

# *ink*

VOLUME 01

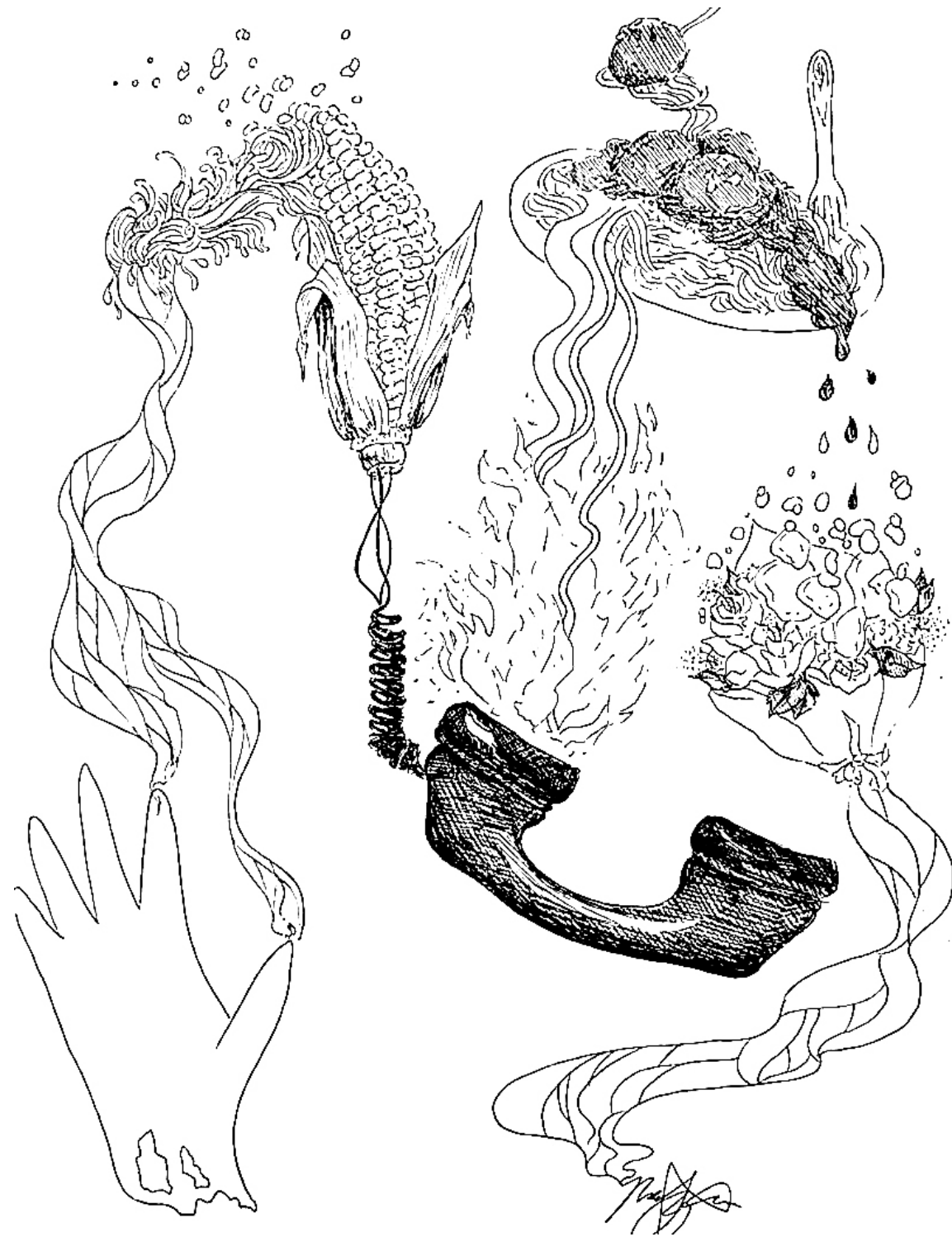
*Teen journal for writing and visual art*

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# LET'S PLAY TELEPHONE

Mandy Xu, Age 17



## WELCOME TO *ink*

This inaugural issue of *Ink Magazine* is more rich, poignant, and full of talent than we could have ever hoped. This first edition includes narratives of emotion, calls to political action, and the many facets of a young person's experience in Vancouver and around the world.

Our vision for this magazine was an inclusive space to highlight the teen voice, and to support local teens in their creative expression. We hope this first edition of *Ink* marks the beginning of a long era of the Vancouver Public Library helping to amplify teen voices and art in Vancouver. We would like to thank all the contributors for their powerful submissions.

Enjoy!  
The *ink* Editorial Board



Cover art by *Natasha Cross*, Age 16

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to the all the artists and writers who contributed to *ink!*

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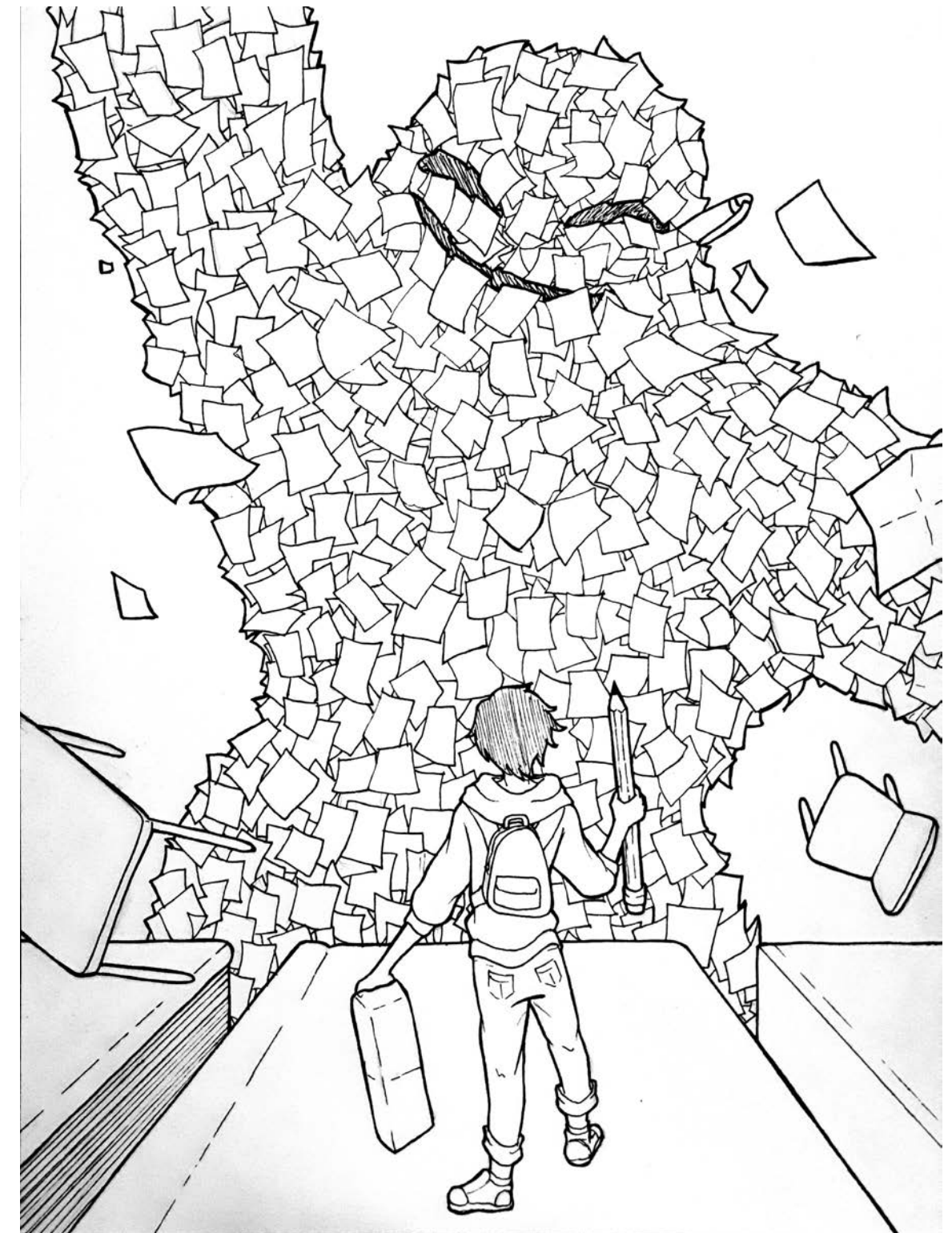
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# A DAUNTING TASK

Sulan Cang, Age 17



"Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will" – George Bernard Shaw

## THE ARTIST ON 0-3 STREET

*Yumai Bishop, Age 16*

He was standing by the wall, no, more like leaning against it. It was one of those walls you see in downtown full of graffiti, and the person looked like a part of the wall. I shifted my umbrella on my shoulder so that I could take a better look at him. At first glance, I thought he had put up a sign asking for money.

But it wasn't. There, randomly hanging on the walls were pictures, mostly the size of a postcard that resembled colourful party banners. They were fluttering as if there was a soft breeze flowing from the messy fields of words behind them. Curious by now, I pushed through the thick mass of people with their soaking clothes. My hands were a dripping moist mess, gripping the umbrella. The plastic felt strangely warm against my palm.

There. I saw that the artist was really not even a grown-up but a boy around my age. Or at least he looked young. But then his strange flint-shade hair that badly needed a haircut and a brush made him look almost as if he was much older. His shabby parka that had long lost its original colour and the jeans that were torn not from fashion were matched with worn-out boots.

Distantly wondering how long he had been there, I tried not to look at his face but at his art. My glasses had clouded over with tiny raindrops over them; I took them off and wiped the wet surface on the sleeve of my jacket the best I could. The water smeared, but I didn't care so much about it. Someone in my head wondered

why I was stopping at such a place. Who cares? I convinced myself and stooped to the lowest-hanging art.

There was something mystic about the picture featuring a girl in yellow and white striped clothing with a balloon. Everything else in the frame was colourless. It was raining except for the part where the girl was standing.

She was crying.

Pit...ter...pat...pitter...

I moved on to the next one. In this painting, the cardstock was transparent and the colours were clear and vibrant like a stained-glass window. It was a window to a sky of another world, twilight by the looks of it, but also at the same time dawn-like, or after a rainfall. The more I studied it, the more confused I became.

The third drawing made even less sense. It was black and white, probably done in a graphite pencil, which looked like a reflection in the water. At first I thought that the reflection was that of a city; then it seemed to ripple into a library, or a room full of shelved books. (It looked too expensive to be a public one, anyways.) Finally, there seemed to be nothing at all. The piece of paper with pencil marks left me with a feeling of nostalgia.

I was sure I've never seen anything like it.

Pit...ter...pat...pitter...pat...

One by one I went over the artwork, forgetting everything else, even the fact that it was raining. Some filled me with a warm, fuzzy feeling, some left me with dread. However, all were important and I burned them into my memory--as if my life depended on it.

The very last one was a self-portrait. The boy in the watercolour was just as shabby as the real-life artist, and he was also leaning against a graffiti wall. The rusty shade was somehow whimsical... when I came to the face, I gasped inaudibly.

I knew that face.

I slowly forced myself to look at the artist's face. A pair of lavender eyes, fresh as an open field, smiled back at me.

"Sam," I breathed, unable to believe it.

"Shhh. Don't sound like you've seen a ghost," my brother, with all the ages gone, replied.

"But I thought..."

He pushed a strand of hair that had fallen across his face, "No thinking. I'm back with my window frames." Window frames... the words he used for his artworks, I should have known. "You will stay, right?" I clung to his clothes like a child.

Instead, he pulled me into a hug. I finally noticed that it had stopped raining, and that there was a patch of warm sunlight shining through the thick clouds. Sam whispered, "Remember that I'm always with you and that you are not defined by others... You can be the best version of you..."

"But I don't want you to go away any more..." My eyes felt hot, and my vision clouded over from the tears in them.

There was a soft gentle breeze and the chirp of a bird whose name I did not recognize whistled past my ears. There was a spinning sensation, and my head was a whirlwind of memories flashing past me.

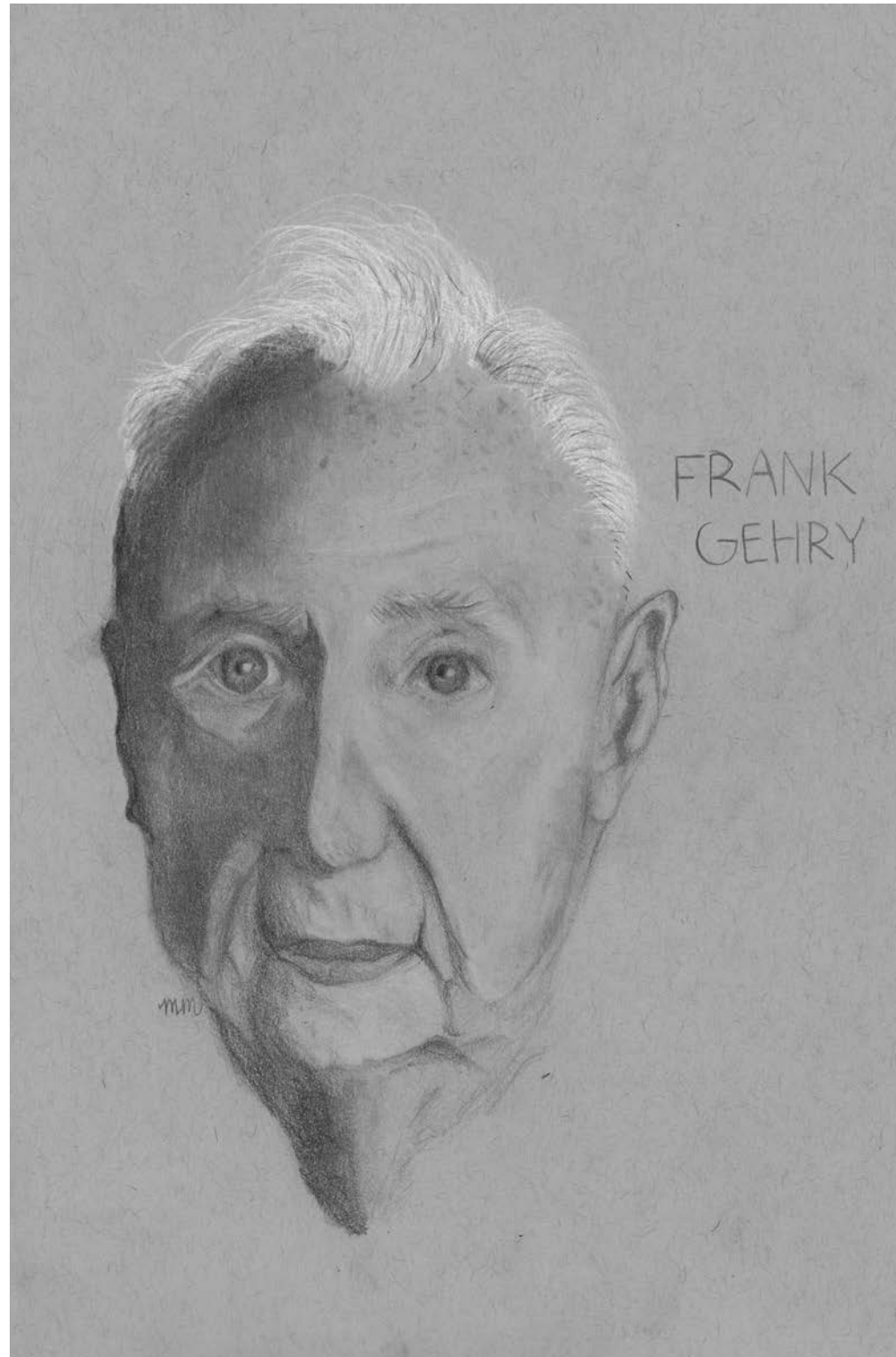
Pit...ter...pat...pitter...pat...pitt...

It was raining. I found myself leaning against a wall filled with graffiti. The rain had made the wall look like it was drenched in tears. I took note of the faded posters and other indecipherable pieces of paper on the wall, my eyes clear and cloudy at the same time. I shook my head free to let go of the memories of a near-distant past. Sam was no more. The artist on 0-3 Street was no more.

A soggy piece of artwork was in my hands.

## UNTITLED

*Morgan McLean, Age 13*



## PRECIOUS OPAL

*Connie Zhou, Age 15*

I am the voices inside your head,  
the colours inside your heart.  
What you try to express,  
I am you.

I am the you who won first place,  
the you who laughs with friends,  
the you who scored one hundred percent,  
I am your smile.

I am the you when they died,  
the you who broke up with him,  
the you who's lost and in despair,  
I am your tears.

I am the you who is thinking,  
the you who is concentrating,  
the you who doesn't smile or cry,  
I am your blank face.

I am you,  
your personality,  
if you die,  
I will die too.

## FREEDOM

Emily Louis, Age 13

Swooping, swirling through the air  
Dancing on the wind and weaving through the shadows

Never pausing, never hesitating once

To move, to run free in the open  
To never be chained ever again  
To always be unattached, uncommitted  
To anything.

Running away from sins  
Tossing away the heavy rocks of fear  
Losing all sense of guilt

This is what it's like to be free.

## SELFLESS

Wilson Whitlock, Age 16

What is selfless? Is it possible to commit a totally selfless act? What is selfish? The two words are opposites: selfless and selfish. Yet if looked at the wrong way, they can be mixed up. For example, if you see a homeless person, cold, hungry, struggling to survive, you would want to help them. A selfish man would think, "If I give this person my coat, I'll be cold on my walk home." A selfless man would think about the rough winter this person has in front of them and wonder how many more nights they can survive shivering until morning. His coat would be off. More common, however, would be the third man, full of uncertainty and indecision, bouncing from selflessness to selfishness. He might think about whether there is anyone around to witness his act of kindness, "The homeless person is asleep, so what would I gain?" It's quite easy to let the selfishness overcome the selfless.

To disregard your own discomfort and struggle, in order to relieve that of someone else, is to commit an act of total selflessness. If selfish thoughts don't even enter your head when faced with an opportunity to affect someone or something for the better, then you are on a path that will lead you to great respect, karma, peace and health. So in that sense, no matter how selfless the original act is, you will gain something from it. This does not make it selfish.

Vegetarianism is an example of a selfless way of living. Many people like the concept, but like bacon more. They are unable to control their body and mind, letting selfishness and greed take over their morals. (I'm not saying someone is a bad person whatsoever, just because they eat meat). Volunteering is another great example of selflessness; giving up your own time, where you could be making money, or spending time with friends, in order to help someone in more need than yourself. However you still get a reward, even if that is not what you planned for in the

first place. Seeing the smiles of those in need, now in less need, makes a big impact on how you live your life – instant karma in the best possible way. The last example I've chosen to write about to support my theory is the selfless act of donation; finding something that you have, that another person is lacking in their life. This can be money, or food, or water. If you are lacking in materialistic things, donating your time and work can make a huge difference.

If you have the opportunity to help, there's nothing standing in your way besides selfishness, greed, and laziness. If you have the money to donate, even a small amount, and you come up with an excuse not to, that is pure selfishness. If you have very little to no money, but all the time in the world there is always something you can do to help. An example would be donating your time to a food bank, completely free, they even give you a free meal. You don't need any skill, just show up and say you would like to help, simple as that.

