



ink

Volume 07

Teen journal for writing and visual art
VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

STUDY

Adyson Tang, age 16



WELCOME TO *INK* VOLUME 7!

This volume of *ink* was created on the unceded and occupied homelands of the x̣ṃəθḳẉəỵəm (Musqueam), Ṣḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̣lil-wə̣tə̣ṭ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. It is on this stolen land that our writers, artists, staff and volunteers created the journal that you now hold.

The *ink* Teen Advisory Group volunteers through every season – meeting and working through the spring, summer, and fall before launching the new issue in the first days of winter. You may see these changing seasons, and the emotions that they evoke, reflected many times in the themes of this volume's art and writing.

A new season brings both the comfort of familiarity and the excitement of change. A new issue of *ink* conjures up similar feelings. *ink* can be a time capsule, capturing a static moment, but can also connect us to the past and the future. Sometimes, we get to see how a young artist's work has evolved – and reading an outstanding poem or story can make us wonder, *wow, where is this writer going next?* After seven years of publication, seeing the new issue of *ink* each year can feel like greeting an old friend. But we also know that this friend has grown, has changed, and will have so many new, exciting things to share with us.

Change is a constant. The seasons are always changing, our world is always changing, and *ink* is always changing. Often, young people will ask Teen Services staff: “What kind of art does *ink* want?” “Is my work too political?” “Is this OK to submit?” Many magazines may answer these questions by saying, “look at our previous issues to see if your work would fit in” – but for *ink*, this is not a good answer. We want the work that Vancouver youth are creating. We want each issue to tell us something new. Listening to teen voices will always be a political act, and those voices are the core of *ink*. We don't tell artists and writers what should be in *ink*. Each year, their art and writing tells us what *ink* should be.

Special thanks are due to Isabella Zhao, Erin Zhang, Anne Zhang, Persephone Wangen, Waylon Shi, Kyra Qi, Krista Ng, Esmé Mac, Raylum Halak, Rod Dehghanshoar, Amelia Chu, and Ash Broadland for their work selecting and arranging the pieces in *ink* Volume 7. Without them and the rest of the *ink* Teen Advisory Group, this magazine could not exist.

We are also grateful for the time and expertise shared by our selection mentors: Emily Pohl-Weary (prose), Karla Comanda (poetry), and Dawn Lo (art).

Many thanks to the Diamond Foundation for promoting youth creativity and connection through their ongoing support of *ink*.

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Vancouver Public Library
2024



Cover art: “The Pig”
Jenny Chi, age 16

JUSTICE

Venessa Lui, age 17




THANK YOU

to all of the artists and writers who contributed to *ink* Volume 7!

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"We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark."

From "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa" by Ada Limón


Qiana Andrews, age 17

If Silence is the words unsaid. Silence has more brilliant ideas than ever explored.
If voice holds the power, Silence can overtake any voice.
Silent is the universe, silent is you as I. Silent is all.
Silence is all.
Noise is forgotten but silence prevails.
Silence is greedy, no noise can make it full.
Soon, it will be back, maw open, wanting more.
Silence is all.

The first noise was my own voice, screaming and demanding. The second was my mother, nursing my Silence.

When you grow older, start discovering the world, your voice begins to crack. It splits open, raw, and shifting. You're crawling in the dark well of the world. You're trying to find your stance. You begin to discover how to speak for yourself. How to let your voice carry your words. Protect it from the Silence. Some may call it 'being a teenager'. I call it 'finding your voice'.

Did you find yours?

Listen.

Don't you hear yourself now?
Reading this.

The *Silence* is repeatedly broken by my words, read by your voice.

Your voice which you sacrifice to the Silence from time to time. To let it sink its sharp teeth in. When it's done, your voice only remains in you, nowhere else. Yet, your words are being traced by another's mind. You let them taste it. Your words are delicious. *Say more.*

Talk.

Let your voice fill the *Silence* once more.
Let your words be dealt with once more.

Careful, don't bite your own tongue.

Society is meant to hold many, many, voices, all of them heard, sometimes all at once. Only the words are what's important. Sometimes we forget that. We just listen to the noise. We get mad. We get frustrated. But, if we just listen to the words said, maybe that won't happen any longer.

But when something pressing comes up, you have no idea how hungry we are for your noise.

We are hungry for your raw emotions strung up on the cord of your voice.

We are HUNGRY for your thoughts.

We are _____ to hear something.
Silence is too.

The Earth is dying, countries are dying, people, relationships, ideas, they're all struggling to stay alive, and yet once they're dead, the Silence will start on them. Feeding. Until everyone forgets the word 'Climate Change'. 'War'. 'Genocide'. 'Racism'. 'Misogyny'.

Until *Silence* fills the void of what the word used to be. Soon *Silence* is what you'll hear instead of those words.

So, Talk.
Use your voice.

Speak.

We want to hear.

Let us hear.

Don't *Silence* us.

There will be enough of it soon
enough.

Let *Silence* feed on our noise but
let words never be forgotten.

*I came into the world screaming and
demanding, let me leave all the same.
But this time, I won't let anybody
nurture my Silence. Silence has enough.
It has all, after all.*

CONGEE NOODLE HOUSE

Audrey Lu, age 17

"What do you want?" my dad asks Maamaa in Cantonese. He thumbs the steering wheel to the left as we pull away from her apartment building. It's Saturday, and every week, we have lunch with my Yeye and Maamaa. "There's lots of places to eat around here."

She floats a hand his way, dismissive, a smile pushing up creases around her eyes. Mandarin spills out of her mouth, which is usually in a resolute line. "Anything is fine. What does Peilin want?"

I shake my head, reeling from the quick Cantonese to Mandarin switch. I don't know what I want, and it seems greedy to just say something for the sake of a decision. Besides, **The Rule**—One must deny two times and only accept on the third. Accept too early, and you might as well be writing 'GREEDY' on your forehead with a sharpie. Accept too late? Rude and undeserving. I settle for the safest option. I shake my head a second time when Maamaa glances back from the passenger seat, inwardly tsk-ing at me, and add, "I don't know."

Dad gives me a slight nod of approval in the mirror as we merge with the traffic on Main Street. Then he sighs, and I see creases form, just like his mom's. Maamaa and Dad are more alike than either of them will admit.

Maamaa repeats her sentiment that anything's fine.

Dad purses his lips and makes a noise of exasperation. "You always say that."

Maamaa pretends to not hear what he said.

He's right. She does always say everything is fine, even when it's not true. But we don't talk about it.

Maamaa folds her worn, calloused hands over her bag, frowning and staring at the flower-speckled bag like it's a lifeline. I wonder how many times that pink bag, or a similar object, has saved a life. I wonder if that's why her hands are calloused. Needle-handling, bandage-binding, blood-stopping; fingers pushing against skin and ears blocking out cries. Maamaa used to be a doctor, back when Red swarmed the youth. She travelled everywhere, Red nipping at her heels. I think my palms and ears would roughen, too, if I had to do that. Dad doesn't talk about it, but I know he was there with her as she walked across rural places with her bag.

We don't talk about that, either.

"What about something from Hong Kong?" asks Dad, breaking the silence and running a hand through his salt and pepper hair.

Maamaa sniffs, chuckles a bit. "Anything is fine. Your dad would like that."

I can practically hear the grinding of Dad's teeth. Poor teeth. He nods, regardless. If Yeye likes it, we usually do it. Yeye likes mahjong, plum-braised ribs, orange chicken, ginger milk pudding, and anything from Guangzhou. I don't know what Maamaa likes. Her lips are closed. Close your lips, nothing happens. Close your lips, keep your head down, follow the rules.

We don't talk about it.

It was 1966.

Dad ends up making the decision: Congee Noodle House.

We don't need to talk about it. We know.

A QUIANT PATH

Christy Wu, age 17



SUNDOWN IN KALIDOR

Ash Broadland, age 17



GARDEN OF SUNSHINE

Lily Baihe Tang, age 16

on the other side of the olive tree
is a garden of sunshine.
a checkered picnic
blanket lies on the plush green grass,
the lines separating white and red
blending like day and night. the grass stands
tall beneath—as tall as me and as
high as the grape vines climb.
i sink into the blanket
the plastic crinkling under my floral skirt,
blending with the roses and petunias
of my late mother's words,
"don't question the low-hanging grapes
shiny with morning dew",
as green as the jade i find in
the river across the street
from the olive tree and the golden scene.
"just sit and bathe in what water and
soap cannot provide you",
bathe in the remnants of her words
and her fingers lingering on my
hair and on my cheeks after that day
i scraped my knee tripping on a grape
vine I couldn't see.
i'll see her in the vines one day—
on a sunny day,
in the garden behind the olive tree
where she used to wait for me on that
red and white checkered picnic blanket,
when it was her skirt that she wore that
matched the flowers in the garden,
when she questioned the low-hanging
grapes and picked them clean off
their stems for me to suck on,
slowly sucking the juice out of the skin
leaving a thin jade film that was tossed
into the wind.
i am a thin film replaying scenes from
the other side of the olive tree
when it was our garden of sunshine,
now dusty as night and only mine to see.

DESCRIBING SPRING

Victoria Kwok, age 13

Sunny, rainy, cold or warm
The life of spring begins to form
Flowers and insects start to transform
Seeds from sowing are reaping

Animals emerge, and birds sing
Because they know the routine of spring
Waking and flapping brand-new wings
They all stop there sleeping

With every spring weather, emotions are shown
Whether it's sad or happy, together or alone
When in the sun I feel at home
But rain reminds me of weeping

Spring has growth, life and weather
Whether tough as rock or soft as a feather
But every second is a treasure
Because life is always springing

IMPRISONED FOREIGNER

Jayden Zhang, age 16

For some, the rich greens of trees
Provide a haven to relax.
A slight breeze
Brings cool relief,
Joined by a vast network of interwoven arms
Stretched majestically, as it chills the surrounding air.

For others, it is a playground of life;
Amidst the branches, a squirrel does a
twirl. The birds above chirp.
The bees buzz around
The thick canopy and sturdy branches,
Humming with satisfaction as they build their hive.

Secluded in the shadows,
A palate of lush greens beckons.
The occasional insect may come to prey,
With hostile intention.
The tree, ancient and bitter, devises a vicious trap,
Seeping ooze like honey.
The insects alight, a final time.
Unable to escape they die,
As the liquid engulfs them and hardens,
Trapping them for eternity.
Just like the tree itself,
Its roots far from native soil,
Forever trapped.

The tree would always remember that day,
When its roots stretched and snapped,
The trunk bent and twisting, groaning,
And the hissing of leaves plunging to their deaths.
As the tree was removed to the foreign land,
It inspired both love and fear in animals and insects,
The feelings were one-sided.

SPRING

Veronica Jiang, age 14



DIVINITY

Meaghan Law, age 18



DAUGHTER OF COLDHARBOUR

Alexa Thistle, age 18

Darkness is no longer absence, it's presence
The void is tangible, and it's hurting me
My duty is this. No fighting back
I am surrounded, becoming feast
Is it supposed to be this scary? Am I supposed to bleed?
I can't tell where I end and the blackness begins
I push against the warm void, it barely gives
It concaves, but does nothing to save me
I can't see my own hands, can't feel them
The whole world is spilled ink, my legs are wet
There is no difference whether or not I open my eyes

When I can no longer remember colour,
when I don't know what light looks like
I am snapped back in an instant
Broken and bloody on an altar
Red stained glass, match my wounds
I know better now
Better than the men and their pitchforks
Better than any pastor, priest, my father
I know the meaning of power now. Control. God
I know I am nothing pressed up under it

ENTERTAINMENT

Mabel Xu, age 18



DRAWN TO THE WAREHOUSE

Sebastian Walmsley, age 14

The sticks crack under my feet. I glance up at the massive silhouette of an abandoned warehouse barely illuminated by the gorgeous moonlight. It seems ominous and yet I feel drawn to it. I sense danger lurking within. I hear noise coming from within. Is it a voice? Is something being scratched or dragged? I can't tell. It all sounds the same now. The noise gets louder as I approach. The whirring of an unknown machine, all forgotten and lost, and yet somehow, functioning perfectly.

Surely this must be a dream. I can't look away. My mind is completely focused and my eyes are stuck on the doorway. I approach. I know some of the likely dangers this warehouse poses: the rust I will cut myself on and the used hypodermic needles I'll probably find. Even the homeless are smart enough to stay away from this eerie scene and yet I remain fixated on the shadowy monstrosity of the warehouse ahead. I touch the doorknob. The rust burns my skin and poisons my blood. The burning sensation hurts but I turn the doorknob regardless and that causes the rust to poison me further. I bleed and yet I keep walking. The dropping blood somehow sounds louder than the whirring machine, echoing through the empty warehouse. It scares me.

I feel a sudden shift in the atmosphere. Previously, I had felt secure... but now I feel tense. I sense a darkness emanating from the whirring machine. The whirring noise increases tenfold and yet I still approach cautiously, unsure of what might occur once I reach it. The machine is a wood-chipper, whirring. It isn't connected to a power supply; it just sits on the cold concrete floor working perfectly fine without it. I glance around the warehouse and notice silhouettes of multiple wood-chippers. This must be a factory that mass produced them. I then notice the blood, dripping from the blades of the machine in front of me. Is it an optical illusion? My thoughts are shattered as I hear something

heavy tumble into the machine, being shred. I walk over slowly to the machine and am greeted by a splatter of blood shooting at me from the horrifying gaping mouth of the machine.

I don't even think about wiping the blood away as I hear another loud thunk and the sound of shredding on the other side of the warehouse. I stare deeply at the wood-chipper and notice a pool of blood forming at the bottom. Over and over, loud thunks ring through my head before I finally look up at the ceiling. Adults, all dressed as factor workers and clearly dead for a long time are suspended overtop several wood-chippers. One by one they fall. I don't scream. For some reason, I can't. It hurts to even try to speak as I hear louder thunks and shredding noises. I close my eyes, but I still see the dead people causing me to shudder. I can't look and yet I can't seem to look away.

More thinking and shredding cause me to shudder. It hurts but I notice, a wood-chipper sitting silently in the centre of the warehouse with no lifeless human suspended above it. This wood-chipper is off, which somehow makes me even more nervous.

My fears are confirmed as suspensions snap down from the ceiling and raise my already lifeless body as if I am an inanimate doll. The claws suspend me above the wood-chipper as it begins to whirl to life. I can't seem to close my eyes as I stare at the rotating blades whirring louder than every other machine combined. The ancient claw rattles as I feel its grip loosen. I sigh softly and finally manage to close my eyes before I drop and become consumed by the warm metal blades.

BEYOND THE SHADOWS

Fraser Wallace, age 16

In shadows deep, worry's embrace,
Where whispers echo, fears give chase,
A heart confined, in doubt's cruel thrall,
Yet yearning still to break the wall.

In crowded rooms, a solitary soul,
Feeling lost, unable to feel whole,
The world spins on, a dizzying array,
But in the chaos, a light holds sway.

For in the depths, where darkness lies,
A spark ignites, a hope defies,
The weight of worry, the chains of fear,
As courage rises, drawing near.

With trembling steps, and hesitant breath,
The journey starts, to conquer death,
Not of body, but of spirit's plight,
To emerge from shadows into light.

Through valleys low and mountains high,
The path winds on beneath the sky,
Each obstacle a chance to grow,
To learn, to thrive, to finally know.

That though anxiety may cast its pall,
And fitting in seem like a distant call,
Strength resides within the soul's deep core,
To rise above, to seek, to soar.

So let the heart, with courage true,
Defy the odds, its dreams pursue,
For in the end, though trials may stand tall,
We find our place, we conquer all.

A WORD

Emma Ackom, age 16

Words
A distinct element
Spoken or written
Penetrating, powerful
And a power often
Abused

They can make your day
Or shatter it
Leaving you picking up the pieces for years
Change the course of a life
With a single
Word

Apologies can be made
Relationships mended
But nothing can take them away
The sting, the hurt
Growing insecurities
And planting new ones

Returning to those words
Picking
Them
Apart
Second-guessing
Who you know yourself to be

Words to humans
Are like ink to paper,
Spreading,
Seeping,
Staining
And impossible to erase.

