

# young voices 2011

*magazine of teen writing and artwork*



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## Tailspin

Elizabeth Delaney, age 15



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# Welcome to Young Voices 2011

What makes someone a true artist? No one can really define it, but the fact remains that some people are willing to explore themselves and the world around them through activities such as drawing and writing, and to allow that exploration to take them to unexpected and original places. Artists are talented and skilful, sure, but above all they're engaged with the world and unafraid of risk. They're good at seeing things in ways that no one else has. The teens who have contributed to this year's edition of *Young Voices* are a pretty valuable bunch of people because they're willing to share their art with us, and to let us use their work to stretch our ideas, perceptions and feelings too.

The artists and writers featured in this anthology are between 12 and 19 years old, and for many this first publication will be followed by others. We thank them for sharing their inspiration with us, and for making their own mark on the landscape of Toronto culture. The more artists and writers we have in our lives and in our city, the richer we all are.

Works in this anthology were selected by our editorial board, which is composed of both teen and professional writers and visual artists. We thank them for their contribution as well.

Enjoy!

The *Young Voices 2011* editorial board:

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COVER ART

## Long Life



**Mandela Smith, age 15**



# young voices 2011

## A Mermaid Kiss

Childhood is the quintessential time to believe in the impossible. The innocence that clouded my thoughts convinced me many ridiculous fantasies were indeed fact not fiction. A magical man in a red suit and a snowy white beard really did deliver presents to every good little boy and girl overnight. A monster would really bite off my fingers if I dared explore the dark abyss found underneath my bed. Once finding out that the "facts" I had once believed were true were actually fiction, it brought on feelings of shock, and in the case of the monster feelings that were tremendously soothing. Though some of the clouds had lifted due to these epiphanies, the real shock that forced them all away was the realization that the people I loved most were not able to walk the earth forever, but one day had to meet with death.

I still remember the last time I saw him. My nerves and the heat were making me extremely irritable as I got out of the car. He just flew in from Florida with his wife Topsy just to visit my family and watch me perform at the competition. Though the air conditioning in the hotel cooled me down a bit, I was still nervous to see him. My father knocked on his door. Seconds later I saw the familiar pair of sapphire blue eyes and the streaks of silver hair and yelled "Grandpa!" I launched myself into his arms and embraced him with all my seven-year-old strength. He smiled and remarked that we should better hurry or else I might be late. I sighed and held his hand as we headed towards the car when a twinkling caught my eyes. I stopped at the sight of the shimmering water of the hotel's pool wave up and down as other swimmers did cannon balls into the water. I instantly knew I wanted to do that too, and started jumping up and down merrily asking if I could go swimming in the hotel's alluring oasis. "After we get back," laughed my grandfather, "I promise."

My piano competition was a blur to me. I was so nervous that I messed up most of what I had been practicing for months. It was ok though because my family comforted me reminding me that though I didn't win, I still tried my hardest and faced my fear of performing. With the stress of competition behind me, I ran to the car and back to the hotel we went to celebrate. I changed quickly into my bathing suit after we returned to the hotel and headed with my family towards the pool.

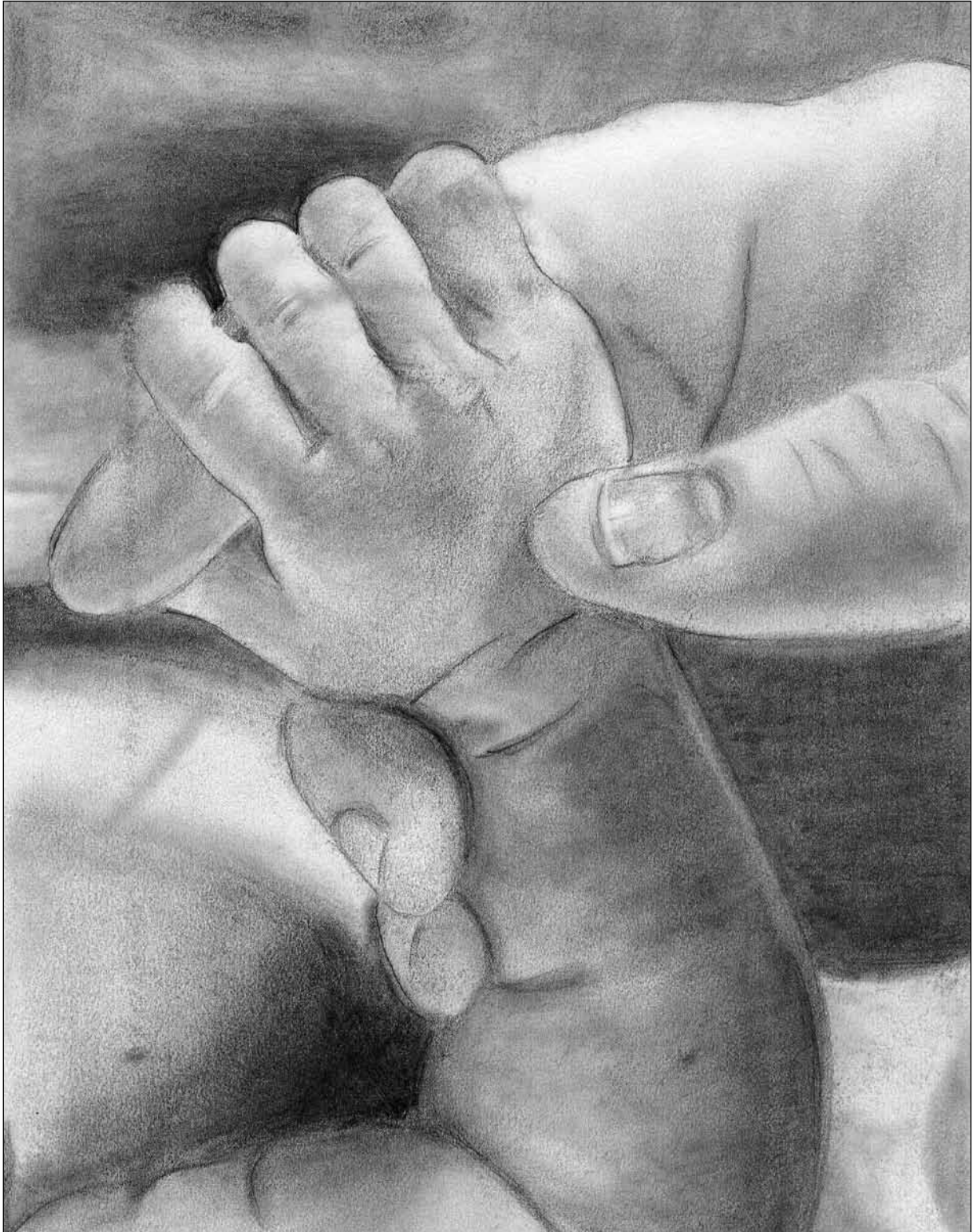
The water was still by now, long deserted by the other swimmers. My younger brother and I jumped into the pool as Mom, Grandpa, Daddy and Topsy eased into the cozy white pool chairs on the deck. Under water, my imagination went wild. The water transformed me into a mermaid with a beautiful green tail and long locks of hair that danced in the water. The pool noodles morphed into sleek grey dolphins and I glided across the water saluting my crowd. After a very long reign as the Queen of the Sea, I decided to exit my kingdom and join those of the earth. Dripping wet, I came toward my grandpa and announced myself as my royal title. He smiled and playing along, asked whether mermaids liked humans. I grinned and replied that I did, especially him. I gave him a hug with my wet arms, leaving an imprint on his shirt and gave him a kiss on the cheek. I told him I had just given him a very special kiss, a mermaid kiss. He didn't care that I had just drenched his entire outfit in water, he just laughed and said he would forever treasure such a token of friendship from a creature as elusive as a mermaid. Little did I know that would be the last time I would ever get to kiss his cheek.

Back at his hotel room, brother and I immediately fell asleep on the bed, tired out from underwater adventures. I just remember my Dad carrying me away and telling me to say goodbye. My vision was still hazy from sleep, so I uttered a quick bye-bye followed with a little wave before my dad carried me into the car. I didn't worry about the lack of a goodbye because in my heart I believed that I would see him again and make up for it. This hope was crushed when I found out that he died about two months after his visit. The facade of immortality was finally dispelled from my mind and soul. The clouds had been lifted, and though the weather was dark for awhile, eventually the sun of maturity made its way into my being. Acceptance was what I embraced. Though he is no longer on this earth, my grandpa is still alive in some ways. Through the memories and pictures that I have secured into my heart, I know that my grandpa will be ever-living, not physically, but in my mind and thoughts. One day when it comes for me to pass, I hope to see him once more and give him another mermaid kiss.

**Nicole Crolly, age 18**

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## Fragile Trust



**Aakriti Kapoor, age 16**



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## The Vanquished and the Victor

Peering over the craggy clifftops  
Riseth the regal sun  
With the chirping of birds,  
The wind tosses around the leaves.

The leaping waves lap  
Against the rocky shore,  
Caressing the soft, smooth banks,  
Shining with a high-spirited glint.

The day drags on,  
The hours lag,  
There's still work to be done.

But at long last  
The night falls  
And light flees the skies,  
For 'tis the reign of the night-time moon.

'Twas a battle well fought  
Yet at end, red stained the skies  
And the victor rose with cold triumph.

Deaf to the ploy of the vanquished  
Who lingered down below  
Waiting to wage another war  
And bring another day.

**Gwenyn Huang, age 12**

.....

## Bicycle

Those people are moving like a turtle  
Who can be as slow as these people?  
I ran to the middle of the road  
A sudden startle

They screamed and shouted, I have no idea why

SCREECH! PLOP!

I was hit by a bicycle

**Xia Yi He, age 12**

.....

## A Severe Dream

Do not forget that your sister plays the violin. There is, in the dream, a family, with one skinny son, and another overly fat son. It can be said that there is possibly no other house in existence that is capable of being messier than theirs.

At night, it shows up in their home. It is not easy to tell whether or not it is even solid. You are there and you see it, holding the knife in its hands — the hands, whose appearance, and even existence, you now can no longer recall.

It approaches only the fat boy, fast asleep in his bed, and runs the knife swiftly through his stubbly neck. There is no blood, not even a trace of a cut. The boy rises and it is gone immediately. Now, he heads to the dirtiest region of his home, and begins cleaning the pigsty. The silence in the house is trance-like and dreamy, a silent melody, and is broken when a white plate slips out of the overly fat boy's fat fingers, and crashes on the ground.

He awakens, unaware of how he has wound up at that spot, with shards of the broken plate around his feet. His family is equally surprised, having awakened from the noise. Now seeing his effort and failure, they burst into laughter, because it is un-doable and he is foolish to even attempt it.

You leave them and most of the next bit is foggy in your mind. You lie in your bed. You are tired — it is nightfall after all — and when you close your eyes a scenario plays before you of your sister. Do not forget that your sister plays the violin. A man yells at her — the man you recognize as her teacher — and tells her he will not help her become a musician.

You do not know of your gift to predict the future, until many hours later, when you are no longer sleeping. You realize it when your sister comes home with tears in her eyes because the same man had told her the same thing.

It comes to your home following that event. You somehow witness everything it is doing although you are certain that you are actually sleeping in bed. You take this chance to really look at this thing. It does not leave an imprint in any way of its existence. It has no face, and casts no shadow. But it seems to be hooded — just about the only trait of the black form before you that is remotely comprehensible.

You are suddenly in your parents' room. It automatically brushes the knife through their throats. Of course, nothing happens. No one even rises this time.

Your sister does not move either when it supposedly slashes her throat. You wonder why its cuts do not cause the smallest degree of damage, but then again, you are not sure that what you are seeing is not a hallucination.

Now, it is your turn, but you are still not in your own bed, and wonder, with a rising panic, why that is so, how this can be real. You are watching it approach your body in your bed, from the side. But you are immobile and cannot stop this dark being as it bends down, near your face, your face which looks tense and disturbed in sleep, and does what it has done to everyone else.

It seems you are a special case. You do not notice that it vanishes because your eyes are fixed on the drops of blood staining your bed sheets. You still cannot understand how you can be bleeding to death, and be watching yourself bleed to death at the same time.

This is the part where you open your eyes. It is almost dawn, and you realize, with great relief, that the terrible ordeal was not real. None of it. It was merely a dream, a harmless dream.

But seven months later, your sister comes home with tears in her eyes because the same man said the same thing.

**Zhala Taghi Zada, age 15**

Storm



**Vivian Tong**, age 16



# I Am

"You're going to write a poem," my teacher says.

Okay, easy enough, I think.

"It's going to be about yourself," she continues.

Simple. I am Celia. I am funny. I have exactly five best friends. My favourite colour is ivory. It's white. But white isn't really a colour. My iPod has become a body part, it's always connected to me. I read books. Lots of books. I love them. I don't have a favourite food, I think, then I try to make that rhyme.

"It has to be divided into three stanzas," she says, and I try to make what I thought of longer.

"It has to be entitled, *I Am*," she informs us, her grade eight class.

I already had about six different titles in my head, but that's okay. I accept.

"It will be like this." She starts to write on the board:

I am (two special characteristics that you have).

I wonder (something you are actually curious about).

I hear (an imaginary sound).

I see (an imaginary sight).

I want (an actual desire).

I am (the first line of the poem repeated).

And I sit there, with lines in my forehead, because all I can think of is:

I am (Celia).

I wonder (who I am).

I hear (people speaking but not listening).

I see (how people with sight can be so blind).

I want (the world to be perfect).

I am (Celia).

And I'm shocked at how my thoughts are, how I only think of how corrupt everything is, how corrupt everything can be, and I'm surprised as to why I didn't start thinking nice things. Beautiful things. Start thinking up a poem about my dreams and aspirations and how I know myself and how I'm proud to be myself. I have so many faults. So many faults. But I didn't once think about that. All I thought about was how everyone else could be so blind, stupid, reckless, careless, the list goes on. But not me. Not once me. So I try again.

I am Celia.

I wonder what's inside the Bermuda Triangle. (Seriously?)

I hear my teacher speaking to me in class. (That's completely irrelevant to what I was saying before.)

I see inside of people. (I'm not making any sense now.)

I am Celia.

And that's so pathetic, so horribly pathetic, that I give up and think maybe the next stanza will be easier, then she writes, writes, writes, and the questions become harder and the answers more confusing and I decide to just put my name and

my friend's names over and over again because that's all I really know about me.

And I think it's over.

It's not over.

Because she's reading us an example, and the first one is about a girl who likes horses. And her dreams, her passions, her self is so blatantly clear in this short poem that I start thinking immediately, "Wow. There's someone who clearly knows who she is, and what she wants. She's definitely found herself."

The second example, however, is not as pleasant. She reads us the first line, which is: "I am a nutty guy who loves dolphins."

And I think up, I am a young girl who likes cats. And I start to get confident again.

Then it changes.

Oh, does it ever change.

Because suddenly, he's expressing his fear, his worry, his understanding about poverty and corruption and the way we are living our lives right now. How it will affect us in our future.

I want to cry.

But then I think that is stupid.

Especially when the last line of that deep and insightful and frightening poem is: "I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins."

Suddenly, that line doesn't seem so silly anymore.

He is a nutty guy who likes dolphins and I am stupid to ever think that there is going to be nothing deeper than that in a piece of expressive writing.

I am a young girl who likes cats.

Right. There's the epitome of deep, insightful metacognition.

"At the end, you sign your name. That's the only place I want to see your name," she says.

What!? My name was all that I had come up with, and she took it away.

She says that we have some time to work freely and I stare at my blank page.

Okay.

I am. I am what? I am young. I am innocent. Or am I?

Considering those thoughts I was thinking a few minutes ago, I honestly don't know. I am protected. Not very well, since I know how to think those thoughts. I am a girl. Yes! Alright, step two. I am a girl and...I love winter.

I wonder why the snow always manages to look so beautiful.

I hear silence, because snow only falls gracefully. Even in a blizzard.

I see white eddies flitting across the landscape of wherever I am in the winter.

I want snow to not be cold.

I am a girl who loves winter.

FINISHED. One problem: I don't like it. I mean, I like it, but I was hoping for something deeper. Oh, well. I don't care at this point. So I go on.

I pretend that the slush is white, that the broken snow is untouched, that the dull is glittering.

I feel cold bite at me, trying to ruin my illusion of my winter

like it has everyone else.

I touch the material of my gloves, jacket, and hat, protecting me from the strands of cold that coil and reach towards my warmth.

I worry that it won't always be like this, that my winter will be invaded by the warming extra blanket that others like me blindly put on it.

I cry as I watch a summer bird flee from my winter with others like them.

I am a girl who loves winter.

At first I think, it has no meaning. But it does.

I wonder why the snow always manages to look so beautiful. (I wonder why my world that I imagine, the nice one, the one with beauty and knowledge and no corruption, manages to look so beautiful.)

I hear silence, because snow only falls gracefully. Even in a blizzard. (I hear secrets. Hints, innuendos, things I will never know. Even when secrets are always around you, they're secrets if you don't know them.)

I see white eddies flitting across my landscape whenever I am in winter. (It always snows, it always will cover up your marks to allow you to make new ones.)

I want snow not to be cold. (I want to feel pleasure without feeling guilt.)

I am a girl who loves winter.

I pretend that the slush is white, that the broken snow is untouched, that the dull is glittering. (I pretend that we have no flaws. I pretend that we have made no mistakes, have thought no wrong thoughts, even though we have.)

I feel cold bite at me, trying to ruin my illusion of my winter like it has everyone else. (I feel the media, the press, the government, trying to take away innocence. Ruin my illusion of pure life. The pressure of getting older, the pressure of my grades, ruin what makes me unique, make my opinion the same as everyone else's.)

I touch the material of my gloves, jacket, and hat, protecting me from the strands of cold that coil and reach towards my

warmth. (My parents. My teachers. Sometimes, even my friends. They all try to preserve my innocence as much as they can, though everything else tries to take it away.)

I worry that it won't always be like this, that my winter wonderland will be invaded by the warming extra blanket that others like me blindly put on it. (Global warming will destroy my perfect illusion of a perfect winter.)

I cry as I watch a summer bird flee from my winter with others like them. (I love summer as well as I love winter. But summer and winter can never collide. I want two worlds that disagree to merge together and be happy.)

I am a girl who loves winter.