I think it is definitely possible to commit an act of pure selflessness, as long as you have the self control to let go of selfish, greedy, and ignorant thoughts. I'm not saying to never think about yourself, but when you see or hear of someone or something in need, there is always something you can do to help, no matter how big or how small.W

## CHINA'S PRIDE AND SORROW – AN EXCERPT

By Allen Huang, Age 17

They didn't know it was the third longest river in Asia back when civilization was starting. The birthplace was the basin, the most prosperous region in early Chinese history yet haunted by both luck and sorrow. To think that China, the booming country today, came from something so plain. The history was almost as if fate (or is God more apt here?) spun the wheel as its people aimed for the coveted, gold-embossed 'JACKPOT', hoping that the slim arrowhead would land on the sliver of space taunting gold-and-riches in front of their eyes.

When nature holds the power to create and destroy, what does the river choose? When the floods came, the corpses of the Chinamen would litter the fields, and the ensuing famine and spreading of disease fell upon them; the arrowhead would land on 'BANKRUPT' and the audience—wary, impoverished Chinese people, disillusioned from their luck, filling up all the seats—would collectively sigh and release a withered "Aw..."

Emperors, soldiers, and armies—always men hungry for more—would attempt to weaponize the river, hoping that it would shift the tides against their enemies. Years, generations, and centuries of the river being used, used as a disposable commodity, would stain history books, exploring and exposing the folly of man. Crowds of people would die from the onslaught of the tide, crashing and roaring, or from the lack of crops after the floods. And yet, the river was valued still.

They say that the Yellow River, cascading velvety as champagne, flowed from the Heavens above, continuing the Milky Way onto land. And, on land, the river poured and trickled, bleeding the tears above, into Earth, the source coming from a girl spinning, weaving stars together, and a cowherd. The river of stars would allow the stars Altair and Vega to meet as a flock of magpies

and crows formed a bridge, connecting them once a year. What a romantic tryst, right? Almost something out of the movies—in this case, from myth.

To be eternal lovers, and yet never meet except for that rare, long-awaited annual moment where everything—stars, fates, destinies—aligns. It's almost like some sort of forbidden fairy tale where the happily-ever-after ending can only happen every-so-often. (Is this the part where I'm supposed to refer ambiguously to this as a huge, unraveling metaphor of a tragic yet inspiring relationship between my parents or my grandparents?) We can go into the dirty-undirty details later, instead, how about I jazz up the story for you in exchange.

A wave of feathered fans shimmy towards the middle, and teetering stoic-faced dancers fling them into the air, opting for a mass of tantalising jazz hands instead. Entering centre stage, the couple twirl in, a pirouette already in session. Impossibly close, they bring the twirl into a tango, slow and sensual. Once the end of the song comes, the script calls for their exit, a departure in opposite wings, and, all too soon, the cardinal red curtain closes. Behind the cloak, only the empty stage hears weeping.

This river, a hazy band of stars, tumultuous as a storm cloud in a bottle, is willing to separate two fated lovers, kill millions in its path, and allow life a chance for survival. But, no one asks why? Why does it allow civilisation to prosper in this contrarian language of life and death? Of course, you could argue that death is simply a part of life, and that 'China's Pride and Sorrow', uncaring, chooses nothing. The millions dead just a result of that flippant attitude of life. (And, who could argue with that?)

Certainly not me.)

## UNTITLED

Lareina Han, Age 14



## THE MYSTERY

Roderick Campbell, Age 13

## NEW OLD

Elly Noetzel, Age 16

I found a book adorned with gold  
It sits now at the top of my bookshelf  
There never was a story better told

Although I can tell the book is old  
I wonder how long it had sat at the used  
bookstore  
I found a book adorned with gold

To the press of my fingers the cover would mold  
The texture of the red leather is soothing  
There never was a story better told

The lettering on the front was bold  
There are grooves in the spine, on the front, in  
the back  
I found a book adorned with gold

When I first picked it up, the book was cold  
The book was small, unassuming, easily missed  
There never was a story better told

I wonder who else has had this book to hold  
It was a written in when I bought it  
I found a book adorned with gold  
There never was a story better told





# RACISM IN CANADA

By Zainab Sayedain, Age 15

We've heard it from friends, politicians, and repeatedly from our own Prime Minister: Canada takes pride in its multiculturalism. However, this perpetuated reputation of widespread acceptance and a "mosaic society" falls flat when we look at the murder of 22-year-old Colten Boushie. When Boushie and his friends found themselves on a road in Saskatchewan with a flat tire, they pulled over onto a nearby farm to seek help. They were subsequently shot at, and Boushie was killed. Gerald Stanley, the owner of the farm, is now being charged with second-degree murder, to which he pleads not guilty. Stanley claims that he did not mean to pull the trigger, and that the firing was accidental. The general consensus of the situation is that this is a telltale sign of racism in Canada, as Boushie was a Cree man who was killed for no apparent reason other than his ethnicity. During the trial, fourteen challenges were allowed, and the defense used these challenges on every single Indigenous juror. This resulted in an all-white jury, much to the dismay of Boushie's family and many Canadians.

Saskatchewan, being a rural part of Canada, is quite used to seeing racism daily. According to polling done in 2015, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are the most racist provinces of Canada by a considerably large margin (Smith; Global News). As a Canadian living in Vancouver, I didn't notice any racism in my region at first. Vancouver has always been known for

its diversity, and it's easy to write it off as an exception to Canada's issues. However, my eyes have more recently been opened to not only the nuances of discrimination in our city, but also the fact that we do indeed have very evident racism surrounding us. Vancouver, along with any other region in the world, is not free from the systematic oppression that is so incredibly ingrained in our society. We cannot address this racism, however, without first addressing the lack of respect for our Indigenous populations. According to the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migrations, a slim six per cent of people within the two provinces mentioned previously would consider Aboriginal peoples to be "very trustworthy", and one in three people believe that the racial stereotypes surrounding these groups are accurate (Smith; Global News).

The key to the eradication of racism in Canada, specifically towards Indigenous groups, is education on Canada's colonial history and the treaty partnerships between the government and First Nations peoples. These concepts need to be introduced at a young age in order to foster an understanding and respectful relationship with Indigenous populations. The perpetuated stereotypes regarding Indigenous peoples are a byproduct of inevitable Eurocentric views that have remained as time has gone by. As a country mixed with natives and immigrants, it's crucial that we are able to understand and recognize that we have not only taken this land

from the people who had it first, but that in the process, immigrants have also killed Indigenous populations, taken advantage of them, and discriminated against them heavily. The reality of our country is that it is tainted with social inequalities and injustices, much like any other country in the world. It is only respect, education, understanding, and recognition that have the ability to change it.

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## DAYDREAM

Lucy Pan, Age 13



*Daydreaming of a  
Sleepless Night*

## FEAR

Lareina Han, Age 14

Night fell, creepily. It was a moonless night; faint stars faded in between sparse and hazy clouds. I was walking through a dark alley, with tension and fear occupying every single corner of my blank mind. I had to keep my feet slightly bent, because as long as I straightened them, the stiffness would send shivers down my spine. I could hear raindrops dropping down from rooftops, and those dim lights from windows enwrapped my body with uncertainty. The dizzy symptom returned back again; I felt my heart was about to jump out of my chest. With difficulty, I overcame a pang of nausea, which came so suddenly and nearly overwhelmed me. Silence surrounded me, while I could hear the beat of my heart loudly. I chose every one of my footsteps carefully, making sure not to startle any dark formless danger lurking in the shadows. Suddenly, I saw a man crouching by a dumpster. His deathly stare petrified me, freezing me in place. My muscles tightened, my forehead sweated, and the draught chilled my wet skin. He started chasing me. However, my feet were numb with shock; my mind was trapped with fatal fear. Exhausting all my strength, I ran away. To my great relief, I ran right into a policeman. My heart skipped a beat as I bumped into him. The shine of his badge calmed my mind. Just for a moment, the world seemed a brighter place.

# THE UPSTATE GRIFFIN BANK HEIST OF '97

*Koa Krakowski Horwitz, Age 14*

From The Perspective of Jared McGill

It's 2017, twenty years after the Upstate New York Griffin bank heist, which left three of four unlikely high school friends dead. The lone survivor was left with all the money and no guilt.

The when: September 5th, 1997

The Girl: Betty McGill

The Boy: Football Captain Ronald Johnson

The Street Racer Champion: Abel Cosentino

(Ronald wrote that Abel was his best friend, but Betty and Abel would probably agree that this is better.)

The lovesick boy: Jo Baker

The school: Thomas Jefferson Secondary School (TJSS)

The Plotline: \*Already happened\*

And so why twenty years later, when three of four of these characters have been killed in The Upstate Griffin Bank Heist, does this story matter?

Well, maybe because, back on September 5th, 1997, the four high school friends were able to escape the pitiful reality of secondary school life for one hour, without smoking, snorting, or whatever young people, do nowadays. In the basement of Moma Koka's diner, the high school friends drank chocolate milkshakes topped with maraschino cherries and fluffy whipped cream, read murder mysteries, and plotted their heist. Ronald, Betty, Abel, and Jo, were able to plan the greatest bank heist ever committed by teenagers. And Betty planned the greatest unknown massacre of three almost innocent teenage boys.

The four high school friends secretly aligned forces for their last year at TJSS. That was when Betty and Ronald became the greatest "street racer gang love story" in New York State (well, at least for the summer).

As with any love story, there is always conflict. This one has a grieving vengeful girl and a love-drunk boy. For Betty and Ronald, there was no better way to describe them.

But why did Betty secretly despise Ronald so much? Well, Betty's younger sister Monica had been one of Ronald's scandalous love stories. Somehow the girls Ronald played with always ended up dead. Monica had been played by Ronald, and after five months and three accidental pregnancies, all that was left were two empty Fentanyl vials and a dead body.

It had been a year since that gruesome discovery, but Betty had silently raged for all that time, concocting a plan to murder Ronald Johnson. True, Betty was not generally considered an angry person, and quite honestly, she preferred reading murder mysteries to actually committing murder. But, Betty McGill never quite thought that it was fair that Ronald Johnson had "murdered" her sister, but would never pay for it. Betty knew she would never rest until Ronald Johnson was seven feet under (his misdeed justified that extra foot of dirt on top of his head).

The only thing was that Betty McGill was a seventeen-year-old girl who had never thought of killing someone before. Perhaps Betty didn't realize that murder doesn't take the knife out of your heart, it just sinks it in deeper.

A blanket of darkness covered the sky as Betty made her way to Moma Koka's diner. It was a classic New York autumn, so the chilly wind blew her brown chestnut hair back, and tinged her pale skin, pink. Betty clutched at her thin sleeveless blouse, which would easily fit underneath the black jumpsuits Abel had bought for the heist. But, against the autumn winds, it didn't offer warmth. Before entering the light surrounding Moma's Koka's diner, Betty hid in the shadows in the alleyway across the street, between the office buildings. A trusted accomplice handed her a gun, then slinked back into nowhere's land. Unlike the other three, Betty's gun wasn't loaded with blanks.

Moma Koka's, a hidden "hole-in-the-wall" that all the locals frequented, was where the four high school friends met to finalize the plan for the Upstate Griffin Bank Heist. As the newest blonde, busty server ushered her to the back door, Betty knew that this was the last time she would walk through this Diner. The stairs down to Moma's Koka's basement were narrow, tilted towards the dim lit room, that Moma Koka called a basement. The walls were covered in torn cornflower blue wallpaper and somehow everything had a musty smell to it, in contrast to the fast-food scented upstairs. Moma Koka's was a local hideout, but truly, you could always feel at home, even while writing novels or using drugs in the basement.

Moma Koka's basement, for all its mystical beginnings, was only a small room that had a red velvet moldy antique couch, and a couple desks from another century. Sitting on the couch was her 1st murder victim, Ronald Johnson, captain of TJSS's football team, and the only person on the team capable of scoring

a touchdown. Ronald Johnson was known for his towering height and his playboy actions. Beside Ronald was Jo Baker, whose raven hair and baby blue eyes, made Jo every bit the rich kid his CEO father had made him. Jo had been a victim since he'd opened his mouth and said Monica deserved to die. Even as Betty looked into his Baby blue's framed by cherry pink cheeks. Betty felt no remorse, for the actions she would commit. Victim number 3 was sprawled out on the disgusting vomit coloured carpet. Abel Cosentino, who had blackmailed Monica into keeping her last pregnancy, and later told her the drugs would only kill the baby. As they suited themselves up with pistols and ski masks, the four friends knew that these chocolate milkshakes from Moma Koka's were completely different from any they'd had before.

As those three boys who were more than willing to kill themselves for her, marched out of Mama Koka's basement, Betty knew, she that would kill them for their past transgressions. Even as Abel drove them to Enver bank, he knew something was off about Betty. Ronald sensed the silent fury that was ripping through Betty as she shot him down underneath the neon Enver bank sign. Even, Jo knew that something was very different about the girl he loved the most, as she shot him to death, with a smirking Cheshire cat grin.

## FLOWER BOY

*Gabriela Haeuser, Age 13*

He handed me a flower,  
One I looked at with disdain.  
Told me I was beautiful,  
Did he have something to gain?

I eyed him sceptically,  
He wanted me for me?  
The idea seemed incredulous,  
Were we meant to be?

His flower I rejected,  
His plans went down the drain.  
I watched his face contort,  
His heart was full of pain.

## UNTITLED

*Elizabeth Yee, Age 17*



# HOW I FOUND MY VOICE

Emma Jule, Age 18

“Each time a person stands up for an idea, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, they send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.” – Robert F. Kennedy

I have decided that I am done being afraid, that I am done hiding my power. I refuse to be scared of other's opinions. This is my story and other people will no longer have power over me. I will share my story for the women who can't, for the women who feel alone in this. I am here, you are not alone.

When I was 15 years old, I was depressed and like many teens do I began to use drugs and alcohol as my vice. I was so overcome with emotions and a longing to fit in that I stopped thinking clearly. One night I decided to go to a party. At this party I got really drunk and I lost my virginity. This was not the magical experience I had thought it would be; this was rape.

I don't remember much. The morning after, I woke up still at the house. My hair and clothes were a mess. I did not understand, nor remember what had happened the night before. I knew something was wrong and I felt different, I felt afraid. It was terrifying to not understand what had happened, to feel not in control of my body. The not knowing and the long gaps in my memory made me jump to the worst conclusions, which weren't far from the truth. The only way I can describe the feeling is, it's like when someone is about to give you really bad

news and you can feel it in your gut and you know they're going to tell you something bad, like your grandma died, but there is nothing you can do to stop it. \*\*\* \_\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*  
I still wake up some mornings with the same feeling. It is like there is something inside of me that has been broken, but even the deepest scars do fade.

There were a few other girls who were there. They did nothing to help me, in fact, they stole my phone, my money and my bus fare. Those girls could have helped spare me from one of the worst experiences of my life, but added to my suffering. I didn't know how to get home from where I was so I walked for three hours. Afraid to be ticketed for not having a bus pass, I refrained from jumping on the skytrain. When I think back on it now, I know I was also just afraid to see other people, afraid to confront what had happened. At least if I was by myself, I could hide from reality a little longer.

Walking home was a nightmare; I remained exhausted and alone with that haunting feeling the whole way back. The walk seemed to go on forever, all I could do was think about how I would be home soon and could shower. I tried to hold back my tears. I wanted to shut my eyes and sleep through this nightmare. How could I be so dumb? What have I done? What happened? That couldn't have happened, could it? These thoughts repeated themselves over and over in my head.

This experience, as extremely painful as it was, helped me realize what it means to be a woman. It opened my eyes and I began to see things in a

different way. I learned that I can't be by myself in an unknown environment; I can't get too drunk and let my guard down. I have to be careful and alert when I walk home at night and I have to watch what I wear to avoid being preyed upon. I shouldn't have to do any of these things to stay safe, but I do because the reality is that you can't rely on other people to protect you in your time of need. You have to be your own hero and look out for yourself.

As I began to heal and was able to talk about the rape, I learned that I was not the only one, in fact, far from it. There are so many girls out there who had experienced sexual assault like this. I am not writing about this because I want to or because I enjoy it, I am writing about it because I need to. People don't realize how common sexual violence is in Canada. There are a lot of people out there who are so caught up in their own worlds, they don't realize the harsh realities other people are living. That is, until something like this happens to you, or someone you love and care about. That is, until something like this happens to your sibling, your child, your friend. That person was me and this assault was what it took to make me realize who I was, what my values were and what I wanted to fight for. This gave me motivation to change and help other change as well.

Sharing my story, I can help people realize that this still happens more than they think and that we need to continue to fight for change. We need to strive for equality. Now is not the time to be selfish. Taking care of yourself is great as long as you don't lose sight of others and don't take your privilege for granted. I used to think that

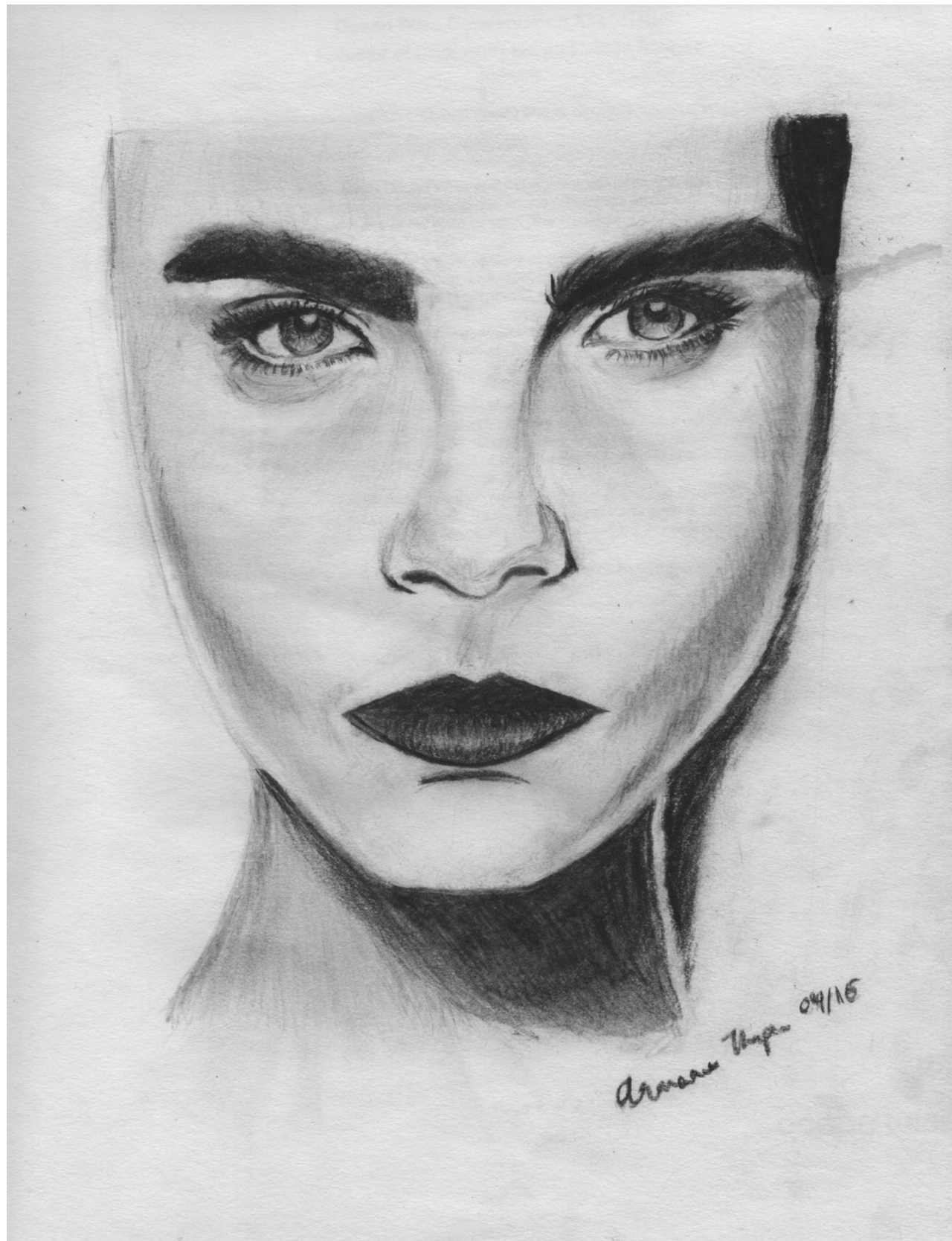
one person is not enough to make a difference. I used to think that one person can try as hard as they want, but some things just don't change.

