering from the wolves they say will inevitably eat us. The wolves aren't real of course, but neither are we.

They say I have to tell the truth to be a journalist, but I was always better at lying. They told me I can't rely on words like "they" and "people," that I

need to know who "they" are, which is interesting because they don't. They call me a mystic, and really, who isn't?

I don't know it yet, but at seventeen I moved houses for the fourth time in four years, from Vancouver across the border into Burnaby, even farther away from the forest. Only seeing the border between Vancouver and Burnaby isn't enough to know it's there, one has to be told. We gave the border a chance to speak for itself, but we were always better in writing.

The horizon was just beginning to darken when my sister and I staggered through the door. The damp had permeated our coats, chilling us to the core. The red sun stared balefully as it sunk below the horizon, tinging the sky with murder and war. They say what makes us human is being aware of our own finitude. I wonder if the sun knows it will die when every morning it claws its way doggedly over the horizon.

## HEARTCRAFT

Roxanna Wang, Age 17



## HARMONY

Catherine Diyakonov, Age 15

*A tribute to a place where we have spent numerous hours connecting our dreams with reality.*

Seven letters.

Where curiosity is sparked,  
Boredom ceases to exist.

An escape from reality;  
Close your eyes and slowly open them to see the seven letter word coming to life.

A minimalistic lamp;  
Turn it on with a click! and watch it dance up to the ceiling,  
Illuminating the workspace where aspirations are accomplished.

A soft bed;  
Begging for you to succumb to its blankets;  
Providing rest from the long days you come face to face with.

A long, organized desk;  
Luring you to open the next chapter of your life,  
Like a rocket ship waiting to take off with the opportunities presented.

A bedroom is a choreographed orchestra;  
What you associate with these seven letters is critical for a beautiful composition.

A place which serves each and every purpose imaginable,  
But too often taken for granted.

Seven letters where you will sculpt your future.

Your bedroom.

# IMBALANCE

Catherine Diyakonov, Age 15

## THE OTHER SIDE

Danika Poon, Age 16

i met someone once,  
scars  
mangled his skin,  
bright purples and whites.

his eyes were devastated,  
like a storm had ripped through him.  
he told me,  
*you may choose not to believe,  
but a woman did this.*

i heard nothing,  
short of the loud roaring in my ears.  
i stuttered out,  
*what?*

he told me,  
*it wasn't beautiful,  
not the way books describe.*

*i had no knight in shining armour,  
no one to save me.*

*there was nothing pretty  
about the bouquets of bruises  
and the thorns weeded inside of me.*

he told me,  
*but i stayed  
with her.  
i couldn't walk away,  
i couldn't leave.  
i need her the same way i need oxygen to live.  
she feels like home,  
the light at the end of the tunnel.  
sometimes,  
he swallowed thickly,*

*i want to go back.  
he said,  
it seems,  
the pain comforted me.  
his eyes,  
empty and desolate  
all the same.  
it was something i could always count on,  
in spite of healed wounds  
or fresh ones.*

my lungs burned,  
like water replaced what had been air.  
a pit formed within my stomach,  
until lunch  
spilled across the floor.

taught to swallow their pride,  
"you cannot cry,  
don't be vulnerable."  
yet the worst that prevails  
"be a man."

how can we fight for equality,  
when male consent remains unappraised,  
abuse, sufficiently represented.  
please, stop encouraging  
toxic masculinity.

you must understand,  
abuse  
is not based on  
what lies between legs.  
abuse is not a misogynist,  
do not mistake it for male supremacy.  
oppression  
is not sexist.





## TOMORROW'S PROTEST

*Yuzuh Bishop, Age 13*

My thoughts all jumble up in a mucky mess.  
I want to speak my mind out,  
But it never comes out right.  
There is so much anger, hate, and stress

Don't treat us like kids.  
We teenagers are not idiots.  
We understand more than some adults do.  
When you treat someone stupid,  
They start to feel and become stupid.

Adults, you were once teenagers.  
Think about one of the best and worst times in your life:  
Falling in and out of love.  
Suffering heartbreaks.  
Experiencing the best day of your life and the next day,  
Your worst.  
Your disrespect making your mother cry,  
Your dad go insane.

This doesn't mean we teenagers have a right  
To swear, be disrespectful, and disobey our parents, teachers, and leaders.

Every person who is a part of our life  
Is meaningful.  
That person may be atrocious or agreeable.  
But each person is a lesson in our lives.  
We learn from that person  
And make mistakes.

Treat us right,  
With love and respect.  
Teach us with love,  
Not hate.  
For we are your future.  
We are  
The Future of your tomorrow.

## SPRING FORWARD

*Marian Manapat, Age 17*

As always  
Bright winter breezes  
Cradled the sun  
Dividing the world into chill and heat.  
Even today  
Fairies whispered their  
Good omens into my ear, saying  
"Heaven never seemed so near" for  
I'd never imagined I'd leave you.  
Just as the morning earlies and night delays  
Kissing your frostbites away,  
Let me remind you:  
My memories will rebuild in time and  
Nightmares I can leave behind.  
Our old songs fade in my mind and I  
Quietly forget a worse time. So  
Remain where you are  
Seven seasons away  
Take your cold and leave this town, you're  
Uninvited anyway, for  
Very bright is the summer sun  
When no darkness clouds the day  
X's seem so dull in time, when my spring arrives and  
Your winter  
Zips away

## THOUGHTS ON A LATE AFTERNOON

*Vicky Nguyen, Age 15*

One thirty  
The scorching sun roams  
A dusty wind blew by  
The withering leaves  
In a haze of slumber  
Students on wooden chairs  
Cramped like anchovies in a can  
Eyes drooping over the dusty chalk board  
Waiting for the geography teacher to sum up his  
lesson  
The words were dry and boring  
Just like the Sahara Desert  
Front row kids  
Drooping eyes in glasses  
Straining all the attention  
On the illegible chalk scribbles of the teacher  
Middle row kids  
Dismissively looking out of the windows  
Now even a sparrow looking for worms  
Seems intriguing  
Back row kids  
Heads on the thick textbooks for pillows  
Longing for a quick nap  
One thirty three  
My fingers tracing on the marks of the desk