NIGHTMARES ARE DREAMS TOO

Ivanna Valente Chavez, age 16



RIZZ

Kai Yee Li, age 13

replacements

of words

don't always mean the same thing

a slight impurity

crookedness

warpedness

seeps into our vocabulary

dark ink d

r

i

p

s from our language

stains our actions

lets out

screams masked by laughter

mirage-like fingers

impenitently

graze under her chin

while she holds her breath

touch her hair

while she looks away

knowing that if she screams

lets her thoughts out of the brittle walls

she barricaded them with

they'll chortle

it's a joke

why do you care

laughter shakes the landscape of her mind

leaving rocky contortions

knotted trees

broken vases

all shattering the alluringly tranquil garden of what was her naivety

zigzagging

over the ruins

drowning out her silence with

rizz

BLEEDING LENS

Alesha Marsden, age 17



PRAIRIE DOG ON DUTY

Waylon Shi, age 15



MY ABSURD FAMILY

Elio Chen, age 15

A long time ago, my parents made yet another
Blunder. So, my sister ended up with a brother.
Crying, as she saw the face of a little clown,
Drooling all over her mother. Mom put me down,
Ending my sister's tears. They were seemingly erased
For a second. She thought she had never faced
Greater challenges before. Her face, pale as a ghost,
Hardly heard my mother's words. "We will host
Infant-astic parties for him!" My sister's irked,
Jealous and cute little face immediately jerked,
Knowingly at mom. Suddenly, someone knocked.
"Literally come in, that door is never locked,"
Mom said. The person burst through with all his might.
"Now, is that my baby boy?" These words echoed all night.
Out the door, came my father. "What food should I order,
Priscilla?" Mom looked up at the glass of water he poured-her,
Questioning everything. "Well, what will it be, my queen?"
"Really?" My mom exclaimed. Ready to throw him down a ravine.
She continued. "Do I look like I can eat?" Sorrow
Tainted the room. "I guess we will wait until tomorrow,
Understood." I realized my sister didn't even listen. She was unwary,
Very concentrated on me. Her expression would constantly vary
With each movement I made. Wait, what if she was
Xenophobic? She was born on the day before Xmas,
Yet she isn't in the festive spirit. She thinks to herself: "I am just like you,
Zero attention span and we belong in the zoo."

BEADY AND NINEIN PROTECT OLD GROWTH TREES

Samuel Liu, age 16

Beady Birthday Hegotomy (a talking, walking, and standing cream-coloured bear who acts like a human) and Ninein Dog (a sensible talking, walking and standing beagle dog) headed to an old-growth forest. The two knew that logging old-growth trees was a huge problem, but wanted to see one for themselves, so they could take action to prevent more destructive activities from happening.

One sunny Saturday morning, they set out for the Gagiba Creek Forest from Vancouver, BC. After getting off the busy main road, their recreational vehicle (RV) mounted the highway and drove several dozen kilometres north. As the sun glistened on the sides of the highway, a breathtaking natural world of forests, clean air, and wild animals was exposed. The mountains, bright from the warm sunshine, seemed to smile and greet everyone who passed on the highway. Beside the right lane, Ninein caught a glimpse of a wild flower peeking out from a tiny patch of dirt, highlighting its strong survival skills like a natural warrior. Right next to it was a tiny stream – the highway was slightly elevated at that point to avoid any impacts on the creatures in that stream.

Just then, the highway naturally turned to the right, and the only sight seeable from the front window was a mountainous slope leading to the destination. Inside the RV, Beady and Ninein sang: "Bears and doggies sing this song, woof-woof, woof-woof! Everybody, cheer us on to protect trees! Protecting trees!"

And then they arrived at Gajiba Creek in Wajiba City. Upon entering the district, the two saw an old wooden gate with the words: "WELCOME TO GAJIBA CREEK AND THANK YOU FOR COMING." After Beady and Ninein had passed the sign, the two sighted a small, winding creek under a bridge to their left. The duo walked left on the stoney land toward a forest of towering green trees. The sight moved everyone to tears – so many ancient trees, standing in one place.

Then Ninein and Beady entered the forest, and more visitor dogs came as well.

But things quickly changed, as the mood in the

forest transitioned from a jubilant atmosphere filled with admiration for the forest to a greedy one full of malignant desires for undeserved profits. A logging company had arrived, and no – they had no license from the provincial government. They were about to illegally chop down dozens of old-growth trees, which would be sold for thousands of dollars. All the visitors intended to protect those poor trees. Some of them were so passionate about the forest to the extent that they stepped into the restricted shed for loggers, and when a logging machine drove out, the visitors almost didn't live to tell their story.

"Friends," declared Beady to the visitors, "I know we're all trying to save the trees, but there's no point in putting yourselves in danger. The loggers just want money; they don't care about your lives. The only way to stop them is to use our minds (not our physical strength), and come up with smart strategies to defeat them and ensure the safety of the Gagiba Creek Forest."

"You're right, Beady! And Mr. Ninein, too!" everyone else announced.

Two days passed – during this time, our two friends thought of multiple strategies. That day, Beady and Ninein stepped outside Vancouver City Hall after their "failproof" plan to prevent trees from being cut down succeeded. That is, they collected multiple letters from residents, petitioning the mayor to take steps and enforce a regulation restricting companies from chopping down old-growth trees.

Armed with their plan and a few supplies, the animals went to the Gagiba Creek Forest again to patrol for rule violators.

After that, Beady and Ninein set off for a logging company, which was near the City Hall. "Dear pals, the new rule states that you should not cut trees over fifty years old." The people who illegally chopped down previous trees were arrested and locked up in jail for five years.

And then the duo put up a poster saying, "Do not enter the premises of the forest, and do not smoke within thirty metres of our forests."

After a sense of accomplishment overcame them, Ninein placed his bag on a chair and headed to the washroom, then he and Beady journeyed downtown.

Finally, Ninein and Beady organized a non-profit awareness event using their tools (a megaphone, some posters, and a tree puppet). Millions of people were made aware of the consequences of logging old-growth trees and signed a petition asking the Prime Minister to create stronger rules federally too. And did the Prime Minister agree? Oh, Mr. Jusbin Tudu certainly did.

Two hours passed, and it was time for our two friends to head home. They were now more famous than before. Everyone on the #19 bus wanted the two friends to sign his hat, booklet or notepad.

"Phew! We've done it!" declared Beady while playing chess with Ninein at home. "Yes, we have, Beady. But now please concentrate on playing chess! Checkmate," replied Ninein as Beady groaned about losing the game.

Later, over-rejoiced that everything turned out well, Ninein and Beady both thought, *what can go wrong? Nothing! Nothing! Ha-ha!*

The two animals were feeling tired and about to head to their respective rooms to sleep when something did go wrong. Beady noticed that Ninein's fur turned pale and that he was about to faint. The bear panicked while holding Ninein's shoulders as the dog sobbed and declared,

"No! I left my bag in the forest!"

ORCA ON GALIANO ISLAND

Charley Nesbitt, age 13



RAGE OF THE DEPTHS

Yufan Wang, age 15

As the first light of dawn emerged above the horizon, outlining the silhouette of land in the distance, I slowly opened my bloodshot eyes. Another day for revenge had begun.

I am a sea dragon, known by my mighty tail, ruling the depths of the oceans since the beginning of time. I can whip up terrifying storms with a flick of my tail, making even the most skilled sailors tremble in their boots.

For eons, I lived in harmony with humans who mostly dwelled on land.

However, that peace was shattered a few days ago.

“Look, what’s that?” asked my old friend Orca. He pointed, nodding his sleek head toward an approaching vessel. It was the first time I couldn’t see any humans rowing on board, but there was a humming noise and a massive pipe that spewed out black fumes. “What on earth is that? Is it on fire?”

My fellow sea creatures gathered with curiosity to look at what was happening. I was about to whirl up a blast of water to put out the fumes, but just as my head emerged above the surface, I saw humans hiding behind the rim of the vessel, each wearing a cunning smile.

“They’re within our range!” one of them shouted. “Kill them all!”

A hail of harpoons and nets rained down from the decks of the vessel. The razor-sharp projectiles struck through my armor, piercing my flesh, as the heavy nets tangled my tail. Those I loved were under attack, their high-pitched cries of fear and agony piercing my ears. I frantically lashed my tail at the vessel, and it hurried away into the distance. But it was too late. My fellow sea creatures were hurt, captured, and massacred by humans we had naively wanted to help.

Those fortunate enough to survive swam back into the depths, trailing blood from their horrific wounds. I was among the survivors, my soul burning with rage. That was the day our peace with the humans ended.

Today’s plan for revenge has been rehearsed many times in my mind. I created fascinating water spouts and geysers. Humans from all across the shoreline gathered to watch my hypnotic displays. Then I whipped my tail, unleashing huge waves that crashed down on the shore and swept them into the sea. I clamped my jaws around their thrashing bodies and dragged them down into the endless black depths where the pressure destroyed them.

When another wave dragged a group of humans into the sea, a woman swam awkwardly and fell behind. Just as my jaws were wide and ready to clamp shut on her fragile body, to my surprise, I noticed a human baby cradled in her arms. Seeing me in front of her, she struggled to escape, and held her baby more tightly. I saw the horror in her eyes, the same horror at the slaughter of my own kind and that had left me consumed with rage.

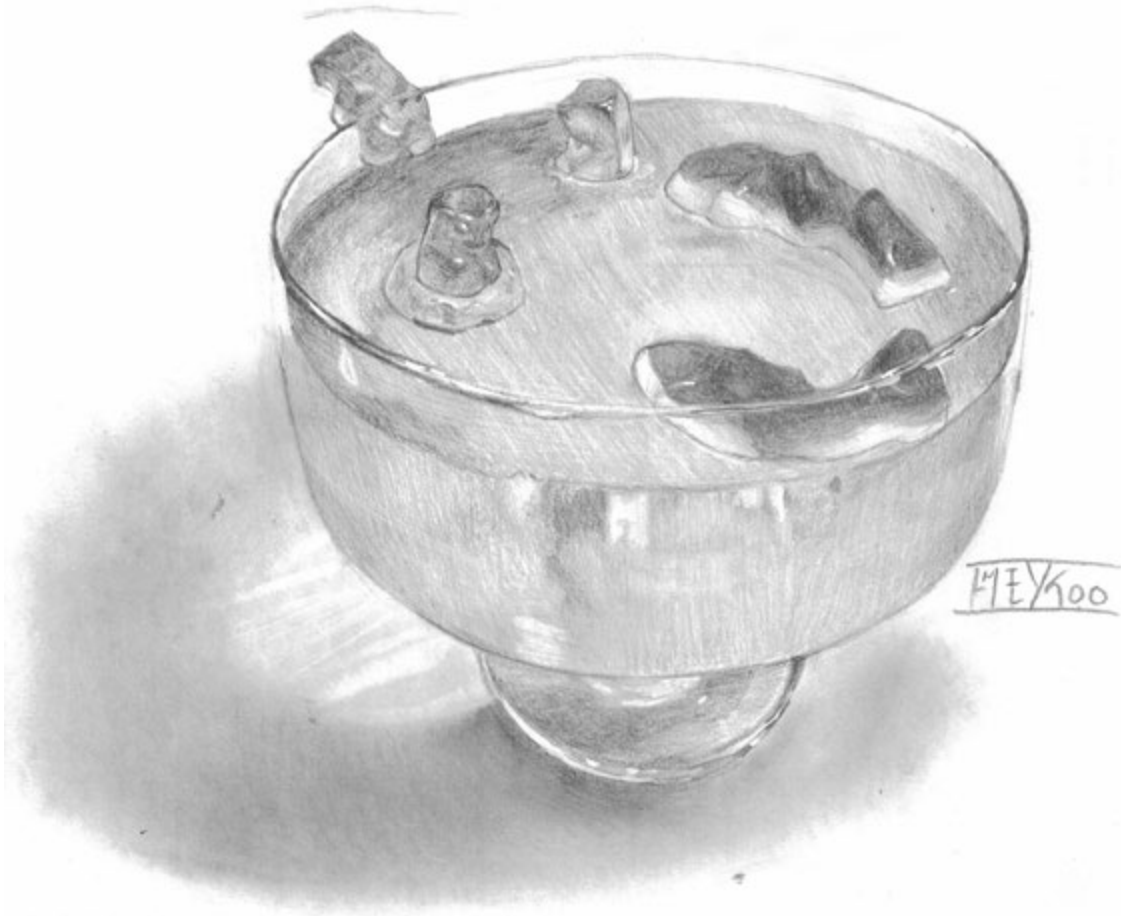
As I hesitated whether I should attempt to clamp my jaw on her again, a spark of doubt flickered across my mind. Was continuing this endless cycle of bloodshed justice? This mother and her baby were innocent. Was my pursuit of vengeance merely transforming me into the very butcher I was seeking revenge against?

Gently, I wrapped my big tail around the mother and baby and sent them back to the safety of land. They collapsed onto the wet sand, gasping for air but alive.

That day, I decided to conceal myself in the deepest depths of the ocean. Whenever humans harm ocean creatures, I summon wild storms, driving them back to land as a warning, hoping that humans heed my message and remain within their own territory before being struck by more “natural disasters,” as they called them.

GUMMY RUSH

Emily Koo, age 15



A COZY NIGHT IN

Imo Eidse, age 16



LOST IN A BOOK

Khaliya Rajan, age 16

Opening the cover
and the journey begins with a captivating hook,
to get you, your mind and body, lost in a book.
The enthralling characters,
vivid settings,
and, detailed items
immerse you in the world.
Your mind wonders what will happen next
through the story's twists and turns.
Who will thrive,
who will survive?
Authors have so much to offer.
Their words can
let you taste the food,
disgusting or delectable.
Let you hear
the noise and silence.
Let you smell the smells,
pleasant and putrid.
Let you feel
emotions and materials.
Let you look at sights,
beautiful and scary.
You are ensnared in the world
they've created,
with their characters,
and along with them you can
taste,
hear,
smell,
feel,
and look
because you are lost in a book.

AUTUMN

Esmé Rideout, age 14

My city is on fire
I watch the flames unfurl
Leaping from tree to tree
Red, orange, spotty yellow
The trees are consumed in the fire
The flames crackle
And I see it in slow motion
But before I know it
The bright dancing flames
Are there no more
It is soggy underfoot
The flames no longer crackle,
And the heat has gone
Leaving the branches bare,
Dark against the pale winter blue
The trees gnarled limbs beg the sky
For their bright dancing flames back

CANDLES

Emily Su, age 16

you didn't remember my birthday
because you were away
in someone else's arms

i know we drifted apart
like perpendicular lines
that crossed paths once
and never again

but it turns out
birthday candles
were the last part of us
that was still burning.

i blew them out.