This rape changed my outlook on a lot of things. I don't want people to be afraid to have daughters anymore and I will fight as hard as I can to change that. I know now that one person can make a change and even a little change for the better is good. I learned that it is enough to just help one person change one thing. Like the quote from Robert Kennedy, I learned that one action can lead to a change. I learned to believe this quote and to try and live by it. I hope this memoir will create even the smallest of ripples.

Disclaimer: my family is aware of these events and have given me the support I needed to heal. This event is in the past and has been dealt with.

# CARA DELEIVINGNE

*Armaana Thapar, Age 15*



# INTRIGUE

*Tiya Tanaka, Age 15*

I rest dormant inside your heart,  
Awoken by a spark.

Birds fall from the sky,  
As I bring a hazy fog.

The world seems brighter with me,  
Like the rays of sunshine under the sea.

I am a mirror reflecting possibilities.  
Will you ever listen to me?

I rip your limbs apart with thorny vines,  
Yet you hide your scars from the eyes of one.

I am masked with perfume  
And caked with makeup.

I will become a rainbow that descends from the  
sky.  
I will be heard, I will make you sing.

A metamorphosis is coming soon.  
I am intrigue.

## ANCHORED

Erin Leung, Age 16

The snow drifted slowly from the clouded sky  
As the wind whisked through my hair with a  
heavy sigh  
The stale taste of Winter lingered on my tongue  
Like this wound inside that has always stung

For the thousandth time I looked into the  
distance for you  
And I knew that you had unfailingly done the  
same for me too  
Even if we didn't expect the other to be there  
Wishing alone had already filled the void that we  
knew we couldn't bear

As if Heaven had heard my silent prayers, there  
you were  
It didn't take long for everything else to become  
a blur  
The sounds of honking cars and splashing wet  
snow drowned in the air  
As the people around us continued on as if they  
did not care

Despite the distance, my heart pounded as you  
looked into my eyes  
The longing in them is something I could never  
deny  
But there we were, anchored on the sidewalk,  
unwilling to go on  
So I think to myself; how can a feeling be wrong?

There were nights where I dreamed of carrying  
all of your pain  
Days where I wished I could've held an  
umbrella under your rain  
I want a lifetime to stand by your side  
Even as we go up and down our ride

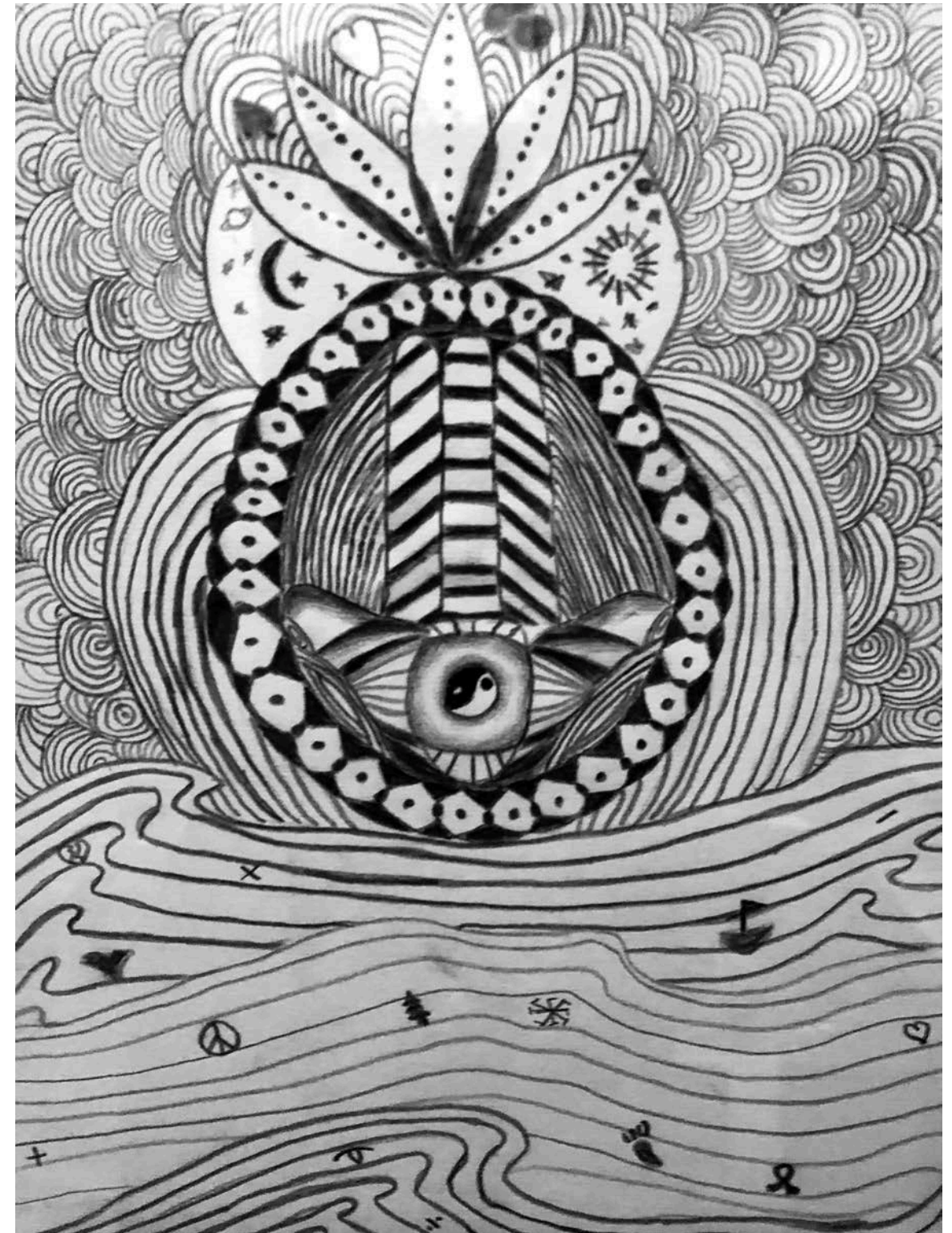
We knew from the start that we weren't meant  
to be  
So we each built a barrier between us in which  
we still cannot see  
But if life had allowed us to cross paths again  
Then perhaps following our hearts is the only  
way to keep us sane

The snow drifted slowly from the clouded sky  
As we penetrated through the wind without a  
single cry  
The sharpness of Winter bit at our skin  
Like this feeling inside us that has been  
nothing but sin

We stopped and looked into each other's eyes  
And we peered into the other's soul which  
unraveled all of the lies  
But why did we only stand a meter apart?  
Maybe if we take another step, this can be  
where we start

## LOST HAMSA

Wilson Whitlock, Age 16



## A LITTLE MIKAILA

*Jazmin Estes, Age 16*



## I'M AFRAID I MIGHT FORGET YOU

*Lucy Pan, Age 13*

On that night I saw the falling stars  
In the field rich with flowers, I extend  
My hand to you, with these gifts of ours  
The longing night will soon come to an end

No words can describe the warm memories  
Needed to find the muse long astray  
As I am lost in the endless black seas  
To lift the unending sight of dead grey

Nor have I ever seen a lily's white  
Still not the vermillion of a rose  
They were sweet, but not yet to my delight  
Drawn after you, a feeling of repose

I hope my dear, I will never forget  
as you wear that lovely pin, a rosette



## CONTRASTING FIGURE

*Benjamin Shihundu, Age 14*



## PRICE OF LETTING GO

*Benjamin Shihundu, Age 14*



## THE DARK TIDE

*Elise Lafleur, Age 17*

Between two school years, the tide has gone out.

They sit quietly: Julian on the outer seat, Zoe inside. The man comes and lowers the bar over their laps, locking it with a rattle. The swing lifts eerily slowly, and the peace that has been seeping into Zoe all summer intensifies the higher they rise. Stress and obligation lie in the lighted fairground and the surrounding city with its pits of shadow dropping under them while they remain motionless. The massive apparatus coils, centrifuging away doubt.

Julian doesn't ask about starting high school; that's not her way. Instead, she draws strength from Zoe's anticipation, laughing stories, and loyalty to her best friend, Julian's older brother. She watches Zoe carefully, noting her polished mannerisms and how she is so utterly self-contained, so assured. She can see a new seriousness in Zoe's bearing as September and her senior year approaches, but Zoe has brought Julian to this carnival and seems to be enthusiastically immersed in it. Is she solemn at school? Will four years between us be too much, or will she still talk to me there?

They stare out in silence, feeling the loss when the swing inevitably slows and begins its descent. Perhaps a minute of this precious time with Zoe is left, and Julian wants to strike up a conversation, a connection, but can't decide how to begin. Zoe is quickly becoming unreachable, fading back into Peter's territory and the school's.

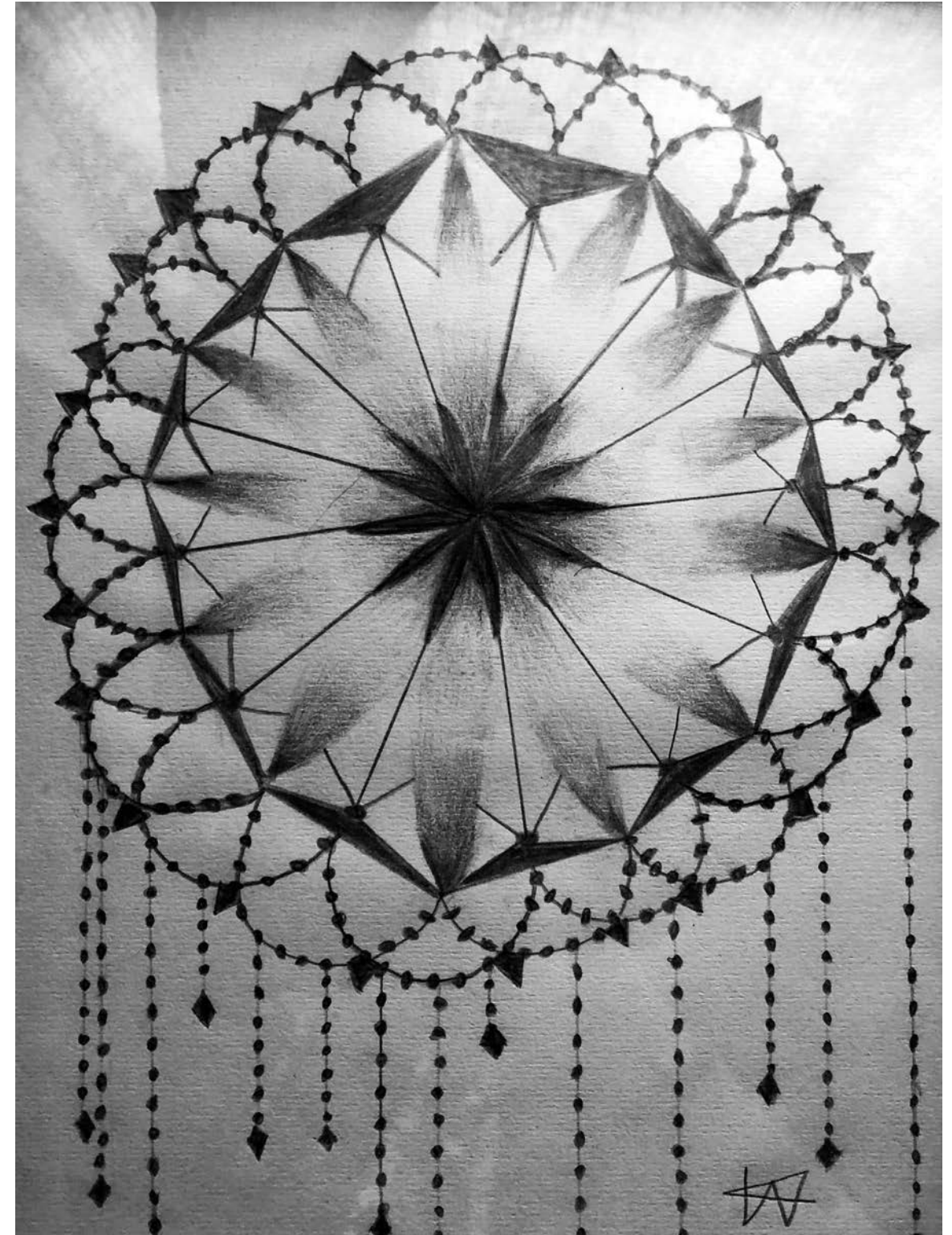
Zoe notices Julian's sudden reserve and feels a spike of fierce tenderness for this girl who is so earnest and observant and underestimated.

"You're going to love high school," she says, feeling suddenly inadequate. For years now she has wanted to take care of Julian and so many like her, the girls who are ashamed of their sincerity and the ones who feel deficient. Now she's a senior: this is her chance. Here is Julian, clumsily reaching out to Zoe, who puts her arm around her.

Fog rolls towards them, over the harbour, over the low coast and its invisible sea. It is borne on the tide of pressure, of fresh starts, of everything they left behind in June returning. Here is one more year, to leave nothing undone. Here come five years sweeping towards Julian. They touch ground and stand. She has no concept of what they will be like, but Zoe will be there.

## DREAMER

*Wilson Whitlock, Age 16*



## A TRIP

*Shijia Han, Age 14*

The school bus starts moving after the last person, Amanda, gets on.

She then plods to a seat beside her friend, Shiloh, and sits down.

Amanda is a skinny petite girl with pale skin; because of her health condition, she moves slower than other students in her class. Similar to Amanda, Shiloh is not a sportive student either. Although her height is a bit tiny for a grade six student, her facial expression is always solemn and well-composed and that is what makes her look mature.

Shiloh and her classmates are on their elementary school graduation trip. They go to the train station to take the train from Reading to London. Although it is a brief journey, Shiloh can feel her heartbeat accelerate because she never travels without her only family member, her lonely and elderly grandfather; she wonders when she will see him again.

The school bus arrives at the hectic train station. The teacher, Pamela, gets off first. The rest of the students follow her track and exit the bus swiftly. Less than a minute later, there are only Shiloh and Amanda left in the bus. Unlike Amanda, Shiloh packs up hastily, but she does not want to leave the school bus. The clusters of crowds now seem abnormal. Some people dash into each other and children cry... is the train station always like this?

Urged by the impatient bus driver, Shiloh gets off the school bus reluctantly with Amanda. They catch up to the class hastily and enter the train station. Just after Pamela hands out the tickets, a young lady runs into the class looking horrified.

The young lady's arm bleeds and she trembles so hard that she cannot even talk. Her face is pale as snow and from her eyes Shiloh can tell she craves to escape but is too desperate.

Pamela tries to comfort her, but the lady raises her arm and points to the back. Through the crowded turbulence, Shiloh sees the nightmare that she will never forget her whole life. There are about five or six of them, with rotten skin and unrecognizable features. They dash in to people and beat them up just like monsters.

An announcement starts going on in the station. A shrill voice comes on; it stumbles and tells everyone they should exit the station immediately. Some students in the class start to run wildly and look for places to hide, but Pamela tries to assemble the class with the responsibility of a teacher. Suddenly, the young lady rushes towards Pamela and they both fall on the ground; everyone is petrified. The lady's skin has now become the same as the monsters.

Everything happens so quickly and outrageously like a dreadful nightmare that Shiloh does not want to believe. It is obvious that there is a contagious virus, but what should the naïve students do? How can they escape or even leave the chaotic station without their teacher? The monsters are now close to the students, they must decide now; stay and perish together, or grab the last chance to survive but forsake each other?

Without hesitation, Shiloh chooses the second option; the merciless but life-saving option. Shiloh grabs Amanda's hand and gets on a starting train that is about a few meters away from them. Shiloh and Amanda are fortunate

enough to get in a vacant cabin, most people are too obtuse to make a choice in time. When the train starts, people who did not have enough time to get on the train thump the doors and smack the windows, but the train forsakes them all ruthlessly within seconds.

Shiloh sits there pondering for twenty minutes. Amanda sits there wailing for twenty minutes; she does not only cry for herself, she cries for her innocent classmates, her dedicated teacher, people who cannot get on the train, the eerie and wicked virus, Shiloh's ruthlessness, and the ending of this turmoil... The train is now half through the journey; it slowly passes the boundary of the town and enters the suburb. Suddenly, both Shiloh and Amanda hear a crashing sound behind them. Shiloh turns her head swiftly... a monster breaks through the window and gets in.

They are the only people in the cabin; the only way they can escape is to go forward. There is a washroom between the cabins where people can hide; both Shiloh and Amanda start running toward their only hope. They reach the washroom door within seconds; the wood door seems as shabby as the washroom. Shiloh already puts her hand on the knob, but unexpectedly, Amanda trips on a broken piece of wood and falls on the ground.

What should Shiloh do now? The monster's hand is a few inches away from them; Shiloh is almost a foot shorter than the monster and she wields no weapon. If she tries to save Amanda, they are both going to die, but if she does not save Amanda... Unwilling to see Amanda's desperate expression, Shiloh turns her back and thumps the door closed behind her.

She can hear Amanda's shrieks while smacking on the door wildly. "Everything will be ok, this nightmare will end soon..." Shiloh thinks, "... the train is going to arrive at London and there will be armed people who can save me... how much do I desire a weapon! If I had a weapon, no matter what kind... even an ax could save Amanda's life!"

Looking into the mirror in front of her, Shiloh suddenly realizes that Amanda did not trip on a broken piece of wood; it was the handle of an ax! Shiloh now remembers there is always an emergency ax under the front row seat of each cabin... but it is now too late. There is a thunderous crashing sound behind Shiloh. Shiloh is not calm enough to look back... because she can feel that the monster is using the ax to break the fragile door.

"Shiloh! Wake up!"

Shiloh convulses to sit up and realizes Amanda is sitting beside her on the school bus to the train station. "Do you know what you have missed?" Amanda inquires with irritation; Shiloh stares blankly. "Pamela just told the class there is always an emergency ax in the front row seat, and you just missed that important information by sleeping!"

## EDINBURGH

*Max Biermann, Age 13*

A stunning city, traditional and old,  
Fascinating history weaved throughout the town,  
The capital of Scotland, beautiful and bold,  
Where neeps 'n' tatties with haggis drown.  
The Royal Mile, with its cobblestone road,  
Spreading from the Castle to the World's End,  
Windows patterned with many a tartan showed,  
An ancient, toll gateway, the rich man's friend,  
Keeping the poor in and the rich free to move,  
Many priceless experiences,  
In the city of Edinburgh.

When summer time has come around,  
The Fringe fills the city streets,  
Along the Mile and on the mound,  
Comedy, improv and dangerous feats.  
Princess Street Gardens and Hunter Square,  
Hosting dance and drama all about,  
Climbing up drainage pipes like nimble hares,  
Escaping straight jackets with chains, leaves no  
doubt,  
That Edinburgh's Fringe is the best festival in  
town.  
Many priceless memories made,  
In the city of Edinburgh.

