



World of Imagination

Imagination Creation Western Union Young Writers
Stories and Poems 2017





Imagination Creation, 2017

Compiled by Rebecca Stockman at Wyndham City Libraries

This anthology is a collection of the prize-winning submissions to the Imagination Creation Writing Competition 2017.

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Imagination Creation

Western Union Young Writers

WRITING COMPETITION 2017

Sponsored by

Western Union Writers

Wyndham City Council

Wyndham Community and Education Centre

Kirpal Singh Chauli Margaret Campbell

15-18 Poetry

First Prize: Coco Huang
Second Prize: Coco Huang
Highly Commended: Indyanna Pyper

15-18 Story

First Prize: Jennifer Nguyen
Second Prize: Coco Huang
Commended: Amy Roberts

11-14 Poetry

First Prize: Alejandra Camacho
Second Prize: Alejandra Camacho
Highly Commended: Lian Parkes
Commended: Sandra Sujith

11-14 Story

First Prize: Abby Strangward
Second Prize: Sarah Deng
Highly Commended: Kylie D.
Highly Commended: Sarah Deng
Commended: Sandra Sujith

<10 Poetry

First Prize: Codey Jackson
Second Prize: Codey Jackson
Highly Commended: Tahlia Walker
Highly Commended: Codey Jackson
Commended: Joann Manoj Jacob
Commended: Codey Jackson

<10 Story

First Prize: Raneth Keshan Sugatadasa
Second Prize: Aditya Nair
Commended: Advika Anoop

Sherryl Clark Award

Codey Jackson

Short-listed Poetry

Indyanna Pyper

Jamie Tak

Cara Murray

Juliette McLean

Inigo Bagatsing

Olivia Khaw

Sarah Deng

Kirra Muir

Santi Bagatsing

Holly Hawker

Haresh Ellinavaalu

Fathima Samah Qaisy

Atricia Evangelia Bodhiwan

Short-listed Story

Tara Moore

Chelsea Hindle

Maddy Walker

Alisha Diacono

Olivia Rodway

Kate Kellaway

Jade Gualter


Pola Szczykutowicz

Rohan Nuthakki

Jayden Jeremiah Ku

Haresh Ellinavaalu

Syazwana Saifudin



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World

By Alejandra Camacho

Morning light,
it blinds the eyes
Ivory clouds,
periwinkle skies

Grimy windows
allow dull glow
Being reminded,
filled, with woe


Breath now minty,
leather shoes
A caffeine fix,
the morning news

Floor, not a bed,
day-old pain
Bleak and sinister,
acid rain

Sunshine dazzles,
birds sing merrily
Seeing a friend,
chatting momentarily

First a small meal,
if there's food to spare
Hear a gunshot,
say a prayer

Feeding the pigeons,
the daily paper
Off to work,
a glistening skyscraper



On go old clothes
threadbare, holes
Shiver and shudder
The angry cold

Finally, lunch
The smell wafts in
Warm and scrumptious
Crumbs on chin

Carbon sky
Family's gone
The clash of bombs
Feel woebegone

Ready for bed
Droopy eyes
Cosy, warm blankets
Ready for sunrise

Find a place
Not too cold
Lay your head
Fatigue takes its toll

Ready for tomorrow
Another day
Good things probably
Coming your way

Hope tomorrow is better
Away from strife
A grasp of happiness
A better life

The Method

By Sarah Deng


I lift myself with firm arm from my chair and stare directly at the person across from me. He's young with a long face and eyebrows. I unconsciously bring my hand to my greying stubble, feeling the countless years of stress and overwork in the rugged hairs on my chin. In that moment I realise I don't remember how it felt to be young. The uncertainty in his posture and smallness of his figure should be familiar to me, but it isn't. Too much has happened to leave room for nostalgia. I anchor myself with my shoulders and lean forward a fraction, eyes darting over his face to absorb as much information as possible. He must have noticed the scrutiny since he begins to rub the back of his neck and he cast his eyes downwards. A blanket of smothering awkwardness envelops the entire room, taking us along with it. The boy fidgets noticeably in his seat and stares up into the right corner of the room, no doubt trying to come up with his own unique set of lies. This is going to be an easy one to crack.

Staring blankly at the shaking hands in his lap, I turn my attention to the police file on the table in front of me. Kaedan Danny, nineteen, witnessed attempting to club a Trooper over the head with the back of its own ARL-45 Seanan Arms Rifle.

The seconds tick on in the Council Approved clock implant behind my cerebellum. It's been a long day yet I am not tired, I'm intrigued. For decades there has been no crime within the walls of Seanan. Not a single incident of misconduct on the streets of this city. No one has dared disturb the perfect tranquillity.

Until last night.

I wish that I could begin the interrogation. I wish that I could learn the motives of Kaedan Danny and comprehend his reckless behaviour. I wish that I didn't have to wait any longer. I am too curious of this meek boy to merely linger about and wait for one of the Council's Troopers to enter and officially commence the session. Before I have even properly caught the boy's eye, I find myself formulating possible scenarios in my mind. Was he bribed by an underground movement group to take out a Trooper? To show the public that it was possible? Was it Ather? No, it couldn't have been. The Council made sure that the entire network was disconnected, the search was too thorough for any of them to have



survived. Despite being the most dominant group of criminals of the century, they did not hold up for more than a few months. They were smarter than other citizens against the Council, but not smart enough.

Who was this boy?

Everyone else in the city knows that simply refusing to clap after one of the Council's speeches with result in the painful public death. The only reason he is in a long-unused interrogation room is because the Trooper he had attacked insisted so. A titanium soldier, devoid of self-awareness and a moral compass had requested that the Council allow it to interrogate the boy. It was surprising to say the least and an opportunity the Council could not pass up. The first crime in decades and a Trooper displaying something vaguely resembling a human thought process? How interesting.

His body language cannot be likened to any other enemy of the Council. All the others who had previously spoken out against them had been stubborn and resistant until the end. Kaedan, however, is trembling like a leaf. I can see the beads of perspiration on his forehead, bleeding down into the forests of his eyebrows. Every now and then he runs his quivering hands down his pant legs, ridding his palms of the wetness.

Finally, the magnetic door opens and in steps a Trooper, a metal monster in a uniform made to hide the bulges of wire and unnatural components that make up its body.

The session has begun.

Sitting down with an unhealthy clank, the Trooper rigidly hands me a sheet of paper. On it I make out a list of questions I suspect it wants me to ask or, more specifically, the Council wants me to ask.

I swallow.

I have to do this right.

I am one of the last human officers in the entire Seanan network. Making one mistake today could mean the end of my career. One wrong word could mean I will have to live like the rest of the population, frightened and hopeless, too afraid to do anything unless the Council explicitly says so. I notice that I am shaking; the paper I am holding seems to be vibrating.

'Are you prepared to explain your behaviour yesterday?'

The words sound strange in my mouth and in the air. It has been so long since I was allowed to interrogate someone. Usually everyone is dragged away by the neck before they have the chance to explain themselves.

Kaedan twitches visibly and turns to me. His eyebrows are raised and his mouth is agape. He looks vaguely surprised, as if he's forgotten that he's in an interrogation room. In that moment he looks sinister. Suddenly, he doesn't look at all meek or confused. He seems calculating and cunning, like he has something up his sleeve. I blink a few times and break myself away from this train of thought. Shaking my head slightly, I tell myself I have been conditioned to over-analyse the facial expressions of criminals. Finding details that simply aren't there in the first place on the faces of everyday citizens is a common error of mine.

He begins to speak but his voice is hoarse. He coughs and tries again.

'Yes... y-yes I am.' Kaedan casts his line of vision down to his hands.

I don't know what to expect from this boy anymore. He gives me a strange feeling. Despite being so sickly-looking and scrawny, he seems to present himself with a vague air of confidence. Underneath that jacket of skittish outer-appearance, I can sense a great fire stirring. Through his eyes I can see the passion that fuels him to continue talking, like a window into his mind.

'You p-people had it coming.'

My heart drops from my throat to my stomach.

What did he say?

I am incapable of feeling angry towards this boy like I should.

Instead I fear for him.


The Council will love having this one made into a public execution. Someone so bold and so outspoken will not have a quick and quiet death.

They'll love finding a way to slowly torture Kaedan, a way to further frighten the remaining human population and bury them under an even thicker layer of forced submission.

I'm shaking and a tendril of dread twists about in my stomach. There is a pregnant pause as my eyes find Kaedan's again.

The Trooper remains deathly still. It's waiting for the boy to continue, for his next line to push its tolerance over the tipping point.

Kaedan clears his throat.



'I-I want it to be known that I did this to prove a point. I know I didn't achieve anything else, nor did I expect to survive into the next week. I did this...'

I can see the Trooper stirring now through the corner of my eye.

I put on the coldest stare I can manage and wait for the boy to continue talking. I want to hear more. I'm so captivated by this person. He's absolutely insane but that's the best part. No one is insane in Seanan. Everyone is painstakingly rational enough to listen to the Council for fear of being killed. Including me.

'...to prove to everyone else that they can do the same. I wanted to do something big because no one else is going to anytime soon.'

In this moment I understand exactly what he is saying.

It's been 2 days, 4 hours and 29 minutes since Kaedan's execution and I can still see his face in the forefront of my mind.

I understand now that there really was a method to his madness.

The only thing I regret is not being able to learn it.

Sighing, I rise from the deck chair I have been reclining in and turn to leave the patio. On the way to the double glass doors that lead into the house, I scoop up a Council Approved Brand bottle of beer and bring it to my lips. It tastes terrible.

I can still recall the look of absolute lunacy in his eyes as he was pulled from his seat and over the table by the Trooper that, all of a sudden, had decided enough was enough. He was screaming as he was forced to scramble to its side, thrashing and punching at the Trooper's metal grip. There were no more words to be exchanged in the interrogation, Kaedan had said it all. He had paid the price as well. His execution had gone on for fourteen hours straight and was broadcast throughout the entire nation. No one made a sound throughout it, but clapped and cheered like they were meant to at the end. It was absolutely horrifying. I had to run to the bathroom to throw up into the toilet. I stayed in there for 12 hours, too afraid to go back into the living room and have to watch Kaedan's face contorted into a look of pure pain. I could still hear his howls and pleas long into the night.

I run a hand through my greasy hair, messy and matted from the nightmares that this boy had induced.

I understood what he said.


Waiting for a revolution is a lot like waiting for a bus to come but not knowing when it will arrive or even where it will take you.

Starting a revolution is a lot like standing up from the roadside and starting to walk. You still don't know where you will end up, but you've started now and you can't stop.

Being the leader of a revolution is like being the first person in an enormous group to start walking, beckoning for the others to rise and follow. Or in Kaedan's case, being the first person to do something big.

I drop the finished bottle of beer into the bin and lean against the wall, exhausted.

Perhaps it's time to rise and follow.



Happy, Gone

By Codey Jackson

My happy is gone, like tears falling

My happy is dead, give sympathy.

My sunshine is gone, like books burning

My sunshine is dead, give sympathy.

My cheerful is gone, like bones cracking

My cheerful is dead, give sympathy.

My joy is gone, like songs ending

My joy is dead, give sympathy.

My hope is gone, like icebergs melting

My hope is dead, give sympathy.

My love is gone, like hearts breaking

My love is dead, give sympathy.

Sister

By Joann Manoj Jacob

I have a friend on whom I can rely
No matter how old we get, our bond will never die.
Sometimes we have arguments, just like any friends.
But the love we have for each other is one that couldn't end.

When we are sitting down, she saves a seat for me.
Every time she sees me, she hugs me happily.
Whenever she gets something, she gets one for me too.
She follows me everywhere, except to the loo.

Sometimes she annoys me, I tell her 'Go away'.
But we both know that our bond will never fray.
When she goes off with her friends, I will start to miss her.
I think I'm really lucky that I can call her 'sister'.



The Blade

By Aditya Nair

Chapter 1: The Accident

It all started on Friday the 29th of July 2004, the day I was born. My parents loved me so much they would do anything for me. My sister was 7 when I was born.

When I was 11 a tragic car accident happened and I died. But somehow I was re-born in the medieval times and my dad was the king, my mum was the queen and my sister the princess. I guess, I become the prince then.

As I went to my castle the guard took one look at me then smiled and said 'this way sir', I followed him and found my parents and my sister. They cried out of happiness 'you are back!' I told them I was their son but from the future. Apparently, I had gone missing one day and they couldn't find me. I told them I had died in the future and ended up here. That night my parents ordered a royal feast celebrating my return. That whole night we laughed over my childhood memories and talked excitedly about their dream inventions. I also told them about some of the cool inventions that were made in the future.

Chapter 2: The Algerian Myth

That night after the feast they showed me my room. It had a huge bed and was very comfortable.

The next morning when I woke up I went to check the newspaper but there was no newspaper. It was a scroll instead. The scroll said 'The Prince is back. But is he the one to defeat the Algerian myth?' As I wondered what the myth was I walked downstairs to meet my parents for breakfast. When I felt the time was right I asked them about the myth. They told me the Algerian myth is about a sword called the Algerian blade hidden deep inside a cave. Only this sword can destroy the all-powerful demon dragon from the underworld.

My parents also told me that all who are born in this kingdom are sent to a fortune teller to find out what their purpose of living is. The fortune teller had said my purpose is to destroy the demon dragon. After I heard all this I asked my parents where the demon dragon was. They told that me no one knows where he lives but they know when he will come. The sky becomes dark and many problems happen that's when he comes, when we

are at our weakest point. That day I wondered if I would be able to defeat the demon dragon when I'm only 11.

Chapter 3: The Algerian Blade

That following day I borrowed one of my dad's horses and set off to find the Algerian blade. It took me one whole day to reach the cave.

At the cave I found out that it was guarded by a magical force field. This force field blocked all entry to the cave. Well, to my surprise, I could go through but not my horse. I realised that only the one that is said to claim the blade could enter. When I entered I could see many ancient statues holding swords. It looked like the statues were made of gold and were like 5,000,000 years old.

Chapter 4: The Sword In The Stone

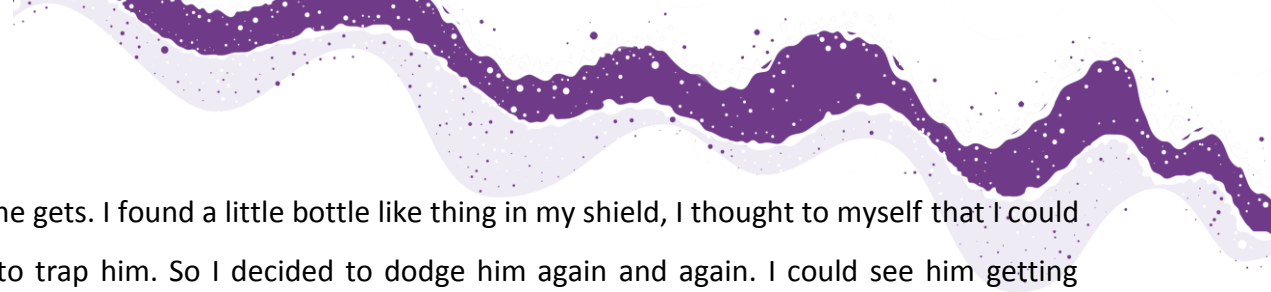
I continued to walk forward when I caught a glimpse of the sword stuck in a stone just like an Excalibur. I quickly pulled the sword out and left. Few hours later while I was riding back to my castle I saw the trees on fire and also a dragon following in the horizon. So I hurried home. When I reached my kingdom I told everyone that the dragon was on his way. So everybody got ready and went in the royal bunker. I got ready to fight as I knew today might be my last day.