Scars of the distant past  
Maybe this carved sword sign was from the  
grade eight kid  
Who has frizzly hair and always has Coke spilling  
on his shirt  
Or the two kids hastily marking their names in a  
heart  
By the head of a blunt compass  
Must have quarreled over their boba glasses  
Someone wrote the name of a rock band  
Now has been dispersed  
One forty  
I finally pick up the textbook  
Intending to write something  
But am disrupted by the deafening sound  
Of a construction crane outside  
The pungent smell of melted gravel and concrete  
Fills the humid air  
The monotonous voice of the teacher still goes on  
Migration, dispersion, or social hierarchy  
While the world is still turning  
In all its frenzy and commotion  
The clock is still ticking  
In an afternoon geography class



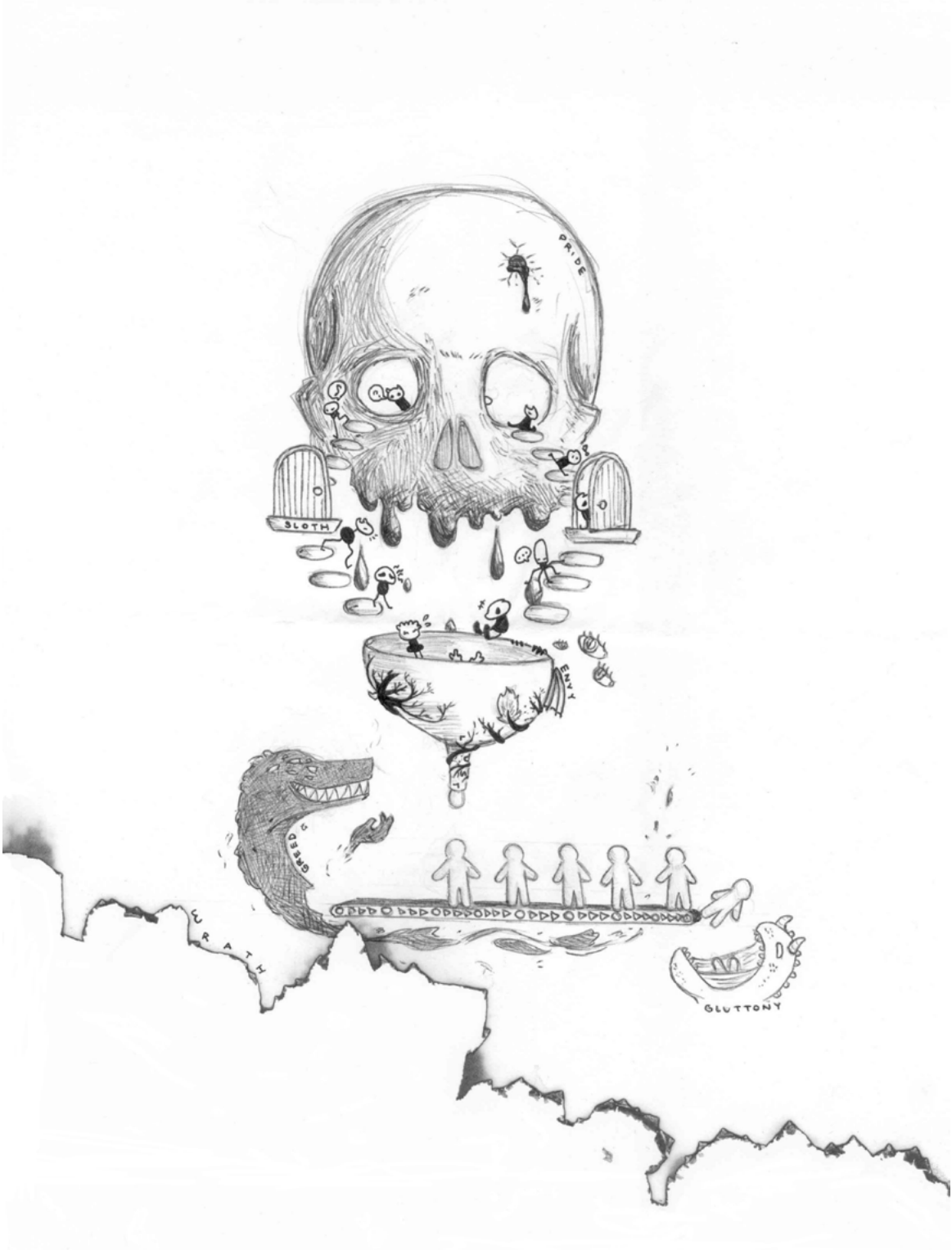
# A REFLECTION ON CREATIVITY

Charlotte Gilhuly, Age 16

# IMAGINATION

Luciana Lo, Age 16

Eyes.  
These instruments identify our world.  
Invisible lights pierce through our iris.  
Conducting themselves into little signals.  
Before entering our brain.  
These signals trigger canvas to spawn in our minds.  
And engraves into our memories.  
A parallel world emerges and we see ourselves in a new light.  
Imagination is what embraces the word vision.