When winter cold has come about,  
Edinburgh's true heart presents its cheer  
The German market with its sauerkraut,  
Its cheese sausages and its beer.  
With the winter market quite close by,  
The hum of the Ferris wheel, the click of snow  
globe photos,  
Stalls stocked with supper and desserts like pie,  
More things to do than anyone knows,  
At Edinburgh's winter festivals.  
Many priceless moments,  
In the city of Edinburgh.

## IN THIS CITY, TOGETHER

*Esme Decker, Age 16*

Under the glowing grey  
muffling sky,  
in the atmosphere,  
a thousand sprinkles of water  
falling  
at once.  
In a trance,  
we float  
across Welwyn street,  
down 21st,  
in brightly coloured rain jackets,  
giddy on each other's company.  
Hoods too low,  
half-covering our views  
as secondary, sleepy eyelids.  
Look up to the clouds  
that seem to surround the earth  
in a layer of fleece and light.  
On our faces, let the tiny tears fall  
the strokes of a fine brush  
with fresh, transparent paint.

Seated in invisible chairs  
upon the stage,  
when our eyes close,  
ghosts shift around us,  
right under our noses.  
You expect to part  
from those you start with  
only to find  
the world takes you back,  
together again.  
And they couldn't be happier,  
thanking you  
for not letting them  
fall  
away.

They trust you.  
A soft, tingly buzzing lingers,  
Encompassing your mind.  
You're secure in your place,  
on this earth,  
in this city.

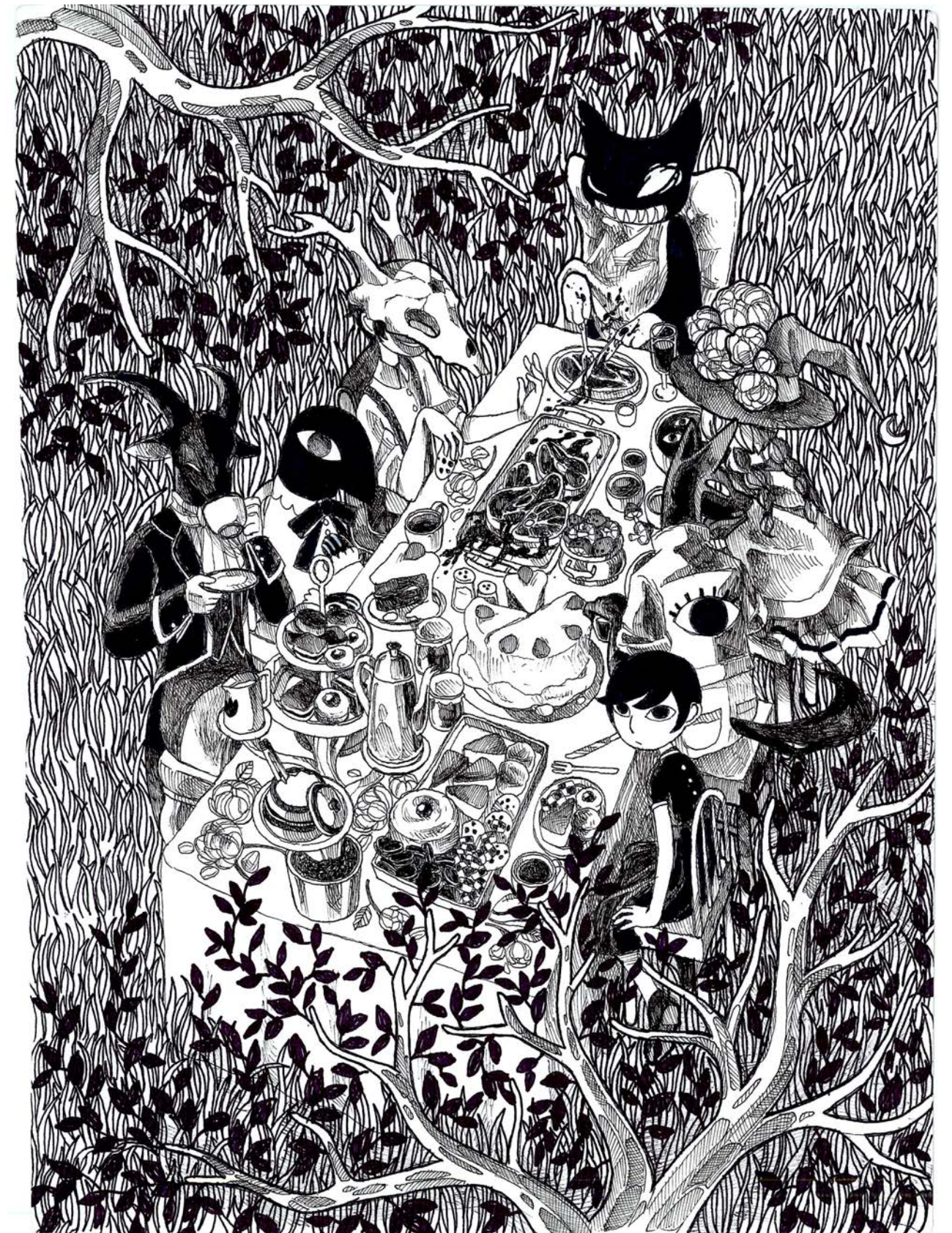
## A TEA PARTY FOR MISFITS AND MONSTERS

Janet Song, Age 15

## THE ANIMALPALOOZA

Gabriela Haueser, Age 13

Acrobatic elephants dancing in the dark  
Blasting music as they do  
Cats watch full of disdain  
Dogs prefer not to complain  
Everyone comes to watch the show  
Fantasizing of what comes next  
Gloriously the elephants prance  
Harmonious in every way  
It is an all-nighter show  
Jumping and twirling  
Kangaroos join in  
Llamas sing along  
Monotonous this show is not  
Near the lake they go  
Or else the fish would not join in  
Pasta is served while the show is on  
Quirky dancers all around  
Reeling in every direction with unicycles  
Singing along to every song  
Truly a fun place to go  
Under the starry blanket  
Very nice bunch to spend a night with  
Wobbly monkeys try to balance  
Xylophones make a clatter  
Yellow flowers bloom silently while  
Zippy zebras zap by



## PLACID TERROR

*Catherine Diyakonov, Age 13*

It was advertised as a beautiful location to spend the summer in... Renovated log cabins overlooking a blue, serene lake surrounded by thousands of towering pines. Why not spend a couple of weeks there in the tranquil environment?

One, and just one, reason.

"Are we almost there?" groused Mark for what seemed like the tenth time.

"Be patient Mark! The beautiful scenery we saw online has to be deep into the mountains where nobody would find it, wouldn't you agree?" Elizabeth mollified.

"I guess," Mark sighed.

The road was slowly spiraling deep into the mountains. It seemed unusually empty there, and the only travelers the friends saw were coming away from the camp. Although this was queer, the three dismissed any hesitant thoughts they might've had and figured that there must be a great deal of campers at the camp already.

"Oh look!" Jane exclaimed, pointing to a sign which read: Blackbird Camp: 5 kilometers.

"Finally!" Mark cried out, peering out the window.

As they were getting deeper and deeper into the mountains, the surrounding pine trees seemed to grow taller and taller, almost as if someone

was towering over them. Nevertheless, the three reached the camp at last, relieved to be there and never more excited to relax after their prolonged journey.

They drove through a rocky, dusty archway, which led directly to the main hall. After the exhausted trio unpacked their belongings from their car, they headed toward the check-in. An old, amiable gentleman came out of his office, smiling a toothless smile at them.

"Welcome to Blackbird Camp! My name is Jack and I'm the housekeeper around here. How're you doing this fine afternoon?" he inquired in a mellifluous tone.

"Nice to meet you, Jack! We're doing fine, but exhausted from the long journey. You?" Jane replied.

Jack curiously studied Jane's lips as she spoke and took some time to think before he replied.

"I'm doing quite well, to be honest. We haven't been very busy these days. Most of our campers leave abruptly, it's very strange. Well, I shouldn't keep you waiting! Here's your key; your cabin is Firebird A3 and is right in front of the lake, such a beautiful view. Enjoy!" he handed over the key and stumbled back to his office.

"Sorry sir, but where exactly is the lake?" Jane inquired, but Jack was already seated behind his computer and merely smiled.

Jane turned around and shared a puzzled glance with her friends. Although none of them had any idea of where Firebird A3 was, the group decided that it wouldn't hurt to wander around and explore the camp. The road was grungy at first, but when the trail abruptly turned into a magnificent path in the middle of the woods, the three friends were in awe. The entire track was full of greenery and it seemed as though everything was alive.

The trio found their cabin much quicker than they expected, and as promised, it was overlooking a magnificent lake and pines whose reflections could be seen in the water. They quickly got settled in and sat down in the living room, appreciating the stunning view right in front of them.

As day transformed into night, and the friends became jaded from the day's adventures, they settled into bed and enjoyed the music of the night.

Just as the friends were falling asleep, it felt as though the world had stopped. The crickets stopped chirping and owls stopped hooting. It was as if something had petrified the creatures to death. And then, the tempestuous weather began. There were periods of time in which the wind was unbearable, and others where there was complete silence. What caused this weather to abruptly take this form? The three friends stared at each other, all of them too unnerved to make a move.

Without warning, a prodigious shadow of a creature emerged. It was taller than the pines surrounding the lake. The wind started howling and big, thumping footsteps rattled the ground, matching the shadow's movement. An ear-splitting scream was instantaneously produced and rang in the air. In a split second, all three friends jumped out of bed and darted to the car. The wind was against them, trying to stop them from escaping. The footsteps were getting louder and the friends kept on fighting for their lives. Panting, they reached their car. Jane, her hands shaking on the wheel, maneuvered her way out of the entrance, escaping this horrible ordeal, never to return again.

## TIMED

Marian Manapat, Age 15

Two minutes.

Just two, excruciatingly short minutes.

That was how long she had until she was forced to enter The Room. That was how long she had until, hopefully, everything she had done would pay off. Just two minutes until the end.

120 seconds until it was all over.

And she found herself aware of each passing moment.

She had spent days upon days attempting to ready herself mentally and emotionally for the unspeakable event that was about to occur. But despite all she did, all she felt was fear.

Fear.

It had started the moment she opened her eyes that morning. The feeling began as an icicle in her stomach. A small icicle threatening to fall and shatter into millions of pieces.

One step closer to The Room and she felt that little icicle evolve into a blizzard.

She noticed that people were crowding around one another. Their eyes were aflame with the same desperation that was present in their strained voices. It was the last two minutes, after all. If there were two minutes until the end, they were going to attempt to make it count.

Her hands began to shake as a chorus of voices cut through the chaos.

"I'm not ready."

"I don't know what to do."

"I can't believe this is happening."

"I can't do this."

"What do we do?"

*Nothing*, she thought. She couldn't bring herself to say it out loud. The words seemed stuck in her throat. *Nothing except wait. Because what else could we do?*

It was an inescapable fate that they all had to accept. Then there was only one minute until the end.

She gulped and looked at her trembling hands. She thought about her family, how they seemed to trust her. How they pushed her to keep going.

If she was going to do this—if she was going to try—it would be for them. But there were 30 seconds until the end.

Her heart was beating in her ears. Her head was spinning and everything, absolutely everything, seemed to slip out of her mind.

*No, no, no, no.*

She didn't want to die. She didn't want to suffer through this. She wasn't ready.

But there was no choice, and there was no way she would let her last 20 seconds be wasted on freaking out.

She took a deep breath and squeezed her eyes shut.

At ten seconds, they called for everybody to line up.

At five seconds, they ordered everybody to enter The Room.

At three seconds, she found what she was supposed to look for.

At one second, she felt the world crash onto her shoulders.

And then her time was up.

-----

She was closing her eyes.

I don't know what this is.

Wondering if there was any hope for her.

What am I supposed to do?

Racking her brain for a solution.

How am I supposed to figure this out?

Because she had to run away from this problem.

This must be a trick. It has to be a trick. It's definitely a trick.

But she felt the seconds slipping out of her grasp.

This is too much.

"Two minutes left," a voice declared. Just two minutes.

120 seconds until it was all over.

Doom.

-----

She left The Room after two hours.

7200 seconds.

She was astounded. Dazed. Stunned. Confused. Dumbfounded.

Yet...relieved.

So surprisingly relieved that she found herself unable to stop staring at the dim light across the hallway.

"Sadie?" a voice said from behind her.

She blinked and turned to the voice, finding a face. A nervous face. A tired face. Her friend, Kate.

"Sadie, how are you?"

She let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. "I'm..." "Fine?"

Sadie shrugged. "I just can't believe it."

"Believe what?"

"That I survived that Math exam."

THE END.

# THE SUN THAT PUSHED AWAY THE CLOUDS

Erin Leung, Age 16

The rain drizzled onto my umbrella from the cloudy skies of Eugene, Oregon, while I stood silently for a long moment at the door to our Bungalow. I took a deep breath and let out a long sigh as I pushed open the unlocked door and headed straight to the kitchen. I stared expectantly at the breakfast table where Mom was sitting on a wooden chair with half a dozen empty Vodka bottles littered on top of it.

She paid me no attention as she poured white liquid into a glass. I threw down my backpack on one of the chairs and walked over to her.

"How many times have I told you to stop making a mess?" I said sharply as I stared at her greasy curls and half-opened eyes.

She sat up and eyed me silently with her lifeless blue-gray eyes. "You're beginning to look more and more like him" she said drunkenly, but despite that, her sweet voice still had a pretty ring to it. "You know, I'm really craving some Bourbon right now, can you get me some?" She swayed the contents in the glass and winced before lifting it to her full lips.

I rolled my eyes--the only stunning trait I inherited from my once enchanting mother, "maybe after you start working again."

I sat at my desk an hour later after I cleared the table, cleaned the living area and threw a blanket over her after she fell asleep on the chair.

Mom has become an alcoholic ever since Dad left us because he gambled away all our money aside from our house. We were a normal family before any of this happened. Mom would go to every one of my school concerts. Dad would come home with pizza and we would all sit in front of the TV. There were times we would do anything to trade back; times that we would hold onto no matter how many waves would crash in our way.

I'd already lost track of all the times I cried myself to sleep but I'll be graduating high school soon. After that, I would be able to move out of this place, and I would never need to come back here again, to face my mom or her boyfriend.

Today was one of those days where I disregarded studying and work altogether and pulled out my old photo album to go through photos we took as a family. This was my way of reminding myself these days will never happen again, but it was also proof that my happy family did exist.

I was about to flip through it when I noticed a small piece of paper slipped between the first and second page. I took it out of the album. It read:

'By the time you read this, you would come to learn how sorry I am. Life has been so hard for the both of us. And it's all my fault.

Ever since you were born, you have shown me what life meant as well as the value in it. Even when you mask your love with your harsh words, I can still feel it and see it through your actions. Thank you for bearing with me all this time. I am aware that you constantly look through these photos as a way of reliving these moments and I do too. I want to change, I want to stop drinking and I want to stop drowning myself in the past but I know I can't. Leaving you is the only way I can ensure happiness for the both of us. At the very least, I can now promise you that you can move on to a brighter future, with no hindrances or obstacles. Alcohol may have made me forget myself but I was only able to last these days with you because you were here for me even if you won't admit it.

You took away my pain, my sorrow, my grief and my thoughts... You pushed away the clouds because you are my sun. I really don't want to hurt you or make you lose a mother at such a

young age, but for me and you, I have to. Please forgive my selfishness. I love you.  
-Mom'

I didn't hesitate as I slammed the letter down on the desk, sprinted down the hall and flung myself into the kitchen. Laid back in her chair, Mom's skinny arms hung limply at her sides as a bottle of pills was spilled on the floor underneath her and the blanket I'd draped over her was now folded neatly on the table. My legs turned into jelly as I walked silently over to her in disbelief. At that moment, a bit of sunlight shone through the large window behind us. Bathed in the small golden light, her face looked absolutely quintessential, with the exception of her sweat-plastered hair. A small smile was hung on her angelic face, her eyes were closed and she looked like a goddess frozen in time.

I was silent for a long moment as the memories of her ran through my head...the good and the bad. Hot tears streamed down my face as I took another step closer towards her.

"I love you Mom." I said as I wrapped my arms around her still warm body, the gauntness of it brought another blow to my already aching heart. "I love you." I couldn't stop saying it as I repeated the words enough to last for a lifetime. I should've told her I loved her because those three words could've saved her. Those exact same words could've pulled our family back together, but it was too late now. I gathered myself and walked over to the window and pulled the curtains aside to let the light pour in.

"You took away my pain, my sorrow, my grief and my thoughts... You pushed away the clouds because you are my sun." I heard in my mind once again as the rain stopped and the clouds gave way to the warm, brilliant sun.



## MORNING'S RAIN

*Tammy Hoang, Age 17*



## POSTCARD FROM PARADISE

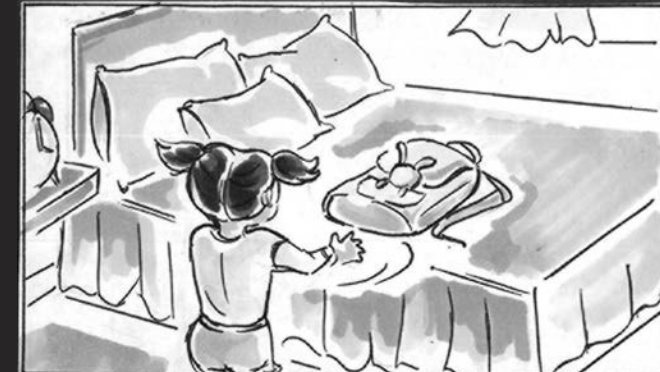
*Lauren Traboulee, Age 15*

I'm writing from somewhere foreign,  
A place even I don't know.  
The trees whisper secrets to each other  
And the waves laugh with the white sand.  
There's people here too,  
They seem as carefree as a summer breeze.  
Teenagers link arms with their friends  
And they skip down the cobbled path.  
I wish I could come back here,  
But I know once I leave,  
My memory will be wiped and  
This place will remain a secret  
For only the lucky few to discover.  
Every street corner has its own song,  
A lilting melody that blends into the wind.  
An old man dances in the street,  
Waving his wooden cane.  
Two children join him and  
Suddenly everyone on that corner is dancing.  
I want to join them but I feel out of place  
Out of place in this bubble of bliss.  
I can't join in fear of popping it  
And ruining the paradise this place is.

Finally, I am able to stand.  
I look up to the picturesque sky,  
The clouds tell me  
It's time to leave.  
I walk along the beautiful boulevard,  
There's a small kiosk on the side.  
I grab a postcard from the rusting shelf.  
A pen appears beside my hand,  
An ancient fountain pen with a pot of ink beside  
it.  
The bizarreness of its existence makes perfect  
sense in this place.  
I don't write anything.  
I pocket the only memory I will have of this  
utopia.  
On my journey towards the small pier,  
People smile at me like I am an old friend.  
Grief and affection spar inside me  
As I come to the realization I can never return.  
My boat leaves shore and strangers wave a  
tearful farewell.  
I pull the postcard out and the pen appears again  
I write down four words,  
"Wish you were here."