Chapter 5: The Arrival

As I was waiting for the demon dragon to come I grabbed some of the strongest armour and a strong shield. As I waited in front of the kingdom gates the grass started moving very fast.

He is here... He looks hungry and strong, but I'm stronger. The wind silences as the dragon lands to get ready to shoot and charge. I ran at him with all the power that I had and then suddenly I started levitating. I guess it was the magical sword. I took my levitation powers to my advantage to strike. My strike was so powerful that it made a scar on the dragon's head.

Now he's really angry, he starts to charge, he smashes into the wall but I feel no pain. Suddenly the dragon starts to shrink. Then I hit him again and he starts to grow. I suddenly realised that as I miss his attacks he shrinks and the more you hurt him the



stronger he gets. I found a little bottle like thing in my shield, I thought to myself that I could use that to trap him. So I decided to dodge him again and again. I could see him getting smaller. He started shrinking more and more. Actually this was easier than I thought. Eventually I trapped him in the bottle and everything went back to normal and everyone was happy except me.

Chapter 6: The Return

It's been a week since I defeated the dragon. But I know somehow I need to die to return to the future and my past self to return here. So I said my goodbyes and I have to admit there were some tears. Then I went to the top of the castle and jumped...then I woke up in my house.

Everyone was happy now. I told my parents about my adventures. Now here I am writing my story....

masculinity.

By Indyanna Pyper


There is nothing brittle in the utterance of an apology.

Yet still,

the skin over your back is taut
as your shoulders s t r e t c h
to fill out imbalances of your frame.

Weakness pools in your mouth
like a sour acid.

You spit the shame out bitterly.



Those Who Died

By Tahlia Walker

Syrupy redness smeared everywhere
The lives of thousands gone.
On poppies we lay
there we stay
the world feeling forlorn.

Gunshots crackle into the air
bombshells fall from the sky.
As we live
we should all learn
to remember those who died.


As ash rains down on top of us
and the ground comes up in flames
Even those we haven't met
lest we forget
our ancestors on that day.

Many soldiers did not return
up to heaven they fly.
On ANZAC Day
we live this way
to remember those who died.

Others want our country
and so they start a war.
Guns we take
peace we make
as we sail back to shore

Screaming, shouting, crying
tears and bloodshot eyes.

We all know to
remember those who,
remember those who died.



The Never Ending Battle

Based on the diary entries of Charlie May, a soldier from World War 1

By Lian Parkes

Muddy trenches rush with streams of brown water

Rats running on my body, all over

The strafing of guns keeps us awake at night

No sign of hope, just fear and fright

Though up 'till now, we have dodged the show

It may be ours tomorrow though

I long to see you, to clasp you in my arms

Hoping you're safe, and out of harm

The morning comes, the ground was covered in snow

I hear the cries of the obnoxious crows

The air is bitter and the moment I dread

Has finally come, as I see the dead

Three bodies lay lifeless, right in front of me

One of which had gaping holes, I felt so sorry

Shellfire is such a horrid thing

The Germans will eventually feel their own sting

Rapidly intensifying, no sign of any end

Anxiety and worry cloud my head

The wrath of death scares me, to the point I feel chills

But it's vital I kill him, lest I get killed

Guns all around us crash and roar
Impossible to hear anyone, anymore
The haunting soundtrack in my mind
The screams of those who fell behind

No time to think, no time to run
No time to even lift my gun
I'm brought to my knees, praying for my life
Hoping I'll live to see my wife
My body aching, struggling to survive
It will take a miracle, to keep me alive
I hear the soldiers, they scream and shout
Is this the end? Eyes blackout.

My battle is over, but the war goes on
Fighting the nightmares of the soldiers gone
Body unconscious, unable to move
My last thought, is of you
The love of my life, whom I'll no longer see
How I wish I didn't come to Gallipoli
My mind slowly drifts, body shutting down
But I'm proud I fought for my wife, my country, my town.

Death's Rigmarole

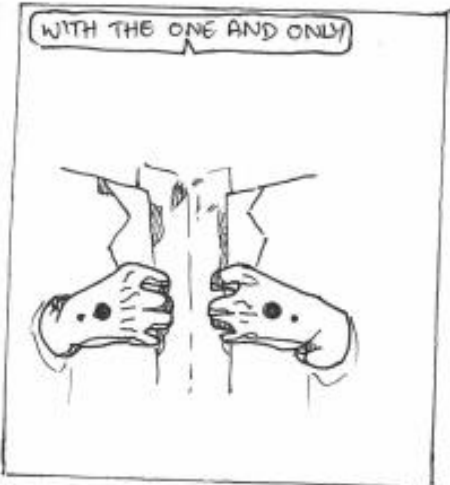
By Sarah Deng





GOOD MORNING EVERYONE! WE HAVE A VERY EXCITING GUEST JOINING US TODAY!

THE CREW AND I HAVE MANAGED TO LAND AN INTERVIEW ...



WITH THE ONE AND ONLY!



...

DEATH!!

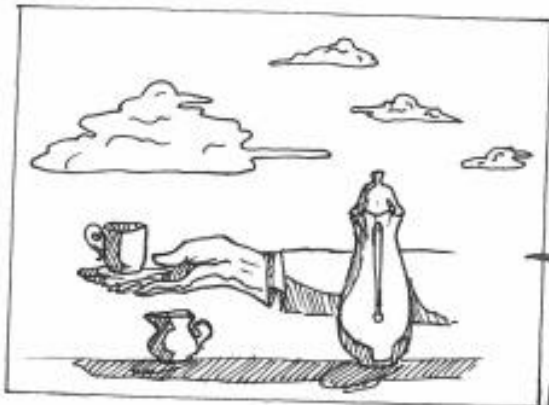


DEATH, WHO ARE YOU?
WHERE DID YOU COME
FROM? GIVE US INSIGHT
INTO YOUR LIFE.



Though I've tried, I find that I cannot
detach myself from titles such as the
'Grim Reaper' or the 'Black Camel'.

I do, however, believe I am much
more than the right-hand man
of a higher power.

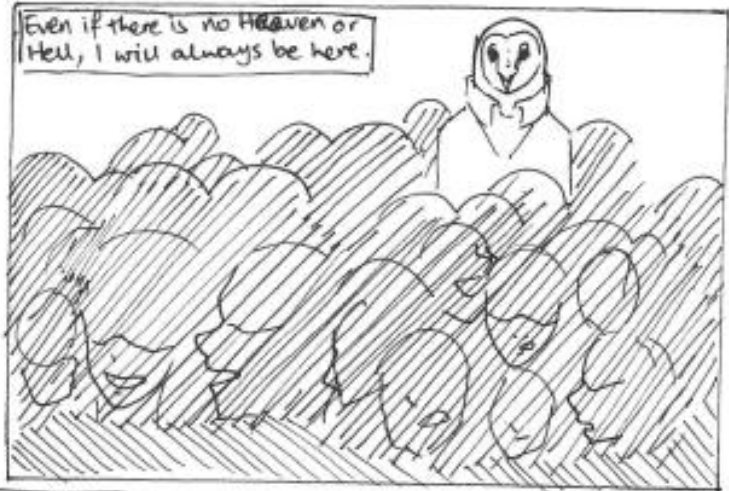


I'm much more, let's
say, organic.

I was born
from the first
living creature,
for the first living
creature.

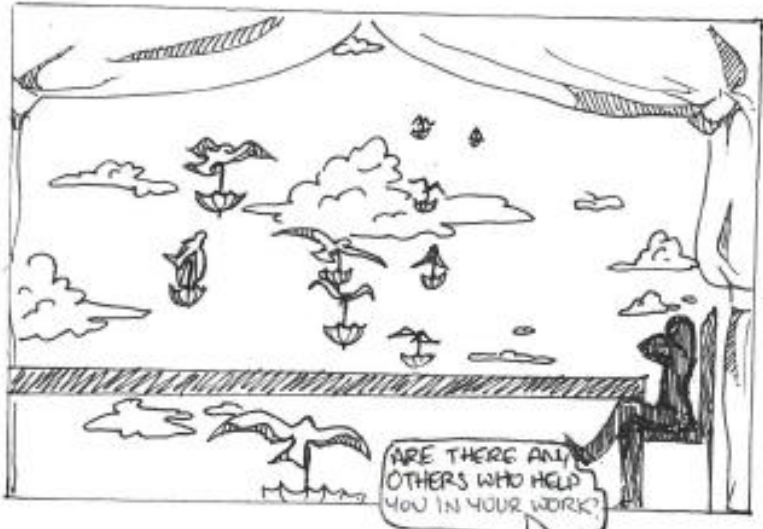


Intangible as I am logical



Even if there is no Heaven or Hell, I will always be here.

INTERESTING. YOU MUST BE A VERY BUSY...UH... BEING

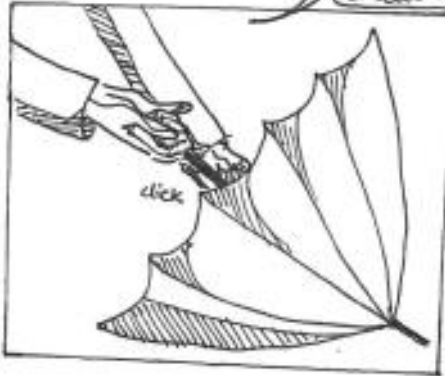


ARE THERE ANY OTHERS WHO HELP YOU IN YOUR WORK?



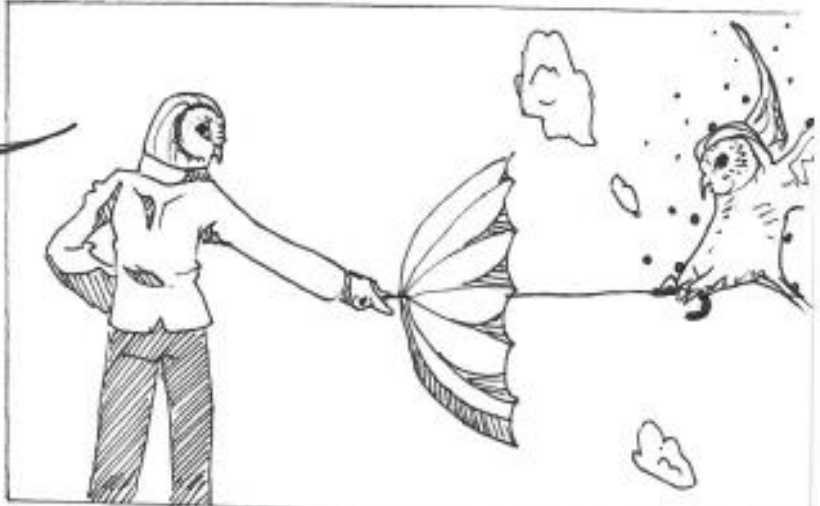
Apart from my owls, not particularly

Why, most people give me too much credit on this 'ending peoples' lives' than I am

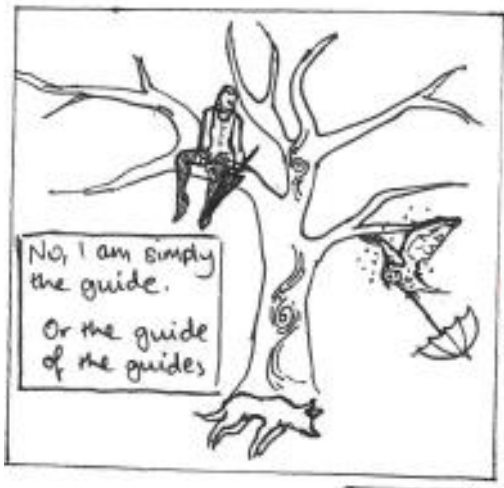


I'm not responsible for the passings of living creatures, I can't even predict them.

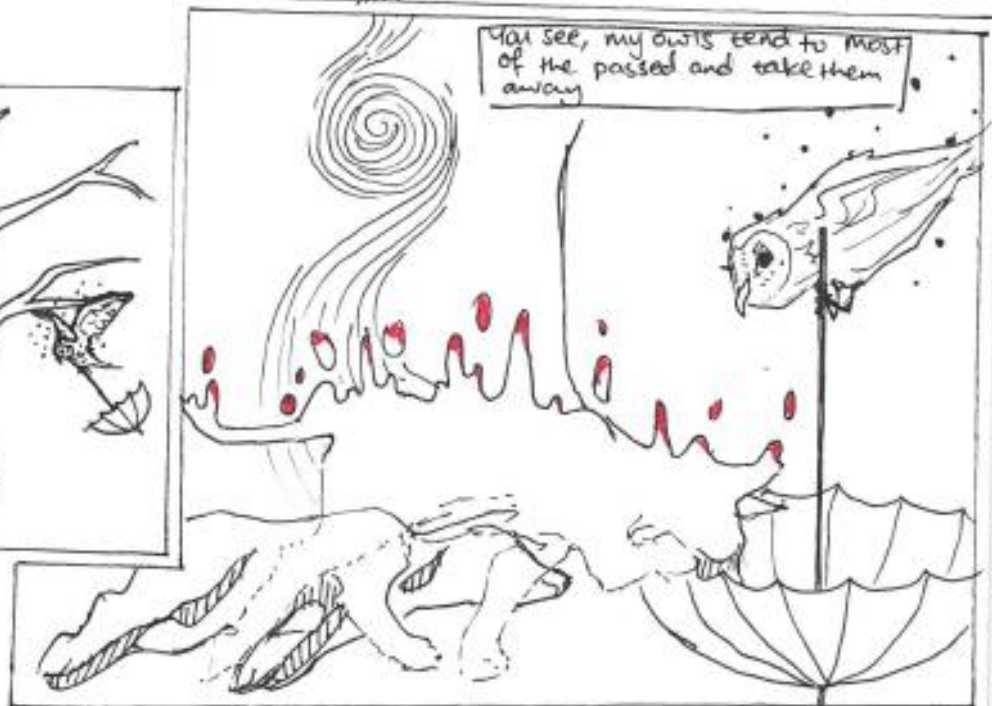
I don't come down upon humans in a black cape and scythe in hand