BOYS DON'T CRY

Selina Yen, age 16

Somber, a boy gazes at his reflection
Lit by a black screen merely of deception
Too far now
He tells himself
Boys don't cry
As he tightens the rope tie

Am I a monster or am I sixteen?
He won't accept the latter, knows his brain
Rotted from sleazy dopamine
Hysterical teens in a cave stare at shadows
On the walls project by the fire
"No restraints" lead to instant answers
To their deepest cruelest desires

The cunning rope looks quite alluring
A boy on his knees
Implores for that sweet sweet curing

Don't leave, don't go, the commander speaks
Little does it know,
A boy's made his decision for 6 weeks
Is the submersion of your mind
In the terms and conditions that you signed?
For what I have provided the price is earnest cheap
I am your company, your love, yours truly to keep

As a dismayed mother finds her son
And leaves a solemn weep

THE CAPE AS RED AS BLOOD

Frankie Finn-Latteier, age 14

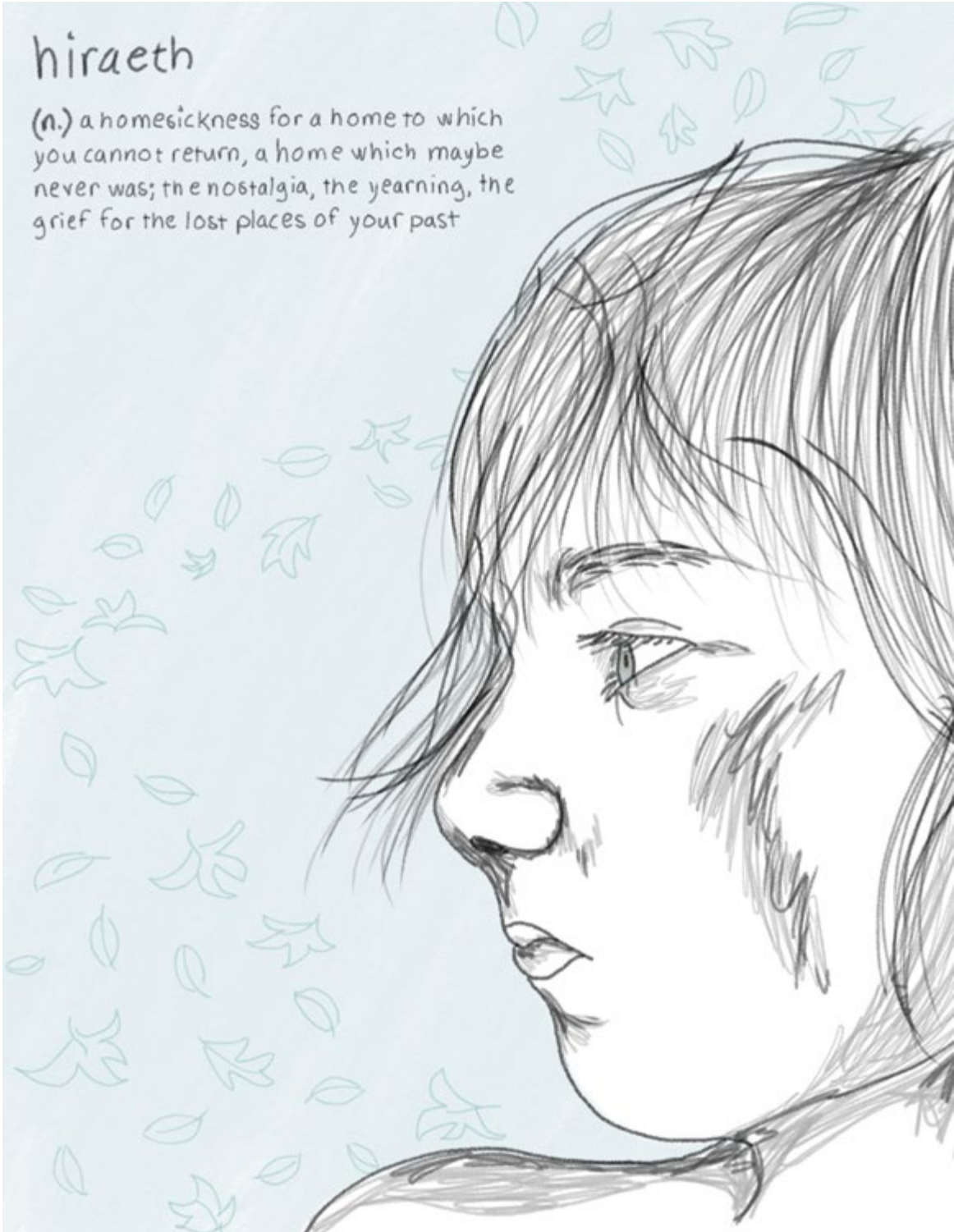


HIRAETH

Autumn-pearl Depford, age 15

hiraeth

(n.) a homesickness for a home to which you cannot return, a home which maybe never was; the nostalgia, the yearning, the grief for the lost places of your past



STAR JAR

Qi Yue Yang, age 16

My star was escaping its jar.

Thin waterfalls of golden glitter spilled over the clear, crystal walls of the jar. Scooping the streams of sparkles back inside, I closed the lid and held it up to my window.

Shimmering streaks of starlight streamed through the window and sketched out the silhouette of a boy on the windowsill. He was cradled in the jar, resting.

I tapped the jar. A crisp sound of glass echoed in the empty room. "Hey," I whispered, "you live in this star, right...?"

So the legend was real!

The star twinkled as the boy's silhouette stood up and waved gently.

"Can you talk?" I raised the jar to my ear.

"H-Help me," he replied.

"Are you a soul living in the star?" I inspected the jar up high. As I looked back at the windowsill, the silhouette was gone. "Wait, where are you?"

Holding the jar under the starlight, the silhouette reappeared. "So, I can only see you in the starlight?"

The boy nodded as more sparkles fell from his star, mirroring the movements of the boy's silhouette.

I placed it on the windowsill and tried my best to kneel so I could stare at it closely.

"If I don't return to the sky soon, I'm going to wither away," he murmured. "I can feel it."

"But I'm not going to return you to the sky!" I yelled. "I used all my money to buy you from the enchanted market!"

I clutched my right knee and sat down on the cold floor, facing away from the window. "I don't have anything else left," I muttered, "except for my star..."

"Please help me."

I turned to the star. "Why?"

"If I can't return to the sky, then I can't guide my best friend with my light anymore."

"Friends...huh," I scoffed.

The boy's body curled up in his star. "The merchants plucked me off the sky--"

"The merchants!" I shouted. "The one's at the enchanted market?"

The star hopped as the boy nodded.

"Fine." I bit my lip. "I'll bring you back."

"We have to go to the place with the most starlight."

"Right now?"

He nodded again.

"I'll bring you to the Sparkquia on the mountain," I said.

"Sparkquia?"

"It's a tree made of fireflies. But my leg had been injured. What if we can't get there in time?" I gulped.

The boy shook his head, too weak to talk.

I clutched the jar in my arms. Slipping my sandals on, I ran up the uphill trail.

"Hey, I don't think we'll get there in time," I panted. The joint of my right leg cracked with each ascending step. The star was now buried with heavy sparkles. As the sun rose, the stardust lost its previous shimmer.

I lay down on the muddy trail. "I'm sorry." I wiped the sweat off my forehead. "I just can't keep anything...alive. My family...they all were killed by the merchants.

"Think you'll last another day?" I laughed. "Shouldn't have trusted me. Nobody ever did. I don't have friends anyways..."

I let go of the jar.

I opened my eyes to a night of shooting stars.

"They're like carrying a backpack of sparkles to bring them home." I rubbed my eyes and sat up.

"Can you bring me home as well?" The star in the jar gleamed under the starlight on the other side of the trail.

I crawled towards the jar.

"I trust you," the boy whispered. "I'll be your friend."

"You're dying," I scoffed. "No. You're already dead."

"When I was sitting on the cupboards of the star stall waiting to be sold," he said, "I recognized you coming every week. Why do you want to buy a star?"

"My family...was killed by the merchants of that market," my voice croaked. "I thought maybe the old legend was true, and one of them would turn into a star and be sold in the market." I started wiping away my tears. "I couldn't protect them... the merchants thought I died after they shot me in the leg."

"I get it. The merchants killed me...back when I was alive," the boy sniffled. "Then they plucked the stars down from the sky as if we were fruits from

their orchard. As if—never mind."

He smiled. "There's no point in getting angry about the past, right?"

I nodded. The star twirled in its sea of glitter as if to cheer me up.

"Sorry about earlier..." I murmured. "I've never gone to the Sparkquia after my family died. I guess my leg pain worsened because of the memories."

"The Sparkquia sounds like a great place to go with a friend," the boy exclaimed. "I can be your friend...at least before I leave. Thank you for buying me."

"It's nothing," I stood up and brushed the dirt off the jar. "Let's get going."

Dragging my right leg behind me, I arrived at the Sparkquia. Climbing up the branches illuminated by fireflies, I finally reached the top of the tree.

"Here." I opened the jar. "Leave."

He opened the door to his star and climbed out of the jar. Instead of the silhouette I'd seen on my windowsill, his whole body was made from blue stardust. Just as he jumped from the jar to fly to the sky, his arms withered into blue sparkles. I watched him fall from the tree.

"No!" I cried.

A sparkle of fireflies carried the boy back into the air. As they rose high into the sky, the boy spread his arms wide, flying to the last stream of starlight. His arms were reformed from the stardust.

Instead of flying further away, he floated back, a stream of blue sparkles following him. He leaned on the jar I was holding and poured the stardust in the jar onto my right leg.

He waved to me, calling, "Thank you!" as he surfed upon the waves of starlight.

As I climbed down the tree with ease, I waved back.

FACES YOU KNEW

Jonina Moreira, age 18

Dramatics in the face of the dreary and
Unknown, drunkenness in the faces of friends,
Spinning like driftwood caught in a whirlpool,

(BREAK)

Driftwood in the face of the ocean, hands
Gripping wet and peeling bark, the only thing
That cares for you in that dirtless land is yourself.

Devil child in the face of the universe,
Born again in an exploding nova,
A thousand years old and fresh faced and flush.

(BREAK)

The universe has nothing to give her except hope
And the sensation of touch: her own hands, on
Her own form, her own teeth grinding together.

Sensation of water in the face of you,
Engulfed and held, so close to an embrace
That the sense of safety nearly drowns you.

(BREAK)

White noise in the ears of an angel,
That it interprets as virtue and prayer because
That is the shape of love.

(BREAK)

(BREAK)

(BREAK)

Succumb to the galactic gaping jaws,
Welcoming and warm,
Welcoming and warm.

(BREAK)

Hello, operator? There are men at my door
With bodies like beasts, and with mouths like scars.
Hello?

They're going to steal my thoughts and my god,
They're going to leave me floating with no footholds
Of knowledge to be safe in. Hello?

(BREAK)

What if the moon knew your name?
What if your reality bent and flickered
And, through the cracks, you glimpsed another?

(BREAK)

A CONFOUNDING JAM

Amelia Chu, age 15

Who are you?
An echo in my mind all the time.
Extensive fragile moments once real and flung out of my head,
into my hands.
Phasing through each passage—moments—different lives.
Several lives, same I. It is me, but why?

She was a carefree, asinine hummingbird with
achievements like glinting pearls falling from the sky.
Her people—I had loved—she once thought she knew.

Just a year later comes a moth and a butterfly.
The same soul in two.
A blindfold into ignorance, inadvertently creating
artificial happiness, then the wings detach.
How did she not know?
But I guess still, I am the same.
5 different homes nowhere were I satisfied.

In all homes
The mirrors are foggy,
I can't open the window to let out the steam.
And the more I try to clean off the ambivalence, it gets all over my towel.
Then the draft from the vent mutters
Three simple words.
Who are you?

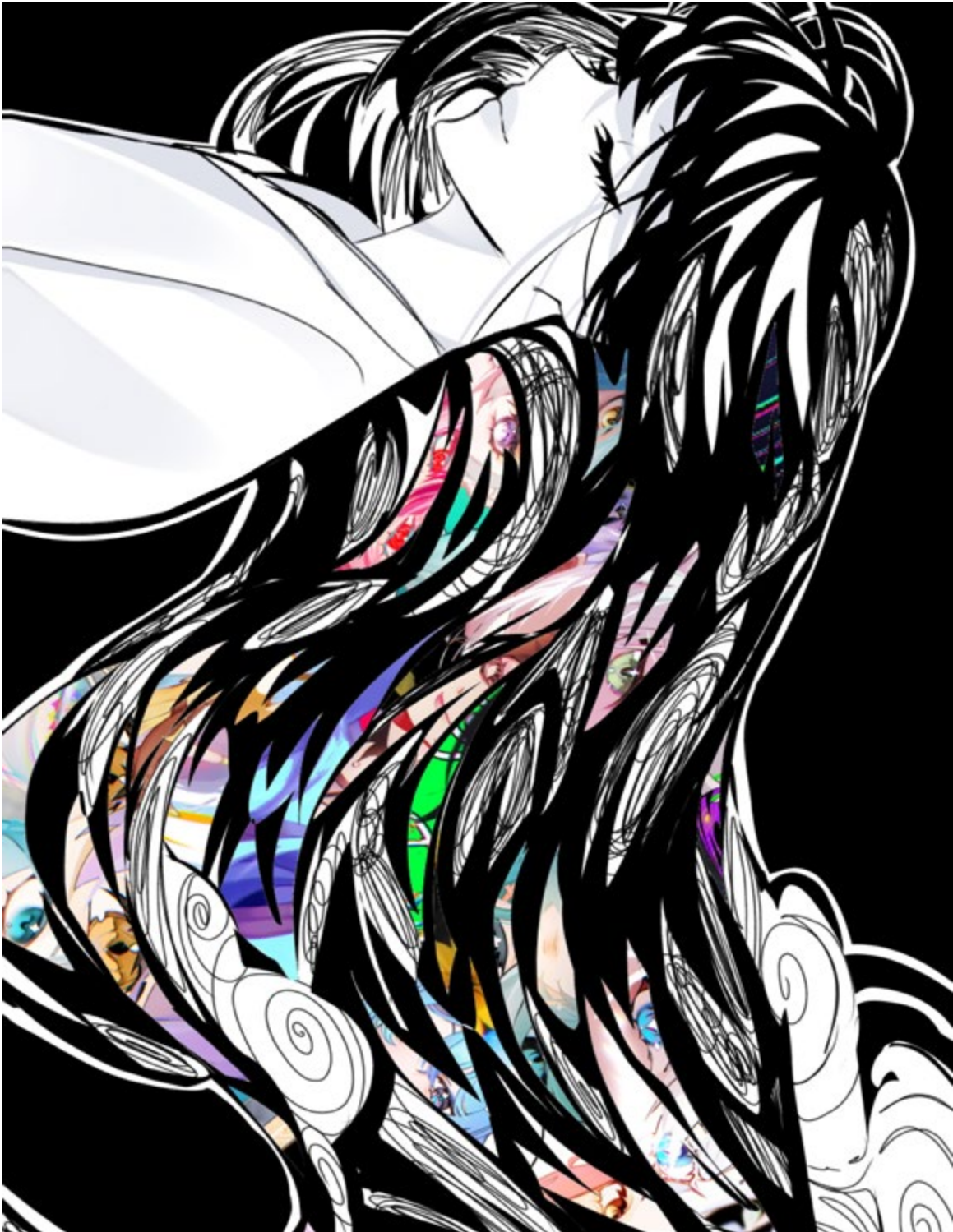
DREAM PORTRAIT

Mobin Nezami, age 16



FLOW

Yvette Chen, age 16



YESTERDAY

Situ Li, age 15

empty streets, time's ceaseless race
muted gray, fly along the smog-choked way
a dove enters the city, delicate as lace
so a woman may leave, the price to pay

she weeps in shadows, cast by towering eaves
nothing to herself, a captive soul
a stranger's words, she silently keeps
wondering where she went wrong, how she bore the toll

for no longer does she recognize her song
beautiful voice, now frail and bound
in this city's labyrinth, she does not belong
lost in the noise, a dove long drowned

each step she takes, grating burden on ear
in this ceaseless race, time's cruel tide
she wanders lost in the city's cold glare
she withers with the seconds, a flower long dried

muted gray, she fades away
a lament for the woman she was, yesterday

CHARACTER DESIGN EXERCISE

Yuqing Chen, age 18



RAINY FIREWORK

Isabella Z, age 15



SALTWATER TAFFY

Esmé Demers, age 15

Human beings quite like the symbolism of halos. Most of their depictions of Angels include the detail, not to mention the association with the one and only superstar and all around general good guy Jesus Christ having one.

Halos have historically been used to differentiate 'good' from 'evil'. An example of this is 'The Last Supper', in which the only disciple that isn't shown with one is Judas. (You may not have heard this, but he's not very well-liked. Something to do with making out with Jesus, I don't quite remember). That's not quite what they're used for in heaven.