# GROWTH

By Tina Zhang, Age 18



## COMING HOME

*Elise Wong, Age 14*

The people around are hectic. Little kids are scattered, despite their mother's will. Businessmen rush to their hotels in hopes of getting a few hours of shut-eye before their big meeting later in the morning. Even my own mother is tapping away at her phone, probably just looking at text messages that she missed while we were away, but stubbornly insisting that she is checking to see when my grandfather will pick us up.

I am quiet. Maybe because I don't want to add to the noise, maybe because I'm thinking of something completely irrelevant, but probably because I'm back home and the reality of all my responsibilities have come flooding back.

While my brain carries these thoughts, my feet carry my body through a set of sliding glass doors. The air around me suggests that it will only get colder if I venture past yet another set of doors and into the world.

It does.

My backpack is heavy on my shoulders and I am exhausted. The bag slips from my grasp onto the hard, grey cement. Thump. I pull my coat tighter around my body.

The sky outside is at my eyes' disposal. The stars shimmer and twinkle with no sign of indigo ever turning to azure. It's dark outside – a blank slate. The kind of clear darkness where it is ripe with possibility and you're not sure whether the next day will bring sunshine or rain clouds.

Taxi headlights pass through, picking up and dropping off people as they go. The occasional car blinds me as they jolt over the speed bump, climbing up the asphalt hill. Soon my family is piling luggage into the trunk of my mom's Toyota Highlander, driven by my grandfather.

Assembling and reassembling in hopes of fitting all the bags in the back without needing them to invade our leg room. Hugs are passed around and ungraceful clambering into the car is done. Popcorn and chip bags are opened, and the chatter begins. Lighthearted laughter fills the vehicle and soon a silence passes over. It is not an awkward silence, but rather a comfortable one, but quiet, so quiet. It's better this way, I suppose. I can collect my thoughts; I can admire the stillness. My mother and sister hate it and they start their own conversation. I sit with my hand supporting my head, letting my eyelashes brush the frosted-over glass each time I blink. I can hear myself breathe. I shift and my jacket crinkles. The position and the atmosphere are nice enough and I drift off.

Something knocks me, and I wake up. Only a lone water bottle rolling between the passenger seat and mine. I pick it up and bring it close to my body, letting sleep take over again.

The car stops. Through the foggy window and through the frosted glass in the front door, I see my grandma's face. Stretching out, I help everybody unload the luggage and heaps of gifts my mother has decided to give out. My tired limbs take me to the back of the car and to the front door. My arms weighted with bags, I push the front door open a little bit more, just enough for me and the bags to fit through. I breathe – just breathe. It always smells like whatever my grandma has previously been cooking. The TV is on, displaying the CNN logo proudly below a messy graph of data. The air is warm, and every light but the ones in the kitchen and living room are off.

This is it. I'm home.

## WASTED EMOTIONS

*Shelly Bahng, Age 17*

haley took that photo of us (it's still on her Insta) we take up a third of the photo, in the background, just slightly off from the supposed real subject of the pic holding hands and smiling at each other if you look closely you can see our mouths saying, I like this, this is nice. we said those languid words, hoping they would have the same affect, because we couldn't dare say I like you. but why can't we?

I like you. do you know that I like you, not because you like me, but because you let me like you? I adore you, and you accept the ways I show it the maternal ways of treats and snacks and that's enough because of you, I stopped staring at untied shoelaces because to see your glinting green eyes I need to look up

why can't we be obvious? acquiescent / give in / eagerly I listen to my favourite songs and wish the next time I hear them with you, my lips will be too busy to mouth the words put your finger on my lips glide along and there are bumps and scrapes of my own doing in your path then, there's a wetness it is saline and shamed into hiding these goosebumps are every nerve in my body rising for you

will you rise for me? can I lift your grey sweater stretch its threads

change the pattern of its knitting (you already changed the pattern of my day) stain it with my acrylic colours you say you'll taint me that I don't deserve your murky palette I wonder how long I can hide behind words because when I say my mood is bright blue I mean, bright blue is still blue

I am full of spite from wasted time and wasted emotions these feelings are to be spent like currency, not saved up to nothing. let's spend it on the smooth planes of your body and the rough curves of mine share the stories beneath your scabs and I'll tell you how I patched up mine

we talked about stars, but we never walked on starlit streets together if we had, you would have seen my eyelashes heavy-loaded, full of ideas they remain as just, ideas

like me, so I can like you as much as I want, as much as I please and you can do the same.

## LIT BY MOONLIGHT

Elly Noetzel, Age 16

Achilles had always loved the lake at night. He lived on the lake, and spent his whole life there, so it was hard to love it, and during the day he only really liked it. But at night, the lake was clear and glassy and lit by moonlight, the waters only disturbed by a boat or two during summer. The night he met Joshua, it was raining, which meant the lake was completely empty. The other boy was sitting on the dock of the resort that was three doors down from Achilles' house. Achilles had been sitting on his own family's dock when he noticed him. The other boy's face was partially obscured by darkness, but moonlight hit the rest, giving him an ethereal glow. He had a slim frame, and old fashioned glasses were perched upon his boyish face. His dark brown hair was stuck around the bottom of his neck and around his ears, but it still had a slight curl. Achilles was instantly entranced. He wondered if the handsome boy was gay. He would be too scared to ask, but the night was egging him on and he went over to introduce himself. He trespassed through three properties, knowing that the neighbours wouldn't care, as his bay was a community where everybody trespassed on everybody's property. The handsome boy turned around and Achilles felt his breath catch in his throat a little bit and his stomach flipped upside-down, and he wondered if this was a good idea. He figured it would be too late to change his mind now, so he bravely walked forward and sat down cross legged next to the handsome boy. "You shouldn't be in the lake if it's raining. Chance of lightning, don'tcha know."

"I'm not in the lake, eh? And do Minnesotans really say don'tcha know?"

Achilles laughed, and for once it was genuine. "Some do. I just wanted to make sure you knew I knew what I was talking about. And your feet are in the lake, that counts. And do Canadians really say 'eh'?"

"Sometimes, but not in the way I used it. And I know you know what you're talking about, but you're wrong."

"Do you have a death wish? If lightning hits the water your feet could get electrified, along with the rest of you!" Achilles grabbed the other boy's bare hand with his own, half amazed with his own bravery, "and, if you get electrified, you'd electrify me too, and I don't think you'd want your death on my conscience."

Death Wish laughed, and he seemed ten pounds lighter.

"No, I guess I don't."

Death Wish took his feet out of the water and Achilles was proud of himself for winning the argument, but he kept their hands entwined. He didn't know why. He chalked it up to the late hour.

"So what's your name, Death Wish?"

"You guessed it. It's Death Wish. That's what they call me. What's yours... um... Minnesotan?"

Achilles laughed genuinely for the second time that day. "That was weak. Mine's Achilles. Strange, I know, but that's what my parents named me. I like it though. It's... nevermind. You have a lovely name too Mr. Wish."

Death Wish paused, before speaking again. "Why thank you Achilles. And did you mean to say your name is... Achillean?"

"Well of course it's Achillean. My name is Achilles. Is your name Death Wish-ian?"

Death Wish shook his head. "No, I mean, is your name Achillean. Like, male Sapphic?"

"I have no idea what Sapphic is. Is that something to do with sapphires?"

"Nevermind."

Achilles inwardly cursed. He had no idea what this boy was asking, and he knew it was important and meaningful, but he didn't know why – all he knew is that there was something in him that was telling him to get to know this boy. He decided to change the subject to save himself from the confusion and the anxiety.

"So can I get your snapchat? After all, I don't really want to pay international fees to text you." Achilles winked, as if that was the smoothest pick up line in the world.

Death Wish grinned. "Sure, let me just..."

Achilles surrendered his phone to the grabby hands of Death Wish. Death Wish hunched over Achilles' phone, and after a little while, he handed it back. Achilles looked at his phone. Death Wish had given himself the nickname Death Wish on his phone, but Death Wish's username was right under the nickname.

"So Joshua, add me when you get back to WiFi, and we can snapchat. Do you want to hang out tomorrow?"

Joshua grinned at the use of his name, but he also looked vaguely stunned. "How did you know my name?"

"It's in your snapchat username."

"Oh okay. Where should we meet? And I'm busy all day, so can we meet in the evening?"

Achilles grinned even more. "Meet me here, around seven-ish tomorrow. Bring your swim

trunks."

"I'm actually busy all day. Will you bring your dog?"

"How did you know I had a dog?"

"I didn't, wishful thinking maybe. Also you seem like the person who totally has a dog, like, a big one."

Achilles laughed, thinking of Fang, his Yorkshire terrier at his house.

"I'll bring Fang."

"Fang?"

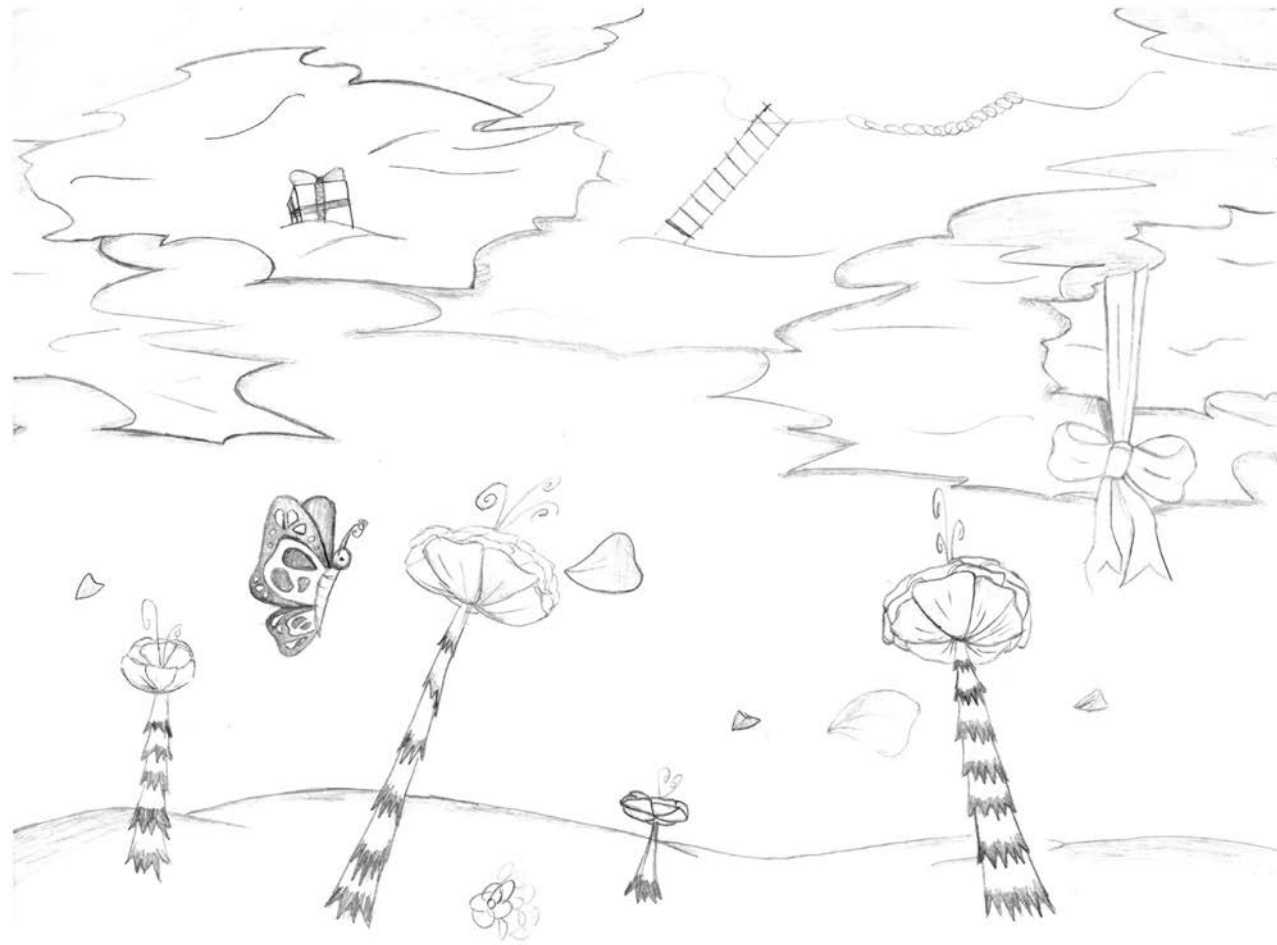
"Harry Potter reference."

"How could I forget?"

The two boys continued to converse for a while, making each other laugh at times, and just getting to know each other. Achilles alternated between calling Joshua by his name, and Death Wish. Joshua was sixteen, like Achilles, he was anemic, and he liked to dance. In return, Achilles told him about his D&D club, and the time he ran a 10k. After about an hour, Joshua yawned, and Achilles realized how tired he was. They said goodnight, and Joshua went back to his Uncle Patrick's, while Achilles walked back to his house, grinning like a complete idiot.

# THE DAY OF THINKING

Roxanna Wang, Age 15



# MY IDENTITY

Jazmin Estes, Age 16



## AZAYLE

Aisha Stewart, Age 17

Dragons, magic and happy endings. Eli was able to differentiate these from reality ever since he was young. He knew they were not real, and he was aware of what real life was like. It wasn't as simple as what they tell you when you're young. The stories of simple lives, happy endings. None of them were true.

That didn't mean he didn't wish that those fairytales were real, though... He'd kill to live in a world like that.

While most describe their depression as a numbness, Eli would describe his as a hyperawareness.

He didn't come from the best of families. He did poorly in school, eventually dropping out in only grade nine.

In reaction to what was happening in his life, Eli slept. A lot. When he wasn't sleeping, he was writing. Write, sleep, eat, repeat. That's just how life was for him. He loathed it- he wished that he could do well in school. He wished he had friends. Eli wished for a lot of things, really, but this was real life.

To ignore the ugly toxicity of the world, Eli turned to his characters and worlds through his writing. What started out as a coping mechanism soon turned into an obsession, then to an addiction. Eli needed to write, he needed these characters. When he wasn't writing- fantasizing or even planning these stories and characters, he'd get so upset – so furious – with the reality that was his own.

Eli could barely keep his eyes open as he wrote the death of a character. He was working on this for quite a while, leading up to the assassination of the king. With a yawn he lowered his head onto the pages of his journal and closed his eyes. As he fell asleep, it almost felt like he fell through the pages of the book...

Eli... wasn't as scared as he should have been, having just woken up in a strange place. One would think that he would be scared as all hell, but after he realized where he had woken up- he wasn't scared. In fact... he was ecstatic.

The brick streets were busy and buzzing with creatures and people. Buildings and structures varied in size. The smaller ones seemed to be shops... the signs were in a foreign language. Larger buildings seemed to be built out of rock, the same rock that the streets were made of. They were a part of the ground. They towered above the city, but the biggest was at the base of the mountain that the city was on. A huge castle which made the stone buildings seem like shacks. Behind the castle was a waterfall, with water flowing under the castle which was built on top of a river, through the middle of the city and off of the mountain it was on.

Eli realized where he was after he left where he woke and bumped into several people - creatures- characters when he was walking. They were his characters. He recognized all of them. He was in a story- his city that he created through his writing.

Azayle.

At first Eli convinced himself that he was dreaming, but Eli knew the difference between reality and dreams. Then he thought maybe he was having some big trip... Or, maybe he passed away and this was some kind of afterlife... After a few days and nights Eli didn't care anymore. He was here - in Azayle. Eli got used to it quite easily. He was a god in this world.

Eli wandered around the streets, daydreaming about more. He already had everything he wished for - this place, these people, dragons, magic, happy endings... Even so, he could do more. He wanted more.

As he roamed the streets a pixie took notice of his thoughts. The pixie flew beside him. At first glance, they looked like tiny stars floating around everyone and everything. Any pixie that took interest in your thoughts would choose you, and their job as a pixie would begin. They'd whisper little things into your ears, telling you what to do. Of course you didn't have to listen to them, but they were still always there.

"Hurry up, find one," The pixie's voice was so quiet, so surreal, as the pixie flew around Eli's head. The pixie even flew through his chocolate brown locks, which fell down his back in curls. 'You can be so powerful... The Great King, Eli V. Johnson... You just need that journal...'

"Where do I even get one...?" Eli asked, his voice low and gravelly, like he was sick, unlike the pixie who was now following him. The tones of her voice were soft and silvery, almost like a musician who was tapping a triangle.

Nobody could see the grin on the pixie's face as she spoke to Eli. He gave into her suggestions easily. "There's a cave... behind the waterfall... the journal will be there..."

After a journey with this little pixie, who was constantly whispering to him - filling his mind with dreams of him being a king, he made it behind the huge waterfall. The sound of water was ringing in his ears as he made his way around.

The cave was dark, with only shimmers of light going through the water and hitting the crystals which covered the walls and ceiling. Eli's only reliable light came from his new, tiny friend. "There..."

His journal was there, in the middle of the cave looking just as he remembered it. Grinning, he picked up the worn, leather bound book. As soon as he did- for a moment, everything went black and everything went still... he looked up from his journal to see what happened. What he saw was worse than anything that could have happened. He saw someone who he hated. His older sister. "Eli!!! Where the hell am I?! Where did you come from?!"

The pixie grinned. Her plan was already slipping into place.

## THE STUDIO

Alex Dines, Age 17

It was just before 10 when he arrived at the studio. The windows were dark and boarded up with thick planks of wood. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a crumpled business card he had received from the photographer a week earlier. He smoothed it out and checked the address on the card. The numbers on the studio doors and the paper were identical and with a sigh, he made his way up the steps to the front door.

The door gave off a strong aroma of oak and he inhaled deeply. The smell made something in his stomach twitch and he swallowed. He pushed the doors and they squeaked softly before opening, creaking as they did. He hurried inside the studio and surveyed the building. It was dimly lit, bare, with only a spiralling staircase leading heaven knows where.

The doors shut behind him and a feeling of unease swept over him in a frantic wave. He rubbed his hands together and folded his arms in an attempt to keep warm. The temperature had dropped drastically from the outside world to this strange dungeon.

"Third floor," a voice called from above and he craned his neck to find the speaker. The darkness looming over him was impenetrable and he cautiously took the stairs one at a time.

He passed what he assumed was the first floor and caught a glimpse of a stack of books and an empty wine glass.

"Keep coming please" the voice called out, and he hurried up the stairs.

He reached the third floor and was greeted by a blinding light. He squinted and edged into the centre of the room. It was large and bare, like the ground floor, but with more furniture. There was a ladder leaning up against the left wall, a lounge

chair in the centre of the room, and a white sheet standing seemingly by itself against the furthest wall.

"Welcome to my studio, please sit down." The voice came from behind him and as he turned around, he came face to face with a tall, black-clad figure. He stared up at the figure in awe, marvelling at their height and strange attire.

"Are you my 10 o'clock?" The figure asked and he snapped out of his daze, realizing that this was the photographer.

"Yes," he said, holding out his hand, "that's me."

The photographer glanced down at his extended hand and shook it lightly.

"Sit," the photographer said firmly and he sat on the ladder that had suddenly moved from the left wall to directly in front of the white sheet. He inched onto the third step and looked around the studio in curiosity. The ceiling, walls, and floor were all plywood and there wasn't a single window. Strange, he thought, I swore there were windows on the outside.

"Tilt your head and prop your knee up onto the second step," the photographer said and he obeyed. A flash went off and he twisted his head to look at the figure. They were holding an old camera and studied him with an unsettling amount of interest.

"Head to the left," the photographer said and he turned his head obediently. Another flash went off and he heard the photographer chuckle.

"You have nice eyes," the photographer said sweetly.

"Thanks," he mumbled, "I got them from my father."