And I'm proud, so very proud, that I was able to create something with a real message. That even though I am lost and confused, I was able to find this small piece of enlightenment about this mystery that is myself. That I was able to create something that acknowledges my faults but accepts that I have them. So proud that I'm not scared to write the rest of the poem. But my teacher and whoever reads it won't know that. They won't see what I wrote about what my feelings about winter really mean.

They won't know how lost I am. They won't know the thoughts, both twisted and wonderful, that go on inside my head. They won't know me.

And they'll never know.

But one day, a few people will.

And the first person will be myself. The next step is the third stanza.

I understand.

I say.

I dream.

I try.

I hope.

I am.

**Celia Ramsay, age 13**

## Escape

He's walking fast on His own street  
And looking down at His own feet  
Trying not to make eye contact,  
It's safer that way, that's a fact.  
No way of telling what people think,  
They can jump you before you blink  
Especially in His own hood,  
So He lies low for His own good.  
All of His dreams are 'bout escape  
From this place of murder and rape.  
Get off of streets where there is blood  
Spilled as often as there is mud,  
Free from permanent stink of weed;  
It's little, that's all He would need.

He is heading back home from school,  
For going there He is called a fool;  
His friends think it's a waste of time,  
He thinks they're fools for doing crime;

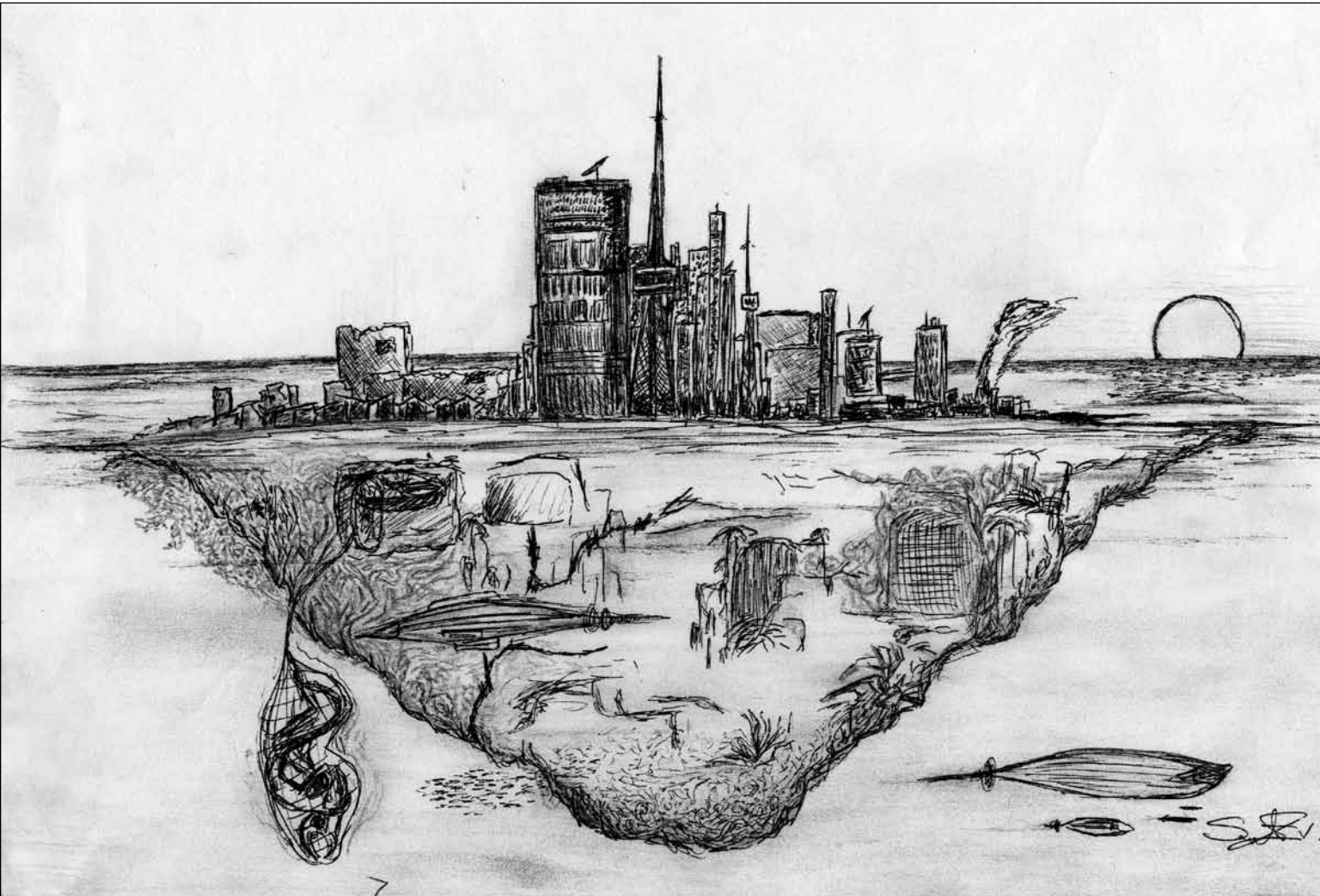
He has some headphones on His head,  
He's writing while lying on His bed,  
His mom calls Him down to eat,  
She says it's getting cold, it's meat.  
That's what she says, He knows it's  
trash,  
That's all she can buy, they have no cash,  
Cause her paycheck is late again.  
He comes down and turns on the fan,

He waits but it doesn't come on,  
All the electricity is gone,  
Cause they still haven't paid the landlord,  
But His mom says she'll sell the Ford.  
The only thing left from His dad.  
His mom says he wasn't that bad.  
"If he wasn't that bad, why'd he leave?"  
He doesn't say it He lets her believe.  
He knows in life belief is key,  
It makes things clearer to see.  
Like seeing He has another day,  
And out of this hood He'll find a way.

**Lizzie Poliakova, age 17**

.....

## A Civilization



**Sandra Zhang, age 15**

.....

## A Penny-a-Piece

Penny-a-piece!

Penny-a-piece!

What can you get for a penny a piece?

A penny for the old man  
That beggar down the street;  
A penny for the young girl  
Stripped for men to see!

A penny for your altruistic name  
A penny for your pleasure  
A penny, that's all you need  
To buy you a sea of treasure.

A penny for the businessman  
And his darkly polished feet;  
A penny for the labouring child  
For the chimneys that he sweeps!

A penny for your darling smile  
A penny for your hatred  
A penny lasts several lifetimes  
Or till words are become sacred.

Penny-a-piece!

Penny-a-piece!

For what in this world ain't a penny-a-piece?

**Roni Luo, age 18**



## Journey

My journey began in a large, beautiful ocean with my millions of brothers and sisters by my side. The saltiness of our home was so familiar and soothing, and seemed to captivate us all. I looked up to the heavens and stared into the blinding yellow orb which was the glorious sun, hearing it calling me and some of the others to it. I began to rise from the ocean and I slowly felt myself being carried away, even though my heart felt as heavy as stone. I looked around me to see many of my siblings rising up with me, most of them happy and cheerful to begin their adventure, unlike myself. I looked back down to my home, hearing my siblings that remained in the ocean bidding us farewell. Their voices grew fainter and fainter, until the sound of their familiar voices disappeared below us. There was no turning back now. I forced myself to look back up to the sky, knowing that if I stared any longer down at my home that I would be a mess the entire journey. I didn't know when I would be back, but I prayed it would be soon.

Ecstatic hollers and joyous hoots sounded from my other siblings that were on this journey with me, all excited to be escaping from the ocean. I remained quiet, not feeling the same way about leaving my beloved home behind for who knew how long. Within a few moments, we could hear other hollers and hoots coming from a little ways away. It was droplets from other bodies of water, big and small. I could recognize the harsh accents of the lake-born droplets, as well as the other strange accents from droplets from other bodies of water. The air was filled with droplets from what seemed to be everywhere, the air becoming very moist. I smiled slightly at all the different droplets taking the same journey. I noticed what seemed to be a pond-born droplet frowning sadly, much like I had been a few moments ago. I flashed him a quick smile, and he returned a weak one back to me. With that I looked back up to the higher skies, feeling a little better about this whole journey.

Time passed, and we soon found ourselves all clumped together to make a soft cloud. It was a bit chilly at such a high altitude, and I could see many droplets shivering slightly. We were not below zero degrees though, that much I knew. With a sudden mass of yelps from the other droplets, I felt myself begin to fall down from the cloud we had made and plummet downward toward the Earth. Fear coursed through me as the ground drew nearer and nearer, and I shut my eyes tight when impact drew close. It surprised me that, when I hit the ground, there was no pain. I opened my eyes again to find myself slipping off a bright red rose. I detached myself from the flower and allowed myself to hit the ground. I felt at ease again now that I was safely resting on firm ground. I couldn't help but chuckle as I saw the panic on other droplet's faces as they hit the Earth like I had.

More time passed, and I was now underneath the green surface and working my way through the dark, underground world. I had been in the underground for a long time, hoping that I would reach my ocean soon. My salty, inviting ocean. Right on cue, a certain smell entered my nose and I could have sworn my heart skipped a beat. The ocean was near. With a final movement I was absorbed into my ocean through a crack in the ground. I breathed in the salt water and a broad smile appeared across my face, for I was at long last home. As I surfaced I saw different brothers and sisters rising up from our ocean into the air, beginning the ancient journey all over again.

**Emily Galloway, age 16**

## A Sender of Doom

An eagle  
A free bird  
A rider of wind  
Soared high in the heavens  
Forever and still  
A dark apparition  
A threat to the sky  
Its wings were fantastic  
Easily weighting  
The burden of life  
On them he flew high  
The ruler of air  
The greatest, the strongest  
But still...  
As quick as a lightning  
An arrow tore through  
The eagle screeched once  
Then crashed to the ground  
A last strangled war cry  
A sender of doom

**Natalia Zhilkina, age 14**

## Lucid Dreaming

It was during the fall vacation when there was no school, and children were allowed to go outside to play in the cool, breezy weather. It was at the home of a three-person household. Down in the basement was the workplace of a busy worker, SuperMom. She was receiving phone calls and trying her best to fulfill everyone's demands and requests. SuperMom was the "Yes-Woman." On the third floor was a man of intelligence, confidence, values and stress. He was the SuperDad. He was stressed with the bills and the poor economy. The numbers simply did not seem to add up. "This will not work, we have to cut down on all our costs," SuperDad mumbled after a great sigh, an attempt at relaxation. Across the hallway was the sound of the radio blasting from the adolescent's chamber of prohibited entry. All seemed normal, but something, somehow, felt out of place. The ambience revealed unusualness. Rock music was playing in the background, and as each beat of the music presented itself to the ears of the dreamer, the miniature townhouse started moving up North. It went past houses, cars, bus stops, and it arrived at the shore of an ocean. Calmly, the townhouse shifted to the centre of the ocean, and sunk itself into darkness.

**Lisa Xiao, age 14**

Fate of Men



Stanislav Ahn, age 17

## Solutions

The sallow young man glanced at the crowded street behind him. No one seemed to be paying him much mind, and so it was with as much confidence as a man in his position could muster that he ducked into the well-lit clinic. He approached the front desk hesitantly, where a comfortable looking woman was doing a crossword puzzle.

"Um, hello," he started, hating that his voice shook.

The woman glanced up at him. "Hello sir, how may I help you?" she said with a smile.

The man jumped. "Well, there's really only one kind available here, right?" he stammered.

Please let this be the right place, please, God, how do you ask directions to this place?

"Of course, sir. You're in the right place," she said soothingly. "May I get your name?" She poised her pen on her clip-boarded form.

"Um, yes. It's E- uh, Jonathon Stein." He fidgeted. The woman scribbled the obvious pseudonym down diligently. The customer is always right.

"Cause of death?" she asked. He thought for a moment, glancing at the blackboard full of chalked-in options and daily specials.

"Euthanasia, please," he said after a short pause.

"All right. Now if you'd like to consider, we've got a special offer on electrocution this week. Barely takes a second."

"No. Euthanasia, please," he repeated firmly, but he looked more anxious than ever.

"Funeral?" she asked smoothly. Just move right along, don't let them panic.

"No!" he fairly shouted. The woman leaned back a little in her seat. He eyed her for a moment as if she'd propositioned to make his skin into an overcoat.

"All right then, sir. Just disposal then?" she asked slowly. This was a volatile one. Handle with care. The young man nodded eagerly.

"Yes, yes. That'll do fine. Now then, eh, how much?" he added, fumbling an old wallet from the pocket of his jeans. The receptionist stared pleasantly at him.

"Seventy-seven, sir," she said smoothly, in her best primary teacher's voice.

He counted out the bills with one hand. "Will cash be all right?"

"Of course, sir." She smiled, accepting and counting them before stuffing them into the cash register that hadn't been replaced in twenty years. "Now if you'd just take a seat, our waiting room is just around the corner there." She pointed with her pen to where customers waited for their turn in plastic armchairs, flipping through magazines and praying they were making the right choice. He disappeared fast. The receptionist watched him retreat for a moment.

Evan Goldberg was unsurprised to find the waiting room half empty. Everything seemed half empty to him nowadays. He wondered how long it would take Lydia to figure it out. A while,

he hoped. He spotted a chair next to a girl with long pale legs who was flipping through Hello! magazine. He sat next to her and she looked up.

"Hello," she murmured. Her voice was like chalk dust. "I'm Scarlet Mercury." She offered her hand. He took it.

"Does everyone use fake names in this place?" he said agitatedly. Her gaze cooled several degrees. "It's not a fake name," she said, and turned away.

A white-coated doctor strode into the room and saved Evan from embarrassing himself any further. "Jonathon Stein?" he called, reading from the clipboard. Evan jumped up.

"Yes!" He shouted, and half-ran to the doctor. Halfway there he stopped, spun around and ran back to the girl.

He leaned his head in close, smelling for the last time the comforting tang of skin.

"My name is Evan Goldberg," he whispered in her ear. She didn't look up.

Several of his last fifteen minutes were spent walking down a metal hallway. The room, when they got there, was huge and white.

The doctor was Tom. He was in his late fifties, probably, with dense eyebrows and a roughly hewn face. Not ugly, but certainly not the last thing Evan wanted to see.

"Cause of death, euthanasia." he read off the clipboard. Evan nodded.

"All right, Jonathon, why don't you just lie down here?" Tom pointed to a metal table in the middle of the circular room. Evan obeyed politely.

"Now, Jonathon. Any particular place you'd like to be?" the doctor asked in his dark voice.

No, Evan thought. Can we please just get this over with?

"Um — well — by the ocean, I suppose. In a comfortable bed," he decided.

The doctor was surprised. Most of his patients came fully prepared for their deaths, even arriving with deathbed scripts that played for hours inside their heads. This one seemed to be making it up as he went along. "Very well, then." He handed Evan a funny looking pair of glasses. Evan slipped them on. The doctor pushed a button and Evan felt the softness of a mattress pushing into his knees. He saw the ocean for the first time. The air tasted like vinegar.

"Can this thing make people?" he added. It did. Tom typed in an order.

A pretty woman knelt beside Evan, lifted a hand and stroked his forehead. Amazing, he thought. This hand is a metal restraint. It feels so soft. "Just take a deep breath. It will all be over soon," she promised. Her other hand rested gently against his thigh. That's a needle, he told himself, but couldn't grasp it. The lies of the senses were too strong. "Close your eyes," she instructed. He obeyed, just like he'd been doing his whole life.

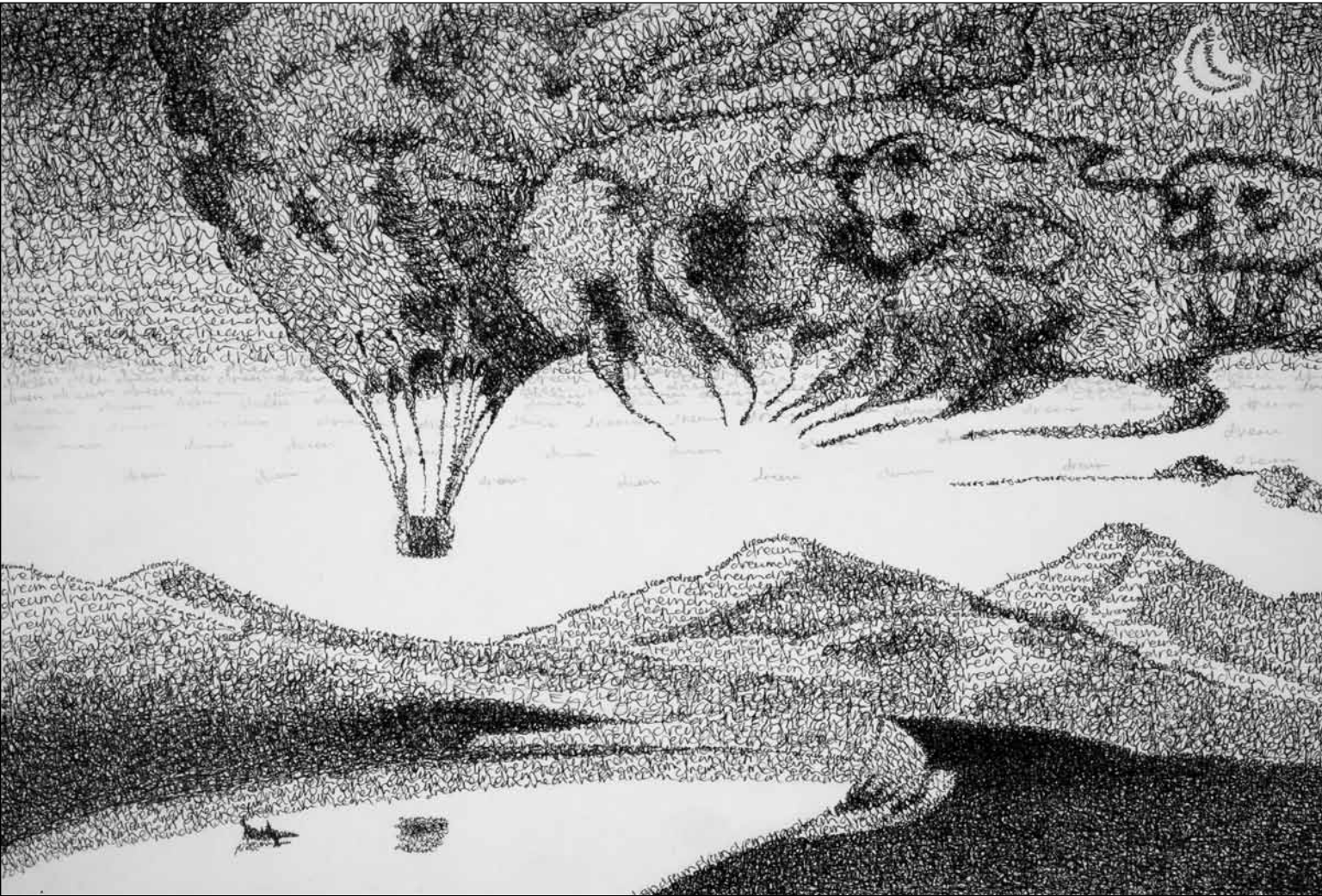
Suddenly he was tired. He wanted to hear a voice again. Once more before he died. "Wait..."