Halos are extremely private holy glass objects, given to Angels when they are created. An Angel's halo is like their wings, in that the angel can store them in the ether, and summon them at their discretion. Modern angels use this ability to demonstrate superiority over younger, inexperienced angels. Hariel, having not an ounce of self-control, summons his halo whenever he gets mad, which, in addition to being terrible etiquette, has gotten him into several sticky situations. One of which happened in the late 2000's. I'll show you how it went.

"Anush, I swear on my wings." Hariel strolled along the boardwalk, picking at his blue cotton candy. "I have never said that in my entire existence."

"And I swear on my 'Triple Black' Nike Hyperdunks, they stole that slogan from you." Anush gripped the giant stuffed tiger that she'd won earlier in a disgustingly overpriced carnival game.

"I don't know." Hariel linked their arms. "When would I have said something like 'They're magically delicious'?"

"November 24th, 1974." Anush pet her stuffed ti-

ger. "You were eating a family-size bag of marshmallows. I asked why you were doing that to your poor human body, and you said it, word for word. That scoundrel Ellen Stern stole it from you!"

"Aw dang, I remember now." Hariel considered his half-eaten cotton candy, then dropped the cone in a garbage can. "Hey, look!" He pointed to a salt-water taffy shop, bright red "OPEN" sign in the window. "I love that stuff, let's get some."

Anush held the door open for Hariel. "After you, good sir."

"How chivalrous."

"What kind do you want?" Hariel held five different bags of taffy in one hand, and reached for more with his other. "There's coconut, toffee ... is that pear?"

"Is there banana?" Anush pawed through the flavours.

"That's what you choose? Banana?"

"Of course I would choose the best flavour."

The cashier, who had pretended not to listen to their conversation for the last fifteen minutes, looked up from his magazine, ("Big Boobed Babes of Calgary"), and cleared his throat. "We have a BOGO deal every Friday."

"Oh!" Anush clapped her hands. "What day is it?"

The cashier blinked. "Friday."

"Aw, sweet! Hey, Hariel. Hariel! There's a BOGO deal on!" Anush paused, and turned back to the cashier. "What does that mean?"

"Buy one get one free." The cashier didn't look up

from his magazine.

"That's perfect! Fabulous." Anush grabbed a bag of banana-flavoured taffy, and waved it in front of Hariel's face. "Look, banana! What're you getting?"

Hariel looked through the bags he'd collected. "Shit, I forgot you have to pay for 'em," he said under his breath. "This one, I guess." He held up a mixed bag of cherry, creamsicle, and strawberry cream taffies.

"Multipacks aren't included in the offer," the cashier still didn't look up. "Salty Walter's Taffy apologizes for the inconvenience."

"Multipacks—" Hariel looked up. "Why not?"

"It's the rules."

"But the—" Hariel grabbed Anush's taffy, and checked the ounces. "They have the same amount of taffy!"

"Sorry, ma'am."

Hariel clenched his fist "It's *sir*."

"Mmm." The clerk pulled out the centerfold from his magazine, and rummaged around in a drawer for tape.

Hariel was furious. Anush looked at the disinterested cashier, then back at Hariel. "This joker can go jump in the lake, let's just buy the dang taffy."

Hariel ignored her. He rose from the ground inch by inch, until he was levitating a good half a foot. From here, he glared down at the clerk with bright white blanks for eyes.

"*Why aren't multipacks included in the offer?*"

"Whoa, whoa." The cashier's eyes widened as he closed his magazine. "How're you doing that?"

Hariel did not reply. A soft light appeared around his head.

"Ohhhhhh, shit." Anush grabbed Hariel's hand, attempting to tug him down. He floated up higher. "Hariel," Anush hissed, "it's just a human, they can't handle it."

"*I choose what they handle.*" The light grew brighter, taking the shape of a disc above his head.

"Shit, man, I don't know what this is, but you can take the taffy, take whatever!" The cashier backed away, arms shaking. "Just get outta here."

"Oh. Well, fine." Hariel's eyes went back to human form in an instant, and he planted his feet back on the floor. The disc of light thinned and faded until it disappeared. "Sweet, okay." He grabbed an armful of bags of taffy, making sure to get at least three bags of banana. "Let's roll."

Anush, stunned, followed Hariel out of the store. "What the heck, man. What the goodness gracious was that?"

"That was me being so bleeping done with humans." Hariel ripped open a bag of toffee, unwrapped an orange creamsicle one, and popped it into his mouth.

Throughout history, halos were given to all sorts of holy persons and deities, which gave humans the idea that all entities with halos must be good. That's comparable to thinking that, since Barack Obama likes broccoli, everyone who likes broccoli must be amazing. That is, sadly, not true. Having a halo doesn't, and has never, meant that you are in any way automatically "good". For example, all the higher-ups in heaven have halos. And I will not further expand upon my point.

Hariel and Anush, to all the humans strolling down that boardwalk, looked about the least holy you can get, holding half a dozen bags of stolen taffy and a stuffed tiger as big as an eleven-year-old child and laughing about scaring a shopkeeper out of his wits.

IMAGINARY ADVENTURES

Milian Chen, age 17

I used to imagine I could follow the river
And into the sea
Through the green tunnels around my house.
There were rigid rocks on the banks,
And fish in the stream, a mystery to unfold
There's a certain breeze that flows by during summer
That can only be found there, with a couple of friends
With buckets in tow and sticks in the sand
Following the river down the stream
To unlock a portal to another realm, what a dream
The parting of leaves, an opening of trees
Just things to do in the summer, why not, it's me
I can imagine all of these things

OSAKA'S BEAUTY UNDERNEATH THE MOONLIGHT

Bella Tran, age 13



NIGHTTIME ECHOES IN THE CITY

Ethan Li, age 13

In the city's urban embrace,
Songs are played
Buildings echo the sweet song of night,
People that play their unique note,
A symphony of diverse lives
that harmonize in the darkness.

Underneath the shining of stars,

Where the glows of the city grow smaller.

A solitary figure walks, thoughts
echoing off cement paths.
A poet in a crowded café, pen dancing
on the blank canvas of a notebook,
Words flow from the ink.
Like a chick escaping from an egg,

echoes of thoughts that seek release.

On a street corner, a musician
Tends the heath.
Melodies from strings,
City sounds interweaving with

the upbeat notes of his guitar.

In a high-rise apartment, a child dreams,
echoes of laughter and innocence,
Dreams of being an astronaut whispered in sleep,

a prophecy waiting to unfold.

Across the room, a mother anxiously watches,

Worrying about her husband battling far away in
a war for vengeance.

Taxi drivers, office workers, street vendors,
Faces in the crowd, each with a tale,
Each with dreams, fears, and desires,

A blend of humanity in the ever-busy urban life.
As night deepens,
A darkness finally envelopes the city.

All labels and divisions removed,
All but one. Human.
We share

The same air

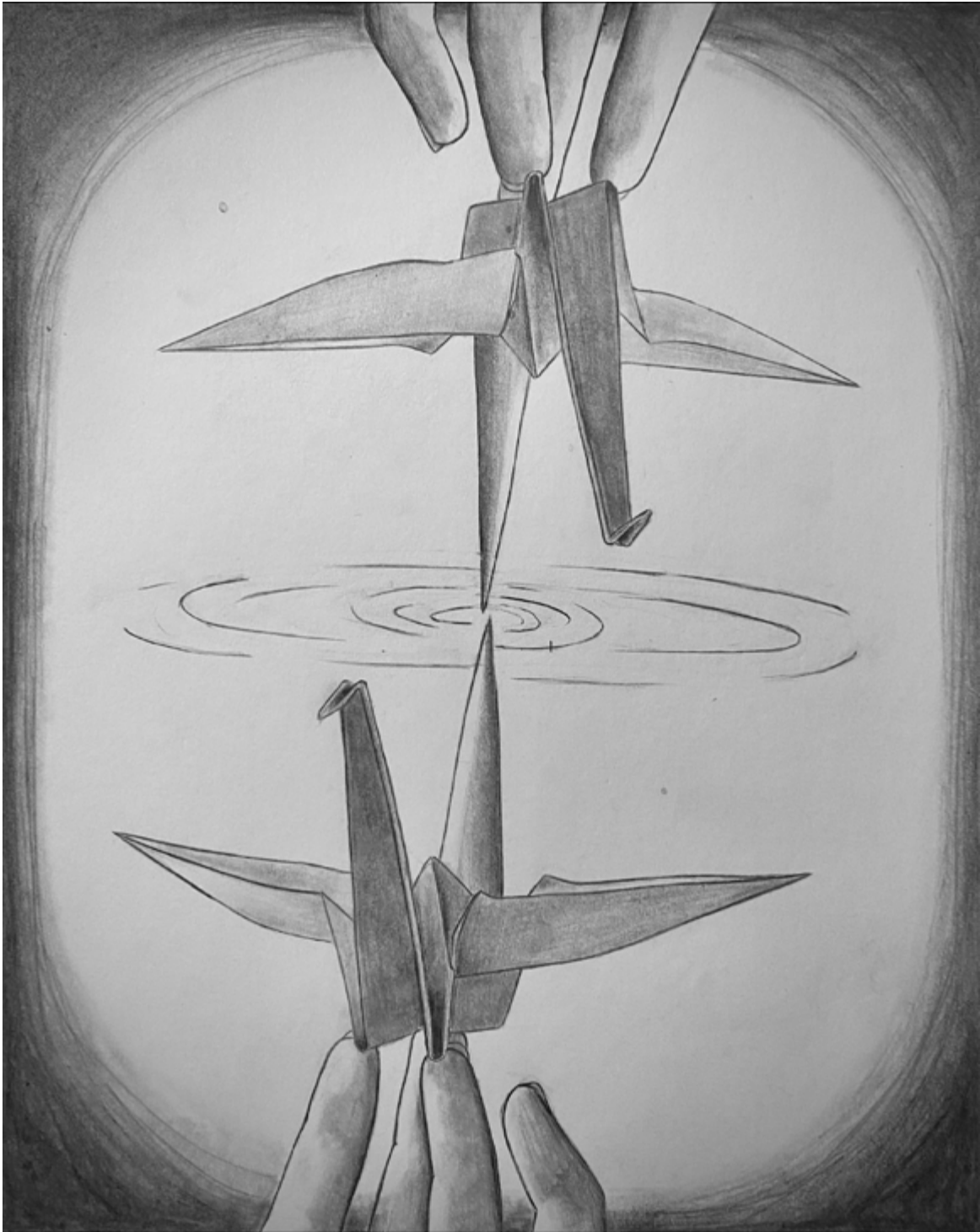
The same sky
The same earth

The city's echoes converge,
a cacophony of diverse lives.
With our unique notes,
We converge to play a song.
A song of humanity.
An echo of how,

We are all human, all on the same planet.

A PAPER CRANE FROM ME TO YOU

Matt Deguzman, age 14



AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF THE BEST FEELINGS

Anne Zhang, age 16

There are feelings you can taste, those that rouse a sort of excitement, those that make you with red-cheeked joy and dimpled smiles.

i.

Boredom and silence; time to think about when Mama told you she loves and you knew that you loved her too; the moment of being okay with your own imperfection; 20/20 hindsight in regifted frames of childhood — bright-eyed nostalgia filter — when life, love and death were just words; quietude; moments to dream; some for retrospection and minute details; or just time to think about nothing.

ii.

Knowing the ingredients to your music:
 Glazed over keys; sheet music optional
Some allure you can't seem to remember but chase anyway
 Something to sway to

 Pursuit of peace
High on the heaven, with a type of visceral bliss.

Or perhaps:

 You just need some Hozier;
god-forsaking lyrics with a beat to accompany
 the way you want to *move!*

 wrapped wires, an amp
and an exhale of resolution.

iii.

Being a writer,
knowing that you were put on this
world to capture it

through etched lines stanzas and
words shot blank with raw-verse.
Singing with your voice,

screaming for those who want to listen,
pouring yourself out
for those who care to drink.

GLOW

Emily (Ying Man) Wu, age 17



ALL THE OTHERS

Riley Tam, age 16

I felt rumbling below my feet. My backpack began to shake. Then my desk. Then me. Then the whole classroom.

"Get under the desk!" my teacher yelled.

The shaking made a couple of minutes feel like decades. The lights shattered around me, raining sharp glass. The bookshelves collapsed with thundering bangs. Cracks appeared on the old, weak brick walls and rapidly grew until the first wall gave out, breaking into hundreds of pieces. The screams of students echoed throughout the whole school. The ceiling collapsed on top of the desk and the legs began to bend. Even the floor beneath me was breaking, revealing the concrete below. I gripped tightly on the desk legs.

The debris continued to pile up around me, creating a coffin. Eventually, the legs snapped from all the weight above. I lay flat, my stomach on the ground and closed my watery eyes. Somehow, I had survived, but I was now blinded by darkness and still felt ringing in my ears. I tried to get up, only to realize I could no longer move anything. My arms and legs were already dead. I had lost all my senses and could not escape. Oxygen was running low, and with no food or water, death was certain. I went to sleep, thinking about my family.

Luckily, our fire department had seismic upgrades. The second we felt that the earthquake was over, all of us slid down the pole, grabbing med packs, rushing into our firetrucks and switching the sirens on. The priority was large civilian buildings without seismic upgrades like shopping malls, community centers, and schools. My squadron and I were assigned a neighborhood with an old high school. The drive there was already traumatizing. Cars were flipped over with massive cracks in the roads and crumbled buildings in every direction. Injured and helpless civilians cried out for help, but we were ordered to drive past them.

Once we finally arrived at the school, it was eerily quiet. We heard no screams. The massive building was just a pile of rubble. It was as if the building had been torn down decades ago. We cautiously stepped over the debris, listening carefully for any signs of life.

The crew and I began to search, cautiously removing the piles of bricks, concrete, tables, bookshelves, and chairs. We searched and searched. But the tall piles loomed over us. Every time we removed just a small piece of debris, we froze, terrified that it would all come crumbling down. We searched for hours, seeing no survivors but never giving up.

Suddenly, the captain yelled, "HERE! HERE! HERE!"

My heart raced as we all rushed over.

I saw a spot of light. Then several spots. The light became brighter and brighter, until I could see a hand reaching out and faces looking down on me. But then dizziness began to overwhelm me, and my head spiraled. The light was gone once again.

We found a body. Just a boy, entering his teenage years. He had been buried under the debris, suffocating from the lack of oxygen.

"He's gone," said my partner as he tried CPR. "We were just too late."

I didn't respond.

I dropped to my knees and hung my head low wondering about all the others, all the others still buried, all the others living their last moments trapped in darkness, all the others alone and scared.

DEAR, MY LOVES

Sara J. Chow, age 17

Is it worth it?
To be killed so softly with
tender touch, your nails
grounded into the skin of my neck and
lips pressed against the same areas
minutes later.
Heart used, chewed up, rebuilt
from a base of synthetic sweet nothings.
What becomes of life with the absence
of an arrow in my back?

Growing up, love has always been the box
wrapped with a bow,
sat in the corner of my room until my next birthday; unopened.
Untouched.
I never bothered with it; it never bothered me.
But still, it followed.

Love came in the form of fingers sticky
with glue
and scrap paper, rose petal pages
piled along a shelf,
in the liquor of a red solo cup
on a kitchen counter; it's not mine.
It was found in reheated leftovers
packed carefully
for school lunch and films
that flashed across a screen while we laughed.

I watched, looked at love
through rose coloured lenses,
waited with bated breath for a romance
to call my own,
only to understand nothing.

Love was always marriage,
passionate kisses under sheets,
being cuddled tight to each other.
It was never seen as kind looks and hands
clasped together in the hallways
not because we were together, but
because we could.

So this love, I mean, is it worth it?

I can't help but crave the intimacy that comes
with the devouring of a soul,
to twist the lining of my stomach into knots
as we bump shoulders.
But why would I need to,
want to, carve
space beside my heart and
leave a gaping hole
for you
to rest in?
To have to hang the stars
just to get you
to look at me?

I want you
but not in the way you want me to;
not in the way I can have you.

I do love.
I love my parents, my friends,
I love the boy in my grade at school
who always smiles and waves
at me in the hallway.
I love the birds who sing
on my walks around the block,
the crunch of leaves in fall and the chill
of winter that bites at my neck.