Another flash went off and he felt slightly dizzy.

"Tilt to the right," the photographer commanded and he felt his neck turn his head subconsciously.

"I've always liked my eyes," he mumbled, "my mother says they make me look like a movie star."

Another flash.

"Your mother's right," the photographer said, "but mothers are always right."

"No," he scoffed, "she's never right."

Another flash.

The room was silent for a couple of seconds with the exception of his heavy breathing. He felt so dizzy and dropped his head into his lap.

Another flash.

"What does she get wrong?" The photographer inquired.

"Everything," he mutters, "she just doesn't understand. She's not like my father."

Another flash.

"Where's your father?" The photographer's hypnotic voice washed over him and he raised his head to meet the photographer's eyes. They were as dark as their attire and seemed endless. He felt as if he could drown in them.

"He's dead." His voice trembled and the photographer raised the camera. He waited for the next flash.

"How'd he die?"

The question hung in the air between them and he wrapped his arms around his body.

"A wine barrel crushed him," he whispered and

closed his eyes, still waiting for the flash.

"How did it crush him? Surely the wine barrel couldn't have rolled by itself on top of him."

"It was loose. It hadn't been tightened correctly the night before."

The photographer stood suddenly and disappeared into the darkness. He waited in anticipation, massaging his head with his palms. He sighed and watched his exhale meander around the almost empty room, searching for an escape.

"What day of the week did your father die?" The photographer's voice came from the darkness and he shivered.

"Wednesday," he replied, "Wednesdays were the days my mother checked the barrels."

"Did she do it?"

"No. The barrels were loosened the night before, on Tuesday. My father had gone to check for a rat my sister spotted and the barrel crushed him as soon as he opened the door. It crushed him like a boot crushing an ant. It should've crushed her," his voice grew louder and it echoed across the room. "It should've killed her," he growled, "it was supposed to kill her. I wanted her to die!"

Flash.

He blinked, slowly realizing the words that had come out of his mouth. He stood up suddenly and stared into the darkness, searching for the photographer.

"Go," the photographer whispered, "I have my picture and you have your confession. Go, and don't come back."

He ran as fast as he could.

# UNTITLED

Kara Yeh, Age 15



# ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Zainab Sayedain, Age 15

anything is possible;

Children are told that  
anything is possible  
in the same breath that they are told  
that life isn't fair,  
and that they cannot  
have everything they wish for.

It is now up to us  
to choose which mentality we would like  
to carry throughout our lives.

It seems that the majority have chosen.

A switch doesn't flip  
at the magical age of eighteen,  
where we are suddenly able to think  
critically –  
no, it is an ability  
that we constantly develop.

To invalidate the voices and abilities of minors  
and to glorify those of superiors,  
is to do society a  
disservice.

Youth are the future;  
passionate, aware,  
and constantly experiencing the results  
of so many broken systems.  
We may not have all of the answers,  
but we have hope, and the ability  
to fight for something better.

We choose to understand  
that life isn't fair;  
however,  
with the utmost common sense that one can  
have,

we refuse to accept it.



## FOREST FIRE

*Emily Louis, Age 13*

The night is humid  
Shadows silently move through the dense green  
undergrowth  
Peaceful  
Quiet  
Tranquil  
But not for long  
Something blots the moonlight  
A mighty lion in the sky, once peaceful  
But now summoned by the commotion in the  
clouds  
Gives a mighty roar, once again the king  
Not the king of the jungle, but the king of the sky  
Flashes crash down  
Showering the earth with terror, shattering all  
hope  
And then  
It touches a mighty giant  
The colossal being fights the blaze  
But it cannot resist the scarlet tongues  
Licking  
The thick bark  
That a time ago  
Protected it  
But now  
Burns it down.  
Destroys it  
Demolishing it  
And bringing the scent of death.  
The red flower moves quickly, blooming on every  
tree's branches  
Leaving the forest charred  
Black  
Imperfect  
And scarred.  
But finally  
The fallen giants seem to give a sigh of relief  
And the lion is silenced once again  
By the sound of heavy tears  
Falling to the ground  
And bringing life  
To the earth

## BULLYING

*Melinda Yang, Age 14*

Grade 1, she glared at me  
She looked unfriendly  
She made me wipe her desk at lunch  
As she mocked and punched  
But time marches on

Grade 3, she ripped my test  
To not cry, I tried my best  
I was scared to tell the teacher  
she will hit me even harder  
But time marches on

Grade 5, I moved away  
But two more bullies came  
They stole my things  
And acted just like queens  
But time marches on.

Grade 7, I finally became free  
I learned how deep friends should be  
I really enjoy this peaceful place  
I want to slow down the pace...  
But time is marching on...

## SOPHIA TOLSTAYA

Irene Zhang, Age 16

First draft. Beautiful lies, Kitty, stunning toothless tongues tying your heart in knots after knots. Spit all over the diaries, the sheets in shreds and untied limbs and stained embraces behind the estate, where you first blushed at the beard, future bard; lost Count. Where, several inches beneath the chalices and chains, a serf boy looks eerily like the heir.

Second draft. Moved into that very house. Keeping watch over the terrace, soft Slavic night snatching his loose robes. I was trained well - made for these sleepless starlights, candlelit solitudes - in the art of looking the other way. Remember the maid in the diaries: there aren't enough ways of being unhappy.

Third draft. Thirteen swollen bellies, all the boys roll out with white threads poking out of their chubby chins, the girls with heads of raven black, my Tatyana and Maria and Alexandra and Varvara. Oh. Varvara. Slipped away from my sight to follow Peter and Nikolai's laughs in the nursery, silky infant songs, Angel voices. That night, separate bedrooms. Until he crawled back in.

Fourth. The more he absorbed and exhaled, the less he knew of the flesh and bone. The blood poking out of my shirt lost in his wrinkled brain. Hindu Boxers rewriting the Sermon on the Mount. I knelt by the window, swept the acres and acres of snow with prayers and royalties. Froze the white walls and green tiles before they can burn on his altars of anarchy. I wore armour for peace.

Fifth. Calluses grew. I drew in my own words the picture of a beautiful house, beady bawdy miles

of bile swirling over dirty goddamn laundry. Every night after dark, after the pen has rebuilt on fair paper pieces of his mind, madman, miracle, mastermind. My plight on the petite notebook. My photographs taken behind the doors, between my dress and dread until the

Sixth; ink ran out. He ran off. I guess it was an alright call after all - the only place I cannot look away from is the blazing boudoir of my own heart. It demanded to know that after hatred burns down Yasnaya Polyana I can still restart. Fingers in his drawers looking for my future locked in legalese. On his way out he picked out Alexandra. To take my place.

Seventh. The very last. Blade to my wrist and blaze to his throat. Only one cuts. Frozen roads of Astapovo, rivers of antipathy shivering close to thawing. Except his eyes are already forming icicles, all the wars forced into a classic Russian peace. On the tracks I was reminded of Anna; but again my Karenin needs no martyr. He had his own heaven and hell. And so out of 1917 I go. Close the shutters. Not one more show.

## A LETTER

Shelley Tong, Age 15

November 1941.

It was almost dawn. The chilly wind blew through my fragile layers of clothes, ushering nothing but terrifying coldness as the barren moon flickered under the lissome clouds.

"Dear sister Cecilia," my numb fingers strenuously wrote down these words, "Everything is going to be fine." That was a lie. Starvation and coldness have taken possession of the soldiers, weaving a web of an intangible nightmare.

"We've been in the Soviet Union for almost five months, and the Nazi party is now advancing towards Moscow." I painfully continued writing, ignoring the itching purulence that was continually distracting me. The world was still swallowed by darkness, accompanied by the gush of wind and cracking footsteps on the chunky snow.

Laying my back on a pine tree while lighting a cigarette, I tightened my Nazi uniform that was stained with the blood. "November in the Soviet Union is excessively cold, and many brave comrades had fought, and sacrificed their lives on this very land." Glancing over the corpses lying in the snow, I timorously examined the twisted faces and the contour of the skeletons under the sheer cover of skin.

I continued. "However, as the night begins its reign, I think of our sweet home." The tranquil suburb crept into my unconscious thoughts like a cat sneaking in the dark duskiness. "My dear sister, please tell mom I'm safe and sound," I kept on writing, recalling mother's pale and blue eyes. In my vague juvenile memory, she was always there to greet me with an affectionate smile. "And tell her I miss the pies she used to bake for me." I paused to ponder, vaping warm smoke from my mouth to expel the ghastly

coldness.

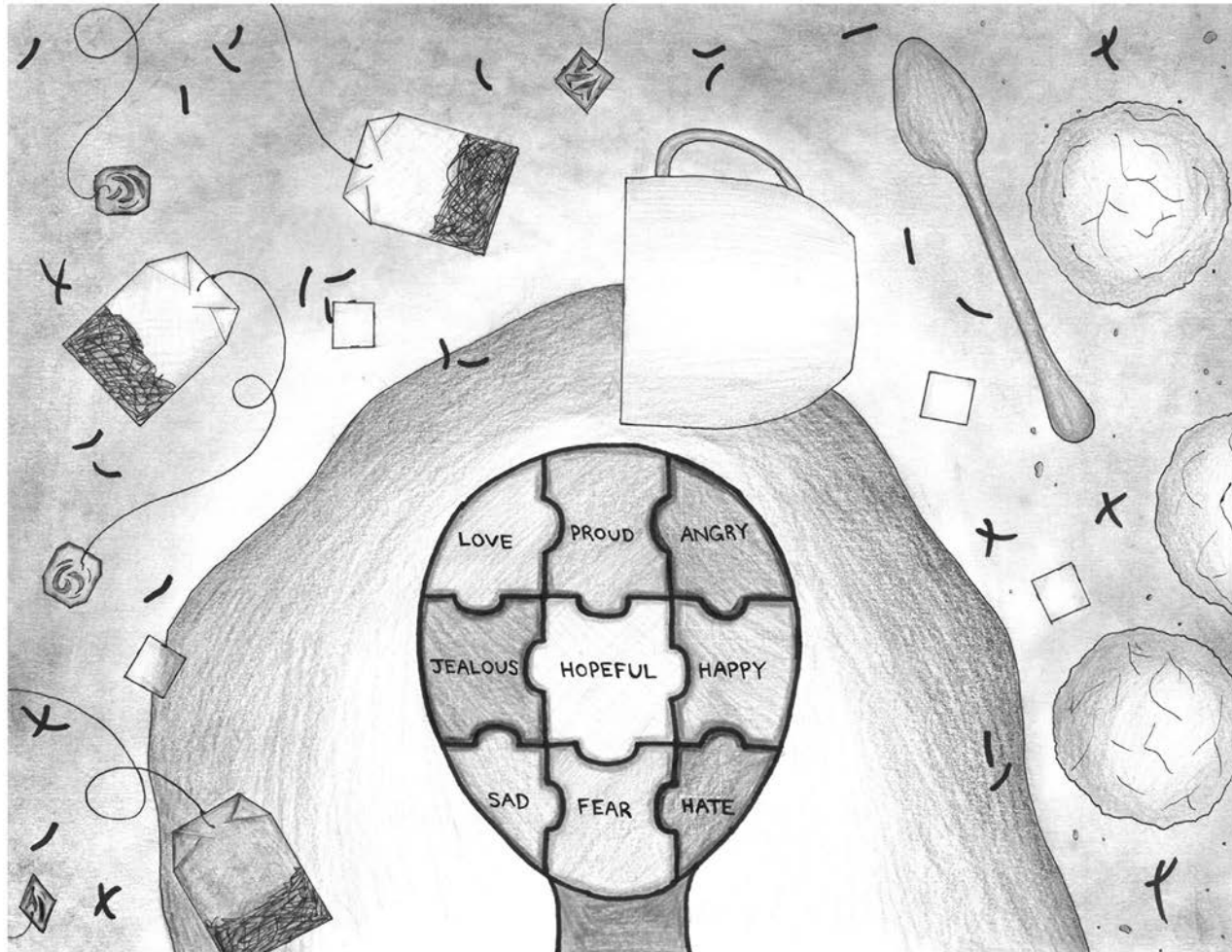
As the appalling solitude rested over the snowy field and the starry sky, I grabbed my pen to resume my writing. "This is a difficult time for the Germans, but we must not lose our fate in the victory." Then I tossed the remaining cigarette to the blanket of snow and watched it turn into a pile drab ashes. "Stay Strong. Send all my love to you and mother." I signed my name with a quivering hand full of wounds and tenderly sealed the letter.

When I heard the blowing of the whistle, I knew it was time for the troop to proceed into the unknown. Twilight has drawn near as the objects in the surroundings nebulously shaped themselves.

I faltered impassively on the virgin snow, trudging further and further. At last, the troop disappeared in the distance.

## ME

Connie Zhou, Age 15



## UNTITLED POEM

Natasha Cross, Age 16

When I sat down  
To write this verse  
I didn't know what I was feeling

I didn't know how to express it  
Into a graceful string of words  
That would flow from my tongue

Amongst analogies  
And similes  
Metaphors and imagery

I didn't know how to make my voice heard  
In a soft manner  
Beautiful and quiet but  
Rationing  
Inquisitive  
Thoughtful

I always tell myself  
When I write a poem  
I want it to make sense  
I want the words to harmonize

No starting a clause and  
Abandoning it mid-thought  
No sharp, angled edges  
No wrinkled exterior

And here I am sitting  
Waiting for the magic to happen  
And I've got nothing

Slippery letters  
Words  
Clumsily placed  
Reeking of instability

I will miscommunicate to you  
That I want to write  
But I don't know how

I've lost my inspiration  
And I'm trying to find it  
Amongst the hundreds of crumpled up papers  
Lined up sequentially  
Row upon row  
Ordered by rejection

And I am tired  
I am hopeful  
And I am a little bit sad

I am pushing it away  
Ignoring it  
Focusing on the beauty  
Even when it's difficult to spot

And it's new  
And it's hard  
But I think I like it

Because it's hard to bare  
Your entire soul  
Into just one work  
Of poetry

I don't owe this to anyone  
Except maybe myself

When I sat down  
To write this verse  
I didn't know what I was feeling

## ICEBOX

*Cate Freeborn, Age 15*

there is a grocery list in her back pocket,  
it's white and brittle and  
her fingers fumble for  
its familiar ashen touch in  
the diffusive chill of aisle seventeen.  
half-pound of chicken breast organic pecans  
cruciferous vegetables  
it's one of those mega-marts swirling dust  
on an infertile thread of highway  
west of cornfield and east of lonely,  
the customers in their muddied pick-up trucks  
looking for someplace to be, someplace to  
belong,  
looking for someplace that never opens or shuts.  
discount champagne rainbow sprinkles neon  
glow sticks  
she doesn't know how she ended up here, in the  
freezer aisle  
alone, lips blue, ligaments  
buried blue and lifeless in a stray icebox,  
but still her  
brined fingers smooth the pockets of a  
pretty, smiling girl  
who burns a minute hole  
in the crinkled seal of a reduced-fat  
yogurt container, smiling  
like her teeth are about to burst,  
smiling like she just kissed the dentist  
in his white coat.

bottle of moonshine whole wheat bread insulin  
needles  
and tenderly she eases the airtight packaging  
from its gentle perch, and peels open  
the small, eroded cavity in her torso. the ribs are  
pared raw,  
glisten harshly in the fluorescent lights, like disco  
balls and  
bleached tile, as she lodges a kilogram  
of weighted relief, of happy beginnings  
and lily bunches on a baby's grave,  
of never quite knowing where you fit  
or never quite knowing  
where to go or who to turn to  
when you are lost in perpetual lostness,  
near the hollow space where a tepid heart  
should swell.  
numbing cream prescription lenses bloodstained  
shirt  
a very tall man strolls past, clutching  
a frayed bundle to his ruptured abdomen,  
and she slips unnoticed to the  
floor, harsh, blinding rubber  
against a mile of skinned knee,  
pretending to read the grocery list  
her mother gave her  
before she stole through the ajar window  
late one february  
and became a missing-persons case.

## NIGHTMARE

*Irene Zhang, Age 16*

F---it.  
Martyr blood dyed my scarf red, or so you said,  
so I  
strained it to hang my childhood and brand it a  
suicide  
  
(or liver cancer).  
  
I giggle over champagne as you march into 1949  
one press conference at a time.  
Every nationalized bottle of water in that Soviet  
edifice laced with my  
cyanide. Every ballot scratched with bad words  
and  
every fire hydrant pumping gun powder instead.  
  
Go ahead and start the choreography. Celebrate;  
you won the 2035 vote  
today. Better get a standing ovation before  
too much heat rises from the palms.  
  
Boom.  
  
The crystal-coffin mummy tumbles.  
Unzipped teeth munch away at your pulpit, your  
newly-black hair.  
I shoot fireworks from my smartphone.  
  
Spell out f---dom with each explosion of poetic  
justice.

## LONG TIME, NO SEE

*Alex Dines, Age 17*

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
Those four little words you said to me  
Run deep, run dry  
Like a river whose current cuts through a naked  
sky.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
An old friend hammered nails into me,  
Now I cannot be, I cannot be  
Your sun, your star, your beauty queen strutting  
the downtown scene.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
Those four simple words now engraved in me,  
Pepper spray to a vulnerable eye,  
I do not see, I do not see  
The eternal hurt you've caused, placed, imprinted  
on me.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
You cannot pretend that you are a butterfly or a  
bee,  
One moves with grace and one has lost its  
beauty  
And you are a beast of the air, of the night, of my  
fury.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
Faster and faster runs the train that is my heart,  
Over mountains, underground,  
What was lost can never be found  
By you or any other treasure hunter  
Looking for trouble, answering to the call of  
thunder.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
A necklace made from broken teeth and fairy  
beads,  
I wait, wait, wait on a park bench in the rain,  
I beg and I plead till the afternoon clouds came  
But you found your fame, fame, untamed.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.

Those four little words mean the world to me,  
It is unknown whether you shall be crowned a  
king,  
I have neither the beauty or innocent face to be  
your queen,  
You made that as clear as the static on the silver  
screen.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
I have never feared any man more than thee,  
Everyone, I believe, has fallen victim to your  
schemes,  
I have never been in more disbelief  
Than when I remember those terrible words you  
said to me.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
I have fallen at your feet,  
To expect any more of me obscene,  
They gave you their lives and you threw it away  
For a sweet, sweet girl who must be prettier than  
me.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
You had the goddamn nerve to say those words  
to me,  
Coward, coward, coward I say,  
You had the nerve to say goodbye to little ole  
me,  
Me, the catalyst of your demise,  
Parasite, poltergeist, passive aggressive butcher  
knife.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
You had the goddamn nerve to walk away from  
me,  
An ocean of grief, I wanted to believe  
In hope, in God, in another word to say,  
A golden dawn to an everlasting day.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
Why did you have to go away?  
The bomb has gone off, shards of matter blown

Into the acid rain coming down in sheets around  
me.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
You had the goddamn nerve to say those  
moronic words to me,  
Your smell is the most potent among my cocaine  
flowers,  
Why didn't you wilt away when you stomped on  
my garden?  
Cracked like a mirror, fractured my light,  
I was told there were many more fish in the sea  
But your fishing hook is still stuck, stuck, stuck in  
me.

Long time, no see. Long time, no see.  
A matchbox built for three,  
Your honesty holds the key  
To crushed dreams, a castle I built by the  
unforgiving sea,  
None of us could have foreseen  
The horrors you would inflict on me.