**VERITAS**  
Kara Yeh, Age 16



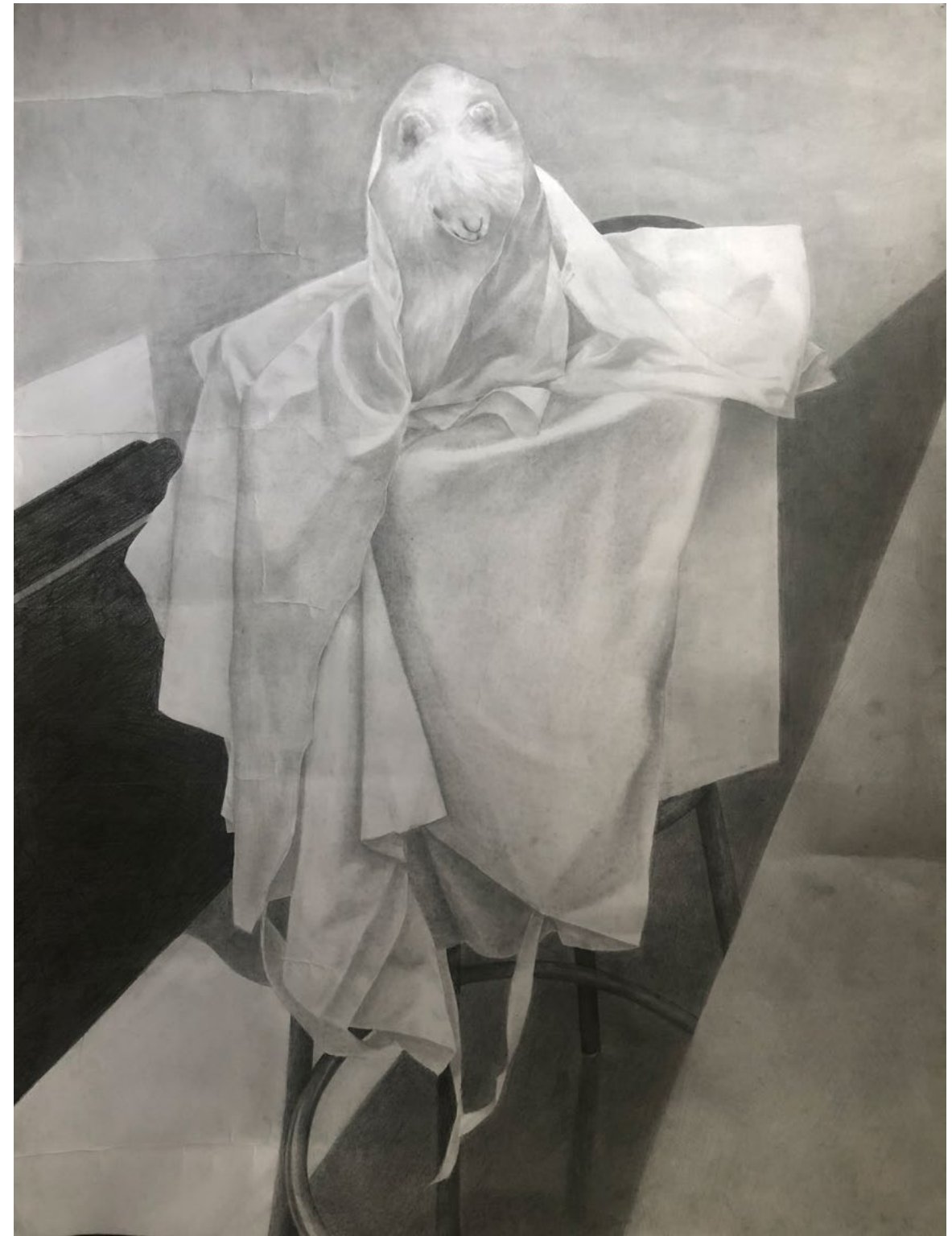
## CHILDHOOD

*Lucy Pan, Age 15*

### CHAPTER OF MY CHILDHOOD

*Isabelle Liu, Age 14*

I have always been told that I have a marvelous imagination,  
What was only for these eyes of mine to see.  
Where I can picture the life  
Of all my convivial desires and childhood dreams.  
At age three I was the princess in a faraway kingdom,  
The brave and mighty hero fighting against the villain being my father  
For just a minute more  
Before I go to sleep  
At age six I was the rabbit  
Gamboling in the forest with my little sister.  
The bumblebee smelling the bright yellow daffodils,  
Cackling and rolling around the untrimmed grass.  
At age ten I was wiser,  
I was just the athlete who received paper medals,  
Just the pirate, sailing on the swing,  
Just the celebrity who could barely sing.  
Those years will always be treasured,  
Even the ones that were surely not the best,  
Because it is impossible to relive those days;  
Adulthood is the next chapter.  
But now that I am older, the sparkle in my eye  
Will never shine as bright,  
For I have chosen to conform  
And drape a cover over that light.



## HA LONG BAY

*Vivian Nguyen, Age 13*



## BLACKBIRD

*Isabelle Chang, Age 16*

broken were my wings  
left shattered beyond repair  
for those who wander by  
hearing but not seeing  
a bundle of ebony feathers  
against the heavy curtain of night

my cry of help was carried by the wind  
yet met by no one  
gradually fading  
then lost

but not all was broken  
I knew my freedom depended not on my wings  
but on my heart

for my eyes can still hunt  
my voice can still sing  
and my feet can still take me  
to places I've never been

I am still a free bird at heart  
as free as can be.

# AN ISLAND OF MEMORIES

*Grace Patterson, Age 15*

This is a story of my earliest memories and experiences on an Island called Hornby, a place close to my heart.

After loading our car with everything but the kitchen sink, we would travel the day's journey to arrive at Hornby. From Vancouver, we would take 3 ferries, one to Nanaimo and then two more smaller ones to Denman Island and finally Hornby. Once on the island we would drive the winding island roads until we found Whaling Station Bay. Across from the bay was a special place once owned by my uncle's family.

We'd park our white Mazda next to the tall pine tree. Whenever I saw this tree, it reminded me of the time my cousins repeatedly got their badminton birdie stuck in the big tree's branches and took turns climbing up to retrieve it. Most trips we took to Hornby were also opportunities to visit with my aunt, uncle and cousins. I can so clearly remember looking up to them thinking, "I want to be just like them when I grow up." Any time we spent together felt like a gift.

On the front lawn sat a weathered shed and firepit. Every year, there would be a fire restriction on the island due to the bone-dry conditions, so the timing needed to be just right to use it. Encircling the pit were chairs and benches built with drift wood from the beach by my uncle and his brother. They even made a "magical" door to the firepit with a crescent moon carved into it.

Every time I walked up the steps to the wrap around porch and through the door to the cottage, I instantly felt as though I was transported back in time. Being on Hornby gave me a chance to unplug from everyday life. The cottage didn't have any Wi-Fi so if internet was needed, you'd have to go into "town". If you wanted to use the phone, you would have to try your hand at the old rotary dial. The living room had a TV, however

it was seldom used, and only for DVDs and VHS. There was also a coffee table full of old board games and a record player. The record player was my favourite thing about the cottage. Music was always playing. I loved listening to the Beach Boys, Nat King Cole, and the Mary Poppins soundtrack.