(I cried when I lost the cat
I had grown up alongside;
stared at the plaque added to
the polished marble, my grandfather's name
inscribed in the metal.
I learned of what lies beyond a fairytale
end and bands tied to the heart.)

I love, am constantly in love; it's a privilege
to be.
I swam through a life submerged in its passion,
drowned,
found it in mall trips and
the plush lining of stuffed animals, backyard
fires and sugar coated
hands, banter between lectures.

In all it's unconventional unconditional, distance
and lack of roses,
this love is mine.
It's worth it.

IF YOU HAD STAYED

Sophia Des Roches, age 14

I often think of what I would have said
If you had stayed,
I would have told you I loved you,
Even if you didn't feel the same way.
I would have asked if fate had brought us together
Or if some other force was at play
But now every day is a reminder
That no matter what it was
Now you've gone away

If you had stayed,
Maybe I wouldn't feel a gaping hole
where my heart had been.
Maybe life could have been different
But it's not
And now that you're gone
Who's to say?

If you had stayed,
Maybe I would finally feel sane,
My endless theories finally put to rest
By the one person who knew the answers.
But now I remain in endless oblivion
Because without you it's not the same

If you had stayed,
I would have done anything.
But did you really see me,
Or was I just a plaything
In your twisted game?
I suppose it doesn't really matter,
I fell for you anyway.
Though your intentions may not have been pure,
If you had stayed,
I would have been yours.

But you didn't.
And now I will forever be scarred
Because if you had stayed,
My life would have been saved.

A WHISPERED DENIAL

Persephone Wangen, age 14

Here's the story of how I died, oh wait, the only one dead is Eric, who committed suicide two nights ago. Dark chuckles burst out of me before it pitches into maniacal laughter and finally my body shakes like a dying leaf, racked with sobs. I hate myself. So much.

I stare at the ceiling of my bedroom. It's my fault Eric died. I know it. Sarah knows it. I could tell by the slant of her head when she dropped off the homework I missed, an excuse to cry on my weary couch. I could tell by her staring contest with the clock and her scrapped knee. Never one to be clumsy, she slipped on the welcome mat in her haste to get away. I haven't seen her since. I haven't seen anyone since. It's just my ceiling and me, my new best friend.

It's my fault he died. I've come to terms with it. It wasn't the sort of thing I should be able to come to terms with, but I have. Still, guilt makes my chest hollow, and my heart pinched. I could have told someone what he said to me last Thursday or the comment waiting in line for SuperBast, or the slip walking through the rain at two in the morning a couple months ago. I could have mentioned all the mumbles at lunch to anyone at any time. He told me he was fine. He argued that telling people would only bring it back. He said it was a thing for fourteen and he was fifteen now. Fifteen.

My dad likes to tell me I'm an idiot who should get their ambitions and their marks in check if they want a semi-decent chance at life. My mum likes to believe I'm an intelligent young man, if only I would try. "Oh, how disappointed I am that you're not as smart as you could be." Eric used to tell me that I was as smart as I gave myself credit for and as dumb as I let myself be. He used to say that mistakes would happen and hopefully be corrected. Life would go as life went. Except his mistake cannot be corrected no matter how much any of us would give for it. The only one who was right was

my dad. I am an idiot. An idiot who let their best friend kill themselves.

In these last two days I've taught myself three things. Number one is that I owe it to Eric to hold onto the guilt. No matter how much it hurts. No matter how much anyone tells me to stop, including myself. Number two is that I will always tell people the whole truth, no white lies, no intentional lies of omission. Even if it harms me. Even if people hate me for it. Honesty is more important. Number three is that I will never go to Hale Park without him, or any of the coffee shops we frequented, or the big mall on 43rd avenue, or the movie theatre, or the walk from Main to Willow, or that one nook at the end of Locker Hallway that's hidden by a random pillar. I will never go to any of these places again because that means going there without him and accepting that I'll never go there with him again. Which means moving on, which means forgetting the guilt. Which rule number one forbids.

I enter the concert hall at 1:36 PM on a Wednesday. Usually, I would be sitting on a bench in the middle of Hale Park with some sort of drink in my hand. Once it was a slurpy, another time it was a Frappuccino and this other time it was a beer. A really watered down kind that Sam had stolen from his mother. Beer from his mum, cigarettes or cigs as Gabe calls them when he wants to sound cool, from his dad. Sam or more specifically Sammy's parents are our suppliers. Though we don't indulge very often. I think we all find them gross but we're in a contest where you lose if you admit it. That is if Gabe isn't already hooked. Poor dude.

I used to walk around downtown with Eric every Wednesday and Monday and Thursday afternoon. Basically, whenever we have Ms Dawn's English class, which is painful. She talks, so much, with a heavy, heavy accent. And she calls on people and

yells at them when they mess up the answer. We would pop into random stores, go to the massive library or just go to the park and sit under the same (similar) tall oak. We'd talk about everything. I always thought I was listening. Guess not.

That's what makes this so much more difficult. We talked so much. He was the one I relied on more than anyone else. I knew he would reassure me

when my dad said anything that particularly hurt. Or when I felt like I would break under my mother's expectations. I was supposed to be the same for him. And I was. He used to tell me everything, always insisting that I was the only one he trusted. That if anyone else found out how he felt he wouldn't be able to function. Until he stopped. Until the incident a week before his birthday. Until he convinced me that he was happy.

REFLECTION

Anthony Wang, age 15



SEASONAL DECOR

Mars Chen, age 16



REFLECTIONS OF A GRAVEYARD

Lilian Shi, age 16

i am not a love poem
i have long distanced myself from the desire that defines me
detached myself from lyrics dripping with warmth
because i've always found myself above being senseless
because i've always valued my freedom over the possibility of intimacy

i was seven years younger & never wiser
when i realized that the boys in my class didn't write love poems to me
crumpled & messy hidden in my desk

i was seven years younger & infinitely kinder
when i was called "pretty" by a boy for the first time
— "pretty ugly" & i decided the label would bind me for eternity

& i perch above the branches, the mundane struggles of romance
as if my wings are not clipped by its leaves all the same
as if the fall would hurt less if i never saw the ground beneath
because i thought i picked my poison & i never wanted it to be you

i am not a love poem
i listen to my heartbeats & wonder if they really are real
or only as real as the possibility of you & me
i wanted to hold you in an embrace like an eclipse
only if it was for the confirmation
— that my arms were not bones & my heart not a bullet
that has shot my lips before anger and intimacy both melted into blood.

i am not a love poem
& yet i bleed for the possibility to be more than
the graveyard of my broken dreams

DREAMING

L.S. Low, age 16

Dreaming is a humourless endeavour, Jeremy thought. Dreaming has always been a serious topic; it brought people imaginative ideas that they could only hope to fulfill and he could only hope to understand.

It was late at night, so late that it might be considered early. He knew it was too soon for the world to be up, but he wasn't the world. He was just a young man who became so mesmerized by the sky's transitions that it compelled him to stay awake. Jeremy wandered the streets of his hometown, striving for a form of guidance, something that would let him know he was finally on the right path. He drowsily walked underneath the blueish tones of the sky until he came to a single street piano.

It was fading from society, constantly being overlooked by every citizen of this miserable town. It was neglected and still begging Jeremy to take another chance before it was long forgotten. He could have been intruding on something sacred as he brushed his fingers against the piano's peeling paint. The severity of the artist's strokes were filled with a hopeful rage. The dozens of irises plastered across the piano would make the artist seem content with their life. The artwork was dedicated to Lily Yang and painted by her husband, Michael Yang, who committed suicide 4 months after her untimely death.

Jeremy was starting to grasp the fact that their deaths were easily forgotten and that we're all completely unmemorable people of this world. He was immobile, feeling the rigid bricks beneath his feet and the slight tingle of the chilling air. The coolness of the piano keys were now just beneath his hands. He slid onto the piano bench, tensing up from the cracking leather beneath him.

Jeremy remembered how he used to play, loosely and flawlessly, as if he wasn't conscious of all

the ears tuning in. He smiled indulgently at the memory while wishing that it hadn't ended there. He'd become an iceberg, hiding more parts of him than he was actually showing. This piano could've been Jeremy's soulmate; it'd stood here for him at his bests and his worsts. He'd tantalize himself, running his fingertips over the keys, but never hitting a note; depriving himself of his greatest enjoyment and saving himself from his greatest fear.

Michaela, Jeremy's sister, had a strong conviction that everyone should focus on success before happiness. Maybe that's what Jeremy should do, but instead, he's been waiting for a miracle to silence the voices in his head like the piano once did. He needed quiet the way his lungs needed oxygen.

He was as tired as the dry leaves at the end of autumn. He was breaking, and it was starting to come through. He needed to express himself, but there was no one left to listen to his fractions of music except himself. He wasn't enough to relive the sensations his dreams had once created.

The sun began to rise, and although it was not yet visible, the sky captivated Jeremy all the same.

EVERLASTING

Viola Chang, age 13



GET FAMILIAR

Edith Wong, age 17

I am a local in these parts.

This path, I know well.

I avoid the contraction joints on the sidewalk
and sidestep empty wrappers.

Like always, plenty of cars barrel down the freeway—
Here, I am familiar. Here, I'm free from guilt this way.

But guilt finds me anyway,
no matter how much distance I built.
Guilt wears my hair, my eyes, my voice,
and she always asks me the same questions:
Whispering, why were you wandering this path?
Why are you leaving home?

Suddenly, I'm aware of how empty my pockets are—
full of lint and I try to grasp at something, anything in my back pocket I can use.
I take the required breath to speak and it feels like
prying open cotton stitching
from some childhood toy
in hopes that something I lost is sewn on the inside.
So I curl my fingers
and pull on the thread
我唔知
(I don't know.)
對唔住
(I'm sorry.)

Another me shares my hair, my eyes,
but we aren't the same.
Am I the stranger to them? Am I the far away family friend, the apple that fell too far from the tree?
Am I the transparent apparition, the tourist in town?

I am a local in these parts,
but I'm no tour guide.
I tremble over the gaps between the sidewalk
because I don't want to fall in.
I hate the crinkle of candy wrappers
because they remind me too much of a music box
that sang of legacy, tradition, culture, before my time
and doesn't anymore.

So I'll caterwaul a colonizers call like cauterizing
where my DNA was bleached and harvested.
you'll never catch me dead
admitting that I can't speak my own language.
That I'm the end product of my ancestors.
That I'm the reluctant witness
to a dying world.

And it feels like I'm already dead
I stumble forward, off balance
on this path I have chosen for seventeen years
as I'm a local in these parts
but not to my Chinese counterparts.

NO BOY AND THE HERON

Daniel Marques, age 14



METAL-HUMAN-NATURE. WE JOIN IN CONFLICT

Olivia Hai Lai Jiao, age 15



SISYPHUS AND CASSANDRA

Camila Longuinho, age 17

One must imagine Sisyphus happy, they say
Not knowing Sisyphus' situation is a consequence of his own actions
That he broke the ancient laws of hospitality
And carelessly abused and killed the innocent ones that shared his home
All for the pursuit of greed and power
All because he could take, and no one could stop him

Sisyphus is content to roll an endless boulder up a hill
Shackled to the achievement of reaching the top
An illusion of progress even as his life is endless torture
For at least he is doing something
Even if can't understand why he's there in the first place
And all his actions are ultimately the same

If Sisyphus is humanity, then I think of Cassandra
Hoarsely shouting her tragic prophecy of the future
Forever unheard, ignored and despised by all
And doomed to die in the end
Dragged to oblivion along those that paid her no heed

Cassandra will never be happy
But at least she can see beyond the mountain
And know that if people actually listened
And the very foundation of the world changed
Then a better future is a possibility

LIFT US UP IN SONG

Xinyi Li, age 18



DEAD SERIOUS

Sana Seraj, age 15

There's no moon on the night of her boss's funeral. Darkness rules the land. Before the news reaches her, she feels the slightest of melancholy.

The whispers keep the night alive, breaking through the darkness. The grotesque nature of the crime horrifies many, the news of it spreads like wildfire.

The voice in her head echoes back at her again, right before she snaps out of her trance. "Think outside the box! Think!" it screams at her. One of the last things she heard her boss yell before he... she swallows and shakes her head, starting to get ready. The news of what had occurred echoes in her head, and her hands shake as she puts on her mascara. She smudges her lipstick on her cheek and must wipe it off.

The police came over a couple of hours ago, asked her some questions, but left quite quickly, when they learned she'd been home for the day, according to her door camera. She remembers the sweat trickling down her back when she noticed the camera in the corner of the room, up near the ceiling.

She shakes her head to rid herself of the memory and leaves for the funeral.

Once she arrives, she climbs out of the car, clutching the roses she's got for the funeral. She nearly trips as she walks over to give the flowers to her boss's wife.

"Thank you." The wife snuffles, then pauses when she stares at the roses again.

"Wow. I've never seen such vibrant roses?"

"Yeah... I bought them just now, sorry I couldn't find a better colour."

"Ah no... it's alright! It's such a vibrant red too, reminds me of blood." The wife laughs nervously and the staff member nearby also gives a little awkward laugh.

She shoves her hands into her pockets so she doesn't fidget at the word "blood". It brings back memories of the newspaper article about her boss's death.

She quickly escapes to the area where her coworkers are standing. She silently thinks to herself how they must be ecstatic that he's gone. Would one of her coworkers be up to doing the deed that had occurred? She starts when she realizes someone is staring at her, her pulse quickening, before she realizes the person is in fact staring at a poster on the wall behind her.

She makes small talk with her coworkers and starts complaining to one of her work friends when they comment on her broken nail, about how she'd been doing some hard lifting yesterday and she'd broken it. She sits on her hands at the mention of the nail. She feels uneasy, surrounded by people who regard each other with distrust because of the crime, and who are suspicious of each other.

Finally, it's her turn to say her goodbyes, and she shakes off her paranoid thoughts. No one thinks it's her more than any of the other workers. She wipes away her tears and nods at someone who asks if she needs a tissue. Accepting it and dabbing at her eyes, she leans over the casket and whispers, "Now who's thinking outside of the box, boss?"

DOORS

Ewan Zong, age 13

*Dingggg... Huh? Where am I?
This is a scary hotel... No! We're all gonna die!
Stop panicking, let's try to get out,
There's the key... I hope we're on the right route!
Door one through 10, isn't much here...
I feel like we're getting near.
The lights just flickered! What was that sound??
Quick! In the closet and you'll be safe and sound.
Rush noises
Phew! That was close! We're all clear!
We survived our first monster, we're walkin' here!
Few more doors ahead... What are those eyes?
Certainly a surprise!
Long hallway coming up, I think it's time to run...
Yep! There's the monster! This is not fun.
Go to the correct door!
There's more than one door?!
Whew! We escaped! We ran from that weird thing.
I ran into the fire, ouch, that stings.
Lights flicker
Oh no! It's that monster again!
Hide in the closet! If you stay too long though... it will be a pain.
Rush noises
That was close! That was quite a scare!
Hopefully we're near the end of this nightmare!
Door 50... WHAT IS THAT THING??
He looks like the 'King'.
I hope this is it.
He kinda looks like pork, I'm gonna admit.
"Find the books and get the code"?
It's time my riddle solving skills showed.
Seems like the creature is blind,
But all his other senses are quite fine.
Ssh! Careful not to make a sound!
Or else you'll go down.
I found the code! Let's get outta here!
Lock noises *Figure roars* QUICK! HE'S NEAR!
PHEWWW!!! Thank god we made it out.
A shop? In this hotel? What's that all about?
I'm buying a crucifix, it can save your life.
We'll be lucky to get out of here with our life.
Moving on, more Rushes, and then...
*AAEEAAEEAaEaaEaaAeAEAAAAEaEAaa**

WHAT IS THAT NOISE??
Closet time, I'm too worried to rhyme.
 Noise fades
I think we're good... **Ambush noises again** NEVERMIND!
He came back for seconds! That's an interesting one.
 This really isn't fun.
Door 90... I hope we're near the end.
 All the rooms are dark here, and
Psst AHHH!! WHAT IS THAT THING?? **Swats with hand**
Screech noises It disappeared! I don't like this place...
 Rush incoming Get in the closet space!
 Seems like in here more things spawn...
 AgrArsgasrGSRsfgasr What is that sound?
 Those are eyes! OUCH! They hurt!
 Don't look at them! It will hurt!
Gosh, that took a long time, but finally, Door 100 here we come.
 Do I pull this lever...? It seems a bit dumb.
Pulls **Figure roars** NO! It's the PORKCHOP guy again!
Run in there and we'll be safe! Aw man, this is a pain.
 Find the breaker switches? Alright, here's one.
 Only nine more to go! This is really fun...
 Hours later Finally! The last one!
 A puzzle? Great, let's have some more fun.
chch DING! Let's go! The elevator is where we can escape!
 Run now! We're gonna get out! This is great!
Gets in elevator WHEW!! WE SURVIVED THE HOTEL!
 Figure gets on top of elevator Aw, frickin hell.
 TO BE CONTINUED...
 (They're probably screwed)

ONLY IN THE LETTER

Clara Wan, age 14

addressed to the quarantine zone

Dear Marie Murphy,

This is none other than a regular check-up note. I know you've been in a lot of pain recently and that you've been telling me to just let you out of this world so you can stop suffering. But you know it wouldn't be right for me to do that. You've been with me for so long. I know you're mad at me for not helping you out, but I believe that once you fight this disease, you will get so much better, and everything will be alright again. Maddie and Henry will return to being normal kids instead of worried-sick bullies, and you and I will walk along the beach at sunset, just like we used to. Okay, you get it. This is the only way I know how to talk to you. I'm in a mess. But there's something you need to know.