## SPLASH OF CREATIVITY

Sulan Cang, Age 17

## THE UNCERTAINTY OF PLANS

Elise Lafleur, Age 17

Over the harbour, orange under grey twilit fog  
float ships' lights,  
beacons of cold and homecoming to one  
unsettled.

Relief and elation and success are more difficult  
than they are supposed to be after  
working to the point of burnout for so long  
and promising myself that I will be gentle when I  
am safe.  
Later.

I don't know how to be gentle with myself. I have  
always nurtured  
the people I am supposed to protect but been  
ruthlessly intent on  
my own perfection and  
to be told to relax and celebrate terrifies me  
because I have forgotten how  
and because it feels like an unforgivable  
indulgence.

It reminds me  
exactly how much friendship and reading and  
freedom to make mistakes  
I have given up  
how much of my personality has been formed  
around being approvable and worthy.  
When you tell me to stop pushing myself,

I rage.  
Are you discounting  
the sacrifices of happiness I have made these five  
years?  
I'm angry that I made them that I let myself  
believe  
others were hinting I should make them.

If I am gentle with myself  
I don't know what  
self denial and self control, what strength  
will fall away next  
leaving me burned out and unable to ignore it  
as I have done so many times because I had to.

don't anymore.



## THE MOON

Shelly Bahng, Age 17

The night sky is as clear as the cold air. Christie let out a breath, and a translucent white fog fumed out of her mouth. The pavement was steady beneath her feet, grounding her to the faint reality in her already inebriated brain. She saw her reflection in the car window, it was too dark out here to check if her eyeliner's smudged but she didn't need a distinct reflection of her face to know that she looked like shit. There was a breeze around her bare legs and through her washed-black denim skirt. The night was only beginning, but she already knew the night would be memorable, though she was sure she'll hardly remember it tomorrow.

The crowded apartment was barely lit. A raging party was happening in there, only the second one she had entered this night. There was noise, swear words coming out of speakers and sweaty bodies bent over, they shook and shivered all night and they'll be sore tomorrow morning. Amongst the intoxicated faces, there was one she wanted to see but didn't want to face. A picture of pale green eyes full of contempt, body language full of discomfort as arms flail right before a hug is decided to be a bad idea floats in her mind. Meaningless words and lies like "I'm good" flew around. The word "pathetic" came to mind.

When Christie got there, the unexpected happened. His eyes were not avoiding her, and his body passed by her as he reached for another drink. His arm hit hers and he apologized, looked up and said something bland but laughable. Instead of looking up and meeting his eyes, she muttered a meek reassuring phrase and moved onto the sofa. Christie sat down, her flushed bare legs stretched out over the ivory carpet, and her eyes trailed back to him. He was wearing the same grey sweater he wore on their first date and a smile on his face. She wondered when he stopped being sad. Then, she got up from the

comfort of the sofa, and the discomfort of the ambient presence of the guy next to her. "Hey," she heard the moment she got up, but ignored it and went to the kitchen table. She poured another drink into her cup, figuring she needed another one to handle the possible conversations ahead of her.

"How do I look?" Her friend, Lan posed in front of her, his hand on his hips and wearing a red glittery crown on his head; who knows where he got it from in this extravagant house.

"Absolutely ridiculous, but, it's fitting," she simply put, as she took a significant gulp out of her cup. "How could you say that!" Lan gasped, then put a hand on the place of his heart, "you really hurt my feelings, Chris."

Christie shrugged her bare shoulders and finished up her drink. Her petite lavender top grazed her upper body freely and her ample legs were peeking out of her skirt. The frayed edges skimmed her thighs as if acrobats were hanging on the strings. Instead of engaging in conversations, Christie listened to Lan talking about a series of different bad dates with a girl who hated dogs and a guy who was arrogant. Christie's eyes wandered to meet His eyes. He smiled, and she smiled back. She wondered if it was convincing enough, but was also surprised at how effortless and painless it actually was. She wondered when she stopped being sad.

"What have you been writing lately?" Lan asked. Clearly, he sensed that Christie was out of it and knew exactly what topic would centre her. This time, he was mistaken.

"I've stopped writing lately." Christie replied and tried not to feel ashamed.

"How come?" Lan furrowed his eyebrows.

"I've been writing so much about boys. Boys who probably go about their day not even sparing me a thought. I want to stop writing about them." She lowered her voice to make sure He didn't hear her. She knew there was no way of making sure.

"You and I both know you're never gonna stop writing about boys," he said, stating the obvious.

The Moon

"But you don't know if he's not thinking about you," Lan said affirmatively, and Christie rolled her eyes at his use of "he" instead of "they". She had hoped to make the topic general and not about Him, who was sitting right there on the green sofa.

"I think, in my own humble opinion, as a boy who likes both boys and girls," Lan said with a hand on his chest, "that boys think about girls as much as girls who like boys do, but girls are so grand for us, too heavy for us to hold on our pens. So we don't write about girls that often. We're too much in awe. When we do, we reduce girls down to their sadness, and reduce even their sadness down to the sadness they have for boys."

"If only my sadness only came from boys."

Christie muttered and gulped down her third drink of the night.

"Sounds like there's a simple solution."

"What?"

"You could start writing about girls. Specifically, one girl." He said as he poked her near her collarbone and grinned at her.

Later, Christie left the party and stared at the

moon. A cloud covered her, but she waited. She was still emitting bright light through the seams of the frothy cloud. Soon, the cloud moved away. He disturbed another star, or bothered a satellite trying to do their job. The moon stayed. She does not falter. She was full, but her potential is unsaturated. She is glorious and powerful and as bright as can be. After some time, she will no longer remember how tight he held her with his heavy tear-filled biceps. She won't remember how the only time he cried was when she told him to leave her. She won't even remember his name. After all, she changes every day.

## WORLDS APART

Emily Ma, Age 14

A mother in Syria  
Cradles her daughter  
Smoothing out her hair,  
The sound of bombs muting their embrace  
Clutching her daughter to her chest  
She pleads that life will stay there in that small  
frame  
Of bone and flesh.

While another mother in North America  
Smooths the sheets of the blanket with her  
hand  
Tucking her daughter into bed with all the  
dreams and wishes and aspirations she has  
Wondering  
Will she graduate? Will she become a doctor?  
An engineer? A writer? An artist?

Looking at her child, she sees limitless potential  
embodied in the small frame of  
Flesh and bone.

Yet her voice is loud and clear  
without hesitation  
When she shouts  
Build that wall  
Keep them out.  
Close our borders

To the mother and the daughter in Syria  
Huddled fearfully in their home  
Bombs raining down on them, terror-stricken.

A boy tears away from his opponents  
Panting, sweat dripping from his brow  
His skates carving the ice  
And the puck dancing nimbly between the  
blades of his stick  
Dancing straight into the back of the net.

While another boy flees from his home in Eritrea  
So he doesn't have to fight in a war  
That is not his.

Wondering  
If he will ever see his family alive  
Again.

A girl pushes through the pain  
Her chest heaving,  
Her body contorted into unnatural positions  
Toes pointed elegantly  
The music she dances to singing gently in her  
ears.

While another girl pushes through the pain  
Her knees to her chest contorted into an  
unnatural position  
In a boat crammed with people, desperate  
Watching as the roiling sea goes black, her father  
drowning before her eyes  
Screams ringing in her ears, the Mediterranean  
Sea littered with  
Bodies.

The mother in North America turns on the  
news, watching the screen fill with the faces of  
refugees,  
Fear trickling into her veins like cold water,  
thinking  
No, My daughter comes first.

We have to take care of our own.

They are invaders,  
parasites,  
swarms,  
taking all our jobs,  
threatening our safety  
terrorists.

The mother in Syria watches the rain mix with  
the tears on her daughter's face as they run,  
Fear swallowing her whole, thinking  
My daughter comes first.

And so they run.

They run, heart thumping in their throats,  
looking  
Back at their entire lives left behind.  
They run  
Toward a destination that never seems to be in  
reach  
And when it finally is  
Safety snatched from them just as they take their  
first breaths  
Of a new life.

No one wants to run from their homes, only  
To be greeted by a wall of not brick or stone, but  
of intolerance.  
The very air their first breaths inhaled were  
Toxic, choking, silenced.

"Go back to where you came from."  
Echos in my ears  
Harsh, scraping the skin, drawing blood  
Echos of what's been said to me.  
"Go back to where you came from."  
Still hurts, even when it isn't directed at me.  
"Go back to where you came from."

I sit in my classroom,  
Head pounding  
My biggest worry is the homework that I haven't  
yet completed.  
Complaining about how annoying my little sister  
is.

While another girl looks longingly at the pages of  
her old school books  
Heart broken  
Her biggest worry is whether or not she will ever  
go to school again,  
She holds her sister close to her chest  
Comforting her as the screaming sirens tear  
through the city.

I stand here now  
Surrounded by people willing to listen  
To the sound of my voice  
Describing the plight of refugees

She stands there now  
Let down by people around the world  
Passively watching  
The destruction of her country

In another home  
The refugees' dreams melt like candle wax as the  
flame dies

We tell each other to dream big, our aspirations  
chasing the sun.  
But their dreams are limited to time measured  
not in minutes or days  
But here and now  
Their future and safety merely an illusion.

Our dreams  
above theirs  
Our safety  
over theirs

Our privilege  
sets us  
Worlds  
Apart.



## LUCID DREAMING

Cate Freeborn, Age 15

in the back room, amid a membrane of  
congealed tobacco and fragmented dreams,  
eight or so men slump backsides against my  
grandma's old  
washing machine, the laundry beating in time to  
the jilted rhythm  
of their ruptured, war-torn arteries.  
aim-then-shoot!  
aim-then-shoot!  
aim-and-shoot boy!  
it is my grandfather, locking his wrists  
around an imaginary rifle, slipping the trigger  
on three,  
his mind a graying galaxy of tumours  
and delusions.

he and the men he once knew spool back  
threads of  
elasticated time,  
spines emaciated, arched  
concretely against an expanse of compressed  
titanium.  
they recount days spent crouched in the  
trenches  
and the perfume of blood,  
exchanging polaroid pinups: these ashen women  
with deadened eyes  
fishnet stockings pulled taut against silken  
thighs,  
a ration of pale, seamless breast,  
and nicotine-stained lips,  
pursed like she's got someplace to be.

*we all know she's just here for the photo*, a man  
in a threadbare  
blazer remarks.  
he curves his lip askew  
like the displaced ligaments  
of wartime women, slaving away at cutting  
boards  
in ragged dresses, peeling skin,  
open-wound souls.  
and they all toss their heads back, aching  
to dislocate laughter from clots of sawdust and  
saliva,  
where only the grunt following a bullet wound  
can be found.  
in their murky eyes, she exists for a singular  
photo:  
to pose for men,  
smile for men,  
raise spirits from the confines of a makeshift  
grave.  
she exists here, and only here.

because here, encased in this room,  
there is no other,  
no elsewhere.  
there is only a gas chamber, and a little girl in  
flannel knee socks,  
and her curls singed. there is a man with a gape  
in his chest, a wisp  
of stiff gauze stemming the ridges and rivulets of  
blood that intermingle with  
his gasoline-stained fingertips,  
and a dozen children's bullets drifting stagnant in

a bathtub.  
there is an old woman whose  
wizened tendrils clasp a clod of tenuous earth,  
the clod on which a precarious world stands,  
and there is a boy with a shotgun tucked  
beneath his right arm, and he blinks as he lodges  
it through his fossilized skull.  
his legs crumple  
like my grandfather's legs crumple, hooked in the  
slats  
of the wooden drying rack,  
where I lay, palpating, skin burning, knees  
tucked beneath the folds of a cousin's skirt.  
his eyes brush over me like gossamer, like  
shadow, a momentary eclipse.  
he clasps me tight, this man I know as a  
grandfather, and I blink  
as the bullet splits apart my temple. he towers  
above me, his smile faltering,  
dropping the gun to the floor  
as he drops with it.  
a faint, undulating thud.

then. there is only a then.  
a dozen heaving breaths,  
bodies dislocated and pallid on the floor.

and then silence, an unending thread of  
punctured silence.  
I press open my sockets,  
and here lies a back room, hollow like my ribcage  
and the dust mites, thick with a musty, residual  
scent,

thick with the melodious remnants of a dozen  
stolen wind chimes.  
I stagger to my feet, numb, procure an urn from  
the legs of the  
piano bench we carved as children,  
tighten my fingers around the glass as it  
ripples. softly, I carry it to the mantelpiece just  
outside,  
arrange it by the portrait of my grandmother as a  
young woman.  
her dull eyes smile through tears in black and  
white.

elsewhere, on the patio, my mother and her  
sister sit with their  
legs crossed,  
arranged stiffly around a sawdust table,  
thighs clad in translucent pantyhose.  
they wear their hair down  
and their coral lipstick blotted,  
like my grandmother above the fireplace,  
thirty years deceased.

## LEOPARDS

By Irina Choi, Age 13



## ANGEL

By Anonymous, Age 16

I advise you to not hide your feelings  
don't pretend to be okay when you're not okay.  
Don't pretend to be happy when you're sad.  
It'll only lead you to misery.

Don't you just hate it when you hear my name?  
I feel the same, and when you hear this you're going to feel this pain.  
And all these guys that you're messing with get away.  
But girl I know you think about it almost every day.  
And I'll be honest I be jealous of these guys too.  
How you feeling with these guys that you talk to?  
Captivated by your mind and your walk too.  
Can't replace these with these girls that I talk to.  
They say lust is love we had trust.

What's good?

I should've held you close should've kept you warm.  
And when the rain is falling wonder who you call, don't pray to God.  
You'd rather drive your car, don't talk pretend, it don't hurt, repent.  
I won't stomp my feet in rage, I'm no champ.  
This issue is I crave you, hate you, think I rip the wings off my angel.

## THE SCHEDULE

Max Biermann, Age 13

I wake up, same time as usual, 6:45 am. Take my shower, same amount of shower gel. I dry myself, the same towel, black and white stripes. Eat my cheerios, Honey Nut Cheerios, 50 grams of milk. I put on my favorite shoes with the same shoehorn I started using 14 years ago and walk out the door at exactly 7:45am. I walk down the corridor, mirroring my footsteps like every morning. I can see the shoe polish stains on the carpet. I reach the elevator, the old, cranky, unpredictable elevator. The one thing in my day that isn't on schedule. Sometimes it takes three seconds to arrive, sometimes seven minutes.

The elevator sounds are terrible and retched, like a hospital, the haunting noises of sickness and imminent death; other times you could hear the groans and moans of the machinery that held the elevator together, like a giant fighting against its shackles. It was disturbing. When the elevator arrived, the disasters it contained would torture me. The sweaty pads lining the sides of the elevator reeked of baked beans and sulfur; the spilt juice stains all over the floor. Pressing the buttons for the 9th, 12th or 3rd floor sets off the sprinklers inside. Sometimes the elevator would fly up uncontrollably and then stop for five minutes until it descended passing one floor per minute. The minute I left the elevator, everything would go back to normal.

My schedule was designed to handle the worst elevator experiences, giving myself twenty minutes for the elevator ride and an extra fifteen if I got soaked. I would go to the mailroom by 8:25 am, get to my navy blue Mercedes by 8:30 am, file my mail away in the glove box and be out of the garage by 8:33 and 48 seconds.

The rest of my day followed a similar, strict procedure. As my father always said, "There has never and will never be room for slacking!" He was a determined and ambitious man and, by the time he was 46, had earned millions. He sold his company to a family friend in order to help recreate his grandfather's old company. It was called "Apple," and my father's new slogan, "I make Jobs." Now I was the manager at Apple, my father sleeping in his millions, my great grandfather, Steve Jobs, buried under his tree in the gardens. Then it hit me. I would be buried under my tree, my schedule under one arm. It's 9:03 am. I turn in to park at the rusty, dented sign that reads, "BOSS SPOT- Do Not Park!" I enter through the automatic doors, enter the middle elevator and arrive on the 38th floor - a smooth 2 minute ride. I sit at my desk and go to work. Every day I complete 36 sales, take 109 calls and attend 22 meetings. I start off the day with a simultaneous call to every employee in the 39 floor building, reminding them to keep on top

of their work. I feel the most organised with my schedule. It has saved my life many times. I made the most important sale in Apple history by being on time and it stopped a bullet and three knives from killing me when I got cornered in an alley. I finish that day with a new record, 835 sales from the top 8 floors, the other 5 sales floor adding 203 sales to our record. This day would certainly be remembered.

I walk down the hallway, phones still ringing as the smooth, polished aluminium doors shut. My descent begins, same speed as normal. I'm in my car at 6:03 pm. Leave the garage, 6:05 pm. Open the garage at home, 6:35 pm. Parked, 6:36 pm. Grab my mail and walk to the inside door at 6:38 pm. Press the elevator button. 6:39 pm. 6:40 pm. 6:41 pm. 6:42 pm. 6:43 pm it arrives after a thud at each floor coming down from the 9th. I step in. 6:44 pm. And then it starts. I fall to my knees, the pressure of the elevator flying through the shaft keeping me on all fours, the emergency hatch rattling in its lock. I reach the penthouses, the 13th floor. It drops. The hatch breaks off. The sprinkler head snaps and flies out into oblivion, gushing water not far behind it. My pen flies out of my pocket, snapping against the hinge of the broken emergency exit, dying the water a deep shade of blue. And then my notebook. It flies up out of my hand, pages falling apart, the metal

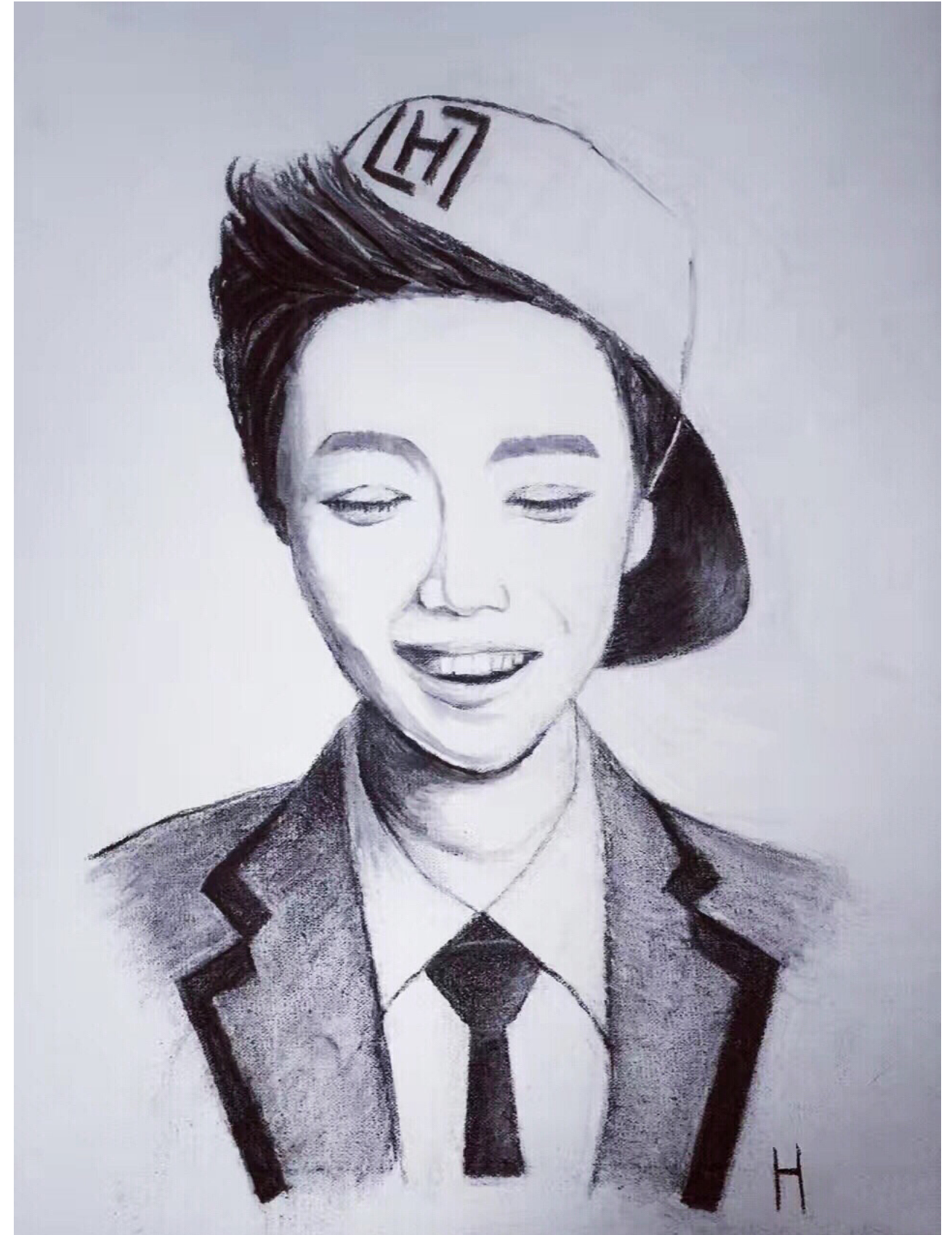
binding unwinding as it soars. It hits the main elevator cable, tearing through it like water when the elevator really starts to drop. The flickering sign which announces the floors explodes in a mass of sparks. We hit rock bottom, first the elevator, then me. Every part of me is intact except a gash from my pen, now a light flow of crimson blood. I can feel the pain aching through my body as I look through the hole in the ceiling of the elevator. I am lying there, unable to live, yet also unable to die. The hatch comes down first, grinding down through the buttons, sending sparks bouncing off the walls. My crimson suit stained with ink from the water now gushing from the hatch and the pipe. The drain in the elevator opens, the collected water now flowing into the sewers. My schedule begins to fall, page by page as if taunting me. It had once saved my life. Now it takes life away from me. The last page that falls reads, "Get Killed By Elevator." The doors open, nurses and doctors debating whether it is worth trying to save me or if I was as good as dead. I see myself being carried into the ambulance, my three little girls watching me out of the corner of their eyes. I pass out.