Also downstairs were the kitchen and dining area. This is where we would have eaten our meals if it weren't for the beautiful weather enticing us to dine outside. I remember on one of my birthdays my aunt made me the most beautiful birthday cake shaped like a butterfly. On the top stood a number 4 candle. I'd never seen a candle in that shape before and believed it to be made of icing. When I asked if it was edible my cousin told me yes it was but it probably won't taste good. I took a bite anyway surprised to find it wasn't food.

Along the walls of the cottage were photographs and artwork created by my uncle. He is a fantastic artist. His work always amazes me. Upstairs hung a large rendition of the Mona Lisa he painted in school. For the first few years of my childhood, I believed it to be the original by Leonardo.

Across the road was the beach, my favourite thing about the island. As a family we would head across early each morning in hopes of securing a good spot on the sand for the day. When the tide went out, little wading pools would form along the beach. The water was almost always as warm as a bathtub.

The sand was the perfect consistency for building sandcastles, or as we liked to create, giant mountains of sand to climb on as the incoming tide would eat away at the crumbling edges. Further down the beach was a permanent volleyball net but we usually stuck to bocci ball. Along the sides of the bay were small cliffs you could walk along. One side had small tidepools where my cousins and I would drop tiny pieces of hotdogs for the

crabs. On the other was a rock formation we referred to as "The Frogs Mouth".

I remember walking down the beach with my aunt when the tide was far out with her dogs. Sometimes my cousins would join us and we'd go searching for beach glass. In the nights, we'd come to watch the sun disappear behind the water leaving a purply blue hue in the sky.

If we didn't feel like going to the beach, Hornby offered many other activities for us to enjoy. Many days we would go to the Ringside Market. The market had a Co-op for groceries, bike shop, two restaurants, a toy store, book store, pottery shop, gas station and an ice-cream shop. There was always something fun happening in the courtyard. Down the road, back towards the ferry was the free store. Originally created as a recycling depot, an organized group of volunteers expanded it to a place to drop off unwanted, but still usable goods, that could then be enjoyed by others. Our families found many hidden treasures here.

Another memorable spot was Helliwell Provincial Park, a series of trails leading through the trees and out to golden grass covered cliffs above rocky beaches.

In the evenings, once a week, the bakery/pizza joint would have free live concerts in their garden. Locals and visitors would gather together on the grass, eat delicious food, and listen to the musical talents of the island.

At the end of the day, before bed, we would all come back home to roast marshmallows at the firepit or, if there was a fire restriction, we would go inside for hot chocolate and stories on the couch.

Hornby Island will always be a paradise to me but sharing these memories with my family made my time there all the more precious.

## I CAN'T FIND MY HOME

*Trisha Iamsakun, Age 15*

Home is where the heart is. Even if I'm homeless there.  
I grew up in a strong home that received me who's been kicked everywhere like a ball.  
The first time the thunder storm struck my home, there was a crack on the ceiling.  
The raindrop that seeped through blended in with the tears rolling down my cheeks.  
No matter who I go to, they can't fix my home and left it with a crack.  
I vividly remembered the second time a rainstorm hits my home.  
Oh how I remembered wishing that I was the third pig in the tales of The Three Little Pigs.  
However, I am the second pig whose house was blown away by a big bad wolf, fate.  
My home is on a land that is more than a thousand miles away from here.  
Grownups never told me but I eventually figured it out.  
Lies six feet beneath the ground and above the blue sky, that's my home.

## SKELETON MASK

*Nicole Hagley, Age 17*





## THE ART OF UNREQUITED LOVE

*Danika Poon, Age 16*

it seems  
I may have fallen in love  
with the soft smile that graces your lips,  
and the endless sea of blue in your eyes,  
and the curly ginger hair that sits atop your head.  
i have fallen in love  
with the constant red that paints your cheeks  
and the freckles that dot across your nose.

just for a moment  
euphoria washes over me  
and i have no doubts,  
no insecurities.  
my heart is no longer broken,  
and you long for me  
the way i do  
you.

but who am i to deceive myself?  
i know that  
when you see me  
your head does not spin,  
and your heart does not stop.

my eyes leak tears of humiliation and hurt,  
faucets for the pain i cannot seem to explain.  
for i bared my heart and soul to you  
on a silver platter,  
littered with words i wish i had never said.

alas,  
you haven't fallen in love with me.

## ASSUMPTIONS

*Isabelle Liu, Age 14*

~~Roses are red;~~  
Roses are not just red  
~~violets are blue~~  
Violets come in colours other than blue  
The truth is sometimes conceded  
This is the life we have to live through

The world outside is darker  
That what we may perceive  
The knowledge hidden in the silence  
Has much more to still teach

Many put on a persona or filter  
To hide others from seeing the truth  
Like how we assume ignoring a problem will go away  
The stress is slowly taking our youth

At times it may be difficult to smile  
To pretend that everything is okay  
But it is fine to let down the barriers  
Even if nothing in the world is going your way

You cannot assume the giggling girl is happy  
Or that the little boy does not have issues of his own  
Nor that the sun is looking forward to rising  
Or that the moon does not want to fall upon the stones

Laughter may not always be genuine  
Cries may not imply you are distressed  
The whole world is engulfed in assumptions  
Sometimes all we need is rest

Through all these postulations and surmises  
Behind all the mist and melancholic gloom  
Hope for the truth is shown through the brightness of stars  
Where blue roses and red violets bloom

## WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU

*Emily Shi, Age 16*

Sometimes "I love you" is a kiss or a hug.  
"I love you" – the taste of soy sauce chicken and stir fry  
"I love you" meant I love you.

Until "I love you" became  
Harsh words and criticisms  
Shouting matches and slammed doors  
My mom told me  
"I tell you these things because I love you. Unconditionally"  
It's funny how "unconditionally"  
is just another word for "if."  
I'll love you if you are perfect,  
If you aren't difficult to love.

"I love you" means "not good enough"  
It's "Why can't you be more like him or her"  
I scream back that "I am my own person"  
My mom seems to think that maybe I shouldn't be.  
"I love you," I tell myself  
"I care about you enough to want you to be better  
You aren't good enough. Not now, not ever."