But it was too late. The girl image flickered as it faded out.



.....

## A Dream



**Aimon Syeda, age 17**

The fresh carcass on the metal table twitched once and was still.

Tom washed his hands and pushed the button on the wall to get the cleaning crew in for another disposal job. He picked up the next clipboard from the stack. Striding back into the waiting room, he wondered how his daughter was doing in New York.

He stopped himself wondering what the fidgety man had been running from. Next patient. Don't slow down, or it'll catch up with you.

"Scarlet Mercury?"

**Alexandra Houston, age 15**

.....

## Warped in Fairyland



**Diane Lopez, age 17**

.....

### A World Of Darkness

A world of darkness,  
Surrounding all of you.  
Nothing but black,  
As far as you can see.  
There is nowhere to go,  
No place to run to.  
Just darkness,  
Nothing else.  
And then one speck of light,

Or are your eyes just deceiving you?  
A speck of light,  
In a world of darkness.  
The order in chaos,  
The exit, from the middle of  
nowhere.  
To guide your way,  
All you need is a speck of light.  
There is always light in dark,

And there is always chaos in order.  
One cannot be without the other,  
If one is absent what would the  
other be?  
To have a speck of light,  
You need a world of darkness.

**Daniel Rosenblitt, age 12**



## Disney's Smoke and Mirrors

There are many questions that have no answers: "Is Kobe better than Jordan?"; "Will the world end in the year 2012?" Although these questions do not have an exact answer, different people will have different responses, in which they each believe. However, one question will leave everyone speechless, and that is: "How many Disney films have you watched as a child?" For as long as I can remember, Disney films were the most riveting pieces of film that I have ever seen. These films are enjoyed by millions, around the world. But what differentiates Disney films from other mediums is their power to inspire and intrigue people from all walks of life. They are able to convey some sort of magic that makes us feel as if we are those characters. However, as I look back on some of those memorable lyrics and scenes from the various films, I realize that they display certain gender and racial stereotypes, such as how women are dependent and men are independent. As the years progressed, they also showed how women are weak, soft, and yielding; while men are strong, muscular, and dominating. Though these stereotypes do not seem dangerous at first glance, they influence difficult decisions that young children might need to make at some point in their lives.

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was Disney's first and by far one of the most memorable full-length animated features from the Disney Studios. The world fell in love with this classic tale about how the timid Snow White took refuge in a forest in order to evade her jealous stepmother, the Queen. Snow White takes a bite of a poisoned apple, which she is offered by her stepmother in disguise, and goes into a deep coma. She is finally awakened by the Prince, and they live happily ever after. Initially, I did not see any flaws in this film, and applauded the storytelling. Yet, as I thought deeply about the film, I realized that there are quite a few stereotypes in this film. To begin with, Snow White is portrayed as a very frivolous woman and does not appear to be as capable or intelligent as the male in the film, the Prince. She is also obedient, polite, and undertakes the housekeeping duties wherever she goes. On the other hand, it must also be taken into consideration that at the time this film was made, these traits were considered ideal for women. Women were meant to be seen as obedient; serving as wives and mothers, who had the sole responsibility of maintaining the house. The men were meant to be seen as strong and the ones who had the final say on everything. This leads to the next stereotype of how women are dependent. For the entire film, Snow White's future depends on the Prince in some way. While she is not waiting for the Prince to come rescue her, she is in a coma where she can only be awakened by, none other than, the Prince. But like I have previously said, this was perfectly normal at the time; so Disney did not intentionally

perpetrate these stereotypes.

Throughout the years, the media had claimed that Disney made a great improvement on the gender model of women by, for example, hiring a female screen writer for the film *Beauty and the Beast*. However, it was really a shallow improvement because it created a rationality that women are nurturers, as Belle continued to love Beast regardless of his rude and obnoxious behaviour.

A few years later, both racial rationalities and the stereotype of dominance appeared in *The Lion King*, where the protagonist, Simba, abandons his family and chooses to take his own path. Even though she is a lioness, the heroine, Nala, is still dependant on Simba and does not take action for herself for several years. At this point, one could be confused as to if Disney is leaving these stereotypes in on purpose, as they have somehow made their way to animals. In this context, Nala's actions could imply that even if a woman knows her personal strengths, she should wait for a man to return, in order to assure herself that she is correct. *The Lion King* was also the Disney movie with one of the most evident racial stereotypes. The characters are animals, but their voices show racist stereotypes. Even though *The Lion King* takes place in Africa, two white American actors are used for the voice of Simba, the hero. However, the hyenas who are bad characters in the film, speak non-standard English and are played by African-American actors and actresses, such as Whoopi Goldberg.

I think that we could agree that Disney has to be one of the most influential forms of media. It has a special ability to capture the hearts of many, and provides a kind of magic that is often imitated, but never duplicated. However, it is this magic that always happens to deceive us, and we subconsciously disregard and consume old stereotypes and gender models that will influence decisions in our lives. Even though decades have passed since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, not much has changed. The heroines in Disney films are still dependent on their male counterparts, and they are constantly yielding and succumbing to the preferences of the men, in order to find assurance in themselves. However, I have noticed that in Disney's latest animated film, *The Princess and the Frog*, the heroine is given more freedom, and is not dependent on anyone; rather, she wants to earn everything herself. She is also the first ever African-American princess. This is contrary to the previous heroines who have altered their personalities to suit their love interests. I believe that by using this alternative to their usual template, Disney might one day be the positive influence that they are perceived to be.

**Mithila Somasundaram, age 13**



## Obsession

And of course who would think that I, the honour roll student and president of the chess club, would be stuck here at the principal's office? I certainly wouldn't think it. The principal asks if I have anything to say to Ben. Feeling Ben's eyes glaring at me, I almost refrain from answering. Almost.

Is having a crush a crime? Because if it's not, then I should definitely not be sitting here listening to the principal's condescending tone. To be honest I think it's Ben's fault. For being so beautiful. I mean, before he transferred to this school I'd never felt this pitter patter in my chest. And his eyes — oh his eyes. A hazel mix of brown, green, and gold. So beautiful.

Every day I tried to get him to notice me by bumping into him in the hallway and standing by his locker at the end of every class. I even called his cell phone every night (without saying anything) just to hear his voice. One night, when the call went straight to voice mail, I summed up the courage to reveal my true feelings for him through song. After the beep I sung a heartfelt rendition of "From This Moment On" by Shania Twain. And now, I'm accused of stalking him.

Honestly, it's just a coincidence that I know where he lives and drive by his house every day. Sometimes, yes, I also visit Burger King just because I know that he works there. And those love letters I stuffed into his locker? I was only joking — I mean, I know he has a girlfriend who owns half a brain and spends most of it on makeup. But I am not a stalker. Just look at my grades. All A's.

The principal smiles at me, understanding my "lapse of judgment" and believing my excuses. He makes me promise I won't do it again. I nod, while fake smiling right back. My fingers are crossed. Star sixty seven.

**Meg Montemayor, age 18**

## Changes

It comes and goes every year;  
The milky snow, fresh grass, wild sun, and feeble leaves,  
Touches us and slowly disappears.

Appalling weather, frozen mere,  
Flakes drifting everywhere, lost in their cold white weave.  
It comes and goes every year.

Sweet grass, warm rain, we all revere,  
Bubble blowing, kite flying, bike riding, to nature we cleave;  
Touches us and slowly disappears.

Dismissal, the teachers are sincere,  
Going home, stuffing bags to the top; to the sky we fly and  
take leave.  
It comes and goes every year.

Back with postcards, clothing, key chains, and bracelets:  
souvenirs,  
It's gone by too fast, and many disbelieve;  
Touches us and slowly disappears.

To a new season we always come near,  
Each one comes to save and relieve.  
It comes and goes every year,  
Touches us and slowly disappears.

**Patricia Su, age 15**

## Hasta Siempre

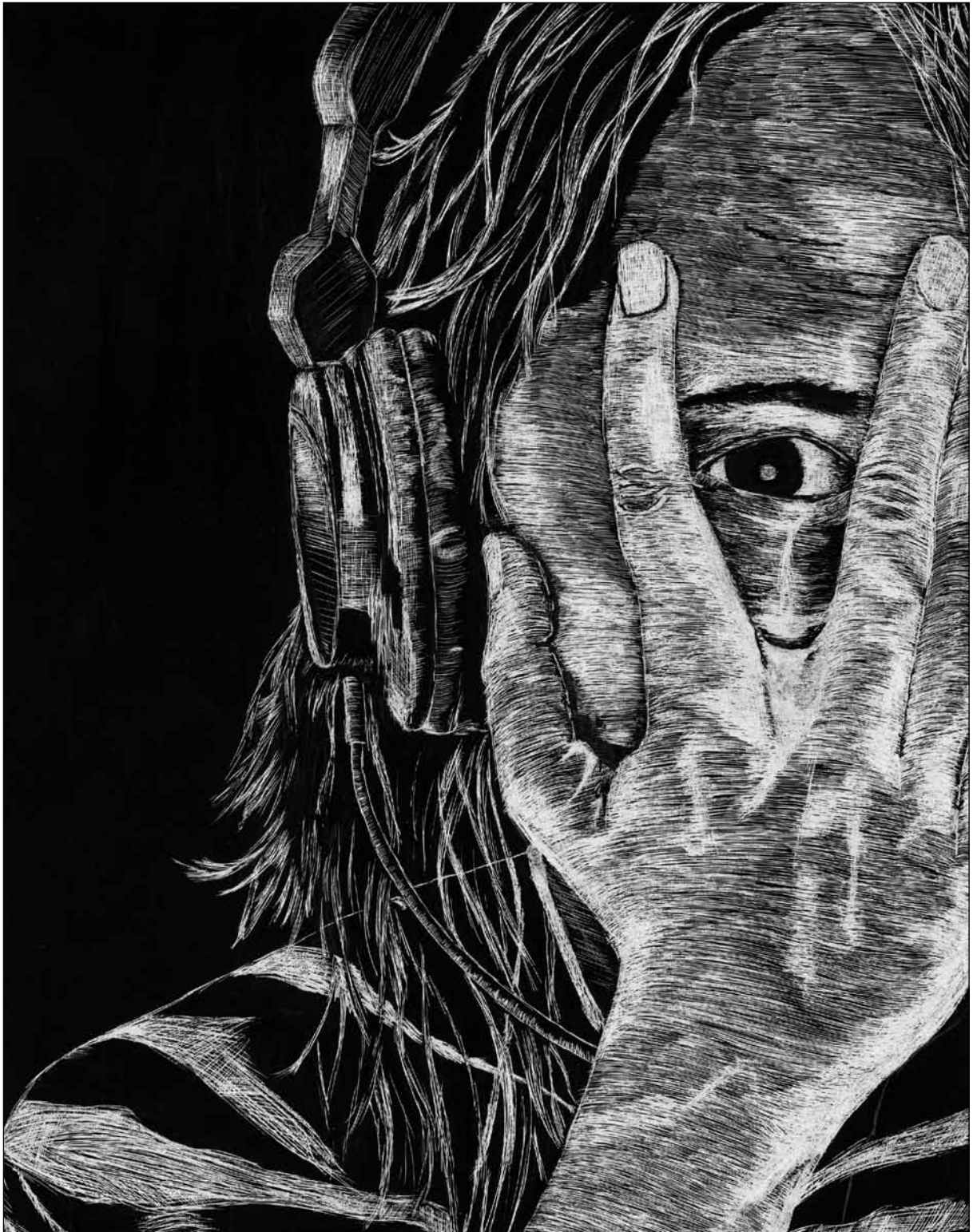
Cracks in the pavement,  
vibrations we can't feel as  
everything falls apart.  
Chained to governments, laws and  
bylaws,  
chalky politicians, ink-stained  
fingers flipping through newspapers  
bleeding  
pain in size 10 font.  
News reports every hour,  
taste of oatmeal clouding the pores  
as, subdued, we water  
plastic plants.  
Brainwaves spiking along with  
Lady Gaga's tempos

going through motions like old reels  
turning and turning  
showing faded memories in black and  
white.  
Yelling out our nightmares in  
dusty elevators  
and treating each conundrum  
as a Rubik's cube.  
Forgotten are the writings of old:  
Meyer our new Tolstoy,  
crying for Swan and not Karenina.  
Wearing the red shirts with the black  
print  
of that revolutionary we don't know.  
No longer the young generation's symbol

is two raised fingers  
but a white circle with a black star.  
We crave oil like junkies  
and spend all our money on faulty iPods  
(there's a new one every month).  
Somewhere a butterfly leaves a prison  
cell  
but flies too close to the sun —  
another soul lost  
as we cash in Welfare Cheques  
for Atom Bombs.

**Claudia Oriano, age 16**

I See You



**Dianne Pereira, age 18**

## A Deal with the Devil's Diva

"Beauty. Glamour. The next Monroe. A Venus among mortals. I could give you the face that launched a thousand photo shoots, banish your bad hair days for eternity! No acne breakouts, no freckles, no flabby arms," she continued with fervour, "no thunder thighs, no doughy paunch. No flaws. You'll be perfect." She stroked my hair, gentle fingers running through lifeless strands. I tried not to eye her untarnished fingernails too enviously.

"Perfect," I repeated. I fidgeted with my hands. Nails bitten beyond redemption, palms sweatier than sinners in church. Coming from someone so breathtaking, it almost sounded plausible.

"It'll be over soon," she assured me. I licked my lips slowly. The saleswoman circled the room like a ravenous predator; each infernal click of the heel filled me with trepidation.

"I'm not too sure about this," I said. The saleswoman smiled and moved closer to my seat. She gestured to the name tag pinned to her immaculate red uniform. The words BELLE ZIBAB, NETHER ENTERPRISES stared back at me. It was evident the saleswoman was a professional, one whose pitch was an offer of a lifetime.

"You can trust me, love. I've been doing this gig long before apple-toting queens owned magic mirrors." The saleswoman batted her mascara-laced eyelashes. I could only assume it was mascara, just as I assumed her nails were manicured, because her appearance was, well, as if she was plucked straight out of a fashion magazine. Almost unearthly. She tugged her nickel hoop earrings impatiently, waiting on my answer. Of course, my gut response was to get on my knees, throw my hands to the heavens, and scream yes at the top of my lungs. But. I narrowed my eyes, wary of the deal. "What's the catch?"

The saleswoman threw back her head and laughed. Her voice tinkled like stained glass windows falling from a cathedral, and as the cackling subsided, I was reminded of harpy shrieks. "Oh, no catch at all. Solely an exchange, dear. It's standard procedure." She cleared her throat, and began to rattle off a list. "Your common sense for a designer wardrobe. Your courage for soft, clear skin. Your opinions for glossy voluptuous locks. Your self-esteem for DD perky breasts. Your friendships for full, scarlet lips." She went on, a frenzied recitation. I opened my mouth to protest, but my throat was lodged with disgust. "Your heartfelt feelings for a petite figure. Your dreams and aspirations for stilettos and thigh high boots."

I swallowed my revulsion and slammed my fist onto my seat, the resounding thwack breaking her off. The saleswoman stopped babbling and raised her thoroughly tweezed eyebrows at me. "That's preposterous! To ask for all of that," I sputtered. "If I gave all of that, it would..."

"It would be like selling your soul," she finished with devilish delight. The saleswoman leaned in. "So, what's it going to be?" I stared at her. I thought of pacts, promises, and payments. Of vanity and visceral nonsense. I pictured myself waking up the next day, a hollow doll, voiceless and friendless.

"No sale," I said decisively.

"Hmm. Pity." She sighed half-heartedly and stretched with feline grace. "Well, I guess eternal damnation isn't meant for just anybody." The saleswoman helped me out of my seat. "I hope to see you again soon. Nether Enterprises always welcomes new clients." She packed my bags, and waved me away. I thanked her, left the store, and continued my shopping.

**Alfea Cassandra Donato, age 17**

## Cupcake & Fork

Cupcake made of cream, fork made from plastic.

Cupcake was born in a bakery, she met Fork there. Fork wasn't friendly at all! They were on sale in a box with a lot of decoration on it. Cupcake felt Fork was really strange, "Hello, eh, Mr. Mr. Mr. ..."

"You offensive Cupcake! Stop stammering there! My name is Mr. Fork!"

Cupcake whispered, "Who offended who?" But she was surprised. "Wow, you are amazing, how do you know my name?"

Sigh. After that, they became friends (or we can say Cupcake became Fork's fan), even though Fork always teased Cupcake. They sang together (Cupcake made Fork sing), danced together (Cupcake also made Fork dance), and chatted together.

One snowy day, Cupcake told Fork, "I want to be on sale."

"Oh c'mon, you are on sale now."

"No, I mean someone will buy me."

"NO! ARE YOU CRAZY! They will eat you!"

"Really? What is eat, does it spell like e-a-t?"

"That means you are going to die, the people who eat you will kill you!"

A few days later, a girl bought Cupcake (the whole box). When the girl started to eat, she held Fork. Fork finally realized that he is the one who is going to kill Cupcake! When he reached Cupcake, he broke himself. Fork thought, "Our hearts are always together, united as one, and smiling even in death."

**JiaXin (Maggie) Han, age 12**



## Ten Minutes of Broccoli

"Eat your broccoli!"

"No!"

"Just eat it!"

"No!"

"Eat it now!"

"Never!"

My mother and I had been yelling back and forth at each other for a while. Finally, she gave up.

"When I come back in ten minutes, I want the broccoli gone!" Okay, maybe she didn't exactly give up yet.