## A WORD OF MOTIVATION

Justine Song, Age 14

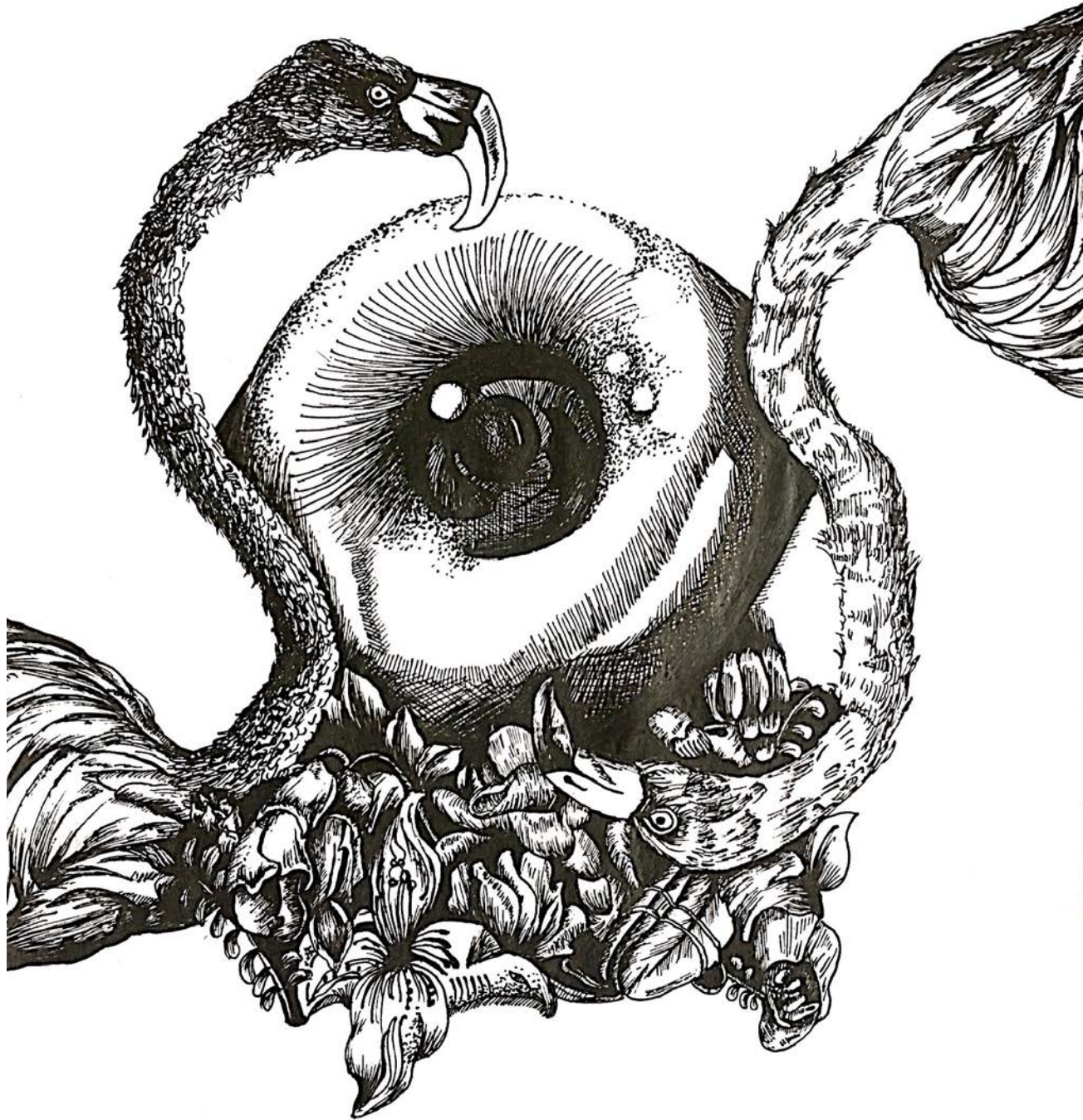
before i was constantly  
sad  
and despised myself so, so much  
for being something i despised.  
but now  
i think about this in a new way-  
the person i am now will never be the person  
i want to be in the future, without  
letting it try to be  
so.  
i want to jump farther, take bigger steps,  
and get up again when i stumble.  
and when i fall, i'll remember that  
my failures mean i'm moving forward  
to  
the new dream of my beautiful self, and  
i'll smile.  
there may still be a small sadness deep within me  
knocking hollowly on my ribs,  
but i will move on,  
and run,  
smiling with my insides  
and outsides  
beautifully-  
until it finally disappears.

and after it disappears,  
i will continue to run.



## EYE OF THE UNKNOWN

*Shelley Tong, Age 15*



## EYE CATCHING EMOTIONS

*Tiya Tanaka, Age 15*

Sometimes, there are people who catch my eye.  
I want to hold them, but I must refrain.  
For if I do, it's love, I must deny.

Whenever they walk near, I become shy,  
Like an armadillo, who shields the pain,  
I mask my feelings and simply pass by.

I don't know why, but I want to deny  
The red rose inside me drives me insane.  
Yet, I crave to water it as I cry.

I want to scream three words that underlie  
This prison I created to constrain  
A whirlpool of emotions I don't buy.

Slowly, but surely my emotions fly  
Away from my brain and into the train.  
The person I once knew was all a lie.

Although it hurts, this isn't a goodbye.  
Our friendship, we decided to maintain.  
But this will not be the last time I cry.  
Sometimes, there are people who catch my eye.

## I'M SORRY

Hannah Wicki, Age 14

She was gone, and it was all my fault.

Three years ago, a small town just west of Nanaimo was where we lived. Life was hard, very hard. Not enough jobs, rent too high, food too expensive, yet she could always smile. She was loved by everyone, for her beauty and big heart. Everything about her could brighten my day. Never had I known someone so perfect, so enticing. She was everything I could not be, everything I wished to become but could not. Her hair, the color of the cedar trunks surrounding our town. Her eyes, as blue as the depths of the sea. Her laugh, like the ravens, was deep and throaty, and ever so joyous, or so I always thought. I didn't notice anything at first, and I will always blame myself for that. It was always just one more fight than usual, one more day that she wouldn't come home till late. But those disputes, grew, they piled up, leading to a war in our home. Sometimes so bad, we wouldn't speak to each other for days. She became invisible to me, I to her. But still, during those quiet nights, I could hear her cries, her whimpering, but I would not go, I could not go, but I should have.

Those days drifted into weeks, then into months, and as time moved on, we did not. There were days where she was happy, when we tried to be our old selves, but it was never quite the same. There was always that awkward moment, a silence one beat too long, that reminded us that things would never be the same. A grimace when I came too close, a sigh of things left unsaid. The tension, the anger, the pain was so high, home felt more like a prison than a safe spot. Yet I never did anything, I would not, I could not, but I should have.

She would leave some nights, I don't know where she went, and I never will. It drove me crazy, the fear, the worry, twisting to anger by the time she arrived. Those nights, our words became a storm, a flurry of bullets thrown at one another, not aimed to hurt, but to kill. Those nights soon became the new regular, the new normal, for we had given up trying to fix it. The wound became too big, too deep, for it to heal, even if I had tried. Still I wouldn't, I couldn't. I should have. The years passed, and we became a mere shell of our old selves, Just a shadow of our former selves. Two ghosts in a haunted house. Then it changed.

The day was cool; fog loomed low over the city. A blanket trying to cover our pain, but nothing could.

Then a bang rang through the house, a sound saying she lost her battle. I ran to her room. Her eyes lifted to mine, as she whispered her last breathe.

"I'm sorry."

I knelt down before her, ran my hands across her beautiful face. Even after carrying all the weight of her sorrows, she always would be my love. A small note fell from her still fingers.

'I'm sorry,' the note read. Her cursive the same as when I taught her, all those years ago.

'Those nights, that anger, I'm sorry for it all. The pain I had, and the pain I caused you. I did not know how to stop it. Before, I would be praised, I would be loved, but it only made me feel worse. The glow in my eyes, the energy in my soul was

simply not there. Instead pain took its place. A void sucking me away, until all that was left was a body empty of a soul. I guess the pain has always been here, always will be, but I could not cover it anymore. I used to be better at hiding it, but I could not stand it. I don't know why, but it wasn't you. It was me who was the problem. Me who caused it all, so I am sorry.'

A tear ran down my cheek, dropping to her cold, lifeless body. I kissed her forehead one last time. "It is I who am sorry." I whispered softly. "For the pain I did not see. For those nights I yelled and screamed, when I should have listened, should have comforted. But I didn't help, I wouldn't, I couldn't, now I wish I did. I am sorry for the days we pretended things were fine, when we tried to forget the problem, instead of confronting it. I am sorry that I failed my duties to protect and care for you, just as I once promised. I am sorry during those nights, when I could hear you cry, I never did go dry your tears, as I did once many moons ago. I am sorry that I never told you that I too, once cried myself to sleep, I knew your pain, knew it would never leave, but I thought you could conquer it alone and that is what I regret the most. I am sorry, my love, my baby, my daughter. I am sorry I failed you, Adria.

# ENCYCLOPEDIA

Mandy Xu, Age 17



# IT

Justine Song, Age 14

If you look carefully,  
without your eyes,  
you may see a fine grimy blue dust-like  
sadness,  
settled all over me.  
I call it It.  
It may seem like a mirage, flickering  
in and out of sight,  
but actually, the yellow of my ink  
covers It up  
from time to time.  
(sometimes even I cannot tell  
whether It is real or  
simply a cruel trick.)

This dusty sadness, sometimes  
I cannot see this,  
but I can hear this.  
It is the howl of an empty hunger,  
and those days  
I block my ears with music,  
hands-  
praying for sleep that  
never arrives.  
But sometimes,  
I cannot,  
and the howl fills me till I am almost  
overflowing  
with the sound,  
and yet I feel as empty as my sadness,  
and the silence suffocates me as  
I lie tangled in my blankets  
and tears become too much to hold back.

I don't like to talk about  
this dusty blue,  
It,  
invisible to everyone but me.  
It is as if some of It has settled in  
my stomach,  
lungs,  
throat,  
and everytime I try to speak even  
a single word about It  
It rears up with a mind of It's  
own  
and bruises my insides with  
sudden grief.  
I wish the people who ask  
"Why don't you just talk to someone about it"  
could understand just  
how "it"  
is not just an  
"it"  
but in fact something inexplicably terrible-  
an It.

It is my monster under the bed-  
the shadows beneath my eyes.  
It is inside me.  
It is me.

And-  
I ask you-  
how could you ever let go of yourself?

## OVER THE EDGE

Emily Ma, Age 14

I clambered over the rocks and jumped off the other side, landing in the dirt, a pillow of dust rising around me.

"You're going to fall over the edge and into the lake if you keep doing that," my mom warned as she slid cautiously down the rock I had just jumped from. I just shrugged and jumped again, nearly slipping off the edge.

I couldn't explain it, but I knew I wouldn't fall. A deep spell of calm came over me as my mom and I continued our hike, my feet falling steadily on the uneven ground. I felt in control of my world, as though I were invincible. I felt powerful, and with every drop of sweat that fell, I felt as though I was unstoppable, even as I deliberately tread nearer to the edge.

As we finished our hike, leaving the forest sanctuary behind us to enter the beach area again, I still felt protected by the forest tranquility. In the distance, I saw two men on their balcony.

"Mom, aren't the mountains beautiful--," but I didn't get a chance to finish.

"Hey, can I borrow your vagina?" Jeering voices came from the balcony where moments earlier I had spotted the two men. They laughed and repeated it again. I jerked upright, my breath caught in my throat, and my body rigid with the stress of the question. I stared determinedly at the mountains, trying to ignore them as I finished my thought.

"Aren't the mountains beautiful?" I repeated more forcefully.

But the words sounded empty, even to me. I felt disgusted, angry, and scared, even as moments ago I had been lost in the beauty of the mountains. That ugly question from the balcony knocked me over the edge that I had been walking so close to.

## SILENCE

Marian Manapat, Age 15

Silence. Very often you may find yourself in silence, only to discover that what you hear is not silence, but a consistent buzz that hides beneath your ears.

You are only aware that there was a sound after it ends. Then you hear nothing.

Silence is the sound of nothing but you still hear it. How would you describe silence? A white noise? A black sound? Empty space?

To me, silence is when you are with those who you cannot connect to. The people who try to share, but are unable to break through your walls.

Maybe a forced laugh is designed to destroy the silence but instead pokes at it rather pathetically. No matter how hard you try, sometimes you cannot escape that sort of silence.

Silence. It's when you are with those who cannot and will not understand you completely. You force yourself to agree, to fake a smile, when really, you are shriveling up on the inside.

You refuse to accept that what you choose to communicate outwardly is not what you truly feel inwardly. You feel the words claw at your throat, dangling dangerously off the tip of your tongue, desperately trying to break through, but instead, the letters fall apart within you.

Maybe, instead, you swallow them, but the words migrate into your mind, relaying the message over and over again until they become a distant memory—either haunting you or hiding in a forgotten corner, waiting for the right moment to devour the silence.

Silence. It's when you are with those who you've known all your life. Silence is when flaming words are thrown like shooting stars at those around you, and you can't help but wonder how you failed to see the darkness that surrounded those stars before.

Silence is the sound you hear when you stare at the remains of a house that could not survive a raging fire. The fire is long gone, but the smoke lingers.

Silence is smoke. You will not— cannot— breathe it in, but you are painfully aware that it is there. You can't get rid of it. You have to wait until it goes higher and higher until it reaches the atmosphere of your world. And although you cannot see it now, it is there. A greenhouse gas can fill the atmosphere of the Earth and is invisible to the eye until you notice how much warmer the world is. The smoke will continue to build up as more fires are started and more fires end. Because if there is a home that has had a fire, it is very likely that the home is now prone to flames. The smoke will cloud the atmosphere and change your world forever. More heat will fill the air. More words will be set ablaze.

Silence is thinking. Silence is thoughts. Silence is nothing. Silence can be everything. Silence is. Is it good? Is it bad? Is it both?

Why does it have to be called silence if it screams so, so much?



teens



*ink*

Teen journal for writing and visual art via  
VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

**CALLING TEEN WRITERS & ARTISTS!**



*ink*

Teen journal for writing and visual art via  
VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Submit your writing and artwork and you could be published in *ink*, a teen journal for writing and visual art published by Vancouver Public Library.

WRITING: two works (max 1,000 words)  
VISUAL ART: two works (digital art, comic or photograph)  
**Deadline: Tuesday, April 30, 2019**

See full submission details at [vpl.ca/teens](http://vpl.ca/teens).

### Submission Guidelines

You may submit up to four pieces each year:

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

**Artwork:** 8 1/2 inches by 11 inches preferred. Black and white artwork only. You may be required to submit your original artwork if your work is selected for publication.

**Digital Art:** High resolution. Minimum 300 dpi. Black and white artwork only.

**Photographs:** High resolution for electronic submissions. Minimum 300dpi. Black and white photographs only.

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

**Comics:** One 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch page maximum.

We welcome voices from teens all over Vancouver. We are looking for creative, original, thought-provoking, diverse, and engaging work. Submissions including hate speech, exclusionary language, or excessively graphic depictions of sexual encounters and violence will not be published. Please review and edit your work for any grammatical errors before submitting.

### Submission Form

Please attach completed forms to your submission and drop off at any Vancouver Public Library branch, or email to [teens@vpl.ca](mailto:teens@vpl.ca). Submissions must be received by April 30, 2019.

Last name \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Postal code \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Submission date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Type of submission:

Art     Comic     Fiction     Poem     Review     Other \_\_\_\_\_

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rl January 11, 2018



# CONSENT AND LICENCE FORM

(for program participants aged 18 and under)



Program Name (the "Program")

Program Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

### SUMMARY

We are pleased that your child is participating in the Program at the Vancouver Public Library. As part of the Program, your child will undertake projects, create new content, and express ideas in physical and/or digital forms (the "Content"). By signing this consent and licence form, you consent to and licence VPL to collect your child's Content to use for non-commercial purposes, such as, but not limited to, use in program brochures, on public displays, or through the Internet in any format or medium or published in an anthology in physical and/or digital forms and made available to be borrowed from any branch of the Vancouver Public Library (the "Purpose").

### CONSENT

- YES**, I consent for my child's Content to be used for the Purpose
- NO**, I do not consent for my child's Content to be used for the Purpose

### GRANT OF LICENCE

On behalf of my child, I hereby grant to VPL an irrevocable, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free licence to use my child's Content for the Purpose, to lend that Content to VPL's patrons in VPL's sole discretion, and the unrestricted right in perpetuity to keep, copy, use, publish, display, and/or broadcast the Content.

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(otherwise known as "waiver" of artistic or moral rights under copyright law).

### WAIVER AND RELEASE

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

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

Child's Name (print)

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date (MM/DD/YYYY)

Parent/Guardian's Name (print)

Address and Phone Number

Witness Signature

Witness Name (print)

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Content Name/Location (for staff use)



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## PERSEPHONE

Tammy Hoang, Age 17

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