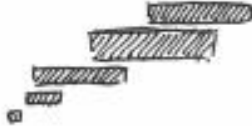
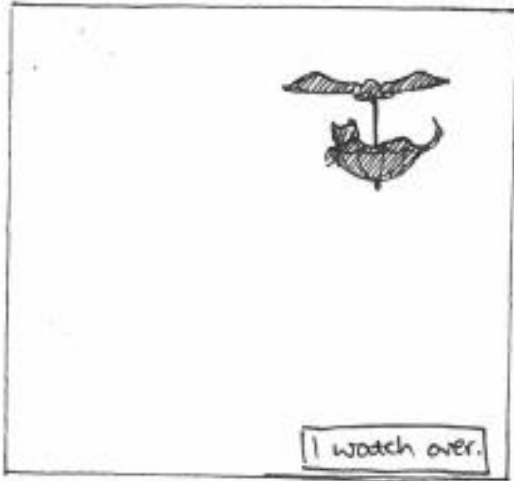


You see, my owls tend to most of the passed and take them away

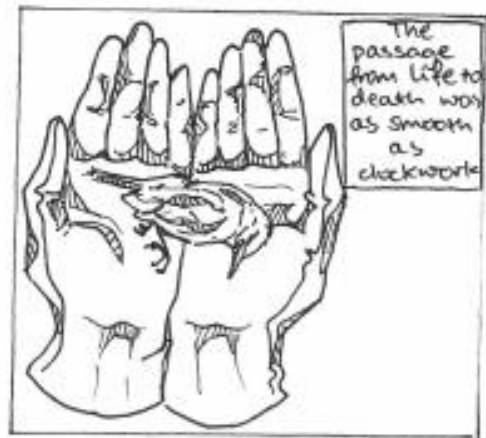


No, I am simply the guide.
Or the guide of the guides





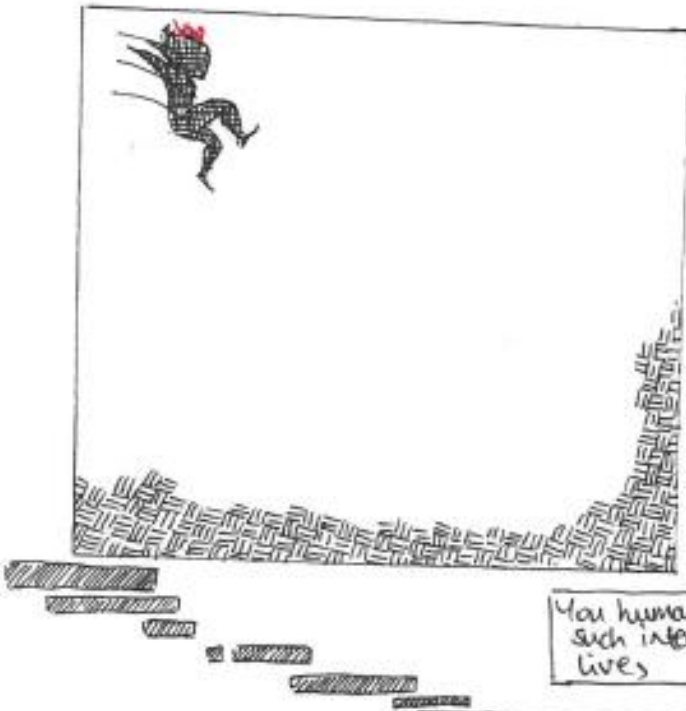
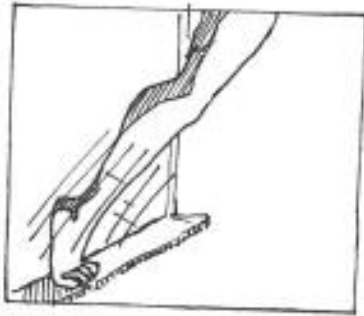
Before the human species,
I needn't even meet with
the departed.

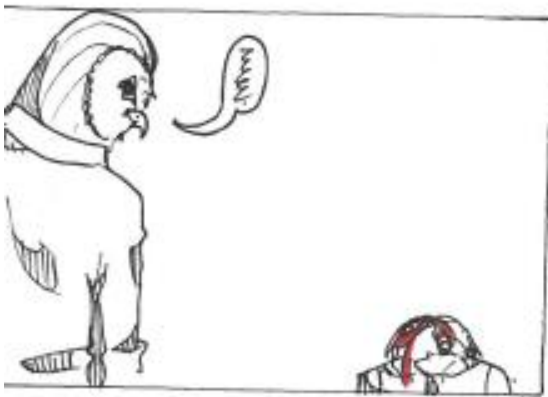
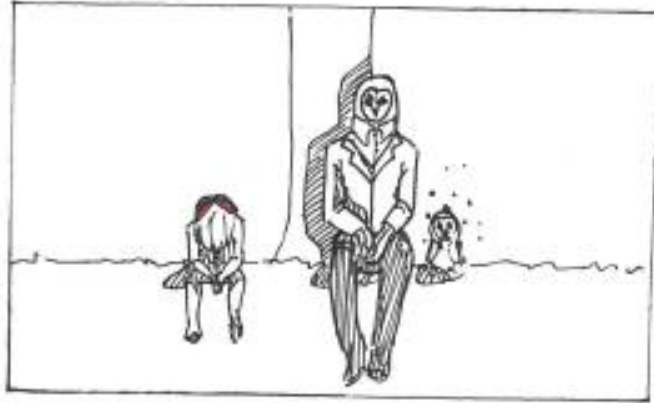












I reside here,
where it is
quiet and
mundane





I'm drawn
to your
kind

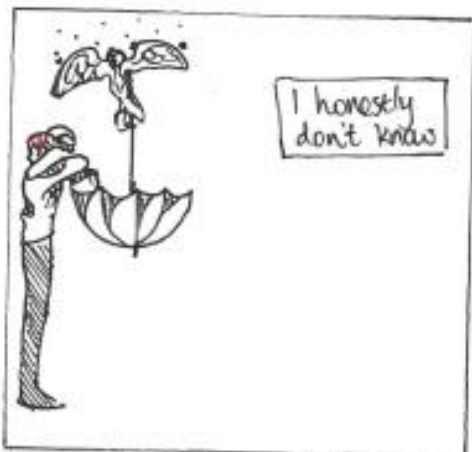


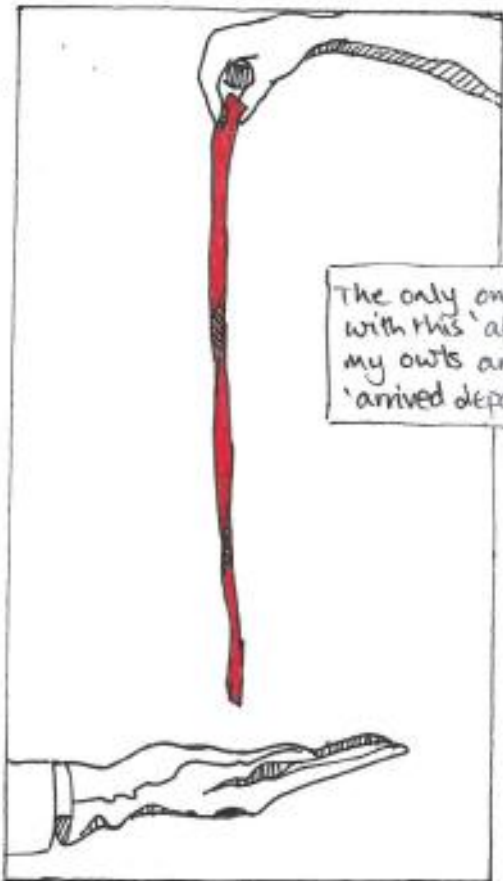


YOU MENTIONED THAT
YOUR GWLSTAKE THEM
AWAY

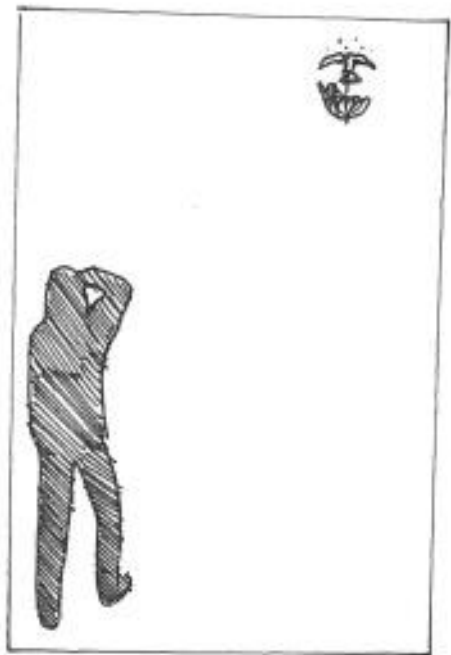


THIS MUST MEAN
THERE'S SOME
SORT OF
AFTER LIFE





The only ones familiar with this 'afterlife' are my owls and the 'arrived departed'.



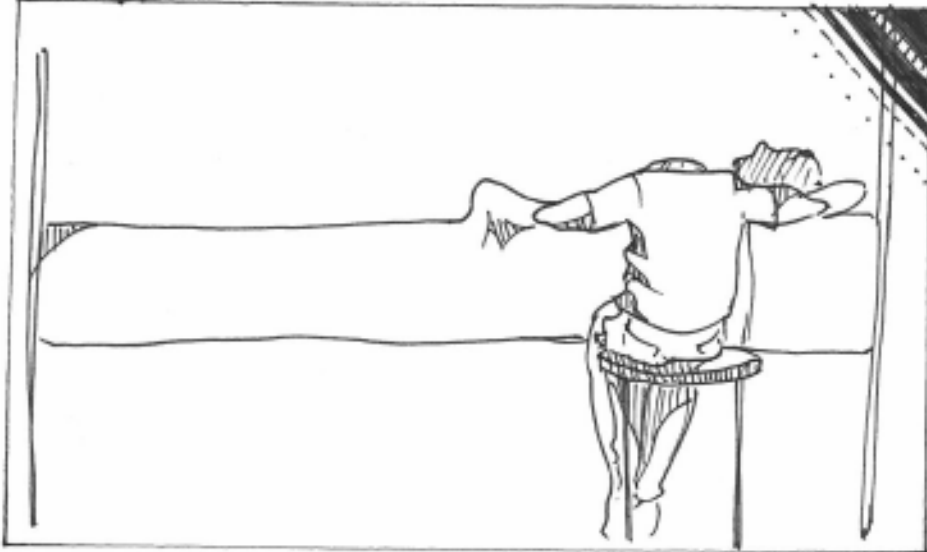
For the birds, it's like migration.



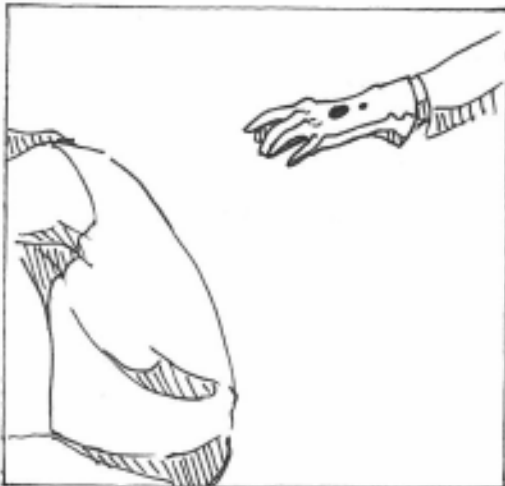
They know where to go, when to go.



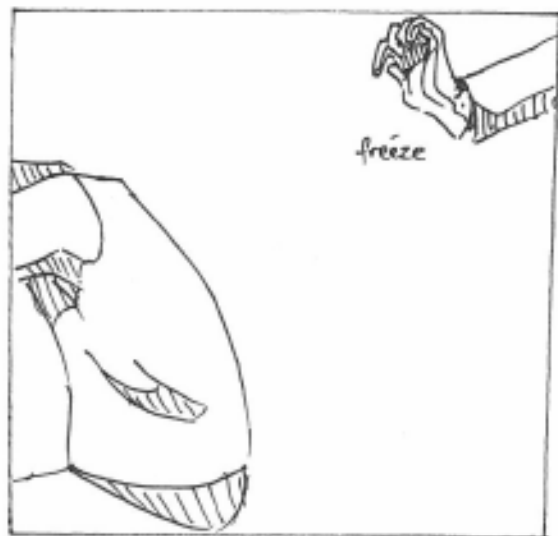
For us, it's like gazing
into the sky...



And contemplating
the moon and
stars...



When human-kind had
not travelled that
far.

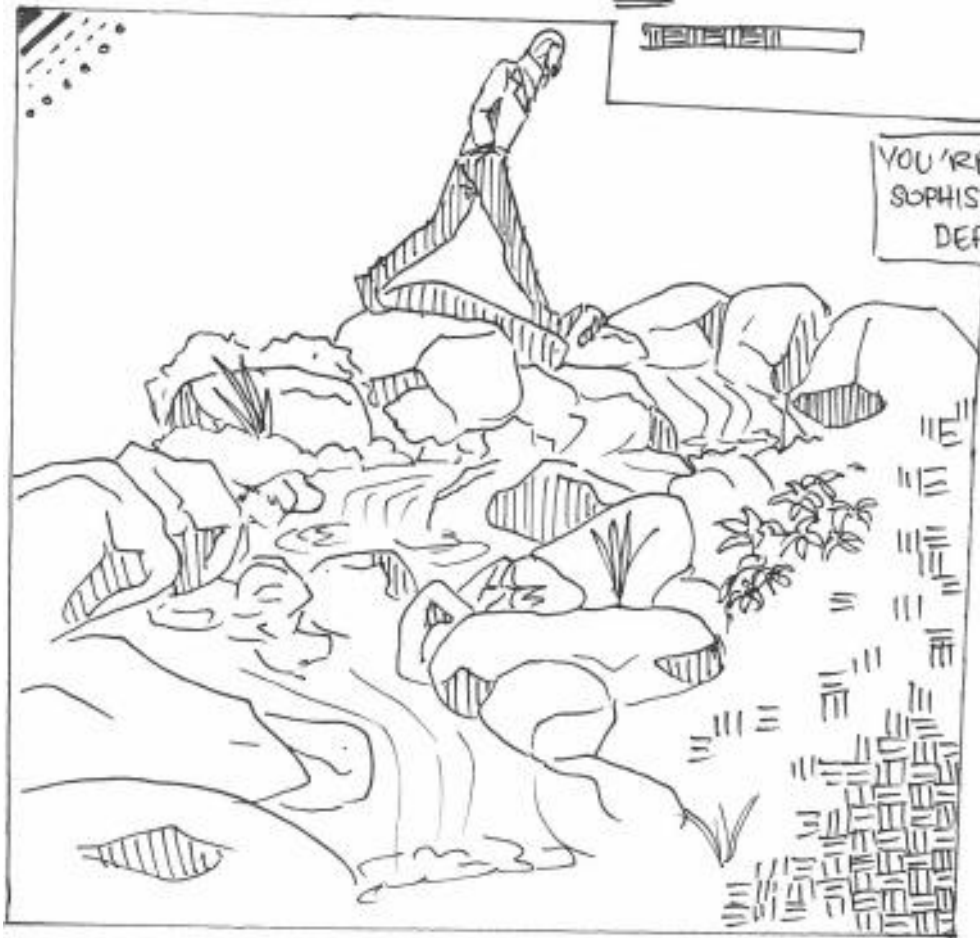


Perhaps their destination
for the likes of you
and I.