As my mom stormed upstairs and slammed her bedroom door, I leaned back on my chair and stared at the few pieces of broccoli left on my plate. I could feel them staring back at me, with a sly, evil smile, those invisible eyes, burning holes in me.

I sat motionless at the dining table, just staring at the broccoli, I let anger build up in me.

My eyes stayed locked on the pieces of broccoli, the dining room seemed to close in on us, I bit my lip as anger boiled inside of me. I. HATE. BROCCOLI.

Slowly, I let anger take over me, I was no longer me, I was a deadly broccoli exterminator, so tall and strong with my long, pointy teeth glowing under the silvery illumination of the moonlight. Every part of my body twisted in rage, like I was about to burst. I gathered everything that was in me and pushed it all into the core of my heart, darkness and hatred filled my veins.

I cursed whoever discovered broccoli.

Then, I let the rage take over me. I let out a long, piercing scream that devoured everything around me, the world dimming away, I kept screaming, but no sound came out anymore. There were no walls around me. No sound. Nothing. The only thing left was a plate of broccoli, floating in midair in this completely empty world. Suddenly, all my anger seemed to flood back in, tearing me apart, I screamed, but I knew no one could hear me.

I charged forward, I took the plate in my hands and smashed it on the floor. It didn't stop falling, and that's when I realized that there was no floor; that I was standing on complete nothing. I looked back at the broccoli, still there, floating. I ignored the world around me, and reached out and grabbed the few pieces of broccoli, I could hear their panicked screams in my mind. Good. I gave them one last stare, then gathered everything I am, and everything I will become, into my hand. I shoved the broccoli into my mouth and chewed furiously. I could hear them screaming, I could feel them dying. Perfect. Finally, I swallowed.

My rage died down almost immediately, and just as fast as it had happened, I was back in the dining room. I could hear my mother coming down the stairs. I looked at the clock, ten minutes was over.

**Sherry Wang, age 12**

## at the corner table of a cafe

4:02 PM

from Her window seat  
the world appeared to Her  
in varying shades of  
grey  
(as though the rain  
had somehow  
bleached  
the colours from  
it)

5:19 PM

busy limbs rushing  
for cover  
from the storm  
in the world on the  
(other)  
side of the glass  
legs slicing  
the air in quick strides  
beautiful heads bent  
under briefcases  
and purses  
and bare arms  
alert eyes darting  
in search of shelter  
a mother  
bundling up her young son  
under a wide awning  
fussing with  
zippers  
and catches  
(carefully pulling  
a tiny little hat  
onto the  
perfect  
little  
head)  
his glee and wonder  
were not lost on Her  
vicariously stretching Her  
arms  
towards the fat rain drops  
with him  
felt the delightfully  
cold water  
on Her hands  
Her arms  
Her face

(dark car pulls up  
obstructing Her view  
mother and child  
magically whisked  
away)

6:23 PM

behind the  
water-streaked window  
the rain was starting  
to let up, and it was now  
drizzling instead  
of pouring buckets

the streets were  
deserted except for  
the cars that  
slid soundlessly through  
the dark (leaving  
two glowing red dots  
in their wake  
like tiny pinpricks of  
light left when two  
matches go out)  
everything looked  
shiny  
and fluorescent  
under the streetlights  
it was a dream world  
surreal, held together  
by a gossamer thread  
so delicate it could  
be torn with a breath  
a sigh  
the slightest movement

Her back turned  
from the window  
a cup of murky  
brown liquid  
(lying helplessly in Her  
outstretched  
hand)

**Angelina Shi, age 18**

## The Hole in Your Bucket

The two made quite an odd couple: the old woman was tall, thin, and, in her soft green dress, very reminiscent of a praying mantis. The large tortoiseshell glasses, perched atop a precarious tower of brown and purple hair, did nothing to correct the image. Nor did the strange way she held herself, craned forward expectantly, squinting into the distance in search of her spectacles, with one arm twining around her partner's — or, at least, halfway around. The large man beside her resembled a hot-air balloon: his stubby legs looked ready to collapse under the bulbous load they carried. The man's arms jutted from his side as if his body were rejecting the appendages; his head was no more than a bald, lumpy growth freckled with cavities (mainly, his eyes and mouth), on which was daintily placed a tiny silk cap. Sweat, not repelled by the appearance of an enormous hankie, dampened the man's head and darkened the underarms of his burgundy velvet suit.

The two made quite a sight; the only feature they shared was a superior sneer.

The act faltered the moment they arrived at the bridge.

Apart from the checkerboard tiles constituting the ground, nothing about the bridge itself was particularly unusual. Nonetheless, the couple was unnerved, a bothersome sense of foreboding causing their brows to crease.

"Act casual, Casual," muttered the mantis woman. The balloon man gave a noncommittal grunt and idly suggested, "There once was a girl from Nantucket..."

Then, together, the two of them stepped onto the bridge.

Immediately something changed. Silence fell on the area, a thick and heavy silence without even the implication of sound. The balloon man frowned harder, a fresh wave of sweat escaping his pores, and wondered where the organ music had gone.

The man shivered. "She had a great hole in her bucket."

An enormous butterfly fluttered daintily through the air, and the balloon man stared at it. A minute ago there had been multitudes, so many that his airway felt almost clogged with them and he'd had to wave his hankie around. And he had been absolutely sure that they were all brilliantly coloured, glowing with unimaginable hues. This lone insect, as it lightly settled upon the screaming mouth of a stone gargoyle, was merely shaded in different degrees of greyness. In fact, the man realized, everything around him was now grey. Even he was grey.

He grieved for his burgundy velvet suit. "She went to a witch —"

He was distracted by the detection of some colour in the corner of his eye, and swung his growth to the left. Standing on the side of the bridge and casually leaning into thin air was a man dressed all in very bright blue, except for the plume on his very bright blue hat, which was red. Definitely a wizard. The mantis woman peered at him, and the wizard peered back with a bright green eye and an hourglass shaped pupil. When the mantis woman was an inch away from him, she suddenly jumped backwards.

"Pardon me," she said. "I can't seem to remember where

I've put my glasses. We're looking for a wizard."

The wizard nodded sagely. "I'm sure he's around here somewhere."

The mantis woman took another look at him. "I do say," she remarked, "you appear to have a goat in your pants."

"Have I?" the wizard asked, glancing downwards. The balloon man noticed that he had hooves sticking out of his very bright blue trousers, and, when he tugged his very bright blue trousers slightly upwards, he had very furry legs.

Oh, yes, thought the balloon man. This was definitely the wizard.

But he didn't say that. Instead, he said, "That hole was a b—"

"Casual," the mantis woman snapped. "Enough of that. We appear to be in the company of a wizard."

"Indeed, indeed," said the wizard. "That I am. Marvellous the Great. Or Wondrous the Magnificent, if you prefer."

"Oh," said the mantis woman. "Well, in that case, I am Miss Monday, and this is Mister Friday."

The wizard raised an eyebrow. "Casual Friday, eh? Would you be Helluva Monday, then?"

She gave him a stern and searing look. "Miss Monday to you."

"Nobody likes Mondays."

"Anyways —" She gave Friday a smack on the head for the wizard's misbehaviour. "— we are in need of your assistance. My companion here appears to have been cursed, and is only capable of speaking in limericks."

Friday nodded. "Who told her to leave him and —"

The wizard interrupted him with a raised eyebrow. "And the swearing?"

"No, no, that's quite ordinary, unfortunately."

"...forget it," Friday muttered dejectedly.

"But, fortunately, both are quite fixable. This is what you inquired about, I presume?"

"Of course."

The wizard nodded, crossed his eyes so that both unusual pupils met in the centre, and waved his arms about. "Squibbly wibbly," he added.

Nothing appeared to happen.

"Well?" said the mantis woman. "When may we have an appointment?"

"Well, no, see, I've already done it."

"No you haven't."

"Yes I have — look, he's not talking in limericks anymore, is he?"

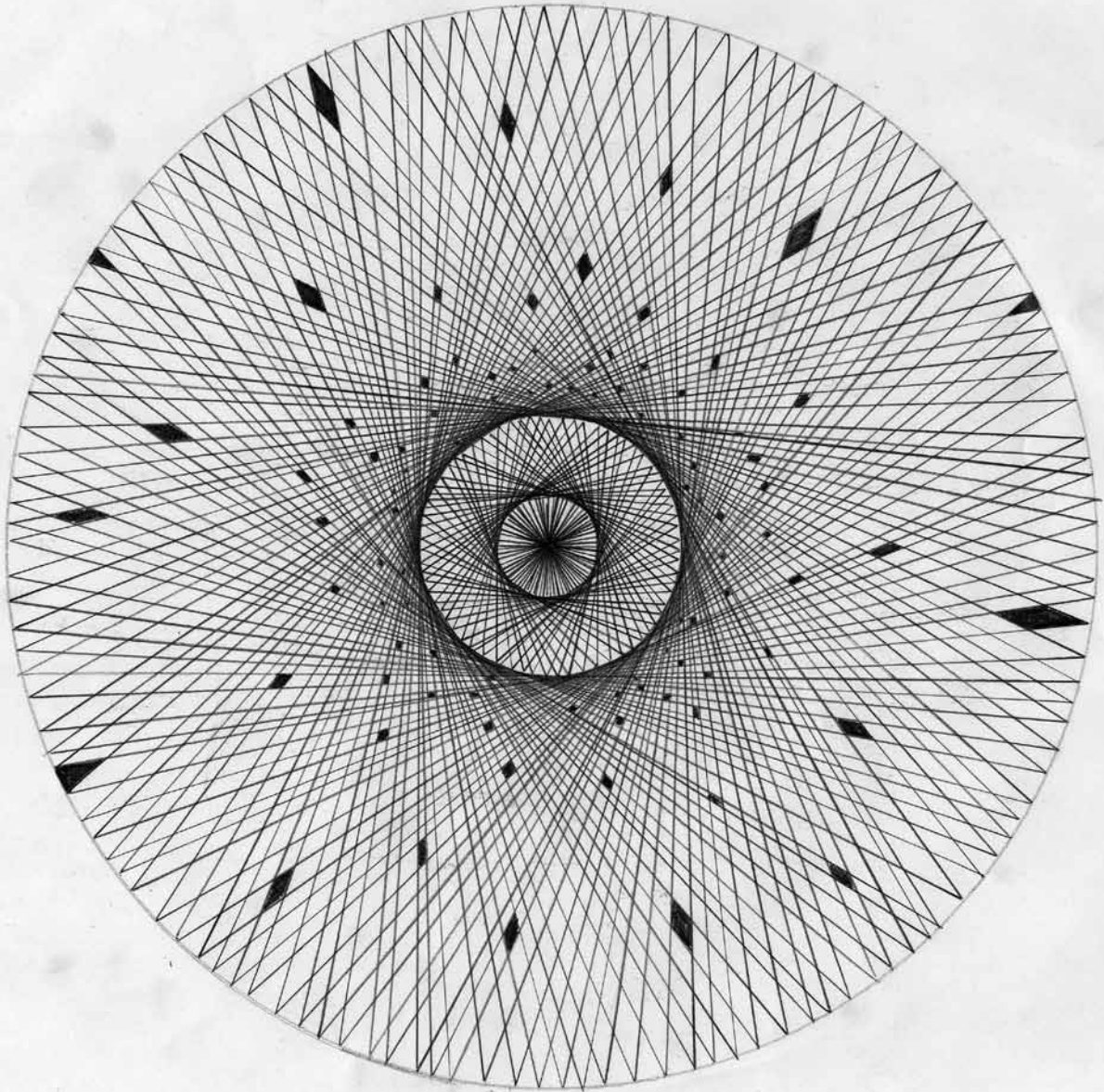
Friday, with a frown, realized he was right. He was quite incapable of speaking in limericks. But also quite incapable of saying anything at all.

"And no more swearing, see? Both problems solved. Now, for my payment."

Quite suddenly, Friday realized something was terribly, terribly wrong. All around him — in the trees, on the bridge, even on the very bright blue pants — were immobile faces. Faces that he hadn't seen in a very long time. And he only stood

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## Cyclical



*Rachel Ng*

**Rachel Ng, age 16**

frozen when the mantis woman screamed.  
The wizard turned to him. Friday covered and clamped shut his eyes. Nothing happened.  
He peeked. The wizard in the very bright blue clothes was picking a bit of cat hair off his very bright blue jacket. Miss

Monday was gone. He glanced at Friday.  
"Well, that wasn't too difficult, was it? Off you go, then."  
And suddenly Friday didn't feel very much cheated at all.

**Amy Schacherl, age 16**



## I Am Not a Haiti Miracle

I felt the earth shattering beneath my feet. The horrific screams of people seemed to circle around me. I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't know what to do. The only world I knew was deteriorating. The walls crashed in on top of me and I was trapped.

Slowly the screams disappeared. The dust that had risen from the destruction was burning my eyes, stinging right through to the centre. I was under a mountain of rubble. I couldn't move. My arm was wedged under what appeared to be the back of an old fridge. The catastrophic pain was horrendous. It was as if a million little needles were all stabbing me at once. I cried for help. But the only response I got was my own voice echoing back at me.

I yelled again, praying someone, anyone, would hear me. But there was only silence. The stillness was making me so impatient. All I could do was sit there and wait. I am not sure how long I was lying there. It was dark and hot under all the rubble. I felt sticky and the air tasted dry. My arm was numb and soon I couldn't feel it at all. Although I was oblivious to real pain, I was still suffering. I could feel myself running out of air. I was gradually suffocating. All my hopes had drifted away.

I heard the loud shriek of someone in close proximity. It was my friend who had also been smashed below the crumbled building. I called her name. Her answer was one word, my name. We both screamed together wishing that we would be heard. We were exhausted. Again, there was nothing but excruciating silence.

The worst part was when she stopped screaming with me, stopped answering my calls. When I knew that she was dead. It was hard to believe she was gone. It made me wonder if any of my friends were alive. Did my brothers and sisters get through and survive this terrible experience? Where were they? For so many questions there were with no answers.

I could feel the temperature rising again to a sickening heat. It was so hot I could taste it. My lungs were receiving less and less air with every breath. I had run completely out of energy. I let my head flop down to the ground. I lightly closed my eyes. It had become impossible to keep them open they felt so heavy.

I reflected on my less than perfect life. I lived in a poor country and worked instead of going to school. Cooking, cleaning and looking after my younger siblings no longer felt like hardship. I still would rather live than die.

I was startled out of my thoughts when I heard the sound of footsteps. Would they find me in time? I was suffocating too fast. My mind became twisted with incoherent thoughts. I knew I was going to die. The people were right above me I could tell, shifting through the remains of the building. I took my last breath and let my soul drift away...

**Laura Makaltses, age 14**

## Goodbye

Invisible  
That's what I am  
Standing here, watching  
The crowd moves  
Swallowing me  
Spitting me back out  
No one really sees me

Background  
That's what I'm a part of  
Always waiting  
For someone to notice  
For someone to say  
'Why do you look so  
Lonely?'

Mute  
That's what my life has become  
I feel as though  
Sound has evaded me  
All I hear is buzzing  
Conversations all around me  
But I'm not involved in any

Blind  
That's what everyone else is  
It's what I tell myself  
An excuse I chant  
'Everyone else is just blind.  
They can't see the real me'  
And it's true  
Because no one sees  
Me

Tears  
That's what run down my face  
Every night at home  
When the mask comes off  
When the curtains fall down  
When I realize I'm really  
Invisible  
Mute  
Worthless

Sharp  
That's what it is  
An edge, razor sharp  
Good enough to do  
What I intend for it to do  
Because I'm just  
Invisible  
Mute  
Worthless

Blood  
That's what spills across the  
sheets  
Marring the purity  
Blemishing the white canvas  
But that's okay  
It will become my canvas

Goodbye  
That's what I long to say  
What I want to say  
But what I can't say  
Because I have no one to say  
it to  
But myself  
So here's to me

Goodbye

**Jessica Sinn, age 14**

## Colours

Romulus the elf dug his fingers deep into the earth, using powers given to his people long ago to feel through the ground each of the colours that coursed in the forest below. The swirling patterns on his skin changed hue to mimic his surroundings, greens and browns intertwined in an earthy dance. Rom took a deep breath and sent his power surging from his splayed fingers like a river of strength into the earth to search for any plant life that needed healing. When he found the dying olive shrub, he gasped slightly, its agony piercing him like an icy blade. The elf sent a flare of power to the shrub and he watched — or rather, felt — it soak up the healthy colour.

Rom smiled, and feeling his work to be done, he snatched back his power. A moment later he froze and sent it all rushing forth once more. He forced his fingers deeper into the earth, his green markings flushing worried blue, searching with newfound purpose.

There it was again — out of place among the earthy tones — the splatter of crimson.

The splatter of human blood, but not just any human's — it was *hers*.

Romulus rose quickly and with wolf-like grace he loped through the woodland, following the throb of crimson with his bare feet. He tried to ignore his conscience — his father's voice — reminding him of the taboo on human contact. But this wasn't just any human he was rushing to — what if something happened? What if she was — what if she had — what if? Rom shook his head to dispel his inner voices and calm his pounding heart.

When he reached a well-worn woodland path, Rom knelt down and stuffed his fist into the ground again, feeling for the pulse of blood — it was strong. Like a hunter suddenly wary of its prey, Romulus blended with the forest as he approached the copse of trees that was the source of the beating crimson.

She was clasping her bleeding arm, the scarlet drops running down her fingers, staining the grass below. Cream-coloured magic shimmered all around her, enveloping the nearby plants. Romulus's skin effervesced with colour and he felt like the sun resided within him, rays of warmth reaching even the darkest emotions. Her fair curls swung wildly as she turned, her face a mask of apprehension.

She rushed over, the haze of her plant magic disappearing from the air. That's when he noticed the inert form of an elf in the tall grass, a thick vine encircling his throat.

"Please, Romulus, let me explain."

"Explain what, Amelie?" he replied in voice as hard as rock. "Explain why the body of my comrade lies at your feet? I do not think what you say will change anything."

Amelie didn't shrink away from his accusing stare but challenged it with her own unwavering grey gaze.

"He was not your comrade, he was a traitor. I was only doing you a favour."

"Taking away life does no one any favours!" said Rom, forcing the words out of his tight throat. How could she? She

knows the penalty for murder; everyone does. She also knows that it is the elves that enforce it.

"I had to, Romulus. I had no choice! The man who sent me took my sister — if I don't do what he asks, he's going to kill her!" Here, her voice shook slightly.