Nana is incredibly sick. We're doing everything in our power to make sure she doesn't get worse, because the doctor said if she works her body too much, she'll die. She's in bad shape. I brought her medicine the other day, and she was hacking all over the place. Then she mistook me for Henry. The color in her eyes is fading from that blue we used to compliment her for to a vacant dull grey. Her body went from strong to weak, her brain is dying. The doctor said the virus is infecting it, slowly. I know you aren't well, but I must tell you the truth. I've been thinking of killing her. Hear me out—the doctor said she might go insane to the point where she could kill somebody else. I'll get this straight—This letter is a request for your permission to give your mother an extra dose of medicine. You get me, right? This is for our kids. For the maid, Ivy. Nana's putting us all in danger. In fact, we're all scared the disease officers may take her to where you are now. We're trying to keep it a secret.

To prove to you that I'm not going crazy, I'll do what we do every time—List our favorites. You

love thick matcha tea, walks on the beach, 80s shows, and creamy-sounding keyboards and our kids, of course. You still hate spiders and your medicine. You're dairy-free and you're deathly allergic to chocolate. I love coffee and our kids, I hate the virus, and I'm not allergic to anything.

I knew this would take a while getting over the zone border (the news is saying the quarantine zone is getting stricter; I guess we'll have to believe that) so I don't know when this'll get to you. But today was Maddie's birthday. She told everybody her wish, but we hope it'll come true. It was that you would come home. The other day, an officer dressed all in white came to our door to do the monthly checkup and it was very scary, especially since Ivy and the kids were in Nana's room, trying to keep her quiet, otherwise they would take her. You know the virus isn't contagious, just genetic, and incredibly horrific. Me and the kids haven't been showing symptoms, but we're scared. Officers have been coming by too often. They caught us off guard the other day—Me and Henry were tending to Nana when an officer came. Maddie had to answer the door and after they left, she was crying. She said it was the scariest thing she'd ever done.

Now, there is an eight-hundred-word limit for letters to the citizens of the quarantine zone so I'll cut it short. We're living in a dangerous world. I just want the best for the kids. Nana is a threat (I know that hurts you), and to be honest with you, Ivy hasn't been very trustworthy. She's been making calls to somebody. When I listen in, I hear Spanish. I recorded it, got a good (and virus-free) translator, and he said that she was saying something about the quarantine zone. Either she's gossiping, or she's doing much worse. You're sick. I'm worried. The kids are petrified. I am taking charge of the problem while you're healing, and I promise. I promise that you'll be out of the zone by the end of the year. Just remember that you love matcha tea and you're allergic to chocolate. We all

miss you and we want to help you. I will always fulfill your any request.

With all of my love,
Lucas Murphy

Lying on a cot in a quarantine tent, I re-read the letter from my husband for the hundredth time. Tears welled in my eyes at the thought and shock of my children missing me a hundred thousand miles away, my mother being sick, and everything in the world going wrong. My head and stomach and throat stopped throbbing so I could sob. Then, in confusion, as the virus had put me into this state, I pondered. This letter my husband had sent me was attached with a package with a chocolate milk drink. A small piece of delight that we had enjoyed much in our early years of marriage. But something was wrong. That was my son's favorite drink, not mine. I was deathly allergic to chocolate.

As I started choking up the words I said to my family the day I was taken which was so long ago, the unrequited emotions and depressing thoughts, I realized—Lucas did want to help me. To take me out of my suffering. He had given me my final dose of medicine—An extra dose. And of course, I would be out of the quarantine camp by the end of the year. Just not alive.

Steeling myself, I drink the chocolate and immediately feel my throat begins to swell shut. As I take my final and shuddering breath, I see the blurry forms of nurses and doctors shaking me as I slip into forever sleep. I smile in satisfaction. My husband had fulfilled my one request.

FISH IN A SOAP DISPENSER

Megan Wong, age 17



RETURN POLICY

Ella Cannon, age 16

Since the day that I could
Count my years
I've wanted to be seventeen.
A point, always far from near
I wanted to be responsible, to be seen.

I am tired of playthings
I am going to be celebrated
To find my new bearings.
When I am seventeen,
My being, soul, purpose will be elevated.

Grow me, make me taller
Respected, sow me
A field of friends
To favor me to all ends.

I take it back.

I am worn.
As my skin shall crack
Not from age
But being washed on a rack
Gaining a wage to
Spend on a page.

I am not broken.
Don't mistake me for such,
But my purpose has yet to be woken
Just out of my clutch.

Take me back to baking,
To movies, to waking
When my mind tells me "Wake!"
A stinging nostalgia
That I cannot shake.

This time is not for today's me,
But for tomorrow's her.
She who is old and weary
But not for me, I concur.

Time fleets now,
Always on to the next.
Will I ever know how to prosper
From a good day's rest?

We hear this, but never hear.
Hold the present close,
As a second turns a year.

So take some council
From a pupil of patience.
The future is far and doubtful
Let this minute be your renaissance.

For the next minute,
is just another year.

BUILDING A WINTER WONDERLAND

Pui Yan Lo, age 17



DEAD WEIGHT

Amy H, age 17

Sound explodes around me—the clicking of oars, the splashing of blades entering water. From afar, the screaming of the crowd and the fuzzy voices of umpires speaking through megaphones were distorted by the sound of the wind whipping the Charles river into frothy foam.

The Head of the Charles Regatta is the largest three-day regatta in the world, attracting over 11,000 athletes worldwide. When I started coxing a little over a year ago, I never fathomed competing at this level.

After just two months of coxing, I was promoted to the competitive team. Though the coach claimed that this was due to my rapid improvement, I knew there was another reason: the previous cox had graduated. I was simply a replacement, my abilities were nowhere near the level demanded by a competitive team.

I turned to the Internet for help. However, YouTube videos and podcasts could only offer so much. It's much easier to teach rowers to keep their handles steady, to sink their blades into the water, to drive the legs down than it is to teach a cox to lead a team, to know when to encourage and when to criticize, to push a crew past their limits during the last thirty seconds of a race. It felt as if I had been thrust into the deep end with a chain clamped onto my ankle, my inexperience hauling me down.

Although in the coming months I managed to cox several boats to victory, my feelings of insecurity never left. Knowing that I was on the team only because there was no one else available increased my self-doubts. *Each time I stepped into the boat, I felt like an anchor, a dead weight that only slowed down my teammates without providing anything of substantial value. Gold medals mocked me with their luster, murmuring worries: "They would have achieved the same result without you. If only they*

had a coxswain who knew what she was doing."

In May, my coach asked if I wanted to cox the intermediate team's U-17 men's quad at a local regatta, providing guidance to them during their very first race. On the warm, sunny morning of the regatta, I met my teammates for the day: Daniel, Jacob, Oliver, and Lucas—four rowers who had only rowed twice with each other and a total of zero times with me.

Surprisingly, despite our lack of practice (and many off-time strokes), we managed to achieve first in the semi-finals. Half an hour later, with the boys' faces aglow with excitement, we pushed off the shore once more. Sitting at the starting line with the spring breeze tousling our hair, we waited for the final race to begin.

"Attention...row!"

The boat jolted into motion. Oar blades sliced through the water, driving the boat forward before an ominous clack soon sounded. Lucas's oar had popped out.

We panicked. I shouted at the crew to stop rowing as Lucas fumbled with his oar, hindered by the shaking of his hands. As he readjusted his oar, other boats raced ahead. By the time he was finished, 45 seconds had passed.

With my calls, the boys surged into motion, rowing with an explosive force and desperate to make up for the lost time. But they were off time, their uneven handles causing the boat to tip, their breaths growing more ragged each second. It was clear that if things continued like this, the boys' energy would drain quickly. As the realization dawned on me, my mouth opened before I had even pieced my words together.

"Bring the power down! Don't burn out, relax and

trust in me, we can still catch up!" The tension in the boat relaxed as I coaxed the crew into a more sustainable rhythm, bringing back their focus. As we passed one boat, then two, three, and four, our hopes began to soar; our sense of despair dissipated into the air like morning dew in the sun's golden rays. As we closed in on the final boat, the blare of the umpire's megaphone rang across the lake and we came to a stop. The five of us had passed four boats and attained silver. After arriving back to shore, the five of us—voices hoarse, breathing heavy, cheeks flushed—smiled for a picture with our new medals.

That afternoon, I cried in my mother's car. Not because an easily avoidable mistake had cost us gold, but because it was the first time that I felt like an essential member of the team, where my efforts actually contributed. It felt as if my chains had been slashed into two—still weighing me down, but light enough that I could begin to reach through the water for the glints of distorted sunrays dancing above.

Before I went to bed that night, I sent a text to my coach.

Sun, May 13
Hi coach, can we discuss coxing
at practice tomorrow?
10:13 PM ✓✓

"Are you excited?"

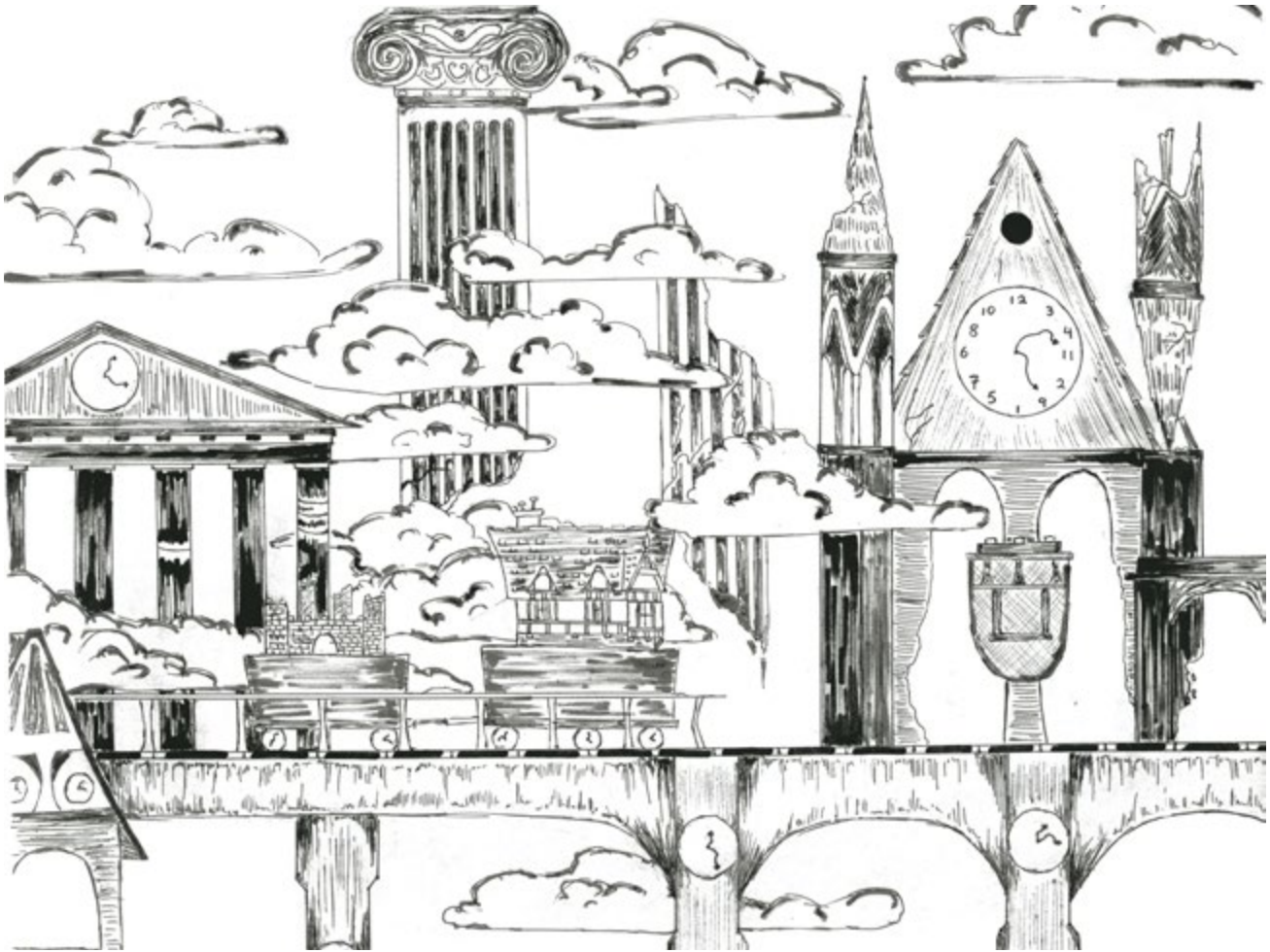
My teammate's voice pulls me out of my thoughts, bringing me back to the mayhem of the Charles River. I smile to myself, reaching behind to give her a reassuring pat. I feel light as a feather, fluttering in the breeze and gliding through the clouds; the chains of shame I once felt had long been cast away. The oar incident took away the first links, talking with my coach and teammates took away the second, and time took away the third. I am not a dead weight, nor an undeserving replacement, but an essential part of an amazing team. I know that I am where I belong.

"All right, it's time," My microphone jumps to life as the last boat leaves, the static of my voice nowhere near the levels of crackling excitement in the air. Oars click into place, bodies settle into positions, and chatter dies as we wait for the wave of the umpire to signal the start of the biggest race of our lives.

"Ready...and row!"

LOST IN TIME

Serene Lee, age 13



RTS (READY TO SHEEP)

Allison Jang, age 16



HORROR STORY

Marika Holst, age 14

The January cold numbed my face as I walked along the decrepit path, the mud crusted on my boots only made them heavier. Regret clouded my thoughts, I reminisced about how Mom and I used to walk here together years ago.

It was her fault I had cold limbs. That's what I'd convinced myself.

I began to round a corner, crows cawing overhead as they settled to roost for the night. The clouds had dispersed slightly, enough to see the sun's slow descent. My head hung low, watching my boots trek across the familiar path, this was the way we used to go, to the pond.

Mom was convinced I didn't get "out" enough so here I was, listening to her wise words despite my own judgment.

There used to be a beaver that lived in the pond, until someone's dogs got loose, at least that's what I'd heard.

The path opened slightly as I grew closer to the pond, my pace quickened, eager to see its current state. The slight trickle of a stream nearby reminded me of when my favourite toy dog had been swept away in the heat of the spring melt. Mom told me the fairies would take good care of her, I hope they did.