A place

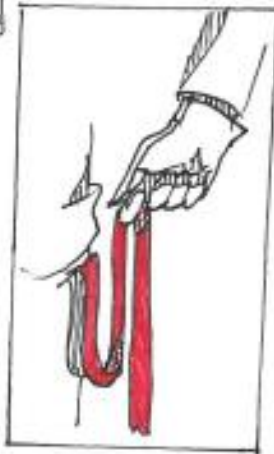
just for them.



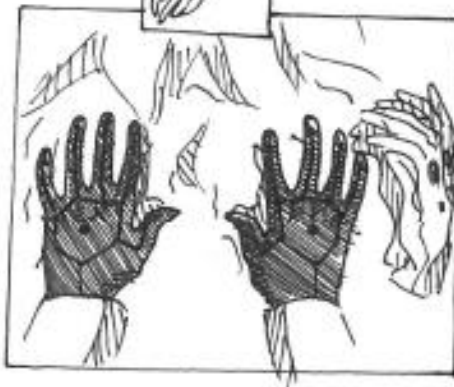
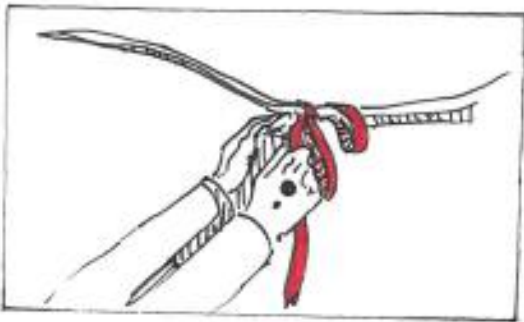
YOU'RE VERY
SOPHISTICATED,
DEATH.



AND YOU'RE
MAKING
THIS JOB
SOUND VERY
INTERESTING

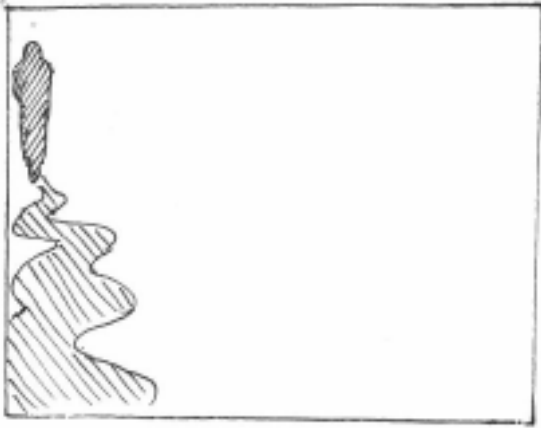


SO TELL US...





No.



I can't really
say that I
do.





A Trip With Ra

By Sandra Sujith

Jayde gazed out of the car window cheerfully. Trees and clouds flew past them, waving as they went by.

'Are we there yet?' asked Jayde impatiently. 'Not yet, darling.' replied her mother, from the driver's seat of their Honda Civic. They lapsed back into a comfortable silence.

Suddenly, Jayde's mother shrieked. Jayde glanced at her mother and saw absolute terror on her face as a truck veered towards their car. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion, and Jayde found herself paralysed, unable to move.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of slow-motion driving, the truck smashed head-on into the front of their car. The windshield exploded, showering the insides with deadly slivers of glass. Tyres squealed as the truck driver pressed down on the brake with all his might. The smell of blood made Jayde wonder whose it was. The truck narrowly missed impaling Jayde's mother.

Jayde was not as lucky.

The metal of the car groaned like the final cry of some wounded beast, shuddered, and fell silent. The silence pierced the air; ironically, the silence was the loudest thing Jayde had ever heard.

Everything went black.

Jayde heard the gentle splash of the oars and the wind billowing in the sails before she caught sight of them. The accident was still fresh in her mind. She groaned and sat up, expecting to feel excruciating pain, but she felt none. The boat rocked gently from side to side, and despite her new surroundings, Jayde felt at home. She glanced at her saviour, the person with the paddle, but she was forced to look away because of the blinding light that seemed to radiate from him. She shielded her eyes.

'Why are you so bright?' she mumbled, with an accusing note in her voice.

Her voice sounded strange, like she was older than she was.

'Here, wear these,' instructed a voice. He had a commanding tone, despite his obvious kindness.

Jayde held out her hand, accepted a pair of sunglasses, and briskly put them on.

Jayde could see everything clearly, despite the fact that the sunglasses were almost completely black. She found herself face-to-face with a man with the head of a falcon. He was wearing out-dated clothes, like it belonged in a history book. Jayde looked around. In fact, everything looked like it belonged in a history textbook. The boat glowed brighter than gold. That

wasn't the strangest part; they were thousands of metres higher than the highest-flying plane. There was no water to be seen – they were simply rowing through the sky.

Jayde gulped, and gripped the sides of the boat. She was pale. Actually, ever since she woke up, her skin was several degrees lighter than usual, almost like a ghost. The man with a falcon head looked kindly at her, almost nostalgically.

'Welcome,' he said majestically. 'I am Ra, the sun. I am carrying you to the Trial of the Soul.'

Jayde blinked. Those words sounded eerily familiar. Memories of her Ancient Egyptian history class flashed through her head. She racked her brain. What else had Mr. Cadah taught her?

Jayde glanced at Ra, and finally mustered enough courage to check if they really were in Ancient Egypt. He nodded with an amused smile on his face, as if he'd seen this several times. Then, she asked him where her mother was. Ra stared at the deck of the boat, and Jayde struggled to contain her tears.

She was on her own.

It wasn't long before they reached the heavenly court-room. Ra bid her farewell; after all, time and tide waits for no one. Jayde modestly walked in, butterflies fighting to get out of her stomach. Inside, there were 42 godly judges. Jayde spotted Horus, Isis and Hapi among the crowd, and the former waved hopefully, with a bright fire that burned furiously in his eyes. Ma'at – the goddess of justice – was stroking her feather and was seated in the corner. In the centre of the room, behind the set of golden scales, was Osiris, seated in a massive throne. Jayde stepped forward.

Ma'at placed her feather on one side of the scale.


Pull out your heart, child, said a demure voice in Jayde's head.

Jayde looked around. She had to be hallucinating, as no one had said it. Jayde pulled out her heart anyway. She wasn't going to take any chances.

Surprisingly, it didn't hurt at all. Her heart thumped in her hand, and she placed the bloody mass on one side of the scale silently. As soon as her heart touched the golden scales, Jayde was no longer in the courtroom – she was lost, drowning in a sea of her own experiences and thoughts.

Memories flew through her brain at lightning speed. The day when she had gotten a cat. The first day of school. Her first friends. The day when her parents had signed the divorce document. Jayde blinked back tears. They had been on their way to reconcile with her father. All the service work she'd done. School friends. Bad deeds. Jayde staggered, and Ma'at caught her.

The scales shook, and the feather sank below her heart.



Silence prevailed, but this was a different kind of silence when compared to the eerie silence of the accident. Then, a deafening applause rose from the seated gods. Jayde turned, and saw that her heart was lighter than the feather. She found herself thinking about all the service work she had done. She looked up, expecting to see her mother, clapping and cheering her on, but she saw no one. The weight of losing her mother snapped back onto her shoulders like a rubber band, and the ecstasy of her Heart – Weighing Trial was forgotten.

Ma'at timidly took her feather back and said loudly, 'She shall pass into the Field of Reeds.'
Anubis nodded his consent.

The clapping increased; in fact, a few of the gods were standing now. Jayde could hold it in no longer, and she let the tears flow.

The applause stopped abruptly. Osiris spoke up.

'Why are you crying, child? You have attained the perfect life,' he asked curiously.

'Please, sir,' cried Jayde. 'I want to be with my mother.'

'Are you sure?' asked Osiris.

'Yes, sir,' cried Jayde hopefully.

'If you say so, my dear. You have attained enough merit to become my Grand Vizier,' he announced, a sly edge to his voice. Osiris snapped his fingers, and everything went black for the second time.

Jayde felt the soft upholstery of her mother's Civic. She opened her eyes. She was back in their car, and there was no truck to be seen. Jayde was so relieved that she began to laugh – softly, at first, and then hysterically.

She had been dreaming.

Jayde's mother turned her head a full 180 degrees and looked at Jayde.

'Are you alright?' she asked with concern.

Jayde nodded, and then shouted, 'Mum, look where you're driving!'

She was a second too late.

Jayde screamed. She glanced at her mother and saw absolute terror on her face as a truck veered towards their car. Jayde cursed silently. She should have seen this coming.

A small voice in her head said *No one can cheat fate.*

Jayde ignored the voice, and willed her body to move. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion and Jayde found herself paralysed, unable to move. *Stop*, she wanted to say. *Not this again.* She was powerless.

Finally, the truck smashed head-on into the front of their car. The tyres of the truck squealed as the driver pressed down on the brake with all his might. A wave of deadly glass slivers washed


over Jayde and her mother. The truck bent and twisted the car into a misshapen metal pretzel, and Jayde watched as a familiar sharp corner advanced towards her mother.

Again.

Jayde's mother wasn't spared, to Jayde's shock. She watched as the front of the truck ploughed through her mother, her screams ending abruptly. The stench of blood abounded.

The car heaved, gave a last final screech, and ceased to move. It was a mangled mess of metal and bloody flesh.

Everything faded to white – for both Jayde and her mother. Osiris watched from above with pity. No one can cheat death. Ra continued his journey across the sky, and some people still maintain that two ghostly figures – a mother, and a daughter – rose like steam from the depressing aftermath of the crash and flew in the air towards the sun.



Letters On Skin

By Jennifer Nguyen

The letter sits there in the letterbox, crinkled at the top right corner. He takes it out, takes the glued edge off and pulls out the folded paper inside.

A single poem, on lined paper.

*leave me here in my pool of blood
the single trickle of melted ice
pouring into the boot-trodden mud
of the battered trench walls
it's cold, the ice in my bones
it's hot, the blood in my veins
the faint sounds of war
did not reach the buzz in my ears
muffled are the cries of men
running or dancing a macabre tango
with the inevitability of Death
i close my eyes now
the breath even on my skin, no longer ragged
a figure waits for me, silent
i go, blood no longer raging under skin
breath no longer ragged
fingertips no longer bitten with frost
eyes no longer heavy with flares
ears no longer deafened with
falling angels of death
i go, in my own pool of blood*

P.S.: what name should I grace this macabre creation?

It is his own communication with the enigma behind the paper. The person knows where he lives and possibly what he looks like, but he doesn't know a single thing about this person. Except for the envelope that arrives every day, some form of writing inside them.

'Cohen!'

He quickly scribbles on the page.

Taken by blood

Folds it, tucks the page inside the envelope, places the envelope back inside the letterbox and runs inside. When he comes back out, there is only an empty letterbox.

The mystery person writes a lot of letters to inanimate objects and nondescript poems that are nonsensical and obscure. Cohen enjoys these – he always memorises the words, because they will physically disappear when he turns his back.

Inside the house, as he shucks off his jacket, a line of ink appears on his wrist. He grins, mouth wide.

See Kathy at 10 Sunday

Yo loverboy hold your pen properly there's ink everywhere on my palm I do not appreciate this graffitiing of my skin I buy products to nurture this lush honey cream goodness do not put my nurturing to shambles

His soulmate, the ever-witty soul. He draws a quick :P on his arm and barks out a laugh when a *you know what you can go throw yourself under a bus you annoying rat* appears just as fast as his pen leaves his skin.

His brother spots him grinning and cackling while holding his right arm out and screams into the kitchen, 'He's talking with his soulmate again!'

'Quit your chitchat and make the sauce!' His mother screams.

'Coming!' He calls out.

His wrist has the entire exchange crookedly-spaced and messily scrawled on. He never stops grinning.

But you love me

Dude I haven't even met you how do I love you

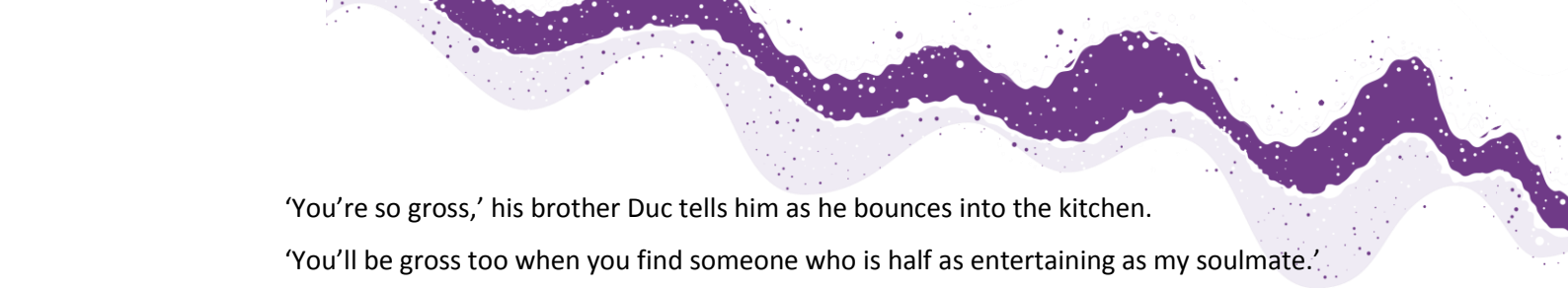
It's nature

Only ugly people say that

I have to go

Bye ugly soulmate that I hate

You still love me



'You're so gross,' his brother Duc tells him as he bounces into the kitchen.

'You'll be gross too when you find someone who is half as entertaining as my soulmate.'

'You're like a different person it's disgusting.'

'I can't hear you over the sounds of jealousy.'

In his world, there is a predetermined law of soulmates. People, according to nature's laws, will receive their soulmate mark at some point in their life. Eventually they would meet and fall in love. The soulmate mark comes in the form of handwriting on skin which would appear on their soulmate's skin. He received his mark at the age of 6 where he was in class and concentrating on how to hold a pen. He dropped the pen from his grip when he opened his fist and saw the line of ink on his palm.

Hello

He screamed. It was high-pitched and very shrilling and loud. Several other children had screamed in response of his yelling and the teacher came tearing inside the room, fearful of children with sharp objects impaled inside their bodies or children wielding sharp objects. Either option meant a lot of paperwork.

'Is everyone okay? What happened?' She gulped in a breath, scanning around the room for any potential hazard. She only saw Cohen clutching his wrist, eyes wide.

'Cohen, dear, did you hurt yourself?' She bent down and he shook his head. 'What's wrong?'

'I got my mark,' he whispered back.

'He got his mark!' His classmates echoed like a zoo of very angry chimpanzees.