Romulus closed the gap between them, unable to resist her cosmic pull and unwilling to break away from her eyes that veiled the truth. "Who is he? Tell me! I can help you, Amelie." His fiery orange markings grew veins of inquiring green.

"I can't," she choked. "I can't tell you, Romulus. I — I can't do it." Her voice shook more than ever.

"Cannot do what? Wha—"

Rom followed her widened eyes turning to look down at his bare feet where a sickly looking vine was snaking around his ankle, its thorns glistening with poison.

"No," he whispered in disbelief, his swirling patterns turning a stark white. "Amelie, I don't understand. I thought you — we —"

Amelie crumpled to the ground, her fierce façade slipping, replaced by a heart-wrenching vulnerability. "I don't expect you to understand," she whispered, her hands knotting in the grass, which lovingly entwined in her fingers. She beckoned at the vine still encircling the elf's feet and it obediently withdrew. Amelie rose with feline fluidity and faced Romulus with the strength he found so beautiful.

"Do what you must. I know your people are bound tightly by laws, and a law like this is no exception."

Romulus's blood ran cold as he realised she was right. Tears trickled down his face as he cradled her pale cheeks with his hands, remembering better days when he held her this close. The elf summoned his powers, his eyes drowning in her grey pools as he began to draw the colour from the only human he ever cared about. Pain built in his chest and compressed his heart until he could barely breathe. His hands shook as Amelie's grey eyes turned paler until they were almost white. The anguish was so intense that he wasn't sure whose it was until his whole body began to shake violently. Romulus pulled away from her, staggering back.

"I can't," he gasped, "I can't do it. Just go. Get away from here before I find that I can."

Amelie stared at him with unseeing eyes and her hands crept to her stomach, embracing what was developing within her.

"You have not taken all the colour from my world, Romulus, nor from yours."

"No." His eyes widened as the realisation dawned. "You are to be the mother of a child?"

"Yes, our child."

Without another word, she turned away, her fingers trailing on the bark of trees, the plants guiding her next steps. Romulus felt his whole world collapse in a forlorn heap and then rebuild itself using the strength of a single, colourful hope.

**Layla Halabi, age 16**

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## Leave on Time



**Janel Halenko, age 17**



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## 3/11

Eleven minutes before three.  
Eleven days after March.  
Mother Nature left a scar on earth, never to be forgotten.  
O Mother, Mother in a fury, seismic wrath,  
Rattled and bruised Honshu to a perilous hue.  
O Honshu, Honshu it left deep scars all over you.

Lamps shook, bottles broke,  
No this horrid scene was no joke.  
Neon signs fell on the street, fissures opened in concrete,  
And bustling hearts pounded offbeat.  
Howling dogs ran, shouting humans ran.  
In minutes, it all changed Japan.

But Mother Nature's rage did not die down,  
For She sent monstrous waves that swept across towns.  
Aquatic beasts engulfed buses, houses, trees, and buildings.  
They mercilessly swallowed thousands of humans and animals  
without stopping.  
Greater fear accumulates as radiation emanates.  
It all happened on this tragic date.

While giant rubbles pile outdoors and at the seashores,  
Honshu's children now sleep on cold stone floors,  
With sparse food and fresh water.  
O can Mother be any crueller?

May through these dark times, you find perseverance,  
Hope, and bravery that will guide you to the light.  
But until you escape the night with confidence,  
We will help you with all our might.

**Rebecca Co, age 18**

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## Still Doll

An avaricious queen, sitting on a table,  
With skin made of porcelain, and braids made of silk.  
Has a ravishing beauty, but a vitriolic tongue,  
That censoriously spits, at her world around.

Reds and browns, pattern beneath her,  
Illuminating glow, shines from above,  
Torn-off wallpaper, creeps from the sides,  
Not much for a palace, but quite enough.

Lavish jewels and extravagant clothes,  
Can never impress her fastidious mind.  
Sweet words and saccharine treats,  
Can never tame her persevering whine.

Still she knows that there is a limit.  
Like a vast ocean that hits a coast,  
Like a boundless land that meets the sea,  
That stops her from her vanity.

Her lips can never evoke a flow of eloquence.  
Her ears can never captivate the song that makes birds cry.  
Her eyes can never find the spectrum of possibilities.  
Her nose can never sense the sweet smell of success.

While her tears pile in an overflowing bottle,  
While her anger suffocates from the frame too small,  
And her frustration drums against the china,  
She dreams of the day that her heart will beat.

**Maria Xie, age 16**

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## Dodge Ball

Dodge ball. Why invent such a sport? Game? Sport-game? Why invent such a thing?! I mean, what's the best way to spend free time? Throwing balls, oh excuse me, WHIPPING balls at people's heads? I absolutely hate playing dodge ball when it's girls against guys. Guys, they have a tendency to do the whipping of the balls and they like to use your face as a target. So you're a girl chilling, waiting for the chance to throw the ball, when WHOOSH! A guy whips a dodge ball smack dab in the middle of your face. Ow, it hurts. But instead of saying sorry, he says something along the lines of, I don't know, maybe "YOU'RE OUT!!!" No, really? Hint the TON of sarcasm. You just whipped me in the face with a ball. How could I possibly not notice? \*cough\* sarcasm \*cough\* And do you not see me walking to the side where the people who are out just chill and be out? Seriously. And another thing I hate. Teachers always get mad at you because you're "not participating, participate", you're a "wallflower", "grab a ball and throw it." Hello? I'm trying to participate. I'm bending down to grab a ball when some other person gets to it before me and throws it. It's not my fault. People never give me a chance to throw the ball. And when I do get someone out and participate, you're never watching. Plus, it doesn't help that I just naturally suck at dodge ball. I hate dodge ball. I hate the boys that whip balls at your face. I hate the teachers who get you in trouble for trying to participate. I hate sucking at dodge ball. I hate playing dodge ball SO often. Grr! I hate dodge ball.

**Maya Fang, age 12**

## The Woman Who Mimics

Unflinching, I stare her down. Sometimes, I am overwhelmed by her unique beauty. Her pursed lips, her big brown eyes, her button nose, they all seem to complement each other. Her face relaxes and she smiles as though her problems have become someone else's problems. This person, in front of me, seems to have a carefree life.

I look harder; I bore myself into the eyes of the person staring back at me. I see her mouth moving and I make out the words. "When you look at me, what do you see?" Suddenly, I hear myself having a conversation with this woman. I see a strong woman, a determined one; this young woman doesn't like to make mistakes. Her eyes tell a story of their own. Her eyes, oh how they sparkle, boasting of big hopes and dreams. Her lips curl up at the edges, her lips parting to reveal a mouthful of pearly whites. The light crinkles at the sides of her eyes tell me that she is genuine.

Her lips begin to move and suddenly I hear her laughter. It surrounds me, engulfs me, and I am overwhelmed with happiness. For a minute, we stand there laughing at ourselves. Tears of happiness sweep down my cheeks and I wipe them away. I see that she does the same. I hear her thoughts and I feel content. I sit there, cross-legged, wondering how I could introduce my new friend to the world. I reach out to touch her, to make sure that she is real.

I see that she does the same.

When her palm presses against mine, I cannot feel her warm human touch. I can feel my eyebrows beginning to furrow into an arch; the thoughts in my mind are tangled, and I am confused. I look up at her and I see that she feels the same way. I reach out to touch her again but this time my hand stops short. I focus my eyes like a camera zooming in on its target. I tilt my head and I find myself tapping a surface, a glass surface. I take a step back and repeat the whole process. I peer incredulously at the image that presents itself to me. My gaze falls; I shift my weight from one foot to the other.

I am faced with a dilemma.

This woman who I have been conversing with is simply a mirage? Perhaps, she is a figment of my imagination, the version of myself that I have always wanted to know. I begin to walk away, but something in the back of my mind tells me to go back.

So I go back.

This time, though, I stare with even more determination to understand this woman who stares back at me. But alas, I tire out and my eyes relax. I throw my head back and laugh at my own silliness. I feel like a child, a baby who is amazed when she first sees her own reflection.

Bent double, I let out a sigh of relief. This woman in the mirror, I have no competition with her. She is me and I am her. I gather myself up and smile at my reflection.

I stand and strike a pose for the mirror.  
Who's looking? (Certainly not the world.)  
(No.) The person looking back at me is me.  
Just me.

And I smile to myself; wink, smile, blow air kisses, the whole mixture and jazz.

And then I look at myself one last time.

I tell myself that I am beautiful.

And there is no other creature on this planet that is like me.

And I ask myself, "Why would I ever want to be anyone else, but me?"

And I turn around, flick my hair over my shoulders.

I walk away from the mirror.

I look back, but only once.

And I smile at myself one more time.

Because I know, I am beautiful.

Right then and there, I promised the woman staring back at me that I would take every opportunity to introduce her to the world.

I turn around and wave.

And as I walk away, all that is heard is the clattering of her heels.

**Tina Ta, age 18**

## Hibernation

I knew that between caterpillar and butterfly a cocoon is needed  
but I thought lying dormant would be  
womb-like, nurturing  
a bit like a cup of tea  
by the fire.

Instead, I feel mummified  
wrapped in layers of discarded identities  
and dreams that needed tweaking  
and it's taking me longer than I had expected  
to claw out — this monotonous journey  
this pointless bobbing and flailing  
is making it hard to move my limbs at all.  
Suspended in jelly, muscles tense against failure  
I wait for a sword to emerge from my chest.  
I wait for my teeth and nails to sharpen and lengthen.  
I wait for the visions  
that will outline my means of escape.

**Alice Gauntley, age 17**

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## Illusions



**Lili Coelho, age 12**

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## Trash

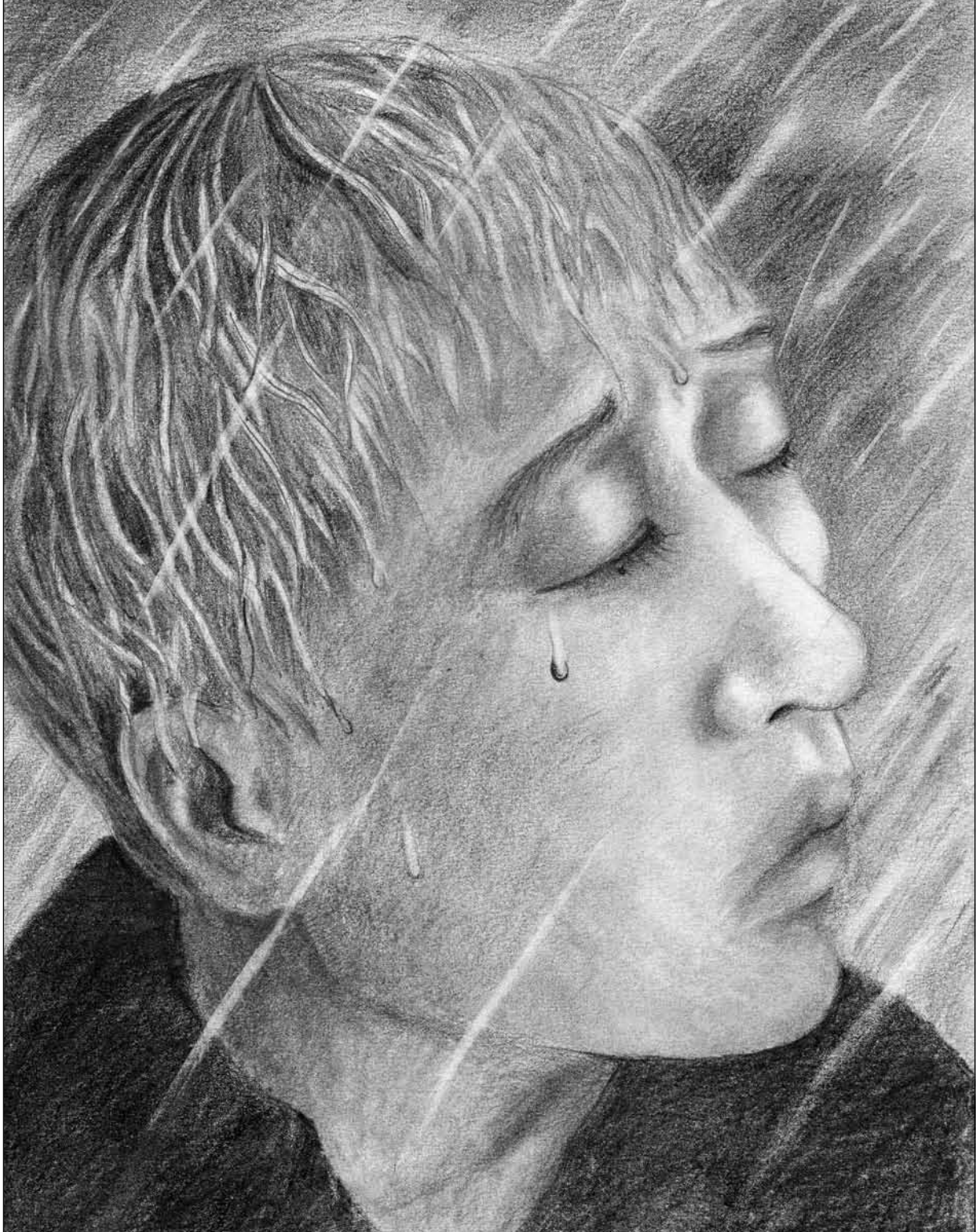
When does garbage become trash? When it's thrown on the ground instead of the waste bin. Me, I'm trash, but would much rather be garbage. Now that I'm trash people step on me and make rude comments like, "Look at the trash on the ground," or "Ew, I just stepped on that piece of disgusting trash!" But really it's not my fault. I used to be a lovely wrapper covering a yummy snack. After I was opened and the snack removed I was tossed on the ground. The waste bin was right there! No reason for me to become trash. Now I remain on the ground adding to the city muck and guck. I used to be the only piece of trash on the street, but now people are oddly attracted to adding their own garbage to the street as well. Now you can hardly see the ground with all of us covering it. Although secretly I still hope that someday I'll get picked up and become garbage. I can only hope.

**Quincy Flash, age 12**



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## The Judgement



**Julia Hou, age 15**

## Letting Go

*The silhouette surges out of the mist. Its engine screams as it expands. Suddenly, I feel the blur knock against my body, pressure quickly building on my chest. My head is wrapped in agony. I begin to slip out of my body, afraid. Soon, I cannot feel anything.*

I smell the sharp cleanliness of a hospital. Struggling against strange bonds, I attempt to lift myself off the mattress below me. Despite my efforts, I remain still.

"Do you think she'll ever wake up?"

That voice sounds vaguely familiar. It is calm and gentle, but with a slight tremor. Suddenly, a vision races through my mind.

*I smell turkey and corn. There is a huge pumpkin pie in the centre of the oaken table.*

*"Happy Thanksgiving!" a woman calls.*

*Mom?*

"She's been in a coma for such a long time. There isn't anything more I can do for her. I'm sorry."

I clench a gigantic carrot in my hands, offering it to the silly goat. It nibbles greedily. I turn around and laugh. Mom is smiling, radiant like Cinderella. There is somebody with his arms around her. They both smile.

Dad?

"I think that we should remove the feeding tube."

The voice smooth as cream begins to shake.

"But before that, we have to say goodbye."

This voice is deeper.

*I am being swung around, elation fluttering in my stomach. My straw-hair whips my cheeks.*

*"Don't stop!"*

*He laughs, warmth leaping from his throat. When I am finally set back on the ground, I bury myself in his thick wool sweater, giggling.*

A cool hand strokes my cheek.

*The pet-store is bright, full of sharp noises and smells. A puppy saunters up to us, a curious bundle of grey rags.*

*"Can we get him?" I ask.*

*My parents chuckle and nod their assent.*

*I scoop the little dog into my arms and kiss its soft head.*

*"I'll call him Boomer!"*

"Maria, we love you more than anything else. I really don't want to let you go."

Mom!

"Didn't she say something? Did you hear that?"

"I didn't hear anything. You need some sleep, ma'am. Her muscles only twitched. Don't worry. It's natural."

But I did speak!

Writhing, I wrestle to free myself from the invisible forces that chain me. In spite of my efforts, my hands do not move. Look at me, Mom! I'm still here!

"Goodbye Maria."

*It is the first day of school. I am scared, but Mom holds me tight before gently pushing me towards the door. I catch sight of my fellow kindergarteners. I step forward hesitantly.*

*"Goodbye Maria! Have a good day!"*

No, wait!

Something is jerked out of my body. It hurts.

No! I'm still alive!

Nobody hears me.

**Kathleen Chen, age 13**

## Another man's place

I hate the way he shamelessly turns the key and enters my house as if it were his own. I hate the way he sits next to my mother with his arm around her waist. I hate the way he insists on telling me stories about his beloved daughter, his crazy college years, his thoughts on the corrupted governmental system of Greece.

He sits on our old brown couch, unaware of the nights another man spent on it watching soccer games, eating souvlaki, fighting over the last piece of baklava. He rests his feet on our red carpet, clueless of the memories it holds. He doesn't know of the dances and the birthday parties, the long sleepless nights before my science fairs, the failed attempts at assembling an IKEA bed. He doesn't know of the loud fights at four A.M. He hasn't heard the sound of my footsteps as I ran towards the living room terrified. He hasn't seen the tears of panic and shame.

Yet, he rests so comfortably where another once sat so tensely. He doesn't scream in anger; he speaks enthusiastically of Plato and Tolstoy. He does not silence me; he demands the expression of thoughts, even on the simple matter of the three-legged pizza tables. And he holds my mother tightly, not out of jealousy or frustration, but from love and pure affection.

He takes another bite from his slice of vegetable pizza and gives me a smile.

I hate the way he smiles so genuinely.

**Ana-Maria Qarri, age 16**

## Slow Train Coming

Take a good look, kid, at what you're doing  
Sit back and rest your head against the window  
Watch the drops slide down the glass  
like they saw it comin' all along.  
Knew they'd eventually slide along.  
And the train slides along on its tracks, ignorant of what it  
leaves behind  
And the waitress shuffles her feet, brings you another drink  
and turns again to check the time.  
Take a good look, kid, past those drops.  
Ain't it a little scary not to know where you're going when  
you know where you'll end up?  
A metronome, a staring face, with no eyes to see your spirit  
Let alone your face  
That tickin' wristwatch won't do you any good, kid, but remind  
you of the time you're spending  
on this train, flirting with sleep, just going for the ride  
to some place you've got to be, where you'll be all alone  
A stranger in a strange city, so far, so far from home.  
Take a second and listen, kid, hear the splash.  
Think of him, and think of her, and picture the perfect figure  
His serenity incomparable, her grace unmatched  
by your tightly gripped fingers on the picture.  
The ashes crumble and start fallin' with every jerk and stir  
The waitress looks concerned  
but you couldn't care less.  
What would you say to her?  
"Scuse me, ma'am, but I've gotta know — is the hard-knock  
row?"