But apparently my "love" was just self-hatred  
When my sixth-grade teacher told my mother  
that I had low self-esteem she asked me  
"Why?"  
I told her "Ma, when people see me  
I'm afraid that they think I'm ugly and stupid and not good enough.  
And I can't help but believe them –  
Because when I come home  
You tell me the same things."  
I wanted her to comfort me.  
What she said instead was,

"That's nothing. My mom used to hit me with a slipper"  
As if that would make it not hurt anymore.  
She said "you have to stop taking things so personally."  
Then, "I love you."

As if it was an obligation.  
Your "I love you" hit me harder than the leather sole of a worn slipper.  
Softened by all the steps you took for me  
I think it broke  
The part of me that actually believed in your "unconditional love"

Long after the burning, angry fire inside me burnt itself out,  
I realized that to you,  
"I love you"  
means "I'm trying to help but I don't know how."

Now "I love you" means pain.  
"I love you" is listening to you talk,  
not to me, but at me,  
From opposite ends of a table,  
the scrape of chopsticks and spoons  
scraping over invisible wounds like salt and sand

"I love you" is said through explosions of feeling,  
when hiding them away from your love becomes too hard.

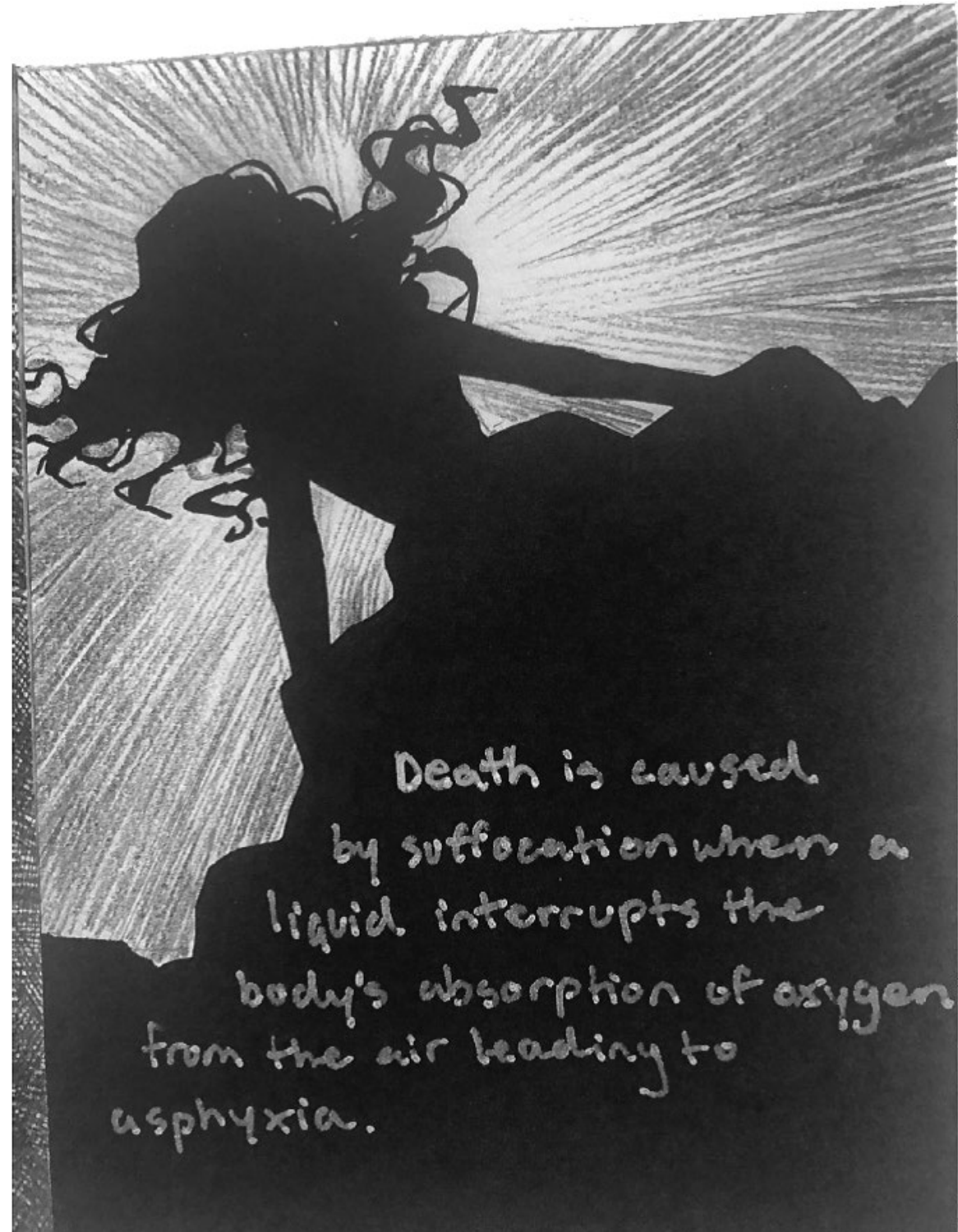
It is the guilt that is with me all the time  
For not being the daughter you wanted  
One whose heart isn't made of glass  
Someone who can take your love

And because it isn't your fault that  
When you say "I love you"  
I say it back, by not saying anything at all.

Silence means a thousand things  
And maybe in it,  
I can trick myself into believing  
that we can love each other in a way  
that doesn't hurt so much.  
So when you say "I love you" and I don't say it back,  
It's because I love you.

## EXCERPT FROM MY EXPERIENCE WITH DROWNING

Lucy Pan, Age 15



## THESE WATERS

Erin Leung, Age 18

I can't breathe.  
No breath can escape  
No air can enter  
Only water has found its way into my chest,  
Drowning out my heart

I can't move.  
The water is trapping me  
Tying me down  
Gripping onto every inch of my skin

I can feel the pressure in my lungs  
In my soul  
The expectations of this world  
Is pushing me lower and lower into these  
waters they call life  
It's a place where some survive and some don't  
It's where some people discover happiness while others find their demise

I can't see anything beyond my feet  
But the responsibilities that are wrapped around my ankles  
Pulling me down  
Deeper and deeper into the black hole below me

I can hear the sounds from above  
Muffled noises of confusion  
Murmurs of worry  
Shouts of panic  
They're calling out my name  
The sounds turn into echoes  
Into emptiness

I can still read my life on the surface of these waters  
Memories worth remembering  
Laughter that needs to be replayed  
But it was a lifetime ago  
When I could still breathe  
Still move  
Still feel  
Still see the world in its colours

It was a lifetime ago  
When I was above these waters.