'Yes, dear, everyone gets their mark at some point in their life. Yours is at a normal age, no need to fret,' she smoothed down his hair, relieved.

'What do I do?' He asked, still clutching his wrist. Shaking a bit.

'You answer! Answer!' The classmates crowded around him, akin to a crazed cult burning an offering to the bonfire of the gods. A pen was shoved at him. His teacher gripped her forehead, breath leaving her harshly.

Hi

The screaming increased at a higher and shriller pitch. A word jumped on his skin.

H I I I I

The teacher had to disband the circle of children chanting 'say something back!' around Cohen. He was feeling sick at the yelling and his six-year-old's mind was trying hard to understand the word 'soulmate'.

The writing appeared almost regularly every other day or so as his replies to the messages. His soulmate was...queer from an early age. For lack of a better word. They were more than enthusiastic whenever he replied and would proceed to litter his skin in myriads of squiggles and spasmodic lines. He is fond of this personable individual who makes him laugh and takes away the wrinkles on his brow whenever he feels tensed. The crude jokes and self-deprecating remarks and sarcastic observations around their world colour his, and his soulmate brings out the garrulous nature he thought was never present in him.

His soulmate he is so fond of, but the writer behind the envelope captures his interest wholeheartedly.

The writing ranges from poems to heartrending actual letters to a father. He knows them like the songs in his head. They are powerful. They are very real. He wants to know the person behind these letters, but the one line question or comment every letter is the only clue he has of this enigma.

An envelope sits in his letterbox the next day. The paper smells like freshly-baked cinnamon. It feels warm too. Lines roll from the top, the edges torn from a notebook.

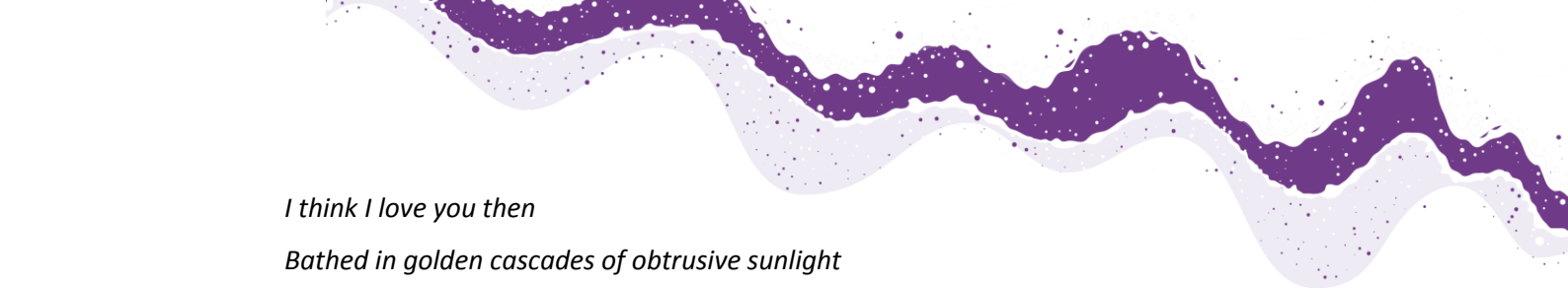
*milk and cinnamon brewing softly
cultivating a heightened expectation
of softness and melting clouds*

Sometimes ordinary observations of the world arrive at his letterbox. The prose gives him kaleidoscopic lenses to focus on the ordinary and the colours unseen by him splash these sights with multitudes of shades that amaze him. How else would a hot latte, seemingly innocent, have the heightened expectation of softness and melting clouds? *Do clouds even melt?*

*P.S.: I was out with my friends in the city. Thought you would like to hear how that went
Ever a mystery.*

But the love poems, when they arrive in their rarity, leave him breathless. In the same hand that writes about bloodshed and macabre dances with death, is also the same hand that captures the fluttering-of-butterflies-in-stomach feeling that he feels when his parents whisper and giggle together during their walks.

Today is his lucky day. Perhaps he is blessed. Or cursed. These poems make him *feel* and that is always a refreshingly foreign notion to him. His chest clenches and he quite forgets he has lungs. It's increasingly becoming a health hazard.



*I think I love you then
Bathed in golden cascades of obtrusive sunlight
Skin glowing an ethereal light
Of deep-dipped honey and sleepy amber
Your skin sweetened by the warmth
Of mollified heaven light
And I think I love you more
In the shadows of the slant of your nose
The space between your lashes and lids
In the dancing shadow and light*

What is breathing anyways?

Cohen chokes and coughs and struggles to find a reply to the customary note at the bottom of the page. A simple line. Two words. His downfall.

P.S.: For you

The downfall, he realises a few weeks after, is not a sudden realisation. He has been denying this notion for quite a time. What does he love so much about this person that makes him question nature's dictation of soulmates?

The raindrops on the window linger and slide down into oblivion. The answer sits lodged in his chest.

The writer is beautifully human, in their fragile words, and one with their emotions. And stupid damned poems that knock the breath out of him.

He loves the pain apparent in the *carve knife tips into my skin* and the nostalgia of *not being able to return to the safe croon of the steady night*. Whoever this person was, the words they write are artworks that only he could see. Beauty, too, exist as the bittersweet taste leaves him from the pain of the words.

Sunlight streamed ribbons of honey gold and dark maple

Feelings of being on a cloud. Of being held against something soft. They make him stop and *listen*. It's useless to try not to. It's exquisite and crafted on a spur, but seeing something unpolished and just so fragile touches him, and like a fool drunk on obsession, he drank from these verses.

His soulmate could forgive him, his soulmate could not. But as long as the verses sing to him he will continue this love.

What do I do to not stab myself in the throat?

He grins. It's a collateral of the exposure to his soulmate. Cohen grabs a pen and scribbles back a reply.

Is this your maths teacher again?

Omo mate you have no idea he doesn't know how to teach I am suffering there are actual tears leaving my acne-ridden face

The librarian casts him concerning looks over his shoulder as his whole body shakes in restrained laughter at the person's words.

Self-study?

I have tried everything I need someone capable I will fail maths and my mother cannot blame it on my atrocious inability to common sense

You were doing so well until you used common sense as a word

English isn't my first language leave me alone you troll

He still smiles. Cohen always smiles around his soulmate. The strain of his Economics assignment leaves his shoulder.

It's okay

He hesitates. Cohen never does this. Asking questions is the soulmate's task, taken almost for granted.

Do you mind if I ask for your name?

His breath is stuck inside his cheek.

Hoai An

'Oh my god it's a Viet girl,' he breathes, almost giddy. He can cooperate with Vietnamese, he can speak the language, he can put away the stress of his mother not being able to converse with his soulmate.

His soulmate.

Cohen stares at the name. He had almost hoped that his soulmate would be someone he will tolerate, not be fond of. The conversations they shared had supported his early teenage years through many traumas and he is fearful of almost letting the bond they had go. But in continuing with nature's decision that this girl is his only true love, he feels that he has cheated the mysterious letter writer who diligently writes to him every day since he was 12 and had not missed a day since.


I'm Cohen. Cohen Nam Le

You're like this famous author Nam Le

ye I read his work

Oh good you're not a complete Neanderthal

Who should he betray?



He decides to keep quiet.

Go study child

Um rude I am you're just conveniently there to provide entertainment services

He misses the verse that lingers and disappears right after.

We are all humans and we are flawed,

But to me darling, you are my forever more

There is no letter for him on that day. For the first time in six years, there is no letter awaiting him. Cohen feels as if a great betrayal had occurred to him. Possibilities filter through his mind. *Maybe my lack of a response on their poem- oh my god I forgot to reply I replied all this time I cannot believe myself they hate me now I am deplorable I deserve death.*

Moreover, he just stares at the letterbox, swallowing what tastes like regret down his tight throat. The pen he always carries, the one recommended by Hoai An, his soulmate, sits heavy in the pocket of his jeans. Cohen pulls it out, glances at the lonely sight of the letterbox and presses the tip into his wrist, a simple *Hey can we talk* wriggling on his skin.

Yeah sure what's up?

PS We can't break up over this weird soulmate bond thing that's worse than over text you need to find me and say it to my face you weak bastard

He inhales. It's a shaky breath. He doesn't know if the air in his lungs is making him want to laugh or cry. He scribbles back instead.

So I tell you everything ye

Yes, and?

I haven't told you about something

I'm sorry I waited 12 years to tell you this it's very unfair to you I'm so sorry

Hold on loverboy slow down what is this 'something'

'I'm so sorry,' he sobs, tears prickling his eyes, 'you're my best friend and I'm hurting you.'

He continues writing.

Every day for the last six years I've been receiving letters from this person I don't know their name or anything about them just that they know me quite well and they write things and drop them in an envelope inside my letterbox

I don't know how or why or whatever but the writing touches me and I love receiving the letters just as much as I love reading them they never say much but the way they see the world is like a whole symphony orchestra in your head and colours onto black and white

I never felt so many emotions before I read these writings

*I guess what I'm trying to say is that
I am very fond of you, you're so dear to me
But I love this person. I'm sure of it*

'You got there before me,' a voice from above him says. He jerks his head up, almost cracking his head, and gawks as a girl with her sleeves rolled up from both hands with lines of ink appearing on her skin. He's conscious of his teary face that is bloated and red and the girl seems panicked that he discovered her and flaps her arms around, knocking into him.

'I wanted to surprise you and everything, but that's kinda not important right now. I'm your soulmate.'

He doesn't speak for a second. Blinks. Stares at the incredibly tiny girl through the bloated lids of his eyes. She stares back, big dark eyes tilting up to meet him.

'How do you know who I am?' He asks instead, forgetting that he was about to end their bond just mere minutes before. Hoai An seems uncomfortable, shifting her feet.

'I might've...stalked you a bit? Knew who you were? I was going to find you today but you're ending our bond just before so I figured we should,' she gestures vaguely, showing their entire conversation on her wrists, 'you know, talk it out. In person. I'm only five foot nothing I don't have enough skin for a break up.'

He cracks a smile. Hoai An grins back. It's like the sun is packed into a smile. He feels warm and a bit dizzy.

'I'm sorry,' he chooses, after a while. 'It's an unforgivable thing, but I can't lie to you. You deserve to be with someone who loves you. I don't think I can.'

She is calm. Cohen meets her eyes and sees the corners of her lips shaking as teeth bite into them.

'What's so funny?' He frowns.

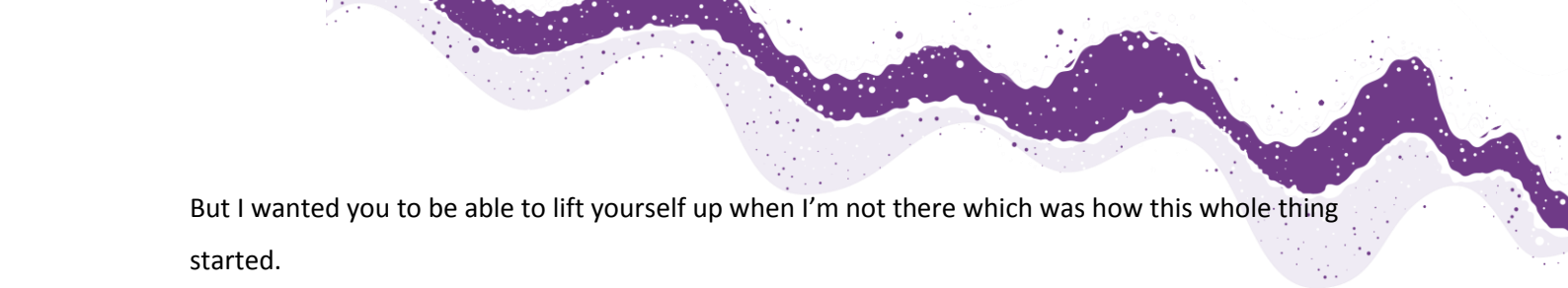
She only shakes her head and pulls out an envelope. A very familiar envelope. Cohen doesn't breathe for a moment. Chokes on his inhalation of air the next.

'It's you?!' He shrieks.

'Um...surprise?'

'How did you even find out where I live oh my god you actual stalker,' he rants at her and she lets him, arms waving everywhere and knocking into her. She waits until he was done accusing her and takes his hands into her small ones. If her smile was like the sun her hands were like a furnace. 'Why?'

'You were always so sad. You never smiled, and you only smiled when I write to you, which,' she grins at him, eyes crinkling. He forgets to breathe again. 'Is absolutely flattering, thanks for that.'



But I wanted you to be able to lift yourself up when I'm not there which was how this whole thing started.

But you were just so nice when you replied and I never showed these poems and letters to anyone else so I thought that if I can talk to you normally and support you silently you will become a better version of yourself that you'll like and love. I've achieved my goal, I have done all I could and what's left was to tell you.'

'That's...so thoughtful,' he blinks. 'Is that why when I told you about your writing you decided that...?'

They both nod slowly. He hasn't let go of her hand yet. The relief of not having to end the relationship he has with both the sarcastic soulmate and the otherworldly writer frees him. He grins widely, looking down to meet his soulmate's eyes. She steps back.

'Let's start over again. Hi, I'm Hoai An. Nice to meet you.'

'Hello,' he lets go of her hand and pulls her into a hug instead, 'I'm Cohen and I'm stupidly in love with you.'

'Nice,' she grins into his chest. 'But you're crushing my glasses.' He doesn't let go.

Mannequin

By Coco Huang

Paul sighed, the pins in his mouth pricking his tongue. The sewing machine whined to a stop, no longer spitting out *tuk-tuk-tuks* as it punctured layers of nylon and spandex. His phone was hidden under the piles of fabric on his desk, tangled in the measuring tape. He answered it while undoing the knots.

‘Hi, cucumber.’ He still cringed at the nickname. Whenever he stood next to his wife Joanne, he certainly lived up to it.

‘Hi,’ he replied awkwardly. ‘How’s training?’

‘Going good.’ In the background, he could pick out the sound of grunting women, followed by a triumphant yell. ‘Just a minute – GET YOUR ASS UP, ROXY! NOW!’ Joanne’s voice slammed into the side of his face. ‘Anyway, darling, has it arrived yet?’

He set down the phone and frowned, thumbing the backstitch. ‘No,’ he murmured. His work was a little crooked, and although Joanne probably wouldn’t notice, it irritated him enough to unpick it.


‘Are you sure?’ A touch of impatience tinged Joanne’s voice. ‘I called up the National Kick-Wrestling Association and they said they’d posted my trophy weeks ago.’

‘Well, maybe it got lost.’

‘Maybe. At least it gives you more time to get another display cabinet.’ Her throaty laugh cut through his thoughts. ‘How’s my new suit coming along?’

He pinched and pulled out the thread, leaving a dotted line of holes. ‘Fine, just fine.’