Is it worth the trip, even though  
I could always turn around and go back?"  
And what would she say to you after heaving a sigh?  
"Sorry stranger, but I just don't know  
What you want me to say."  
And you'd just stare.  
"See, stranger, you know what you'll end up with anyway  
If there were a right answer, you'd know why you'd be on this  
train  
But until you've picked and gone a way  
There ain't nothin' to say."  
Watch those drops slide on down  
'Cause at the end of the day, even if all you can say is  
You went so far out of your way  
Went so far even as to age  
But felt nothing quite the same as being with your joy  
You at least got to watch those withering drops, slide on down  
with fate  
The same way you'd just slide away  
if you knew what else to do and say.  
But it just wouldn't be the same if you never saw the beauty of  
that glass  
or the excitement that uncertainty brings  
Though the seconds may sound like symphonies  
as they pass in all their volumes, drowning you away.  
So take a look, kid, and remember what they say —  
it ain't about a destination.  
Get on the train.

**Sylvia Di Leonardo, age 18**

## Imagination

Daddy said he was going to be early. I look up at the clock and he's TEN HOURS LATE!?! Oh, wait; Mommy said not the big hand. So he's an hour late. He's never late. Why's he late now? Did he get hurt? Did he crash his car? Get abducted by foreign spies from Tibet? Are they torturing him, trying to find out why stinky cheese is so stinky? Maybe the bad men in black who abducted my bunny kidnapped him. Maybe they're actually good men and took daddy away for a vacation on a tropical island in the Bahamas. Or maybe a group of evil winter faeries, like in the books my older sister reads, abducted him. They could've taken him to the world of the fey by bewitching him with some sort of magical spell. Their queen must like him. I remember Mommy telling me Daddy used to be very handsome. He would refuse them, though. He loves Mommy very much and always will. The queen then would become angry with him and would have sent him to faerie jail. There, faeries would force him to eat faerie food, forcing him to stay in the faerie world forever. He would've cleverly hidden the fact

that he didn't eat anything at all and then somehow broken out. While making a daring escape attempt, he'd sneeze at the worst of times and would be caught again by the faerie guards. A pixie disguised as a faerie would rescue him, and then demand a reward: the teddy bear Daddy bought for me. Daddy would refuse, and then the pixie would be very angry. He would then hand Daddy back to the faerie guards and then Daddy would be taken back by the faerie queen. Meanwhile, he'd be freezing since he's in the winter court and not the lovely summer court. The queen would be furious. She'd order him to a dark and scary place where he'd have to —

I hear a knock on my door. I get up and open it. Daddy's standing on the other side, smiling sheepishly. He's holding the teddy bear he promised to get me in his arms.

"Sorry, sweetie. I'd never miss my daughter's seventh birthday, but I couldn't find my glasses... They were on top of my head the whole time!"

**Sanjana Mazumder, age 15**



London Clockwork



Tracy Li, age 13

## You and the Washroom

Person wakes up in the morning and goes to the washroom.  
The morning routine.

He rubs the sleep from his eyes, the dried drool from his chin, and the tired from his expression. The mirrors surrounding almost the entire square of this room spit his reflection back at him, and he is forced to face himself once again after a full night of closed eyes and anything-without-reality rest. Does a man ever fear the morning because of his knowledge that there is his reflection waiting to greet him?

And in this kind of place, or at least the larger, public ones, women gather together by the rows of sinks. They let the hot breath escape from their lips and spew out words of judgment, hate, and pity. Strange, however, that in these public rooms of private gossip sessions, voices easily echo through the space to reach unwelcomed ears, and cubicles offer unsuspecting hiding places for the uninvited. Or maybe women's public washrooms were made to break down the bonds of sisterhood. For, while hiding in those little cubicles to avoid high school bitches or have a private moment of humiliation and tears, a girl can look to the walls beside her, or, the cubicle's door in front of her, and be quickly comforted by scribbled words of maliciousness written by the people who share her similar curves and soft voice.

**Nina Hang, age 18**

## Roadmap



**Angelina Shi, age 18**

## Going Home

Her hand grasped mine too tight,  
Her fingers looked strange, comparatively,  
Like ancient carrots  
Withered from their long stint underground,  
And dappled orange and brown, from sun spots  
I look at her face.  
Wrinkled and pale,  
Like a crumpled tissue  
And her eyes, vacant,  
She sees beyond  
And I see only her seeing  
A fog settles over us  
Comfortable, as fogs go,  
But then, what fog isn't unearthly?

**Ellen Venus, age 16**

## The Not Quite There

Moving,  
Catapulted forward; on an uneven track,  
Lost; in the sparks of passionate life,  
Burning brilliantly it stills,  
It's so close you can reach and touch it.

Ever forward you are pulled,  
Gliding with effortless grace while basking in the far gone yesterdays,  
Knowing that never again will it be the same as this precious moment,  
Yesterday is locked in a time capsule to be opened never if ever,  
And true reality is still somewhere in the mirage of distance,  
Where fantasy has not quite left;  
The magic within lingers, unmoving as the sun's rays glinting upon youthful hair.

Your location mimics a chameleon as it effortlessly and endlessly changes  
names barely skimming between the heres and theres,  
Within the not quite there life is filled with hope and possibility,  
In the state of just being where even a blade of virgin grass holds the world's  
promise though it is encroached upon by the millions,  
The past drifts somewhere behind,  
As you contemplate the has been and set your eyes ahead awaiting the  
promising future that still is;  
In the place of not quite there.

**Sarah Empey, age 16**

## Mourn

You are in war.

Look up. You see a blank, wet sky and it is almost dawn. Look down. You see dead bodies and muck. You are crouched in a trench where young men are expected to sleep, eat, fight and die. You are one of these young men. You are a soldier. German voices whisper barely thirty metres away, across the barbed wire and no man's land. They are crouched in trenches too; the sky is their blanket. You think you can hear the same sort of regret and recklessness in their voice as your own. Sometimes, when you are delirious and almost asleep, you think you can understand what they are saying.

Hell is among us today. Hell is among us today. Hell — "MERDE!" You look left. Pierre grasps his jammed rifle, desperately trying to fix it before the attack at dawn. Pierre looks angry; he kicks aside a rat that is trying to get into his rations bag and moves down the trench.

"Where are you going?" you hiss at him. You are ignored. A minute later Pierre returns. His face is stone and he has another rifle. It is a British Lee Enfield. A bit of blood is still crusted on the bottom of it. You don't ask him where he got that, you understand. Corpses have no need for guns.

On your right, McCain is singing under his breath. His red hair is like a fire in the night. He closes his eyes and pictures that he is back on the coast of Nova Scotia with his wife in his arms. Then he opens his eyes and directs his watery gaze at you.

Ready to die?" he mouths. He might have said something else, you are not so sure.

"I didn't sign up for this," Pierre scoffs. You agree with him. The war posters didn't let you think you signed up for the rats or the lice or the smell or the mud either. But when you started having regrets, you were already in a uniform and on a train bound to Middle-of-Nowhere-and-Really-Cold, Quebec; you trained in hay fields and slept in tents shaped like dunce caps. After a month you went to Europe to fight until you die or until the war is over, whichever comes first.

A shell whistles through the air, exploding in the trench next to yours. You hear screams. The bright flashes and shrill cries of more shells follow. The machine guns start rattling. The attack has begun.

Men pour out of the trenches with a roar, weapons held high. Some fall immediately as enemy bullets find their mark.

"See you on the other side!" McCain shouts and charges, with a song on his lips. The sun begins to rise over the horizon.

Pierre murmurs a quick French prayer and throws himself out of the trench too. You climb to follow but before you take ten steps, a shell explodes too close. The white light blinds you and you plummet. Something heavy drops on top of you. You

open your eyes, realize the things pinning you to the ground are wagon wreckage and Pierre's body. His torso is mangled by the shell that was meant for you. His handsome face is hardly recognizable.

You struggle. You have to move or you will be shot down like a sitting duck. You clutch for the rifle you dropped, but it had jammed in the mud and won't fire. You take Pierre's Enfield instead and apologize to unhearing ears. You shove his body aside and promise you'll dig him a grave if you survive. The wagon wreckage is heavier. You feel shrapnel scratching your face and digging into your arms. You finally break free and crawl through the mud like a beggar, looking for a trench or a hole in the ground where you can find shelter. The bombardment of deadly bullets continues above your head. Your heart beats until it is numb. The ratatat of an enemy's machine gun draws closer. They are aiming for you. You dive into a small shell hole and hold still until the rattling stops. You are half blinded by the blood and mud in your eyes. A corpse shares your hideout, its legs are missing.

"This is not what I meant when I said the other side," the corpse groans, "I reckon we are only halfway there." You stare and realize that it is McCain, and he isn't dead yet. His fiery hair is muddy and a gaping bullet hole decorates his chest. It is clear he is only alive by a force of will.

"Hey," he gasps. Blood dribbles down his chin. "There's an address in my breast pocket. Please." His blue eyes look at you imploringly. "Tell my wife I love her — and I think — Joel is a good name — for our — baby." His eyes glaze over and he is dead. You reach into his pocket and find a bloodstained photograph. It is McCain and a woman, embracing in a field of flowers. His face smiles mischievously in love. The woman's face is lost to a yawning bullet hole. You turn the photograph over and groan. The bullet hole goes right through the middle of the address. You tuck the photo back into McCain's pocket and apologize to him too.

Then you close your eyes for a moment and mourn.

You mourn for Pierre. You mourn for the Germans. You mourn for McCain who will never be able to sing a lullaby to his baby. You mourn for the ravaged field you are fighting on that used to be a farmer's land. You mourn for the millions of other lives war will cut short. You mourn for Canada, which is developing into a strong and fine country but only through the blood and pain of its sons and daughters. But war is still war. And at the end there is peace.

So you get up and push on.

**Lisa Xuan, age 15**



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## What Is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a seed,  
And love is the water,  
In which it is  
nourished.

**Navkiran Verma, age 13**

.....

## Fragile

Every peace has its shaker  
Every wound has its maker  
Every heart has its breaker  
Every life has its taker

**Geraldynn Lubrido, age 14**

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## The Ever Lonely Maker

I remember a time back when I could  
Laugh all troubles away, as though they were  
Never surrounding me in the first place.

I remember a time when gods would see me,  
And I would look back at them with wonder,  
Wanting to behold them, in all their glory,  
Never realizing that they saw me in  
A similar light, never realizing  
That their castles, splendid beyond reason,  
Always existed within the confines  
Of my ever growing heart, mind, and soul.

I remember a time long ago when  
Angels and demons danced daily for me,  
Their intricate twirls and twists all part of  
A great war, of which I was simply a  
Battlefield; my hopes, dreams, desires, all  
Of which were among the casualties. I  
Fought them, I made my own dance, I dug my  
Own grave, and I resurrected on the  
Third day, wanting an end to the cycle.

I remember a time when pain didn't  
Hurt me, when immunity taught me  
How to feel, how to love, and how to hate,  
All with a passion more intense than the  
Matrimony of space and time. The moon  
Often entertained me, proving to  
Me that even if the world hates, the man  
On the moon would teach the laughter of the  
Night, the sadness of the day, and the time  
When the two swirled together to form the  
Colours of the between of sin and saint.

I remember a time, not long ago,  
Or so I would like to believe, back when  
The metaphors of the world could be seen  
Undisturbed, when I could see without fear  
Of the unseen, when I could see the world  
Outside without fret of the world within.  
Now I am blind, my vision clouded by  
The fogs of the hills of the world within,  
Falling down abyss after abyss, in  
Search of the sight that I shunned long ago.

Why do I remember? Why recall at  
All? When will I stop grasping at cliffs that  
Have no desire for my simplicity,  
That are so high, challenging me without  
Word, language, or sound. I muster strength, I  
Gather courage, I decimate fear, yet  
All is in vain, for I have no entrance,  
No egress, and no present. All I own  
Is the crimson Crown of a Badger King,  
The spiteful blessings of the elusive  
Star Queen, and the wisdom of the River  
Goddess, yet nothing can surpass the will,  
The crush, and the entrancement of the cliffs.

I caress the edges of worlds within  
The canvas of the divine, aspiring  
To be the subject of their greatness. In  
My attempts, I forever push them away,  
The chase haunting them more than they haunt me.  
I emit hatred at their harsh gauntlets  
In the hopes I could win their mistrust and  
Admiration. The revelations found  
In the dust of my inaction would lead  
To despair, which would lead me to anger,  
And then to my ever lonely maker.

I remember a time when those elder  
To us lost the belief that we were young.  
The weight of their pride now crushes the wants  
And dreams of a race once free, the vile greed  
Taking yet another form, seducing  
The crushed remains of lost souls ever more.

**Naveen Nirmalaraj, age 16**

# Music Is My Voice



Emma Lysbet Meyler, age 13

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## Sea Monster



**Karilyn Xu, age 16**

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## Watermarks

The watermarks remain, yet life goes on. Houses still stand empty as the day they were built, their mouldy carpets a reminder of those water-soaked days. The walls are marked with angry wavy lines where the water dared to rise. It swept everything away. Knickknacks collected from years of travel from those of us who were lucky enough to leave. Pictures of the grandparents wedding. Her in a fussy gown with a high collar. Him wearing an expression of antiquated stoicism. They knew the New Orleans that existed before the technicolour beads and the rum soaked nights that bled in to the early morning. It took your children's toys and your father's orthopaedic shoes. All that remains is the old bourbon mansions, the projects with their grey ragged lawns and the new developments. All of them stripped of their possessions, their paneling, their furniture, their dignity. All of them soaked halfway up to the ceiling with the marks of the flood that took life as we knew it away. Life in the Big Easy is different. Callousness and debauchery seem so much more expensive when we forgot about the true cost of human carelessness. The nation held their breath with us. After a month or so, the nation around us returned to normal, relieved that they could

turn on the news and see a story about something comforting like violent youth gangs, product recalls and fluff pieces on waterskiing gerbils. We can't remember time, we can't even remember our first pet or the name of the street we grew up on, we just knew that they, like everything else, were underwater. Time went on here, after they removed the last of the bloated corpses and we watched the water drain back into the ocean. You'd expect the landscape to change, and it did. But the surprising thing was the sky. For days after the rain stopped, the sky was a serene crystalline blue. A contrast to what was happening on the ground. For days after it happened we looked up. We were surprised at what we found. How jealous we became of the flocks of birds, mocking us with their freedom. They could just build another nest. Some of us watched clouds after our televisions were carried away. We would find the old set weeks later on a neighbour's lawn in a pile of unrecognizable junk. It was hard to watch TV after we got our lives back in order. We'd watch the host's mouth moving and not understand a word. We'd listen to the laugh track and feel lost and confused.

**Kennedy Ryan, age 17**



## Clear, Blue Ocean

This was her favourite place in the whole world. She loved standing on the beautiful white sand, looking out towards the clear, blue water. The wind was blowing hard today, like always. My hair flew with the wind, like it was trying to get away from me, just like hers used to. We all used to ask her why she stared at the water for so long, what it was that she was looking at or looking for. Now we know.

Nobody is at the beach today, except me. It's far too cold in late November; the snow will start falling soon. But it's a special day for me. It's been ten years. She loved this beach so much. When she was getting ready to go, she would throw her precious things into the water. She didn't throw in many things, only her favourite book and a locket. I had never seen the inside of the locket. When I asked why she was throwing her things away, she told me that she was doing the exact opposite, she wanted to keep them forever and she was sure that this was the only way to send them to herself. I didn't understand what she meant but I was only five years old back then. I was the only person she told. If only I had known what she meant.

I take out the letter I wrote to her. I hope it will find its way to her. I stand there, looking at the water for a long time. It was so clear and so blue. Anyone would have thought it was beautiful. But I know it's not, I know it is evil. All I see as I look out towards the water is the clear, blue trap that took my sister's life. I close my eyes and raise the letter high in the sky. I feel the wind fighting with me as it tries to snatch the letter before I'm ready. I take a deep breath, let the letter go free and open my eyes, watching it float towards the ocean, watching it disappear.

I don't know what really happened that day, nobody does. Some people think it was a complete accident, that she was swimming out and accidentally went too far, swimming on such a cold day. Some people think she did it on purpose. I don't know what to believe. When I think back to what I can remember, it seems possible that she was depressed or angry, or something. But it can't be possible at the same time. Because she's my sister, because I love her, because she wouldn't have left me if she had a choice, she just couldn't have.

I stare at the water, even after the letter is gone. Snow starts drifting towards the sand as I begin to leave. She loved snow. Maybe this is a sign, maybe she got the letter. Something catches my eye then, something sparkling in the water. I hate the water; I haven't touched it in years. But there is something about this object that seems to draw me in. I bend down and pick up the shiny object. I look at it in my hands and I realize I see my sister's locket. It didn't find its way to my sister. I guess my letter didn't either. Maybe I always knew it wouldn't. I open the locket and I see I was wrong, the truth is staring me right in the face. It wasn't an accident. She killed herself. She left me when I needed her; she didn't love me enough to stay, to work things out. Hot tears run down my face, it feels like fire burning my insides. I should throw the locket back in the water; try to send it to her again. But I don't. I shove the locket deep inside my pocket and take it with me. Because I'm mad at her. Because I don't have anything else left from her.

**Sherry Zhu, age 14**

## Analysis of a Tot

46 chromosomes,  
neatly paired  
or at least that's what you'd like to think  
half of you  
half of your other half

but which ones?

the ones that made you tall,  
with a misshapen ear  
and a tongue you cannot roll?  
or that help you do crosswords  
and play the oboe?  
the ones that made his eyes muddy brown  
his mind quick  
and webbed his toes?

will she blame you  
or thank you  
for her perfect pitch  
and crooked teeth

the strangely-shaped mark  
on the back of her knee?

and which of her atoms are yours  
and which came from your weekly falafels  
and chai tea at that place beside your work?