**DIVIDED***Nghi Nguyen, Age 15*

She knows her parents would be happier if they split up. No one needs to be a chef to know a dish tastes awful, and she doesn't need to be a marriage counselor to understand a relationship is causing far more harm than good. It started with her mother sharing casual insults: "Your father is messy and poor and has no backbone; don't make my mistake, marrying a man like him." And it gradually evolved into fights where no one gained anything but sore throats from screaming at the top of their lungs.

Once, after they had finished bickering about buying their son too many video games, they asked her why she had cried. Was the reason truly so unfathomable? Every angry word and condescending tone could be heard if one stood at any spot in the three-room basement, the space they had been, and still are, living in. Nonetheless, she'd learned since to no longer be sad about her parent's arguments. Despite this, one would not have a hard time finding that her parents are, indeed, good people, each with different talents, skills, and interests. But the best of people can do the worst things. The act of coexisting within a household made them toxic, yet archaic beliefs and children forbid them to divide.

Her parents' relationship clearly damages both the people involved in it, but what isn't, and never was, clear was how it infected her. Before she realized her mother's true nature, she very much

imitated her. Listening to her mother's insults and trash talk, she picked up her arrogance and audacity to express judgment. Like her mother, she too could manipulate her friends. Her brother is her mother's favorite child, so it is always she that must listen to her father ramble on about the way his wife treats him and how no woman of the household should treat their husband "like that."

She's yet to find any compassion for her father. It hurts more to know that much of what her mother says about him, no matter how offensive, is true. She's tried suggesting splitting bank accounts. She has encouraged him to put things into perspective and talk, like a levelheaded adult, to his wife. She's yet to mention divorce, but all suggested ideas were either "against their culture" or outside the realm of possibility because, in the end, her father still loved her mother, so she has long stopped trying.

Always, she wonders what the point is in caring. Her parents would happily pay for her college fees, she could get some important degree, and then escape the province never to be seen again; she just needs to endure the now. She despises herself for thinking this way – why doesn't she love people who love her? But she knows why: those people are ignorant of the people they hurt. She regains confidence in the idea again, but the back and forth continues. At least parents are not the only people who raise you.



## SKY LINES

Grace Patterson, Age 15

## I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU AGAIN

August Kirste-Yee, Age 17

A grave, a shovel, a dog.

Me, and midnight.

We used to do that, describe the situation like poetry. You always loved poetry.

I remember how you cried at the burnings. I remember the flames and the chants that I was too young to understand. I get it now.

I remember how you raised me to love words, not to be afraid of them like everyone else. How you kept stories alive through me. Poems hidden in our whispers and minds.

I know that I'm not supposed to be out here. Outside, I mean. You know what they say about the air. That a piece of cloth doesn't make a difference. But it's better than nothing, right?

It would've been more dangerous to steal a suit.

I scratch the dog behind the ears. Rosie, her name is. A wild thing, somehow surviving in the toxic air. I think you'd like her.

She eventually runs off, and so would I, if I could survive. I wonder how she stays alive.

I worry that one day she won't come find me.

Hey Mom.

I'm sorry.

I know all you wanted was for me to be safe. I know why you sent me away. But I have to do this.

Did I tell you that it's no better here? We're penned up. Poked and prodded like animals in a science lab.

I guess that's kind of the point.

I know that somehow, despite everything, you'd find it hard to disapprove of what I'm doing. You were a rebel too, in your own way. I only inherited it.

I joined the resistance.

Don't worry about me. I know how to fight. I'm not afraid to get knocked down.

Maybe if this works I'll be able to come and find you. That's why I'm out here, swallowing fumes. Digging up a grave.

Hey Mom.

I can't wait to see you again.



## YOU WERE (NEVER) THAT GOOD AT ART

*Alpha Yu, Age 17*



## SEARCHING FOR HIS FACE — EVEN THOUGH I HAVE PICTURES

*Erika Chung, Age 16*

i have a confession to make.  
i forgot his face.

i told him i'd always remember.  
i promised him i would.

there's a boy standing at the greenway's end.  
he's short but slim, wearing black skinny jeans.  
i'm at the edge of the world.  
fog shrouds our solitary figures  
tracing a desolate curl around mine  
surely he can feel my presence, because i sense his.  
my minty breath mixes with the clouds.  
it's a gust of faith, cooling his damp forehead  
from a distance.

i squint at the form opposite mine.  
the pictures don't do him justice.  
meaningless features drift aimlessly  
across my conscience.  
i see the curtains framing his eyes, gapped teeth  
carrying his heart.

somehow, a piece is missing.  
the essential is invisible. picture him  
doesn't feel right. he's escaping my mind.  
i still forget, though everywhere i leave reminders  
to myself.

i tear off my own mask  
skin,  
bone,  
flesh,  
hacked from my skull.  
i wear scarlet-coloured spectacles  
searching for his face  
underneath mine.

# SEBASTIAN

*Jan Peng, Age 15*



# A MOMENT: SUSPENSION

*Marian Manapat, Age 17*

Then a blanket  
A cloud  
A heavy mist  
A hypnotizing veil  
Shrouded their heads  
And infiltrated their chests

The turn of his head  
Suddenly fanning the smoke  
To find hers  
The glint of his eyes  
A magnet to her own  
They drew her in  
Entrapped her  
Sealed her solidly into the fog  
With no back door

The concert outside raged on  
But the distant songs did nothing  
But brush her ears

They sat  
Side by side  
Cursed to their seats  
But spell-bound in each other

Close together  
Yet galaxies apart

Gravity pulling them near  
Orbits keeping them far

With 7 billion shades of purple  
Gleaming in his eyes  
And a multitude of stars  
Rising in her own

This sacred, cursed space  
Bubbles up  
Seizes the oxygen  
From their time-held lungs

There is chemistry  
Biology  
Written in the stars like  
Astronomy

And they are held suspended  
In the bewitching  
Confounding  
Enchanting  
Cloud of stardust

Genies in a lamp of their own  
Never wishing to escape

# THE WHISPERS IN THE DARK

*Mace Carnahan, Age 13*

This is a story I do not often tell. I promise, sincerely, that this has scarred me for life and, although I have looked into psychological explanations for what I heard and natural explanations for what occurred, they remain unsatisfactory.