He went in with a torch and his measuring tape, refusing to turn on the lights. He knew the layout of the room by heart; the walls were adorned with life-sized posters of his wife in mid-air, her thigh muscles tense and bulging as she delivered a strike. These images encircled the rows of display cabinets, which stood at Joanne’s eye level but towered over Paul. The edges of the ceiling were lined with LED bulbs, and he’d almost been blinded once by the glare from the glass panels and the golden statues behind them. They all belonged to his wife, except for a dusty folder which contained his few certifications. There wasn’t much of a market for handmade clothing, especially when mass-producing clothing printers made everything so cheap, but there was little else he could do. He’d gotten into the kick-wrestling attire niche after he’d met Joanne, but he still shopped for groceries with her credit card.



He knelt, as though measuring a client, and placed his tape along the ground. He memorised the dimensions of the space available for the new cabinet and scrolled through the cabinets he'd bookmarked on his phone. None of them would fit. He exhaled, slightly irritated, and headed to the kitchen. Joanne had moved his box of tea leaves to a different shelf. He opened the lid and inhaled, allowing the fragrance to soothe his mind.

While the water boiled, he sifted through the fridge. There was plenty of beef for dinner, but perhaps he would go out and buy some chicken. After all, his wife had said his belly was protruding and his thighs were getting flabby the last time they were in bed together. He pinched the thin roll of fat over his stomach, testing its tautness.

The kettle clicked off. He saw his reflection in the steel casing, and wondered when his eyes had grown so still.

It was yet another celebratory dinner; plenty of women, and plenty of beer. The kick-wrestlers laughed and spilt their drinks, resting their arms on their husbands' shoulders. They murmured appreciatively when Paul arrived, and one of the women elbowed Joanne. 'He's a real beauty,' she whispered saucily, cracking her massive knuckles. 'Didn't think you'd go for the petite type, though.'

Joanne raised an eyebrow. 'He's not petite where it matters.' The women broke into hoots of laughter, splattering the table with pale specks of spit. Paul smiled, reluctantly polite. He'd heard that one before.

The evening wore on, and Paul found himself alone with his thoughts as usual. He'd grown tired of observing the women, admiring the broad bumps of muscle that strained from open-back dresses, their vein-ridden biceps and well-built calves that trembled with life. The other men had complemented his outfit, a pine-green self-tailored suit with subtle vertical stripes, but he heard a hint of something underneath their voices that made him doubt their sincerity. He'd had too much to drink, he knew, and now the corners of his vision had softened and his inner musings were slurred. Staggering a little, he excused himself and headed for the bathroom.

He wasn't aware of his name being called, the sound overpowered by the amplified splash of his urine against the urinal. There was a hand on his shoulder, an unwelcome shake, and a lopsided smile. He shrank away instinctively.

'Bloody hell, mate. You don't remember me?' The man's bristles were in focus, dark and prickly. His skin seemed too tight, his nose too wide. 'Black Friday Peppers? Back at uni?' The husky voice seemed familiar, but too distorted to recognise.

Paul followed the bristles up to the dark-circled eyes. 'Kevin?'

'That's more like it!' Kevin slapped him on the back good-humouredly. 'You look good, man.'

'Thanks,' Paul said, trying to examine him clearly while his mind protested. 'You've put on weight,' his mouth said, to his own horror.

Kevin chuckled. 'Well, Mia doesn't mind too much. She's buried under her work half the time and when she isn't, she's going on about headaches and other shit.'

'You married Mia?' Paul exclaimed, incredulous. He knew her from Kevin's mother's restaurant, where their band had played on Friday nights. She'd come over complaining they were too loud, shooting them a side glare whilst mixing cocktails. But Paul had kept his amp turned down low, so only he could hear what he played. It was an intimate experience, like there was a ghost instrument in his mind, even when the drums and the lead overshadowed him. But its voice had left when he'd sold the guitar, a sacrifice to make ends meet. He could still feel the weight of the instrument, the four steel strings on his once-calloused fingers. He hummed an old melody, unsure of the words.

'Hey, I remember that one.' Kevin's voice was accompanied by a faint tinkling.

Paul nodded. There was a line he'd loved in that song, a simple but intriguing one, that he'd written on the ceiling of his first apartment so he'd see it just before the lights went out.


The sea throws rocks together, but time leaves us polished stones.

Perhaps time had indeed polished him, he pondered. He was a beautiful, good husband, and wealthy enough to do what he loved. He'd left behind the stubborn and reckless young man he was, proud of eluding authority. Yet sometimes there was a subtle bitterness in his throat; a passing touch when his wife wasn't home for dinner, or when he put another trophy on display. He knew he was rambling on, making no sense, his mind a turbulent sea tossing around thoughts like stones.

Kevin grunted, drawing his attention. With a loud *zip*, his fly came unstuck and he did up the button, an ugly, grey standard one that Paul recognised from cheap general stores. 'Let's go out for drinks, I'll shout you one.' Paul vaguely heard him, and didn't resist when Kevin guided him by the arm.

It was muggy and damp outside, the rain bringing little relief from the stickiness that crept down their necks. A glass was placed in Paul's hand and he drank, the coldness forcing him awake. Kevin smiled when he noticed his change in demeanour. 'So,' he began, deftly licking the foam from his lips. 'How did you end up with someone like Joanne?'

'Pure luck,' Paul said and laughed, as though he'd already planned his answer. 'After I left uni, I went on so many blind dates. None of them worked out; they were all kind of a joke, really.' Kevin nodded in sympathy. 'So I got desperate and . . . well, turned to my old ways.' He saw Kevin's



eyes flicker for a second; the disconcerting movement assured him that Kevin hadn't forgotten his highs and lows. He fidgeted, tracing the beads of water that trailed down the sides of the glass, suddenly aware of how little space was between them.

'Let's just leave it at substance abuse.' Kevin said, also uneasy with being reminded of their rash decisions.

'Call it whatever you want,' Paul shrugged. He chewed on a half-melted ice cube, the sensation both uncomfortable and satisfying. 'Anyway, one night I ended up at a strip club – everyone probably thought I was gay - and these women - yes, they were older than I was - thought I was the entertainment, until . . .' He gestured exaggeratedly for Kevin to continue.

'Joanne?'

'Yes, Joanne. She was huge, and clearly a kick-wrestler, so they took one look at her and fucked off.'

'Wow,' Kevin said, awestruck. 'What a remark-' He belched and laughed embarrassedly. Paul caught a whiff of cinnamon on his breath mingled with the stench of beer. He tried not to think of how he'd tasted it before, how he'd woken up in the afternoon with the same scent lingering between his teeth.

'I hope, for your own sake, your old days are over.' Kevin's words clicked him back in place, and he blushed at his daydreams.

'I know, I know.' He swirled around the ice cubes, wishing they would melt faster. 'It's bad for Joanne's public image.'

'Not only that.' Kevin leaned closer. 'Honestly, I didn't think you could kick the habit, but you did, and you look great. But I've always wondered . . . every time you said you'd stop, there was something that sucked you back in. The excitement, perhaps, but now I'm starting to think it wasn't just that. You were afraid when it wore off. Afraid of what, I don't know, but you broke every mirror you saw – so what was it?'

A lump forced itself up his throat. 'I-I don't know,' he lied. 'That was ages ago, I don't remember.'

'Of course.' Kevin leant back, evidently disappointed. 'I'm sorry for asking. So, what's it like with someone like Joanne? Plenty of fun, I suppose?'

Paul sighed inwardly in relief, his tension dissipating into the clammy air. 'No, we're very careful. We discussed having children, but that's not possible since it would interfere with her career.' He couldn't imagine her trophy room being replaced with a nursery, or what it would be like to hold a child in his arms. He would probably never find out.

'That's a shame,' Kevin said. 'But you're so supportive of her nonetheless. Didn't she win

another championship recently?’

‘Yes, and I’m very proud of her,’ Paul replied. It was his default response. ‘But I’ve never seen her kick-wrestle before.’

‘What?’ Kevin exclaimed in disbelief. ‘Not even once?’

‘She said it’d be too violent to watch.’

‘Nonsense,’ he snorted, handing him his business card. His eyes gleamed briefly as he extended the invitation. ‘I’ll take you if you want.’

Paul trimmed the ends and stretched it over a mannequin. It was a shame he hadn’t finished it in time for Joanne’s match that evening – he’d been strangely unsettled since he last saw Kevin, winding the thread incautiously and jamming the machine. He’d finished off the remaining seams by hand, but his stitches were uneven and he’d nicked his thumb. Even as he inspected his work, the same odd sensation returned; his mouth tasted like wood and he breathed through a tight throat.


His workroom was a mess; perhaps that had triggered his nerves. He stored away the excess fabric, rearranged his tools, and swept up the loose bits on the floor, but the feeling only intensified. He kept cleaning despite the growing faintness in his head, but it lingered in the little nooks and crannies that he couldn’t reach. He tried telling himself that he was alright, despite the growing faintness in his head. Then he realised he wasn’t breathing and gasped, a dizzying rush of air bursting through and spinning his vision like a pinwheel while he tried to hold on.

‘Are you alright?’

He must have imagined it. The mannequin beside him blinked its fake-blue concerned eyes and patted down its suit lapels self-consciously, uncertain of what to do. Suddenly another mannequin jerked, convulsing as it tested its limbs. It was his wife, beaming in her new bodysuit. ‘Hi, I’m Joanne,’ she said, posing with her hand casually on her hip. ‘I’m a seven-time national champion in kick-wrestling, ranked third internationally. And this is my adorable and lovely husband.’ The mannequin sauntered to her side, pecking her on the cheek. Its face was a permanent smile, accentuated by perfectly shaped eyebrows. ‘I’m Paul,’ it said brightly, extending a hand. ‘Pleased to meet you.’

Paul gaped at them, too stunned to respond. And then he understood. It was an answer he’d known but denied himself, too afraid to disrupt the seeming stability of his day-to-day life. It had watched him from the mirror as he waxed his forearms, shaking its head as he ripped out hair in painful strips. It had seen him conceal the blemishes on his face, the unwanted scars of adolescence. And now it looked at him, eye-to-eye, and waited for his next move.

Paul smiled bitterly, an ugly but honest smile he didn’t dare to wear in public. The



mannequin's smile faltered; it leant back on its stand, and Joanne was gone. He flipped open his diary and called the number on the business card. As he waited for Kevin to pick up, he took the rotary cutter from his desk and removed its safety case. Deep in thought, he fingered the cool metal. Then he hurled it at the mannequin.

The blade thudded, sinking into its plastic chest.

Teased

By Codey Jackson

I am **lonely**

My only **friend** taken away by **others**

Sounds of **bullies** enter my **mind**

Saying our **friendship** was **not** meant to **be**.

As I **stare** into the **blankness**

I **hide** from the **future**

The **dark future** where I am **alone**.

I am **sad**

My only **happiness** taken away by **others**

Sounds of my **parents** enter my mind

Saying our **friendship** was **not** meant to **be**.

As I **shake** off the **fear**

I **hide** from the **future**

The **dark future** where I am **alone**.

I am **scared**

My only **courage** taken away by **others**

Sounds of my **friend** enter my **mind**

Saying our **friendship** was **not** meant to **be**.

As I **tackle** the **truth**

I **hide** from the **future**

The **dark future** where I am **alone**.

A Hard Day

By Advika Anoop

'You haven't done your job!' shouted the queen.

I put both hands on my face and strolled home.

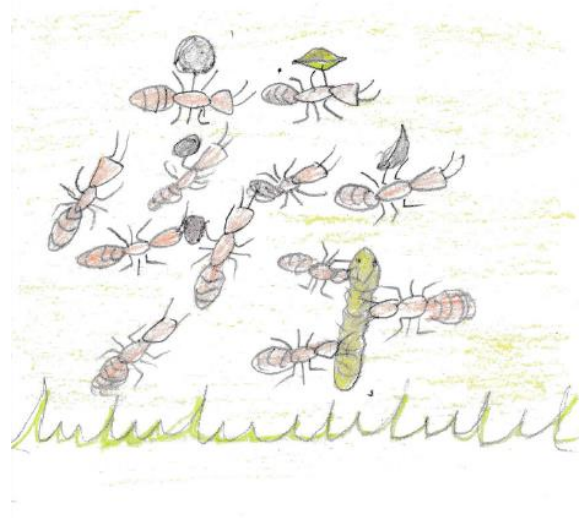
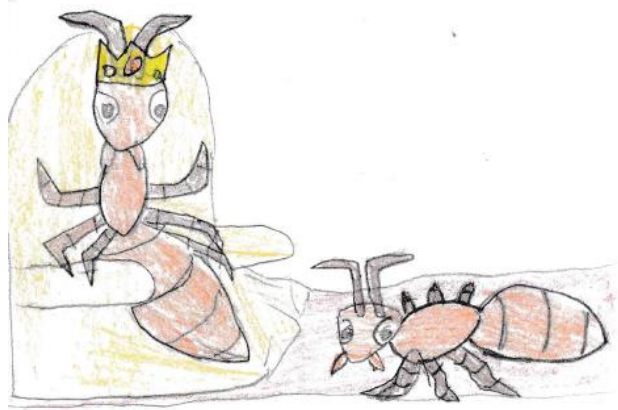
'Being an ant is not as easy as you think,' I whispered to myself in a deep voice.

An ant has to be as precise as a robot, as quick as a cheetah, as brave as a soldier and most of all, as strong as a man who can carry eight buses.

Ants are never lumbering or slumbering.

But I am so small and...

I will tell you why I am disappointed.



It was a fine windy day when I was at work.

I was carrying a heavy breadcrumb to store for winter.



Suddenly, a gusty wind violently tossed the crumb and me. Zinggggggg!

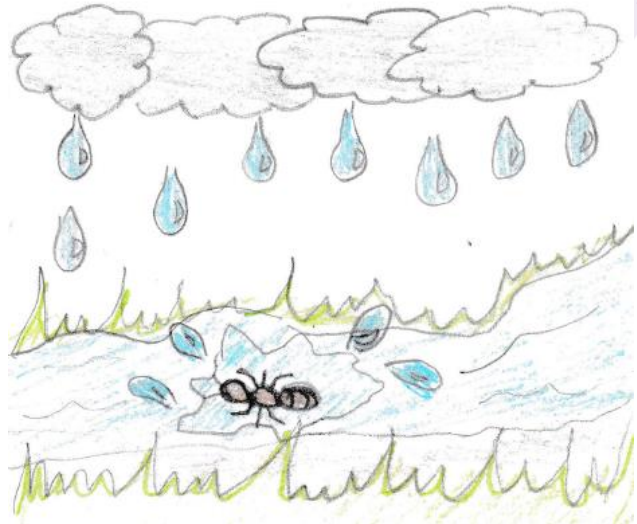
Back we went, soaring through the air like a bungee-jumper!



Like a plane doing the loop-the-loop!

I lost my crumb, but all I needed to do was save my life!

I ran fast like a race car to the nearest shelter. The bad news was, it was raining big slippery drops. I fell into a stream and I was about to drown. My legs could not even move, so I had to flow with the stream to wherever it took me.