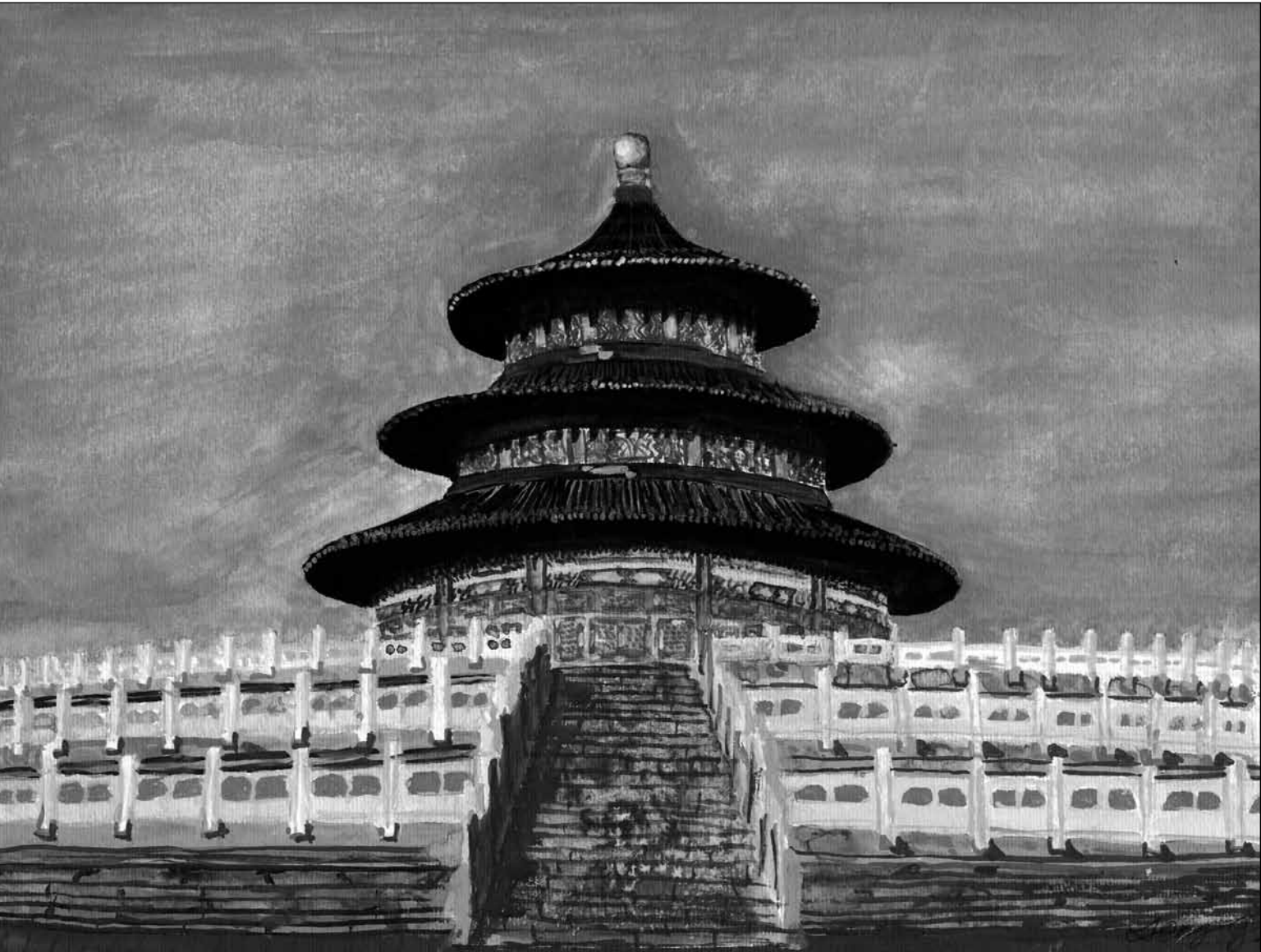
were some once in dinosaurs and  
great kapok trees?  
or blue whales?  
or the dust of primordial stars?

is she, your  
flesh and blood,  
really composed of just you?  
or,  
made  
of so much more?  
just like you.  
just like us all.

**Brianna Smrke, age 19**

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## Temple of Heaven



**Tony Zhang, age 16**

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## Temporarily Untouchable

When I row I am fluid. I am arms, back, and legs, bending and compressing in continuous flow. I am a spring, loading and firing repeatedly, hypnotically. I am an alternation of bodily rhythms: inhale, exhale, heartbeat, repeat. I am the delicious ache of lactic acid, the frenzied surge of epinephrine. I am the rush of the stroke, the light grip on the handle, the slide of the seat across a universe of smooth metal. I am the rote pattern of an unfeeling machine, anything but human. I am as close to perfect as my body will allow.

When I row, I am my own escape.

**Emily Warman, age 17**

## Free

I am free  
But truly  
I'm not.  
I can smile.  
I can laugh.  
But live my life  
Exactly as I want,  
I cannot.  
I am free  
But truly  
I'm not.  
I am but  
One person  
In a world  
Of billions.  
In a painting,  
I am only  
A dot.  
Am I free?  
I thought I am.  
Free as in free?  
I'm truly not.  
Do you believe  
That you're free?  
Then you must  
Be a fool.  
Can't you see  
That the world we're  
Living in  
Is very cruel?  
You must be blind;  
Blind as the three blind mice.  
All are dark inside;  
Hurting each other  
Not once,  
Not twice,  
But a million times thrice.  
Freedom.  
What a wonderful thing!  
Will I ever attain it?  
Maybe, when I hear  
The angels sing.  
Perhaps one day,  
I will finally  
Be free.  
Free as in free,  
When I can finally be me.

**Jhobell Kristyl Faustino,**  
age 18

## Tomorrow in the Park

The sunbeams scattered through the leaves, painting the bird-filled pathway with patches of light. Frank sat on his favourite bench in the empty park, reading his newspaper in the shade of a maple tree, as he did every day. He checked his watch. It was 12:25. Putting the newspaper down for a moment he smoothed his grey suit and straightened his black tie; he had considered a blue one in the morning, but decided against it. He picked up his newspaper and continued to read, waiting.

It was not long before he heard the flutter of the birds' wings as they took to the trees and the clack of heels against the concrete pathway. He froze, holding his breath and clutching the paper a little tighter as clacking heels walked past him. And as he did every day, he heard them stop at the next bench, just across from him. Relaxing his grip on the paper, he finished reading the article he was on and put it down beside him.

He looked at the woman who he had spent half of his lunch with every day for the past few months. She wore a beige business suit, which Frank thought complemented her well; her hair was tied in a ponytail bringing attention to her glasses, giving her a professional appearance. Her own newspaper, which Frank knew she would read later, was on the bench beside her as she ate her lunch. Frank had finished his own lunch, a rather boring ham sandwich, earlier.

The woman looked up at Frank and smiled, making his heart skip a beat. He smiled back and averted his eyes to a nearby bird, which was his custom whenever their eyes happened to meet. The truth was that he was interested in her, but wasn't quite sure what to do with his feeling, being the awkward individual he was. He had spent the last few months thinking of the various things he could say to her, but had never dared to say them. One day he hadn't brought a paper, hoping to ask for hers and start a conversation, but she didn't bring a paper that day either. So instead Frank spent his lunches sitting across from her, never saying a word, but instead enjoying their quiet atmosphere.

But today he was determined to talk to her. It was easy he told himself, all he had to do was say something, but that proved harder than he had foreseen. He felt that whatever he said would be stupid. Something like, "Nice weather we're having," or, "Terrible news about so-and-so, don't you think so?" would surely only lead to an awkward silence.

He noticed that she had finished her lunch. Realizing that it was his chance to strike, he thought desperately of something to say. But his mind turned blank, and before he knew it she was reading her own paper. He repressed a sigh, and turned to listen to the birds sing. He wished he could be as calm and collected as she was. He looked at his watch and saw it was time for him to get back to the office. He stood up reluctantly, picking up his paper. Well, he thought, there's always tomorrow.

On the bench across from him, Jane sat unnaturally still as Frank walked past. She put her paper down for a moment and watched as he walked out of the park. Once he was out of sight she sighed. She had hoped that today would be the day she would talk to the man she spent her lunches with. She had been trying to get his attention for quite some time now, making sure she looked her best when she went to lunch, but it didn't seem to be working. It seemed he didn't have any interest in her because whenever she smiled at him, he would return it politely and then look away.

However, as much as Jane wished he would talk to her, she wished even more that she could talk to him. But she was always too frightened to start a conversation. Once she had deliberately come paper-less hoping to borrow his, but he had not brought one either. When she had finished her lunch, she had tried to say something, but felt stupid sitting there doing nothing, and had grabbed her paper in panic.

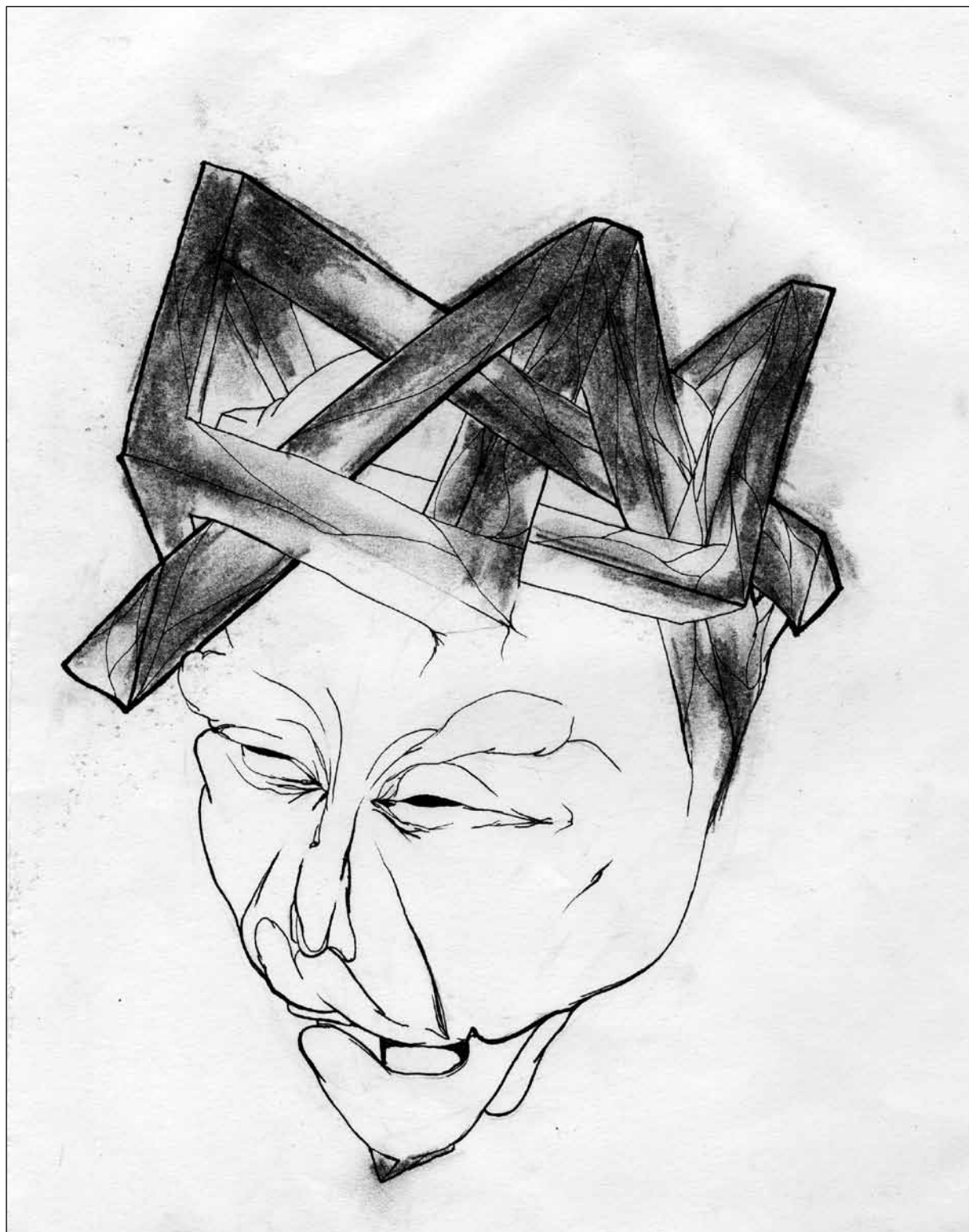
She looked up at the trees and wondered if she would ever get to speak with him. Should she just give up, just eat lunch with her co-workers and forget about this unrequited love. Looking back at the bench across from her she decided that she would wait because there was always tomorrow.

**Jeanne Homer-Vanniasinkam,** age 17





Prism Wisdom



**Tucker McLachlan, age 16**

## Seize the Day

"People aren't like they used to be," Grandma sighs wistfully, though her fingers do not hesitate from going to the next piano key. Notes from *Clair de Lune* drift softly around us, Debussy's exquisite piece encasing us into our own little bubble. "How so?" I ask absentmindedly, my mind buffered by gentle tides of music. Grandma is already 75 years old, and she has lost much of the hand steadiness and coordination demanded by certain technically difficult pieces. Nevertheless, she is a woman full of spirit, ("Enough spirit to fill 20 men!" she'd laugh) even if her body has begun to degenerate. I slant a look at her, feeling a tender warmth rise in my chest, lips quirking fondly at the sight of her with thin lips pursed, crinkled brows furrowed in concentration. "They don't believe in good things anymore," she says finally, the tinkering of notes an appropriate, soulful fanfare. Her hands — wrinkled, frail, so parchment thin — caress the monochromatic keys and gravitate towards her sides. Grandma turns her body to me, her silver hair immaculately done up in a French chignon, paisley blouse glimmering subtly in the half-light; none of her jauntiness, however, can hide her jaundiced skin and tired, restless eyes. "When I was your age," Grandma reflects, and rolls her eyes good-naturedly in response to my own, "well, children knew how to respect their elders, for one." I smile impishly at her, gesturing for her to continue. For all my posturing and teasing, I really do enjoy listening to her grand regales of the "good ole days," so distant and different than my own. "There was nothing like the rudeness that you see teenagers exhibiting today. My, if I behaved that way then, I don't know what they'd do to me!" she exclaims, and shakes her head. She leans forward, her old arms encircling my neck, a human necklace, her face open and lightly eager. "But do you know what I loved best?" she asks, eyes a little brighter, ebony sheets flecked with starshine. I shake my head no, playing along. "It was the chivalry, dearest," Grandma whispers, soft fingers smoothing my brow. "It was the belief in courage and strength of the heart. The value of human life not only based from the exterior, but also from the interior. It was the way I yearned for another day because there was a sunset, and hoped for the future because the sun rose." I nod, staring at her, where greyish light is washing her features, making her intensely beautiful and strangely timeless all at once, regardless of the physical evidence that indicates otherwise. I love to hear her speak, because she is so poetic and romantic, in a sense, and so very eloquent; she could make the driest of subjects become an object of affection and interest. "Grandma seems to have lived in a fairytale," I would think sometimes, because while those ideals were morally pleasing and valuable, they were not realistic; not now anyways, in a faithless, electronic

age. I don't tell her that though, because she is quixotic and passionate about her ideologies, and I am more down to earth; truthfully, I wouldn't stand a chance against her in a debate. Grandma pats my cheek, withdrawing her rickety limbs, and nods sagely at me, her eyes twinkling brighter. "Now, I know what you're thinking, Missy, but believe me when I say that they are good things to believe in." Her parchment mouth curves, higher and higher until she is smiling a wonderful, healthy smile I haven't seen for a while. "You're a good girl, you know that? You're a good girl. My, I remember when you were just a little wee babe, not taller than my knee. And now, look at you! A lovely young lady, and still growing. You'll be taller than your father one day!" Grandma is swooping in for a kiss, and I do not attempt any of my usual evasion techniques with her. Her mouth is dry but cool against my cheek, and I am glad that she does not hold high regard for lipstick. Instead, I carefully wrap my arms around her back, until my fingers twine together, a human lock. I snuggle my face into her neck, inhaling her soft floral perfume, along with the slight wafts of itchy spices and moist dough. She begins to hum a heavily edited version of Ludovico Einaudi's *I Giorni*, and though she is aging, her voice has not suffered so heavily yet as the rest of her. Born with a storyteller's voice that forever spins sunlit nets for the mind, I wasn't ever surprised that she also had a singer's dulcet voice, mellifluous and delightfully soothing. We sit there, wrapped in each others' arms, for what seems like forever, waiting for dawn or dusk, whichever first to come. Lulled, my eyelids begin to close, a heavy, feather-soft quality that should have irritated me, but really didn't. "You're the best grandma in the universe," I yawn, words muffled with sleep and paisley cloth. Grandma is singing again however, and her verse of "life is beautiful" skitters against the four walls that are too small to hold it in, rising like a red balloon, ready to pursue the sky.

It wasn't the last time I spent with her, for she died some months later, but it was the most memorable, filled with a profound meaning and the feeling of both regret and closure. When a loved one dies, there is never going to ever be an "okay." Their ghostly spectres will always appear in places where they have been before, as if simply thinking of her can conjure her laughter, her face, her behaviour, her voice. Loss is something that I find so difficult to accept, though she would have just laughed and told me that that's just the way life is. So seize the day, because life is beautiful.

Dedicated to all who have lost, and to all who haven't.

**Maria Duong, age 16**



Snapshot



**Carol Hu, age 12**

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## The Sunday Train



**Tamari Dunkley, age 14**

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## The Clothesline

Hand in hand they dance in a row,  
Hither and thither, and to and fro,  
Flip, flap, flop, and away they go —  
Fluttering creatures as white as snow,  
Like restive horses they caper and prance;  
Like fairytale witches they wildly dance;  
Rounded in front, but hollow behind,  
They shiver and skip in merry March wind.

Once I saw her dancing excited by,  
Struggling so wildly till she was free,  
Leaping pegs and clotheslines behind her,  
She flew like a bird, and none can find her.  
I saw her gleam, like a snail, in the sun,  
Flipping and flapping and flopping for fun,

Nobody knows where she now can be,  
Hiding in a ditch or drowned in the sea.  
She was my handkerchief not long ago,  
She will never come back to my pocket,  
I know.