When I was a child, I was scared of the dark. I swore to my mother I heard voices in it. They were not evil, but they were not familiar and so they scared me. It was not uncommon in the middle of the night for me to wake up and hear "whispers," as I would call them when asking my mom. She figured they were just "bumps in the night" and typical kids' nightmare material. I tried often to explain to her that it was more than that, that they sounded different from one another the way people's voices do. On some nights I would get so scared from these "whispers" that I would sleep in my mom's bed with her. It was an added bonus that the bathroom was directly outside of her bedroom door for my late-night tinkles.

I should add, at this point, that when walking out into the hall to go to the bathroom, you looked directly down the stairs that would lead you into my living room on the first floor (as my mom's bedroom was on the second floor). On one such night, around Christmas, I awoke and felt the need to relieve myself. I walked out from the door and distinctly heard the phrase "Look!" and to my astonishment, a red light, almost like a spotlight, was cast upon the wall at the very bottom of the stairs. The light had no other source; it was by itself, and I was transfixed by it.

Being a little kid, and it only being a few days from Christmas, I KNEW what this light was. IT WAS SANTA!!! How else could he get into my house to know I was being a good boy? I was so excited I began walking down the stairs to greet him, picking up my pace after the second step as the light began to creep off the wall and fade into the darkness in my living room.

That's when I heard him. A very strong, masculine voice. Different from the first. Not at all like my father's (not to say he isn't masculine; it was just distinctly different). It said, "Stop! Right now. Go back up those stairs." I listened, turned around, and what happened next, I am not sure I would believe if someone had told me this same story. After reaching the top of the stairs, I heard a very loud crash that sent me running back to my mother's bed where I jumped straight under the covers and stayed there the whole night.

When we awoke the next morning, the poinsettia lights (little Christmas flower lights that glowed red) my mother had put on the railing down the stairs were pulled straight down to the bottom of the stairs, some broken from what seemed like a forceful tear, lying in a single pile. The sink in my kitchen had fallen from the wall. My mother could not explain it! My father was worried we had been the victims of a home invasion. My sister was crying. There was nothing missing, nobody had broken in, there did not seem to be any reason this had happened. And then I saw it, and I kept quiet about it because I was so afraid that I could not force words out of my mouth.

There, on the edge of the sink which was been facing up, were three indentations where the finish on the wood had been worn, almost as if in a forceful grip. Something down there had grabbed it and thrown it down. That was the loud bang I heard.

I was mortified. After that day, I never heard a single voice again. I do not like to imagine what was waiting downstairs for me that night, if it was anything at all, but I can tell you that the reality was that something had physically acted upon two things in my house near the bottom of that stairwell.

After this, I never heard another whisper again. Which is sad, because in some ways I would have liked to thank the man (masculine energy?) that had stopped me from going down those stairs. This happened when I was 7. I am 20 years old now, and still afraid of the dark. ESPECIALLY shadowy stairwells.



## PROTECT THEM IN THE DARK

*Nghi Nguyen, Age 15*



## LUCID DREAMS

*Vicky Nguyen, Age 15*

Trapped inside the four walls,  
desperate for a wisp of fresh air  
all motions  
seem to halt.  
The clock on the wall  
in a haze of slumber.  
snoring loudly with the  
indefinite tick-tocks.  
The dog-eyed book  
sits still on the desk  
wishing the characters  
would come out  
and talk about their days.  
The wilted flower on the balcony  
with its petal shriveled  
bends its delicate neck  
to contemplate  
about the chats it once had  
with the sparrows.  
I take a snooze  
on the flowery couch.  
Dreams  
slowly passing in my head  
like a Kodak film tape.

Humid dreams  
about rain puddles by the sidewalk  
paper boats floating.  
Cotton-candy colored dreams  
tulips blooming in the spring breeze,  
eight year old me  
delightedly eating waffle ice cream at a Dutch  
windmill.  
Chalk-dusted dreams  
about a grade seven class  
flamboyant trees  
their bright red petals  
like little flames  
while the scorching summer wind blowing by.  
Visions of late summer nights  
filled with the smell of chlorine.  
The translucent light reflected  
by the tranquil poolside.  
I reach out to grab  
a bubbling dream  
hoping to relive  
in the haunting nostalgia.  
It pops.

# HOLE IN A WALL

Charlotte Lemon, Age 16

## Hole in a wall

Poem in context of COVID-19

I am a mouse  
I live in a hole in a wall  
Coming out only for blocks of cheese  
I'm in it for the long haul

I'm small and I scurry  
It's only my baby and me  
I protect us as much as I can  
Tell me, when can we be freed?

Everyone wants a few blocks of cheese  
Some end up with many  
Some will only get one  
Some always had close to none

Day ninety-eight quarantine  
Is taking a toll  
Only so many blocks of cheese to go around  
Only so many dices I can roll

My case is  
Going outside is risking it all  
Because I am just a mouse  
And I live in a hole in a wall



Charlotte Lemon | 2020

## Hole in a wall

Poem in context of COVID-19

The speaker's metaphorical perspective as a mouse is representative for feeling small and forgotten during the ongoing pandemic

I am a mouse

I live in a hole in a wall

Living in "a hole in a wall" refers to living in a tight and modest space that may be thought of as unpleasant

Coming out only for blocks of cheese

I'm in it for the long haul

Sought after blocks of cheese are a reoccurring allusion to in demand supplies and groceries that are scarce due to restocking challenges, production and panic buying

Everyone wants a few blocks of cheese

Some end up with many

Some will only get one

Some always had close to none

I'm small and I scurry

It's only my baby and me

I protect us as much as I can

Tell me, when can we be freed?