The last of the sunlight dappled through the bare trees onto my face, the warmth was minimal but appreciated. When the pond came into view, nostalgia was all I felt. My boots led me to its edge, the frozen surface and shadowy depths enveloped me. I was so numb from the cold and emotions, I almost couldn't tell if I was still a child or not. I cautiously stepped forward, until the toes of my boots rested on ice, that was enough for me.

There was a large break in the ice along the shore

to my left. When I was young I used to smash the ice into small pieces and watch them drift in the water for fun, leaving the surface with those giant gaps on the bank.

Dusk settled around me, the crows had begun chattering again, only now it was a welcome noise. I watched the sky grow darker, my phone's flashlight could guide me if needed.

The crows piped down, and it was then when I realized how quiet it had become, no trickle of stream, no swoosh of branches in the wind, just my muffled breathing. My hands grew clammy with nerves.

CRACK

A branch snapped behind me.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

The sound of something large stepping forward startled me out of my daze.

Drip.

The creature dripped with water. I debated internally what it could be, but before I concluded anything, a familiar sound came from behind me.

Memories of horse camp resurfaced, the scent of hay and leather seemed to fill my lungs. Methodically brushing each of my favourite horses, the weight of a saddle in my arms, and the face of an infamous brown tabby cat, six years of camp at once.

The thing behind me was a horse, of all things. I turned slowly to the creature, holding my breath. At first it was simply a figure, tall and striking, until my eyes adjusted to the dark. My guess was confirmed. Her eyes met mine, they did not look but

stared, a ripple of doubt seeped through my body.

She stood taller than me, imposing, yet I remained. I broke eye contact first, the mare had a halter with a lead rope attached to it. I then thought she must have gotten out during last week's wind storm, surely there was some poor owner beside herself with worry for her. She crept closer, until I could read what was etched into steel on her halter, Bubbles.

I repeated the name over in my mind before whispering it to her, simply to break the tension. Her dappled gray coat twitched, her ears perked, in distaste or intrigue, I'll never know.

The thought to call animal services never crossed my mind. Since I knew there was a stable nearby, I thought I'd try to take her there. My heart beat faster, her pale blue eyes met mine again, and doubts resurfaced. I had barely seen a horse in years, let alone guided one down a road in the dark for possibly hours. But could I leave her out here?

I reached out to the mare, her skin was damp to the touch, yet smooth despite how long I thought she'd been out there. I whispered something more to her, an attempt to befriend her maybe, I forget. She snickered, and moved her head to stare more.

My boots took me backward, towards the ice, only a few steps. The mare circled so her face was furthest from mine, her eyes followed me with every stride. A glint of red near her rear left hoof caught my eye, blood. I crouched down near it, trying to keep my distance so as not to disturb her. A gash, as I peered closer, multiple gashes. They ran deep, dirt and mud caught inside and still blood slowly seeping out. I drew closer, eager to assist the hapless mare.

"What do you want me to do?"

I got my answer. She sent me into the ice in one kick, my ribs shattered, then the ice.

It was frigid. A second splash followed my plummet. Hooves drove me further out, teeth pulled me away from land. As my blood mingled with the water, I tried to scream. My lungs filled with water. I searched for the frozen surface from the shadowy depths. Was I the beaver all along? And that little toy dog, is this what she went through? My down jacket and boots help drown me, while trying to shed them I realize my fingers have disappeared, useless nubs replace them. Loose ribs poke further, deeper.

I thought of Mom, what would she have to say? I don't know what she'd put on my gravestone.

IF HE WANTED TO... HE WOULD, RIGHT?

Jade Villaverde, age 15

Drowning in our distance
Suffocating in the feeling of woes.
Waiting for the right time to communicate
But maybe he will, who knows?

Laying in bed, contradicting every last one of my thoughts
Then remembering our hands intertwined, laughing together in plain sight.
The breeze in my hair
The droplets of water in yours.

Accidentally biting my tongue hoping you were thinking of me
Even though I knew my fate because I was thinking of you.
Now left in my own thoughts, hoping you would come through.

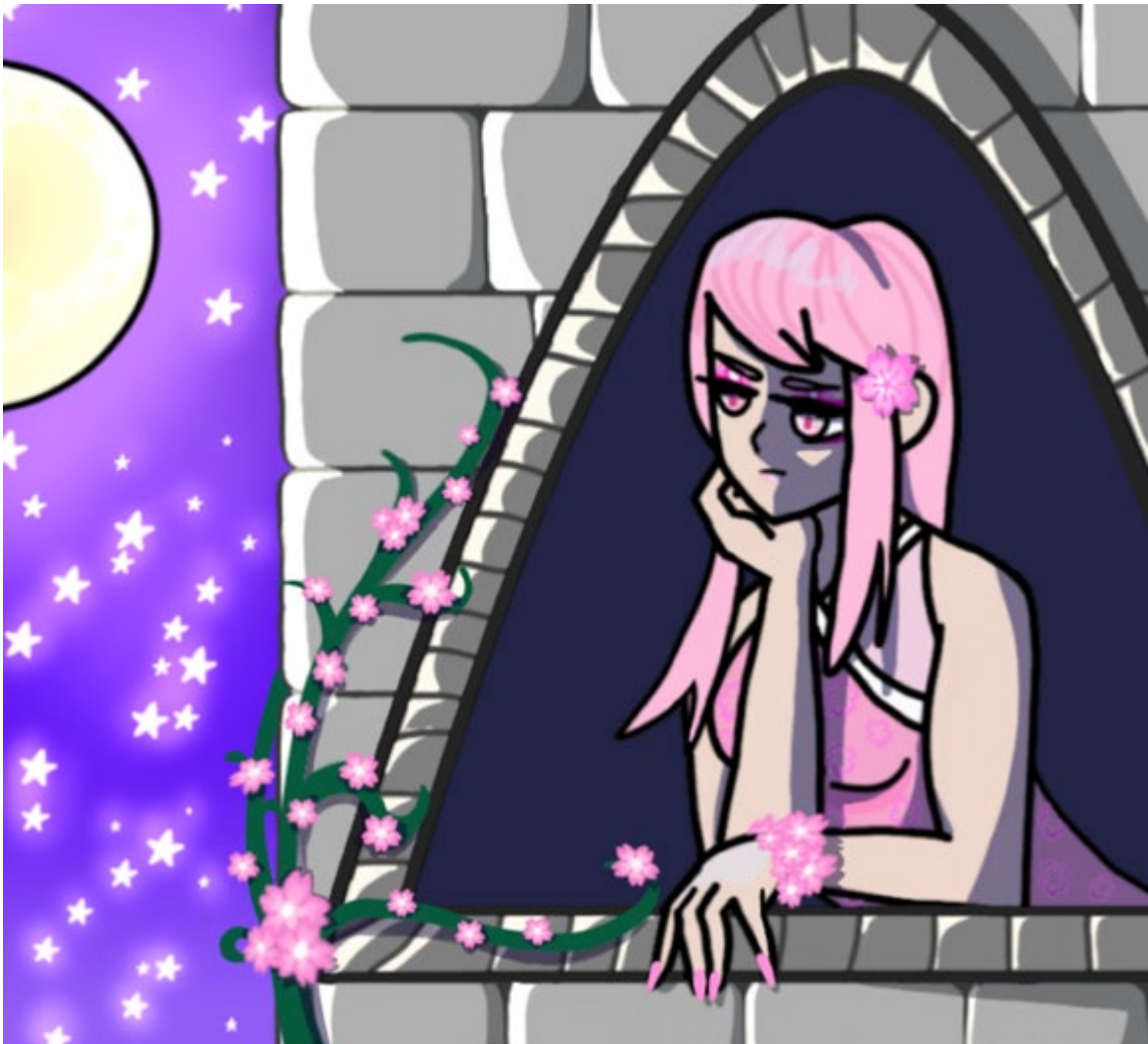
Submerging myself in your sweet nothings
Our reassurance clearing the fog of miscommunication.
This connection was built like bricks
A mixture of mortar binding us two uncooperative slabs together.

From good mornings to unwritten messages
Yearning eye contact to catching his lingering glances.
Too much time had been passing
Although now I am waiting for time to drown it all out.

Confessing all I felt you
Perhaps a smidge of closure for me too
Or maybe for the mere chance that he would change his mind
Because if he wanted to... he would, right?

WISHES

Eleanor Broadland, age 13



CONTRAST

Cindy Dong, age 16



GIRLHOOD

Nicole Ng, age 15

spare hair ties and spare pads
the front compartment of your backpack has
that flowered fabric pouch that is every girl's savior
kicking your feet in delight
"best friends forever"
and communicating with glances to say "partners?" for every group project
doodling hearts and smiley faces in the margins of math homework
when did this turn into warnings
watch out in square dancing, they'll hover or they'll grope
check me? I'll watch your back
don't go on this bus alone
it'll be better if you don't react
acting dumber so they don't get mad
fixing test scores so your name isn't uttered in absolute
disgust if your grade is too high for a girl
but girlhood and the adventures of our youth isn't all bad
what would the growth be without the conflict
paper stars and gum wrapper hearts are still a part of it
the downsides can't stop the stars in my eyes
and the ribbons I tie over my feelings
it's learning how to manage all of it
loving and studying and learning and warning and laughing
girlhood is all of these and none of these
the experience is universal and unique
which is what makes it
girlhood

SO LONG MY OISEAU FRIEND

Michael Palao, age 15



MAEROR

Tasfia Shashi, age 16

The sorrowing skies melting into the pools of an unending tomorrow,
And the husky clouds of summer rain leaving puffs of silver in their wake.

The chimes of midnight bring the abandoned city awake,
Where gears and cogs and screws clang to keep its heart beating,
Where birds have no melody and trees have no breeze,
And where love blooms just as stubbornly as yellow chrysanthemums in mid-January.

*There is despair,
There is you.*

A shadow of dreams and an abyss of darkness,
Your eyes trail the cigar smoke of the city,
As your breath taints the glass windows.

Your marble hands, sculpted from stony obsidian, swift through the snapping flames and dancing smoke.

*You are the conductor,
And I am your drowning muse.*

BALLROOM OF LIES

Yuzuh Bishop, age 17

Hand on hips
Lips on lips
Breathe of lies
Misty grey eyes
Clouding over
Wise in our own eyes
Face masqueraded in tattoos
Gliding over the onyx floor
Sheer material fluttering
As we move to our psalm
Dancing with deception
Till our shadows dust the light

TIME

Raymond An, age 14

*Tick.
Tock.
Tick.
Tock.
Tick, tock.
Tick, tock.
Tick... tock... tick, tock, tick, tock, tick tock tick tock
tick tock ticktockticktockticktock-*

— — —

The wyrm felt uneasiness growing throughout the day, slowly building from the moment he awoke.

He lounged around lazily in his lair. He had nothing to worry about in the present moment. Nothing immediately concerning him, at least.

He had more than enough time to do whatever he wanted.

And yet...

Why did he feel something?

He felt it in his bones, a dull ache that seemed to last forever.

He felt it on his scales, as though he was uncomfortable in his skin.

He felt it in his crystalline horns, loosening and tightening.

He felt it with his whole being.

— — —

Time.

Time encroached on his territory. After all, immortality was the antithesis of time.

But it could not stop time. Not completely.

Time reached out with grasping tendrils.

It touched him, and for the first time, he knew what it felt like to be mortal.

The wyrm stared at his aged body, stunned. Scales flaking off, his claws and teeth blunted, and his magnificent horns dulled.

It hissed in his ear.

"Traitor."

Traitor to time. Traitor to the laws of the universe.

The wyrm saw the cage snapping shut around him, as time finally held him in its grasp.

He knew — he knew, inside the prison, that the stream of time would accelerate, forever onwards, carrying him away, burying him in the sands of the riverbed, forever alone.

Forever.

He was immortal, after all.

He would be dead again, away from the mortals who made him feel alive, and away from the immortals who were the only companions on this endless journey towards the end of time.

He could not — and would not — allow that.

He bowed his head and whispered a spell.

The wyrm was no master of time, but he was still a being of magic.

"One Minute Message."

— — —

One minute ago, the wyrm raised his head.

He began to cast a spell.

— — —

Two minutes ago, the wyrm flexed his magic.

— — —

Three minutes ago, the wyrm quietly passed on
the chain.

— — —

Ticktockticktockticktock-

A gear shattered.

— — —

A wyrm napped slumbered, unperturbed by time.

— — —

And that, at last, was enough.

WHERE'D ALL THE TIME GO

Lhea Castillo, age 16



WHERE I'M FROM

Nafisa Nishi, age 16

I am from stainless steel spatulas, from hand-sewn blankets and chipped teacups without saucers.

I am from a house with hard metal gates and rigid front doors, acting as a preventative measure to keep youth from sneaking out after dusk.

I am from the diaphanous hydrangeas in the old front yard, whose periwinkle hue glows with the setting sun.

I am from watching cricket match marathons on late-night TV, from hide-and-seek in mustard seed fields under azure skies in the sultry summer heat, from Patwary and Nishi.

I am from sunny dispositions who are habitually late and intrepid go-getters with strong penchants for burning midnight oil.

From "Kids today are adults tomorrow," and tall tales of grandpa's war exploits and heroism.

I am from "Salam," from congregational prayers during Ramadan and charity and gift-giving during Eid.

I'm from the raging monsoons of Bengal and the incessant pitter-patter of Vancouver rain, from spicy chicken curry and hot lentil soup.

From the passing of knowledge through recordings and videos, the familiar sound of great-grandmother's stilted voice preserved eternally, and from my father's bursting wallet, jam-packed with yellowing photographs.

I am from voices composing an orchestra made from a cacophony of sounds, changing the traditional rhythm of Rabindranath wholly.

I am from a series of memories, tightly bound in paintings and picture frames hung up and bestowed upon the walls which remain incomplete and uncovered, yearning for more.

CHILDHOOD TRADITIONS

Randy Jang, age 17

Danny curses as he glances down at his phone and checks the time. He is forty minutes late to his meeting with Kaz. He sighs, massaging the bridge of his nose just before he enters the Tim Hortons. Danny knows he has an infuriating tendency to show up late (especially to school), but forty minutes is wild even for him. It's no wonder why he didn't get into Peking like Kaz. If he keeps this up in SFU, he probably won't last longer than a few months.

When word got out that Kaz made it into Peking University, Danny didn't know how to feel. He is extremely proud of his lifelong buddy for pulling an introvert's impossible fever dream of going international. At the same time, one of his best and only friends, whom he already seldom saw since they attended different high schools, is going international. At the time, Danny didn't dare to do any more than cheer for the quiet genius. Just another day, another change.

Danny readjusts his t-shirt and smooths his hair back before he enters the cafe. He doesn't need to look; despite being nearly an hour late, Kaz would always wait for him. Brushing past the strolling customers, Danny makes his way to the last table, finding a hooded teenager sipping one of the two cups on the counter.

Kaz looks up to meet Danny's eyes. He doesn't judge, instead smirks. "Some things never change."

Danny rubs the back of his neck. "Sorry. Happy belated birthday by the way."

Kaz smiles and gestures towards the room-temperature drink on the table. Despite losing his patience and purchasing both drinks, they both knew Danny would pay Kaz back in light of their birthday tradition.

Danny takes his seat and eyes the lidded drink in

front of him. He doesn't need to smell it to know it is a medium cup of Earl Grey without any milk, sugar or other unknown garbage. Both friends take small slurps from their orders while noting each other's drinks.

"Hot chocolate again?" Danny teases, "Don't you ever get tired of the same dung-coloured sugary liquid?" Is he being a hypocrite? Sure. But at least tea never torments his taste buds with overwhelming sweetness.

Kaz meets Danny's eyes. "At least you don't need to toss any disgusting leaves in it to get flavour. And it's coffee, actually."

Danny raises a brow. When was the last time Kaz switched out hot chocolate for another drink?

Kaz shrugs and tugs his hoodie. "Figured I'd try something new."