**Wasifa Noshin, age 12**

## Summer '97

I take Dad's lighter out of my pocket. I press down on the trigger, birthing a small flame.  
So it does work.

I take out the piece of paper from my pocket and unfold it. My name in Sharpie seeps through both sides in cat-scratch. I roll it up again, twirling the letters around my fingers. I place the roll between my lips and the lighter to the end.

I breathe in and out and taste the words as they dismember into ashes and embers.

Suddenly, you appear out of nowhere. I quickly put away the lighter and the roll. I look to the ground. Small pebbles surround my feet. I kick them into the river, ever so innocently, and fool myself into thinking you'd be convinced by my acting.

"I'm just here for the fresh air."

"I know," you say, "aren't we all?" You join me in rigid stance.

We look up at the moon. I spot a star, maybe a planet. I feel a little smaller, less significant now than five minutes ago. But it's not the star's fault.

We don't speak. I look at you, only to catch your gaze fixed upon my trembling fist.

"Fresh air, hence the lighter?" you ask with obvious mockery, as subtle as a gun. My eyes tear up from the smoke effervescing from my head. I don't care if you see. I take out the paper and start to ignite it once again.

"I sleep better when I'm tired and I'm not tired yet," I reply. We watch each x and o disappear and scribbled hearts break into dust, a sort of glow that would put fireflies to shame. If only they were there to see it.

You suddenly grab it from my hands halfway through. Embers invade my breath and I cough. You try to make out what's left, squinting at what clearly has become nothing the human mind could acquire, let alone comprehend. You're acting too, now.

"He means well," you say, drawing from only what you believed about him. You look for an answer on my face. A single tear streams down my neck, but you don't see it. I don't let you.

"He would have never been if you hadn't —" I choke on a thought of you, one that I tried to swallow for so long. Tears relay through my sinus. I can no longer keep acting, though you were no fool from the start.

I take back the burnt slip from your hand. I look at my watch. 4:34 a.m. The sun will be up soon. I try to reignite the paper, but fail to start a flame. I toss the lighter into the river. With the moon as my flashlight, I count the ripples.

I quickly think of something else. I run my fingers through my hair and pull out the elastic that held it together. I pick up a stone and wrap the note around it, securing it there. I swing my arm back, ready to launch. But you grab my wrist, stopping me once again.

"I thought you've forgiven me already," you whisper. I read your eyes. I attempt to evade you at this point, but I always listen to you. Even when I don't want to.

"It's not you that I can't forgive," I crumple and bury my face into my knees, curling up as blame and accusation batter my torso all over again.

I open my fist, freeing the papered rock from my grasp. I watch it roll on the ground. It finds its own way into the water, granted momentum by gravity. I watch the ripples and your reflection as they both slowly evanesce.

I feel your arms engulf me from behind. You whisper into my hair. I can barely understand you. All I hear is my name, and everything else is a blur. "Love is watching someone die," I think I hear you quietly sing. I don't bother being sure. I close my eyes, and just nod and listen.

I force my eyelids open, and they sting. They feel red, but there's no way of knowing. I find myself against a tree beside the river, lighter in one hand, rolled up paper lingering in the fingers of the other. Only a stub is left. It's still burning.

I rinse my face in the river. The aftertaste of your old words disappears. I touch my hair, feeling the new words, and worth, you've whispered into it. Into me.

*We were just two grains of sand in an hourglass of millions. You simply fell first.*

**Sarah (Shuran) Liu, age 19**

## Your Worst Fear

I am a creature of Night  
Sent by the Devil  
To reap testimony  
Of his work

I wait  
I watch

I live in the shadows  
Of your heart  
I dwell in the blackness  
Of your soul

I watch  
I wait

I track your every move  
I note your every thought  
I inscribe your every mistake  
I anticipate your downfall

I wait  
I watch

You have evaded me before  
But I will snatch you in due time  
You will feverishly attempt to escape  
But I am your worst fear

I watch  
I wait

And when you least expect me  
I will round the corner  
I will jump the barrier  
I will cross the line

I wait  
I watch

I will raptly observe as  
My messenger fulfills his duty  
I will gleefully relish the moment as  
My purpose is accomplished

I watch  
And then —

I  
Will  
Take  
You  
As  
My  
Own

**Scarlett Rider, age 15**



## Equinox (1000 word excerpt)

The living room is purple. It isn't so much the colour of the walls as it is the colour of the very air. It's well past midnight now and yet it is somehow darker in the little apartment than outside. And there is a surreal light shining through the deep fuchsia drapes, painting the room in their hues.

Her face is passive as Morgan stares at her, trying to catch her silver-blue eyes. But she refuses to meet his gaze, twisting her long neck away from him.

Even now that her hair is dried off, her curls still hang lifelessly. And if she is in pain she doesn't show it.

They sit next to one another on his couch, knees touching, her bag placed at her feet.

"Please Sugar, tell me you're done," he says.

She leans back into the couch further; the suffocating silence sits heavily about the room.

"Come on, how many times has this creep done this to you?"

His body is completely facing her now, yet she remains curled in on herself.

When he still does not receive an answer he says, "Forty-seven times, that's how many. Jesus, Reilly."

"You counted?"

"This ain't funny. Do you know how many times you said you would leave, how many times you promised me this would end?" That breathless sensation returns and he feels his veins begin to pump with electricity.

"I know I did, but I wanted, needed to try. He promised me. He promised me and I believed him. But every time he broke a promise, I still told myself that one day I would get the real Lucas back."

"I don't think that Lucas even exists."

Music suddenly breaks the tension in the room as Reilly's phone goes off.

"It's him, ain't it?" he says, standing.

But she simply averts her eyes to the bag by her feet.

There is a look of disgust on Morgan's face as he reaches for the phone on the table in front of the two of them. Looking at the caller ID his face creases and his eyes narrow.

"Aren't you gonna answer it?" Reilly's gaze is still trained on the floor.

"And have him know you're here with me, nah, no way."

"He probably already knows."

The phone stops ringing and Morgan turns to face her. "How would he already know?"

But Reilly simply hikes her shoulders up in a nonchalant shrug. "I don't know. He just seems to know things."

Morgan glares down at the phone when it begins to ring again, his grip impossibly tight on the small object.

"He's not going to stop," she states plainly.

"Oh yeah? I know how to make him stop."

He takes the phone over to the flat plain of the hardwood flooring and tosses it on the ground. Reilly makes no audible sound of protest as he raises his foot, the incessant ringing still invading their purple

## Dance of the Spirits

It is brilliant, the dancing hues  
I am marvelled, hushed, humbly subdued  
Disseminating over black sky  
Against the cold, out of reach, they cry  
Tears of glowing curtains

The entangled limbs seem to breathe  
Igniting the darkness, speaking to me  
Sharing the unknown that I wish to know  
How does it happen, that you seem so close?  
Yet untouchable, a mile-wide fire  
Tell me your secrets, your deepest desires  
Tell me, Aurora, how does it feel?  
Blazing the earth in lights surreal  
A palette of the rainbow

We are enveloped, engulfed by your wonder  
Electrons spiralling, in the dead of winter  
You kiss with soft lips midnight Alaska, wordless Sweden  
Blessing them with magnetic collision  
Tell me, Aurora, do you feel tired?  
Thousands of years, always brighter  
1621, now 2011  
Touching, teasing, radiating heaven

The sun, creeping up the reluctant horizon

What a miracle that I have seen  
A regal wonder, a glorious dream

### Sophia Sun, age 14

Note from Wikipedia: In northern latitudes, the effect is known as the *aurora borealis* (or the northern lights), named after the Roman goddess of dawn, Aurora, and the Greek name for the north wind, Boreas, by Pierre Gassendi in 1621. Its southern counterpart, the *aurora australis* (or southern lights), has similar properties, but is only visible from high southern latitudes in Antarctica, South America, or Australasia. *Australis* is the Latin word for "of the South." Auroras can be spotted throughout the world and on other planets. They are most visible closer to the poles due to the longer periods of darkness and the magnetic fields. The Cree referred to this as the "Dance of the Spirits."

room, ripping through the tough silence.

Just before he brings his foot down on the offending device it beeps.

He picks up the phone and looks at the screen. Text message waiting, it says.

Morgan arches his eyebrows before flipping it open.

"What does he want?" Reilly says.

Morgan says nothing, but his eyes are black and he glares at her before throwing the phone against the wall, where it cracks and shatters.

Reilly doesn't even twitch from his outburst; rather she remains motionless, even as he returns to the couch.

"Sorry," he mumbles.

She doesn't respond, instead she leans closer, pressing her lips to his ear.

But only a few words escape.

"Tell me, would you kill to save a life?" she whispers conspiratorially.

It's so slight, he isn't even sure he hears it at all, let alone correctly. But the silence in the aftermath of her statement has the purple walls echoing with her words.

Her face is no longer stoic when he hears it a second time. She gazes at him through her dark lashes, the fine hairs like black widows against her alabaster skin.

"Would you kill to save a life?"

And then it materializes out of nowhere, in a flash of silver, a revolver lays before his eyes. Gleaming white in some non-existent moonlight, it is almost too bright to look at. Almost.

"Tell me Morgan, would you kill to save my life?"

He tries to swallow, but his throat feels like a desert has taken up residence. He hadn't noticed when it had started, but as he looks up at Reilly's face, he sees tears rolling down her cheeks.

It is then that he realizes just how ghostly she truly looks with her translucent skin thrown into relief against her red hair. The room casts her slender body in black and violet shadows and the revolver lies firmly in her hand, her knuckles white from the iron hold.

"I have to let it go." Her voice is shallow and broken.

"I know, but this is not the way." He places a hand over top of the one holding the gun. "Come on, put it away." But she shakes her head, cradling the gun as if it were an infant in need of her protection.

"Do you really love me?" she says, her eyes are wide and unfocused. "You do love me, right?"

For some reason he doesn't know how to answer the question. Eyeing the revolver as if it were some obscene hand gesture, he stays quiet.

She then leans forward, his silence breaking her. She hides her face in her knees, and weeps. The gun hangs limply from her fingers and Morgan carefully slips it from her hand.

Placing the object on the table in front of him he realizes the safety isn't on.

Heart thumping, he turns and wraps his arms around Reilly, circling one around her waist and placing one on her head. He gently runs his fingers through her hair and then kisses the crown of her forehead. No words are spoken.

The serenity of the moment is interrupted by a vicious pounding on the door that tears through the apartment. Both instinctively reach for the gun, yet it is Morgan's grip which tightens around the handle.

**Leigh Cavanaugh, age 19**



## The Red Rose

I am beautiful, flawless, pure to the eye.

The earth is my womb,  
My roots run deep, the undying mother's love.  
Keeping me grounded,  
Granting me a home.

My stem is my arms, reaching up to the heavens,  
Embracing the stars, granting freedom of soul.  
My thorns form a knife, a subtle blade,  
Protecting my flesh from others.

Passion drenches my heart-shaped petals,  
Ruby red, spilling their warmth.  
The dew as eyes, brimming with bliss.  
Layers upon layers of sweet, red wine.

I love.

I hurt.

My petals are stained with blood.  
The dew as heavy teardrops,  
Tumbling over the bitter edge,  
Plundering into the abyss.

My stem is my arms, reaching out for aid,  
Grasping thin air in dark despair.  
My thorns gash out through my sides,  
Tearing the flesh of others.

My spindly roots bind me in shackles.  
I tug, I pull, I rattle.  
They never falter, never loosen.  
The earth is my tomb.

I am hideous, blemished, broken to the eye.

**Sara Abhari, age 15**

## A Date with Starbucks

You,  
with your pale, slim figure  
a size that fits all hands  
and the perfect green nip at your waist  
steaming past the edge  
the breathlessly tantalizing exhale over  
the tip of you  
your warmth jolting my senses  
the taste of your sweetness riveting  
and exhilaratingly intoxicating  
on the buds of my tongue  
as I lick down your side  
your wet loveliness all around me.

Me,  
sitting by the barista  
an open Sudoku in hand,  
a pen spinning between my fingers  
thumbing your rim, begging for more  
and you ignore me, you sit  
and you tease because you know I want you  
your bubbly kiss  
as I watch you cheat on me  
with the starving artist with a sketchbook in his hand  
or the shabby author chewing on the end of his pen  
dreaming of the girl who walks by on Saturday  
afternoons,  
wondering why I try so hard to be pretentious  
because amidst all this  
you are so worth it, darling.

**Catherine Gao, age 17**

## Momma's Gold Stars

Momma makes a life for me, me and her, here in Canada. Momma has a pair of big rough hands,  
worn by age, weathered by experience, lined by work. Momma does a lot of work.

She goes to work as soon as she drops me off at the daycare with Ms. Lepinsky and the twins. I know this because once, when I didn't want to go to the daycare and I begged her to stay home with me, just me and her, she told me, "Momma needs to go to work."

In grade one we have work too. We do math work and English work and something called bell work. I always get shiny stars on my work and then I bring them home to show Momma. I like the way she looks at me when I show her, and the way she pinches my cheeks with her big weathered hands and calls me *canim*, darling. I wonder where Momma's gold stars are.

Sometimes when a button falls off my jacket or I come home with a rip in my corduroys, Momma brings out a spool of thread and a sharp needle, works on the garment. She makes everything better again, good as new, she and that magic spool of thread, she and that needle, gripped firmly in her hand as she hunches over her work. She is never happy when I rip my pants or lose a button. She scowls at me and complains about the work. I want to ask her why she goes to work then.

Once in a long while we get a phone call to our apartment from far away. Momma's voice gets more worried and her face looks scared. She speaks in Turkish, fast and low. She always calls me over to say hello to the other person after she's done talking, and I always hear a crackly voice saying hello back, hello and how are you, *canim*.

One time, after a phone call, I ask Momma why she looked so scared. She doesn't say anything. I think about things that make me scared, crawly things with long legs I find in our kitchen sometimes, the big black boy who makes the mean face at me at school. When she finally talks, she pulls me close with her big strong hands. She is shaking, but her hands are still strong. "Karim. I want you here, and I want you to listen, *canim*. Whatever happens to us — whatever might happen to me and you — we will still have each other."

I am confused, and Momma is crying. I look at her and nod anyway.

**Shirley Miao, age 16**

## Love, love, love

I weave with brightly coloured strings  
To keep my mind off other things  
So, ladies, let your fingers dance  
And keep your hands out of romance  
Lovely witches  
Let the stitches  
Keep your fingers under control  
Cut the thread, but leave  
The whole heart whole

Merry maids can sew and sleep  
Wives can only sew and weep  
Falling in love with love  
Is falling for make-believe  
Falling in love with love  
Is playing the fool  
Caring too much is juvenile fancy  
Learning to trust is just  
For children in school

I fell in love with love one night  
When the mood was full  
I was unwise with eyes  
Unable to see  
I fell in love with love  
With love everlasting  
But love fell out with me

**Stephanie Rotman, age 14**



.....

## Think Like an Eagle



**Lisa Subryan, age 16**

.....

## Brown

The brown in your eyes  
made me forget all your lies  
So besotted was I;  
failing to realize  
your sinful twist  
like nuts and chocolate mix.  
Your lone, beach-tanned figure  
standin' at the doorway  
of your terra-cotta cottage.

Leaving, I gain a little courage.  
Sticky like clay  
my "insecure love" you say.  
Like rich, fertile soil  
was its quality m'boy.  
You oppose with a frown  
your mood, a monotone brown.

**Oshin Manghirmalani, age 16**



The Magician



Lisa Xuan, age 15

# young voices 2012

magazine of teen writing and artwork

Call for submissions

Express yourself!

## GUIDELINES

1. **Write what you want to write!** It can be a poem, story, essay... whatever you like.
2. Submit only your own **original work**.
3. **Submissions are not returned**, so keep a copy of your work.
4. Toronto Public Library has one-time print and electronic rights to all work, as well as the right to excerpt from the work for purposes of promotion.
5. Written submissions will be selected from each of the following age categories:  
**12–14; 15–16; 17–19.**
6. Artwork will not be categorized by age for the purposes of choosing what to publish.

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

### WHO CAN ENTER

Teens, 12–19 years who live or go to school in the City of Toronto.

### WHAT CAN BE ENTERED

You can enter two pieces each year:

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

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

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

### Artwork:

- 8 ½" x 11" preferred
- Black and white artwork only

### Photography:

- 4" x 6" preferred; 300 dpi resolution for electronic submissions
- Black and white photographs only

### HOW TO ENTER

#### *In a Toronto Public Library branch*

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

#### *Online submissions*

##### *Written*

- Submit written work online using the submission form at [torontopubliclibrary.ca/youngvoices](http://torontopubliclibrary.ca/youngvoices)
- FULLY complete the online submission form **including your address and postal code**

##### *Artwork*

- Submit black and white artwork via email to Ken Sparling, [ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca](mailto:ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca)
- In the body of the email, please supply your name, age, address with postal code, and phone number
- **you will be required to submit the original artwork should your work be selected for publication**

### Photographs

- Submit black and white photographs, minimum 4" x 6", 300 dpi via email to Ken Sparling, [ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca](mailto:ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca)
- In the body of the email, please supply your name, age, address with postal code, and phone number

### SELECTION TIMELINES

Submission deadline:

**Saturday, March 31, 2012**

- Editorial teams meet to make selections during spring 2012
- Contributors selected to be published will be contacted during June 2012
- Only those with work to be published will be contacted
- *Young Voices* magazine is published once every year in October
- Questions? Contact Ken Sparling [ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca](mailto:ksparling@torontopubliclibrary.ca)





# YOUNG VOICES 2012 Submission Form

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

Submissions with incomplete forms may not be considered for publication.

Submission Deadline: Saturday, March 31, 2012

Last name \_\_\_\_\_ First name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal code \_\_\_\_\_

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

Age \_\_\_\_\_  Male  Female Today's date \_\_\_\_\_

Title of your submission \_\_\_\_\_

Genre of submission:

Poem  Fiction  Rant  Review  Art  Photograph

Other (please specify what type of work you are submitting) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of library branch where you submitted \_\_\_\_\_

I heard about *Young Voices*:

at the library  at the mall  at school  at a shelter  online at *ramp*

Other (please say where) \_\_\_\_\_



[torontopubliclibrary.ca/youngvoices](http://torontopubliclibrary.ca/youngvoices)





Untitled

Blake Abbey-Colborne, age 17



*Day and Night*  
Kate McLeary, age 14

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