I finally reached my home with a joyful heart that I lived! However, I cannot forget how the queen scolded me for not doing my job. That is when I decided not to work again, but that is impossible.

‘Hey, can you get me some tea?’ I ordered.

‘Yes,’ said my maid.

I was resting my legs on the couch after a hard, tough day at work, when suddenly... Boom! I looked up. It was Matt Ant, who lived on the floor above and he broke my roof!



‘Oops, sorry mate,’ he said.

‘Oh, not again!’ I sighed.

Patience is what you need on a hard day.

Sam and the Lost Dragon from the Mysterious Island

By Raneth Keshan Sugatadasa

Chapter 1 – The Four Dragons

Once upon a time there was a boy named Sam. He was an explorer. He loved exploring dragons so, one day Sam took a boat to an island named Mysterious Island.

When he was half way there it started raining very hard and the waves started getting bigger and bigger. Then a big shot of lighting came out from one of the clouds. Sam was really scared. So, he jumped out. He swam as fast he could. Eventually he made it to the island safely.

After that long swim, he felt really tired, so he had a small rest. When he woke up, he saw parts of his ship everywhere. He felt nervous and safe at the same time. He was nervous because he had no way to get home. But he also felt safe, because he had read many books about this place.

He slowly put his head up and he got a big surprise. He saw four dragons sitting in front of him. Sam could tell that they were dragons, because dragons have special wings. The wings were big and strong looking and there were spikes at the top of them. Sam felt a little scared, but he read books of how to talk to them.


He slowly got up. Then the dragons came closer to Sam. He took a deep breath and started talking to them. He told them, 'Hello, my name is Sam, don't worry I'm not going to hurt you'. The dragons started to smile at him.

Chapter 2 – Fire, Water, Glass and Ice

Then Sam noticed the dragons had different colours too. Luckily, he had brought some of his books with him. The books said that 'if a dragon has colours on it, the dragon has powers too'.

The book said, 'if dragons are combined they can make a giant dragon with all the powers that each dragon had'. Sam was very excited, because he never knew that dragons could have powers. The dragons had four different powers. The first dragon could blow fire. The second one could spray water. The third one could cover in grass and the last dragon could change into ice. Then they combined their powers together. The powers hit the ground and everything shook.

Sam was surprised as the dragons started talking to him. They told Sam that 'There is an army of skeletons trying to catch them and their friends'. Then Sam said, 'As long as we stay together we will be safe'. Then Sam and the dragons went inside the jungle.



As soon as they walked into the jungle, there were giant ants. Ants quickly flew to make a wall to stop them from getting through their jungle. Sam got a big shock when he saw giant ants making a wall around him. He closed his eyes and all of a sudden there were no ants. All he could see was some giant ant skeletons lying on the floor.

Chapter 3 – The Lost Dragon

Sam decided to go through the skeletons. The skeletons were dusty and old. Sam went to the water dragon and asked him to spray water to clear the path. Then Sam jumped onto the water dragon and flew further to the jungle. Then the other three dragons followed them. Halfway there, they saw some strange looking plants.

The fire dragon went to touch the plants. But when he went to touch it, the plant started to grow bigger and bigger. Suddenly the plants used their huge roots to attack the fire dragon. The fire dragon started to panic and blew fire out of his mouth to the giant roots. He managed to stop the attack.

But...

One root managed to get inside the fire dragon and hurt him. As a result of it, fire started to come out from the dragon's body and the dragon fell to the ground. Sam and the other three dragons started to panic. The grass dragon flew forward as fast as he could to help the fire dragon.

The grass dragon had healing powers. So it went close to the fire dragon and started to give him as much as heal as he needed. Then, as quickly as lightning, all of the fire went back into the fire dragon. Sam was happy to see the fire dragon was safe and alive.

They began to walk again. On their way through the jungle, Sam saw many interesting plants and animals. Sam was amazed and said, 'Now I know why they call this place a mysterious island'. In that moment, Sam and the dragons noticed funny looking tracks on the ground. The tracks led to a small cave with a small door at the front of it.

The dragons were scared, as they started to shiver their bodies. Sam was brave and knocked on the door. He waited for a long time. When he was about to knock again, the door opened and out zoomed a little dragon with lightning. The little dragon went straight to the other dragons and hugged them tight. All the dragons were happy to see the little dragon, as they all flew around with him. The fire dragon blew fire into the sky and it turned in to fireworks.

After their reunion, the dragons spoke to Sam. They said, 'We are standing in front of the city of the lost dragons'.

Chapter 4 – The Battle Against The Skeleton Army

The little yellow dragon guided Sam and the dragons in to a mountain. Sam saw bones stuck into trees and on the ground. There was a sign next to the mountain saying, 'Skeleton Mountain'. Sam realized that, if he wanted to go back home, he needed to battle against the skeletons. The little yellow dragon flew back to bring all the help Sam needed to defeat the army. The dragon came back with all the other lost dragons. They all flew to the top of the mountain.

Skeletons were starting to wake up. They were crawling and climbing to the top of the mountain. The scary battle started to begin. The skeletons sent their army to kill the dragons and Sam. Dragons blew all their powers together to create a dragon with all their powers. The brave dragons with combined powers led the battle for the dragons and Sam.

After a few hours of fighting, the skeleton army started to become more powerful. Sam was looking for a way to defeat the army. He started to collect the dragons' powers to make a weapon to attack the skeleton army. Finally, he managed to create a flame thrower with all the power in it. Sam pulled the flame thrower and let it sling into the skeleton army.

BOOM!!!!!!!!!!

The mountain was covered with smoke. Sam saw the skeleton army was lying all over the mountain through the smoke. Sam screamed loudly as he knew that was the end of the war. Then Sam and the dragons came down from the mountain. They started to make their way back home. They passed all the mysterious plants and creatures. They came back to the starting point of the jungle.

Sam said good bye to all the dragons, sadly. The dragons were crying and told Sam to come back soon. Sam waved goodbye to them, as he saw the rescue team. Sam was relieved and smiled. Sam felt a warm touch on his shoulder and started to hear his favourite voice.

'Sam, Sam wake up, it's time to go to school'. Sam opened his eyes, smiled and hugged his mum.



Boredom

By Codey Jackson

Boredom feels like a blank spot in your day
Like a conscience telling you to stay
Like an emptiness in your head
Like the need to stay in bed
Like when you try to run a race
All the redness in your face
Boredom feels like a blank spot in your day.

Boredom looks like a plain empty space
Like an astronaut in space
Like a person still asleep
Like a school mate left to weep
Like the grass when it snows
And no sympathy is shown
Boredom looks like a plain empty space.

Boredom sounds like a moaning kid
Like a sound that was hid
Like the sound of nothing
Like when a phone doesn't ring
Like a song never sung
That needs more work to be done
Boredom sounds like a moaning kid.

Boredom is awful in every way.

Hospital Bed

By Alejandra Camacho

Fibres stinging from the chemical cleanse

My bones are rubbed sore

Flimsy I am, can hardly hold myself up,

Let alone you and all of your problems

My joints squeak and my knees ache

It's me, the one who's hurting

I held you when you wanted me,

needed me,

hated me.

When you insisted you didn't need me

(Guess what? You did)

It's me, the one you ignored.

I'm tired, can't you tell?


I've seen life

blossom out

of nothingness

And seen it fade away,

rotting and deteriorating,



holding on,
to that last sliver of existence

until the last moment.

Why can't I have that peace?

It's me, the one who's tired.

Coming and going

Nothing ever really stays the same

Everyone leaves me

eventually

Screaming with joy

Or screaming with sorrow

'He's in a better place now'

Where is that better place?

Can I go there?

It's me, the one who's seen it all

Workers

Dashing me this way and that,

forever fleeing from

one room to the next.

Frantic ants in a needy colony

A colony that doesn't spare a thought for

those it uses

It's me, the one you wore out

Resentment fills me,

'til it boils to the edge

But never quite spilling over

Forgotten, lost, silenced

Day by day I sit quietly

Holding on

to the hot coal of anger

Never the strength

to let it go

It's us, the ones you forgot.



Grave of the Butterflies

By Coco Huang

A lone tree stands in the town square,
gnarled branches like twisted hands
reaching; nestled in its joints,
a thousand maple-red leaves
sleep with folded wings.

A breeze – it chills the old moaning tree
that rubs its palms together for warmth;
Awake – crisp-veined leaves a-flutter
with lusty hues of rich red gold
enchant the wandering eye
and drown in its
abysmal black.


Now and again, a butterfly breaks free,
soars in sunlight and splendour
ascends with violent vigour
but feels and knows
the dying of the
breeze.

There lies the brave soul,
There lie all the brave;
The children, pink with wild delight
leave footsteps on their grave.

But not all children are lovingly scarved –
How he wishes that he were!
If only a trace of his mother's light touch,
swathed between layers of wool and fur –

He doesn't.

By the damp pit he kneels and prays
and stirs the ghost-leaves in their graves
with questions that no child should ask:
whether it hurts when butterflies die,
and where, and how,
and when, and why.



Desiccated Embryos

By Coco Huang

I

Look at me, Satie, Satie,
So dearly wrapped in muslin cloth
Ascending from my watery lair
5 Adorned with wreaths of seaweed hair.

Do I fascinate you, dear Satie?
Do not be afraid – you may stroke me.
(What a pretty rock! How sticky!)

10 Indeed, those are my feet
Quite dainty, aren't they? Just like hers,
Irresistible to your touch. Why,
You are laughing! Have you never heard
A holothurian purr?
15 You, with the ears of a child, are no
Stranger to this world
Than we are.

II

20 Beneath the streetlight stood a lonely man
In velvet grey. The cobblestones were sighing
And his heart was curled and crying
When the wandering mongrel's wretched song began.


25 It sang of smoke from narrow streets
That grinds its way through flesh and skin
Until it hears the clammy beats
And softly smothers the soul within.

30 O! he cried – his veins were spilling moonlight,
An incandescent puddle at his feet.
O! He soared, his heart aloft the night
In lone splendour; an angel armed with a hammer
Striking music from clouds and fog,
35 A flabby prelude for a dog.

(Citing Byron's famous Ode)

III

40 Where is it? Where is it?
My pocket-coat – of course!
Which coat? Which pocket?
The one that smells of horse!
A muffle – a shuffle
45 A noise you can't resist
I come, little scrap, I am
 coming
 coming
 com-
50 Ah – *je suis désolé*, Monsieur Sucrier
I did not see you standing here
With arms on hips and horrid frown
No wonder I would knock you down!
55 Erik Satie, *ignoramus aboil*
A mystical sausage-brain at toil
Do not insult me, Monsieur, Monsieur,
For it is you who cannot hear
The half-sounds and quarter-sounds
60 The dotted sounds and spotted sounds
The turgid sounds; the feckless sounds
The sound of spilling yourself all over my floor!
I hear them all! I write them all!



65 A nightingale sings at my window
A beautiful song, sighs the poet,
His hands clasped beneath his chin.
Listen! The poor beast has a toothache
And warbles like a drunkard.

70 What love is there without misery?

I see you now, little scrap,
Tucked amongst the eggs.
Let me peel the canvas from my skin

75 And fill you in
With brushstrokes the world has made.

My name is Erik Satie,
Just like everyone else.

Quotations

9: Translated from the score of *Embryons Desséchés* – Erik Satie (1913)

32-33: ‘Aloft the night/In lone splendour’ - *Bright Star* by John Keats (1838)

35: Translated from title *Préludes flasques (pour un chien)* – Erik Satie (1912)

37: Deliberate misquotation; refer to Satie’s in-score joke ‘citing of Schubert’s popular Mazurka’ in *Embryons Desséchés*

55: Direct quotation from Henry Gauthier-Villars (1897)

56: ‘Mystical sausage-brain’ – Henry Gauthier-Villars (1897)

78-79: Apparently found written on a strip of narrow paper along with hundreds of others inside Satie’s piano after his death. However, this remains unproven

The Truth that Lies Within

By Amy Roberts

A half-hearted orange sunset emerges from the distant sky, casting a shadow over the town that lay outside my window. It was **the day that would finally put an end** to the hollow conversations and the lost words... the broken family. **It had been five years since his sentence had commenced.** My dear brother... his bruised hands, his muddy t-shirt, his honest smile... **my dear brother was now locked behind thick, unrelenting iron bars. I couldn't wait to embrace him again... it had been much too long.**


My finger still hovers aimlessly above his name on my phonebook whenever I go to make a call. My eyes scan the walls as I walk through my house, searching for his young face. Young, I say... but he was no child. Jeremy was going on nineteen when the **police took him.** I remember every single miniscule moment of that night; the limp unseasoned pork that lay on my white ceramic plate, the slow bubble of my kettle as it came to the boil... the lifeless ring of the telephone as I reached my arm out to pick it up. The obtuse voice of the police officer assured me that everything was going to be okay, although it was clear on both ends of the line that it wasn't okay. It would never be okay again.

The news called it 'Murder at the Watertower'. I went out to visit the place about a year after it happened, that exact spot on the side of the hill. It was right on the outskirts of the town where few trees were growing, only those who could survive the malignant Australian sun. The rusty iron ladder still hung there, swaying monotonously in the breeze... the ladder that he had **climbed down before being taken away.**

They told me that he did it, that he did it on purpose... they had found the body. The police rung me, at seven thirty on a Friday evening and told me that my little brother had murdered his best friend... that he had shot him and thrown his body off the edge... with his own two hands. The hands of a teenager, the hands of my baby brother, were not capable of killing. **He didn't do it.** I never believed it.

My brother was one of those people who are always happy, regardless of where they are or what they are doing. He would come and visit me when I was on study breaks and we would sit on my cheap plastic chairs, watching trashy TV and eating cold pasta. Sometimes we would just sit in silence, letting the chaos of the world speed right past us. I loved the moments where there was nothing to say, because simply being with each other made us feel complete. He would have given everything for me. That's the kind of person he was... selfless and kind-hearted. He had a soul that needed more time to be free.

The strength that I once had when he was by my side no longer remains. Sideways glances from passers-by are one of the only reminders left that I exist. I am alone, terrified by the constant thought that I fail to matter anymore. Such dependence could be viewed as 'unhealthy', but this could not be



further from the truth. This dependence was one of the only things that kept me sane. I lived off the love I had for my brother.

I sit in my car, with my windows half wound down. A slight cool breeze blows through the car park, unusual for such a place in the middle of summer. **He is being released at five o'clock. In half an hour, my brother would walk out of those doors. I would see his blue eyes shining into mine once more, because the thirty minute visits and phone calls had never been enough. Five years of thirty minute visits had broken my heart. I need to hold him in my arms again.**

It was five o'clock, in that empty car park right outside the left wing of the prison.

Five o'clock in the car park outside the prison

Perhaps it was five o'clock at the prison. Where I wanted to be, where I wished I was.

Where I should be

Where I should be seeing my brother's face once again...

... But it isn't five o'clock...

It is almost eight at night and I am sitting in the car park of my apartment block with tears running down my face, scouring my thoughts, trying to find some kind of an answer as to why I do this to myself on the same day every year.