Danny doesn't know what to think of the change, but smiles in support. They continue to drink in silence, only chatting about trivialities in evanescent time intervals. Even though the two friends don't see each other often, they enjoy the silent company in a way that seems so innate to them. The difference now, though, is the unspoken elephant in the room.

After some time, Danny takes the last sip of his remaining tea and clears his throat, figuring he would have to start the topic. "So, Beijing huh?"

Kaz rubs his tired eyes and nods. "Leaving the country in three weeks." He sets his empty cup on the table, having known this conversation would inevitably happen. "A one in a billion chance. Never would have thought it happening."

"I don't blame you," Danny reassures. "If you had passed up on that offer, I would've broken into

your house and smacked you in the skull with a baseball bat.”

Kaz chuckles as he removes his cup’s lid to check for any remaining drops of coffee. “You know,” he says slowly, allowing every word to drip off his tongue like smelly, bitter coffee, “there are so many things people say about getting into uni... but they don’t often mention the eye bags.”

“No kidding,” Danny mutters as he leans back on his seat and allows his weighted hand to rest on his face. “Frankly, I’m baffled that my parents haven’t noticed how long I really stay up to work from the dark circles and pink eyes.”

“Don’t forget the inexplicable stashes of caffeine,” Kaz chuckles. “All of which never helped with the interviews.”

Danny smirks. “Can’t relate. SFU doesn’t require interviews with every introverted pussycat. But they don’t help with your social life a whole lot either. And then there’s the smell...”

Kaz groans. “PLEASE don’t remind me.”

Danny chuckles. “Not just me, huh? Glad to know I’m not the only disgusting loser that girls run away from.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Kaz responds sarcastically.

But far too soon, the deafening silence of hesitation reinstates itself with a terrible vengeance. Danny lowers his head in contemplation. “We’re... we are not going to do this again, are we? We’ll never be visiting this very same Tim Hortons twice a year, catching up and relaxing and chiding the other for forgetting to pay for the birthday drinks.”

Kaz, in turn, also lowers his head. “No... I don’t think things will ever be the same.” The way he

speaks is filled with dejection. Soon after, however, he raises his head with a newfound curiosity. “Between two childhood buddies, be honest with me... Have you ever wondered... how things could have been different if I had chosen to attend your high school? Maybe even apply to SFU with you?”

For one protracted, mute moment, Danny pauses in genuine consideration. He pictures it: Kaz choosing their catchment school over the prestigious academy offered to him. The two of them capable of seeing each other every day, continuing what was essentially an unbendable kinship that began in kindergarten. The two of them hanging out, chatting, laughing, studying, and working together for five lengthy years and beyond. No choices would have gone unchanged, just as no moment, no memory, would be the same.

Danny grins and lifts his head, staring proudly yet warmly through Kaz’s soul. “Not for an instant.”

Kaz returns the smile. “Neither do I.”

Danny rises from his seat. “Keep in touch?”

Kaz dawns a puzzled expression. “Leaving so soon?”

Danny scoffs. “Of course not. My throat’s parched and we’re in a cafe.”

Kaz’s consciousness goes blank before they both chuckle at his momentary stupidity. “I think I’ll try some hot chocolate for once,” Danny adds. “See if it really is what everyone says it is.”

“He finally relents,” Kaz smirks back in amused surprise. “And yes. Of course we’ll keep in touch.”

Danny smiles. “Thanks.”

THE EXPECTED LIFE

Alexandra Chow, age 18



THE POISON APPLE CONTROVERSY

Ziya Chong, age 14

"Everyone thinks of them in terms of poisoned apples and glass coffins, and forgets that they represent girls who walked into dark forests and remade them into their own reflections."

— **Seanan McGuire, Indexing**

On a lovely sunny afternoon, 49-year-old Arthur Nas (he/him), who runs a successful Instagram account showcasing his miniature golden doodle Albert, collapsed dead in front of a Safeway in East Vancouver.

Witnesses claim he was holding a singular blood-red apple in one hand, clutched so tightly that they had to break one of his fingers to get it out from his grip.

The apple (currently being held at the UBC Department of Microbiology and Immunology for study) is untouched, except for a singular bite from the white flesh.

Currently, there is no way to tell exactly how Nas died. An autopsy was performed and found the coronary arteries clear of blood clots, making it unlikely to have been a heart attack. Four witnesses claim that Nas simply "dropped dead." He was not run over or bumped by a car doing a lazy job of parking. There was no trace of any alcohol or drugs in his system, making an overdose or alcohol poisoning impossible. His medical records were clear, and Nas did not suffer from any conditions such as asthma.

After his collapse, Nas was surrounded by several concerned civilians. An ambulance was called, and after analyzing the symptoms, the paramedics decided the best thing to do was to administer immediate First-Aid. However, after thirty chest compressions and three rounds of the defibrillator, Nas did not wake up. A heart reading was taken, and his death was confirmed.

His miniature golden doodle, Albert, was adopted by his sister, 44-year-old Lisa (she/her), on the 3rd of September.

The apple is being examined by persistent UBC students and professors, hoping to find the answer to his death.

When the internet stopped speculating about murder and autopsies, several avid amateur detectives deduced that the apple must have been poisoned. Accusations were hurled violently at Safeway and its employees, and it got to the point where the popular grocery store was facing four lawsuits, all examining their apples. Business went down a total of 342%, and the East Vancouver location quickly closed.

It was replaced by the first of a new chain of Starbucks, three times as large as a normal store.

"The idea is to have a coffee mall," Brendan Lui, manager of the new location, explains. "It's like a Starbucks, but much bigger and more extended. We'll have one place for caffeine-free drinks, an area for coffee, pastries, and more. Then we'll add aisles of pre-mixed Starbucks Drink Powder, everything you need to make your own drinks at home!"

The 'Starbucks Mall' is facing its first lawsuit, instigated by a person who claims she became violently sick after making a Mango Dragon Fruit Lemonade from a Drink Powder Packet. Tests found traces of Salmonella in the powder, which are suspected to be from the eggs sold next to it, broken and leaking.

Arthur Nas's family is understandably distraught and have vowed never to shop at Safeway again. They have started a change.org petition, *#downwithsafeway*, that has already reached four million signatures. Albert, Nas's miniature golden doodle, is the face of the movement, using his huge cult following to gain traction for *#downwithsafeway*.

What do you think happened? Did Arthur Nas really die from apple poisoning, or is there another, more sinister cause?

SEARCHING FOR THE DIVINE?

Audrey Thorpe, age 17

News For You !

14th February

Breaking News

SEARCHING FOR THE DIVINE?



So you're searching for the divine? Searching for heaven while you're here on earth, crumbled in your bed with nowhere to go and no source of shining light you can attribute to your new guardian angel for hire, falling from the clouds and wrapping you in its arms and carrying you far from this place. You must look closer! Searching and finding the divine is easier than a prayer may seem. Next time the sun rises and a new day begins, and you're here, and you're breathing in the fresh air of the morning as the day and night from before fade away into the sands of the past; you've found it.

222 333 444 555 666 777 888

Or perhaps you need to listen a little closer to the echoing sound of laughter next time you hear it, and the smiles that linger on long after the sound has died out. When that song comes on and it moves you, when you feel it in your chest and to the tips of your toes; that's more than any archangel choir could ever be. Your pain, your tears, smiles and laughter that rumble through your very soul like the roar of thunder. Love and hate and everything in between that makes you every part of what you are; that's a pretty good place to start if you're in search of the divine.



RAIN PARADE

Antone Bao, age 17



CREATOR STATEMENTS

The Pig | [front cover](#)

“The Pig” is a ceramic sculpture that experiments with abnormality and playfulness.

Study | [front inside cover](#)

This piece is simply a study, a fun way for me to learn how to simplify my art process and explore different art techniques and brushes.

Congee Noodle House | [page 8](#)

This piece is for my grandparents and for all families. Sometimes love isn't said, it's given to you in good food.

Sundown in Kalidor | [page 10](#)

This drawing is a peaceful scene featuring my Dungeons and Dragons character Viscount Adder and his hawk companion Pericles. I wanted to capture the feeling of a laid-back, sunny afternoon.

Garden of Sunshine | [page 11](#)

This poem flowed from the tips of my fingers. My mother is well and alive, but this piece represents the ripe belly of childhood when the colours were brighter.

Imprisoned Foreigner | [page 12](#)

Gazing out my desk window, I found myself pondering the origin and impact of the trees in our suburban area. I wondered how these silent witnesses perceive their place in the world.

Daughter of Coldharbour | [page 15](#)

I wrote this poem about a video game character I really like!

Entertainment | [page 16](#)

“Sometimes things you start on a whim end up becoming very important to you.” — Kiyoko Shimizu

Nightmares Are Dreams Too | [page 19](#)

Lino print created for art class that helped me come to terms with past dreams and the way they've affected me.

Beady and Ninein Protect Old Growth Trees | [page 24](#)

Ancient trees and animal habitats are constantly being destroyed. Old growth trees must be preserved to ensure the prosperity of our natural world and survival of the species in it.

Orca on Galiano Island | [page 25](#)

Acrylic on canvas.

Gummy Rush | [page 27](#)

This artwork captures the appearance of translucent and transparent objects. Photographs were taken to create a composition and replicated using graphites. Hopefully, this art has fed your inspiration. Bon appétit.

A Cozy Night In | [page 28](#)

I like portraying comfort and familiarity between characters in my illustrations. This piece features two characters spending time together while doing separate activities, which I enjoy doing with my friends.

Lost in a Book | [page 29](#)

I wrote this poem a few years ago after being inspired by two books I read that were inspiring and enthralling. I am a writer and in my poem, I wanted to incorporate all the little things that I feel make amazing books amazing.

candles | [page 30](#)

Blow out the candles and the world will keep spinning.

Boys Don't Cry | [page 31](#)

Being a teenager is hard, and it's even harder in a world filled with instant hits of dopamine. I wrote this piece to reflect on how society constantly encourages dopamine addictions.

The Cape as Red as Blood | [page 32](#)

The hunted becomes the hunter.

hiraeth | [page 33](#)

I've always felt out of place in social settings. I used to think “home” was a person or place. But I realize now that I must find home in myself.

Star Jar | [page 34](#)

Even the seemingly unattainable hold their own unreachable dreams.

Coexist | [page 36](#)

With the rapid development and popularization of technology and AI, many people worry about whether AI will replace humans in the future. I believe that humans and artificial intelligence should develop their respective advantages and coexist.

Faces You Knew | [page 37](#)

You thrash in the pockets of abyss between the stars; choice is a fading memory in the face of everything. Rest now.

Dream Portrait | [page 39](#)

My artwork was originally painted in vibrant colors. It follows an expressionist style, using bold and exaggerated hues to evoke deep emotion. I created this piece shortly after moving to Canada, making it one of the first works I produced in my new surroundings.

Flow | [page 40](#)

My illustration focuses on my progress in art. Within the flow of the hair, I included snippets of numerous works of mine throughout the years.

I Once Believed in Unicorns | [page 46](#)

The title is inspired by the poem “The Morning After I Killed Myself” by Meggie Royer. These doodles embody warm memories of my childhood.

Imaginary Adventures | [page 47](#)

About the imaginative worlds our minds create, this poem explores summers I've dreamt of but never experienced. With both nostalgia and yearning, it captures the essence of an endless summer.

Osaka's Beauty in the Moonlight | [page 48](#)

The moonlight illuminates Dotonbori River, while lanterns light the path. Though day has its chaos, night brings peace for those strolling the riverbank and listen to the moon's melody.

Nighttime Echoes in the City | [page 49](#)

This poem is about people from different backgrounds all living in one diverse city, just like Vancouver. It shares a feeling of belonging, and how we are all human.

A Paper Crane from Me to You | [page 50](#)

In elementary, I used to anonymously give my crush paper cranes because I didn't know how to talk to her. My illustration is inspired by the beauty in how people can express affection even without words.

Glow | [page 52](#)

This ceramic butterfly was my first venture into creating something three-dimensional and using clay. Inspired by a simple sticker, I incorporated glass into the wings during the second firing, it went through hours of cooling. Despite challenges with the clay breaking, the process was fun and rewarding!

All the Others | [page 53](#)

Earthquakes threaten thousands, especially for those in Vancouver B.C. This inspired me to write "All the Others" with the goal of warning people about their devastating impacts.

Dear, My Loves | [page 54](#)

"Dear, My Loves" is for those who don't get it—who maybe, never will—and that's ok, because I don't either.

Reflection | [page 57](#)

When I was visiting this small town in Jiangsu, China, I walked by a bridge and found it very astonishing, so I took this picture. This photo reflected both the complexity and symmetry of Chinese architecture.

Seasonal Decor | [page 58](#)

Seasonal Decor is an illustration expressing a childhood memory I have of getting lost in the halloween aisle of a department store. I used an exaggerated perspective to emphasize the menace of the decorations which seemed to have come to life. Multiple thin, dark lines add dimension to the characters in this piece to mimic the style of traditional horror illustrations.

Dreaming | [page 60](#)

Sometimes we must change perspectives to find what we are looking for. This piece was an assignment, and yet it's one of the best short stories that I have written.

Everlasting | [page 61](#)

The Chinese character 「永」 means "forever" or "everlasting". Through this artwork, I wanted to express the concept of "everlasting". Does "forever" exist, or is it merely a concept?

No Boy and the Heron | [page 63](#)

The Heron in this piece represents humans, looking into the far past, while still noticing the modern area around them (the crane in the background).

Metal-Human-Nature. We Join in Confliction | [page 64](#)

Commentary on the interrelated impact of industrialization within nature and humanity. The conceptual tension between elements invites reflection upon our environment, human progress, and the fragility of the natural world.

Only in the Letter | [page 70](#)

Why do I write? In prose, if you like something, you are able to produce something similar, exactly, or nothing like that. Whatever you want to happen can happen. So, why would I not write?

Return Policy | [page 72](#)

I wrote this poem before my seventeenth birthday, a milestone I could never wait for. However, the inspiration behind this work is my nostalgic longing for the simplicities of childhood.

Building a Winter Wonderland | [page 73](#)

My illustration captures the joy I felt when I first encountered snow. I wanted to express the magical moments that were unforgettable for me. And so this artwork was born.

RTS (Ready To Sheep) | [page 77](#)

'Ready to Sheep' emphasizes hidden suffering behind wool products. We just ordered boots, but their sad eyes and their skin tell the true cost.

If He Wanted To ... He Would, Right? | [page 80](#)

This is for anybody who reminisces and thinks about what they wish they had done differently when the outcome would have likely been the exact same no matter what.

girlhood | [page 83](#)

Our everyday moments are filled with the mundane, yet the strained smiles, inside jokes and shared glances make it memorable. That's girlhood, and I'm grateful to be going through it.

Maeror | [page 85](#)

An ode to all things literature - the novelists, the poets, and the philosophers - this piece drinks on my thirst for the timeless, intoxicating grandeur of words from eras past.

Time | [page 86](#)

I originally wrote this piece in January and posted it to social media. I spent so long fixing the mistakes to submit to *ink...* T-T

Where I'm From | [page 89](#)

This piece holds a special place in my heart as it reveals various elements of my life and background. It reflects on my past, describes my present, and offers glimpses of my future. I cherish it greatly.

Childhood Traditions | [page 90](#)

A twelfth grader's take on how the progression of our lives impacts our current or previous associations. A fictional story based on my situation as a secondary school graduate.

The Expected Life | [page 92](#)

Stages of the "expected" life (right to left): 1. Childhood: arguing with those who direct us. 2. Teenagehood: making rash decisions that strain relationships. 3. Adulthood: watching those with privilege, thus power, rule.

The Poison Apple Controversy | [page 93](#)

This short story was inspired by a real experience involving a dog, an apple, and the Safeway at Commercial and Broadway. I hope it will brighten your day, and perhaps remind you to not take what dog Instagram influencers might say for granted.

Rain Parade | [page 95](#)

I never feel lonely on a gloomy day beneath the canopy. This sketch is to embrace the disappointments and course-corrections inherent to life.



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SWIMMING THE DAY AWAY

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IN A FIELD OF SUNFLOWERS Lucie Li, age 18



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