The number ninety-eight holds significance in being the amount of deaths due to COVID-19 in British Columbia at the time the poem was written (April 24, 2020)

Day ninety-eight quarantine

Is taking a toll

Only so many blocks of cheese to go around

Only so many dices I can roll

The speaker's "case" is not COVID-19 itself and is instead the challenges of social distancing as a single mother

My case is

Going outside is risking it all

Because I am just a mouse

And I live in a hole in a wall

### Key

#### End Rhyme

Throughout the poem, quatrains use end rhyme

#### Repetition

Repetition of allusion "blocks of cheese" is used to emphasize feelings of desperation.

First two and last two lines repeat the same idea to tie off the poem

### Note from the Author

"Hole in a wall" uses a series of quatrains to tell the story of a single mother amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The poem recognizes families that are most vulnerable to impacts that go beyond the virus, referencing safe child care during social distancing and challenges in purchasing necessary supplies.

## LOSS

Charlotte Gilhuly, Age 16

"I... I didn't expect this. I... hope they can forgive me."  
Why were those her last words- "I hate you! I never want to see your face again!!"  
Her last breath- Why were those her last words to him?  
Why didn't he save her? Her last argument  
Why didn't he stop her, Why didn't she apologize?  
Ask if she was alright? Why didn't she trust him?  
He should've run faster He was so trustworthy.  
He should've caught up before she entered the forest She shouldn't have run  
He should've have apologized for what he had done wrong. She shouldn't have gone to the forest  
He should've saved her. She should've turned back.  
Why couldn't he save her? She should've run home when she saw the spider with a woman's face.  
Why was he so weak? Or the mysterious man with the bone-white hair.  
Why did she have to- Why was she so naive?  
die. I don't want to-  
"Bang."  
One word – and it was over.

## SENTIENCE

Jan Peng, Age 15

My father used to be the happiest man alive. Something changed. The vibrant smile he would wear in photos seldom occurred.

"Look to the sky, child." Father glanced back while I struggled to trail behind. "What do you see?"

"I see the sun and sky." My eyebrows brushed together quizzically. "Why do you ask?"

"I see global warming, pollution, and beautiful seasons all painted over with a simplistic design. Merely a mask." Sorrow etched his words. My brain churned to process his words. I struggled to comprehend.

"Where are you taking me now?" My pudgy legs leaped to satisfy his brusque strides.

He then abruptly stopped, "where are we now?" Ahead was a vast, placid, blanket of grey.

"It's the ocean." I cocked my head. Why was father doing this?

"There used to be magnificent creatures inside," his breath stopped short, "but now we don't have any. Not even on land. We were best friends with them once but there are no more."

"Tell me! Tell me! What happened?" I hopped up and down.

He didn't respond. His lips settled into a firm frown. "You're too young to understand." He sat down and stopped talking.

"What?"

"No."

"Please?"

He then patted for me to sit down with him. "Have your *robot teachers* taught you anything about countries yet?"

My ears perked at the question. Why did he emanate such disgust for my teachers? "Yes! I've learnt about European countries!"

He chuckled lightly, as if it were forced. "Guess what?" His smile wavered, "I've travelled the entire world twice. I've been everywhere."

"Really? That's so cool!" I gaped at my father, "I want to go! Can I? When?"

"Of course, you will."

"When will I have the time?"

"Eventually child, you will realize what our world has become. I don't have an occupation. I can't even if I wished to; AIs are deemed more efficient. Most are satisfied with the monthly paycheck without having to do anything. But after traveling everywhere already, life is dull." His monotone voice was laced with loathing.

"What?"

He leaned in, only inches away from my face. Two serious, brown speckled hazel orbs fixed onto mine. Wrinkles accentuated his face and crinkled at the slightest twitch.

"You don't understand, do you?" he murmured, rancid coffee emitting from the gust of world: fatigue.

"I really don't understand, Father."

"Life means nothing. Not anymore."

## IN THE CRACKS

*Erin Leung, Age 18*

I was born in the dirt between the cracks  
Away from the garden  
I grew up standing alone in the pavement  
Isolated from my kind

I watched them from afar  
Season after season  
When their heads turn toward the sun  
Their stems curving in the rain  
Leaves swaying in the wind  
As they protect each other in the storm

I would do the same  
Alone

They would laugh at me  
The way my thin yellow petals draped around my  
face  
The fact that no aroma emitted from me  
While they, in their bright  
Red  
Pink  
Blue  
Dresses danced in the sunlight

I watched as they were tended  
Hands stroking them  
Noses sniffing them  
Water drizzling upon them

I yearned for those same hands  
That same love

I wanted to be where they were  
Be who they are

One day  
My wishes were granted  
A familiar hand wrapped around my stem  
And my ends wretched in agony  
As I was lifted away from my home

For the first time  
I escaped the cracks

And then I was falling  
Falling into a grey world

Other greens were there and  
Me  
The others of my kind  
Not the bright  
Reds  
Pinks  
Blues  
But yellow  
Ordinary like me  
I fit in

I escaped those cracks

## COVID STREET ART

*Grace Patterson, Age 15*



teens



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*ink*

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### Submission Guidelines

You may submit up to four pieces each year:

- Two pieces of writing per person
- Two visual pieces per person - a piece of artwork, a comic OR a photograph

**Writing:** 1,000 word maximum. Typed entries preferred, but not required.

**Visual art:** 8.5 x 11 inches preferred. Work in colour may be submitted, however all interior pages will be printed in black and white. You may be required to submit your original artwork if your work is selected for publication.

- **Digital Art:** High resolution. Minimum 300 dpi.
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### Submission Form

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Title of submission: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of submission:

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Where did you hear about *ink*?

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In consideration for my child being permitted to participate in the Program, I hereby release and forever discharge VPL from any and all liability for any and all losses, damages, injuries, harm, or expenses of any kind that I or my child may suffer, incur, or experience in any way arising from or in connection with any act or omission of my child.

I confirm that I have read and accept the contents of this document.

Child's Name (print)

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Parent/Guardian's Name (print)

Address and Phone Number

Witness Signature

Witness Name (print)

Witness Address and Phone Number

Content Name/Location (for staff use)



**Teen Services**  
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**TOGETHER**  
*Renata Lawrence, Age 18*