Even today, a part of me truly believed that I would see him again...

... **because thirty minute visits and phone calls were never enough.**

But the truth was that there were never any thirty minute visits and there were no phone calls. Because my little brother never climbed back down that rickety iron ladder that night on the hill. He never got taken by the police car late at night and he was never trapped behind thick metal bars in the old prison just outside of town.

My brother got mixed up with the wrong people. They changed him. His best friend Nathan had let him down on some kind of drug deal... a deal that got him far too involved with a dangerous crowd. The police were right, my beautiful little brother had shot Nathan in the head and thrown his body off the edge of the water tower. But the police hadn't found only one body at the bottom of the tower...

Five o'clock somewhere else

But not here

Tears running down my cheeks

Because I still can't bring myself to believe the truth

He chose to do it

Speechless

By Kylie D.

As the curtain goes up, I take a deep breath. I am about to dance in front of the whole world! The music starts, and I take my first pose. Then I arabesque, and dance like I never will again. As the music slows down, I end in my last position. The crowd goes wild! People give me a standing ovation, they love me!

I hold onto the tiniest, smallest piece of that dream. I open my eyes, and let that piece go. I smile. Then I remember what today is. It's Sunday, and I have an appointment.

I cling to my father as I enter the building. I don't know where we are going, who we are going to see, or what we are going to do. We go to the elevator, and dad presses the level 3 button. As the doors open, all I see is a long, long hallway. A hospital-like hallway; white washed walls, doors on both sides, and a cold, tile floor. Immediately, I know I will not like it here. It reminds me too much of when... I stop, knowing that memory will only lead to tears. We walk down the hall, stopping at about the 12th door. Dad opens it, and pushes me in. It looks like a doctor's office. A man at the desk stands up, and asks if my name is Hannah O'Brien. Dad nods his head. Then the man comes up to me, and asks if I would like a lollypop. How old does he think I am? I accept it anyway. Then this stranger, who I have never seen before, takes my hand, and leads me into another room, behind the desk. There is a table, and two chairs. He sits down in one, and gestures for me to sit in the other. I stay standing. He tells me his name is Mr. Harrison. I say nothing. He shrugs, and starts asking me questions.

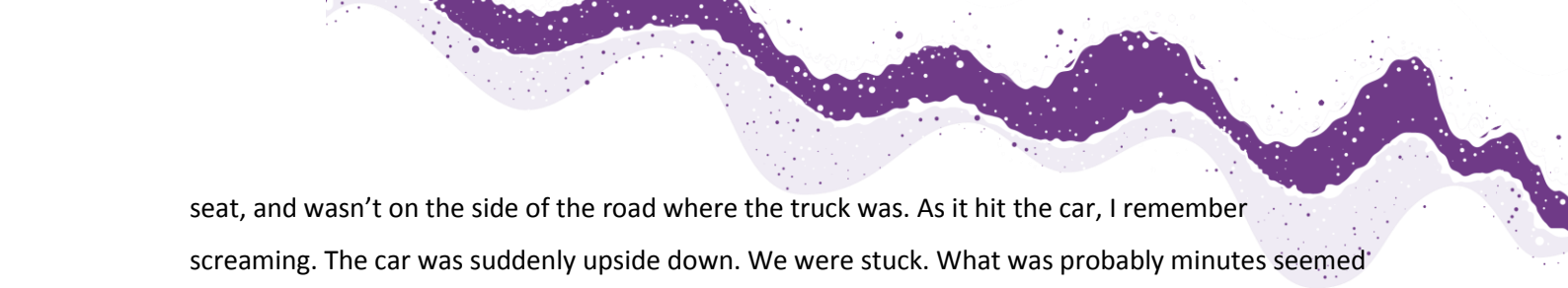
'How old are you? Where do you live? What school do you go to? Do you like it there? What are your friend's names? What is something interesting about you?'

I stand there in silence, letting him finish. Then he asks one more question...

'Why do you not speak?'

I shrug, knowing he will never find out. I haven't said one word, not one sound has come out of my mouth, since that day, four years ago.

We were in the car, driving to my dance class, doing one of our favourite things, making stories, with random objects we saw on the streets. Then we heard a car screech, and I looked behind us, only to see a truck coming towards us, and showing no signs of stopping. I shouted to my mom, telling her to move the car, so we didn't get hit. She had no way of doing this. I was in the back



seat, and wasn't on the side of the road where the truck was. As it hit the car, I remember screaming. The car was suddenly upside down. We were stuck. What was probably minutes seemed like hours. The firemen, police, and ambulance people were all there. They cut through the car to get us out. I was mostly okay, but my mom looked a mess. There was blood all over her, and her left leg was sticking out at a strange angle. They took us into the ambulance, and performed an emergency operation on mom as soon as we got to the hospital, but they weren't able to save her. My left arm was broken, but that was the worst of the damage. Ever since, I have not spoken, have not told anyone what really happened on that day.

The strange man keeps on asking questions, bribing me with chocolate and candy, but I still do not answer him. After about an hour, he gives up, and takes me back to dad. Car rides are now in silence, unless my brother and sister are in the car. Then it is loud, and annoying. Dad takes me to get ice cream, and tells me I am going back next week. Oh well.

The next day is school. I go to the 1st grade class, with the 6 year olds. The teacher has given up on trying to make me talk, and lets me read my book at the back of the classroom, while the kids practise their reading. At break time I go outside, bracing myself for the taunts from the 3rd graders.

'BABY! Why are you with the little kids? STUPID! You can't even say the alphabet! Are you going to answer me? Rude!!'

These come from the kids my age, who don't know what happened. I have been put with the little kids because I don't speak. All the kids my age tease me about this. Every day, all year.

The week goes on the same, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. On Sunday, I go to that man again. This time, there is another girl there. She looks about the same age. Mr. Harrison introduces her as Daisy. Then he brings both of us to that room. This time, there are three chairs. We both stay standing. He asks Daisy the same questions he asked me.

'How old are you? Where do you live? What school do you go to? What grade are you in? Do you like it there? What are your friend's names? What is something interesting about you?'

The difference this time, is that she actually answers.

'I am eight years old. I live two blocks away. I go to Pegasus Elementary School. I am in grade three. I do like it there. I have two best friends. Their names are Ellie and Sophie. My dad is dead. Why are you asking me these questions?'

I look at her. She said her dad is dead. My mom is dead. Maybe we could be friends. As soon as that thought enters my mind, it flutters away again. What am I thinking? Of course we can't be friends. I don't talk. Then Daisy turns to me, and says, 'What's your name?'

I have to think quickly. I decide to try something. I sign my name out in sign language. The look of surprise on her face makes me feel bad. But then, she signs back, 'Nice to meet you Hannah! I hope we can become friends.'

Wait. What? Did she just use sign language!?! Have I actually found someone I can speak to? I smile at her, and she returns it. Then we turn to Mr. Harrison. His surprise is written all over his face. We both start laughing, even though mine is silent.

Dear Diary,

This is the first time I have used you! My name is Daisy Wilson, and I am 8 years old. Today Mom made me go to the Speech Therapist. URGH! There is nothing wrong with my speech, I just prefer to use sign language.

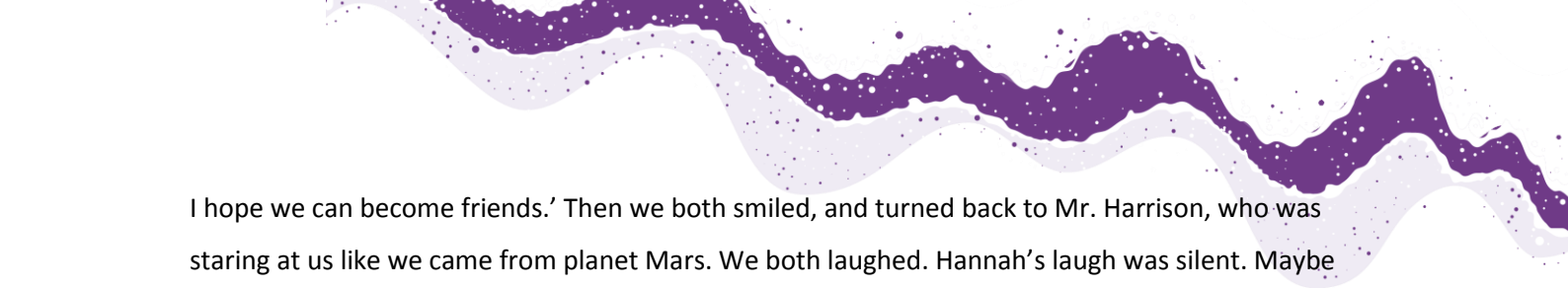
When we got to the building, Mom led me to the elevator. She pressed the level 3 button. It took us to a level with only a long, long, long, white, hallway, that reminded me of the hospital Dad was in. He died 4 years ago, of cancer. Mom will not talk about him, no matter why I am asking, or what I want to know. Anyway, she took me to the door that said 'Mr. David Harrison, Therapist of Speech'. Fancy. I sat down, and Mom left for work. The man behind the desk, who I'm guessing was Mr. Harrison, asked my name. I told him it was Daisy Katherine Wilson. He mumbled something that I didn't catch. I waited for a bit longer, maybe 15 minutes, before another girl came in with her dad. He dropped her off and left. I guess parents didn't want to be there. Mr. Harrison took us to a little room. There was a small, round table, and three chairs. He told us to sit down. I stayed standing. So did the other girl. I looked at her. She seemed to be about my age. Then Mr. Harrison started asking me questions.

'How old are you? Where do you live? What school do you go to? What grade are you in? Do you like it there? What are your friend's names? What is something interesting about you?'

I thought about it a bit and then answered,

'I am eight years old. I live two blocks away. I go to Pegasus Elementary School. I am in 3rd grade. I do like it there. I have two best friends. Their names are Ellie and Sophie. My dad is dead. Why are you asking me these questions?'

Then I turned to the girl and asked her what her name is. She looked at me hesitantly, and then, out of all the things she could have done, SHE SIGNED TO ME. SHE USED SIGN LANGUAGE TO SPELL OUT HER NAME, which I learned was Hannah. I signed back to her, 'Nice to meet you Hannah!'



I hope we can become friends.’ Then we both smiled, and turned back to Mr. Harrison, who was staring at us like we came from planet Mars. We both laughed. Hannah’s laugh was silent. Maybe she couldn’t speak, or make sound. I asked her why she was there. She told me her Mom died in a car crash 4 years ago, and hasn’t said a word since. I felt so sad. I told her my dad also died 4 years ago. She asked me why I was so happy, so I told her that my dad wouldn’t have wanted me to live my life sad, he would have told me to be happy, and live life to the fullest, not to dwell on his death. After that she looked at me in a new way.

xoxo Daisy

Dear Diary,

It had been a week since the last Speech Therapy appointment. I had another one today. I hoped Hannah would be there.

When I opened the door, I saw that she was! I went up to her, and gave her a hug. She looked surprised about that. Then, guess what she did!?

She said, ‘Hi, Daisy!’

WHOAH. Her first words in 4 years were ‘Hi Daisy’!!! That’s so cool.

I asked her if she wants to come over to my house after the appointment. She said okay! So, after Mr. Harrison talked to us, and told Hannah how proud he was of her, Hannah came back to my house. We went swimming, and I had the most fun I had had in a long time. We decided to use sign language, because it was more comfortable for both of us. I was so proud of her.

I have made a new friend, and she lives one block away.

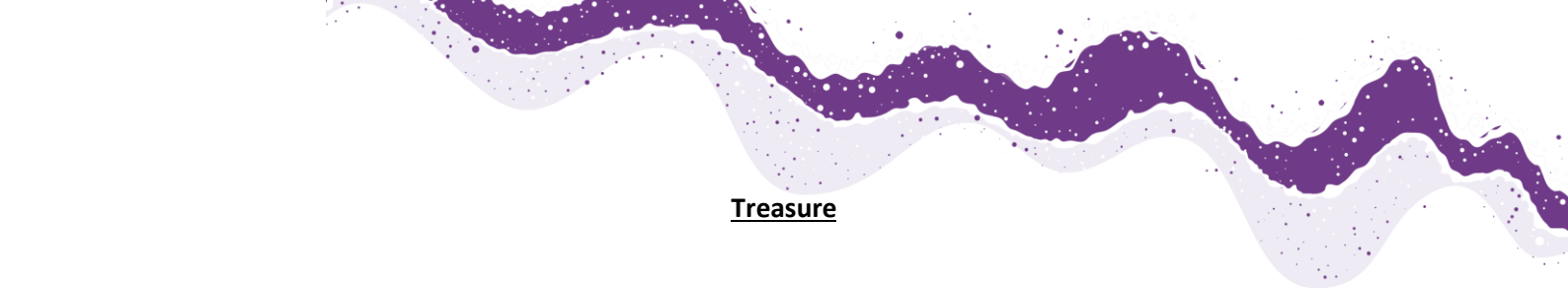
Next time I write I will have more news about this!

xoxo Daisy

Pen and Paper

By Codey Jackson

I'm in a special world
When I have my pen and paper
I can use it to express my thoughts, emotions and imagination.
I can draw a special artwork
I can make a special card
I can create a special masterpiece to give to someone kind.
I can write a letter to a loved one
Or connect with my pen pals
I can draw a picture for some friends which can mean more than just words.
I can write on the paper
To send a special message
Everyone understands, but it can mean more than expected.
I can also write a special poem
A piece so good to see
We have a special connection, my pen, paper and me.



Treasure

By Sandra Sujith

When I was young,
So long ago,
I wandered the streets,
In search of treasure.

Gold, I thought,
God's very own gift.
I took to the seas,
I pillaged and plundered,
Robbed and raided,
And soon,
My skull 'n' crossbones
Were feared across the seven high seas.
But it did not give me pleasure.
I was still hungry for more.

Money, I thought,
The key to joy.
I churned the waters,
Of business itself,
I bargained and bought,
Traded and thieved,
And soon,
I swam in money.
But it did not give me pleasure.
I was still hungry for more.

Friendship, I thought,
A facet of life.
I wandered the city,
And bought myself,
Some loyal friends.
But it did not give me pleasure.
I was still hungry for more.

My demise came,
One fine day,
when my fellow peregrinators and I
were ambushed,
the rats of friends I had with me
deserted the sinking ship.

I was beaten and bruised,
Thrown around like a doll,
and left to wither and rot.

The world spun,
and I said goodbye to this cruel world.

Just as I let go,
someone pulled me back.

They fed me,
Helped me,
and nursed me back to health,
And that very day,
I learned about true treasure.

This treasure can never be depleted,
and even a drop of this treasure,
can save a million lives.
Even a drop of this treasure,
can melt a stone heart.
Even a mention of this treasure,
can turn the tables.

And sometimes,
Now that I am old,
I sit in my rocking-chair,
and show this treasure to others,
And I speak fondly of my treasure.
'The treasure,' I say,
'Comes from the heart,
for it is Kindness.'



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